**Interview with Lucy McClarin of Jersey Shore, Pennsylvania**

_Interview conducted by Sandra Rife, former director of the Lycoming County Historical Society’s Taber Museum in Williamsport, and Lynn Estomin, Art Professor, Lycoming College, June 2013._

Mrs. McClarin (right below) was a Garment worker at Weldon’s Pajama Factory in Williamsport, PA, located between Park Avenue and Memorial Avenue along Rose Street, formerly the location of Lycoming Rubber Company. Weldon’s also had factories in Muncy, Lopez, and Dushore Pennsylvania. Lucy’s daughter, Deb Emig (left below) worked at Weldon in the summer while a highschool student, then worked at Glamorize as a sewer and later went to design school and became a pattern maker.

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*SR:* How many years did you work at Weldon’s?

LM: Twenty five. I quit when they closed it down in ’79. I began in 1955 working at a sewing machine putting together the three pieces of the collars – the liner, the front and the back.

*SR:* Why did you choose to work there?

LM: I liked to sew. I sewed at home a lot. My mother did too.

*SR:* How did you know about the place? Did you see an ad?

LM: No. I just knew about it and went and applied.

*SR:* But you were already skilled?

LM: Yes, I made all kinds of things.

*SR:* Can you remember your first day?

LM: They just took me in and set me down at a machine. I took the place of a lady who got to be a floor lady.
SR: Did they train you.
LM: Years ago I worked at the shirt factory in Jersey Shore so that’s how I knew how to make collars. I worked there six years. So when I went to Weldon’s, I just stepped right in.

SR: What is a floor lady?
LM: A floor lady is over 30 or 40 girls in a room, like a supervisor.

SR: Was there more than one floor? Were they working on several floors?
LM: Oh, yes. This was fourth floor and it had three great big rooms. There was a floor lady for each room.

SR: Did you like what you did? Can you describe your tasks?
LM: Yes, I liked it, very much. We had bins next to us on the floor. There was a young boy who stacked the bins. He knew what everyone did. We called him a bundle boy. The parts were tied in bundles, sixty to a bundle. If you had to get sixty out in an hour then it would last you an hour, or half the day.

SR: Can you describe the machines; the brands? Did you ever get a new machine?
LM: It was a factory sewing machine. There were all kinds, Singer, Juki and all that. I never got a new machine but I had to put lace on women’s collars so I had to go to another machine for that.

LE: Can you tell us about a typical day?
LM: Punch the time clock first. You go to your machine and wait for the bell to ring. You weren’t allowed to pick up anything until the bell rang. That was for your production. The more you get out, the more money you make, so you weren’t supposed to start until seven o’clock.

SR: So it was done like piece work?
LM: Piece work. That’s what we did. We were paid by the pieces we produced.

SR: Did you have breaks?
LM: Yep. Break at 9 for 10 minutes. Then twelve o’clock. When I first started we had an hour for lunch. And then it kept dwindling down to a half an hour. Then we came back at 1:00, when lunch was an hour, and then at 2:30, I think, we had a 10 minute break. The time changed a lot. Years ago we worked till 4 but then we came down to 3:30, then it was time to go home.

SR: So it didn’t matter how many hours you put in, you still were only paid for the number of collars you finished?
LM: Yes. We kept a sheet of paper and we cut the tickets off, pasted them on and they added them up in the office at the end of the day, and that’s how they’d pay you.

SR: Why did they cut the lunch time back?
LM: I don’t know. That was just the way it was when I worked at the shirt factory, they gave us a whole hour. It started out that way.

LE: Was there a cafeteria?
LM: Well, when I first started there was no cafeteria. You carried your lunch. And we’d go outside and sit in the car and eat our lunch and come back in.

SR: They didn’t have any tables or chairs where you could eat?
LM: They might have but I preferred to sit in the car.
SR: Did you ever change your tasks; did you ever change from doing collars to anything else?
LM: Yea, I did a lot of other jobs but they weren’t my main job; my main job was collaring.

