

Oral History Interview with EULIS PIPPIN at his home at 3810 1st Avenue, on February 16, 1988, interviewed by Linda Bohannon.

B: Tell us when you started.

P: I was 16 years old and I started to work down here (Bibb Mill) September 19, 1934.

B: Is that the year they had the strike?

P: Yes, I came up here just before the strike and during the strike, you know, jobs were hard to get then. I went to work when there was them guards all over Bibb City, National Guards.

B: Did you get a hard time about that or were you too young to worry?

P: Well, we got a little talk about it. See, they'd holler at us but they never did bother us. I worked from then, 9-19-34, until 4-15-80 and I retired.

I went in as—well, I done different things. I laid up roving in there and I run drawing frames and I run what they call slubbers. And then about '42, I went to fixing and I fix for about 2 years and then I went to supervisor and I stayed there until I retired a supervisor. I got up about ...I was an overseer but that's rough and then I come back down to supervision.

I was in supervision when I retired. One day...see, there's a world of difference in there. See, these were two complete floors of carding. Carding, drawing, roving.

B: Is that where you were a supervisor?

P: Yes, and we used to run the roving through the slubbers, then run it through the enameters and then the speeders. Well, they done away with the enameters and the speeders and we went to what's called long draft and we done away with the creeling. We bring the drawing straight to the roving and just creel the drawing in there and run it to the roving and then it goes to the spinning. And from spinning to the spooling and after spinning and spooling, it went to the slasher room. But it went to the filling, it would go in—you've heard of battery filling? Well, it made filling for the battery. Then the other went and made warp and went through the spinning. Then they made the finished material.

B: What were they making when you went to work there?

P: We were making tire cord. We had a contract with the government to make tire cord stuff. But we got to where we mostly made sheeting. We made a little denim, not too much, the old Swift was in denim full. We got into that a little bit. It didn't last long.

B: Were they making tire cord when you went to work?

P: I don't believe they was. A few years after I went to work there, they went to making tire cord. You know, it wasn't too long after I went there before the war come. Like I told you, we had two floors of drawing and roving for years, then we went to super draft and then we went to \_\_\_\_\_ from there, we took all that out and put in rovomatics. We had about 75-80 slubbers, well, we went and bought 30 rovomatics and they'd put out just about as many pounds as all them others together. And we had 614 cards, I think, and they bought 90 high speed cards and it took the place of that 600 something. They were real slow but these things flew.

B: What about people when they brought in the new equipment? Did it replace a lot of people?

P: It cut the work force about 50%. At least that, if not more.

B: When did all those changes come?

P: Well, that came, Rovamatic, around in the late 60's and in the meantime, along there in the 60's, they closed up all the windows and air conditioned. Air conditioning, that was a wonderful thing. Used to, all the air we could get was raising the window out and that was all the air we had, but they closed them up. You can see how they are now. It was glass. They took all that out, closed 'em up and put us air conditioning in there. That was fine. I wish they had that all the time.

B: You said you came here in 1934 when you were 16. Where did you come from?

P: Well, I was raised on a farm. We come up to Ozark, Alabama and stayed about a year. Do you know where that is?

B: Yes, sir. I'm from Dothan.

P: By God, I am, too. Well, we came up to Ozark and stayed about a year, year and a half. Then we came from there. I had a brother up here and we came on up and stayed with him some time until we got on our feet. Then, he was running cards and he got us all in the mill. Me, two sisters, and one of them was married, and her husband, got us all in the Bibb.

B: All of you started during the strike?

P: Yes.

B: Did you come because you knew about the strike and there were jobs available or was it just...

P: The little mill shut down, completely down. The little mill in Ozark shut completely down. And we had to go somewhere. My brother, he came down there and brought us up here.

B: Did you work in the mill in Ozark?

P: Little bit. I wasn't but 15. I learned to run drawing and frames and I sweep some.

B: Were you about as young a worker as they had then?

P: Yes, I guess so. I don't remember any of them younger than me. They wasn't in the mill. And my mother died while we were there in Ozark. She was buried on Mother's Day in 1934.

B: And you all came not too much after that. Where did you live when you first came here?

