

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL INTERVIEW WITH FLORENCE H. LUSCOMB

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Autobiographical interview with Florence Luscomb

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O'Farrell: Florence, in the written history that you gave me, you said that you became a member of the Boston local of the Stenographers, Typewriters, Bookkeepers and Accountants Union, AF of L. At one time, you were president and delegate to the Boston Central Labor Union. After that you became a member-- when the CIO was formed, you became a member of the United Office and Professional Workers. I'm wondering about-- in our previous interview we didn't talk about the Stenographer, Typewriter, Bookkeeper and Accountant's Union. I wonder if you could just think about and tell me anymore about that local union where you met. If you were president of the local, some of the things you were involved in.

Luscomb: It was-- the branch here in Boston was a very-- I don't know just what work to use-- it was almost a fake union. There was one firm that were public stenographers. I mean where people who didn't have an office-- office work themselves, but if they wanted typewriting done or anything, they would bring

them to this firm. It meant that all the labor unions-- many of the small unions didn't have offices and didn't have office workers, and so they would bring their work to this one firm. It said it belonged-- it had founded the office worker's union here, but they didn't want any other public stenographers office to join the union because they, the first one, had a monopoly on all the stenographic work for all the unions around. So they-- instead of trying to make other-- to get organized the other public stenographer's offices, they were trying to prevent them from joining the union. It was just a business advantage for them. When I finally was made at one time the president of this one union and I wanted to go out on a large organizing campaign to get all the other public stenographer's offices organized and union offices, they wouldn't stand for it, the people who owned this one. So that it was not/looking after the interests of organized labor, but they were looking after their own business interests. So that I was quite disappointed in that union, and that was why when the CIO union / I immediately joined that and worked with that and paid no more attention to this AF of L union.

O'Farrell: Was the AF of L Union-- the people who actually worked there who did the stenographic work-- they were members of the union, and they're the ones that in fact didn't want to organize. Or did the people who owned the company itself--

Luscomb: It was just the people who owned the company were the ones who were the workers there. It was just two or three-- There were a couple of women-- I think there was a man in it too. I don't know whether he was in the union or whether it was merely that he was a friend of the couple of women who work-- who this business. So it wasn't large.

O'Farrell: But you worked with those women as president of the local?

Luscomb: Yes. As I say, I was very anxious to go out on an organizing campaign

all over the city with the other public stenographer's offices. They wouldn't let me do it. So when the CIO started up an office worker's union, I immediately joined that and worked with that and no longer worked-- had any membership in the other one.

O'Farrell: How did you get to have a membership in the other one?

Luscomb: It was just founded, and I was one of the ones who founded it, one of the group that founded it. I think the national union was just founded, and I'm not sure but what I was a delegate at the founding convention of the national one. I can't say that. I don't remember. But there wasn't-- at that time of course when they founded the national one, then we had to organize a local branch here. I was one of the group who worked and founded this branch of the--

O'Farrell: The main members were this-- Oh, this was the CIO.

This was the CIO one.

Luscomb: /I was one of those who founded the Boston branch of it.

O'Farrell: Can you remember who else you worked with in doing that?

Luscomb: No. (Laughs)

O'Farrell: When you were a delegate to the Boston Central Labor Union--

Luscomb: Of course that was AFL. The Central Labor Union was.

O'Farrell: Now is the Boston Central Labor Union-- is that a labor council made up of all the--

Luscomb: Of all the unions that belonged to the American Federation of Labor. This would be a Boston branch of the National Federation.

O'Farrell: Do you remember when that would have been-- when you were a member of the AFL union and on the Boston Central Labor Council?

Luscomb: No. It would be just two or three years before the '39.

O'Farrell: So that was around 1936, '37.

Luscomb: '36 or '37.

O'Farrell: Can you remember anything more about the Boston Central Labor Union?

Luscomb: No, I--

O'Farrell: Did you go to meetings every month or--

Luscomb: I don't remember. (Laughs)

O'Farrell: Do you by any chance remember any other women who were involved? Or was it mostly men?

Luscomb: In the Central Labor Union. There weren't very many women in the labor movement. Mostly the jobs that women held weren't organized. The sales women in department stores-- I don't remember that they had a union at that time, but that would be a field that women would work in. Of course in some of the clothing industries and in/weaving mills, the making of the cloth. But that was not done-- the making of cloth was up in Lowell and up there. That was the center of those. But the making of dresses, making of clothing, sewing up the cloth into clothing was one-- an occupation that the women had very much, although the owners of the shops where they did their sewing were men primarily.

