

ES1 – Edna Smith, "Getting a Job during WWII"

Time-Line: Decade V, Labor History Time Line, 1942, "War Industries in Bridgeport"

Transcript: pp. 15-17

ES: Two girls from Milford came. My sister, older sister and a friend of hers. Because the war had broke out and they were looking for help. They lived in Milford and they wanted to know where GE was so they came to my house for me to take them over to the GE so they could get a job. I went with them to show them where the GE was. They was all gung ho, you know --war effort, gonna make some money, and I sat there with them. Of course they was being hired. So the woman at the desk, she says, "How about you? Wouldn't you like a job?" I said, "No, I don't want no job. I said I brought them over. I said, "No. I'm not looking for a job." She said, "Wouldn't you like to help the war effort?" "I don't have my birth certificate. Blah, blah, blah." You know. My sister says, "She was born in Milford and I'll get her birth certificate when I get off the bus today." "Oh," she said, "Bring your birth certificate Friday and you can get hired. We do need your birth certificate. Who's this?" I said, "That's my sister." She said, "Oh, that's no problem. You come Friday and you got a job." We got outside and she said, "Give me fifty cents for to get your birth certificate." I said, "I don't want no job." "Yes you do, yes you do." So, I said to the girl at the desk, "If I bring my birth certificate, will you give me a job with

them?" She says, "Possibly, yes." You know that didn't happen. So Friday came, I got my birth certificate, and it was raining cats and dogs. I said, "Well, this is a good excuse for not going." So I fooled around and fooled around. Got up early because I always get up early. I figured I'd use the rain for an excuse and something said, "Go on over." So I went over and I was hired. Of course, I didn't get a job with them.

I: What did you do?

ES: I did assembly work.

I: Was that for munitions or something like that?

ES: No, no. I never got on the war effort that I thought I was. I worked on switches. I worked on every kind of switches you got in this room. Just about that GE made. We made switches for everybody. Wall switches, light switches, all kind of switches, but they used to go under different names. It would be GE, Waring, Schick. We'd probably make five switches and four of them was another manufacturer and one would be GE.

I: Oh, I always suspected that. Interesting. Now what did your sister do? Or was it two of your sisters?

ES: No, one sister and one friend. They were in the war effort. They were over there on bazookas. They was over there on Seaview Avenue. They were really in the war effort. But I stayed in one room seventeen years in the one room. I never was transferred out. I did work downstairs for awhile on the "B" floor and then a job opened up on the "C" floor. And you could transfer. You could ask for a transfer and I asked for a transfer

and the foreman, he got hurt. His feelings was hurt because I had asked to get out--. I didn't have anything against him, but I figured it was better for me to go upstairs. To tell you the truth, there was a bunch of black girls working and where I was was all white and I thought it would be so nice to work with my own kind. So I applied for a job upstairs and I got it upstairs. But Monty, he was so nice. He was a strapping man. And he felt so bad. He said, "You leaving me?" And I said, "Well, Monty, I have nothing against you, but I want to go upstairs with them colored girls upstairs. I want to go upstairs and work with them." He said, "Go ahead, but I thought we were treating you alright down here." I said, "You were, but let me go upstairs." I said, "If I don't like it I'll come back down. Okay?" He said, "Okay." But I never went back down at all. But I stayed there. I went there in 1943 and I come out in 1971.