P: Right down on 1st Avenue down there about 19th Street. There's not, right where we lived, a street there. In fact, just this side of that old mill place (City Mills?) there were some houses there. There ain't even no houses there now.

B: That's a long way. Did you all walk?

P: Yes, we walked.

B: Dora Watson told me that she remembered that during the strike the workers came in on railroad cars. Did you just walk in or did you come in by railroad cars?

P: We walked. That's why we heard some of them holler at us. Scabs. It didn't bother me at all. I was making when I started to work there...I wasn't making much, about 6,7, 8 dollars a week. And that was a lot of money. I didn't know what to do with it. I didn't have sense enough to put it in the bank. Man, I enjoyed it. I had a lot of money.

B: Did they pay you from the time you went to work or did they make you work?

P: I went in experienced. See, those drawing frames run by hand clock. The more I ran them, the more I made.

B: On production?

P: Yes, and I was a good one, I could run the fire out of them things. You can ask my wife. She finally, years later after I got married, I married when I was 21, I got her in there and she said I just set up on them cans and let them things run. Which was true. I knew what I's a-doing. Poor old thing—she worked just as hard as she could. Yea, I got some of that 12-hour business there at Ozark. 12-hour day.

B: Was a 12-hour day standard?

P: Up until then it was all you could get. Roosevelt got that changed.

B: By the time you started at the Bibb, how many hours did you work?

P: Eight hours a day. Lot of difference. Just eight hours. Lot of them said they wouldn't fall out about it when they cut the hours from twelve to eight and they got a raise, too. That's a fact.

B: After the strike, did any of those workers come back to the Bibb?

P: Yes, there was a lot of them come back. They finally just about all come back.

B: You didn't worry about losing your job when they came back?

P: No, I didn't. I didn't worry about it.

B: What was your favorite thing at the mill? What did you like doing best while you were there?

P: I believe it was fixing. I said a many a time I wished I had stayed on fixing and not even a-went on supervision. That supervision, I'm telling you...you get about 40 people working for you. You got a headache. All their problems are yours. You got to handle all their problems.

B: Were most of your workers men or women?

P: Mixed. But I'll tell you, I might have had a few more women than men, but you can't beat a good woman on a job. You know, to start with, we didn't have no colored people working there. We might have had one, not over two. Then I remember the first time they hired a bunch of colored people and brought them in there. I couldn't tell one from the other. All I know is they all is black and when I retired I had mostly women and I had some good ones. Real good ones. I had one little white woman running rovamatic, the rest, except for one colored man, was colored women. And had some good ones. Sure did. That's the truth.

B: Were there people who did not get along as well as you did? Was it a smooth transition?

P: I got along with them pretty good. Sometimes you gonna...some people won't let you be good to them. You know that? I have had to let several go. They just wouldn't. Some lay out. The biggest problem I had with laying out was white men. I'd talk to them. Sometime talking don't do no good. I've always said if you got a problem—move it. I stuck with that all my life. If you got somebody worrying you—move 'em.

'Course back during the war, we had a problem about trying to keep help. I been out here on Sunday afternoon. They had three automobiles down there at the office and we could use them to hunt help. I'd get out here on Sunday afternoon hunting help lot of times. 'Course I put it on the time card and got paid for it, but I'd much rather be doing something else.

B: Did you ever go back to South Alabama looking for help?

P: No—just about all of them come up here. We had a lot of people working over here from Selma, Crawford...them colored people, they come in here just as regular as clockwork. Sometimes I wondered how they get here so regular as they did. But they'd get here. Way up in Harris County. And they'd get to work. And a lot of them that live right close by couldn't. And I wondered a lot of times, I think sometimes, they get colored people, some fellow would have a pick-up truck closed in. They'd haul a load of them. They was regular. I had some good ones. Well, I had some good white people and some good colored people and I had some white people that wasn't too good and I had some colored people that wasn't too good.

B: So color didn't make a lot of difference when it came to working?

P: That's right.

B: When did you move into Bibb City, into the village?

