

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL INTERVIEW WITH FLORENCE H. LUSCOMB

SESSION 1

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MIT ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Autobiographical Interview with Forence H. Luscomb

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Session 1

Transcribed by Janet Billane

Luscomb: --picket line the next day wearing gas masks, and when you've got a Dupont, a member of the inner circle of the Dupont family going on a strike picket line in a gas mask, all the-- Of course the strikers notified the press, and they all came took pictures of us on the strike line there. And it was-- the story went all over the country of *Zara* Dupont out on the picket line--

O'Farrell: I can imagine. Wow!

Luscomb: In a gas mask.

O'Farrell: And then the investigation that followed from that.

Luscomb: And then the investigation brought out what it was,

so that that was the full details of this thing, that I walked on a picket line in a gas mask. And it was later on *noticed* that the policemen were not only public servants of the law but were simultaneously taking pay from the employers, with the approval of the chief of police. Yes, I learned firsthand much that you can't learn in colleges. So--

O'Farrell: Would you like me to make a copy of that and then send this back to you?

Luscomb: No. I've got a good many copies, so you're perfectly welcome to take it. And there may be other things in there, but I thought that that was particularly suitable.

O'Farrell: Yes. Yes. Definitely relevant. Any other materials, like any--

Luscomb: And that was, as I say-- *Zara* Dupont was-- I was just-- this was just the things that I had-- but *Zara* Dupont was on that line. And also there was this one line that we were on for-- I think it was <sup>for</sup> thirteen months or so, which was a trucking firm over here in Cambridge. And the man that used to-- he paid his workers very little, and they had very hard, very vicious working conditions. The law said that you couldn't have a man hire a teamster driving a car and work him <sup>hours</sup> for more than twelve/because he'd be so tired that he'd be a danger on the road. So what this man did-- he would have his man work all day-- it was a trucking firm, and he would have-- sometimes they'd be moving-- moving furniture, moving *firms* from one place to another-- and he'd work them all almost up

to the twelve hours, and then he would load up their trucks with a load to go to New York. And he'd send them out to go to New York, so that they would get over the borderline of Massachusetts just at the twelve hours. And they'd still have to drive all night long to get to New York or other-- wherever he was going, down to Pennsylvania, what have you; they would still have to drive on. And he would violate-- he would get around the law by that. And five-- about four or five of their men wanted to-- said they thought they ought to have a union and get decent conditions and better pay. And they began to talk to their fellow workers about forming a union. And the boss got wind of it. And he fired these men. And they started a picket line outside of his-- of the garage, which was right down near Central Square in Cambridge. And one of my friends-- I guess it was one of the fellow members of the United Office and Professional Workers Union-- she came by this picket line one day, and she asked them what they were striking about. And they told her the conditions. And she reported it to us. And so we went over there-- I went over there, and Zara Dupont went over there. And he-- his trucks left at six o'clock in the morning-- they left the garage there. And so we had to get there by six in the morning. And after they'd/gone out <sup>all</sup> then there was no sense in picketing there. So you were just picketing for an hour or so. But you had to be there at six in the morning. And so we did that for-- kept that up I think for about thirteen months. And they finally got an order--

got a decision by the court that he was doing illegally in requiring his men to work so long, or whatever it was. He was breaking certain of the labor laws. So then we no longer had to have the picket line there.

O'Farrell: But it took thirteen months.

Luscomb: But it was for thirteen months that we were picketing at six A.M. (Laughs)

O'Farrell: Just amazing. Florence, are you from around here?

Luscomb: What?

O'Farrell: Are you from Boston?

Luscomb: I was born in Lowell, but my mother moved to Boston when I was a year and a half old. And I have lived in greater Boston all of my life, in Boston or Cambridge or Brookline-- right in greater Boston.

O'Farrell: Do you remember your grandparents?

Luscomb: No. I didn't know them. They didn't live in these parts.

O'Farrell: On either your mother's side or your father's side?

Luscomb: I don't know anything about the-- on my father's side. My father and mother separated when I was a year and a half. They were never divorced, but they lived separately. And I don't think that my father's father and mother were alive. I never heard any

mention of them at all. My mother's mother had died when she was twelve years old. My mother was born in 1848. And her mother died when she was twelve years. And her father-- the family had come over before the Revolution for both-- on both my father and mother's side, they had and had taken part in the Revolution. But my-- as I say I know nothing about my father's family. But my mother's family has settled out in the Berkshires as farmers. But my grandfather went to-- was it Amherst College-- at any rate, and then he went to the Harvard Law School. And he was a very successful lawyer. And he married a woman from St. Louis, and he moved out there and set up his legal practise there. And he was elected as a member of Congress during the Civil War, as a Republican, which of course at that time was the progressive party, believe it or not. (Laughs) It's hard to believe now. But-- so that he didn't live around these parts. He had his law practise out there always. So I didn't know him, except one time, when one of his sons-- one of my mother's brothers died-- and he had lived-- the funeral was here, and my grandfather came on to the funeral. And I just saw this very old man come in. And that was all, but I didn't--

O'Farrell: How many brothers and sisters did your mother have?

Luscomb: My mother? There were five-- there were five children in the family. Mother had four-- four brothers and sisters, but one of her sisters died fairly fairly young. So there was just left-- it left three brothers.

O'Farrell: And then your mother moved to-- your mother was born in St. Louis.

Luscomb: No. Let me see. I don't think she was born in St. Louis. I think it was before my-- I can't tell you that-- just where she was born. But she lived in St. Louis for a while after her mother died and after she had graduated from school. You see she and all the five children were sent off to boarding schools. And she was sent up to boarding school in Andover and then another one down in Connecticut afterwards. And after she finished her education, she went out to St. Louis and kept house for her father and one of his brothers, who lived together. So she lived in St. Louis for a while.

O'Farrell: Did she got to college?

Luscomb: No. Not many women went to college in those days.

O'Farrell: But she went through elementary school and then--

Luscomb: Se- went to female seminaries, which was-- which of course-- I think it was-- Wasn't it Smith College-- wasn't that founded as a female seminary?

O'Farrell: Yes. I believe it was. So then she moved back to--

Luscomb: And then she came back to Massachusetts.

O'Farrell: And then went to Lowell? Is that where she met your father?

Luscomb: Well I don't know. Mother-- because she and her husband had been separated, she never talked about him at all. I never-- She never said anything/<sup>unkind</sup>about him or anything else. But I just never

heard the details of their life. When I was a girl, he would come and visit me perhaps once a year or something like that. But it just was/a strange man walking in--

O'Farrell: It was never discussed.

Luscomb: I never knew anything about it or what the trouble was between them to this day. She never talked against him or about their troubles.

O'Farrell: Just never talked about it, period.

Luscomb: No, never talked about it.

O'Farrell: Did you have any brothers or sisters?

Luscomb: I had one brother who was six years older than I. And when my father and mother separated, Mother-- They said that-- they agreed that they would let him choose which one he would go to. And he was only about seven and a half years old. And he elected to go with his father. But after some years, I think when he was around twelve years, he moved back to-- and lived with Mother. So for-- he lived with us for some years. But then he got married when he was only twenty-two so--

O'Farrell: He was gone.

Luscomb: When I was only sixteen so--

O'Farrell: So he was around for a while but not--

Luscomb: Yes.

O'Farrell: Do you know what your father did in terms of work or--

Luscomb: My father was a-- well he did two things. He was an artist, but not a very successful one. And he supplemented his-- he lived-- he set up his residence down in Nahant. I think the Luscomb family had settled up in the North Shore, in Lynn and Nahant and around that region. And my father lived in Nahant. And he did painting, as I say, not as a very successful/ and he-- in his home-- he took in lodgers.

O'Farrell: Did you ever go there to visit him?

Luscomb: What?

O'Farrell: Did he always come to visit you, or did you sometimes--

Luscomb: I never went to his house. No, I never--

O'Farrell: When your mother moved to Boston then, did she go to work outside the home or--

Luscomb: No. My mother had been named for her grandmother, who lived out in Saint Louis, Hannah Skinner. The Skinner/had settled-- I judge that they were pioneers out there and had acquired considerable land out in the region which later became part of St. Louis itself and valuable because it was right in the heart of the city. And my mother as I say was named for her grandmother out there. And-- so when her grandmother died, she left her property there to my mother. And it provided my mother-- it didn't make her a tremendously wealthy woman, but it provided her enough to live on all her life.

