



PINE RESIN IN THEIR VEINS: WOMEN AND THE EAST TEXAS TIMBER  
PRODUCTS INDUSTRY, 1935-1975

by

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Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of  
AddRan College of Liberal Arts  
Texas Christian University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of

Master of Arts

May, 2012

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Writers always owe a debt of gratitude to many people, and I am no exception. I was blessed at Texas Christian University to be surrounded by a stellar faculty and had the pleasure of working with an excellent advisor, Dr. Rebecca Sharpless, and two great committee members, Dr. Gregg Cantrell and Dr. Max Krochmal. All helped my writing develop and improve.

The East Texas Research Center at Stephen F. Austin State University and the History Center in Diboll, TX helped tremendously. Additionally, Dustin Parrish proved to be worth his weight in gold. His aid in finding people to interview and in helping with numerous other tasks proved invaluable. Carolyn Whitsitt acted as editor, sounding-board, and friend beyond measure. I also owe a personal debt of gratitude to Brittany Hall, Briana McCord, Alicia Mitchon, Rebecca Kietlinski, and Sara Mote, all of whom never doubted my abilities, even as I did. Furthermore, my fellow graduate students at TCU, particularly Jamalin Harp and Miriam Villanueva, acted as peer advisors and counselors throughout the entire process.

I must also thank my parents, who have helped me in more ways than I can name. My mother is the best cheerleader a person could ask for, and my father's ties to Temple-Inland helped a great deal. In addition, I could have not completed this project without the constant support of Travis Lipscomb. Though I may try, I can never completely thank him for his never-failing encouragement, patience, and love.

Finally, this work is dedicated to Hattie Butler. Though she, like many of the other women included in this study, would be too humble to see why she was important enough to be written about, I hope she would be proud all the same.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	ii
Introduction: A Historical Overview of Timber and Gender from the Lumber Boom to the Great Depression	1
Chapter 1: “Nannie the Nailer”: The Timber Products Industry in Depression and War, 1935-1945	11
Chapter 2: “Theirs is a Never-Ending Job”: The Gendering Of Work in the East Texas Timber Products Industry, 1945-1975	41
Chapter 3: Discrimination at Work, Problems at Home	70
Conclusion	99
Bibliography	102

## INTRODUCTION: A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF TIMBER AND GENDER FROM THE LUMBER BOOM TO THE GREAT DEPRESSION

In the Brookshire Brothers grocery store on Chestnut Street in Lufkin, Texas, large paintings decorate the walls. They are an artist's rendering based on photographs from the city's past, depicting what someone in the store's management felt best represented Lufkin. In one of the pictures, taken in the 1940s or 1950s, a middle-aged man and woman stand on either end of a large saw, caught by the photographer in the middle of cutting a large pine tree. This picture affirms Lufkin's past and present position as a center of timber activity and shows the strong tie between the Deep East Texas people and their forests. The area has long depended upon the timber industry for economic success. The rise of sawmills created numerous towns in the area known as the Pineywoods during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>1</sup> The closure of sawmills, on the other hand, could obliterate a town from the map, sometimes after only a few years of existence.<sup>2</sup> This reliance on timber has affected most of the citizenry, providing employment for a large number of the populace throughout the lumber boom of the late nineteenth century and into the post World War II years.

As the picture also indicates, women significantly participated in forestry and timber products. Women associated their identity with the sawmills and timber industries surrounding them. One resident of Diboll, a major timber center near Lufkin, Mary Jane

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<sup>1</sup> For the purposes of this study, the "Pineywoods" and "Deep East Texas" refer to the heavily forested area south of present day Interstate 20 and north of the Gulf Coast. This study will focus primarily on industries operating out of Angelina and Nacogdoches Counties but will occasionally include information on the surrounding counties that are also part of the Deep East Texas Council of Governments (DETCOG): Houston, Jasper, Newton, Polk, Sabine, San Augustine, San Jacinto, Shelby, Trinity and Tyler.

<sup>2</sup> For more on the rise and fall of sawmill towns, see Thad Sitton and James H. Conrad, *Nameless Towns: Texas Sawmill Communities, 1880-1942* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998).

Christian, described herself as “sawmill bred with pine resin in my veins.”<sup>3</sup> Scholars of the lumber industry in East Texas, however, have paid scant attention to women, mostly due to their absence in the dangerous large sawmills. Sociologist Ruth Allen, author of *East Texas Lumber Workers*, firmly stated in 1960, “Though the employment of women and children has been reported in each decade . . . women have never played any significant part in the lumber industry as paid workers.”<sup>4</sup>

When I first read that sentence as an undergraduate in 2008, I immediately thought of my great-grandmother. She worked in the timber products industry as a lumber grader during the late 1950s for Southern Pine in Pineland, Texas. From her stories, I knew that she had not been alone or in a small minority. Upon further research, I discovered that, since she focused on sawmills, Allen missed women’s involvement in the lumber industry as a whole. Not only did women work as paid laborers in the lumber industry in the 1950s, like my great-grandmother, they had been there as industrial workers since the 1930s.

Utilizing oral histories and extensive timber company records, this study argues that women workers in the East Texas timber products industry performed a valuable role, first as inexpensive stopgaps during the Great Depression and World War II and later as necessary solutions to a persistent labor shortage. Unlike other industries and areas around the nation, the East Texas timber products industry retained their female blue-collar employees in the post-World War II years due to their proven work history in the 1930s and early 1940s and their low wages. Although they held non-gender-

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<sup>3</sup> Mary Jane Christian, interview by Gayle Beene, Diboll, Texas, July 10, 1985, Diboll History Center.

<sup>4</sup> Ruth Allen, *East Texas Lumber Workers: An Economic and Social Picture, 1870-1950* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1961), 59.

normative positions, however, they continued to face discrimination tied to wages, promotions, and race in addition to problems at home from chore loads and childcare. Their position is paradoxical: on the one hand female timber product workers were confident, saw-wielding, industrial workers, different in many ways from their counterparts across the nation. On the other, they had nearly identical gender-based problems at work and home as all other women.

Overall, this work is an attempt to integrate the account of one group of women in one specific region into the larger narrative of gender and labor history. Historians have left the topic of rural women's labor participation in the postwar years largely unexplored.<sup>5</sup> It represents one small step toward illuminating what women in non-urban or suburban areas did for employment in the postwar years and how culture and place could be instrumental in determining opportunity.

Postwar life in non-urban and non-suburban areas remains largely unexplored, aside from scholarship on textile mills and female farm workers. Though the majority of Americans lived in urban and suburban areas at mid-century, a substantial number remained in the countryside and small towns. The historiography of rural and small town America in the postwar years tends to focus on farm life and the effects of changing agricultural processes.<sup>6</sup> As exemplified by the timber industry, however, not all employment in postwar rural and small town America revolved around farming and its support system. Even that industry's historians, however, have not produced scholarship

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<sup>5</sup> For example, two histories of rural America, John L. Shover, *First Majority-Last Minority: The Transforming of Rural Life in America* (De Kalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1976) and David B. Danborn, *Born in the Country: A History of Rural America* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995) focus solely on farm labor and the changes in agriculture; Danborn even apologizes for the narrow focus.

<sup>6</sup>For more see W. G. Younquist and H. O. Fleischer, *Wood in American Life, 1776-2076* (Madison, WI: Forest Products Research Society, 1977).

after a certain point. Indeed, the only two histories of the East Texas lumber industry, Robert Maxwell and Robert D. Baker's *Sawdust Empire: The Texas Lumber Industry, 1830-1940* and Thad Sitton and James H. Conrad's *Nameless Towns: Texas Sawmill Communities, 1880-1942* end, as the titles suggest, before the end of World War II. The East Texas timber industry, which included a Fortune 500 company, did not end in the 1940s, and it is arguable that the most significant and profitable evolutions took place after 1945.<sup>7</sup>

This work seeks to address three central topics on women's participation in the East Texas timber products industry. In the first chapter, I address 1935-1945, arguing that women formed a cheap source of labor to an industry struggling under enormous debt and low board prices, despite an increased demand from the nearby oil wells. During the war, the number of female employees increased to fill in for the servicemen. Some of those women returned to the workforce in more traditionally female jobs.<sup>8</sup> Others, however, never left the plants and were later joined by more women.

From the war years, through the second wave feminist movement, and into the present, timber products industries employed women to stack lumber, saw boards, and grade broom handles. While television stars in the 1950s, such as Barbara Billingsley and Donna Reed, portrayed a stereotyped urban white feminine ideal, East Texas women recognized, as did many other women around the nation, that their lives did not match those on television or described in most ladies' magazines. The vision of women as

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<sup>7</sup>*Fortune* ranked Temple-Inland as a Fortune 500 company until it fell to 557 in 2008 from 414 in 2007. "Temple-Inland," *Fortune*, May 5, 2008, Accessed January 27, 2012. <http://money.cnn.com/magazines/fortune/fortune500/2008/snapshots/763.html>.

<sup>8</sup> Mary Potchernick Cook, "Angelina's Rosies: Women at War in World War II in East Texas." MA thesis., Stephen F. Austin State University, 1998, 157.

housewives or in traditionally feminine jobs, like clerical or educational fields, did not apply to all women in East Texas. Their story shows how women in the postwar years could discard, knowingly or unconsciously, traditional gender roles out of personal preference or in the face of economic pressure. I assert in the second chapter that the timber products industry kept women in non-traditional positions after World War II because of a continued labor shortage, the lower cost of female labor, and an absence of hyper-masculinity around the timber industry in East Texas, unlike the Pacific Northwest and other timber regions.<sup>9</sup> Once hired by the timber products industry, due to a subtle gender division in the industry, often upon seemingly illogical lines, female timber workers did not view their work as exceptional or masculine.<sup>10</sup>

Furthermore, though employed in a blue-collar field, women in the postwar East Texas timber products industry faced many of the same discriminations and difficulties as their counterparts around the nation. Chapter 3 examines racial, wage, and promotion discrimination. This chapter also shows that female timber workers felt the same pressures from housework and childcare as working women around the nation. Although they appeared to be breaking gender boundaries in a male-dominated industry, in reality, the women, often pushed into the industry's employment by narrow opportunities elsewhere, faced continued limitations.

### **Timber Towns: An Overview of the East Texas Timber Industry**

To understand the role of women in the East Texas timber products industry, it is necessary to examine the environment in which they lived. When the first Anglo-

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<sup>9</sup> Allen, *East Texas Lumber Workers*, 51.

<sup>10</sup> For example, women could operate electrical saws but not electrical screwdrivers. Lola Carter, interview by author, Diboll, Texas, July 27, 2011

American settlers came to Texas in the early 1800s, they found a thick forest expanding from the Louisiana border to the Hill country in central Texas. Dense areas of multiple kinds of pine and hardwood trees stretched across the land for more than 36,000 square miles, an area larger slightly larger than the state of Indiana. The densest area of forest most used in commercial industries lay near the Louisiana border around the Sabine, Neches, and Angelina rivers.<sup>11</sup>

Prior to the 1870s, few sawmills took advantage of the dense forest. East Texans, who had long seen their timber holdings as a limitation to agriculture, were more than willing to sell stumpage (the right to cut timber) to investors at low rates in the years after Reconstruction.<sup>12</sup> Two such investors began the first large sawmill operation in East Texas. In 1877, Henry J. Lutchter and C. Bedell Moore, lumbermen of Williamsport, Pennsylvania, bought a small sawmill in Orange, Texas, and began turning it into the first large mill.<sup>13</sup> Lutchter and Moore began the lumber boom as other lumber tycoons followed their example.

The work at both large and small mills was hard, long, dangerous, and paid poorly. Ten-hour days were the norm during the lumber boom.<sup>14</sup> The hazards of the work were staggering. Kirby Lumber Company, in 1914, had a 25 percent casualty rate, which, as Thad Sitton and James Conrad have noted, was “equal to that of some combat

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<sup>11</sup>Robert S. Maxwell and Robert D. Baker. *Sawdust Empire: The Texas Lumber Industry, 1830-1940*. (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1983), 3.

<sup>12</sup>Thomas D. Clark, *The Greening of the South: The Recover of Land and Forest* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1984), 15.

<sup>13</sup>Maxwell and Baker, *Sawdust Empire*, 20, 31.

<sup>14</sup> Texas Bureau of Labor Statistics, Biennial Report, 1911/12, 166-180.

infantry companies.”<sup>15</sup> Considering the environment of early sawmills, which demanded great physical strength, the absence of women workers should come as little surprise to observers. Sawmill companies did not fail to hire women because of ideas about women and men’s proper spheres and employment; they did not hire them because most women could not meet the physical requirements.

In the case of the first large sawmill, Lutchter and Moore never attempted to build a company town. They paid their workers in cash and did not own the land under the town. That changed as the lumber boom began in earnest. As other lumbermen began their enterprises in the years after Lutchter and Moore’s success, thriving towns bloomed around the mills. The owner of the sawmill typically controlled all of the land around the mill. As a result, he built and owned houses, hotels, commissaries, doctors’ offices, and all other buildings in the town. Diboll, a typical sawmill town, sprung from the vision of Virginian businessman Thomas Louis Latane Temple, commonly referred to as T. L. L. Temple. After a failed attempt at beginning a lumber company in Arkansas, Temple created Southern Pine Lumber Company in 1893.<sup>16</sup> As the mill began operation, the workers and their families formed an active town.

Diboll and towns like it were among what journalist George Creel referred to as “The Feudal Towns of Texas” in an article for *Harpers Weekly* in 1915.<sup>17</sup> Men like Temple owned all the land in their town and set the rules. Companies did not pay cash wages. Instead, the company paid workers in merchandise checks, redeemable at the

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<sup>15</sup> Sitton and Conrad, *Nameless Towns*, 159.

<sup>16</sup> Megan Biesele, *The Cornbread Whistle: Oral History of a Texas Timber Company Town* (Lufkin, TX: Lufkin Printing Company, 1986), 6-7.

<sup>17</sup> George Creel, “The Feudal Towns of Texas,” *Harper’s Weekly* 60 (1915): 76-78.

company store. In this manner, the company's money made a circle: from the company to the worker, than back to the company through the commissary or rent. A federal investigator for the Commission on Industrial Labor in 1912 thought the merchandise check in East Texas sawmill towns to be "the most reprehensible thing your investigator has discovered in his work of investigation in this country; the merchandise check controls the town. . . ."<sup>18</sup> Workers found the commissary prices to usually be inflated in comparison to privately owned stores but could not exchange their "sawmill dollars" for cash without facing a 20 to 30 percent loss in value. As lumber historians Robert Maxwell and Robert Baker explain, "The system, by its very nature, kept the worker broke."<sup>19</sup>

Despite the conditions, "in the entire history of Texas lumbering no band of workers burned a mill, picketed a main office, or sacked a company store." Maxwell and Baker assert that the reason labor uprisings like those in Homestead and Pullman did not happen, despite the feudal aspects of sawmill towns, could be found in the roots sawmill families planted in their towns.<sup>20</sup> The life of a sawmill worker operated in a masculine, dangerous, and insular world. The work required great upper body strength and posed risks that were seen as too great for wives and mothers. In sawmill towns in East Texas, however, unlike the logging camps of the Pacific Northwest, masculinity did not completely dominate the landscape.<sup>21</sup> Families created communities in sawmill towns

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<sup>18</sup> Allen, *East Texas Lumber Workers*, 140.

<sup>19</sup> Maxwell and Baker, *Sawdust Empire*, 151.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 153.

<sup>21</sup> Allen, *East Texas Lumber Workers*, 51.

and participated in the function and preservation of the companies almost as much as their husbands and fathers did.

### **Gender in the Sawmill World**

Companies reinforced gender roles through policies and daily events, like the ringing of whistles. Sawmill wives, like sailors, had to respond to the sounds of the appropriate mill whistle. To provide meals for their husbands' strict work schedules, wives had to prepare meals on time. At 5 a.m., the "biscuit whistle" blew, and wives began to make breakfast for their husbands, usually biscuits, syrup, eggs, bacon, and coffee.<sup>22</sup> Following that, the sawmill wife cleaned house, washed clothes, cared for children, and visited neighbors. Cleaning the house was a much more labor-intensive task in sawmill towns than in other areas. Cinders rained from the sawmill's massive smokestacks and necessitated nearly constant cleaning of clothes and home. Myrtle Rushing remembered how the cinders would come through window screens into her home in Diboll in the late 1920s. "Housekeeping was really hard. You had a day's job every day," she stated. "It was the same old thing, you really had to work."<sup>23</sup> At 11:15, a "cornbread whistle" rang to remind wives to place their lunch cornbread in the oven for their husband's noon arrival. The whistle was such an intrinsic part of the community that chaos ensued one day when Southern Pine did not ring the 11:15 whistle, and multiple husbands "came in from work at noon to find their wives taking their morning naps . . . and the cook stove as cold as a well digger's shovel in Idaho. To the question about the possibility of some immediate grub . . . came the same reply of 'Are you

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<sup>22</sup> Sitton and Conrad, *Nameless Towns*, 130-31.

<sup>23</sup> Myrtle Rushing, interview by Marie Davis, Diboll, TX, 1986, Diboll History Center.

CRAZY. Why the Eleven Fifteen ain't blowed yet!"<sup>24</sup> As a result, Southern Pine quickly reinstated the 11:15 whistle, which goes off every weekday in Diboll, even in 2012.

Women were also extremely active in the civic life of the sawmill town. Females were at the lead of church activities and charitable organizations.<sup>25</sup> Employment opportunities for women in sawmill towns and East Texas in general, however, were few from the lumber boom through the early 1930s. The following chapter examines why the region did not have more female jobs prior to the mid-1930s, what women who needed income could do, and how employment patterns for women changed in the midst of the Depression.

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<sup>24</sup> "The Biscuit Whistle," *The Buzz Saw*, March 31, 1949, 4. *The Buzz Saw* was the Southern Pine Company's newspaper, was operated by employees, and lasted from the mid-1940s to the mid-1950s.

<sup>25</sup> Sitton and Conrad, *Nameless Towns*, 53.

## CHAPTER 1: “NANNIE THE NAILER”: THE TIMBER PRODUCTS INDUSTRY IN DEPRESSION AND WAR

When Nannie Stanaland was fifteen years old, she began working at the Temple Manufacturing Company’s wooden box factory in Diboll, Texas. Her father had died that same year, two days after his fiftieth birthday, and the family needed more income. The company required their workers to be over sixteen years old, so Stanaland dropped out of school and lied about her age. The supervisor, a friend of her father, knew her real age but sympathized with her family’s situation and allowed her to begin work in a low-level position, matching boards for the boxes. In this position, Stanaland matched boards of equal length and placed them on the crates before another person nailed them in place. She eventually did a little bit of everything with the company, as did many of the female employees at the factory, ultimately operating the complicated and unwieldy nailing machine. After meeting her husband at the box factory, the two worked together until the factory closed at the end of the Korean War. Stanaland became a stay-at-home mother.<sup>1</sup>

This story of a young girl forced to enter the workforce to help her family has occurred throughout America’s history. What is intriguing is the fact that Stanaland began work in 1931, during the Great Depression, a time when public opinion condemned women workers for supposedly taking jobs from men. This trend, however, does not appear to have been universal to all regions and industries. Indeed, the employment of women in blue-collar work in the timber products industry does not have foundations in World War II, as in many other industries, but in the lean years of the Great Depression. Southern Pine Lumber Company, owned by the Temple family, serves

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<sup>1</sup> Nannie Brazeale, interview by Jonathan Gerland, Diboll, Texas, March 23, 2000, Diboll History Center.

as one example. It began diversifying prior to the beginning of the Depression, creating other timber products in addition to sawed boards, and opening a box factory in the 1920s as a subsidiary company, Temple Manufacturing. Employees at the box factory manufactured all kinds of wooden boxes, particularly fruit and vegetable crates and egg cases. During the difficult years of the Depression, when it was actually operating in the red, the company increased the number of women working for the box factory. The Diboll box factory was a major employer of local white women in manufacturing jobs and laid the foundation for women's further employment in the area's forest products industries.<sup>2</sup>

### **Nationwide Depression, Lumber Diversification**

According to the archivist at Diboll's History Center, Jonathan Gerland, women's employment occurred as a philanthropic outreach from Southern Pine. Supposedly, the company knew that families were hurting during that decade, so they hired wives and daughters to help increase incomes.<sup>3</sup> A 1935 photograph shows female employees, including Nannie Stanaland, in front of the factory. Females account for nearly a quarter of those pictured, and most wear the overalls and work clothes that designate them as laborers in the factory. The ages vary from young teenagers to elderly women, and there is not a single racial minority, male or female.<sup>4</sup> According to personnel records, many of the women pictured remained with the factory into the 1940s, and more females joined

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<sup>2</sup> Jonathan Gerland, "The Temple Associates Box Factory in Diboll," *The Pine Bough*, July 2000, 20. The *Pine Bough* is the publication of the Diboll History Center.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Jonathan Gerland, "1935 photograph features box factory employees," *The Diboll Free Press*, February 24, 2000, pg. 3A.

them during World War II.<sup>5</sup> There is no evidence of what kind of reaction men in the town and company had to the new female employees.