P: I lived up there on Meritas Drive and up there on 3rd Avenue right after I got married, right up there across from North Highland Furniture Store. Then I moved up on Meritas Drive. My first daughter was born in '41 and while she was real small, we moved over here on Park Avenue in Bibb City. We moved then and stayed there several years, then we moved down on Hanson Avenue, then my boy was born, then I had another daughter. Two daughters and a son. They are all grown and married and I got five grandkids. Grandkids kind of boss me around. Then my sister lived at 102 Hanson Street, just at the corner and I had a three room house down there. I moved up there and got a four room house. The feller living there now, he lived here. He lived on—this was a two family house and all my kids were at home. Dan Spivey wanted a four room house, so we went to personnel and just swapped. I got this house and he moved down there. That was about in '58 and I been living here ever since. I done spent more on this house than I give for it.

B: This one is four rooms.

P: Six. With a large bathroom on the back. It was originally a two family house. In that pantry back there on this side, there is a place where they had a hot water tank. They could cut the hot water off from the bathroom when those other people—it's in there now. Got it fixed where they go in there, they cut their hot water on and when they come out, they cut it off. You can't expect them to furnish them other people.

B: So they had one, too?

P: I didn't never found one on that side.

B: Were those houses built with a bathroom or was it added later?

P: It was built with it.

B: Was there a kitchen on each side?

P: Yes, I sleep in the kitchen over there on the back. It's a bedroom now.

B: Was it still a two family house when you bought it? Had it already been converted?

P: I moved here in '58 and bought it in '64. I closed up one of the front doors. There were two front doors and I closed up that door and made me a pantry and I opened this door bigger and it's just one family if you can call me and my wife a family. I told her when she gets after me in this big house, she can't catch me.

B: When you were renting, what was it like?

P: We didn't pay no water bill, light bill. We just pay about 80 cents a room with no light or water bill.

B: Did you all ever have boarders?

P: No, I wouldn't have boarders at all. Lot of people do and do all right but I just never had boarders.

B: Was the Bibb City Hotel right across the street from your house?

P: Yes, there was a hotel there and a big old line of houses right around there, too. There was houses all down there.

B: Some of the houses have been replaced by that big parking lot?

P: Yes, there's a bunch of them been tore down. Several houses and the hotel, too. Right down there at the bottom of that parking lot there was Hanson Avenue. There was houses along both sides and they come on up around the hill and they come on up here to the hotel. I don't know...there's probably been 10 or 15 houses tore down...hotel and all.

B: When were those torn down? How long ago?

P: Either...I reckon it was in the 60's. It might have been around '60.

B: Who lived in the hotel? Was it really a hotel or did people really live there?

P: It was a hotel. If you worked in the mill, you could stay there and they'd just take it out of your check.

B: About how many people lived there?

P: There's a pretty good sized hotel...I imagine there's 20-25 people stayed there. It wasn't no big hotel...might have been 30. Just a boarding house to accommodate people who would come and get a job and not have any place to stay. They could stay in the hotel.

B: Did they have kitchen facilities? Did somebody cook?

P: Yes, it was nice. They had meals served at certain times and cook to do it.

B: And it all came out of the check?

P: Yes, they take it out of the check.

B: How did they decide who got a house and who didn't? Did everybody that wanted to live in the village?

P: Well, you had to go to the personnel office and they'd put your name on the list. If you knew somebody, you could get by that list. And...but it took me a pretty good while to get in the village. Sure did.

B: Was it a lot more expensive to live outside the village?

P: Yes.

B: So that put money in your pocket when you got to live in the village?

P: That's right.

B: Did all three of your children go to Bibb City School?

P: Yes, and they all went to Jordan.

B: What do you remember about the school when your children were there?

P: Well, it was a...my baby girl... I went up there the first day she ever went, I took her and stayed there with her awhile. It was a lot different from what it is now. There's mostly colored kids up there now. They wasn't then. You might want to cut that out on this thing.

B: No, that's no problem.

P: Colored kids just didn't go up there then. Back, you know, 'til they passed that civil rights bill, we had different water facilities in the mill. White people had one and colored people had one. 'Course, one was just as good as the other, but different. Bathrooms same way.

B: Are there any blacks living in Bibb City now?

P: If there are, I absolutely don't know it.

B: Do you remember any ever living here?