O'Farrell: So that she didn't have to--

Luscomb: So that she didn't have to work for a living, and when she

died, she left her property to my brother and myself, which has given me a little bit of an income, along with what I had worked for myself. But my mother was a very remarkable woman because she came-- her family had become what you'd think an upper middle class family. They'd come over, as I say, just as pioneers and been farmers out in the West. But her father had been so successful as a lawyer and in all his life that they were really a very-- They'd all gotten education, all the children and all that. So that they-- you'd think of them as an upper middle class family. And-- but my mother-- as I say, she did-- her mother died when she was twelve. And she'd never lived in-- hadn't been brought up in a family and taught what to believe and everything. But she was just living in boarding schools. So it means that she had thought/through all these things herself. And she was an outright progressive person and always on the side of labor and the working people, although, as I say, she didn't have to work for her own living. But she joined the Knights of Labor, which was the earliest labor organization which was open to people who weren't themselves workers and open to women. Now when women-- when she as a woman joined that, it was very very early. And she joined the-- let's see-- the Knights of Labor. I remember when I was a little girl I suppose I must have been around eleven or twelve years old. we got up very early one morning in order to get down to Lynn, and of course transportation in those days was not as good as it is now, for a rally at which Eugene V. Debs was going to speak. And she took me with her. She went to all sorts of progressive meetings. She was a member of the populist party and always on the side of labor.

O'Farrell: So she was involved in politics as well as the labor movement.

Luscomb: Yes. And was active in the woman's suffrage movement. She was a delegate to the National American Woman's Suffrage Convention in 1892, and she took me with her as a little girl of five. And I heard Susan B. Anthony speak. Now as a little girl of five, I can't tell you what she said. But I remember very clearly that I was at that convention, and that they said to me, "Oh this woman speaking now is Susan B. Anthony." (Laughs)

O'Farrell: That's wonderful.

Luscomb: So I got-- She would take me to all sorts of meetings. And she'd have books or leaflets around the house for me to read.

O'Farrell: So you got a very early start doing that.

Luscomb: Yes, I got an early start. She never dictated what I should believe, but she always made it possible for me to know about these things. She was a remarkable woman, really remarkable. And as I say, she was born in 1848, and most women didn't take an interest in public issues at that time, only the really progressive, the really radical--

O'Farrell: It was a very small group--

Luscomb: Of the woman's movement.

O'Farrell: Which she was very much a part of.

Luscomb: She was not a very strong woman. She felt that the way

she was raised and the schools and things, and during the Civil War, they got very poor food, and she was rather frail. But she spent her life in taking part in the labor movement or the woman's movement, in all sorts of progressive causes.

O'Farrell: Had her mother been involved in things like that?

Luscomb: Well, as I say, her mother had died when she was only twelve, and so probably her mother had not.

O'Farrell: And she wouldn't have that much of a--

Luscomb: And she wouldn't know about it. Anyway her mother wouldn't have affected her life very much.

O'Farrell: How old was your mother when you were born?

Luscomb: Well Mother was born in '48, and I was born in 1887. You can (laughs) do the arithmetic.

O'Farrell: I can do the arithmetic on that. (Laughter)

Luscomb: If I-- if it had been '88, and she was '48, she would have been forty. So she was thirty-nine.

O'Farrell: Thirty-nine. So she was older when you were--

Luscomb: She was thirty-nine when I was born.

O'Farrell: So she was older when-- she had you quite late, especially for that time.

Luscomb: She didn't get married until-- I think she was thirty-one when she was married.

O'Farrell: And your brother was six years older.

Luscomb: Six years older, yes.

O'Farrell: Did she ever talk about you know, getting married later?

Luscomb: No. No. She never-- because of her break with her husband, she never talked about her matrimonial affairs.

O'Farrell: Did she talk with you about what she'd like, you know, you to do with your life or--

Luscomb: No, she took me with her to all sorts of progressive meetings. She tried to influence me by exposing me to these ideas. And she would encourage me to take part in the suffrage movement. As a child-- as a youngster, all through my-- for my school years in my spare time, I'd do what a high school girl could do. I would usher at meetings, and I'd hand out leaflets, I'd and/address envelopes and do things like that in my spare time. And Mother would encourage me.

O'Farrell: And then you grew up. You always lived in the Boston area.

Luscomb: Always I lived in the Boston area, yes.

O'Farrell: Did you grow up in the same house-- did you move houses as you were growing up or--

Luscomb: Did I what?

O'Farrell: Did you move houses when you were growing up, or did

you live in one neighborhood pretty much.

Luscomb: Well, we lived for-- we lived in the heart of Boston for a good many years, which of course at that time was-- Boston Street wasn't such a large city. We lived on Yarmouth/for about-- I think it was around thirteen years or so. Then we moved up on Huntington Avenue.

O'Farrell: Did you have a house or an apartment?

Luscomb: No an apartment. It was an apartment.

O'Farrell: And then your brother came back to live with you when you were about six or seven.

Luscomb: Yes.

O'Farrell: Okay. Who did you play with when you were a child. Were there-- did you have other girlfriends or did you play with the boys?

Luscomb: Oh, just all the kids in the neighborhood would play together. We'd play hopscotch and-- (laughs)

O'Farrell: Did you have special chores that you had to do as a child around the house?

Luscomb: No. My mother had, as I say-- She had gotten this property from her grandmother, for whom she was named, and so she always had a household servant, a cook, a nursemaid. And it freed her time to take part in some of these social activities. I don't mean social but--

O'Farrell: Social causes.

Luscomb: Social problems activities. And she could-- In those days if you had a housemaid, the regular standard pay was \$2 a week plus their room and board. And one time, my mother's neighbors came in in protest-- a delegation came in to protest because she was paying her household servant \$3 a week, and all of their servants were protesting and getting dissatisfied because here was somebody who was getting fifty percent more pay than they were getting. And they-- the household servants had to stay in or-- they couldn't go out any night except one night a week. Thursday was the maid's night off. And my mother said, thought that after the girl had washed the dishes, she ought to be able to go out if she wanted to. So after she got through-- she not only had Thursday night off when she didn't have to cook and could go out. But she also could go out any night of the week. And they-- all the other housemaids were indignant that they didn't get that same treatment. You see it was Mother's sense of the rights of labor and justice and fairness to other human beings.

O'Farrell: Did the neighbors get her to change her mind?

Luscomb: No, they did not. (Laughs)

O'Farrell: Were you close to the woman who worked in your house and did you--

Luscomb: Well yes.

O'Farrell: Was it the same woman for most of your growing up?

Luscomb: Well, they would change every now and then. They would

change. And then-- well, later on, after I got well grown up, I said well, I'd take over the cooking. And mother didn't want to have a nursemaid-- a nurse-- the cook was leaving for something, and the difficulty was to find somebody else to come in. Oh yes, they also objected to the pay that she was giving her-- paying her household servant.

O'Farrell: And that must have-- she must have been quite strong to just do that.

Luscomb: Stand up for them.

O'Farrell: I mean I imagine there would have been a lot of pressure on her to change.

Luscomb: Well, she was on the side of the people.

O'Farrell: Did you sort of think about when you were little what you might do when you grew up? Did you think about--

Luscomb: No, I--

O'Farrell: That you would be like your mother or did you-- or different from your mother?

Luscomb: Well I guess-- Mother, as I say-- she never dictated what I should believe, but she exposed/<sup>me</sup>to all of these ideas. She would take me to meetings to hear Eugene V. Debs or to hear people and to read books and things. So/<sup>that</sup>I just automatically believed in these things.

O'Farrell: Did religion play an important--

Luscomb: No. My mother-- she was a very religious person, but quite early in her life, she felt that the organized churches were supporting the wealthy and not the needs of the working people. And she-- although of course, she was brought up as a member of a church or-- everybody was in those days, she left the organized church. And she never belonged to a church again, but as I say, she was very religious. She would read her Bible and all that, but not as a member of any church.

O'Farrell: So you didn't grow up in any--

Luscomb: So I wasn't brought up in any . . . (interview interrupted) . . .

O'Farrell: Well she was clearly part of that very tiny tiny group of-- You know part of what we're trying to understand is, you know, how does one person get the strength to be that different from the rest of her community.

Luscomb: Well, she always encouraged me, as I say, to think for myself and not to accept just the conservative ideas. She never dictated what I should believe, but she exposed me to all of these ideas.

O'Farrell: How long did your mother live?

Luscomb: She lived to be, I think it was eighty-four. She lived until '33, I think it was, or thereabouts.

O'Farrell: And she was in Boston-- she was able to see the suffrage movement turn in to the right to vote and all of that.

Luscomb: Yes.

O'Farrell: Where did you go to school?