O'Farrell: They would have been organized primarily by the International Ladies Garment Worker's Union. So you were one of the few women who would be on-- who would have gone to the Boston Central Labor Union Meetings.

Luscomb: I don't remember whether I was merely filling in when somebody who would

have gone from the office worker's union was not able to go. I know I did sit in on the Central Labor Union Meetings some time, but I don't think that I was the one who ordinarily went to it.

O'Farrell: Can you remember anything else about those meetings, what kinds of things might have been discussed? Any prominent Boston labor union people?

Luscomb: No. I don't. (Laughs) I was very active from then on for a number of years in the labor movement. When they had strikes on, I went out on the picket lines with all sorts of worker's groups. There were quite a number of women who were not workers but well-to-do women who were very much interested in the labor movement. When there was a strike, there was a little group of them that would very often go out on the picket lines with them.

O'Farrell: When you were involved in the picket lines, was that around this time in the 1930's or was that earlier?

Luscomb: I think it was in the latter part of '39 and around that time and from then on.

O'Farrell: In the thirties and before the war.

Luscomb: When was it that the Second World War started? Wasn't that around '39?

O'Farrell: It began around the late thirties and then we joined in early 1941 I think. So it was around in that time.

Luscomb: It was around in there, but after we, the U.S. joined in the world war, all labor activity-- the labor union's activity was suspended for the war effort. So it would only be up to '41.

O'Farrell: So most of your activity then was when the CIO was getting very active

in organizing.

Luscomb: The CIO was just being organized at that time. I can't tell you the exact year, but '38 or '39. I think it was '39.

O'Farrell: You had told me about a trucking company that you had been involved with picketing. Was that around this time as well, in the late '30's?

Luscomb: I think it was, but I'm not sure.

O'Farrell: Do you remember what trucking company that was by any chance?

Luscomb: I don't remember. I know where it was located. It was just near Central Square in Cambridge. It was just off Central Square. I could point out now where it was on the map.

O'Farrell: You said that you were part of the founding group of the United Office and Professional Workers, and you told me a little bit about some of your organizing efforts. But can you remember anything more specific about founding that group, other people that were involved, people from other unions who might have assisted you?

Luscomb: If I went upstairs and looked over my mailing list, I would know one or two. Mills was one of the women. She lives down towards not Lynn, but up in the northern area here. I'm still in touch with her occasionally. I could get that name for you if you'd like it.

O'Farrell: Okay, maybe we could do that when we're finished talking. Do you remember-- we had talked about your mother and her involvement in these various movements and your sort of growing up with having lots of different ideas presented. Were there any major differences between you and your mother in terms

of the programs that you were interested or the--

Luscomb: No. No difference at all. Mother was interested in the things that I was. In fact the reason I was interested was because she had exposed me to those ideas when I was young.

O'Farrell: Can you remember anymore detail about any of your childhood friends or classmates, any differences that you may have had because you were in a single-parent family and your mother was more radical than--

Luscomb: No. I don't think there were any special differences. I guess I explained why I had to go to a private school rather than a public school. Going to this little private school-- it was small-- the class would not be very great. It wouldn't be like a neighborhood school where we'd all know each other because we lived in the same neighborhood, but they would come from different parts round about, different parts of the city and all, so that we didn't socialize so much after school hours. We were all friends in the school, but as I say we weren't--

O'Farrell: Were there other children who had mothers or parents whose views were similar to your's?

Luscomb: I don't recall any?

O'Farrell: Do you recall being really different then in that respect or--

Luscomb: Well. I don't think that in our school we discussed the social issues or anything like that. You don't generally with grammar school children or high school-- not many of them. You're too busy studying, learning ^{your} / (laughs) mathematics or chemistry in high school or history.

O'Farrell: Even though you didn't go to school in the neighborhood, you still then had friends from the neighborhood that you would also--

Luscomb: Yes. There was a group of us when I lived in Allston that always played together and worked together. We had regular monthly meetings, and we went on ^a ~~went on~~ picnics/together, and things like that, so that there was this little neighborhood group that--

O'Farrell: Do you remember anything special about other things you did or--

Luscomb: No, except we had this one. We called ourselves the philistines. I don't know how they got that name. It was named I guess before I moved into the neighborhood and joined it. We'd have a monthly meeting at one or another person's house, and in the summer time we'd go on picnics together and all that.