The actions of Southern Pine appear extremely unusual when juxtaposed against the national trends during the Great Depression. Most companies in the nation did not hire women, especially married women, for industrial jobs in the Depression years. Public sentiment rejected the independent woman of the 1920s, typically characterized by the urban flapper, as economic hardship increased. Traditional views of married women's domestic roles became further entrenched as male unemployment continued to rise. Many Americans viewed working women as selfish and greedy, depriving a worthy male breadwinner of employment. In 1936, 82 percent of people polled believed that women should not work if their husbands had a job, and more than half wanted a law passed to prohibit wives from working at all, even if their husband made very little in income. Three-fourths of those supporting such laws were women.<sup>6</sup> The federal government enacted laws that prevented a female from working in a civil service position if her husband held a job in the government as well.

Nevertheless, many women had no choice but to continue in or enter the work force as the economy contracted. Women's participation in the labor force increased during the 1930s, growing from 22 to 25 percent of the working population. For married women, the percentage of those employed increased from 12 to 15 percent.<sup>7</sup> Many

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<sup>5</sup> "List of Temple Employees for the Month of August 1947," Box 223, Temple Industries, Forest Collection, East Texas Research Center, Stephen F. Austin State University, Nacogdoches, TX.

<sup>6</sup> Hadley Cantril, *Public Opinion, 1935-1946* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1951), 1044-75.

<sup>7</sup> Peter Gabriel Filene, *Him/Her/Self: Sex Roles in Modern America* (New York: New American Library, 1976), 219.

women had an easier time than their husbands or male family members finding employment, due to the sexual divisions within business. The Depression hit heavy industry, where male workers were most concentrated, particularly hard, and areas where female workers dominated the workforce, such as service and clerical fields, did not suffer as much.<sup>8</sup> As in previous decades, management continued to justify women's low wages and status with the idea that males were the providers, even when women were the primary breadwinners.

Even before the Great Depression, in the 1920s, lumber companies across the nation had entered a decline. Lumber barons viewed reforestation programs with contempt, because of the costs involved in buying and paying taxes on land while waiting an average of thirty years for the newly planted trees to reach a profit.<sup>9</sup> Most sawmill towns disappeared after a company cut all the surrounding forestation and moved to another area. As the forests of the nation shrank, this process could not continue forever. Thus, the lumber boom had reached its end; there were fewer forests to sustain all of the existing sawmills, and fluctuating demands for lumber caused periodic mini-depressions in the industry throughout the 1920s.<sup>10</sup> Those companies that would survive had to consider reforestation and diversification.

At the same time that companies began to realize the problems intrinsic to “cut and get out” methods, the Great Depression hit. What began as a stock market crash in

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<sup>8</sup> Susan Hartmann, *The Home Front and Beyond: American Women in the 1940s* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1982), 19.

<sup>9</sup> Robert S. Maxwell and Robert D. Baker, *Sawdust Empire: The Texas Lumber Industry, 1830-1940* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1983), 193.

<sup>10</sup> Delores Morrow, *Our Sawdust Roots: A History of the Forest Products Industry in Montana* (Missoula, MT: University of Montana, 1979), 61.

October 1929 led to the worst economic crisis in the nation's history. Prices for lumber plunged from \$42 per thousand board feet during the late 1920s to \$24 per square foot in 1930, \$18 in 1931, and \$14.65 in 1932. Production costs remained stable throughout the 1920s and 1930s, ranging from \$23 to \$24 per thousand board feet. As historian Thad Sitton observed, "If [lumber] companies operated from 1932 to 1940, most of them operated at a loss."<sup>11</sup> Lumber companies throughout the nation stumbled as contracts petered out; some closed down completely. In Montana, only 72 sawmills out of 114 remained in operation in 1932, and the state did not reach pre-Depression levels until a decade later. The national market for lumber did not fully recover until the housing boom of the 1950s.<sup>12</sup>

In East Texas, ghost towns rapidly appeared as one mill after another shut down. After their sawmill burned in 1934, Carter-Kelley Lumber Company did not rebuild, and their company town of Manning slowly faded off the map.<sup>13</sup> The huge Kirby Lumber Company, which was the largest lumber producer in the South, declared bankruptcy, and the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railway took control, shutting down most of the mills in Tyler and Jasper counties. Although John Henry Kirby, the founder of the company, referred to by contemporaries as "The Prince of Pines," remained president, the company never recovered.<sup>14</sup> Neither small nor large mill operations were safe.

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<sup>11</sup>Thad Sitton and James H. Conrad, *Nameless Towns: Texas Sawmill Communities, 1880-1942* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998), 200-201.

<sup>12</sup> Morrow, *Our Sawdust Roots*, 64.

<sup>13</sup> The Texas Almanac has not listed Manning as a town since 1947. Megan Biesele, "Manning, TX," *The Handbook of Texas Online*, Accessed March 5, 2011, <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/htm08>.

<sup>14</sup> Sitton and Conrad, *Nameless Towns*, 202.

The companies that did survive operated on reduced production schedules and laid off workers. Some companies, particularly those sponsoring company towns, tried to limit the impact of reduced work schedules on their workers. Frost-Johnson Lumber Company in Nacogdoches gave each employee some work a month, though it might only be a few days, and the Angelina County Lumber Company in Lufkin tried to do the same.<sup>15</sup> Employees found their wages reduced to just over one dollar a day, but some companies tried to offset the reduced hours and wages by dropping or abolishing rent on company houses and offering commissary credit for necessities. Companies that had prohibited outside peddling turned a blind eye as workers tried to earn extra income.

Indeed, the lengths to which many sawmill company owners went to help their employees is extraordinary. At the East Texas sawmill town of Wiergate, Wier Lumber Company, run by Bob and Tom Wier, continued to operate. In an effort to distribute reduced hours fairly, men who had the most children received the most hours and wages, a policy that the employees widely approved. The people of Wiergate were so grateful for the company's efforts that a common saying during the Depression was "In God we trust and Bob we must." Motivated as much by practical considerations as by compassion, companies tried to keep their employees on so that when the Depression ended, the mills could return to full capacity. Training skilled workers in the sawmills cost time, effort, and money that floundering companies could not afford.<sup>16</sup>

The strain of trying to keep Southern Pine Lumber Company from folding was too much for the elderly T. L. L Temple, who passed control to his son, Arthur Temple,

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<sup>15</sup> Maxwell and Baker, *Sawdust Empire*, 201.

<sup>16</sup> Sitton and Conrad, *Nameless Towns*, 201.

Sr., in 1932. The company had acquired a great deal of land and new equipment right before the market crash and was over two million dollars in debt. The Temple family had watched the collapse of the massive Kirby Lumber empire and strained to avoid a similar fate. According to interviews with residents of Southern Pine's sawmill towns, management ceaselessly worked to help employees and their families.<sup>17</sup> In 1935, the company sold more than eighty thousand acres of its timberland to the U.S. Forest Service at the rock-bottom price of \$2.75 an acre. Unlike many sawmill operators, the elder Temple believed in buying timberland and owning it indefinitely. His grandson considered the trauma of selling land at such a massively discounted price to the government as one of the factors in T. L. L Temple's death that same year.<sup>18</sup> The younger Temple found himself reduced to begging companies to supply the commissary on credit to feed his employees. "Dad [Arthur Temple, Sr.] never slept," according to his son, Arthur Temple, Jr. "For two or three years he almost didn't sleep because he was worried sick about the debt. . . ."<sup>19</sup> A pragmatic banker in St. Louis saved the company from demise. Refusing to throw the company into bankruptcy, Fred Florence of Republic Bank declared, "We don't know a damn thing about running sawmills. . . They [Southern Pine] will do a better job than we can. I vote we stay with them, damn it." Thus, Southern Pine survived the Great Depression.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Those interviews are too numerous to list. See the many accounts in Megan Biesele, *The Cornbread Whistle: Oral History of a Texas Timber Company Town* (Lufkin, TX: Lufkin Printing Company, 1986).

<sup>18</sup> Arthur Temple, Jr., interview by Megan Lambert, Diboll, TX, April 8, 1985, Diboll History Center.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

Some companies entered a period of reorientation, and the timber products industry branched out. In 1930, a chemist with a doctorate from Johns Hopkins University, Charles H. Herty, developed a successful process that created newsprint pulp. He faced difficulty in gaining financial backing, because many people believed that southern yellow pine's resin was too dense for the creation of paper. Lumber retailers and craftsmen considered southern yellow pine an inferior product to other types of woods.<sup>21</sup> Herty's luck changed after a chance encounter with Ernest L. Kurth, the owner of Angelina Lumber Company. Kurth liked the idea and began a newsprint manufacturing company, Southland Paper Mills, Inc., in June 1938 with investment help from Arthur Temple, Sr., and other similar companies. Southland Paper Mill was the first successful producer of newsprint from southern yellow pine, and other companies all around Texas and other parts of the South began in imitation.<sup>22</sup>

The introduction of non-sawmill forest products industries created a small opening for women workers. This mirrored a wider pattern in other industries at the same time. Across the nation, companies replaced old equipment with new, easier-to-operate machines. Although this was an expensive undertaking during a depressed economy, in the long term, companies knew this evolution would save them money by converting higher-paying skilled jobs into lower wage non-skilled jobs. According to an investigation by the U.S. Women's Bureau, a federal agency founded in 1920 to monitor the welfare of working women, even during the Depression, men did not seek out those

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<sup>21</sup> Maxwell and Baker, *Sawdust Empire*, 211.

<sup>22</sup> Maxwell and Baker, *Sawdust Empire*, 211-212. The complete correspondences related to the birth of the paper mill are in the Angelina County Lumber Company Records in the Forest History Collection of the East Texas Research Center at the Ralph W. Steen Library, Stephen F. Austin State University, Nacogdoches, TX.

lower status jobs and the lower wages attached to them.<sup>23</sup> With these technological innovations across multiple industries, women could enter blue-collar industrial fields that had been previously deemed too dangerous or beyond their physical and intellectual capacities.

### **Women and the Timber-Products Industry**

Women in East Texas sawmill communities had had limited employment options at the beginning of the industry. As sociologist Ruth Allen observed, “Wage work for women . . . was nonexistent. One can only wonder—almost marvel—that no ‘women’s industries’ were organized to use this pool of labor.”<sup>24</sup> Allen went on to note that many women worked as unpaid family laborers or as piece workers, though, as stated before, she did not note the entry of women into plants in the 1930s. An investigator in the 1910s was shocked to see women performing masculine tasks, like hauling heavy logs and branches. He noted that in an unnamed lumber camp “mothers with little babies have to get crossties [timber used in railroad tracks] for the railroad company for bread.”<sup>25</sup> This sort of work was primarily in exchange for food, not for a wage. Due to a need for cash, some women created their own jobs and became self-employed, usually in traditionally female tasks. At Ewing in the 1920s, Pearl Braggs cleaned and ironed for the higher-ups in the town.<sup>26</sup> In Diboll at the turn of the century, a “Grannie

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<sup>23</sup> Alice Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work: A History of Wage-Earning Women in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 261.

<sup>24</sup> Ruth Allen, *East Texas Lumber Workers: An Economic and Social Picture, 1870-1950* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1961), 157.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> Ben Barlow, “Ewing—Growing Up,” In *Remembering Ewing*, ed. Lamar Tinsley (Lufkin: Pineywoods Pringing, 1987), 12.

Scarborough” operated as a peddler of buttermilk, butter, and eggs.<sup>27</sup> Other female entrepreneurs found employment as occasional cooks or as household help.

When sawmills opened, towns usually formed around the operations. The owner of the company, operating in a semi-feudal manner, usually owned the new town as well. Towns such as Diboll (Southern Pine’s company town) and Kirbyville (One of Kirby Lumber Company’s towns) appeared on the map during the lumber boom at the turn of the century. Since the company owned all the land in the town, it also owned the boarding houses, restaurants, and schools. Quite a few women in the pre-Depression years found themselves on the sawmill company’s payroll. Sawmills hired women for typically gendered employment as teachers, boarding house managers, restaurant cooks, secretaries and commissary clerks. Teachers in sawmill towns often lacked certification, and instruction revolved around the fundamentals of reading, writing, and arithmetic. Teachers were paid either directly by the sawmill company or through taxes on the company’s landholdings.<sup>28</sup>

Women usually ran boarding houses or worked there as cooks. In the 1920s and 1930s, Della Williams operated the Beanery, the single men’s boarding house in Diboll, and Cora Nash was the cook there for seventeen years. Due to her race, Nash, an African American, had even fewer job opportunities than the white women in the town but was able to earn a decent wage of four to six dollars a week, usually in cash, at the Beanery during the 1920s.<sup>29</sup> The work involved in managing a boarding house was exhausting.

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<sup>27</sup> Biese, *Cornbread Whistle*, 33.

<sup>28</sup> Maxwell and Baker, *Sawdust Empire*, 141.

<sup>29</sup> Biese, *Cornbread Whistle*, 59.

Marjorie Pickel Davis, the granddaughter of Emily Estes, white operator of the Star Hotel in Diboll, remembered that “They were cooking all day, three meals a day . . . . We got up about 2:30 or quarter to three, and fixed their [the men’s] lunches.”<sup>30</sup> In the Southern Pine logging camp of Fastrill, Vina Wells’ mother operated the boarding home. Wells remembered, “My mother and grandmother had to get up at four o’clock . . . . And they cooked everything. They did not have anybody else to help them cook, but it was good.” After they were done preparing lunch and washing dishes, Wells’s mother and grandmother “went to bed. They needed it.”<sup>31</sup>

A handful of women worked in the commissary, for the company doctor, or as secretaries. Lucille Warner was a Southern Pine Lumber Company nurse beginning in 1940. In her first year on the job, she discovered the multitude of injuries inherent in sawmill life. A man came in to have a splinter removed from one eye and during the course of the examination his other eye, which was glass, fell out, to Warner’s shock and surprise. Additionally, many people named their babies for her after she aided in successful deliveries.<sup>32</sup> In the offices of Southern Pine, Rhoda Faye Chandler’s first job was dipping cardboard “checks,” the company currency, in wax. The company did not pay federal currency until the 1950s, and wax made the company money last longer. She went on to be a kind of social worker for the company during the Depression. She interviewed employees and visited their homes to see if a particular family needed financial assistance.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 60.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>32</sup> Lucille Warner, interview by Marie Davis, Diboll, Texas, 1985, Diboll History Center.

<sup>33</sup> Rhoda Faye Chandler, interview by Becky Bailey, Diboll, Texas, 1982, Diboll History Center.

During the Depression, the women of Diboll, who had watched as their husbands received drastically reduced pay and their family economy suffered, were more than eager to join the labor force, and the management of the box factory knew it. It is possible that Temple Manufacturing Company's management felt a philanthropic urge that prodded them to hire women during the Depression years. On the other hand, the fact that new machinery allowed women to work on a repetitious assembly line in a non-skilled, low-wage position was probably also a factor. Sawmills were dangerous and required physical strength, even with new technology, that women usually did not possess, but the new industries were neither overly hazardous nor physically demanding. That is not to say that the numerous testimonials by former employees of Southern Pine and Temple Manufacturing about their company's compassion are not true, but profit, particularly in light of the company's substantial debt, must be considered as well. Regardless, the opening of the box factory, and, in 1939, the Temple-White Company handle factory, provided women with their first blue-collar industrial positions in the East Texas sawmill communities several years before the first Rosie hit the rivets during World War II.<sup>34</sup>

### **The Timber Products Industry Slowly Recovers and Goes to War**

As the Depression waned, several factors helped to pull East Texans out of economic difficulty. In October 1930, the discovery of oil in the northern part of East Texas provided jobs for unemployed timber workers. The rapid construction of oil derricks and buildings around the oil fields created an uptick in lumber demand, though not enough to return production to pre-Depression status. New industries opened on the

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<sup>34</sup> Gerland, "Box Factory," 20.

sites of some of those that had closed. Lufkin alone housed the Angelina County Lumber Company, the Mummert Grain Door Factory, the Lufkin Box Factory, the J. M. Moore chair factory, the Norris Standard Fence Company, and a creosoting company. The Moore chair factory, the Norris Fence Company, and the creosoting company all began production during the Depression, 1930, 1931, and 1938, respectively. As a result, during the 1930s, Deep East Texas, particularly Angelina County, earned a national reputation for timber production, and both the United States and Texas Forest Service located their headquarters in Lufkin.<sup>35</sup>

Then the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. The dark days of the Depression reversed rapidly with the coming of World War II. The nation prepared for total war, and industries returned to full production. East Texas and the lumber industry mostly followed the same path as the rest of the United States during World War II. By 1943, the government counted East Texas sawmills and timber products plants as essential defense industries. The War Materials Commission contacted all paper and pulp manufacturers, stating, “Employees in pulp mills are performing an essential job and are assisting materially in the war effort. . . .”<sup>36</sup> The Southern Pines War Production Committee and representatives of the War Department held a meeting in Lufkin with lumber manufacturers. The committee told mill owners that they required three hundred million feet of lumber for the war.<sup>37</sup> Timber products companies rose to the occasion, operating around the clock. Employees benefitted greatly from an increase in hours;

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<sup>35</sup> *Lufkin Daily News*, June 24, 1943, Section III, 2.

<sup>36</sup> Telegram War Materials Commission to Southland Paper Mill, February 5, 1943, Southland Paper Company, Forest Collection, East Texas Research Center, Stephen F. Austin State University, Nacogdoches, TX.

<sup>37</sup> *Lufkin Daily News*, June 6, 1943, 1.

southern lumber employees saw their total paychecks increase 70 percent from the beginning of the war to the end, compared to 50 percent in other manufacturing areas.<sup>38</sup>

Timber was vital to the war effort. In 1998, Stephen F. Austin State University graduate student Mary Potchernick Cook compiled a list of war materials utilizing wood. The inventory included barracks, training planes, railroad equipment, ammunition and blood plasma boxes, rifle stocks, and charcoal, to name only a few.<sup>39</sup> Seventy-five to ninety percent of Texas timber contributed to war work, and timber companies even harvested dogwood trees to meet the timber demand.<sup>40</sup> Companies adapted to war needs. Temple Associates Lumber Company built homes for defense areas, more than any other company in Texas. Temple-White Handle Factory in Diboll produced mop handles for the Army and Navy, needed for biohazard cleanup, at a rate of 35,000 a day.<sup>41</sup> Southland Paper Mills began to make thick kraft paper for packaging shell casings, Moore Chair Company made wooden bullet hole plugs for ships, and Norris Fence Company made wooden ammunition boxes.<sup>42</sup> Angelina County Lumber Company earned the Army-Navy “E” Award for quick pace and quality five times, the only lumber company in the nation to do so.<sup>43</sup> Angelina County alone produced \$25 million worth of war material in 1944.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>38</sup>Allen, *East Texas Lumber Workers*, 150.

<sup>39</sup>Mary Potchernick Cook, “Angelina’s Rosies: Women at War in World War II in East Texas.” MA thesis., Stephen F. Austin State University, 1998, 170.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., 13.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., 168, 174.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., 18.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., 16-17.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., 169.