P: I think there was one staying down on Hemlock one time but I think he's gone now. Matter of fact, there was a bunch of white boys and colored boys rented a house, anyway, things was pretty rough. They left.

B: How did things change after they sold the houses around here? Were there big changes?

P: Yes, quite a bit. One thing, we had to go to making payments on our houses. They'd take the rent out on us on the check. They was gone get it if I got a check. An lot of places people took pride in their houses, you know. It was like this one, I had it underpinned. I had siding put on it, walls paneled. I put a new roof on it. My God, just name something that I hadn't done! Of course, you know when anything happened back then, all we had to do was go down to the shop and they'd come fix it. I don't care what it was, it didn't cost us a dime. It would be nice if that was doing it now.

B: Did they take care of the yards or were you expected to do your own?

P: You know, I must have taken care of our yard part. I reckon I did. I know I do now. Bibb City's got a crew—they cut all the grass 'side the road. They keep all the grass cut. All them old hills back over yonder, you talk about a time cutting grass. They handle that now. I wouldn't last 30 minutes. They sweep the streets once a week. Now we got some rough places I think around Bibb City but right around here is pretty nice. As far as I'm concerned, it's all nice people and nice neighbors.

B: Did you feel like you lost any of your independence when you moved to the village? Did they tell you what to do or how to do more if you live here than outside?

P: No. You lived just like you was at home.

B: Did people ever get kicked out?

P: Yes...when you quit the mill, you moved. You didn't get your last check until you did move. They've had quite a bit of change. You go down there to the mill now and there's a lot of difference. You know, after I retired, one of those colored women that worked for me said, "Mr. Pippin, it ain't nearly like it was when you was up there." Made me feel good and made me feel sorry for them. It ain't nothing like it was when I was in there. I don't know. I used to know everybody and everybody in the mill just about knew me, but now it gets where I don't know too many down there now.

B: Brady (Pope) told me that you used to have time to be friendly with people.

P: I used to have fun going in there, I just had a spring in my walk and I was kindly up in the air. I enjoyed going in there. Even when I was running drawing and had women running drawing, we just...I enjoyed it. But the last...now, I went to work there on the second shift and I stayed on second shift 38 years.

B: You like it?

P: It's the best shift is down there. Then they finally kept on and on and stayed after me all the years about going on the first shift. I didn't like the first shift. I can't sleep waiting for a clock to alarm. It messes me up. On the second shift, I get off at bedtime, 11:00 o'clock. I got to be...and I sleep until I want to get up. That's the difference. That's worth a lot to me. I stayed on the second shift 38 years and I worked about forty-five and a half years. I put them last seven and a half years on first shift.

B: What is your favorite memory about working in the mill?

P: Well, I was young and there was a lot of pretty girls on the frames. I guess that was my favorite time...get in there with them. We'd get a little break and we'd play around a little bit and, of course, we had to keep our machinery running. I'd get mine to running and have a little time and I go around to them other jobs. Old Sue King, Mildred Kirkland and all of them. They was...we was all young. I just liked that.

B: Did your wife work in the mill when you met her?

P: She went to work in there and worked one or two days and quit and went back down the country. She come from down the country. Then she come back, stayed over there with her brother. I met her and she said she knew about me a long time 'fore I ever seen her. We, I met her and got to going with her and we got married.

One other time, she went on in there and started running cloth. Then she went to drawing frames, slubbers, then, she worked there 38 years. She went...the last 16 years she worked was in the cloth room. I told her that's where the old folks home was.

B: Is that where they check the cloth?

P: They inspect cloth. Run it over them tables. She didn't like that neither. She made good money up there running those slubbers 'bout as much as weavers did, but they was getting awful heavy and I knew when we changed to rovomatics she couldn't. Them spools weighed 5 - 7 pounds, one of them. The ones she was handling didn't weigh but 1 or 2 pounds. I got her transferred out to the cloth room. She worked the last 16 years out there. Boy, she sure didn't like it. We was both on the first shift, she didn't like it and I didn't like it. That sounds funny. Near about everybody you see want to get on first shift. I like second shift. I told them I stayed on there so long, I got used to it.

B: You said she didn't like it and she went back. Did a lot of people do that?