Luscomb: Well, that's quite a story too. (Laughs) When I got old enough to go to the public-- go to school-- I suppose that would be go to primary school-- the law said that nobody could go to public school without being vaccinated. So Mother took me to a neighboring physician to have me vaccinated so that I could enter the primary school that fall. And it so happened that this particular doctor that she just happened to select-- he was-- had his shingle out on the street somewhere-- he had a son who had died from an improper vaccination. And he was bitterly opposed to vaccination. And he lectured my mother upon the dangers of it. And so she got convinced, and she wouldn't have me vaccinated, which means that she couldn't send me to the public schools. So I had to go to private school. And I went to a little private school *Stone* one woman had teaching herself and so forth. And all through my school years, I went to private schools. And when I got to-- there was one grammar school that was both grammar and high school that was called *Chauncy Hall*, and it was coeducational, and it's-- I went to it through grammar school and high school. And the high school was especially a preparatory school for MIT. And when I went there, most of my boy fellow students were going on to MIT. And I thought to myself, "Well, why shouldn't I go to MIT." And so just that accident, the fact that I wasn't vaccinated and had to go to private schools and that the private school that I happened to go was this that made a specialty

providing to MIT meant that I went to MIT. (Laughs)

O'Farrell: Did any other girls go?

Luscomb: Not from that school. I was the only one from that school. At that time, MIT had a student body of twelve hundred, and there were twelve coeds. There were an unusually large number in my class. There were five women in my class. And I graduated in \_\_\_\_\_ nine. And Mother wasn't specially anxious for me to go to college or to go to MIT. But if I-- that's what I wanted to do, she would finance it and so I--

O'Farrell: That's what you did.

Luscomb: I went to MIT.

O'Farrell: What did you major in? What were your subject--

Luscomb: Well what I had-- I was very fond of the growing things, the plants and trees and all that. And I wanted to be a landscape architect. And they had a course in landscape architecture. But it had been dwindling, and the year that I entered they gave it up. But they said that if you took the four years course in architecture, they would have a graduate one-year course in landscape work. So I took my four years in architecture in order to get my graduate course in landscape architecture, and I was the only one applying for it so it wasn't given. So I became an architect. But I always enjoyed drawing and all. I don't know whether I inherited that from my father, who as I say was an artist. And at any rate, I'd always enjoyed drawing and art work, so I became an architect.

O'Farrell: Were you close to the other <sup>four</sup>/women in your class?

Luscomb: With what?

O'Farrell: Were you very close with the other four women in your class?

Luscomb: Oh yes. We were all very friendly. And the other twelve women-- the other eleven women in the ~~college~~ <sup>whole</sup> college.

O'Farrell: Did you have any teachers in elementary or high school that particularly encouraged you or that you remember especially?

Luscomb: They encouraged the students to go to college, the girls as well as the boys. Several of the teachers were urging us to go on to college.

O'Farrell: Were they women teachers or men teachers or both?

Luscomb: I think as far as I remember it would be both. But I don't remember what it was. But they tried to get the students to go on.

O'Farrell: So they were encouraging.

Luscomb: Yes.

O'Farrell: But there was no one-- I mean you just decided on MIT--

Luscomb: Yes. (Laughs) Well, it was because Chauncy Hall specialized in sending its students to MIT. Of course they didn't have to go to MIT; they could go to any other college. But they told you

what a nice place it was, what a fine education you'd get there, how it would fit you for your life career and all that.

O'Farrell: Did anyone try to talk you out of it when you said that you wanted to go too?

Luscomb: No, I don't think-- I don't recollect that anybody did.

O'Farrell: So the teachers-- even though you were the only girl from that school going, they were supportive. Did you enjoy the four years there?

Luscomb: Oh I enjoyed it very much. I was-- It was the things that I was interested in. As I say I always had enjoyed drawing and the art work. So that I was very much interested in my course there.

O'Farrell: Were you involved in other groups or political groups with the students or labor groups or any of that?

Luscomb: Yes. Well all through-- as I said all through my high school years/<sup>well</sup>and even some of my grammar school years, I'd been working in the suffrage movement, doing what I could do in my spare time. Of course I didn't have very much spare time at MIT, but I did some things. Of course there was the summer time.

O'Farrell: And the suffrage movement was the main activity that you--

Luscomb: Yes. That was it. That was it very decidedly. Do you know what the condition of women was a hundred and twenty-five



only state in the union. The-- there was no public schools for girls, except again, Massachusetts had set up-- well, very briefly they had a public school for girls for a couple of years in Boston. And then they stopped it. Down in Marblehead / at one of the town meetings, some man had gotten<sup>up</sup> / and said-- suggested that they really ought to appropriate money to set up a public school for girls. And another citizen got up and said very indignantly, "What? Spend public money to educate SHES!" So that the wealthy people, and that means<sup>just</sup> / a very handful of the population, could either send their girls to private schools, or they could hire tutors to come in and teach their girls. But for the whole mass of the women of the country, there was no education at all, except what their own families might teach them, just the elements of reading, writing and 'rithmetic so that they could read a cookbook or keep track of what money they might have spent in buying some of the food for the family, something like that.

O'Farrell: So that they had no way to fight the laws, which they couldn't even read.

Luscomb: Nothing. Nothing. And they had no knowledge, no real education at all.

O'Farrell: So in that sense, <sup>7</sup> some of the education that your mother got was really unusual for women at that time.

Luscomb: Yes. Well, that was because she belonged to a family that could afford to send her to these female seminar-- one of these female seminaries.

O'Farrell: Wait, what's your--

Luscomb: Well that was-- But you see my mother was-- *I think* was born in '48 so that-- And then her mother died when she was twelve years old. So that would be 1960 (sic), so that by that time that these-- a lot of these very hideous suppressions had been done away with. The woman's movement started in 1848, with the Seneca Falls Conference in New York, which was just a local conference. And two years later, there was the national-- the Seneca Falls Conference-- you know how it came-- the Seneca Falls Conference started, don't you?

O'Farrell: No.

Luscomb: Well, the woman's movement grew out of the-- really out of the slavery-- antislavery movement. The more public spirited women, women who weren't satisfied to be just interested in their own family affairs were horrified by slavery, and they wanted to take part in the great antislavery movement. And some-- although of course-- woman's place was in the home / but some of the antislavery societies in different states-- some of the states-- they would admit women into their societies. And in 1840, the British Antislavery Society against slavery, decided to call a world conference / and they sent out an invitation to the antislavery societies of every country in the world to send delegates to this great world conference in London against slavery. And the-- along with the men delegates, two of the states of United States sent some women delegates. Massachusetts sent three women delegates, and Pennsylvania sent five women delegates. And when these five-- when these eight women arrived in London and presented their perfectly legal credentials as delegates, the

British were horrified. They'd never dreamed of women taking part in this-- in this public conference. It just wasn't done, you know. It was indecent for women for do it. And they spent an entire day debating whether they would accept these perfectly legitimate credentials from the women. And at the end of the day, they voted that they would not seat the women, that they women had got to sit in the gallery behind a curtain. And it so happened that one of the most famous-- world famous leaders in the antislavery movement was William Lloyd Garrison. And his boat had been delayed in getting across the Atlantic by storms. And he didn't arrive until the day after this vote against the women had been taken, and William Lloyd--

## BEGIN TAPE ONE, SIDE TWO

Luscomb: In this world conference against slavery because of its treatment of women. Well, there were two of the women, sitting there in the gallery-- One of them was a Quaker. And the Quakers were the only group in America-- a very small religious group that believed in and practised the full equality of women. And the other one was a young bride on her honeymoon. Her husband was one of the delegates to the conference. And these two women, as they sat in the gallery, were so indignant over the treatment they'd received that they'd vowed that when they got back to this country, they would call a conference on the rights of women. And-- but they lived in different states, several hundred miles apart. Of course in those

days the automobile hadn't been yet invented. And you didn't just hop into a car and drive for a few hours. You had to take a train or maybe a stagecoach and travel for days perhaps to get from one state to another. So that it was not for-- let me see, that was in 1940 (sic) / it was not until eight years later that they got-- happened to be in the same town together. One of them went to visit a friend in a neighboring town. And they got together. And they decided that now they could carry out their plan of calling a conference on the rights of women. But they got<sup>it</sup>/up in a great hurry, because, as I say, one of them was just visiting a friend there.

O'Farrell: They had to do it quickly.