SR: What other jobs did you do?
LM: Robes. Men’s and lady’s robes. I piped real pretty almost like satin piping down the front on a piping machine, a real old machine. I would go to another big machine for the men’s big sleeves and put three rows of piping down there in different colors and that was velour.

SR: Can you describe what piping is?
LM: Yes, it’s a little bead that goes in here (she shows the front opening of her jacket) and hooks your facing and this front together.

SR: Now you said there were floor ladies. I understand there were also people like button stitchers and others.
LM: Oh, yes. Buttons, button holes, everything you do on them (the pajamas), they had a place for it and it went right down the line in the room.

SR: So it was really assembly work. Nobody took a product from the beginning to end; everybody did a different part?
LM: Yes. And mine was at the beginning because it was the collar and the cuff department was at the beginning too.

SR: Why did you go to do piping and why did you come back to do collars?
LM: We changed back and forth for the seasons. In the summer time there were short sleeves and in the winter time, long sleeves and also no collars in the summer; we did the collars in the summer so they would be ready to sell in the winter.

(Lucy brings out a dark blue men’s long flannel type robe with white, red and light blue trim and describes it and the work done on it.)

LM: This is what they ended up doing. They got all of the pajamas out that they wanted to get out, I guess, over the years so they started making these (the robes). This is what I did. (She shows where she ran the piping from the bottom of the left hand side front opening all the way around the collar to the bottom of the right hand side opening.) And they had the back patch sewn on for support, I guess. (She shows a small semicircle swatch of fabric sewn on the inside of the neck opening beneath the collar.)

SR: Did someone else do that, just the patch?
LM: Yes, someone else did that. Here is the sleeve I was talking about. (She shows a broad sleeve with a white band running the length of the sleeve with piping on either side of the band and two horizontal bands around the sleeve, one red and one light blue with piping on each side of the bands.) They are pretty; I like them; they are so warm. When they closed down, this is what they were making. I got two for my husband when they closed down.

LE: Did you have a double needle machine for this?
LM: No, mine was a single.
SR: I cannot fathom how you could do this all day long one piece after the next and get it (the piping) in there correctly.
LM: You have to learn to hold them tight, either at the top or the bottom, so they come out even when you get to the bottom at the other side.

Lucy’s daughter, Deb Emig, comments from off camera: There is a folder that they use that’s attached to the single needle and the piece (of piping) coming in automatically folds within the top and bottom layer.

SR: Is that little piece of piping folded over some core?
DE: It’s covered and it comes upon a roll, a big roll, and it unrolls and feeds right into the machine with your fabric pieces.

SR: So there were all kinds of things besides sewing machines in the room. There were things that did other tasks as well.
LM: When I finished sewing the collars, they were inside out. They were in my bin in a long line, I left them sewed together, and so someone took them and turned them (right side out). They went on down the line and they put them on a hot machine to press them after breaking them apart. (Lucy uses her hands to describe a somewhat vertical hot plate that the presser stood in front of.) She put the collar on this plate and she used her foot to press a pedal that brought the presser down on the collar and that would heat it and it stayed there perfect.

SR: Was that her only job, to do the pressing?
LM: They moved you back and forth. If she was faster than me and she ran out of work, they put her on something else, for just the time being.

SR: So she was next to you then? When you would complete your collars, you passed them on to her, so they didn’t have to go into a bin for the bin boy to take around?
LM: No, after the bin boy filled your bin, he didn’t come back. I forgot though that they did have a cutter who cut the tips of the collars before they were turned (right side in). So that was my job for years and years and years. They had five floors and on the fifth floor they had all these embroidering machines, fifteen or twenty of them all in a row. Some lady would run that machine and embroider our emblem like this (she shows the left front of her jacket) and she’d flip it back and she’d do a whole bundle just like that and she kept walking up and down that line. I never worked in there.