O'Farrell: Was this mostly girls?

Luscomb: No. It was both.

O'Farrell: Was this when you were in high school or younger?

Luscomb: This was mainly high school. I'm still a friend of the younger sister of one of the boys that belonged to that group. They lived right across the street from us when we lived in Allston, the first place. The boy was very active in our philistine group, and his sister/ and there was just a youngster who was two or three years old or a year or two old. I'm still in touch with her. She's the one of them that is left alive and is still--

O'Farrell: You're still in touch with her.

Luscomb: Yes.

O'Farrell: You had mentioned that/^{even}when you were very young, you had volunteered

and been involved in the suffrage movement and gone to meetings with your mother. Did this group of kids that you played with, were they involved in things like that as well?

Luscomb: I don't think that they were. It was just a social group of youngsters rather than a group to take part in any civic activities.

O'Farrell: So that you would mostly do the civic things with your mother rather than with other friends that you worked with?

Luscomb: Mostly, yes.

O'Farrell: Do you remember any times when having such radical ideas made you unhappy or was a problem? I suspect that there were many other kids at that time who just didn't have the same kind of--

Luscomb: Well, I don't suppose that I, as a youngster, was really putting very much of my time on social issues, social questions.

O'Farrell: You had talked about your trip^{to England} and learning more about the suffragettes and the suffragists.

Luscomb: 1911.

O'Farrell: Could you talk a little bit more about the relationship of the British movement with the American suffrage movement. Was there a similar kind of split here, like the suffragists and the suffragettes?

Luscomb: Of course, the older organization there was the suffragists, and then Mrs. Pankhurst felt that they weren't being active enough, and they weren't taking the movement out to the man in the street, so that they founded-- Mrs. Elizabeth, Emmeline Pankhurst founded the suffragette movement to do the shocking thing of holding open-air meetings and to do all sorts of things that would bring it to the general public. I guess I told you about what they did at the

gallery at the Parliament there. Things like that. They invented all sorts of things to get publicity to make the public think about the status of women. It was-- to hold open-air meetings on the street corners was shocking.

O'Farrell: Was there a similar division in the American--

Luscomb: We had at that time no militant movement here. We didn't have any open-air meetings. But along around 1908 or '9 or '10, along around there, we read about what had been happening in England and that they were holding open-air meetings. So some of the members of the suffrage association here in Boston, Massachusetts decided that they would like to try and hold open-air meetings. So they arranged to go out to the small town of Bedford here on a Saturday afternoon and hold an open-air meeting. There were two or three of the women who were prominent in the suffrage association here. One was a woman lawyer, Mrs. Teresa Crowley, and another one was a Mrs. Fitzgerald-- Susan Fitzgerald-- one or two others. Those are the two names that occur to me immediately. So they went out one time, one Saturday afternoon^{to}/Bedford. I think they had gone out before and put up notices that they would be there the following Saturday. Right in the heart of the town where they had a little common, they stood there and held their open-air meeting. I went out and saw them. Probably mother went with me. I don't know. I think that was the first open-air meeting that had ever been held for suffrage in this country. But then the movement spread, and we just took to the streets so as to reach the common man and make him think about it.

O'Farrell: Did they get a crowd for their--

Luscomb: They got quite a crowd. Out of just curiosity people would come to see this strange thing, women speaking outdoors in public. They thought that first one was so successful, so valuable that they decided that every Saturday

afternoon they would go to some different township around here and have an open-air meeting. It was three or four weeks later that they asked me if I would speak at one of them. I did. It was my first suffrage speech, and I guess it was my first open-air speech certainly.

O'Farrell: Do you remember where that was?

Luscomb: I don't remember which because they went to these different towns every week. I think I have recollected to where that was, but I don't know whether I could dig out any papers that would tell me.

O'Farrell: Is this when you were a student at MIT?

Luscomb: It depends on whether I was still in high school or at MIT. I can't tell you whether I was in high school or a student at MIT.

O'Farrell: Did you do that again and again?

Luscomb: Then I was regularly speaking at open-air meetings. They had them, not just on Saturday afternoons and then, but they'd hold them in downtown Boston at various times.