Luscomb: This was in Seneca Falls, New York in 1848. And they found a place to hold a meeting. And they drafted a call to a conference on the conditions<sup>of women</sup>/and got it printed in a local newspaper. So it just went out-- the news of it went out to the neighboring towns. And they drafted the resolutions that they wanted to get passed and provided for the speakers and all. And this Seneca Falls Conference was the first in all the world on the rights of women. But as I say, it was just a local one. But the news of it went all over the country. The newspapers carried the story of this awful thing that had been happening in Seneca Falls, New York. But two years later, in 1850, there was a world-- there was a nationwide conference on the rights of women in Worcester, Massachusetts. And it had a thousand delegates, coming from eleven states, as

far away as California. Now there was no railroad out to California at that time. You had to come by stagecoach up over the Rocky Mountains and across the praries and take perhaps weeks to get across. And yet some delegates-- women delegates came all the way from California to take part in this national conference in Worcester, Massachusetts. And that was the start of the woman's rights movement. And they worked from then on to do away with all those hideous oppressive laws as well as to <sup>abolish</sup> law give women-- make them equal citizens of their country.

O'Farrell: Yes. They had a much broader concern about economics and legal rights than just the right to vote.

Luscomb: Yes. Well, you see the right to vote wasn't so important as to make it illegal for a man to beat his wife or to say that she should own the children that she had borne, that he couldn't give them away, and all of those things, that she should have a right to own some money and get-- buy the things that she needed.

O'Farrell: Did your mother then-- did she belong to specific groups within the suffragette movement that were--

Luscomb: Oh she belonged to the organization, yes.

O'Farrell: Did she have any leadership roles in--

Luscomb: No. No.

O'Farrell: So she just-- she was a worker.

Luscomb: Mother, as I say, was rather frail. And she was never a public speaker or anything like that. She just was a supporter. But she was an utterly devoted person.

O'Farrell: Did you hear stories of the Seneca Falls Meeting, as a child at all?

Luscomb: No, not especially.

O'Farrell: Were there other women that would come to your house or talk about it?

Luscomb: No, no.

O'Farrell: You've more learned that from what's--

Luscomb: Yes, what I've read in books. As I say, I did, as a youngster-- I did all through my school and college years, I did whatever I could do in my spare time. And the-- there was plenty to be done. They started having open air meetings. The British started that. The British militant-- the suffragette movement. Of course, there was the suffragist movement and the suffragette movement, but it was Mrs. Pankhurst in England who decided that when they called meetings in halls or in private, the only people who came to a meeting would be those who were already interested in the movement, and that you had got to convert the whole mass of the people. And so they decided to go out on the street corners and hold open air meetings. And it was considered perfectly shocking for a woman to stand up on a street corner and make a speech in public. And-- but the militants did that. And then they did all sorts

of other things to bring the issue before the public, make it a dominant issue. And in 1911, there was a world conference on women's rights-- women, held in Stockholm. And I was a delegate to that. And I and/ <sup>one of</sup> the other women-- Massachusetts <sup>went over early</sup> delegates / and I spent-- we spent about five or six weeks in London-- or about four or five weeks in London, studying the British suffragette movement, or the British suffrage movement. We went to dozens of meetings, both of the suffragist and of the militant suffragettes.

O'Farrell: Now, can you explain the difference to me. The suffragists were--

Luscomb: Were the old-- That was the old movement-- the conservative movement that would only hold indoor meetings.

O'Farrell: Okay. And they stayed as a separate--

Luscomb: And they stayed as a separate group, but the British--

Mrs. Pankhurst and the organization that she set up were called suffragettes. And they went out. They said they'd got to go out and take it to the man in the streets. So they held open air meetings. And they got a publication. And they had it sold. Women went out as newsboys and sold it on the streets. And I-- when I was there / <sup>in London,</sup> I sold the suffrage paper on the streets in Trafalgar Square.

O'Farrell: Get some experience, huh?

Luscomb: And then they had a-- one woman refused to pay her taxes until she got a vote. You know no taxation without re-

presentation. And so the government had-- She was a woman-- I think she was a woman doctor. And the government seized her household furniture, and they were going to auction it off to pay her taxes. And they had a parade of protest from somewhere in the heart of London down to the auction room. And I marched in that parade. It was also rather amusing. We did of course-- of course, while we were there, we not only studied the suffrage movement, both the militant and the non-militant/<sup>movement</sup> and went to all sorts of meetings and rallies, but we did a lot of sight-seeing. And one thing that we thought we would like to do was to see the House of Commons in session. And when we tried to go into the women's gallery to see the House of Commons, we found that the British-- the suffragettes had gone into the gallery and staged a demonstration. And when the guards-- they'd shouted out, "Votes for Women!" And they'd thrown down leaflets onto floor of parliament. And when the guards rushed in to drag them out, they found that the women had chained themselves to the railing. So they carried on the demonstration for half or longer until they managed to saw them loose and haul them out. So they'd made a law-- a rule that no woman could go into the woman's gallery without a letter of permission from some member of parliament. And then they discovered that many of the members of parliament were in great sympathy with the woman's movement and were quite willing to give the women letters of permission. And so they made the further provision that they could give their-- only give letters of permission to their own relatives. There was one American woman, Mrs. Glendarine who lived here in Boston, who had lived in England for quite a while. And she

had been a friend of a man who was a member of parliament there. And she'd given us a letter of introduction to him. And we called at his house one day. And he wasn't home. But we didn't meet him, but we talked with his wife, who was a very lovely woman, and we had a nice visit. And we happened to mention how disappointed we were that we couldn't see parliament in session. So a couple of days, there came to us-- there was delivered to us at our hotel, a letter of permission for his cousins to go into the House of Commons to the women's gallery. So we went into it, and we saw the parliament in session. And a few years later-- of course he knew he was perfectly safe, that we weren't going to stage any demonstration; it was just that we should have a chance to see this-- a few years later however my cousin became the prime minister of England. It was Ramesy Macdonald. So I am a cousin of a prime minister of England. (Laughter)

O'Farrell: So that-- I'm really/<sup>glad</sup>that you got to see what that was all about. That cousin would be the son of one of your mother's brothers?

Luscomb: Oh well, he invented that. I mean--

O'Farrell: Oh I see. I see.

Luscomb: It was a rather commonplace saying that Americans were cousins of English-- the English. We were all cousins. That was a common phrase at that time that the cousins--

O'Farrell: My grandmother was English and always used to say kissing cousins.

Luscomb: Oh yes. So that the two countries were cousins, and so that was what he took advantage of, that common slang, common phraseology that was in use.

O'Farrell: So you became related to the Prime Minister.

Luscomb: Yes. (Laughs)

O'Farrell: That's great. That's great. How did you get to be a delegate to the Stockholm meeting? That was after you had graduated from MIT?

Luscomb: Yes. It was 1911. I graduated in aught-nine.

O'Farrell: What did you do when you got out of school with your architecture degree?

Luscomb: Oh I became an architect. I worked-- it was one of the women who had graduated a good many years before I did from MIT, and she'd made a very distinguished record there. She had taken the highest honor that they offered in the architectural department. It was a year's traveling fellowship in Europe to study the European architecture. And her home was out here in Waltham, so when she came back from her year's scholarship, she set up her office there in Waltham, and when I graduated, I went out as her draftsman. And I worked for her there. And after a few years, she very generously took me into partnership out there. So I worked as an architect until the First World War came along. And in time of world war, there is no building. I've never seen any official figures for the First World War, but I know what happened. You just-- nobody was doing any building. And the government

did make an investigation in the Second World War. And ninety eight percent of all the architects in America were unemployed at that time. And it was the same way in the First World War. So when my-- I'd put all my spare time, and the woman that I had worked for-- we were working for out there-- was equally interested in woman's suffrage. And she was quite willing to let me off if there was any special activity that was necessary. So after the-- when my architecture folded under me, I took a full-time paid job as the assistant executive secretary with the Boston Equal Suffrage Association. And I never went back to my architecture. I stayed on all my working life as an executive secretary in various civic organizations, such as the-- surveying the industrial and factories--

O'Farrell: The garment industry.

Luscomb: And other things like that. The last paid job I held for about seven years as the executive secretary of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom here in Massachusetts.

O'Farrell: So you had about ten years/<sup>experience</sup> then as an architect before you went full-time into--

Luscomb: Well, it was a little less than ten years.

O'Farrell: Were you elected as one of the two representatives to go to Stockholm or--

Luscomb: No, there were more than two. There was a large body. I don't think there was any limit on the number that could go.

O'Farrell: Oh. So-- but from Massachusetts, were there more

than that that went?

Luscomb: I don't remember how many-- 1911 is a long way ago. (Laughs)

O'Farrell: Yes. But that must have been really exciting.

Luscomb: And as I say, I took extra time while I was going over there. I not only went to England beforehand, but then we went across to the Continent and spent about a week in Paris and then went up, spending a couple of days in Belgium and in Holland and in Denmark and went up to Stockholm and then came back through Norway.