The war caused a massive labor shortage in the East Texas timber products industry. Workers flocked to the Gulf Coast and other major industrial centers, drawn by higher wages and cheap housing in the shipbuilding industry. Facing the exact opposite problem of the Depression years, around one thousand sawmills in the pine woods of the South shut down during the war years due to the dearth of labor, including the Ewing mill near Huntington in Angelina County. The owners of the Ewing mill tried to augment their workforce with female workers but could not maintain their production.<sup>45</sup> The situation in East Texas became so desperate that the Southland Paper Mills officers, Kurth, Temple, and Henderson, asked to use German prisoners of war in the timber products industry. The War Manpower Commission, a new government agency designed to oversee wartime labor, approved, and Camp Lufkin opened on February 15, 1944. POWs arrived just in time for an unusually intense freeze that threatened East Texas forests. They set to work harvesting timber as quickly as possible.<sup>46</sup>

Employers, as shown with the East Texas lumber company's preference to use POWs over women, initially hesitated to hire women. The War Department confirmed the position that those who produced war materials "should not be encouraged to utilize women on a large scale until all available male labor in the area has first been employed."<sup>47</sup> As the war progressed and millions of men left for military service, industries reversed their opinion. The Office of War Information (OWI) worked in tandem with columnists in newspapers and magazines subtly to maneuver women into

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<sup>45</sup> Ben Barlow, "Ewing—Growing Up," 12.

<sup>46</sup> Cook, "Angelina's Rosies," 35-36. For more on the German POWs in East Texas, see Mark Choate, *Nazis in the Pineywoods* (Lufkin, TX: Best of East Texas Press, 1989).

<sup>47</sup> Records of Headquarters, Army Services Forces, Box 605, National Archives, Record Group 160 as cited in Hartmann, *The Home Front and Beyond*, 54.

war work. Articles across the nation appealed to women's patriotism, arguing that women enabled men to do their duty in the military.<sup>48</sup>

The POWs were not enough to relieve the massive labor shortage in East Texas, although they did manage to save most of the 1944 timber harvest. Thus, the women of East Texas, like their counterparts across the nation, faced increasing pressure to join the labor force. Local newspapers encouraged women to take on jobs related to the war effort. The *Lufkin Daily News* reported on local speeches that called on women's active participation. A 1942 Rotary Club forum on "Women in Industry and Business," conducted by local businessmen John Redditt and Al Cudlipp, in Lufkin encouraged women to leave the home and perform public service.<sup>49</sup> Local advertisements in the paper, such as a 1943 ad for Satterwhite's Business School in Lufkin, cried, "Uncle Sam and his war industry wants 6,000,000 women to take jobs and he wants YOU! When you take a war job you help the nation take a step toward victory."<sup>50</sup> "There is a certain pride in the fact that the 'weaker' sex has shown that they are not so weak after all and are adaptable to the situations which the war has enforced," reported *Lufkin Daily News* editor Wade Beaumier.<sup>51</sup>

The media, however, did not encourage women to become too masculine. Although *The Lufkin Daily News*, like many others throughout the area and country, wrote stories that highlighted women engaged in war work, they usually used staged

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> *Lufkin Daily News*, October 4, 1942, 1.

<sup>50</sup> *Lufkin Daily News*, March 21, 1943, 12.

<sup>51</sup> *Lufkin Daily News*, February 25, 1945, 1.

pictures of the woman, looking appropriately feminine, at her job.<sup>52</sup> In fact, some women made a conscious decision to maintain their femininity on the job. Delila McGaughey Leevin, a typeset operator for the *Angelina County News*, made an effort to wear colorful dresses, a bow in her hair, and fingernail polish, a fact the local newspaper made sure to report.<sup>53</sup> Thus, the media reassured both women and men that the gendered order was not facing too great of an onslaught.

Despite those protestations, historians have typically marked the war as a watershed in the labor history of American women. William Chafe called the 1940s “a turning point in the history of American women” in terms of the changes in the female labor force.<sup>54</sup> Other historians see World War II as part of a continuum, although more amplified between 1941 and 1945.<sup>55</sup> In March 1941, 10.8 million women held jobs; that number soared to 18 million by August 1944.<sup>56</sup> Manufacturing received the largest increase out of all other areas of employment; female participation increased by 140 percent.<sup>57</sup> Although these numbers are impressive, as labor historian Alice Kessler-Harris has shown, 1.5 million of those additional women would have entered the labor

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<sup>52</sup> Cook, “Angelina’s Rosies,” 56.

<sup>53</sup> *Lufkin Daily News*, November 1, 1942.

<sup>54</sup> William Chafe, *The Paradox of Change: America Women in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 172. Chafe attributes the rising numbers of married and middle-aged workers in the postwar years to the World War II years

<sup>55</sup> Karen Anderson and D’Ann Campbell are two of the historians who see World War II as a case of continuity over change. Karen Anderson, *Wartime Women: Sex Roles, Family Relations and the Status of Women During World War II* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1981) and D’Ann Campbell, *Women at War With America: Private Lives in a Patriotic Era* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984).

<sup>56</sup> Marc Miller, “Working Women and World War II,” *The New England Quarterly*, 53(1) (1980), 42.

<sup>57</sup> Hartmann, *The Home Front and Beyond*, 21.

force over time anyway, and fewer than 5 million of all the women working during the war had not been in the labor force before the war.<sup>58</sup>

When women did enter war factories, they usually made better wages than they had received in other occupations. In 1939, the median national wage of men was \$962, compared to \$568 for white women and \$246 for minority women.<sup>59</sup> In industry, wages reached historic highs, and women's earnings rose accordingly. The government had enacted equal pay policies, and, though never consistently applied, they contributed to women's rising income during the war.<sup>60</sup> Women around the nation left their low-paying jobs or the home to take advantage of increased economic opportunities as well as for patriotic reasons.

### **Women, Timber, and World War II**

In East Texas, World War II exponentially expanded what Temple began at his 1920s box factory. Women entered the timber industry at an unprecedented rate. Like their counterparts around the nation, many of the women entering the timber factories were older and married. Seventy-five percent of new female war workers were married, reversing the long-term labor trend favoring single women.<sup>61</sup> One of the women matching the new demographic trend was Arrie Trevathan. Trevathan had three sons serving in the military and wanted to help the war effort. Temple-White Handle Company in Diboll employed her as a painter for the handles. She greatly enjoyed her

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<sup>58</sup> Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work*, 276.

<sup>59</sup> *Changes in Women's Occupations, 1940-1950*, United States Department of Labor, Women's Bureau Bulletin 253 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1954), 11.

<sup>60</sup> Hartmann, *The Home Front and Beyond*, 21.

<sup>61</sup> Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work*, 277.

job, despite the intense summer heat and the horrible smell from the chemicals in the paint. Although he could not remember if his mother received the same pay as the men at the factory, Trevathan's son, Clifford Trevathan, stated that even if she had not earned an equal wage, she would not have cared, due to her intense patriotism and feeling that she was supporting her military sons.<sup>62</sup>

In fact, Southern Pine, like most of the industries in East Texas, followed the federal equal pay law and did pay women an equal amount as men for entry-level positions. Few women rose past that entry-level status. The only job women at Southern Pine were not permitted to do was "sawing in the woods."<sup>63</sup> Other companies, however, out of desperation, allowed women to work as lumberjacks. Garrison Brick and Tile Company, which, despite its name, also operated a small sawmill, in Nacogdoches hired women to "fell trees, load them on trucks, and grade and mark processed lumber." However, the lumber companies claimed that the women had neither the experience nor the physical endurance to work effectively as lumberjacks and relied upon other forms of labor, including the aforementioned POWS, to meet demand.<sup>64</sup>

Instead, many women worked inside the plants. Pauline Burroughs worked in Technical Services for the Southland Paper Mill. Technical Services, a new department, employed thirty-five to forty women as laboratory technicians who created and tested the chemicals used in the paper. The women earned an equal wage as their male counterparts and enjoyed the work, despite its harried nature. "You didn't have a lunch hour,"

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<sup>62</sup> Clifford Trevathan, interview by author, Lufkin, TX, October 12, 2008. In fact, Trevathan was very disappointed to leave her job at the handle plant and could not stand the idea of not working after the war. She worked in some capacity until her death.

<sup>63</sup> Vernon Burkhalter, interview by Mary Potchernick Cook, Diboll, TX, July 1994.

<sup>64</sup> Choate, *Nazis in the Pineywoods*, 96, 110.

Burroughs recalled. “You ate your lunch walking. You have a sandwich in one hand and a sample in the other.” She expressed perplexity at the surprise in many people’s reaction to women’s abilities during the war. “Perhaps because they [women] had never been in the production part of any kind of industry before. That was all new.”<sup>65</sup>

A female war worker for Norris Fence Company in Lufkin, Odell Plummer, confirmed the novelty of East Texas women in industry: “Before the war, women had no place in the public world, at least in small towns and rural areas like East Texas. They were home people—housewives.” Plummer began her work at Norris running the lath machine and setting up paint machines for picket fences. Eventually, the company made ammunition boxes, and Plummer inspected boxes, placing any nails the nailing machine had missed. She referred to the work as an initial “nightmare,” due to the intense heat and constant splinters, but came to like the work and company.<sup>66</sup>

Women worked in many entry-level positions in the timber products industry. At Temple Associates Box Factory, some women sawed lumber, matched boards, nailed the boxes together, stacked boards, loaded boards, and attached the rope handles to completed boxes. Glennie Rector, who had worked with her brother, father, and husband for the box factory since 1928, worked on the nailing machine, first making vegetable crates during the Depression and later ammunition boxes. Although she enjoyed her work, calling the other employees “one big happy family,” she remembered the monotony of standing in one place for nine hours in uncomfortable safety shoes with steel toes.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Pauline Burroughs, interview by Mary Potchernick Cook, Lufkin, Texas, March 1992.

<sup>66</sup> Odell Plummer, interview by Mary Potchernick Cook, Lufkin, Texas, August 1996.

At the Temple-White handle factory, 50 percent of the employees were women. They mostly worked in the paint shop, dipping handles into large vats of paint, but also worked in other areas as well. Before the war, only men had worked in the lumber yard at the handle factory. Dick Hendrick, the yard supervisor at Temple-White during the 1940s, claimed that “It wasn’t that it was work women couldn’t do to a certain extent. It was just that men had always done it.”<sup>68</sup> With the advent of the war, women stacked lumber and hauled it in buggies in the yard. Most were young women who quit school to work at sixteen or seventeen years old. According to Larue Caples, who served as a yard worker, “They needed workers and there was nobody else to hire. Those boys who were eighteen years and older were going into the service. The boys wouldn’t quit high school, so there were mostly women in the yard.”<sup>69</sup> It appears that the people of the town condoned girls quitting school but accepted that boys needed an education. Women found such acceptance in the yard that, eventually, a woman replaced Hendrick as supervisor in the yard when the company promoted him, though she did not continue in that position after the war’s end. There is no record of if the company asked her to step down from a supervisory position or if she made the choice to leave the yard and the company.<sup>70</sup>

Indeed, the work in the timber products industry was not always easy or enjoyable. Shift work usually required the women, who mostly walked to work, to find their way to the factory in the dark. Most of the factories were cold in the winter and

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<sup>67</sup> Glennie Rector, interview by Mary Potchernick Cook, Diboll, Texas, August 1994.

<sup>68</sup> Dick Hendrick, interview by Mary Potchernick Cook, Diboll, Texas, July 1994.

<sup>69</sup> Larue Caples, interview by Mary Potchernick Cook, Diboll, Texas, July 1994.

<sup>70</sup> Burkhalter, interview by Cook.

oppressively hot in the summer. The employees usually worked nine-hour days and faced monotonous and repetitious work. Many companies, including the Temple subsidiaries, received waivers from laws that prohibited women from working over sixty hours a week.<sup>71</sup> Imogene Sowell, a worker in the Temple-White lumberyard, remembered, “You had to stoop all day. We were hot, tired, or freezing most of the time.”<sup>72</sup> Another Temple-White employee, Opal Newberry, recalled, “Under the shed [stacking lumber outside] was definitely a man’s job, too hard for young ladies,” although many women did that work anyway.<sup>73</sup>

Machines and accidents injured women on the job. Working conditions were dangerous, with lumber stacked as high as twelve feet. One woman would climb to the top of the stack and keep it from falling over while other employees added more boards. “Boy, did they wobble,” remarked Sowell.<sup>74</sup> The precariously perched stacks, whirring saw blades, and flying debris created a treacherous work environment. Lula Copeland worked for the Temple Associates box factory stacking and loading lumber. Seven or eight months into the job, she injured her back while pulling lumber onto a boxcar. The injury ended her stint at Temple Associates. The loss of her job was doubly painful; as an African American, she had few better paying work opportunities.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Letter from Leonard Carlton, Texas Commissioner for the Bureau of Labor Statistics, to Clyde Thompson, Purchasing Agent for Southern Pine Lumber Company, September 7, 1945, Box 225, Temple Industries, Forest Collection, East Texas Research Center, Stephen F. Austin State University, Nacogdoches, TX.

<sup>72</sup> Imogene Sowell, interview by Mary Potchernick Cook, Diboll, Texas, July 1994.

<sup>73</sup> Opal Newberry, interview by Mary Potchernick Cook, Diboll, Texas, July 1994.

<sup>74</sup> Sowell, interview by Cook.

<sup>75</sup> Lula Copeland, interview by Mary Potchernick Cook, Diboll, Texas, June 1995.

African American women entered the timber products industry of East Texas for the first time during World War II. According to Southern Pine's records, the company employed African American women in more menial and labor-intensive jobs than their white counterparts. Very few worked as machine operators; most worked as laborers in the yard, hauling, loading, and unloading lumber.

Although they made the same wages as their white female counterparts, they faced additional discrimination. Since they worked in positions that were more strenuous during the war, they were more likely to be injured. When African American A. V. Copeland (no relation to Lula Copeland) sought compensation from Southern Pine for a 1944 knee injury that resulted in broken bones and a permanent disability, the company investigated her personal life, arguing that, due to her recent marital separation, Copeland was not deserving of work compensation. Copeland sued and, three years after her injury, won her original compensation and an additional fifty dollars.<sup>76</sup> Another African American woman, Sarah Little, did not receive her insurance compensation from Southern Pine for a shoulder injury after the company discovered that she had syphilis. They argued that her sexually transmitted disease caused her shoulder pain, and, probably not wishing for news of her condition to spread, she did not press the issue.<sup>77</sup> There is no evidence that the white women who filed for worker's compensation underwent similar investigations, and African American women were much more likely to have to sue for their compensation than white women.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Clyde Thompson collection, Box 72, Folder 2, Diboll History Center, Diboll, Texas.

<sup>77</sup> Clyde Thompson collection, Box 72, Folder 62, Diboll History Center, Diboll, Texas.

<sup>78</sup> Clyde Thompson collection, Box 72, All Folders, Diboll History Center, Diboll, Texas.

Neither white nor African American married women could negotiate injury settlements with the company on their own. Benjamin Strauss, the insurance representative for Southern Pine, noted that, before the war, they had negotiated with married women without their husband's approval. In 1944, however, he wrote to the personnel director of Southern Pine, Clyde Thompson, that, "when women entered the industrial field in large numbers, we decided that it was best to insist that the husband sign the settlement papers on all claims settled with women for injuries they received in the course of their employment."<sup>79</sup> Strauss does not provide any justification for this change in procedure. Single women could negotiate settlements on their own. This was, obviously, a massive inconvenience for women with husbands overseas, and the company did allow waivers to the restriction for wives of servicemen.

Most women generally enjoyed their work, despite its hazards. Larue Caples was greatly satisfied with her job at Temple-White, saying that work "holds the mind and body together" and "was a life-saver after my father died."<sup>80</sup> Pearl Havard, a board matcher for Temple Associates box factory, remembered, "I didn't have any complaints. The bosses were real nice."<sup>81</sup> Jossie Stanaland, a worker at the Diboll box factory, recalled, "It was a lot of fun. Hard work, but I loved it. I had money to spend. During the Depression things were rough for awhile."<sup>82</sup> Marie Carnley, a Temple-White employee, seconded the economic rewards of employment. "This work took and grew me up real

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<sup>79</sup> Letter from Benjamin Strauss to Clyde Thompson, October 31, 1944, Clyde Thompson collection, Box 77, Folder 25, Diboll History Center, Diboll, Texas.

<sup>80</sup> Caples, interview by Cook.

<sup>81</sup> Pearl Havard, interview by Mary Potchernick Cook, Beulah, Texas, July 1993.

<sup>82</sup> Jossie Stanaland, interview by Mary Potchernick Cook, Diboll, Texas, July 1994.

fast,” she said. “I felt like women could carry out jobs and be respected. When you’re poor and need money and can get an honorable job, you are glad to have it.”<sup>83</sup>

Many women in East Texas war manufactures were from rural areas and used to doing work that was not gender specific. They specifically cited their experiences as farm laborers as enabling them to adjust to industrial work. Mattie Schultz, a worker for the Lufkin Box Factory during the war, felt that she was more than ready to work at the factory. She noted, “I had been raised on a farm and had helped to plow as a young girl.”<sup>84</sup> Likewise, Jossie Stanaland worked in cotton and cornfields before the war and was “used to hard work.” She noted that those who had never worked “would get real tired and their hands would blister until they got used to it.”<sup>85</sup> East Texas’s female war workers typically came from farming communities and utilized the skills they learned in the fields at their new jobs, setting them apart from women who entered the workplace from less rural areas.

Childcare was a problem for all female working mothers. There was no active government campaign for childcare facilities for female war workers. The War Manpower Commission asked mothers of young children to remain at home and appealed to employers not to recruit them.<sup>86</sup> Women who entered the labor force, however, often worked nine- or ten-hour days, six days a week, and the media lambasted women who left their young children. On the other hand, if women took time off for family needs,

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<sup>83</sup> Marie Carnley, interview by Mary Potchernick Cook, Diboll, Texas, July 1994.

<sup>84</sup> Mattie Schults, interview by Mary Potchernick Cook, Peavy Switch, Texas, July 1993.

<sup>85</sup> Stanaland, interview by Cook.

<sup>86</sup> “Policy of War Manpower Commission on Woman Workers,” *Monthly Labor Review* 56 (1943): 669.

they received subtle messages denigrating them for their lack of patriotism and devotion to the war effort.<sup>87</sup> Although a few childcare facilities were set up, they did not come close to meeting the demand and did not survive the war. In East Texas, no daycare facility opened for female timber industry worker's children. Women usually left their children with relatives, although a few hired African Americans to look after children during the day and cook meals.<sup>88</sup>

### **Planning for a Postwar World**

A 1943 Women's Bureau survey of ten production areas found that 75 percent of the women expected to be a part of the postwar labor force. Of that number, 90 percent wanted to remain in the same employment area in which they held occupation. The number was higher for African Americans. In all of the surveyed areas, 94 percent of African Americans wanted to remain in the labor force.<sup>89</sup> Unfortunately, the end of the war also ended many women's plans to remain in their jobs. As the war wound down, propaganda promoted messages of domestication. Women like anthropologist Margaret Mead assured the public, through women's magazines, that "far from wanting to get out of the home, during the years when they are needed in it, more women want, if possible to devote themselves to their homes and their children."<sup>90</sup> Although the Department of Labor and the WMC tried to support women workers, massive layoffs began as war

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<sup>87</sup> Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work*, 292.

<sup>88</sup> Cook, "Angelina's Rosies," 113.

<sup>89</sup> *Women Workers in Ten War Production Areas and Their Postwar Plans*, Washington, D.C.: Women's Bureau Bulletin No. 209, 1946, in Rosalyn Baxandall and Linda Gordon, eds., *America's Working Women: A Documentary History, 1600 to the Present* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1976), 261-62.