P: A lot of them. She had a brother come in and went to work down in the basement. He worked two or three nights. He went back down the country, down...you know where Slocumb is?

B: Yes, that's where my mama and daddy live.

P: What's your daddy's name?

B: Raymon Cox.

P: Did you ever know Jordan Mayor or Willard May? Hubert May?

B: Was your wife a May?

P: Yes, there was four boys and one girl. Yes, she was raised down there. Her daddy was named Jordan May.

B: My daddy worked summers at the Bibb while he was in school, but after the war, he did something else.

P: What did he do up here?

B: He was an accountant, civil service, at Fort Benning.

P: Talking 'bout her brother...he came up here two or three nights and he quit and went back down there and told them that people up here didn't live off nothing but BC's and Co'Colas. Some of them just couldn't. But when I first came up here, I was so lost, you know. This is a pretty big place. I didn't like it. But after I stayed awhile, I got all right. I got where I could get around. I just love it. I love Bibb City.

B: Everybody I know that lives here loves it.

P: Yes, there ain't nothing like it. And you know, there's a lot of people allover town that don't know where Bibb City is. They don't know. A lot of them don't even know where Bibb City is.

B: Did the people who stayed on the farm think you were crazy for coming up here to work?

P: Well, you know...way back yonder, cotton mill people weren't thought too very much of. But they got up where they made good money. I've seen people down there make, just labor, \$400-\$500 a week. They get where they made pretty good money. Made 50-60 dollars or more every day. Other words, they just come out of the kinks. They got where they thought more of it. But way back, years ago, cotton mill people weren't really thought too much of, but that's all changed. Theys a lot of things that's worse than cotton milling. After they closed it up and air conditioned it, it was all right. I worked in there lot of years until that was done. It was hot!

B: Did you feel like the dust or noise ever bothered you? Did you have breathing problems?

P: Yes, yes. I have chronic bronchitis.

B: Do you think that's from the dust?

P: I believe that's it. I can hear pretty good, though. Thank goodness, I hope I don't lose my hearing. I haven't got a hearing problem. Of course, I can't see nor hear as good as I have. I wasn't as old then as I am now.

B: I want to ask you about the Progress Club.

P: It was right down there. The building is still down there. We used to have a glorious time down

there. Shoot snooker, pool, playing pinnocle. It was a glory hole! Progress Club!!

B: Could any man who worked in the Bibb go there?

P: Well, mostly people who worked in the mill. That's what it was for...people who worked in the mill.

B: Could women go?

P: No, we didn't have women messing around there. We couldn't talk like we wanted to with womens in there. They didn't let any women go in—just men. We played pinnocle, shot pool. They had a snooker table down there. Used to on second shift, I got up ever morning about 10:00 o'clock, I'd go and I'd play snooker. About 2:00 o'clock, I come back and eat and here, I'd go in the mill. I couldn't do that now, but I did then. I was young then. But that was a glory hole in Bibb City. We had a barber shop in it, too. You could get your hair cut in there. Mac McCoy was in it. He died a year or two ago. He lived over back of that fiber mill.

B: Did you have to pay for haircuts?

P: Yes, you paid for haircuts. Haircuts was 50-75 cents. Now, like it is now...5 bucks now. Cheapest I know of is 5 dollars.

B: Could anybody have alcohol in there?

P: No, they didn't allow any gambling in there, either. We just played for fun. Wasn't any gambling, drinking or anything. You go in there drinking, you wouldn't stay long.

B: Who ran it?

P: We had a Houston Clark run it for years, then Dennis Heider. Fred Heider was athletic director for Bibb City for years.

B: Were they employed by the Bibb?

P: Well, I think they was paid out of the profits they made, I guess. Bibb looked after it. It belonged to the Bibb. I don't know how they paid out. I know they made some money off of it. I guess that's how they did it.

B: How did they make money?

P: We had to pay a little bit to play snooker and pool. You didn't have to pay nothing to play pinoccle. I think it was practically nothing to play. Then he had a counter, he sold candy, cigarettes, Co'Colas and all kinds of drinks. He made off of that. I don't think they tried to make money. They just tried to break even. Bibb furnished the building. It was a nice place to go. I used to go there a lot.

B: What happened to it?