O'Farrell: So you had a really long trip.

Luscomb: So we had a-- we did a lot of sightseeing in addition. Since we were over there, why not?

O'Farrell: Why not! The architecture firm-- did you have any trouble, you know, getting business because you were women or--

Luscomb: I think we were the only architectural firm in the town. So that while people could go to other architectural firms outside the town, we had a lot to do. We built one of the schools in the town. We built a school in one of the neighboring towns. We built the motion picture/in town, and then of course a great many private homes, so that we usually had-- were kept busy.

O'Farrell: More than enough to keep you busy. Were you active in the Women's Trade Union League at that time?

Luscomb: I was. I was active in the Women's Trade Union League, and I-- In fact I think I was president of the Boston Local for one while.

O'Farrell: And that was during that same-- that was one of the many women's groups that you were involved in.

Luscomb: As I say, the-- my employer, who generously took me into partnership, was equally interested in the woman's movement, so that unless we were awfully rushed in our architectural/ <sup>designing</sup> why she'd let me off to do various activities if there was any necessity for it. And then of course, sometimes there were necessities or activities right there in Waltham. There was a little traveling circus that came to town. And they were going to have a circus parade through the town, as an advertisement. And then of course, they'd have the circus in the evening up in the tent, somewhere out in the fields there. And we-- right in our office, we painted a sign, and then I got up very early in the morning and went to see the man who owned this little traveling circus and asked him if in the circus parade going through the town, he would hang this sign on the elephant, VOTES FOR WOMEN. (Laughs) And it so happened he believed in women's suffrage and was very glad to do it. So when the circus parade went through town in Waltham, here was the elephant, VOTES FOR WOMEN! (Laughter) And we did all sorts of things like that.

O'Farrell: Do you remember your sort of first specific project or work with the trade unions, you know the first picket line

you got involved with or--

Luscomb: I don't know what one would be the first one. I think this-- I know that this one over in Cambridge in the transportation company there was one of the early ones. But I was on so many different picket lines. At that time, there were a good many strikes. It was during a period of labor activity. And they called-- there were a group of prominent citizens in Boston, including women-- women especially, who were perfectly willing to go out on picket lines and on labor lines. So that we had a great many picket lines with-- when there were strike situations.

O'Farrell: So that the women involved in the women's movement and the suffrage movement very often were on picket lines and involved.

Luscomb: Yes. Although I think-- I don't know whether-- I think this was largely after the suffrage was won. I'm not sure. I'd have to check on the dates.

O'Farrell: After you graduated from MIT and started as an architect, did you continue to live with your family, with your mother?

Luscomb: Oh yes. I lived with my mother all while she lived, yes.

O'Farrell: Did you consider getting married or--

Luscomb: I never got married. I had a great many good friendships with men, and one or two of them would like to have married me. But I never felt that I cared enough for any man to really marry him. I would have been very happy to have met a man that I wanted to marry. But I wasn't going to get married just for the

sake of being married. I had enough self respect as a woman to live my own life.

O'Farrell: To not do that. In looking at your work experience then, if you had the choice of all-- you know any job, you know with training and all the things that would go with it, what kind of work would you choose now? I mean would you want to work in anything different than you did?

Luscomb: No, I don't think so. I think that some-- one of these great social movements would be the thing that would be most interesting and most satisfying. You feel that you are really a part of history, of making history-- of the advancement of the human race, the advancement of society.

O'Farrell: Did you ever consider going back to architecture once you--

Luscomb: No, I never did.

O'Farrell: While you were at MIT, did you feel that you got all the proper training the same as the men and all of that?

Luscomb: Oh yes. Yes.

O'Farrell: Once you were there, it was *all equal*.

Luscomb: Yes.

O'Farrell: Do you want to stop for a couple of minutes or--

Luscomb: Not unless-- maybe you want to.

O'Farrell: No. That's fine. I get so interested in it that I kind of get carried away. Could you tell me then more specifically about the work with the office and professional workers, when that began and--

Luscomb: That began I think as far as I have been able to dig out in my records, it was around 1839. I mean 1939. (Laughs) And there was a national movement for the organization of women and especially/who-- there had never been any organization of the women who worked in offices. Women who worked in factories had various-- various union organizations. But no unions for the women who worked in offices. And so they called a conference to organize a union of women office workers. And it was set up as the United Office and Professional Workers of America, UOPWA. And I think that I attended that national convention. Now, I can't say absolutely. But my-- I have a feeling of impression that I was at that national founding convention. But I know that I immediately became active to try and get a local organization set up here in Boston. And several of my friends who were working in offices also-- we got together, and we founded this little Boston local affiliated with the national organization. And we were just really a handful of us. And we tried to get other people that we knew among our friends who worked in offices. And we gradually built up a membership. But I don't think it was ever more than fifty or at most seventy-five, probably nearer fifty here. We-- the first thing that we-- the work-- the place where we really made an effort at unionization was one big firm down in Post Office Square. Now, I don't know the name of the

firm now. I don't remember it. And I don't know just what it did. But it had a large-- a very large office staff. As I recollect it was fifty or seventy-five girls who worked as office workers. It seems-- it sounds as though it must have been a secretarial office. And they paid them miserable pay. And they had very poor working conditions. And I remember vividly that as an example of the treatment of the girls, if there was some job that the firm wanted finished, and it wasn't done at five o'clock, the girls would have to stay and work overtime, work all evening, all night. It might be-- maybe you had a ticket to go to the theater that night. But if you didn't stay and work, you'd be fired. And or you might be going to a party. Whatever your plans were, it didn't matter. You'd got to give up your own life for the sake of doing what the firm wanted done. And as I say very poor pay. And one of the members of our union happened to get talking with one of the girls who worked for this company. They were sitting next to each other on the streetcar or something like that, and they got talking. And so the girl who worked there gave us the names of some of her fellow workers, the names and addresses. And we called at their homes and talked with them and said they ought to belong to a union, and they could force the company to give them better pay and better conditions. And we built up quite a little group that was interested in forming a union. And then the owners got wind of this movement among their workers to organize. And they immediately raised their pay. And the girls were no longer interested in the union. Not one of them would continue as a member of the union. They hadn't ever joined, and they wouldn't

join, although we had won them decent pay. And we felt that was a union victory. But it didn't build up the union any. And the same thing happened in many other-- other shops or offices. And altogether, we felt that we had gotten-- we knew we had gotten better pay for several hundred of the office workers in Boston. But they--

O'Farrell: They wouldn't join.

Luscomb: It didn't build up the membership in the union. And then-- just then, the Second World War came along. You see this was around '39 and '40 that this thing-- And the labor movement in this country made a pledge that during the World War, they would not have any strikes. They would stop their labor movement, hold it in abeyance rather than have any-- in any way endanger the war effort of the country. And so the entire labor movement stopped, stood still, all during World War II. And at the end of World War II came along the McCarthy era. I don't know whether you know what the McCarthy era was. But it was an era of almost outright fascism, of the denunciation of every labor movement, of every progressive movement whatsoever. Anybody who was affiliated, who joined any organization with any progressive social purpose would be-- any person who was known to belong to one of these organizations would be fired from his job, his or her job. They didn't dare sign petitions. You couldn't get anybody to sign a petition because if your name appeared on any one of these petitions, you'd be fired or you'd be discriminated against in some way. And the whole social

progress was absolutely stopped. And many of the trade unions were destroyed. And our own Office and Professional Workers, UOPWA went to pieces at that time.

O'Farrell: Before the war, when you first started, in '39 and '40, did you get support from other unions in trying to organize.

Luscomb: We were a member of the CIO, the national-- the left wing-- / it was the AFL and the CIO. And the AFL was the old labor organization, and it was conservative. And CIO was the more militant and new labor movement that was coming in. And the UOPWA was a member of the CIO. I know because I was a-- I was at some time a delegate to the national meetings of the CIO.

O'Farrell: Was that during this time or before that?

Luscomb: It was before the--

O'Farrell: Was it before you got involved in the UOP?

Luscomb: No. No. I was representing the UOPWA on the national.

O'Farrell: To go back just a little bit, could you talk more about any involvement with the unions after you left the architecture firm. What was/<sup>your</sup>first executive secretary job after-- during the war then?