<sup>90</sup> "The Women in the War," Jack Goodman, ed., *While You Were Gone: A Report on Wartime Life in the United States* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1946), 173-96.

contracts slackened.<sup>91</sup> Between June and September 1945, factories laid off 25 percent of their female work force. The overall female labor force declined from a peak of nineteen million to nearly seventeen million in 1946.<sup>92</sup>

At the same time that the end of the war pushed numerous women out of industry, ideologies based on traditional gender roles pulled them into the home. Many social scientists in the late 1940s considered working women as a cause of family problems. By leaving the home, they were obviously neurotic and, as such, poor and unstable workers. They did not have the imagination or capacity to be as good a worker as men.<sup>93</sup> As the postwar era progressed into the Cold War, anticommunists viewed women who stepped out of the housewife role with additional misgivings. They were needed inside the home to raise the next generation and provide a safe and strong place against the communist threat.<sup>94</sup>

In East Texas, many of the patterns shown across the nation held true. The local newspapers printed nationwide and local articles debating what to do with Rosie. The editor of the *Lufkin Daily News* praised local women for taking on traditionally male jobs but stated, “it is an understood matter that returning servicemen will go back to the jobs they had preceding the war relieving many of the female workers of their duties.”<sup>95</sup> Local business leaders, like lawyer and former state senator, John Redditt, continued the

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<sup>91</sup> Julia Kirk Blackwelder, *Now Hiring: The Feminization of Work in the United States, 1900-1995* (College Station: Texas A&M Press, 1997), 136.

<sup>92</sup> Hartmann, *The Home Front and Beyond*, 24.

<sup>93</sup> Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work*, 297.

<sup>94</sup> For an excellent examination of the role of the family during the Cold War era, see Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1999).

<sup>95</sup> *Lufkin Daily News*, February 25, 1945, 1.

commonly held view. In an address to the Rotary Club, Redditt explained, “Women are needed for production in war, but in practice their place must be in the home if our nation is to maintain its progress . . . . Women are happier in the homes, and after the war we will find the home life of the nation rebuilt.”<sup>96</sup>

Several of the major industries in East Texas conducted massive layoffs of women. In August 1945, Lufkin Foundry, which made gears and tank parts, laid off all of its female employees. The owner of the company, W. C. Trout, claimed that the women had held special government jobs and had no training for general work.<sup>97</sup> Of the fifty former war workers whom graduate student Mary Potchernick Cook interviewed, only four remained in an industrial setting. Recalling her difficult labor with Lufkin Foundry, Nina Brown Duncan remembered, “Maybe they let me go, but I remembered that I wanted to quit.”<sup>98</sup> Faye Merriman Love, also of Lufkin Foundry, recalled that layoffs occurred because of lack of material, not because the company wished to fire women and hire men in their stead.<sup>99</sup> That argument is true to a certain extent, but Trout laid off all of the women with no regard for seniority or skill and kept men who had been hired after those women, making the argument disingenuous.<sup>100</sup> It is more probable that Trout saw women as temporary additions to his foundry, not permanent hires.

Even women who did not have to leave the labor force often did so. The rate at which women left their jobs voluntarily was at least double the number of those who left

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<sup>96</sup> *Lufkin Daily News*, October 4, 1943, 1.

<sup>97</sup> *Lufkin Daily News*, August 20, 1945, 6.

<sup>98</sup> Cook, “Angelina’s Rosies,” 96

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 98.

<sup>100</sup> *Lufkin Daily News*, August 20, 1945, 6

involuntarily, and women who had never worked before were especially likely to move back into the home.<sup>101</sup> Pauline Burroughs, an employee with Southland Paper Mill, claimed that the company did not fire a single woman after the war, but every woman except her quit to be a housewife or take a more traditional woman's job. The company immediately filled those positions with men. When she ran into those women after the war, many would tell her that they were bored at home, and "they wished a jillion times that they'd have stayed with it." Burroughs faced harassment from men returning from the service who wanted her job. She remembered, "They didn't mind letting me know that I was in a man's world. Just like that, just because you're a woman you don't have to support yourself." She remained with the company for thirty years and eventually gained acceptance among the men in her department, saying that, "they treated me like one of the boys."<sup>102</sup>

Women experienced a drop in employment rates nationwide after the war, and East Texas was no exception. The entry of women in the timber products industry during the Depression years, however, put that particular area of the labor force on a different trajectory. Unlike industrial areas that first saw widespread female participation during World War II and could explain their appearance, and resulting layoffs, as an emergency of war, the timber products industry had hired women before the war and continued to hire women after 1945. Women had proven to be a cheap and dependable source of labor in the Depression and World War II, and East Texas timber companies acted accordingly. A labor shortage in East Texas in the postwar years, women's lower pay rates, the introduction of new, deskilled, and, therefore, feminine positions, and the expansion of

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<sup>101</sup> Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work*, 286.

<sup>102</sup> Burroughs, interview by Cook.

the timber industry into new products caused timber companies to continue employing women.

As the following chapter will show, women continued in multiple positions in the timber products industry and, in fact, very little changed after the war ended in terms of what kinds of jobs women could do. Once in those factories, however, gender roles affected what those women did, their wages, and their ability to rise through promotions. The paternalism of timber products companies and patriarchal nature of women's work in the postwar years combined to continue established gender patterns, although women did work in blue-collar industrial positions. Women never faced overt discrimination in hiring, but they were limited in what tools they could use and how much knowledge they could receive about machines and operations. While "Nannie the Nailer" did not return to the kitchen like Rosie the Riveter or move across the labor force into traditional female occupations like teaching, nursing, or secretarial work she faced continued limited opportunities for advancement in the postwar timber products industry.

## CHAPTER 2: “THEIRS IS A NEVER ENDING JOB”: THE GENDERING OF WORK IN THE EAST TEXAS TIMBER PRODUCTS INDUSTRY, 1945-1975

In 2004, Hattie Butler prepared to move into a nursing home in Lufkin, Texas. She was eighty-two years old, and her severe rheumatoid arthritis had reached a debilitating point. She could no longer move around as easily or take care of herself sufficiently, and she reluctantly decided to move. Her older sister, Malissia Butler Price, was joining her in the home, and the two had to consolidate decades of furniture, pictures, clothing, and knickknacks into one small room.

The sisters had many things they could have brought to hang on their room’s small walls. Out of all the pictures and decorations, however, Butler chose to make sure that her plaque for twenty-five years of service to Temple Industries came with her.

Butler began working for Southern Pine, later Temple-Inland, in 1958. It had not been her first job; a difficult life had forced her into one form of employment after another. Her father had abandoned her and her siblings at an early age, and her older sister and brother-in-law, Malissia and G. G. Price, accepted her into their home in Alto. She never finished school and worked at various odd jobs until her brother-in-law lost his employment at a local mill, bringing the household to a turning point.

One of Butler’s relatives, J. B. Stephenson, was a foreman with Southern Pine at their sawmill in Pineland, Texas and obtained employment for both G. G. Price and Butler. Butler’s first job was in the sawmill as a lumber puller and cutter. She pulled lumber off a conveyor belt, determined the dimensions that were required, and cut the board to the specified length on a large saw. Eventually, Stephenson trained Butler to be a lumber grader, determining the fitness of lumber for production. Butler, however,

never had the official title of “grader,” a position that paid well, because she continued to perform other tasks in the plant. She moved to Southern Pine’s Pineland plywood plant during the late 1960s, continuing to act as a lumber grader and in other positions. She retired in 1980.

Butler worked long and hard hours in Southern Pine’s plants, coming home covered in sawdust and with aching joints. Nevertheless, she felt a deep gratitude and fondness for the company that gave her a livelihood and helped support her sister’s family, with whom she lived nearly her entire life. In many ways, she derived her sense of value and worth from her work for Temple Industries. Instead of being a burden to the sister who had taken her in as a child, Butler was able to become an asset. The heavy brass plaque for twenty-five years of service, therefore, confirmed Butler’s hard work and remained in her room at the nursing home until her death in 2008.<sup>1</sup>

Hattie Butler was not an exception. Many women across the nation worked outside of the home in the postwar years. The difference between the majority of wage-earning women and the women like Butler in the forest-products industry was the type of work done. Most women across the nation worked in the service or white-collar industry as clerical workers or in traditionally feminine occupations, like teaching and nursing.<sup>2</sup> Women in the East Texas mills and plants, on the other hand, operated saws and heavy machinery in a manner similar to their male counterparts. Although females working in the forest-products industry may have seemed nontraditional by national standards, however, the companies feminized certain work through deskilling and genderization by

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<sup>1</sup> Dorothy Price, interview by the author, Huntington, Texas, January 2, 2011.

<sup>2</sup> Susan Estabrook Kennedy, *If All We Did Was to Weep at Home: A History of White Working-Class Women in America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1979), 204.

job description, as shown by Butler's career history. Thus, neither the industry nor the female workers viewed the jobs as unusual for a postwar gendered world. Furthermore, unlike the trajectory of women's work in other industries across the nation, the types of work done by women in the Deep East Texas timber products industry after World War II does not indicate a change. Female employment in timber represents continuation; those employed did the same work and faced the same hazards they had in the 1930s and World War II. The timber industry in Deep East Texas is highly unusual in its carryover. Although work for females was gendered, it was not overtly so, and it did not significantly change from the first half of the twentieth century to the second, other than to expand in terms of possible employment as the timber products industry grew.

#### **Defying Donna Reed: The Nature of Women and Work in the Postwar Years**

Despite the fact that, in 1945, public opinion and outside pressures had pushed and pulled white women into the home and out of the workforce, they did not all remain at home. Immediately after the war, rates of women workers dropped. But in 1947, the growth of employed females began again, passing the rates of women in the 1944 workforce. This workforce, however, looked different from the female workers prior to the war. Whereas most employed women before the Depression and war years were young, single, or childless, in the postwar labor force, married women outnumbered single women, and women with children saw great gains in labor participation.<sup>3</sup> By

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<sup>3</sup> Julia Kirk Blackwelder, *Now Hiring: The Feminization of Work in the United States, 1900-1995* (College Station: Texas A&M Press, 1997), 143.

1960, one-third of those employed included mothers with children under the age of eighteen.<sup>4</sup>

Unfortunately for these new labor recruits, women's increased participation in the labor force did not coincide with an enlarged acceptance for nontraditional gender constructs. Traditional roles could not be overturned overnight. A media blitz in the postwar years preached domesticity and a woman's fulfillment through home and family. When supposedly misguided women did enter the work force, some public policy makers argued that they deserved discrimination. In leaving the home, they were possibly neurotic and, as such, poor and unstable workers. They, according to some writers, did not have the imagination or capacity to be as good a worker as men.<sup>5</sup> Yet, in spite of widespread media censure, women continued entering the workforce. Reports on working women in the 1950s expressed surprise at the number of women in the labor force. The word *revolution* appeared frequently, showing the disbelief in women's rejection of domestic tranquility.<sup>6</sup>

The resistance to women's employment outside of the home did not only stem from the fear of losing traditional gender roles. Many white Americans, in the face of the Cold War, had turned inward, toward the ideal nuclear family. The media perpetuated the idea through television and magazines. Characters on popular television shows, like June Cleaver on *Leave it to Beaver* and Donna Reed on *The Donna Reed Show*, propagated

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<sup>4</sup> William Chafe, *The American Woman: Her Changing Social, Economic and Political Roles, 1920-1970* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 218.

<sup>5</sup> Alice Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work: A History of Wage-Earning Women in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 297.

<sup>6</sup> Eugenia Kaledin, *Mothers and More: American Women in the 1950s* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1984), 63.

middle-class motherhood.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, the 1959 "kitchen debate" between Vice President Richard Nixon and Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev underscored the accepted role of American women on a national stage. At the American National Exhibition in the Soviet Union, Nixon praised a model kitchen for its ability to make life easier for housewives. When Khrushchev countered that communism did not confine women to the home, Nixon brushed the argument away, clearly communicating the differences between the ideal American postwar experience and the Soviet world.<sup>8</sup>

As the Cold War continued, anticommunists viewed women who stepped out of the housewife role with additional misgivings. Child psychologists warned of a child's need for full-time attention, lest they fall prey to juvenile delinquency or communist ideologies. The nuclear family was the foundation of democracy and, as such, mothers and homemakers were the first line of defense. As historian Elaine Tyler May has suggested, "self-supporting women were in some way un-American."<sup>9</sup>

Nevertheless, the number of female workers continued to grow as business demands increased. Across the nation, however, the kinds of work in which women generally partook changed in the postwar years. On one hand, more women held production jobs in 1950 than in 1940.<sup>10</sup> In the blue-collar jobs they obtained, though, they were in deskilled positions, not in the higher-paying skilled areas. In 1959, labor analyst

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<sup>7</sup> Behind the scenes, however, some of the female actors, like Donna Reed, asserted creative and business control.

<sup>8</sup> For more on the "kitchen debate," see Ruth Oldenziel and Karin Zachmann, eds, *Cold War Kitchen: Americanization, Technology, and European Users* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2011).

<sup>9</sup> Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 13.

<sup>10</sup> Blackwelder, *Now Hiring*, 131.

Robert Smuts concurred that women in factory positions worked as assemblers of small items and machine operators, and "most jobs [were] still assigned on the basis of sex, and the best ones [were] still reserved for men."<sup>11</sup> The most rapidly growing industries, however, were in the service and clerical fields and relied upon female labor.

Government employment agencies in 1946 found 40 percent of female applicants in service jobs, 13 to 15 percent in semiskilled positions and fewer than 5 percent in skilled work. These were menial and poorly compensated positions. Women earned an average of less than sixty-five cents an hour in 70 percent of the jobs available to women. This was a salary paid to less than one-fourth of all men.<sup>12</sup>

Why did women continue in the labor force after World War II in spite of the media's opinions, low wages, and little recognition? In East Texas and across the nation, women usually entered the workforce out of economic necessity. The postwar economy, dependent on consumer participation, demanded more income than many families with one breadwinner possessed. After years of deprivation during the Depression and World War II, families wanted new commodities, like televisions, cars, and appliances. Competitive consumption was necessary to achieve the middle-class American dream. Thus, women pursued employment to help the family budget but did not wish to equal or surpass the income of her husband. The typical middle-class working woman of the 1950s and 1960s was supplementing her family's livelihood, not challenging the male

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<sup>11</sup> Robert W. Smuts, *Women and Work in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), 33.

<sup>12</sup> Hartmann, *The Home Front and Beyond*, 91.

breadwinner.<sup>13</sup> Additionally, rising earnings, fewer children, and the completion of childrearing relatively early in life left middle-class women free to find employment.<sup>14</sup>

For working-class women, the economic situation was more dire. In the cultural debates over whether or not women should work, few scholars and journalists paid attention to poor women in both rural and urban areas. Although the end of the war brought new consumer goods, it also heralded inflation and rising costs. Meat prices alone increased 122 percent in two years.<sup>15</sup> This increased pressure on families already dealing with inadequate incomes. East Texas, in particular, was an area with deep poverty. In 1950, seven out of the twelve counties in the Deep East Texas Council of Government had more than 20 percent of their families earning less than \$2000 a year, the cut-off line for deep poverty, as defined by the United States Census Bureau.<sup>16</sup> In 1950, the median annual income of southern male workers, including those living and working in Deep East Texas, in logging was \$1,151; in sawmills, \$1,545. Only private household servants, earning \$763, were lower. The median for all workers in the state of Texas was \$2,332, making the wages for sawmill and lumber workers significantly lower than those in other occupations.<sup>17</sup>

This pattern of low wages for blue-collar workers did not end in the 1950s and 1960s. Nationwide, as late as 1974, 3.2 million working women were married to men

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<sup>13</sup> May, *Homeward Bound*, 149.

<sup>14</sup> Kennedy, *If All We Did was to Weep at Home*, 203

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 20

<sup>16</sup> Ruth Allen, *East Texas Lumber Workers: An Economic and Social Picture, 1870-1950* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1961), 6. Those counties were Jasper, Newton, Polk, Sabine, San Jacinto, Trinity, and Tyler.

<sup>17</sup> *U.S. Census, 1950*, Pt. 43, Texas, Table 86.

who earned less than \$5,000 a year, and another 2.3 million were married to men who earned between \$5,000 and \$7,000. At that time, the Bureau of Labor Statistics estimated that a family of four needed \$7,386 a year to remain above the poverty line.<sup>18</sup> Many women had no choice but to work in whatever positions they could find.

In company towns and the rural outposts of East Texas, the typical white-collar industrial jobs, like clerical work and teaching, were not widely available and also demanded an education few lower-class women in the region possessed. Women could, and did, work in the typical "pink-collar" industries, like waitressing. Billy Raye Rice spent most of her working life, beginning in high school, working as a waitress in several of the Temple family's restaurants and hotels in Diboll during the 1950s and 1960s. Too small to prime the water pump in the mornings to make coffee, she relied on local men, including Arthur Temple, Jr., to carry in firewood and prepare the pump. Her friendship with Temple and her loyalty to the company earned her continued employment in various Temple operations, including a brief stint in the plywood plant, for as long as she wanted to work.<sup>19</sup>

Rice, however, was an exception. Sociologist Ruth Allen correctly claimed, in her 1961 work on East Texas lumber workers, that few female-oriented service industries, like clothing stores and beauty salons, existed around sawmill towns during the lumber boom at the turn of the century.<sup>20</sup> That did not change with the end of World War II, since companies maintained control of their towns and the businesses within them,

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<sup>18</sup> Kennedy, *If All We Did Was to Weep at Home*, 204.

<sup>19</sup> Billy Raye Rice, interview by the author, Diboll, Texas, April 1, 2011.

<sup>20</sup> Allen, *East Texas Lumber Workers*, 157.

including all of the boarding houses and restaurants and nearly all of the retail stores.<sup>21</sup> Although the lumber companies would probably not have objected to a beauty salon or another female enterprise in their town, few women had the necessary capital to start such a venture. With so few options, the same timber industries that employed their husbands and fathers provided the answer for women's search for gainful employment. Due to a labor shortage, the fact that women worked for lower wages, and the absence of a masculine mythology around the East Texas lumber industry, unlike that in the Pacific Northwest, the East Texas timber products industry welcomed women into the plants.

### **An East Texas Timber Revolution: The Timber Industry's Postwar Expansion**

In the immediate aftermath of World War II, heavy industry contracted, as shown in the previous chapter when Lufkin Foundry lost military contracts and laid off numerous workers. The East Texas timber industry, on the other hand, thrived. With the growth of many housing developments and the beginning of a building boom, the East Texas timber industry entered a new era of profitability. New possibilities opened up for the industry, in addition to the continued production of solid wood board. Using the Temple family's operations as an example, one can see how the timber industry expanded in the postwar years. In 1949 alone, the Temples opened two more sawmills, a planer mill, an expanded handle factory, a wood flour plant, and a timber treating plant in Diboll. The following year, they rebuilt the box factory, which had burned in 1946.<sup>22</sup>

Innovation and technological advances allowed for further diversification. In 1958, Temple opened a fiberboard plant. Fiberboard represented an efficient method of

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup>For more on the 1946 box factory fire, see Chapter 3.

using all parts of the logs brought into the sawmills. Bound with synthetic resin, fiberboard forms when machines press leftover sawdust and wood fibers into boards used in furniture, housing, and insulation. Mills first began making particleboard in 1945. It is similar to fiberboard, but the wood chips are larger and the resin is more susceptible to dissolving in water. As such, it was not popular in its early incarnations and mostly appeared in cheap furniture. Thus, the Temples did not open their particleboard plant until 1974, when the product's popularity had grown.

Similarly, changes in synthetic bonding resins allowed for the use of southern yellow pine to make plywood. A product of the twentieth century, plywood is made of thin layers of wood, known as veneers. Resin bonds the veneers together, arranged so that the grains are at right angles, forming perpendicular patterns. Beginning in the Depression, plywood was mass-produced and was an important material for construction during World War II. Southern yellow pine, with its notoriously thick resin, could not be used until scientists developed new synthetic bonding resins. In 1964, the Temples opened the first southern yellow pine plywood plant in Diboll. The concept spread rapidly. Southern yellow pine plywood, by the 1970s, accounted for a quarter of the plywood market.<sup>23</sup>

All of these new products, for the most part, did not require the same amount of upper-body strength as most sawmill jobs in the postwar years still did. The production relied upon machines and unskilled labor to operate them. In a ten-year period following the war, the timber products industry of East Texas added thousands of these new,

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<sup>23</sup> W. G. Younquist and H. O. Fleischer, *Wood in American Life, 1776-2076* (Madison: Forest Products Research Society, 1977), 125.

unskilled jobs.<sup>24</sup> At a time when rural blue-collar women needed jobs, the timber products industry needed cheap, unskilled laborers for the new fiberboard and plywood plants, as well as other ventures.