P: It just went out of business...shut it down. They got a storeroom, store stuff in there now. They got

a cloth store upstairs.

B: Can anybody go in there?

P: Yes, we can buy stuff at 20% discount. Cost you more. You can go in there. Cloth store. All ex-employees of the Bibb can get 20%.

B: Did they have insurance when you were working all those years? Medical insurance?

P: No medical insurance for years when I first started but they did have \$1,000 life insurance policy with Prudential. Then it kept going up. Then they come in with medical insurance. That was several years after I was there. In 1952, we started a retirement plan. We draw two checks from New York Life ever month for retirement. Then they come in with hospitalization and I'll tell you one thing...it was good. I had pneumonia one time in '79. I went in the hospital and stayed a week. When I come out of there, I owed them \$83 and the insurance company got the rest. 'Bout \$1,800 - \$1,900 dollars. That was good insurance. I wanted to keep it but they wouldn't let me.

B: What about insurance after retirement?

P: You buy a supplement policy. We got that AARP. When I retired, I had \$49,000.00 insurance down there, but all I got to keep was \$8,500, paid up.

B: Did they have doctors in Bibb City?

P: They had them come up here ever day. Old Conner & Cohn come down to the clinic.

B: Where was the clinic?

P: They got nurses down there in the big office now. I seen 'em this morning. I had to go down there. I can go down there and get my blood checked, ears checked. They've checked them down there. But when I come here there wasn't no personnel office, period. Mr. Nailor had a secretary...he was the superintendent of the whole mill just like Mr. Turner was. It was Mr. Nailor, then Mr. Newton, then Mr. Turner. He was there when I come in...Mr. Nailor. Then Russell Newton took it, then John Turner took it.

B: When did Mr. Turner come?

P: He come from Macon. He stayed there. He come around 1960. He was always nice to me. You wanted something and you was right, you got it. He didn't have to call Macon to get it approved. He done it. I like a man like that. I hate to go to a fellow and him say, "I'll see about it". He could move mountains.

B: Was there ever a time when the unions tried to come into the mill?

P: They never have made very little effort that I know of to get that started. They come up from these other mills and shut this one down. That's when the strike was in '34. Well, the Bibb didn't. People was afraid to go in there. That's the way that was.

B: Did they have tight security?

P: This place was full of them National Guard. I remember I went around there. They had a clinic and a swimming pool. We went around there and let the doctor check us a little bit, then we went in the North gate. Mr. Turner's secretary, all she done was ask me my name. We didn't even have social security numbers then. We got them in about '36. They just ask us our name and put us on the payroll. That's all there was to it. Went right to work.

B: There's a big slab of concrete almost under the water tank. Is that where the jail was?

P: That's where the jail was. They been tore that down just a few years ago. That wasn't a jail...it was a sweatbox! Man, that was an awful place.

B: What would you do to get put in there?

P: The Bibb City police would put you in there. I wish you could have seen that thing. Man, it be punishment enough just to keep a fellow in there a week. He'd probably die. Especially in the summertime.

B: Why would they lock somebody up?

P: Well, they get to cutting up here in Bibb City and won't behave themselves. Something like that. They'd lock 'em up. I put one fellow round there and forgot about him for 2 or 3 days. Man, he was miserable. They didn't lock too many up. You find an outlaw ever once in awhile. Yeah, I think they put one round there and forgot him, for several days.

There's been a lot water went down that Chattahoochee since I been here. Yes, sir!

B: Has much been added to the mill since you came to work?

P: Mr. Turner built a place for about 250 "shedless" looms and other than that, the mill was finished in 1920. He done that after he come here. Mr. Turner built a weave shed out there. You know just below the mill there use to be houses down there. On the other side of the mill on the right. Where the weave sheds are, there used to be some houses down there. Used to be one just below the Mill...two story house. They tore 'em all down.

B: Where was the superintendent's house?

P: It was way on back around there. Mr. Turner built that. It was built for him, the company built it, he didn't. When he left, Fred Vann, he was Bibb engineer, he lived in it. He died while he lived in it.

B: When did they stop using the house?

P: I think it's about rotted down, maybe, I don't reckon they tore it down. I don't know.

- End of Interview