Luscomb: It was with the-- After I left architecture--

O'Farrell: You said that you became an executive secretary--

Luscomb: Yes. I think it was with the Massachusetts Civic League,

which was an organization which existed then. It was not a really radical organization. But it was an organization which had been founded by a rather wealthy man here, who was very progressive in his outlook, to do work for legislation in social reform. And they sponsored-- tried-- they did work with the legislature to try and get the passage of various measures. And I say, not really radical but all that would be social betterment. And I know one that they-- I was put on their staff as the assistant executive secretary. And they assigned me to <sup>and</sup> try/get the legislature to pass a bill for the payment of wages to prisoners. The-- all the prisons maintained industries of various kinds and often manufacturing goods that were needed in the prison system itself, or maybe some of them would be for sale. And the men had to work-- do this work in the prison factories. But they got no pay for their work. And it meant that often when the men got released at the end of their prison term, many of them would have not a single penny in their pocket. And they'd go out, and how could they get anything to eat that night, how could they get a place to sleep that night, except by committing a robbery.

O'Farrell: Even though they'd been working all those years.

Luscomb: Even though they'd been working all those years. So the Massachusetts Civic League said that they ought to be paid wages for their work. And part of their wages they would have while they're in prison so they could buy extra food or subscribe to magazines or what have you. And part of it would be saved for them so that when they were released, they would have

a sizable amount of money in their pockets to take to provide-- keep them alive and for their subsistence until they could find a job working. And so they-- they put me in charge of getting that bill passed by the legislature. And it meant that I had to draft all the leaflets that would explain this bill and the need for it. And I had to get-- to interview prominent people and get them to sponsor the measure and support it. And I had to arrange for meetings or to get organizations to let speakers come before them and explain the need for this bill and to get them to endorse it and all-- do everything and to have lobbying at the state house with the <sup>men</sup> And we finally got the bill passed, but they set an incredibly low pay for the prisoners. But we felt that we had established the principle. And the pay that they set was 3¢ an hour. But we'd established <sup>the principle</sup> and that we could get later legislature to increase the amount. And I think that's gone up now. But it's still a very miserable sum. But at least we got that thing through. And that was the sort of thing that the Massachusetts Civic League worked on. And I worked with them for a couple of years on that measure and other measures.

O'Farrell: Were there any particular trade union people that you would have been involved in-- with like on getting legislation passed or--

Luscomb: Oh I-- We would apply-- we would appeal to everybody that we could-- according to whatever the bill was-- that the particular bill was. And then I took a job-- I was still working for them, but I was asked for this job of the inspection in

the women's garment factories. The International Ladies Garment Workers Union in New York City, where-- which was the center of the industry had for many years had this inspection service as a part of their union agreement. It-- and the union-- and in New York, the garment industry was very largely unionized. Most of the garment shops were union shops. And they had had this additional inspection to make sure-- guarantee the safety and sanitary conditions.

O'Farrell: That must have come after the triangle fires.

Luscomb: Yes, after the triangle fires. <sup>Yes.</sup> / Exactly. And so they had had it. Well, the industry here in Boston had finally gotten strong enough in its union organization to get this as a-- one of the terms in their union agreement here. And one of my friends was put in as the inspector-- the director of this-- what they called the Joint Board of Sanitary Control. And it was called a joint board because it consisted of equal members of the owners of the union and of the public. And that Joint Board of Sanitary Control was to control the sanitary and safety conditions in the factories. And this friend of mine was, when they got that-- when the union got strong enough to insist on this as a term in their union agreement-- this friend of mine was the director of the Joint Board of Sanitary Control. And she did the inspection for two years. And then her husband--

O'Farrell: It was a woman.

Luscomb: That was a woman, yes. And her husband-- at the end of a second year, her husband got a job somewhere else, in some

other city. I forget-- I don't know where-- so they were moving away. And she recommended that I be made the director, and so to take her place. So I took over as the director of the Joint Board of Sanitary Control. So I was with the civic league for two years, working on legislation. And then I became a factory inspector.

O'Farrell: So that would have been around 1922. And was that then a full-time job?

Luscomb: That was a full-time job, yes. And I did-- for two years, I did <sup>the</sup> factory inspection in the women's garment industries here. And conditions were very very bad. Of course the-- as you know, in the triangle fire in New York, the factory doors were locked and--

BEGIN TAPE TWO, SIDE ONE

O'Farrell: So did you have a set of regulations that you inspected by or--

Luscomb: I-- Well of course, I was only trying to enforce the state laws, governing the safety and sanitary conditions of factories. And it was because the state inspection was so imperfect. They didn't enough inspectors to get around with any degree of frequency. Perhaps once or twice a year. And the result was that the conditions were intolerable. And when I started in my inspection, I would find that-- well, women would be sitting there working at a sewing machine for eight



O'Farrell: So these places were by then organized.

Luscomb: Yes. And finally, I would send in complaints to the inspection department and the labor department of the state house for such and such conditions in this factory. And they wouldn't do anything about it. As I say, they didn't have enough inspectors. They wouldn't do it-- take any trouble. So finally one day-- one time I got half a dozen very prominent, wealthy, socially prominent women in Massachusetts, who were interested in the-- in Boston-- who were interested in labor conditions. They probably were members of the Women's Trade Union League or something like that. And I took them with me. I took two at a time <sup>two</sup> different days to inspect some of these factories. Now I couldn't-- under the terms of the union agreement, I had no right to demand that they let in these other women, but when I knocked-- when I went into the door with these two women, why the owners didn't-- maybe they didn't know they had a right to say, "You can't bring them/<sup>in.</sup>" At any rate, they didn't. So I took these women around to the worst factories that I had. And I showed them that. And then they got together, and they wrote up a report as to the conditions that they had found in the garment factories in Boston. And they sent this as a complaint to the state inspection department. And I sent a copy of it to every newspaper. (Laughs) And the newspapers printed it when was signed <sup>over</sup> these socially prominent women in Boston. And within five minutes, the state inspection had inspectors down over these factories. (Laughing)

O'Farrell: Did they change the conditions?

Luscomb: They changed the conditions in those factories. Yes. But then the two years of the union contract were up. And there had been in the women's garment factories, a great many what they called runaway factories, moving South, where they could get unorganized, ununionized labor very cheap. And it meant that the-- practically the women's garment/<sup>industry</sup>was being almost destroyed in the North. And the union was very weak. And when they came to negotiating another union contract, there were so few union shops up here-- the union was so weak that it wasn't able to insist on their having this Joint Board of Sanitary Control put into the union contract. So that went-- was done away with. In fact I'm not sure that the union still existed in Boston. It had very many-- very few shops left anyway up here. So they-- that inspection was done away with. So that ended my two years of factory inspection.

O'Farrell: When you were doing that, were you the only one for this joint board that was doing--

Luscomb: Yes. There were enough-- weren't so many factories in Boston-- in the Boston area, to require more than one person to do the inspection.

O'Farrell: And then you made your reports to the Massachusetts State and Labor--

Luscomb: Yes.

O'Farrell: Did you also work closely with the people from the

garment workers' union, since it was under their contract?

Luscomb: Yes. Of course I-- They got-- they cooperated very much with the inspection because it was all in for their benefit.

O'Farrell: Were there women within the ILG then that you worked with who were leaders at that time? Or was it mostly men who were at the top of the--

Luscomb: I think they were largely men, but I can't say. It was a long time ago. I mean I was active in the labor movement in general so that I . . . (interview interrupted) . . .

O'Farrell: Yes. We were just talking about your two years as the inspector /having ended. And you were saying that you were just generally involved with the labor movement, so that the various social issues that you were worked on-- there were labor unions often also concerned and working on those same issues?

Luscomb: Yes.

O'Farrell: What did you do then after that job ended?

Luscomb: I don't know. Have you got my--

O'Farrell: Yes. (Papers shuffling)

Luscomb: I'm wondering-- I don't think of-- The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom-- (Long pause)  
I can't say-- I can't remember right now exactly what-- you see-- the dates of these.

O'Farrell: But just in general, what were some of the groups--

Luscomb: Now let me see-- '20, '22, '24-- I think that that was the time I took the job as the state executive-- the executive secretary from Massachusetts of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom. I don't think there was any job in between those two.

O'Farrell: So you went right into that. Did you have-- were there women from the unions involved in these groups as well? I mean would there be women from the trade union movement, who were part of the state group for peace and freedom that you--

Luscomb: Not so many. It was largely-- they would largely be the upper middle class women. I mean the working women would be believing in peace and freedom. But they would be too busy, and so that they couldn't-- they couldn't really be active in it.

O'Farrell: It kept them more/<sup>than</sup>busy just doing their own jobs. }

Luscomb: Yes.