Because of the growth in the timber products industry, many East Texas women kept their jobs following the war or entered the workforce for the first time in the newly expanded mills. Their employment options varied. Both Southland Paper Mill and various Temple industries, as shown above, planned expansions and easily absorbed both returning veterans and others seeking employment. Southland began work on a new pulp mill extension. Temple-White added new special items to its production line. Mummert-Moore Company began making domestic chairs, Norris Fence expanded its production to include doors, and Temple Associates began operations building houses and furniture.<sup>25</sup> Additionally, multiple Temple plants, Norris Fence, and the Lufkin Box Factory all continued to hire women workers after the war.<sup>26</sup>

The new technology and expansions allowed for an increase in deskilled jobs in the timber products industry. Thus, in the East Texas timber products industry, the kind of work in which women participated changed little between the war and the 1950s and 1960s, although their opportunities for employment in the new positions and plants increased. Vernon Burkhalter, the personnel director for Southern Pine, went to Oregon and Washington to examine plywood plants in preparation for the opening of Diboll's plant. When shown the jobs that were "men only," Burkhalter replied, to the disbelief of

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<sup>24</sup> Megan Biesele, *The Cornbread Whistle: Oral History of a Texas Timber Company Town* (Lufkin, TX: Lufkin Printing Company, 1986), 153.

<sup>25</sup> Mary Potchernick Cook, "Angelina's Rosies: Women at War in World War II in East Texas." MA thesis., Stephen F. Austin State University, 1998, 144.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 113.

the plant managers in the Pacific Northwest, that he had women in Diboll who could do those jobs just as easily. He recalled, “When we started doing our hiring, we started putting women on those jobs.”<sup>27</sup> Although Burkhalter claimed that the company was an equal opportunity employer long before government mandates, the fact that women worked for lower wages at Southern Pine may have also been an enticement to find women employees.<sup>28</sup> Regardless, women could enter new plants across East Texas in new, deskilled, positions created by changing technology.

This episode between Burkhalter and the managers of the company in the Pacific Northwest highlights just how different the hiring practices between the East Texas timber products industry and the same industry in other areas were in the immediate postwar era. Women did participate in sawmill and other timber operations all around the nation during World War II, as they did in East Texas. One of the most studied operations was a sawmill in New Hampshire, the Turkey Pond mill. That mill opened in 1942 to process salvaged timber from a 1938 hurricane. The federal government ran the all-female operated mill until its closure in 1945. Women operated all of the machines and processed all of the lumber, although they were under a male supervisor, and the sawyer (person responsible for operating mechanical and chainsaws) was also male. Additionally, they worked for a cheaper rate compared to male laborers. Still, when the war ended, they all lost their jobs and either returned to being housewives or to more traditionally feminine occupations.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Vernon Burkhalter, interview with the author, Diboll, Texas, April 1, 2011.

<sup>28</sup> Louis Landers, Archivist, Diboll History Center, e-mail to author, April 27, 2011.

<sup>29</sup> For a brief account of the Turkey Pond mill, see Sarah Smith, “They Sawed Up a Storm” *The Northern Logger and Timber Processor* 48 (2000): 8-10, 61-62.

Sawmills in the Pacific Northwest also hired women for the duration of the war, but once the war crisis had passed, those women either left or their managers laid them off. Either way, the Pacific Northwest held on to the historical memory of masculine participation in the timber products industry, personified by the solitary, flannel-wearing, supermasculine lumberjack, into the postwar years, discouraging female participation. On the other hand, the East Texas timberman did not enter the state's roster of legendary figures alongside cowboys and frontiersmen. As Ruth Allen explained, "The actuality of the present [1960s] mocks any romance that might be generated about the [timber] worker and his work."<sup>30</sup> Thus, there was no memory of male-only enclaves, where men could live without their families and beyond the scope of civilization, that women wanting to enter the occupation in East Texas had to combat. This also meant that timber products companies did not have to justify their decision to hire women to the larger community. They simply hired women because they needed them.

### **Women and the Temple-White Handle Factory**

One of the largest employers of women within the Temple industries was the Temple-White handle factory. The factory originated from the 1910 White Wood Products company out of Martinsville, Indiana. H. B. White conceived an idea to utilize sawmill waste by making handles. For two years the sawmill and handle factory worked together, and in 1912, the handle factory moved to Spencer and later Crotherville, Indiana. In 1922, the Whites moved their factory again to Bogalusa, Louisiana, after the Great Southern Lumber Company sawmill there agreed to give its waste products to the Whites. The Great Southern Lumber Company, however, fell prey to its own practices.

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<sup>30</sup> Allen, *East Texas Lumber Workers*, 51.

In 1938, it ran out of timber after not using any type of conservation or reforestation and shut down, leaving the White Wood Products company without a supplier. That same year, the company negotiated a contract with the Temple-run sawmill in Diboll and moved into a new plant there, forming a new company: Temple-White. Production began in February 1939.<sup>31</sup> In 1949, the factory could finish roughly 50,000 handles per eight-hour day.

The Temples built a large building, six hundred feet long and one hundred feet wide, for the new handle factory. Oneta Hendrick, payroll clerk for Temple-White and wife of the factory's superintendent, remembered the building as "maze-like."<sup>32</sup> At the front was the square shack, where the raw material for handles arrived and laborers stored it. By the late 1940s, Temple-White had sixteen suppliers, including multiple Temple-owned plants, cutting waste products from their sawmills into squares for their handles.<sup>33</sup> Women and men stacked the squares in the yard to dry, then moved them under a large shed, and as the factory required more raw material, they pulled squares from the shed.<sup>34</sup> The work in the square yard was so grueling, due to the labor intensity and exposure to the elements, that the Temple employee-run newspaper, the *Buzz Saw*, singled out the women at Temple-White's yard for commendation. The fact that mostly men ran the paper and chose to highlight women for their hard work is illustrative. One article stated, "We'll have to hand it to Dick Hendricks' crew of women who stack squares at Temple-

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<sup>31</sup> Herb White Jr. "Handles Play Major Role in Waste Utilization," *The Buzz Saw* Volume II No. 10 April 20, 1949, 2,4,7.

<sup>32</sup> Oneta Hendrick, Interview by the author, Diboll, Texas, July 26, 2011.

<sup>33</sup> White, "Handles Play Major Role," 4.

<sup>34</sup> Hendrick, interview by author.

White. Theirs is a never-ending job in good weather and bad, in hot summer and chilly winters.”<sup>35</sup> This comment demonstrates how much the company relied on women to do undesirable jobs and that their male co-workers did acknowledge their labors.

The first area inside of the plant was the turning room where machines turned squares into dowels. That room also housed the lathe machines, which shaped the dowels into handles, and the automatic chucking and boring machines, which rounded the ends of the handles and bored a hole for the broom or mop wire. Sanders smoothed the handles before they were moved to the next area, shipping.<sup>36</sup> Women operated all of the aforementioned machines, but they were not responsible for upkeep or taught how to maintain their machines. Full-time skilled craftsmen fixed broken machines. According to Oneta Hendrick, “How many women could break a machine down and work it? Few women are mechanically [adept]. And that’s what men did, things like that.”<sup>37</sup> Women could run the machines, but the male-dominated management and many of the women themselves did not think the female workers were capable enough to understand them.

Although women could not maintain their machines, the machines could injure them. Accident reports for Temple industries offer a snapshot into what women did in plants like Temple-White. A hand drill operator at the handle factory drilled through her little finger in 1946, and that same year another drill operator dropped the entire drill on her right foot, nearly breaking her bones.<sup>38</sup> In a time before safety equipment, quite a few

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<sup>35</sup> “Hot off the Handle...” *Buzz Saw* January 31, 1948, 4.

<sup>36</sup> White, “Handles Play Major Role,” 2.

<sup>37</sup> Hendrick, interview by author.

<sup>38</sup> Clyde Thompson collection, Box 84, Folder 37 and 23, History Center, Diboll, Texas. Hereafter cited as HC.

injuries came from pieces of sawdust or trash blowing into unprotected eyes. In 1947, for example, Nina Fox, a trim saw operator, had a piece of trash blow into her eye, as did Lillie Roach, a buffer operator, in 1946.<sup>39</sup> Considering that the women were working with wood, splinters were extremely common. Maurine Windham, while pushing handles into the automatic chucker, got a splinter in her thumb that was large enough to require a doctor's visit.<sup>40</sup> Other hazards could include misplaced footing, slips, and falls. One woman had a square fly back and break her nose, while another tried to haul too much and pulled a muscle in her back.<sup>41</sup> While hauling squares from the yard to the plant, one of the boards between a truck and the plant that Laura Mae Sikes was walking on broke, causing her to hit the bed of the truck. This caused a great deal of bruising and, since she hit the truck bed astraddle, some gynecological damage.<sup>42</sup>

The worst injury to a female machine operator at Temple-White on record happened in February 1947. Alice Myres worked on one of the boring machines, and the machine smashed her finger, causing an eventual amputation. She filed for workman's compensation through Temple's insurance company, but, for whatever reason, the company chose to fight the claim. The insurance company hired investigators to interview Myres's neighbors, hoping to ascertain the extent of the injury. Once the courts established that Myres had really lost part of a finger, she finally received \$750 in

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<sup>39</sup>Clyde Thompson collection, Box 84, Folder 46, HC.

<sup>40</sup> Clyde Thompson collection, Box 84, Folder 37, HC.

<sup>41</sup> Clyde Thompson collection, Box 84, Folder 37, HC.

<sup>42</sup> Clyde Thompson collection, Box 84, Folder 46, HC.

December 1948.<sup>43</sup> It is unclear from the available records why the insurance company fought against Myres's claim. Her race is unknown, so it is uncertain if that was a factor, as it was with African American Temple employees during World War II (see Chapter 1).

After sanding, the handles moved to the shipping room. Women and men stacked handles by orders, moved them onto one of the Texas-Southeastern (the company's railroad) railroad cars, then the train pulled the handles to Lufkin, where major railroads shipped them out of the state. Most of the handles went to northern states.<sup>44</sup> Customers for handles were numerous and scattered throughout the United States, even reaching Cuba and South Africa. Temple-White continued to have a contract with the United States military after World War II, and biohazard cleanup for the armed forces proved a boon for the company, who made nearly all of the mop handles used by the military.<sup>45</sup>

After the shipping room came the paint room. Customers could order handles in any color they desired. Women, according to Oneta Hendrick, the wife of handle factory superintendent Dick Hendrick, "did all of the painting. The men didn't like to paint."<sup>46</sup> Mixing the paint, however, was considered too difficult for women. As Hendrick said, "It required men's work really, just like a woman mixing paint, you were paint from here down. And they were five gallon cans. How many women can lift a five gallon can all day long?"<sup>47</sup> The supervisor in the paint room was also male. Women began by painting the handles by hand, a tedious job that involved dipping the handle in large tanks of paint

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<sup>43</sup>Temple Industries collection, Box 215, Folder 15, East Texas Research Center, Ralph W. Steen Library, Stephen F. Austin State University, Nacogdoches, TX. Hereafter cited as ETRC.

<sup>44</sup> Hendrick, interview by author.

<sup>45</sup> White, "Handles Play Major Role," 4.

<sup>46</sup>Hendrick, interview by author.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid.

and endeavoring to remove the handle without allowing the paint to run back on the handle. Eventually, by the late 1940s, the company added painting machines, which the women ran and did the same job that they had done by hand. Ages among the women varied greatly at Temple-White. Many were in their thirties and forties. The *Buzz Saw* featured Syble Nichols in 1947 as the oldest handle dipper in the Temple-White paint shop. Although they did not state her age, they did mention her two daughters, one college bound and the other thirteen, and her hobby “which is sewing, and she is very good at it.”<sup>48</sup>

At the Temple-White handle factory, thirty-three year old Jewel Minton went to work in January 1948. She painted more than three thousand mop and broom handles by hand a day. After a machine entered the plant, she was able to dip six thousand handles into the machine in eight hours, a feat that only she and one other woman ever accomplished. To those who remarked at her abilities, she replied, “You had to concentrate. It was compared to rubbing your head and patting your stomach at the same time.” She worked for the handle factory for sixteen and a half years. When going through menopause in the 1960s, she began suffering black-out spells at work. Temple-White sent her to two doctors in Tyler and placed her on disability. Minton was such a good worker that Herb White, Jr., a manager of the plant, remarked, “She is very disabled, if she wasn’t we would be glad to have her back today” presumably in her old position.<sup>49</sup>

In February 1948, an article in the *Buzz Saw* appeared applauding the handle factory women like Minton. The author stated, “They don’t have the most comfortable

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<sup>48</sup> “Paint Shop Department” *The Buzz Saw*, July 15, 1947, 3.

<sup>49</sup> Jewel Minton, interview by Marie Davis, Diboll, Texas, October 7, 1988, Diboll History Center.

place in the plant by any means, especially during the summer, because even with the temperature high outside, the steam is on inside—and then there is the odor of paint thinner hanging heavy in the air all the time.”<sup>50</sup> Indeed, every woman who worked at the handle factory, whether inside the painting room or in another location, remarked on the noxious fumes and intense steam in the painting room. Furthermore, the repetitive action of dipping the handles, before the arrival of the machines, hurt the women’s hands. Emma Pitts reported having muscle spasms in her right index finger after beginning work as a handle dipper in July 1946. The supervisor in the paint room remarked that, “There is no help for this as all new dippers have to get their fingers toughened.”<sup>51</sup>

### **“One Man Even Quit Because the Work was So Tough”: Box, Furniture, and Fence Making**

In Diboll, women continued to work after the war for Temple Manufacturing’s box factory. The Temple Manufacturing Box Factory employed many women. The box factory typically had a female workforce of 40 percent of all the workers, although some employees estimate the number at a peak of 80 percent.<sup>52</sup> Nannie Braezeale began working for the box factory at the age of fifteen in 1931. As mentioned in Chapter 1, she had to lie to obtain the job, since she was not sixteen. She participated in all areas of box manufacturing until the factory burned in a suspicious fire in 1946, resulting in the loss of 135 jobs.<sup>53</sup> One quarter of those jobs belonged to women, including Braezeale. The factory reopened as Temple & Associates Box Factory (commonly referred to as Temple

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<sup>50</sup> “Hot off the Handle...” *Buzz Saw* February 27, 1948, 4.

<sup>51</sup> Clyde Thompson collection, Box 84, Folder 37, HC.

<sup>52</sup> Louis Landers, Archivist, Diboll History Center, e-mail to author, March 23, 2011.

<sup>53</sup> Nannie Braezeale, interview by Jonathan Gerland, Diboll, Texas, March 23, 2000, Diboll History Center. For more on the factory fire, which had ties to union activity in Diboll, see Chapter 3.

Associates) in 1951 with a proportion of two women to every male employee. The factory made ammunition boxes for the U.S. defense department as well as vegetable crates for California and South Texas, and Temple Associates quickly made a reputation for themselves. They broke defense records for war manufacturing, reaching one million boxes by May 1953.<sup>54</sup>

Brazeale remembered that women at the box factory “did a little bit of everything.” She pulled out bent nails and operated a stamping machine which placed the Temple logo on the boxes, among her many duties. “It was hard work at times,” she recalled. “I was really sore some days; one man even quit because the work was so tough.”<sup>55</sup> A photograph of Brazeale in 1951 shows her sawing boards on a massive piece of equipment.<sup>56</sup> Women like Brazeale were on the rapid assembly line, operating nearly all machinery and saws, though, as in the handle factory, they were not responsible for maintaining or fixing their machines.

Jocie Swallows began working at the box factory in 1953. Swallows’s husband began complaining that money was too tight on only his salary as a fireman at the sawmill to support their nine-person family. Hoping to end the pressure, Swallows began work after her last child went to school. Like Brazeale, Swallows did a number of things. In one of her first jobs, she worked behind the saws, stacking the small pieces of wood into frames. After a few weeks there, she moved behind the nailing machine where she put boards onto the bottom of the box for the nailer to fix in place. The work was

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<sup>54</sup> Jonathan Gerland, “The Temple Associates Box Factory in Diboll,” *The Pine Bough*, July 2000, 20-23.

<sup>55</sup> Brazeale, interview by Gerland.

<sup>56</sup> Gerland, “The Temple Associates Box Factory,” 20.

more labor intensive than she thought it would be. “I was still out of shape after seven babies,” she remembered. “I turned around and picked up two boards and turned around to the box. I worked that fat off; I got pretty lean to the tune of about three hundred boxes a day.”<sup>57</sup>

The supervisors moved women around throughout the year, so they rarely had the chance to become well-acquainted enough with a particular machine to understand how to repair it. In this way, management prevented women from gaining enough experience to become classified as a skilled machine operator.<sup>58</sup> Swallows recalled how some women became so familiar with their machine that they did not need assistance from one of the male mechanics. Referring to the nailing machine, “sometimes it would miss a nail or something, and she [the woman operating the nailer] got to be a pretty good mechanic. She could do little things that made it operate without calling a man up.” Most women, however, did not have that opportunity.

Marie Hutto began working at the box factory in 1954. Her husband drove trucks for the company and told her about the job. Hutto had one daughter, and unlike many women, “I didn’t have to work, I just did it ‘cause I wanted to, so we could have a little extra money.” She used the money to buy extra clothing for her children, pay for extracurricular activities, and generally raise the standard of living for her family. In this way, Hutto mirrored the archetypal suburban wife who went to work in order to participate in the postwar consumer economy, not the majority of women employed in the timber-products industry, who worked as a necessity. At the box factory, Hutto was a screw-setter. Panels had to be screwed into place for the box to take shape. She set the

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<sup>57</sup> Jocie Swallows, interview by author, Lufkin, Texas, February 12, 2011.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

screws into the hardware of boxes on the conveyor belt before the next person on the line used an automatic screwdriver to secure the wood panels. Some employees at the box factory were paid by the box, including Hutto, “So you really had to work hard to make any money.” The most Hutto ever brought home in a week during her two to three years at the box factory was thirty-five or forty dollars.<sup>59</sup> It is unclear why some women at the box factory were paid piecework and some were not.

Lola Carter also began working for the box factory at the same time as Marie Hutto and in the same position. When asked if there were “guy jobs and girl jobs,” Carter responded that the girl jobs “was just everything.” Women, however, did not use the electric screwdrivers on the assembly line. They set the screws in place, but men operated the machines. It is unclear why women could operate other machines in the plant but not the electric screwdrivers. They were a newly introduced technology, so that may have played a role in men’s unofficial monopoly.<sup>60</sup> Similarly, after the box factory purchased a new nailer in 1951, it was several weeks before management allowed women to operate the machine.<sup>61</sup> Men may have deemed the new items as too skilled for women to operate. Once it was established that the technology was not tied to a skilled occupation, women could operate them. By the 1970s, for example, almost all of the forklift drivers in Temple industries were women, whereas in the previous decades, the company unofficially classified forklift driving as male.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Marie Hutto, interview by the author, Dallas, Texas, April 9, 2011.

<sup>60</sup>Lola Carter, interview by the author, Diboll, Texas, July 27, 2011. Swallows, interview by author.

<sup>61</sup> “Box Factory Nearing End of Present Contract,” *The Buzz Saw* Volume IV No 15, November 1951, 5.

<sup>62</sup>Burkhalter, interview by author.