O'Farrell: What specific things would you talk about to--

Luscomb: Of course we talked about the fact that the mothers wanted to vote-- ought to have a right to vote in order to have a voice in the public schools that her children were going to, make sure that they were good schools, and all the other conditions that affected the lives of her children. So that was why the mothers needed to vote. But some women who were not mothers but were working women-- that the conditions in which they worked, the amount of pay they got for their work, the conditions, whether they were in the shops

where they worked or whether they were healthful and good for their health and the length of hours they worked, the factory laws that governed the conditions of their work might decide whether they would be healthy and strong or whether they would be sick. So that's why the working women needed a chance to vote. Then of course for the tax-paying women, the wealthy womwn, we said well their money is taken from them in taxes on any property that they own, but that money may not be spent for purposes that they would like to see it spent for. Maybe they'd like to see better schools or public hospitals and so forth. Instead of that maybe the politicians are spending the money on something that they think is wasteful or even harmful. So we put up all of these things.

O'Farrell: For each of the different groups of women. Were there women who opposed your going out and speaking in open-air meetings and--

Luscomb: Of course there were some women who were opposed to suffrage at all. They were of the wealthy-- mostly the wealthy privileged classes who didn't need-- their living conditions weren't affected by law especially. Of course the old motto was that woman's place was in the home. The anti-suffragists were never a large organization, but as I said, they were largely the upper middle class, upper class women who had plenty of money to spend, so that although they were few, they had power and could put on political campaigns.

O'Farrell: Were there any like the women in England who supported suffrage but didn't think that you should go out and have open-air meetings--

Luscomb: There were some. But I think most of the women who believed in suffrage were accepting the open-air meetings and all of the activities to go--

O'Farrell: So you pretty much started where the British suffrage--

Luscomb: Yes. We learned from the British to go into outdoors, go to have to

the open-air meetings.

O'Farrell: Did you work with any labor union people during that period in the suffrage movement?

Luscomb: There were some of the men who were active in the labor movement who were supporters of woman's suffrage. When-- if we had a big meeting, why some of them would speak some times.

O'Farrell: Did you know people like Emma Goldman?

Luscomb: She of course was not here in Massachusetts. I don't know whether she ever spoke at meetings here or not. But I didn't have any direct contact with her.

O'Farrell: Besides these outdoor meetings, did you go to regular meetings of the suffrage movement?

Luscomb: Oh, absolutely. Of course the outdoor meetings would be only in the summertime. You couldn't get a crowd to come out much in winter. Today I don't think many would want to be out standing on a street corner for hours.

O'Farrell: Was there a group of you that continued to work together during that period? Was it a large group or a small group of women?

Luscomb: In the suffrage movement?

O'Farrell: Yes. In Boston.

Luscomb: Yes. We had an active, Boston Equal Suffrage Association for Good Government, was the name of it. Then of course there was the state headquarters which was also located in Boston, but that worked throughout the whole state, and then in other cities and towns, there would be local bodies that would carry on the work.

O'Farrell: Any other kinds of things that you would do? Did you do leaflets or--

Luscomb: Yes. One time, they said-- the argument that the anti-suffragists used was that the women didn't want it. Of course that meant not only the anti-suffrage women, but it meant any politician that was opposed to it would say, "Well, the women don't want it. It's just these handful of cranks that are asking for this." So we set out in Boston once to get a petition signed by women that would be the equivalent to the majority of women in Boston who would be eligible to vote. Nobody knew how many women would be eligible to vote, but we assumed that there would just the same number of women eligible as the men who were eligible. So we set out to get a petition signed by women that would be the equivalent to the ^{majority of} men voters. I can't remember just how much it was. I may have some record of that somewhere. It was thousands and thousands. I don't know. The number that comes to mind is a hundred thousand. But whether there were two hundred thousand men voters, we set out to get a majority of the same number of women voters. So for about a year, we worked canvassing door-to-door all over the city, and getting the signatures of women, and we got the ^{the} majority, the number that was/equivalent to a majority of the men voters in the ^{to pass a bill} women. Every year we were trying to get the legislature/to enfranchise the women in the state elections. So we'd have a hearing at the state house on the bill that was filed to amend the state constitution to allow women to vote just on the same terms as men. So after we'd got all these signatures and petitions, I remember the hearing at the state house, the hearing that was being held on the amendment to amend the state constitution. Then we brought in these great big piles, piles and piles, armloads of this, that said women were asking to have the amendment to the state constitution to allow women to vote. We went in the public hall, up in the state house where the hearing on the bill was being held and laid down on the table in front of the hearing there, laid down

these thousands--- ten of thousands and perhaps a hundred thousand-- we got the number whatever it was that would have given us a majority. Their eyes fairly bugged out. It was very impressive. But that had meant that we had actually canvassed door-to-door all through the city, in the slums, in the fashionable Back Bay district, in the foreign sections, all of that.