O'Farrell: I read in the-- sort of some of the histories of the Women's Trade Union League, that in the '20's, there was pretty much of a split between the working women and union organizing and some of the more-- the other women's groups that were more concerned about-- well after the vote was won, that were more concerned with, well the peace movement or other social reform measures. Do you have particular recollections about that or--

Luscomb: No. I haven't any special information on that subject.

O'Farrell: I can't remember where I read it, but it was about-- particularly about the Women's Trade Union League, that there had been some of the men in the union saying that they weren't interested enough in organizing.

Luscomb: I was a member of the Women's Trade Union League, which was trying to help to organize women.

O'Farrell: Did you do any specific organizing at that time or not? That was just one of their goals, was organizing.

Luscomb: Yes. It was just a-- on anyone's field that we felt there might be a chance to get-- to set up an organization, why then we'd work on that. But I mean-- this-- the Women's Trade Union League was not a union itself, but it was trying to promote to the union movement.

O'Farrell: During that period are there particular things you remember about the union movement: like you were telling me earlier about picketing for the truck drivers. Any other kind of incidents that you particularly remember that--

Luscomb: Then there was this one I spoke of where they threw tear gas at the-- (Laughs) I remember one time there was a strike-- it was somewhere down-- somewhere near downtown. And of course the law said a picket line was required-- a legal picket line was lawful, a nonviolent picket line. You had a right to picket in case of a strike. And I know there was one time that the mounted police came. And we were picketing

in front of a building where there was a strike on. And the police drove us off and around the corner so that the scabs could get into the building without going through our picket line.

O'Farrell: So you would often be called by the unions to come and support their picket lines?

Luscomb: Yes. As I say, at this period, which was when there was the great union movement, the-- all sorts of women-- there was a large body of women, who were not themselves laboring women who would <sup>be</sup> called to come on the picket lines.

O'Farrell: Like the Dupont woman that you mentioned earlier.

Luscomb: Yes. But it was a great union movement at that time.

O'Farrell: And very much had the support of other progressive organizations. Any unions that you worked with more than others in that capacity. I mean you worked with <sup>the</sup> garment workers obviously.

Luscomb: Well, that of course was a full-time job. No, I can't say any one special-- I was <sup>out</sup> on many-- on a great many picket lines when there were union strikes.

O'Farrell: Then it was not until the late thirties that you got involved in professional-- the office worker and professional union, after the--

Luscomb: Well, that was around thirty-- was it thirty-nine I said,

O'Farrell: Thirty-nine I said you said, yes. So that was after Roosevelt had come in, and progressive movements were even more supported. You said that you went to the CIO convention.

Luscomb: Went what--

O'Farrell: To the CIO convention.

Luscomb: I don't remember whether it was the convention or whether it was just a national board/<sup>meeting</sup> that I was sent-- that our union would be having a representative on, and I was asked to go this time or several times--

O'Farrell: So were you actually a member of the United Office and Professional Workers in your--

Luscomb: Yes. Oh yes. Yes. I was the president of the local union here at one time.

O'Farrell: And what were some of the main problems? You were organizing primarily women clerical workers.

Luscomb: We were trying to. (Laughs) But we never got very large.

O'Farrell: As you look back on it now, what were some of the major problems in organizing the women? Things that you ran into.

Luscomb: It was-- I think a major problem/<sup>was</sup> that women office workers felt socially superior to women factory workers. And they thought of unions as being what factory workers had. It never occurred to them that unions would be appropriate for them. And that is why

I have been so very very much pleased over the recent developments of-- it started out with Nine to Five, which doesn't call itself a union, but it does exactly the same work-- and the fact that they are forming actually what they do call as unions in many organizations. They have a movement on-- over at Harvard and at MIT.

O'Farrell: MIT has a quite a strong--

Luscomb: Has quite a strong one. And I have spoken at both of those places to the union organizers-- to groups that were-- of people who were-- meeting for the unionization-- the organization of their office staff. Office and other. At Harvard, it includes not just--

O'Farrell: That includes the building and grounds people and the other staff people.

Luscomb: Yes. Staff in general.

O'Farrell: Did you find any things then that were particularly successful in reaching the women, or it was <sup>just</sup> that they generally considered themselves above unions?

Luscomb: Well that was-- That I think was one of the difficulties that we had.

O'Farrell: Were the women who had clerical jobs also the more middle-- upper middle class women who--

Luscomb: Yes.

O'Farrell: But yet there were other women like yourself who

joined. There was a small core of you who joined that-- or formed that union here.

Luscomb: Yes.

O'Farrell: What other women did you work with, were you close with in the union?

Luscomb: In the unions?

O'Farrell: Yes. Other women that you worked with. Or when you started the local of the United Office and Professional Workers, were there a core group of you that-- who organized--

Luscomb: Yes. Yes.

O'Farrell: Did they work in-- you know in other companies around here or-- Do you just remember much about them or what they did?

Luscomb: It's a-- No we just were on the lookout for any office where there was a real dissatisfaction and a feeling of the need of united action to improve their conditions.

O'Farrell: And then go and talk with them--

Luscomb: Yes.

O'Farrell: Were there any men that were particularly supportive on your activities?

Luscomb: I don't recall. There were men, but of course the office workers were primarily women. And the men from some of the other unions would be approving of our endeavour to unionize the office workers, but they wouldn't--

O'Farrell: But it was up to you to do it.

Luscomb: It was up to us to do it. Yes.

O'Farrell: Do you remember anything in particular about the CIO meeting that you went to?

Luscomb: No. No.

O'Farrell: Anything. It was just a regular convention business meeting.

Luscomb: Yes.

O'Farrell: Did you see that there were any barriers on the part of the union to getting women involved? Were there any things that union itself did that would have prevented the women from getting involved-- I mean any struggles you had within that organization?

Luscomb: I don't think of anything.

O'Farrell: And since it was mostly clerical workers, you were mostly women. I mean there was no top level of men that--

Luscomb: The union-- of course the United Office and Professional Workers was a woman's union. It didn't have men involved. I can't say that there weren't any men members. But I don't recall any men members. I don't recall them now. That was a long time ago but-- (Laughs) But its official body would be-- would have been women.

O'Farrell: You said that during the war then, all-- most union activity stopped. Did you still keep your membership and keep

your <sup>?</sup> group together.

Luscomb: Oh we kept our membership but just stopped trying to make union demands for changing-- better conditions of labor and better pay and all that. We made no struggles like that.

O'Farrell: Did you-- You said at one time you were president. Did you negotiate contracts and that sort of thing?

Luscomb: We never got to that point where we actually had a union contract with any firm. As I say we got better conditions in several offices for--and covered hundreds of workers. But it was not through a union contract. It was <sup>through</sup> the threat of a union contract.

O'Farrell: Who were you working for at that time?

Luscomb: Who was I working for? I wasn't working. I wasn't <sup>down</sup> holding /any paid jobs at all.

O'Farrell: So when you were with the-- after the garment worker inspecting job, then you went with the peace movement--

Luscomb: Yes-- Women's *International.*

O'Farrell: Was that a paying job?

Luscomb: That was a very low paying job. (Laughs) The peace movement was not a wealthy one or-- (Laughs)

Still isn't.

O'Farrell: / Okay then during the war, what were your main activities-- the main groups that you were involved with during the war years.

Luscomb: I can't tell you. I--

O'Farrell: Okay. Is there any other jobs you held that were particularly you know involved with unions or after that--

Luscomb: No. I don't think so.

O'Farrell: Especially not after the McCarthy period. (Luscomb laughs) That must have just been incredible. The McCarthy period. Just incredible.

Luscomb: Oh it was. It was getting very close to fascism in this country. Very close.

O'Farrell: I can just-- I can vaguely remember as a child hearing about McCarthy and just--

Luscomb: It was terrible.

O'Farrell: Let me ask you just a few general questions. If you could /say-- if you can-- what you would say was the most exciting part of your life-- what period and activities were--

Luscomb: The campaign for woman's suffrage, for the freedom of one-half the human race to have a voice in their own government. The only people who were not allowed-- I mean this was to be a democracy, a government of the people, by the people-- and the only people who were not allowed to have any voice in their government were criminals, the insane and women.