In the final stage of the box production process, the men inspected the boxes. “These men were working by the piece,” Swallows remembered, “and boy did they move, but . . . if there was a nail missing in those boxes, they were supposed to catch it and put that nail in there. It had to be inspected to see that those nails were there and that the screws were there before they loaded it in them trailers.” Women did not act as inspectors at the box factory, as it was considered another purely male domain. Temple-owned industries did not promote a female to inspector status until the early 1960s.<sup>63</sup> As with fork lift driving and electric screwdriver operations, male management probably deemed inspecting as requiring too much skill for a woman.

As in the handle-factory, there were multiple accident reports filed at the box factory. The box factory did not have safety glasses for their employees, and, like the handle factory, sawdust could, and did, fly into worker’s eyes, causing burning and a temporary work stoppage.<sup>64</sup> Slips and falls were also common, as seen in the case of Sadie Read, who worked on the saw line, tripped, fell, and strained her knee.<sup>65</sup> Machines were another ever-present source of danger. Varma Simmons, a rip saw operator at the box factory, caught a finger in the saw on June 20, 1946, and lost a fingertip. This did not stop Simmons from returning to work on July 8, 1946.<sup>66</sup>

Conditions inside the factory were different from the handle factory. Unlike the closed-off handle factory, the building for the first box factory “was open all around” with a railroad track running on one side. As a result, the building allowed a breeze to

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<sup>63</sup>Swallows, interview by author. Hutto, interview by author.

<sup>64</sup> Clyde Thompson collection, Box 84, Folder 42, HC.

<sup>65</sup>Clyde Thompson collection, Box 84, Folder 7. HC.

<sup>66</sup>Clyde Thompson collection, Box 84, Folder 5, HC.

blow through in the summertime, relieving the oppressive Texas heat and humidity but was miserably cold in the winter. Workers could only add so many layers of clothing. Pearl Havard, who worked at the first box factory until it burned in 1946, remembered, “I wore a sweater, and working there, I couldn’t, because the sleeves, we was afraid it would catch in the machine.”<sup>67</sup> The design of the second box factory, completed in 1951, mirrored that of the first box factory.<sup>68</sup> During the winter of 1951, however, the box factory management closed the building in “on all sides with tin materials in an effort to keep the winter weather from hampering the employee’s work.”<sup>69</sup>

The second box factory was dependent on military contracts from the Korean War, and after the war came to a close, so did the factory. To their credit, the management at Temple industries tried to move many of the women to other factories within the company; many women dispersed to other Temple industries, including Josie Swallows, Marie Hutto, and Lola Carter.<sup>70</sup>

Swallows moved to the furniture-making plant of Temple Associates. She ran saws, cut cleats, drove legs down into chairs, and ran a sander. Her longest running job was running a clamp that made headboards. She usually worked an eight-hour shift, but it was an uncertain schedule. The plant often ran out of parts to make the furniture, which shut down the entire line. “They were liable to walk by any time and tell you to ‘go fishing’ . . . You never knew when you were going to have a full week or a full day.” In 1970, the furniture factory shut down, and Swallows moved to the planer mill, which

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<sup>67</sup>Pearl Havard, interview by the author, Lufkin, Texas, July 13, 2011.

<sup>68</sup> Gerland, “The Temple Associates Box Factory,” 20.

<sup>69</sup> “Box Factory Nearing End of Present Contract,” 5.

<sup>70</sup> Gerland, “The Temple Associates Box Factory,” 20.

was part of the larger sawmill operation, smoothing out the surface of the sawed boards before shipment. There she wrapped and packaged lumber for shipment until her retirement in 1982 at the age of sixty-seven, demonstrating how a number of women could, and did, make a long-term career out of a traditionally masculine job in timber products.<sup>71</sup>

Hutto also moved to the Temple Associates furniture factory. She began as a sander, using sandpaper or hand sanders to prepare furniture for paint. “Needless to say, your hands were pretty rough at the end of the day,” she recalled. In the early 1960s, Temple Associates promoted Hutto to final inspector of furniture at the plant, the first female inspector in a Temple-owned business. She received a small raise, ten cents above minimum wage, for her extra duties. When asked what other jobs women did at Temple Associates, Hutto replied that they worked on nearly all parts of the assembly line. Men, however, were responsible for fitting drawers. The supervisors considered that job too challenging and difficult for women.<sup>72</sup>

Like Swallows, quite a few women worked at the planer mill as low-level laborers. Some worked in shipping, like Swallows, wrapping lumber and preparing boxes, and others pulled lumber off assembly lines, hauling it to various locations. Mary Jane Griffin worked at the planer mill as a lumber handler. She helped crews load and push large buggies of lumber to and from the planer. The buggies were extremely heavy and prone to turning over or rolling back on the person pushing it. Griffin discovered this in May 1947 when the wheel on the buggy suddenly reversed, crushing the bone in her

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<sup>71</sup> Swallows, interview by author.

<sup>72</sup> Hutto, interview by author.

big toe.<sup>73</sup> This injury does not seem to have ended Griffin's tenure at the planer mill; she appears on a list of employees at Southern Pine in 1948.<sup>74</sup>

Two counties over from the Temple Associates Box Factory, in Sabine County, the Temple family owned and operated several industries, including two sawmills, a plywood plant, a flooring unit plant, and a toilet seat factory, in Pineland, their company town. Mary Russell went to work at a Southern Pine Company flooring unit plant in Pineland during the late 1950s, cutting knots out of boards with a large saw. Russell had attended college in Tyler, where she graduated with a degree in business. She met her husband in college and, after they married, they returned to Pineland, his hometown. Russell hated the town. "I thought it was the awfulest place I had ever seen," she remembered. "We had one way bridges, no bank, you know, no, no anything, and I didn't like it. I really didn't like it." There were few opportunities for Russell to use her degree or obtain any work outside of the Temple plants in a white-collar position. Shortly after her first job at the saws, the plant offered her a job as a grader, determining the fitness of different boards for sale. This had been a traditionally male occupation. Her husband, though, was one of the managers for the company, and, therefore, her promotion was not typical. Furthermore, she only remained in the position for three months, when she quit due to pregnancy.<sup>75</sup> It did, however, pave the way for other women, like Hattie Butler (see beginning of chapter), in the occupation.

A decade later, in about 1966, Louise Clark also went to work in the flooring unit plant in Pineland as a grader. She pulled lumber of various lengths, anywhere from a foot

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<sup>73</sup> Temple Industries collection, Box 214, Folder 1, ETRC.

<sup>74</sup> Temple Industries collection, Box 253, Folder 7, ETRC.

<sup>75</sup> Mary Russell, interview by the author, Pineland, Texas, January 22, 2011.

and a half to five feet, from boxes, graded them, and then sent them down the line. After she hurt her wrist, the company moved her to a toilet seat making plant. At the toilet seat plant, she nailed bumpers onto the bottom. The toilet-seat started at the pressroom, where Clark's mother, Naomi Davis, worked. Davis was responsible for mixing with glue leftover sawdust from the nearby sawmill, pressing the two mixtures together, and heating it in a large oven. Workers sanded the seats, dipped them into paint, and then sent them to where women like Clark nailed on bumpers. They were then packed and sent to various stores, like Sears.<sup>76</sup>

Leona Stephenson was the second woman hired at the newly opened seat plant in the mid-1950s. Stephenson's husband, J. B., was a foreman at the plant and, as such, found his wife the job. Management at the company hired women, according to Stephenson's daughter, Dorothy Price, because "women's fingers were small enough that they could handle the little instruments to put the lids on the seats." Specifically, Stephenson removed the chemicals, through a complicated boiling process, from the lumber used to make the seats. The lumber for the toilet seats came from salvaged lumber from the sawmill and was considered too poor for usage as boards, plywood, or particleboard. Stephenson remained with the company until her retirement in 1973. As one of the first women hired in Pineland (the first woman hired for the seat plant left in the late 1950s, due to declining health), Stephenson is the only woman in the company's retirement photo for that year, surrounded by fourteen men, including her husband.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Louise Clark, interview by the author, Hemphill, Texas, January 23, 2011. In 1964, Southern Pine Lumber Company changed its name to Temple industries.

<sup>77</sup>Price, interview by author.

Like the women at Temple's plants, at Norris Fence in Lufkin, Odell Plummer continued to work after the war's end. According to Plummer, Norris continued hiring women after the company found out what good employees they made. "They never slacked up hiring women," Plummer declared.<sup>78</sup> Plummer worked on both fences and grain doors for boxcars. She was responsible, in her first job after World War II ended, for putting pieces of wood on a chain [assembly line] for fence production. She next moved to painting the fences, dipping them in large vats of paint and hanging them up to dry. Her last job at Norris was running a large machine that turned the wood pieces into fence slats. Later, she worked for Norris after it became a box factory, operating similarly to the box factory in Diboll. Like Southern Pine, Norris Fence and their later box factory discovered that women could work long hours at monotonous tasks for less cost.<sup>79</sup>

On the surface, women in East Texas timber plants appear at odds with common perceptions of postwar femininity. As shown above, though, that appearance is deceptive. Although they were working in a blue-collar industry, operating heavy equipment, using physical labor, and risking as much injury as men, there was still a gendered aspect to their work. As seen in the many examples above, management relegated women to low-paying, low-skilled jobs in the timber plants across East Texas. Women could paint handles, but they could not mix the paint. They could operate nailing machines, but they could not repair them. They could operate saws, but they could not drive forklifts.

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<sup>78</sup> Odell Plummer, interview by Mary Potchernick Cook, Lufkin, Texas, March 1992.

<sup>79</sup> Odell Plummer, interview by the author, Lufkin, Texas, July 17, 2011.

Thus, the years after World War II represented continuity in the timber products industry for women's employment. The uniqueness of women's participation in the timber products industry lies in the fact that, from 1935 to the early 1970s, very little changed. Unlike nearly every other heavy industry in the nation, women did not enter timber in World War II and leave soon after; they entered in 1935 and never left. Furthermore, the nature of their work did not evolve. They remained in primarily deskilled, machine operator, and common labor positions. The number of those positions, and, therefore, the amount of women in them, however, expanded as new products, technological change, and expansion came to the industry.

Women in the East Texas timber products industry were acting in a different role than their counterparts in pink-collar jobs across the nation, but they remained in the same gendered play. If working as a nailer or saw-operator in East Texas did not detract from a woman's feminine status in postwar America, neither did it provide her with many opportunities for advancement. As in industries across the nation, women very rarely became supervisors or obtained the knowledge for a higher-paying job. At an even greater disadvantage were African American women who, like their male counterparts, were forbidden from certain occupations and relegated to low-level labor. Maintaining the status quo of high-skilled, high-paid men and low-skilled, low-paid women and minorities was a subtle but definite form of discrimination, as will be shown in a closer examination of wage-based discrimination and racial practices in the following chapter.

### CHAPTER 3: DISCRIMINATION AT WORK, PROBLEMS AT HOME

In terms of women's work in the postwar period, the East Texas timber products industry mirrored national trends with a few significant differences. As discussed in Chapter 2, women in East Texas timber towns worked because their families consistently needed money; therefore, they worked in full-time permanent positions. Like their low-income counterparts elsewhere, however, their wages often did not match those of men, due to their gendered work and subtle discrimination. Moreover, in the East Texas timber industry, even men's wages were unusually low. Union activity in the major timber industries of East Texas was conspicuous by its absence. To understand women's wages in the timber products industry, an analysis of why organized labor did not spread in the industry, thus improving conditions for both sexes, is necessary.<sup>1</sup>

Similarly, female employees found their opportunities for promotions to be even further limited than access to equal wages. Women timber workers could work for decades and never see a single promotion in rank.<sup>2</sup> Although very rarely openly belligerent toward women workers in the mills, male workers and supervisors resented women's encroachment into the timber products industry.<sup>3</sup> Even federally funded organizations, like the U.S. Forestry Service, based, for Texas, in Lufkin, actively

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<sup>1</sup> For more on earlier efforts to unionize the timber industry, see Geoffrey Ferrell, "The Brotherhood of Timber Workers and the Southern Lumber Trust, 1910-1914," PhD dissertation, University of Texas at Austin, 1982; Charles Rudolph McCord, "A Brief History of the Brotherhood of Timber Workers," MA thesis, University of Texas at Austin, 1959; and Ryan Gullett, "East Texas Theater of the Timber Wars, 1910-1913: Kirby Lumber Company's War with the Brotherhood of Timber Workers," MA thesis, Stephen F. Austin State University, 2010.

<sup>2</sup> Jocie Swallows, interview by the author, Lufkin, Texas, February 12, 2011.

<sup>3</sup> Vernon Burkhalter, interview by the author, Diboll, Texas, April 1, 2011.

discriminated against women in terms of placement and advancement into the mid 1970s.<sup>4</sup>

At home, women faced additional difficulties. The support, or lack thereof, of husbands mattered in how women viewed the success of their work life. As discussed below, many husbands in the timber products industry supported their wives' work endeavors, but there were exceptions that highlight how powerful a role husbands continued to play in their wives' decisions. Additionally, housework and childcare further complicated female timber worker's lives, as it did all working women.

Furthermore, the East Texas timber products business was not a fully white enterprise. African American women, like their white counterparts, participated in the industry, but they faced the complicating factor of race. East Texas in the postwar era mirrored in most ways the Jim Crow world of the rest of the South. Timber towns enforced segregation, and racism abounded. For African American women, their lives bore the double mark of their gender and race. They struggled to be both full citizens and successful workers in timber industry-ran areas, facing discrimination in everything from work location to housing.

### **African American Women and the Timber Industry**

In factories across the South, and, in many cases, across the North, African American women faced discriminatory practices. They often occupied the lowest and most menial positions in the plants, and companies spatially separated minority women from white women.<sup>5</sup> This act represented widespread fears about African Americans'

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<sup>4</sup> Elmer Pittman, interview by the author, Zavalla, Texas, July 18, 2011.

<sup>5</sup> Megan Taylor Shockley, *"We, Too, Are Americans: African American Women in Detroit and Richmond, 1940-54"* (Urbana: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 18.

alleged uncleanliness. African American women, according to this widely held opinion, were dirty and, therefore, a hazard to their white female co-workers.<sup>6</sup> White women's resistance to the idea of working next to African American women provided a pretense for companies to refuse to hire African American women altogether, both during and after World War II.

Across the nation, African Americans were among the many women laid off by war factories as contracts declined in 1944 and 1945. The national government's increasing shift towards conservative policies and communist fears placed civil rights organizations and unions on the defensive. African American women facing discriminatory layoffs had little recourse. Furthermore, African American women did not benefit when factories began to hire back some white women during the Korean War.<sup>7</sup>

Thus, the postwar world attempted to relegate African-American women once again to service jobs. Sixty percent of African-American working women nationwide in 1950 were employed in household service jobs, working for women in private homes. In this work, they tried to hold on to a sense of self-respect in their work. They could sometimes choose their employer and set boundaries on their work assignments. One woman told her employer, "You said your girl cleans the floor, and I'm not your girl . . .

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<sup>6</sup> Transcript of Women's Conference, 7 Feb. 1942, 40, box 2, United Auto Workers War Policy Division Collection, Wayne State University, as cited in Shockley, "*We, Too, Are Americans*," 65.

<sup>7</sup> Shockley, "*We, Too, Are Americans*," 140.

and I don't scrub floors on my hands and knees."<sup>8</sup> Their wages, however, remained less than half those of white women in 1950.<sup>9</sup>

The East Texas timber products industry was firmly entrenched in southern segregationist attitudes. As lumber historians Thad Sitton and James H. Conrad have remarked, "The tenor of interracial relationships at a mill town took its cues from the man at the top of the pecking order, the owner or superintendent."<sup>10</sup> Some companies treated their African American employees better than others. Josephine Rutland Frederick, a white Diboll citizen, remembered that the Temple family did not tolerate the Ku Klux Klan in their town. While the KKK was very active in nearby Lufkin, the Temples and their white law-enforcement employees restricted the more violently racist behavior in Diboll.<sup>11</sup>

The Temple family operated their company towns into the postwar years as, relatively speaking, more accommodating toward African American citizens, who represented 36 percent of the population of Diboll in 1950.<sup>12</sup> African American workers remember Diboll as a good place to live, and the Temple family as cordial. Wilk Peters, an African American worker for the Temple's sawmill, remembered that "There were no

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<sup>8</sup> Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work, and the Family, from Slavery to the Present* (New York: Basic Books, 2010), 198, 213.

<sup>9</sup> Susan M. Hartman, *The Home Front and Beyond: American Women in the 1940s* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1982), 94.

<sup>10</sup> Thad Sitton and James H. Conrad, *Nameless Towns: Texas Sawmill Communities, 1880-1942*. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998), 72.

<sup>11</sup> Josephine Rutland Frederick, interview by Becky Bailey, Diboll, TX, October 13, 1984, Diboll History Center.

<sup>12</sup> *Census of Population and Housing, 1950: Summary Population and Housing Characteristics: Texas*. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1951, 43-157.

ethnic slurs in Diboll . . . for blacks, living conditions were fair."<sup>13</sup> Although living conditions were "fair," as Peters recalled, they were far from equal to what whites enjoyed. White housing, across the railroad tracks, was noticeably superior. Until the 1950s, when the company began selling all of the houses, African American company-owned houses were unpainted, unlike their white counterparts. They were smaller and made of lower-quality materials, usually one-by-fours with weather stripping.<sup>14</sup>

For African Americans, their working life in the timber products industry operated along similarly segregated and discriminatory practices. Although the Temple family admirably combated the KKK in their company town, they did not pay African American employees equal wages, employ them in similar jobs, or provide them with opportunities for advancement. That is not, however, how some citizens of Diboll remember the actions of the Temple family. Former personnel director, Vernon Burkhalter, opined, "Arthur Temple Jr. was a great influence on our industry here in equal rights, promotion, equal treatment for everybody, regardless of race, creed, or color. They had a real strong belief that that was the right thing to do, and we didn't need have to have a bunch of laws. We were practicing that before it became a big thing with the government and all their agencies."<sup>15</sup> Willie Massey, the black school's principal, remembers circumstances differently. Using the schools, which the company controlled until the 1960s, as an example of Temple's unwillingness to accommodate African

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<sup>13</sup> Wilk Peters, self-interview, Baltimore, Maryland, September 28, 1984, Diboll History Center. Peters recorded his memories of Diboll for inclusion in an oral history project.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> In three interviews, Burkhalter said similar things, almost down to the exact phrasing, with three different interviewers and across several decades. He obviously firmly believes this to be true, or this is a case of someone "protesting too much." It is the author's view that it is the latter. Vernon Burkhalter, interview by the author.

Americans equally, he remembered, “I think that if Mr. Temple wanted it [schools] integrated, he could have integrated it anytime. That’s the way Diboll was . . . he let it go until the state started requiring that the schools integrate.”<sup>16</sup> Similarly, the company-run restaurant, the Pine Bough, integrated after black freedom riders staged a sit-in in the segregated restaurant in the late-1960s. The company had forewarning that the freedom riders were coming, and, not wanting to bring unwelcome attention to his town, Temple told the restaurant to serve the protesters when they arrived, which they did.<sup>17</sup> Although some citizens remember Temple as treating African Americans in the postwar years equally, in practice, he tended to wait until outside pressures forced his hand, though he did not actively resist.

In the late-1960s, the company decided to go to the Rio Grande Valley and bring Mexican migrant workers into the plants. A labor shortage forced the Temple industries and other area businesses to look elsewhere for their needs. At the time, there were roughly three to four hundred jobs open in heavily industrialized Angelina County. They had first looked in Alabama, Georgia, and Louisiana, where some mills had been shut down, but the burgeoning Civil Rights Movement made company officials reconsider recruiting African Americans from other parts of the South, probably fearing that ideas of social and legal equality would arrive with them.<sup>18</sup> Management preferred to bring

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<sup>16</sup> Willie Massey, interview by Marie Davis and Pate and Vivian Warner, Diboll, Texas, April 22, 1986, Diboll History Center.

<sup>17</sup> Megan Biesele, *The Cornbread Whistle: Oral History of a Texas Timber Company Town* (Lufkin, TX: Lufkin Printing Company, 1986), 94.