O'Farrell: How many women were there who were doing this kind of work. Were there just a couple of you who kind of kept at it?

Luscomb: Oh there were more than that, a great many more. I can't tell/^{you}how many. Of course we not only did the canvassing, but if there was a woman's club, we try at one of their meetings to ask if we could speak there and circulate the petition there. Or one of their members might undertake to circulate the petition at the club meeting.

O'Farrell: Did you do other lobbying at the state house?

Luscomb: Oh yes. We lobbied. Every year we put in this amendment to the state constitution. So we lobbied every year.

O'Farrell: You then became secretary of the Boston Equal Suffrage--

Luscomb: I was the assistant executive secretary. The executive secretary was Mrs. Pinkham, Mrs. Winnona Pinkham. She was the executive secretary to plan all the work, and I was the assistant executive secretary.

O'Farrell: Was that the group that you worked with--

Begin Tape Two, Side Two

O'Farrell: You were saying that the state sent out two groups to reach the women who lived in rural areas where you didn't even have any contacts. You

were in charge of one of these groups.

Luscomb: Yes. Between these two, why we covered all of these small towns. We would go and spend a day in each township and canvass. If we saw a man out in the field working, we'd run out to him and hand him a leaflet and tell him why he ought to vote yes on the referendum that fall. Then we'd canvass all the homes and talk with the women and try to find those that were-- a little group of them that were really strongly in favor that would form a little local group and carry on the agitation up to election day. If there was any small local industry-- there might be a sawmill or something like that, we'd have an open-air meeting at noontime. When the whistle blew at noontime, the men came out to get their lunch. We'd be there and telling them-- handing out leaflets and saying, "Come back at half past twelve for an open-air meeting." So a lot of them would come back at half past twelve, and we'd have half an hour for an open-air meeting until the whistle blew at one, and they had to go back to work. So maybe we'd have-- in a good many of the towns a noontime meeting at the industry, and then we'd have-- if there was an East Podunk and and a West Podunk, we'd have two meetings in the evening, one at seven and the other one at eight-thirty in the other one. That's when-- I guess I told you I'd made two hundred and twenty-two speeches in nineteen weeks/ ^{on that campaign.} Did I tell about the man--

O'Farrell: No.

Luscomb: At the end of the meeting-- I did all the speaking on that campaign. I was the speaker on that party-- I was in charge of the party. After I got through speaking and having a little question period, then I would announce that we had large yellow VOTES FOR WOMEN buttons. We'd sell them for a penny a piece. But of course if you wanted to help the cause and pay more, why we wouldn't refuse to take it. So there was one very small town. It was up just

outside of Haverhill. I don't remember the name-- which town it was-- but a very small country town. I'd made the speech, and I was going through the crowd with a handful of these buttons, "Anybody want a button, want a button, want a button." One man said to me very earnestly and very sincerely as he gave me double the required amount, he said, "It was worth two cents to hear you speak." (Laughter)

O'Farrell: Who were some of the other women that went with you? Do you remember who went with you on that trip?

Luscomb: I can't tell you their names. They shifted. Generally they would come out for a week or two. There were one or two of the people, girls who stayed through the entire campaign. But I don't remember the names.

O'Farrell: Were there any state legislators that you worked with particularly?

Luscomb: If we were working in the home town of one of the legislators, why we would call on him decidedly, but most of them would live in the cities, most of the legislators or the bigger towns. We were going only in the extreme rural areas, so it was very seldom that there would be any man who had been elected to the legislature who came from a very small town. . . (interview interrupted) . . . I probably have written up in-- and I can go upstairs and try to dig it out in some of my files there, some of the experiences in this campaigning, both when we were covering the state, but other times.

O'Farrell: Are there any materials that we could make copies of? I'd be happy to do that, make copies and make sure you got all of the original ones back. . . . What happened with the state referendum?