Then I went down to the third floor and a lot of these bras and things we made were shipped overseas and they brought them back and took the labels out and we put new labels in, on third floor. But it was just temporary. That’s when they started shipping things across the pond, I guess.
And the second floor was shipping. Everything was pressed and folded on the third floor and then they went down to the second floor. Men worked down there and they boxed them all up and shipped them out. And the first floor was all offices. So that’s Weldon’s.

LE: Were there jobs that only men did besides the shipping.
LM: Well, carrying in the great big rolls (of material) off the trucks and stacking them. And I forgot, up on the fifth floor they rolled the material out and cut it, on big long tables the whole length of that place.

SR: Now did they have pattern cutters or did the patterns come to you?
LM: (Pointing to her daughter.) She can tell you that. She’s a pattern cutter.
DE (Lucy’s daughter): They had pattern makers there at Weldon’s.
SR: Did any of the patterns come from elsewhere?
DE: I would say no.
SR: So, were these pattern makers the designers? Did they design the pajamas or did somebody design them someplace and then send them off to have the patterns made?
DE: They were designed in New York.
LM: And they were printed on big rolls of paper.

DE: Remember Lou Fries, Mom? He was a big pattern maker at Weldon’s for many years. Now I don’t think he designed. But they probably got the designs from New York and the pattern maker makes the pattern. The designs came from their New York office. And maybe different designers. They did some Christian Dior, some Halston.
LM: I have a Halston up in my closet, a pretty velour jacket.

SR: How did you dress when you went to work?
LM: Jeans.

SR: And was it comfortable in there, was it too hot, too cold?
LM: I didn’t mind it. In the summer time when there was no air conditioning, they opened the windows, but the heat was good.

SR: Were there any women supervisors above the floor ladies?
LM: Yes. I guess there was one in every room, I think.

SR: Did you dislike any part of the job or find it monotonous?
LM: No. As long as I could go over my production and make money, that was stars in my eyes. I had just got married and then I had two children after I started working there.

SR: Could you socialize or chat with one another while you were working?
LM: Yea. A lot of girls chatted but I wasn't much to chat. My neighbor friend was always chatting to me and the floor lady got after her all the time. But I shouldn’t say that.

LE: Was there any maternity leave?
LM: Yea, for both of them.

LE: How much time did you get off?
LM: Three months. I took six months for my daughter. The garment worker (union) paid so much for our hospital; it wasn’t much back in those days.

SR: When you started was there a union or did that come later?
LM: I think it came later, just a short time later, a year or so.

SR: Was it International Ladies Garment Workers Union?
LM: Yes, I know that by heart.

SR: You lived in Jersey Shore, correct?
LM: I lived in Avis, which is four miles west of Jersey Shore.

SR: So did you drive to work? Did you car pool?
SR: Was there ever any conflict between the workers and management?
LM: Wasn’t for me. I just went in and did my job. I suppose there’s a lot that goes on like that in any factory.

SR: How did your income from there compare to your husband’s?
LM: Didn’t compare at all. As a piece worker, we started out at 75 cents an hour.

SR: So you were at minimum wage?
LM: And the minimum wage went up to maybe a $1.25 an hour but when you are on piece work, you don’t need to pay any attention to that. They gave raises as the minimum wage went up.

SR: Were there safety issues? Did you have to worry about any injuries?
LM: Yea, they gave you certain doors to go out if something happened, the closest door (to the steps) from where you sat. There was a door at each end of the room, not the whole floor, each one (room). So if there were three of them, there were six doors.

SR: Were there fire escapes?
LM: I don’t think. I only ever went out one door from where I sat.

SR: Did you ever get needles in your fingers?
LM: I never did but some of the girls did.

SR: Were there any muscle or joint discomforts? Did your neck get tired?
LM: Yea, a lot of them (the sewers) went to the chiropractor. When I did lace on collars I leaned over like this because they were horseshoe like this, and I put my arm out like this (she bends her head to the left, reaching her left arm as if it were on the table top, and demonstrates how she fed the lace through the machine at an awkward angle) and it just drew a little (pointing to the right side of her neck). A lot of girls went to the chiropractor because of the way they sat and so on.