O'Farrell: Have you been at all disappointed in what's happened

with the women's movement since that time or--

Luscomb: No. I'm not at all disappointed in it. I'm just trying to insist that it isn't finished. We've only come so far. And we've got to go on until we finish it. In the last few years I've had a tremendous number of speaking engagements. And it is with the new upsurge of the woman's movement. And-- well in one three year period, I had over a hundred and seventy-  
speaking  
five/engagements, as far west as Chicago. And more than half of them have been on the history of the woman's movement. And I always end up by saying-- I'm telling about how we got our political freedom but saying that we haven't finished the job yet and that we've got to go on. The Declaration of Independence said "All men are created equal." And until we make that read, "All men and women are created equal," we haven't accomplished what the Declaration of Independence was meant to stand for, and that the most bitter discrimination against women today is that against the working women. And according to government figures, forty-six percent of all women of working age are working outside the home. That's pretty close to one-half of all the women of America. And again by government figures, the average pay of the working woman is fifty-nine percent of the average of working men. Or if you're a black woman, the average pay is forty-nine percent of the average pay of men, less than half. And that means that women who work are held down regardless of their abilities, to the lowest paid and/<sup>the</sup>least interesting and creative jobs. They're never promoted according to their abilities. And that is the greatest discrimination against women that still remains. Now they're are other things that need to be done. We need to have

child care centers so that the woman who is working outside the home knows that her children are taken care of and are having development and training and all that will make them happy and valuable citizens of the country, the child care will do that for them. And I sometimes say-- I point out the fact that I have-- well in '62, I visited China. This was long before the United States/<sup>government</sup>was willing to have American citizens go into China. And I visited in Shanghai. I went to see a great industrial plant. It was a machine shop. Had five thousand employees, and about a fifth of them were women, women working as skilled machinests, driving the overhead cranes and all that, getting equal pay for equal work. And the factory maintained a child care center. And it had a nursery. If a woman got pregnant, she had fifty-six days of maternity leave with pay. And when she came back, she could bring her baby there. And it would be at the nursery. And she would get free care for the child. And she would have two half-hour periods a day with pay to nurse her baby. So that you had the woman as a mother not sacrificing, but recognizing that the welfare of the children and the welfare of motherhood was social welfare.

O'Farrell: Yes. That's important for everyone. Do you see China as one of the places to learn more about how to do this.

Luscomb: I absolutely do. I absolutely do.

O'Farrell: Have you been back again or--

Luscomb: No. I've never been back. (Laughs) I was a delegate to a world disarmament conference in Moscow that year. And I

was a delegate to the conference against A and H Bombs in Tokyo. And there was no transportation from Moscow to Tokyo. What people did was to take a plane and go down all the way around India and up through Hong Kong to get to Tokyo. Well, I had been very much interested in China ever since <sup>I read</sup> Edgar Snow's Red Star Over China when it first came out. And I'd followed the developments in China. And so I made up my mind that I would like to go down through China to get to Hong Kong. But there was no way in this country that I could get a visa from China because I knew the United States/<sup>government</sup> at that time was so bitterly opposed to China that if I mailed a letter to the Chinese government, it would never be delivered. But I went to the conference in Moscow, I hunted up the Chinese delegation there and asked them if they could get me a visa. And about a dozen of the other American delegates also asked if they could go into China. Well China had been welcoming people from every country on earth except the United States. They were afraid of getting in spies and saboteurs. And now we know what the CIA has been doing in other countries all over the world, they know that they were wise. So there was one very prominent American woman journalist, Dr. Anna Louise Strong, who had visited China many times and had written various books and lectures, lectured on it, and she had spent the last thirteen years living in Peking. So they sent these-- gave her these names of these dozen Americans and asked her if she could vouch for any of them as being safe for them to let in. And it so happened that when she was on a lecture tour in this country many years ago, I had presided at her two meetings in Boston and entertained/<sup>her</sup> overnight in my home. So she vouched for it that I was not a member of the CIA, and

I got a visa. But the China-- of course generally they give you a visa by stamping/<sup>it</sup>in your passport. But China knew that the United States government would be so critical that they gave me my visa on a separate sheet of paper so there wouldn't be any record of my having gone into China in my passport. So I flew out over the trans-Siberian airline to Novosibirsk in the heart of Siberia. And the Peking airline came up to there. And I just swapped planes in the airport and flew down to Peking. The only trouble was that the dates of these two conferences that I was a delegate at only allowed me eleven days in China. But I spent about five days in Peking and the surrounding territory up in the North. And then I flew down to Shanghai, which was the only place that had industries at that time. And I had four days in that region and then flew down to Canton in the South and had three or four days in that section. And that's only about four hours ride by train out from Hong Kong so I--

O'Farrell: Did they have someone with you the whole time, interpreting--

Luscomb: Yes. The Chinese Peace Committee provided me with guides and interpreters. They had one young woman who went with me all the time. And in each city the local peace committee would provide me with local guides to all the most interesting things in that neighborhood.

O'Farrell: Almost fifteen years later now, would you like to go back and see it again?

Luscomb: Oh I would love to go back. Yes. (Laughs)

O'Farrell: Have you read E. J. Kahn's new book on China?

Luscomb: Who?

O'Farrell: E. J. Kahn. I understand he's just written a book on China. And I haven't seen it yet, and I just--

Luscomb: What's the name of it? Do you know? Kahn?

O'Farrell: Yes. K-A-H-N. It's more though about the American people-- foreign service people who were in China. The <sup>Foreign</sup> Robert Service and that group. But he spent, you know, some time in China now and was also quite-- you know-- quite impressed. Is that a country more so than say Sweden that you would look towards in terms of women-- or the East European countries?

Luscomb: I think it's the most interesting country on earth at the present time. (Laughs) And that's not saying that Sweden and other countries aren't tremendously interesting and tremendously important. What's developing in Africa and what we have got to look forward in course of time in Latin America. It's not yet developed there but--

O'Farrell: But you feel that China right now is--

Luscomb: Right now China is the most interesting in the world, I think. The most significant.

O'Farrell: Particularly in terms of-- but also in terms of women and the level of equality that they have reached.

Luscomb: Absolutely and when you consider what-- Now I was in China-- it was just a little less than thirteen years from the liberation in '49. And in the old China, and that means in '49, the condition of women in China was just unspeakable. A man had a legal right to kill his wife. He could sell her as a slave to anybody else. And one of the first things that new government did was to declare the full equality of women. And when it came-- when they had the land reform and took away the great estates that were owned-- enormous estates-- and distributed them among the peasantry, the women got their share of their land. And all of the laws regarding women were made equal. And that this was done so immediately after--

O'Farrell: In a very short time period.

Luscomb: China has two-- when I was there had two vice-premiers. That's the equivalent of vice-presidents. And one of them was a woman, Madame Sun Yat-sen. Have you ever known of a vice-president in the United States who was a woman? (Laughs)

O'Farrell: No. I don't think we're likely to have one soon either. In terms of efforts in this country, do you see the ERA, the Equal Rights Amendment as the next-- as the most important thing for women <sup>to</sup> do?

Luscomb: It's one of the very very important things, yes. If we don't get it-- if we don't get it ratified by the required number of states in the-- within the next couple of years, why we'll have to have it passed again. And we're going on until we get it passed.

O'Farrell: Do you think that the organized labor has been supportive of that?

Luscomb: I don't know. Probably it's very different in different unions.

O'Farrell: Have you followed or been involved at all in this coalition of labor union women that got started just three years ago I think? It's called CLUE.

Luscomb: I know of it, yes. (Laughs) Not being a labor union woman myself now-- (Laughs)

O'Farrell: Yes. You haven't been directly involved.

Luscomb: <sup>all</sup> After/in about seven months I'll ninety-- (Laughs)

O'Farrell: <sup>That's amazing.</sup> Well from everything I hear you're extremely active and involved in this--

Luscomb: Yes, I am. (Laughing)

O'Farrell: Okay one last question then, which it says here on my list: if you were sixteen again, or could, you know, relive your life, is there any particular thing that you would do different in terms of the woman's movement or your activities? Is there--

Luscomb: No. I don't think I'd do anything different. The-- I've tried to be active in the outstanding social reform movements of the time. And they'd be the same. My judgement may have been wrong. Or I may have not done the best that could have been done. But I did the best that I could judge.

social

O'Farrell: What do you see is the outstanding/issue today?

Luscomb: I think that the world is in the midst of the one of the great ages of social transition. Just as they came from slavery to feudalism and from feudalism to capitalism, I think we are in the process of going from capitalism to socialism-- communism. And no great change like that occurs except over a period of scores of years/ or hundreds of years. You don't change the whole foundations of society. But I have visited in China. I went into the USSR many years ago-- '33 I think it was or '35 the first time. I've been into Cuba. I've been into East Berlin. And I know that that is what the human race is moving towards.

O'Farrell: And that's good.

Luscomb: And it means the welfare of/<sup>a</sup> vastly greater proportion of the human race than you get under capitalism. Capitalism is founded on the welfare of a wealthy ruling class.

O'Farrell: I think that pretty much handles the questions I had.

END OF INTERVIEW