<sup>18</sup> Vernon Burkhalter, interview by Becky Bailey, Diboll, Texas, December 31, 1985, Diboll History Center.

Mexican families, beginning with twenty-five to test the waters, instead of run the risk that African Americans from the Deep South would arrive and foment "social unrest."<sup>19</sup>

In this segregated and discriminatory world, African American women faced an uphill battle in terms of employment and equal opportunity in the East Texas timber products industry. The large Angelina Lumber Company, in Lufkin, had one African American woman on their payroll as a janitor in 1946.<sup>20</sup> It appears from the personnel records for Temple-owned industries that the company hired very few African American women from the end of World War II until the 1960s, although they employed many African American men in both logging and sawmills. African American women are not present on employee lists for the Temple-White handle factory or the Temple Associates box factory in the 1950s, though they worked for both companies during World War II. At that time, as discussed in Chapter 1, they worked as laborers in the yard or in the mills, hauling lumber and loading buggies, the most menial jobs at the bottom of the pay scale.<sup>21</sup>

As the war years waned, African American women in Temple-owned industries were more likely to lose their jobs. When Johnnie Mae Harris, a block catcher (person who removed leftover logs from an assembly line) at the sawmill in Diboll, slipped and fell at work, the company did not return her to her position after she received treatment for her injury. "We are discontinuing women employees on the plant and do not have a

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid. Few Mexican workers resided in Diboll during the time period of this work, and the company did not employ any Mexican women before 1975.

<sup>20</sup> Angelina County Lumber Company Employee Records, Box 3, Angelina County Lumber Company Collection, East Texas Research Center, Ralph W. Steen Library, Stephen F. Austin State University, Nacogdoches, Texas. Hereafter cited as ETRC.

<sup>21</sup> Clyde Thompson collection, Box 77, Folder 71, 72, 66, and 67, History Center, Diboll, Texas. Hereafter cited as HC.

place for her," personnel director Clyde Thompson recorded in an April 1946 report on the accident.<sup>22</sup> One month later, Lizzie Robinson, a forty-five-year-old African-American laborer at the Temple-owned lumber mill in Pineland, also did not return to work after she cut her finger. Thompson again commented that they were trying to eliminate female employees and "are laying off the older ones first, and for that reason, Lizzie was not put back to work . . . ."<sup>23</sup>

Thompson's argument would have been more convincing if Josephine Leavines, a white laborer at the same Pineland mill as Lizzie Robinson, had not returned to work in August 1946, three months after the mill refused to reinstate Robinson. Age could not have been a factor in the decision; Leavines was two years older than Robinson. Their occupations were very similar. If the company was trying to release female employees through attrition, then it is odd that Leavines remained in the plant for the course of the personnel records, appearing as late as the last available notes in December 1946, and was not turned away after her injury.<sup>24</sup> The only difference between the two women appears to be their race.

Although no concrete reason is readily available, the failure to hire African American women in Temple-White handle factory and Temple Associates box factory during the immediate postwar years may have stemmed from what administrators viewed as practicality. Neither factory, unlike the larger mills, had segregated bathrooms, which, in the Jim Crow South, were customary. Management allowed the one African American

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<sup>22</sup> Clyde Thompson collection, Box 82, Folder 22, HC.

<sup>23</sup> Clyde Thompson collection, Box 83, Folder 31, HC.

<sup>24</sup> Clyde Thompson collection, Box 83, Folder 23, HC.

employee, an elderly man at the handle factory, to use the bathroom with his white counterparts. The expense of adding segregated bathrooms may have proven more than management was willing to pay. Conversely, it may have been a convenient excuse to keep African American women out of an industry employing white women.<sup>25</sup>

Another possibility for the underrepresentation of African American women in timber plants may have been the gendered nature of labor in the factories. As stated earlier, some jobs were considered more suited for men than women. The jobs at the handle and box factories were within the scope of approved women's work within the timber products industry, and, as a result, a large number of women employees were concentrated in those two factories. Many white women in other factories across the nation opposed working alongside African American women. The pressure from whites not to hire African Americans would have provided management an excuse to practice a prejudiced hiring policy.<sup>26</sup> Through either self-regulation or conscious discrimination on the part of management, African American women did not frequently materialize on the payrolls of most East Texas timber mills until the 1960s, except in janitorial positions explicitly unequal to white women workers.<sup>27</sup> While the Civil Rights Movement played a role, African American women's appearance in East Texas timber mills in the mid-1960s and beyond probably was because of an increased demand for labor in the wake of continued mill openings and further technological advances that called for more unskilled labor.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Louis Landers, conversation with author, July 13, 2011.

<sup>26</sup> Shockley, *"We, Too, Are Americans,"* 140.

<sup>27</sup> Frost Lumber Company, employee ledger, Forest Collection, East Texas Research Center.

Despite this discrimination, some African American women found employment in the East Texas timber products industry. Wilma Berry had worked in private homes in the 1950s. She began working at the planer mill in Diboll in the late 1960s, a job that she considered amazing in comparison to her previous employment. "Let me tell you something," she stated. "If you work in private homes from 8am to 3 or 4pm for three dollars a day, then you think you're making money when you're making a dollar and twenty-five cents an hour . . . I praised God when I got to Temple." Although she considered the job to be "a blessing," she noted that white women in the company "didn't work like we [she and other African-American women] did. They had easier jobs." Berry and one other African American women worked at the "dry chain", pulling dried logs from a conveyor belt. She recalled that most women worked in other locations, and white women, in particular, enjoyed less strenuous positions at the recently opened fiberboard plant.<sup>29</sup> Berry worked as a lumber puller, taking specific boards off a "dry chain" or cable. Eventually, she moved to the guardhouse and spent her remaining years until retirement riding a buggy around the company checking machinery.<sup>30</sup>

Due to rampant, ingrained discriminatory practices, Berry and African American women like her constituted a small minority in the timber products industry. In their public life, they faced segregation everywhere from the meat market to the location of their homes. At work, their positions were more menial, difficult, and strenuous than white female workers, from whom the company spatially separated them. Due to their

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<sup>28</sup> Burkhalter, interview by author. Refer to the previously discussed labor shortage that caused local companies to hire Mexican migrant labor from South Texas.

<sup>29</sup> Wilma Berry, interview by the author, Corrigan, Texas, February 26, 2011; Burkhalter interview by author. There are no personnel records on the fiberboard plant. Many interviewees mentioned women who went to work at the fiberboard plant, but none were available for interviews.

<sup>30</sup> Berry, interview by the author.

race, they faced lower wages than whites. Their gender, however, also caused wage differentiation. Both white and black women endured that particular discrimination.

### **Gender Discrimination and Wages**

Wage inequality between men and women, a phenomenon as old as wage work itself, continued in most industries in the postwar years. Although much of the "wage gap" could be attributed to occupational segregation, even men and women working in similar or identical jobs after World War II often received unequal wages. General Electric provides a stark example of endemic wage discrimination on a nationwide scale. In the 1940s, General Electric provided women with a wage rate one-third of what a man would receive for an identical job. After 1964, General Electric could no longer have separate male and female pay rates, so they changed the numbers signifying grades of work, so that men still earned the highest wages on the job scale. This practice persisted at General Electric until a lawsuit in 1972.<sup>31</sup>

Women across the nation began to push for equal pay for equal work in the 1960s, and their efforts bore fruit in legislation. In 1963, an Equal Pay Act outlawed differential pay in equivalent jobs but did not include domestic or farm workers. In Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, companies with more than fifteen employees could not discriminate in hiring based on sex, religion, and ethnicity.<sup>32</sup> Across the nation, by 1970, the number of women in skilled trades increased nearly 80 percent from 1960 and the

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<sup>31</sup> Rochelle Gatlin, *American Women Since 1945* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1987), 39.

<sup>32</sup> Alice Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work: A History of Wage-Earning Women in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 314. The word "sex" was thrown into Title VII by Senator Howard Smith as a joke, hoping that it would stop the passage of the bill. When a committee tried to remove the word, two female senators threatened to stall the whole bill, and it passed over a majority of legislators protests

number of women in traditionally male occupations had increased, though to proportionally low percentages. On the eve of the second wave women's rights movement, more than 40 percent of married women worked and the number of young women with children in the labor force skyrocketed.<sup>33</sup> Among blue-collar workers, however, individuals did not see the general gains. In the 1970s, they remained passed over for promotion, despite the passage of equal opportunity legislation, and their wages remained unequal to men.<sup>34</sup> The practices placed women in separate job categories than men, often on the basis of slightly different skill descriptions. Employers technically provided equal pay for equal work, but the pay did not coordinate to the work of equal value.<sup>35</sup>

The evidence on equal pay for women in the timber products industry is contradictory. A major factor in the low wages for women in the East Texas timber products industry was the similarly low wages for men, referred to in Chapter 2. The Deep East Texas timber products industry in the postwar years was, for the most part, not unionized, making timber wages significantly lower than wages in other industries. In her 1960 sociological study of East Texas lumber workers, Ruth Allen attempted to identify why unionization never took hold in the timber industry. She named four factors that made opposition to lumber companies, through labor organization, almost impossible. Strikes did not cause as much fear to timber companies as other industries. "When a plant closes down," Allen explains, "its loss of revenue is offset by

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 312.

<sup>34</sup> Julia Kirk Blackwelder, *Now Hiring: The Feminization of Work in the United States, 1900-1995* (College Station: Texas A&M Press, 1997), 183.

<sup>35</sup> Susan Estabrook Kennedy, *If All We Did was to Weep at Home: A History of White Working-Class Women in America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1979), 208.

approximately one-third because of the fact that it has not been paying wages. When the saving from other costs of productions are added to the wages saving, it becomes clear that a strike of workers in the lumber industry means a comparatively small loss to employers."<sup>36</sup> According to Allen, a strike cost employers in the timber industry less than a small increase in wages.

Allen pointed to a lack of unity among workers themselves as the second reason for the failure of unionization. Antipathy between white and African American workers caused the possibility of organization to be dim. Prior to World War II, the Brotherhood of Timber Workers had limited success with integrated unions in East Texas; the area was too much a part of the Jim Crow South to embrace labor organization that would benefit both races.<sup>37</sup> Similarly, in the 1920s, sociologist H. T. Warshaw saw the lack of immigration from either foreign countries or other sections of the United States as an important reason for the failure of organization. Without new ideas and a diverse workforce, Warshaw maintained, the lumber industry would not organize.<sup>38</sup>

Allen believed that the fact that most East Texas lumber employees had dependent families deterred active protests. "In the Western and Lakes states," she notes, "single men made up about two-thirds of the labor force in the lumber industry; in the South, about two-fifths."<sup>39</sup> This led to Allen's fourth reason: the paternalistic attitude of employers in the lumber industry towards their workers. Company owners saw their

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<sup>36</sup> Ruth Allen, *East Texas Lumber Workers: An Economic and Social Picture, 1870-1950* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1961), 185.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 186.

<sup>38</sup> H.T. Warshaw, ed. *Representative Industries in the United States* (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1928), 481.

<sup>39</sup> Allen, *East Texas Lumber Workers*, 187.

workers as too ignorant and dependent to allow for any serious recognition of an official group speaking through a representative. Allen bemoaned the fact that lumber workers accepted wages far below what was available in the rest of the state, refusing to move to another job out of fear of change. She concluded her study by calling lumber workers "deprived children of a difficult history." That history, she contended, "embraces . . . company towns persisting well into the second quarter of the twentieth century; wages paid in kind or in nonmoney symbols; denial of a right to organize for presentation of their interests by subtle methods when possible, by overt ones when necessary. Their history may be characterized as the story of a plot, and the plotter's names were inertia, ignorance, and (must one add the third?) tyranny."<sup>40</sup>

Although perhaps melodramatic, Allen's four reasons are all valid. Perhaps the most important reason for the lack of unionization among lumber workers, which she alludes to in her final cause, was fear. The East Texas timber products industry used whatever means necessary to keep unions out, both before and after World War II. Megan Biesele, author of an oral history of Diboll, pointed to the organization by Temple Lumber Company employees of a committee of thirteen in the 1920s as an example of how much workers did not want unions. This committee, made up of thirteen workers, reported to management anything that might indicate encroachment by the Brotherhood of Timber Workers (BTW) in Pineland, Diboll's sister town. In some cases, the committee used brutal tactics to expel union organizers from town.<sup>41</sup> The assumption that the committee's presence indicates an antipathy towards unionization from

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 199.

<sup>41</sup> Biesele, *Cornbread Whistle*, 62.

employees is naïve at best. That committee was, more than likely, organized by the company or by employees paid an extra amount by the company to keep the BTW out. The tactic worked. Fear and intimidation kept unions out of the timber industry of East Texas into the postwar years.

In the late 1930s and 1940s, companies could not threaten unions or those who might join unions with the kind of violence and intimidation practices of the pre-Depression years. The Wagner Act, passed in 1935, guaranteed the rights of workers to organize and to strike.<sup>42</sup> Instead, companies could employ other methods. A popular technique was to tie unions to communism. Unions struggled to survive within a country that conflated workers' rights with socialism, at best. This forced many unions to drop civil rights programs and other contentious issues.<sup>43</sup> In Diboll, Arthur Temple, Jr., owner of the Temple industries, gave two speeches in 1950, one to the Negro Chamber of Commerce and another at a Juneteenth celebration. In both talks, he explicitly tied unionism to communism, perhaps fearing that African Americans were more susceptible to the siren song of workers' rights than white employees. There are no records of similar speeches to white audiences.<sup>44</sup> Other records from Temple during the early 1950s depict investigations into prospective employees from out-of-town, to ensure no union history.<sup>45</sup>

Perhaps the most explicitly anti-union episode in the postwar years was the 1946 Temple Manufacturing Box Factory fire. The Congress of Industrial Organizations had

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<sup>42</sup> The passage of the Taft-Hartley Act in 1947, however, curtailed some of the advancements of the Wagner Act, including preventing supervisors from enjoying the privileges of the Wagner Act, placing restrictions on strikes, and prohibiting closed shops.

<sup>43</sup> Shockley, *"We, Too, Are Americans"*, 139.

<sup>44</sup> Temple Industries collection, Box 253, Folder 6, ETRC.

<sup>45</sup> Temple Industries collection, Box 253, Folder 7, ETRC.

successfully recruited several box factory employees that year, one of the only successful union encroachments into the Temple industrial monolith. Shortly thereafter, the factory burned to the ground. The fire began between twelve and one o'clock in the afternoon, when nearly all of the employees had returned home for a lunch break. Sawmill and timber product plant fires were and still are not unusual. The timing of the fire, the almost complete erasure of it from public memory in Diboll (it did not appear in any histories of Diboll or the newspaper), and the complete lack of any kind of unionization after the fire casts a suspicious light on the event. Employees who do remember the fire tied it to the union activity, although they never explicitly came out and said that they believed members of the union set the fire or the company burned the building on purpose to punish the employees.<sup>46</sup> It is a big coincidence that at a time when the box factory was almost out of contracts, since the war was over, and some employees (no one can remember how many) joined the CIO, the building burned. Temple did not rebuild the box factory until the Korean War introduced a new demand. Whether the company actually burned down their own factory, union agitators set the fire, or the whole matter was an accident, there is no evidence of employees joining unions after the fire. Fear of repercussions was very persuasive.

Proving that wages for timber products employees was low across the board is simpler than demonstrating wage discrimination between men and women in the industry. According to available records, in 1954 at Southern Pine, women and African American men earned eighty cents at an entry-level job, and white males earned eighty-

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<sup>46</sup>Swallows, interview by author.

five cents at the same level.<sup>47</sup> On the other hand, former management at Southern Pine claimed that they based the pay at all plants by 1960 on a job rate; everyone who worked in a certain category received the same wage.<sup>48</sup> For example, a lumber grader working for any Temple industry in 1951 made between 85 cents and \$1.10 an hour.<sup>49</sup> Operating in the same way as General Electric's aforementioned wage scale, however, this could lead to "male" wages (the higher amount) and "female" wages (the lower).

Unfortunately, few surviving payroll records exist to allow for an analysis based on equality of position, number of years served, and gender. Only one record exists that indicates that Southern Pine discriminated against women employees on wages. Annie L. Williams, a white woman, was hired in 1947 to be an end matcher. At the same time, a man was hired for the same job, and the company paid him ten cents an hour more.<sup>50</sup>

The women who worked for the same company at the same time have differing stories. Mary Russell, an employee at Pineland's toilet seat factory and, later, a lumber grader, insisted that Temple did not pay women the same wage for equal work. When asked if women received equal pay for equal work, she laughed and replied, "Are you kidding? No!" She continued, "That was one thing my husband [a plant manager] always brought up at meetings, that a woman doing a man's job should draw the same pay. He just thought it was unfair, and it was."<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Louis Landers, Archivist, Diboll History Center, e-mail to author, April 27, 2011.

<sup>48</sup> Burkhalter, interview by author.

<sup>49</sup> Arthur Temple Jr. collection, Box 13, Folder 30, HC.

<sup>50</sup> Temple Industries collection, Box 303, Folder 16, ETRC.

<sup>51</sup> Mary Russell, interview by the author, Pineland, Texas, March 23, 2011.

Jocie Swallows, Louise Clark, Oneta Hendrick, and Marie Hutto, on the other hand, asserted that they received the same wages as men. The reasoning behind many of the women's belief that they received equal wages as men is a matter of speculation. In the case of Oneta Hendrick, her husband, Dick, was a supervisor and later a plant foreman for the Temples. A condemnation of the company's policies may have been a reflection on her husband, who, according to his wife, tied his identity to Temple.<sup>52</sup> The consistent gratitude and affection for the company demonstrated in the interviews seem to surpass all criticisms, so perhaps the women honestly believed Southern Pine's pronouncements that they treated every employee equally. What is significant is that, when interviewed, no female employee of the timber products industry, other than Russell, perceived themselves as unequal. There is enough evidence to conclude that women, while paid an equal starting salary, did not receive equal pay over the long-term. Even when discrimination was blatant, as discussed below, female timber products employees did not protest, at least not publicly. Bound to their jobs by their families' financial need and a lack of better positions, women faced few other options, and their employers knew it.

### **Gender Discrimination, Promotions, and Male Coworkers in Timber and Forestry**

The patterns of promotions and raises, unlike the shaky evidence for wages, speak to a persistent discrimination. Nationwide, industrial employers did not place women in jobs that constituted a step on the promotion ladder. As a 1959 study of women and work acknowledged, "It is still true that most women end their working lives performing much the same tasks that they performed when they began work." At the time of the study, out of every 1000 male industrial employees, 153 earned \$6000 or more, but only nine out of

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<sup>52</sup>Oneta Hendrick, interview by the author, Diboll, Texas, July 26, 2011.

1000 female employees reached the same level.<sup>53</sup> Women did not receive the same raises and promotions that enabled them to enter higher income brackets.

Jocie Swallows remembered that there were few opportunities for promotion in any of the Temple plants, and most women stayed at the bottom with very few exceptions. She worked for Temple from 1953 to 1970 at the box and furniture factory making only ten cents over minimum wage at her highest earning point. When she moved to the planer mill in 1970, the company removed even that small raise, and she spent three months at minimum wage before receiving another raise.<sup>54</sup> Although Swallows worked for nearly twenty years at practically minimum wage, with no chance for further raises, she still maintained that the company treated her equally, in terms of wages, to her male cohorts.

Further complicating the advancement process for women, if a female employee in the Temple industries left to have a baby during the 1950s and 1960s, she returned to work at a beginning wage, not the wage at which she left. That was if she returned within three days of giving birth; the company fired women who took four or more days.<sup>55</sup> All employees received a physical examination before being employed by the Temple industries. If pregnant, the employee was not hired. Some women hid their condition, although this could meet with tragic results. In 1956, a female Temple employee miscarried at work, to the consternation of Vernon Burkhalter, the personnel director,

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<sup>53</sup> Robert W. Smuts, *Women and Work in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), 106.

<sup>54</sup> Swallows, interview by author.