SR: Were there any opportunities for promotion for women?
LM: Oh, yeah.

SR: Like to floor lady or supervisor?
LM: Yes. And even if you run out of your work or if they discontinued your job, they’d start you on another one similar and then they’d give you so much percentage for so many weeks until you’d get up to what you almost made on your own job and that really, really helped out. Some places where you start out, they only give you the little bit that they are going to give you.

SR: Was there any harassment of the female workers?
LM: Not much. Not around me. I just went in and worked and I never paid any attention to anybody. When I first started working, that floor lady said she couldn’t believe how I sat there and worked, and I said “Well, I always worked. It’s just natural.”

SR: Did all the workers in your room relate well to one another?
LM: Yes.

SR: Was your social life outside of work connected to your job?
LM: Not too much. When I came home, I just forgot about work.
SR: When you left Weldon’s in 1979, did you continue working?
LM: I had a year off for shipping the stuff overseas. They gave you a year off with unemployment (benefits). Then they gave you, what do they call that, where they pay your way to college or train you for another job, if you wanted to. But I didn’t do that. My husband had a good job at that time so I just stayed home and worked around the house.

SR: Did you go back to work?
LM: Yea. I went to Glamorize down on Reach Road. I had to get ten more years in before I could retire.

SR: Then at Glamorize you were still sewing. Did you have a particular part of the undergarment that you worked on?
LM: Yep. We did girdles. I did an over lock (stitch).

SR: What is an over lock stitch. (Lucy’s daughter shows an example off camera.) So the over lock stitch is the finishing stitch, the one that wraps around the seams so you don’t have frayed seams.
LM: When I went to Glamorize, the manager or boss was starting a new line of girdles and he bought five machines, Jukis, and he put me on one, and they were over lock and kind of heavy duty.

SR: What’s a Juki?
LM: A brand. You can buy all kinds of machines called Jukis now. But that was a Juki over lock and I ran that for ten years. And that’s where I retired.

LE: And was that piece work?
LM: Yes it was. That worked just like Weldon’s did.

SR: What time did you start your day at Glamorize?
LM: Seven.

SR: Same as at Weldon’s. Did you have a bunch of stuff in your bin that you had to finish and if you finished it, you were through? Or did you just continue working until quitting time (on other stuff)?
LM: Do you mean for the day or to retirement?
(Chuckles.)
LM: You didn’t have to finish a bundle. If they needed more out, they’d have you work overtime, an hour or so. I worked a lot of overtime at both places.

SR: So they gave you overtime pay.
LM: Oh, yes. Time and a half. Time and a half and if you got over 45 hours, they gave you double time for Saturday morning if they took you in there.

SR: Did you keep up with any of the women you worked with in either place after you retired?
LM: We go out about every two months for lunch. In fact we are going Friday.

SR: And when you do, do you talk the old times, about your work?
LM: No. We just talk about the stuff that’s going on today.

LE: How did you learn to sew?
LM: My mom. My mother had a real old treadle machine and she had ten kids and we had gardens and stuff like that and we’d get our feed for the chickens in feed bags and they had real pretty print and stuff on them and she’d make us dresses out of the print. Back when we were little, that’s all we wore, was dresses; we didn’t have jeans. I used to sneak my brother’s once in a while and wear them.
SR: Did your mother work outside the home?
LM: No, never. It was all she could do to raise ten kids. She'd bake bread like you wouldn't believe. I can taste it yet. My mother-in-law worked at Susquehanna Silk Company here in Jersey Shore, PA.

SR: But your daughter has continued to work in the textile field.
LM: Yes. She does a little different kind of stuff than I do; she's a pattern maker. And she can design and make a woman look like a woman and mine looks like a dog or something like that; I can't do that kind of stuff.

SR: And I understand your mother-in-law worked in a silk mill?
LM: Yes. I don't know too much about her. She was weaver on big looms in the silk mill down there on Birch Street (in Jersey Shore). She worked there nights. She quit when we got married and had a baby and she baby sat. She wanted to sing lullabies and stuff like that.