Luscomb: We were defeated in that state referendum, but it left the state

thoroughly organized. We had contacts to every city and town. The movement was very much stronger because of that referendum even though we didn't though get a majority of the men to vote for it, but/^{we}undoubtedly had converted a lot of men that hadn't ever thought about it anyway. It was just four years after that the Congress passed the federal amendment, the amendment to the national constitution. That had to go down to the states to be ratified by the thirty-six state legislatures. Massachusetts legislature ratified it within four weeks. It was one of the earliest states to ratify it. We always felt that it was because we'd built up such a strong organization and educated the whole population of the state so much through our 1915 referendum that the Massachusetts legislature was willing to ratify it immediately. We were one of the earliest states to ratify it.

O'Farrell: Were there any legislators that you had particular contact with or remember as particularly supportive?

Luscomb: I'll read you a little poem that I wrote on two of the legislators. (Laughs)
 . . . (Interview interrupted) . . . For the state legislature, (reading out loud)
 "There are a few men here and there who fight the battles of advancing womanhood in halls of legislation, platform, press. Where woman can not serve herself, they serve her. I speak them words of thanks. A dumb dog can not speak his thanks when he is served, but he fawns before you, he crouches at your feet. He writhes his gratitude from head to tail tip. His adoration overflows his eyes. He licks your hand. I can thank the men who serve advancing womanhood. I thank them with set phrases. I thank them with conventional *glances* I thank them with formal handclasps. My spirit is a little dog at their feet. (Laughs) You asked about some of the men. These were two of the Massachusetts senators.

O'Farrell: Which senators were they?

Luscomb: Shuebruk and Gibbs. . . So they were two of the men--

O'Farrell: Do you remember anything more about those two men?

Luscomb: No.

O'Farrell: Would you go and meet ^{with} them in their offices and talk to them about the legislation?

Luscomb: Probably would have.

O'Farrell: Did the Boston Equal Suffrage Association have offices in Boston

Luscomb: Yes.

O'Farrell: Do you remember where they were?

Luscomb: At various times they were at different places. There's a street-- and the street that runs paralell to--
I don't remember the name of it . . . (interview interrupted) . . . / is it
Beacon Street that runs up in front of the State House?

O'Farrell: Yes. I think so.

Luscomb: There's one street--

O'Farrell: Park Street is on--

Luscomb: It comes up at one side, but I mean the one that runs right in front of it and goes up way up through ^A . There's a street that runs paralell to that just the next street over. If you went down Charles Street, you'd come to it. Our offices were on that, opposite the Public Gardens.

O'Farrell: So you were very close to the State House.

Luscomb: Yes. That was one of the places where we had our offices at one time, but I don't know the others. (Shuffling through papers) If you want to take this, you can see. This is a woman at MIT. This is what it was like to be a woman at MIT. They asked me to speak on that one time to the-- So if you want . . .

O'Farrell: Yes . . . Let me make a copy of this and get it back to you.

Luscomb: That may be the talk that I gave at an MIT meeting that they had at one time. This is from the Christian Science Monitor, a picture about-- We got the vote by demonstrating. This is the way we looked when we did it. The women's clothes at that time came down all the way down. These are various-- This is a British suffragette. (Still going through papers) This was our little automobile that we toured the state in 1915. This was the young man/^{who}was our chauffeur in it, and here were--

O'Farrell: Could you drive yourselves or did you--

Luscomb: We had a young man.

O'Farrell: Was that because you didn't know how to drive or it was--

Luscomb: I learned how to drive during this summer when we were going. He taught me to drive, so I got so I could-- remember we weren't going to the cities; we were going through the rural areas, the small towns. So we went over just little dirt roads and up over hillsides and all. When you got to be able to drive like that, it was nothing to drive it through a city, well paved streets, afterwards. So I got my driving license in 1915 from that. All that you had to do in those days to get a driving license was to send in a sworn statement that you had driven a hundred miles. Then my mother gave me a first car in 1920. But those are pictures of the campaign in 1915.

O'Farrell: Were people friendly when you went out and talked to them like that?

Luscomb: Mostly. Yes. (Still going through papers) That's the National Organization for Women. These are very old. This is from the Syracuse newspaper, January 27th, 1914. Mrs. Catt was the national president of the Suffrage Association then. At that time, just before the federal amendment was passed by congress in 1919, the suffrage associations all over the country had I think it was two hundred thousand members of the organization. I did some special campaigning out in New York State in Syracuse when they had a referendum on their state constitution. These are the other women who were there. . .

O'Farrell: Do you remember Mrs. Catt very well? Did you talk with her?

Luscomb: Yes. Not intimately, but I have met her.