<sup>55</sup> Louis Landers, discussion with author, July 11, 2011, Diboll, Texas.

who wrote a letter sternly reminding the company doctor, S. L. Stevenson, to note any suspicions of pregnancy in the employment records.<sup>56</sup>

Timber products companies employed few female supervisors. The *Buzz Saw* reported on the promotion of Juanita Nixon in 1949, the only recorded female supervisor between 1945 and 1975. Nixon oversaw the buffing and waxing of handles for Temple-White. Rather than focus on the qualifications and skills that led to her promotion, the paper applauded her ability to work "under the great 'say a few well chosen words,' and we hear she listens well so we believe all will be fine in Mr. Davis' [who was over all handle production] department." In the same article, the author, Herb White, Jr., mentioned that W. E. Bryce also became a supervisor but made no comments on his ability to listen or his tendencies to talk. White only had to assure his audience that the new female supervisor would listen and avoid unnecessary chattering, implying that the male supervisor would automatically refrain.<sup>57</sup>

The names of no other female supervisor at any Temple or local timber products industry appeared in print until Delores James in 1975. James became a plywood plant supervisor, but the newspaper article on her promotion, headlined "The boss is a lady," emphasized her womanly qualities, stating, ". . . she certainly has proven that being cute and feminine has no drawbacks to the job." James supervised thirty-five people and was the only female supervisor in any local timber operations that the article author could find. She had attended business school and worked for Temple's real estate division before becoming a supervisory trainee in June 1974. Her experience in business probably

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<sup>56</sup> Letter from Vernon Burkhalter to Dr. S.L. Stevenson, December 15, 1956, Temple collection, Box 304, Folder 1, ETRC.

<sup>57</sup> Herb White Jr., "New Supervisors," *Buzz Saw* January 31, 1949, 5.

helped her gain the position over other women who had worked for the company longer and did not have degrees.<sup>58</sup>

Vernon Burkhalter, who, as personnel director, was in charge of hiring, remembered that in the 1960s, "Some of them supervisors and foremen would scream bloody-- well, the fiberboard men balked at some of them [female hires] ... A lot of them guys didn't like women out there in the plant ... It was different; it was a change."<sup>59</sup> Although the men expressed their apprehension and hostility towards working with women to Burkhalter, this frustration did not appear to reach the women who all claimed that their male coworkers treated them very well. The supervisors and foremen treated them well and did not make disparaging comments to their face. Probably this reticence stemmed from the fact that most of the men grew up with the women or worked with their husbands, so harassment took on a more personal and, potentially, more dangerous nature for the harasser.<sup>60</sup> In one of the few cases of male coworkers remarking on the oddity of a female employee, Wilma Berry remembered men commenting that she was "crazy" to be working at the planer mill and that they would not let their wives work in such conditions, but no men made overtly derogatory comments.<sup>61</sup>

Female employees faced other complications. Department stores did not always stock the necessary apparel women in heavy industry needed. Leona Stephenson could not find appropriate work clothes, like pants and overalls, when she began work at the toilet seat factory in Pineland in the mid-1950s. She searched the entire area and could

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<sup>58</sup> "The boss is a lady: Pinewood plywood plant supervisor," *The Free Press* July 17, 1975, 2.

<sup>59</sup> Burkhalter, interview by author.

<sup>60</sup> Russell, interview by author.

<sup>61</sup> Berry, interview by the author.

not find ready-made work clothes for women. Adolescent male blue jeans proved to be the only work clothes she could find, and she was thankful that she was small enough for them to fit.<sup>62</sup>

Occasionally, a woman's personal life placed her job at risk and added credence to nationwide fears about women working outside of the home. Swallows remembered how in the early 1970s, "I learned after we went to work there was two . . . lesbians . . . they caught in the bathroom, so they fired them on the spot." Neither the work place nor East Texas society accepted homosexuality, and the two women left town in disgrace. In particular, this incident highlighted fears that women working in a male-dominated arena were not feminine and trying to be male.<sup>63</sup>

Even government entities practiced occupational discrimination against women. The U.S. Forest Service, part of the Department of Agriculture, played an important role in timber management. This position made them a close partner with the timber products industry, creating, as public policy analyst Elaine Pitt Enarson has observed, "an intimacy which is sometimes controversial."<sup>64</sup> In terms of timber maintenance, the Forest Service is responsible for tree planting, fire prevention, and the maintenance of forests and forest services. Women became field workers in the Forest Service in the 1960s. In the Pacific Northwest, women applying for field positions came face-to-face with a hostile, masculine profession. Tree-planting was the first position women received. They were monitored closely, and supervisors often saw what they wanted so see. Those who

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<sup>62</sup> Dorothy Price, interview by the author, Huntington, Texas, January 2, 2011.

<sup>63</sup> Swallows, interview by author.

<sup>64</sup> Elaine Pitt Enarson, *Woods-Working Women: Sexual Integration in the U.S. Forest Service* (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 1984), 5.

wanted the women to succeed approved of the women they supervised; those who did not made callous remarks and spiteful comments. In the late 1960s, one supervisor of a female field worker in the Pacific Northwest remarked, “I really don’t want any women on my team, but I understand we have to hire a minority. You’re a minority, and you’re that much better than a nigger. And if we get someplace and have to go down a hole, lady you’re going down there.”<sup>65</sup>

In East Texas, the first female Forest Service employees were a team of tree-planters in 1974. Sisters Elmer Pittman and Reva Weaver of Huntington received a government contract to form an all-female tree-planting team in the Angelina National Forest. It was the first team of its kind in the Forest Service; women in other regions worked on sex-integrated teams. The two applied for the contract after their nephew remarked on the ease of the job. The local forest agent did not want to hire them, maintaining that the women would not want to work in an isolated area without private bathrooms. The all-female team came as part of a compromise, so that the women would not have to work with men. The forester dubiously gave them a contract to plant twenty-four acres, believing that the women could not accomplish the task. With the help of a local forester, sympathetic to their situation, they learned how to plant the trees. Toting a bag of fresh tree seedlings from a belt, they hand-planted each tree with a seven-pound tree-planting bar. The seven-person team worked six hours a day, and each woman planted approximately three-fourths of an acre per day.<sup>66</sup> After the second day, the Forest Service, seeing that the team meant to complete the job, moved the women to a fifty-acre

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<sup>65</sup>Ibid., 124.

<sup>66</sup> Elmer Pittman and Reva Weaver, interview by the author, Zavalla, Texas, July 18, 2011.

section. They completed the twenty-four acre lot in five days and the fifty-acre section in slightly more than a week. The Forest Service thereafter continued to hire Pittman for other contracts, including tree poisoning, tree removal, and more tree planting.

On the second day of work, the Forest Service sent out a photographer and journalist. The author emphasized that the women were “definitely not members of any women’s liberation movement and they are not trying to prove anything.” They referred to the women, almost all in their thirties and forties, as “girls” and noted that all of the women had the permission of their husbands to work. Pittman was quoted as saying that her husband did not object “as long as it didn’t interfere with his weekend fishing trips to the nearby lake.”<sup>67</sup> As seen in the next section, even after a long day of back-breaking work in the woods or in the timber products plants, women like Pittman were still expected to attend to all of the household duties.

### **The Double Burden: Female Workers and Home Life**

According to most of the women interviewed, home life usually determined the success of their work experience. Mary Russell, Marie Hutto, and Louise Clark's husbands worked for the same company, so the level of understanding was very high. Only one woman who worked for Temple reported any conflict with her husband over the demands of her job.<sup>68</sup> As with most working women, however, East Texans felt pulled in two directions by the pressures of work and home. After hearing her husband complaining about the cost of supporting his wife and seven children, Jocie Swallows

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<sup>67</sup> “Women resting up after long tree planting job: Zavalla woman heads first female planting team,” *Free Press* March 23, 1974, Section 2. Pittman later divorced that husband.

<sup>68</sup> Russell, interview by author; Louise Clark, interview by the author, March 23, 2011, Hemphill, Texas; Swallows, interview by author. The one woman who had problems with her husband, Jocie Swallows, apparently had many other issues with her husband before her employment, so this may not have been directly because of her work.

began working at the box factory. "Men ask for it," she declared. "They come in off of their jobs and holler 'hand me my slippers' and 'hand me a cup of coffee' and make it sound like their jobs were so horrible . . . We went out there with them and found that we could handle the work better than they can."<sup>69</sup>

Men could bring their wives' working life to a screeching halt. Reva Weaver worked as a tree planter alongside her sister, Elmer Pittman, on contracts for the Forest Service six hours a day. Her husband demanded that, if she worked, everything had to be finished at the house when he came in from his work. She had to pick the children up from school, tidy the house, and have dinner prepared. The strain of working and doing all of the housework "nearly killed her," remembered her sister. After completing two contracts for the Forest Service, Weaver had to quit under the demands of her husband, though she enjoyed the work and being with her sister and other women outside the home.<sup>70</sup> Weaver's situation was not unique. As late as 1970, housewives spent from five to twelve hours per day on household work if they did not have a job and from four to eight hours if they did, while husbands spent one-half to three hours daily on house-related tasks whether or not their wives also held a job.<sup>71</sup> If they worked, women in East Texas and elsewhere knew that their husbands would probably not help with the housework.

Many women in rural areas did not have the same luxuries as their counterparts in the suburbs, like an automatic washer or electricity. The maintenance of their homes,

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<sup>69</sup> Swallows, interview by author.

<sup>70</sup> Pittman and Weaver, interview by author.

<sup>71</sup> Joann Vanek, "Time Spent in Housework," *Scientific American* 231 (1974): 116-20.

while important to most women, proved difficult in the company towns of East Texas. Housing conditions were not always adequate. In Sabine County, home of Pineland, one of Temple's company towns, fewer than one-sixth of the homes reported on by the 1950 census were "not dilapidated" and had a private toilet and bath with hot running water.<sup>72</sup> Keeping a home, that was probably falling apart when the family first rented it, neat without tools many other women in the country had and producing meals without hot water, electricity, or gas stoves taxed the patience and abilities of women in Deep East Texas. In 1951, a congressional report described one family's timber company home in East Texas:

The Littles live in a three-room "company" house which consists of a living room-bedroom combination, a kitchen and bedroom. There is an outdoor toilet. There are no bathing facilities, nor do they have electricity. Although they have an ice box, they get ice for it when they go to town for groceries. Their household furnishings are scant, consisting of one-table, four straight chairs, one armchair, an ice box, a double bed, and pallets on the floor upon which the children sleep.<sup>73</sup>

Although perhaps an extreme example, the Littles' company-owned home was similar to other company housing in East Texas. In Diboll, as late as 1950, company houses for lower-level white employees and African Americans had outdoor pit toilets.<sup>74</sup> The houses for white employees in Diboll in the 1950s were four rooms: kitchen, living room, and two bedrooms. Even the homes of supervisors did not have hot water or gas until the

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<sup>72</sup> *Census of Population and Housing, 1950: Summary Population and Housing Characteristics: Texas*. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1951, 430.

<sup>73</sup> Joint Committee Print, *Making Ends Meet on Less than \$2000 a Year: Case Studies of 1000 Low Income Families*, 82d Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> Sess., 1951, 50-51. Reading between the lines of the report, the author believes that the company town that the investigation refers to was Pineland, though there is no way to be certain.

<sup>74</sup> Jewel Minton, interview by Marie Davis, Diboll, Texas, October 7, 1988, Diboll History Center. For more on African American housing, see the above section on African American employees.

mid 1950s.<sup>75</sup> At that same time, Arthur Temple, Jr., made the decision to sell all of the company housing to the employees. Claiming that company housing made employees unable to think for themselves, Temple sold the homes for around a thousand dollars each.<sup>76</sup> Families now owned their own homes and could improve them as they saw fit, if they could afford it. The maintenance of their own home, as opposed to a company home, proved more inspiring for women in the company towns.<sup>77</sup>

Women's labor at home also slightly decreased as sawmills and timber plants worked to reduce the ashes and soot that rained down on and into nearby homes.<sup>78</sup> The burden of food preparation, laundry, and general cleaning, however, continued. Jocie Swallows bemoaned the fact that she still had to do all the washing, cooking, and ironing while she worked. She admitted that the laundry for her nine-person family suffered while she worked, and she regretted that she could not see her children more.<sup>79</sup> Oneta Hendrick remembered waking at 5 a.m. throughout the late 1940s and 1950s to cook breakfast for her family of five, get the children ready, make lunches for everyone, and get the kids to school all on her own and without the aid of hot water or indoor plumbing.<sup>80</sup> Similarly, Marie Hutto came to lament her decision to work outside the

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<sup>75</sup> Hendrick, interview by author.

<sup>76</sup> Biesele, *Cornbread Whistle*, 116.

<sup>77</sup> Minton, interview by Davis.

<sup>78</sup> Biesele, *Cornbread Whistle*, 116

<sup>79</sup> Swallows, interview by author.

<sup>80</sup> Hendrick, interview by author.

home. "I really regret in a way ever going to work and leave Rita [her daughter]. You miss out on so much."<sup>81</sup>

Along with the persistent weight of housework, women in East Texas, as in all parts of the nation, had problems with childcare. Some women, like Jocie Swallows, were home early enough that their school age children did not need outside supervision. Daycares did not exist on a widespread basis for those with less fortuitous schedules. Many working women relied on family members. A joint study by the Department of Labor and the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare in 1965 reported that nearly half the children of working mothers were cared for in their own homes by relatives. An additional 16 percent were in someone else's home, 15 percent had mothers, like Swallows, who only worked during school hours, and 13 percent joined their mothers at work. 2.2 percent were in daycare; the rest took care of themselves.<sup>82</sup>

Odell Plummer remembered, "If you didn't have someone to keep your children, you stayed home." Her mother took care of her children during the day.<sup>83</sup> Wilma Berry, an African American worker, had six children and fewer options. All of her neighbors worked, and no white woman would take her children, if she had asked. Five of her children were school-aged, but she sent her baby son to her mother in San Augustine. She could only visit him on weekends until he was old enough to return to the family in Diboll.<sup>84</sup> For the women who did not have relatives available, the only option on hand, if they had the money, was hiring someone. Both Mary Russell and Louise Clark, white

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<sup>81</sup> Marie Hutto, interview by the author, Dallas, Texas, April 9, 2011.

<sup>82</sup> Kennedy, *If All We Did Was Weep at Home*, 212.

<sup>83</sup> Odell Plummer, interview by the author, Lufkin, TX, July 17, 2011.

<sup>84</sup> Berry, interview by author.

women, had African American women take care of their children, wash, and cook while they were at work.<sup>85</sup> Many other women, both in East Texas and across the nation, were not as economically well-off and could not hire someone. In those cases, the mother usually stayed home and the family's overall economic condition suffered, or she worked and put together a patchwork of childcare.

Despite the fact that women in the East Texas timber industry occupied a nontraditional position, they still faced discrimination like their counterparts around the country. African American women suffered doubly due to both their race and gender in the segregated communities of East Texas. Both white and black women saw low wages, due partially to a lack of union representation as well as their gender, and an inability to rise through promotions. At home, women cleaned, cooked, took care of the children, and worked with the same duties as if they had been stay-at-home wives. Though nontraditional in hiring practices, East Texas timber towns continued to force women into gendered worlds with unequal wages and opportunities.

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<sup>85</sup> Russell, interview by author; Clark, interview by author.

## CONCLUSION

In early 2012, it would not be odd for a visitor to one of Temple-Inland's Diboll plants to see a woman operating a forklift, stacking lumber, or running any of the machines necessary to the production of sawed boards, fiberboard, and particleboard.<sup>1</sup> There are females at all levels of the company, including supervisory and sales positions that the company denied them prior to the 1970s. Nor is this unusual on a national scale; women in the twenty-first century do not face nearly as many employment barriers as their predecessors.

What is different about the women in East Texas's timber products industry is the legacy they have inherited. Rather than the relatively recent encroachers in typically male factories, the twenty-first century female timber employee's work mirrors those of female workers in the same industry as much as seventy-five years ago. From the end of World War II to the mid-1970s, female timber workers occupied a precarious position somewhere in between gender-line-breaking vanguards and Cold War conformists. Postwar timber employees entered their positions usually for the needed income, as did many working women of the time. Similarly, once hired, female timber workers faced culturally sanctioned job discrimination. They appeared to be doing masculine work, like operating heavy machinery and facing the same possibilities of dismemberment or serious injury, but management prevented their access to certain knowledge and skilled trades. In a more overt show of discrimination, African American women hit racial barriers, and both races faced wage differentiation, promotion ceilings, and the disapproval of some male co-workers and family members.

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<sup>1</sup> International Paper bought Temple-Inland in December 2011, and the sale was finalized in February 2012. For the sake of consistency, I will continue to refer to the company as "Temple-Inland."

The fact remains, however, that these women had a job unusual to both the industry and the nationally conceived gender boundaries. Why did the industry in East Texas persist in hiring women after World War II? The first reason is the early history of women and timber in East Texas. Women were always present in the company towns as paid and unpaid laborers in non-mill positions. In the 1930s, they entered the mills as cheap laborers to fill the demand for lumber from the oil boom. Thus, women's participation in World War II was not an anomaly, as it was in other industries and regions, and lumber companies could not dismiss it as such in the aftermath of the war.

Second, in the long run female employees were cheaper than male employees. They did not hold skilled positions nor were they allowed the opportunities for advancement and higher salaries. Nearly all the women in this study ended their time in the industry's employment at the same level at which they entered. Moreover, the postwar East Texas timber industry faced a labor shortage, and women's labor proved a viable solution.

Finally, in the case of East Texas female workers, place played a large role in widening their opportunities. Texas did not adopt the lumberjack as a hyper-masculine ideal, unlike the timber camps of the Pacific Northwest. Perhaps the mythos of the cowboy and oilman was enough for the Lone Star State. For whatever reason, that particular construct did not resonate in the East Texas timber industry, and so women's entrance into the plants was not curtailed by worries over masculinity and femininity.

In fact, none of the women in this study felt a loss of femininity from their occupation. They remained wives and mothers first, hampered by their double-burden of wage and housework. They all regretted not spending more time with their children, but

none of them apologized for their time in the plants or lost their pride in what they viewed as a job well done.

Once employed in the timber products industry, many of the women continued to work until their retirement; some found that they could not escape the tug of work. After her retirement, Jocie Swallows made a stop at the Lufkin paper mill with her granddaughter. "I was just standing around and those lifts and stuff was running and oooohhh," she shivered with delight. "I can't explain it, but I wanted to get out there among them so bad."<sup>2</sup> Perhaps she was recognizing, like Mary Jane Christian, another timber resident, the remnants of the pine resin in her veins.

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<sup>2</sup> Swallows, interview by author.

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## VITA

Meredith Lee May was born September 24, 1987, in Lufkin, Texas. She is the daughter of Cecil Eugene and Sandra Rene Price May. A 2006 graduate of Huntington High School, Huntington, she received a Bachelor of Arts degree with a major in History from Stephen F. Austin State University, Nacogdoches, in 2009.

In August, 2010, she enrolled in graduate study at Texas Christian University. While working on her Master of Arts degree in History, she held a Graduate Assistantship in 2010-2012 and tutored at the John Justin Athletic Center in 2010-2012. She is a member of the TCU Graduate Student Senate, Phi Alpha Theta, the Texas State Historical Association, the Texas Oral History Association, the Southern Historical Association, and the East Texas Historical Association.

## ABSTRACT

### PINE RESIN IN THEIR VEINS: WOMEN AND THE EAST TEXAS TIMBER PRODUCTS INDUSTRY, 1935-1975

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Since the late nineteenth-century, one of the most important industries to East Texas has been timber. Several studies have examined the timber industry during the boom years from 1890 to the 1920s as well as the labor practices those companies employed. None, however, has examined the role of women inside of timber products plants. Beginning in the 1930s, women entered the timber products industry as industrial workers. Their numbers increased with World War II, and timber companies retained their female industrial workforce after the end of the war due to a labor shortage, women's lower wages, and the lack of a strong masculine identity tied to timber. Far from cooperating in a new gender-line-breaking experiment, however, this study argues that the companies needed women's employment to lower their costs, and women in East Texas needed the positions due to a lack of other suitable jobs in the area.