SR: It would be interesting to find out about that as well because it is interesting to me that three generations in the same family were involved in textiles.
Lucy's daughter: And all of her sisters and some of my cousins.

LE: How many of your sisters worked in textiles?
LM: All. There were four of us.

SR: Where did they work?
LM: They worked where I worked. They worked in a different department so I really didn't pay much attention to what they did.

SR: Were they all working on the machines or were they doing other things?
LM: They worked on the machines. My one sister set the collars that I made (affixed them to the pajamas) way down on the other end of the room; that was about the last thing you put on a garment. I don't know what the other two did. They worked in Lock Haven at the other sewing factories.

SR: Getting back to your sewing the collars. You sewed the collar and then passed it was passed on to the presser, the woman who put it in the plate, turned it, snipped the corners, put it in the plate, and then pressed it so you had a nice collar. Then where did it go after there?
LM: She tied it up in a bundle and it went on clear up almost to the other end where they made all this part of the garment, the bodice.

SR: Was there somebody who took it from there, who delivered it from your area?
LM: Yes, they had girls do that. Everything was in bundles. She'd pick them up and take them up.

SR: And by girls, do you mean young girls?
LM: Yeah, sort of. Just starting out till they learned whether they wanted to sew or do something.

SR: So they actually would train people?
LM: Oh, yeah.

SR: So somebody could come in there not knowing how to sew and they would train them?
LM: Yes.
SR: But they probably preferred people like you who they didn’t have to train. So that’s how the younger women would start by just doing that kind of stuff, like an apprentice.
LM: It’s like us getting a pattern and opening up and saying now where are we going to start. You have to read it and then do it. They had these supervisors show them how.
DE: They usually only did one part. So all they had to do was learn the one part.
LM: So when you’re in a room with about 60 girls, you see the stuff flying.

SR: And you made pajamas for both genders and all ages?
LM: Yes. We did. We made little boys’ flannels, we made ladies’ silky stuff and Christian Dior, they got samples in there for Christian Dior and they had me make the samples for them. I didn’t know what I was doing, but they showed me. I have a couple of tops that I didn’t finish. I brought them home when they closed down. They only did a couple. I guess they were going to try to put them in production but I guess it didn’t work.

SR: And you came home after you retired and continued to sew.
LM: Yes. I love doing quilts now. My daughter got me into quilts. I always made square dance dresses; I made roller skating skirts for girls. We’d go roller skating and I’d make them for my friends. Stuff like that. In fact, I still have my roller skates.

SR: What happened to the scraps of materials at Weldon’s.
LM: They stacked them up and put them on a floor, I don’t remember which floor. We went down to the Pajama Factory for dinner and they took us on a tour down through all those empty rooms and there were just boxes and boxes of scraps, some an inch wide, some two feet wide, and anybody who wanted them could take them.
DE: That wasn’t too long ago, maybe last year.
LM: And one floor had boxes and boxes of scraps and they’d let people go down there and get a plastic bag and whatever you could stuff into that bag you could have for a quarter or fifty cents. We got some pretty good pieces out of there. I made two big quilts with them.

DE: Mom, why don’t you describe how fast you made the collars, how you didn’t stop, and how you went around the corner without stopping. That’s what some people don’t realize. How you have to sew very fast to make production and how you just whip the corner with one hand.

LM: The men’s (collar) had a point on it. (Using the collar of her jacket, Lucy shows how she ran the seam from one side to the other of the collar.) After I put the three pieces together (the lining and the pajama fabric of the collar), I would run the seam up this side (the short side) and turn it (at the point of the collar) then around to the other side and do the same thing, that’s all. The lining makes it a little stiffer. The women’s (pajama collars) were kind of flannel like and they had little narrow lace that went through a folder and when the seam got to the point of the collar, I had to use a pick, the mechanic made me a screwdriver with a little sharp pick on the end, and when I made the seam up to the point, I would pick that lace in there so I didn’t run over the lace (with the seam). I was putting the lace between the two pieces of the collar. If you run over the lace, when the turner turned the collar, the lace wouldn’t show and it wouldn’t be pretty. So they would give them back to you and you would have to pick that thread out and repair them. And that would cut your production down.