O'Farrell: Your mother went to this meeting as well? It says Mrs. H.S. Luscomb and Miss Florence Luscomb.

Luscomb: H.S. Luscomb would be my mother.

O'Farrell: Can you describe Carrie Chapman Catt? Do you remember much about her at all?

Luscomb: She was the national president, and she was a regular statesman in planning all the strategies, the things that we should do, where we should concentrate in our activities on certain congressional districts when we wanted to make those men vote in Washington on the federal amendment and so forth.

O'Farrell: Did you work with Francis Perkin at all when you'd go to New York? She became Secretary of Labor under Roosevelt.

Luscomb: She used to come to the National American Suffrage-- the annual

national conventions that we held. I've heard her speak there.

O'Farrell: One newspaper article from the Syracuse Journal in which Florence Luscomb and her mother, Mrs. H. S. Luscomb attended a meeting with Mrs. Carrie Chapman Catt and a group of district suffrage leaders photographed at the Y.M.C.A. Which one are you? Can you find yourself?

Luscomb: Oh, am I in there? I think I'm there, just peaking round that hat.

O'Farrell: The second article is from the Post Standard, Syracuse, New York Tuesday morning, January 27th, 1914. "Women will vote in 1915," says Mrs. Catt; chairman of Empire State Campaign Committee speaks at opening session of suffrage conference in Y.M.C.A. Hall."

Luscomb: This is a talk which I gave before the League of Women Voters, and you might like to take this. It tells about how the League of Women Voters got founded through Mrs. Catt's suggestion at the National American Women's Suffrage Convention in 1919 when the federal amendment had been passed by Congress but not yet ratified. You can take that. This is just my general talk on the history of the woman's movement. These are just various talks that I have given, generally the same, or covering the same ground. Now the suffrage association-- the Boston association had its headquarters at 585 Boylston Street, Boston.

O'Farrell: That gives some of the names of some of the other people involved?

Luscomb: Yes. Those are the offices on the letterhead. We had all sorts of publicity stunts, a bluebird! (Laughter)

O'Farrell: That's wonderful. I wonder if we could make a copy of that. I think [?] it was union-made.

Luscomb: Oh, this was-- I wonder if this gives the year on this. September 1st, 1889. There were suffrage leaflets that they got out, published fortnightly by the American Woman's Suffrage Association at 3 Park Street, Boston.

O'Farrell: Was your mother involved in something like this?

Luscomb: Did I tell you about how I got started on this. Mother 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 child of five, I can't tell you what she said. But I remember distinctly the two things, the fact that I was at that convention, and that they said to me, "Oh, this woman speaking now is Susan B. Anthony!" So from that time on, I was in the movement. This is Olive Schreiner who lived in South Africa, and she wrote "Three dreams in a desert." These little leaflets were published-- I don't know whether they came monthly or what-- but this is her story and a list of other leaflets. You can see the subjects that they covered in double leaflets. You might like that. Now this is another woman's suffrage leaflet on Lucy Stone. This one is 1893, September 1893. That's just a personal letter from Margaret Bondfield in England who was very active in that. . .

O'Farrell: Do you have some articles written on your trip to China?

Luscomb: No. I don't think I have. This was during what we call the McCarthy Era. I got called up. They had an investigation here in Massachusetts, and I got called up for it. This is the speech that I made there. I didn't take the fifth amendment, but I just told them it was none of their business.

O'Farrell: Were you called up because of some of the organizations that you had belonged to?

Luscomb: Oh yes. Very much.

O'Farrell: Did you belong to the Socialist or Communist Party?

Luscomb: No, I didn't. I believed in communism and socialism, but there were certain of their policies and the activities that they were doing that I didn't think were the proper way of selling their cause to the public and all, so I didn't belong to them. But I never hesitated to admit that I believed in that system. In 1935, I went to the Soviet Union and had a month and a half there.

O'Farrell: Were you with a group that went?

Luscomb: No. I went by myself.

O'Farrell: Did you know anyone?

Luscomb: Well they were having a world congress inviting people from all over the world to come to this conference in Moscow, and I went as one of the delegates to study what the new conditions were. Of course in '35, it wasn't too many years. It was less than twenty years from the founding of the-- If you would like. . . . And this was an article that I wrote for publication in the Monthly Review. This was-- I don't know what magazine this is-- oh the American Socialist, "Witch-hunts I have seen." It was during the witch-hunt period. So they asked me to tell what I had seen. So if you want . . . (interview interrupted)
...

O'Farrell: You had mentioned also that . . . (interview interrupted) . . .
You had mentioned the Women's Trade Union League a little bit in our last talk. I was wondering if you could talk a little bit more about the trade union league here in Boston. There's really not a great deal of information available about the League.

Luscomb: I was a member of that. In fact I think I was on the board for a while. We were trying to build up the labor movement among the women who worked in Boston of course, and also when there were bills before the legislature, we would attend and speak, either for or against depending on what the bill was purported to do. So it was to be the voice of the working women.

O'Farrell: Were you involved in the lobbying, speaking for or against different bills?

Luscomb: Yes. We would. I can't tell/^{you}what particular bills. I don't remember now because it was many years ago. But I know I did lobbying on various bills.

O'Farrell: Was that/^{at}the same time that you were working on the suffrage movement or was it after?

Luscomb: It was afterwards. I don't think the Women's Trade Union League/^{existed}during the suffrage period. I don't know when it was founded. But the women who were working on the suffrage movement-- there was so much to do that we were not taking part in other things. We might belong to an organization that was something we believed in, but the time would be putting

O'Farrell: So it was after the vote was won that you then became active in the Women's Trade Union League?

Luscomb: Yes.

O'Farrell: Do you remember any of the union women in particular who might have been involved in that or the kinds of-- Did you do educational programs?

Luscomb: I have such an abominable memory for names. Probably in some of these documents that I just leafed through here--

O'Farrell: Do you remember any of the programs? You did lobbying. Did you do educational programs?

Luscomb: I can't tell you. I do not remember.

O'Farrell: Were you active in the league for very long?

Luscomb: Oh yes. It was several years at least that I was on the board there. I always worked with it. I was a member.

O'Farrell: You had also mentioned that your mother was involved in a meeting of the Knights of Labor. I just wondered if you could remember any other stories about that?

Luscomb: It wasn't a meeting. She belonged to it. She joined the organization. It was the first nation-wide labor organization that was in existence. It would take in as members people who were not themselves workers. My mother had inherited for whom she was named, from her grandmother, Hannah Skinner-- she had inherited some real estate property in Saint Louis which was where her grandmother lived. I judge that the family had gone out/(in) pioneer days and just had a farm and that it finally became in the heart of Saint Louis and very valuable real estate. When she died, she left her real estate there to my mother. Now what started me off on that? Oh you were asking about my mother. So my mother-- her father's family had come over before the revolution and had fought in the revolution, and they settled out-- they were farmers out in the Berkshire hills.

O'Farrell: You told me some of this in our other meeting.

Luscomb: Oh yes. But my grandfather, my mother's father, graduated from Amherst and from the Harvard Law School and was a very successful lawyer. Her mother died when she was twelve and the five children were sent away to boarding school.

So she wasn't raised in the heart of a family and educated to believe certain things. All the causes that she was interested in were things that she herself had thought through before.

O'Farrell: And the Knights of Labor was one of those--

Luscomb: She joined the Knights of Labor, and she was active in the suffrage movement.

O'Farrell: Did she ever talk about going to any meetings of the Knights of Labor?

Luscomb: She didn't talk about that, but she took me as a child to all sorts of meetings that might be on labor issues, or they might be on other issues. But she was not a very strong woman. She felt that in the private schools that she was raised in as a small child-- and this was during the Civil War when there was shortage of food and all-- and she felt she was half-starved then, and she was never very physically strong. But she took a part and went to meetings and contributed to organizations and did all that. But it meant that she had thought through her opinions. I remember-- I probably said this-- I remember that when I was fairly young-- I suppose I was ten or twelve or something or other, we got up very early one morning to go down to Lynn-- of course the transportation was much slower in those days-- to get down to Lynn in the middle of the morning for an open-air rally for Eugene V. Debs.

O'Farrell: I think you said that the first time you voted afterwards--

Luscomb: I voted for Debs. I cast my first vote for president for Eugene V. Debs. But Mother was always on the side of labor, of the working people.

O'Farrell: Do you remember much about Debs, about seeing him or--

Luscomb: No. I was a ten or eleven year-old child-- wouldn't remember much of what he said. But I followed his career and all of that. I thought I had written, "What was it like to work for suffrage?" I thought that I was asked some time to make a speech on that subject, and I don't find it. But if I do locate it anywhere, I'll mail it to you.

O'Farrell: I thought that you did give me one that was--

End of Interview