SR: So you had to be pretty fast.
LM: Well, twenty five years at the same job.
LE: How fast would you have to do it?
LM: It all depends on how hard you put your foot down (on the pedal). You just hold the fabric and you can go fast or slow but you have to come right up to that point (of the collar) where the needle goes to make a turn.

DE: Mom, show your hands and pretend you are sewing a collar at Weldon's.
LM: (Lucy demonstrates with her hands the way she would run the collar under the sewing machine needle). I would take the top one like this (with her left hand raised facing down) and I would put the bottom one down here (with her right hand facing up beneath the top hand) and I would just let them drift and I learned to go real fast. If I needed tension, I would pinch a little bit.

SR: When I sewed, my bobbin would just get all jammed up and snarled. That's why I appreciate people who can sew. Did your bobbin ever get snarled?
LM: Oh, lots of time. That's the machine. It means the tensions in the bobbins aren't right so the mechanic has to come and adjust them.

SR: So that would mess up your production, too.
LM: Yes, but they only give you so much time to do this. About fifteen minutes. And those mechanics have to get out of there and have that (machine) sewing.

SR: So if you got held up in anyway, you just lost pay.
LM: Yes, I would lose that little bit of money.

LE: Can you describe your machine?
LM: You had a presser foot that you pushed (she demonstrates how the presser foot of the sewing machine was controlled with her right knee by pushing and releasing a device or lever). You never had to reach over the machine to do it (lower the presser foot).
DE: That way you had both hands free. Then you pressed a pedal to make it go.

SR: You had to have everything synchronized and you had to be well coordinated. Did you get a bad back at all, from using your legs all the time?
LM: The first time I ever worked in a factory, the first day, it was in Jersey Shore in the shirt factory, we made white men's dress shirts and I made the collars. I was sitting there sewing and the boss came along – it was my first day – and he had a yard stick and he hit the back of my chair and he said “Sit up straight!” lie that. And you know, I sat up straight ever since and I never had a back ache or anything.

SR: So he was doing it to help you?
LM: Yes, and I am glad he did.

LE: What was the worst day you ever had on the job?
LM: I had lots of worst jobs but I kind of learned to conquer them. I worked with a lady who made collars with me when I first went to work and she used to get so mad at her machine because it would break thread and she would lose out on production. She'd take her fist and hit that iron machine. I said, “Oh, don't do that. It will be bad when you get older.” I don't know what ever happened to her.
SR: How many years did you work at the shirt factory in Jersey Shore before you went to Weldon’s?
LM: I worked there for six years and then I went to Mill Hall and worked at Sylvania for two years – I loved that job – and then it went out of business, the shirt factory went out of business, and then I went to Williamsport and they started a Sylvania and I went down there for two years and then they moved way down towards Muncy so I went to Weldon’s after that and then Glamorize, and that’s my story.

SR: So you worked all your adult life?

LE: What did you love about Sylvania?
LM: I made more money there than I did at the shirt factory. It was production, too, on an assembly line. There were about six of us and we made tubes for radios. If you got caught up to the lady sitting next to you, the floor lady would have a whole box of them sitting here and she would fill this back up (her work area) for me. If I were working for a raise, she would have to do that every hour. Say I got ten more out an hour. If I would do that for a week, then I would get my raise.

SR: But they went out of business?
LM: Yes, every place I worked went out of business, all but Glamorize, and then I retired before they went out of business.

LE: What do you remember about the union?
LM: I liked it because it paid our hospital insurance and things like that. I didn’t participate too much in the union. The ones that were over me, over the other girls, they took care of that stuff.

SR: Did you ever have to have a strike or anything like that?
LM: No

SR: And they did take union dues out of your pay?
LM: Yes they did. At Glamorize they didn’t have a union; the company gave us what we wanted. They were a very nice company to work for. So was that about fifty some years of work?