

## A Jewish Immigrant in the Maritimes: The Memoirs of Max Vanger

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# DOCUMENT

## A Jewish Immigrant in the Maritimes: The Memoirs of Max Vanger

### INTRODUCTION

BETWEEN 1901 AND 1921 more than 140,000 Jews migrated to Canada, the vast majority driven from the Pale of Settlement in western Russia by anti-Semitic laws and violent pogroms. Nearly 3,500 people settled in Atlantic Canada, mostly in Halifax and Saint John.<sup>1</sup> One of them, Max Vanger, arrived in the Maritimes before the First World War and subsequently recorded his experiences in considerable detail. Writing for his grandchildren during the winter of 1966-67 at his home in New York City, Vanger recalled his early life in the Maritimes as a shoemaker, peddler, lumberman, garment cutter, shopkeeper and fish merchant before he had emigrated to the United States.<sup>2</sup>

Vanger was born in White Russia to one of seven Jewish families in a village of more than 300 Russian peasants. His father was the village blacksmith, and Vanger's earliest memories concern the shop where his father made horseshoes and sharpened tools with the help of his sons. Apprenticed at age 12 to a shoemaker, Vanger learned to hate the smell of leather. Writing against his parents' wishes to an uncle already in Canada, he began saving for his passage to the New World. When the uncle responded favorably, "I stopped taking orders [for shoes, and] told everybody that I was going to America. I did not know that Canada was a separate country but it did not make any difference to me". After a tearful departure from the parents he was never again to see, he and another boy began the hazardous journey to Liverpool where they finally boarded a ship for Halifax. During the five and a half day trip he suffered severely from seasickness: "I thought I was dying". A day after disembarking in Canada in 1910 he arrived in Saint John at age 16.

This excerpt focuses on his first five years in New Brunswick and Nova Scotia.<sup>3</sup> In simple but evocative prose, Vanger offers vivid and often amusing or poignant accounts of his living and working experiences. He quickly adjusted to the multifarious world of the Bluenose jack-of-all-trades, learning English as he

1 See Bernard L. Vigod, *The Jews in Canada* (Ottawa: Canadian Historical Association Booklet No. 7, 1984). See also Sheva Medjuck, *Jews of Atlantic Canada* (St. John's, 1986).

2 Max Vanger, "A Dream Came True: Memoirs" (typescript, 1967), 128 pp. I am indebted to Milton I. Vanger, Cambridge, Massachusetts, for bringing his father's memoir to my attention. A copy of the typescript has been deposited in the archives of the New Brunswick Museum, Saint John. Ninety-three pages are devoted to Max Vanger's experiences in the Maritimes. A much condensed version of the full document appeared in the *American Jewish Historical Quarterly*, LXIII (September 1973), pp. 57-88, under the title, "Memoirs of a Russian Immigrant".

3 The present document reproduces pp. 31-52 of the typescript. Some paragraphing has been added to improve the readability.

moved into and out of a wide variety of occupations. His work reveals both the fluidity of class lines in the Maritimes for an energetic and talented immigrant and the uncertain business climate that could turn an opportunity quickly into a disaster. During intervals of illness, discouragement, or joblessness, an aunt or uncle gave him sustenance and pointed him in a new direction. Like so many immigrants from the Pale, he gravitated into left-wing politics and joined the Socialist Party of Canada local in Saint John. He also organized the Saint John branch of the Arbeiter Ring (Workmen's Circle), a North American working-class Jewish fraternal organization based in New York City. Throughout the document Vanger's excellent recall of people and places offers those telling details that make his reminiscence ring especially true.

The remaining portions of Vanger's memoir provide a detailed account of peasant life in Russia before his departure and also chronicle several other business ventures in New Brunswick. On the eve of the Great War he made \$30,000 shipping salmon to Boston and Montreal and lost it when the fish spoiled. As the price of hides rose, he began touring the countryside in a Model T, buying both cattle and junk. A little later, harvesting lumber on a tract he had purchased, he boasted of becoming "the first Jew that actually worked in the woods" of New Brunswick. He returned to the scrap metal and hide business after a brief partnership in a Saint John shoe store. In 1923 he fell in love with a young lady visiting relatives in Saint John and followed her to her home in New York City.

ROBERT H. BABCOCK

My uncle came to meet us at the pier with a horse and wagon. When we saw him we were so delighted to see someone we knew. He took us to his home and I stayed with them. My friend who came with me went to my uncle's father who was his uncle. Here is where my first disappointment began. My friend went with his uncle the very next day peddling for junk and the first day he made two dollars as his share. I was staying in the house talking with my aunt. She knew that I was a shoe maker but that was below their dignity to allow me to work as a shoe maker. I did go out in the street and saw a shoe repair store. I walked in but I could not talk to the man so made signs that I was a shoe maker and wanted to work at it. He understood me and signaled for me to come to work the next day. I was so happy that I too would be able to earn some money but just as I got home and told my aunt that I got a job to go to in the morning as a shoe maker, she would not think about it and would not allow me to work at it and I should not feel bad that I did not earn any money. I did not have to pay her for board until I got something different to do other than a shoe maker.

I was not doing anything for days and weeks until finally I tried to peddle to buy old rubbers, tea, lead, etc., but after I would get one bag full it was too heavy for me to carry it to the junk shop. I would put it in a place mark down the address and go to the junk shop and wait until a peddler would bring his day's collections to sell and would ask him to do me a favor and go with me to bring the few bags I had already collected and one was a distant relation so he could not refuse me. He would go with me and bring the bags and I would sell what I had and made out quite good but I did not like this kind of arrangement.

Neither did I like to be a junk peddler, it was not what I dreamed I would be doing so I went to the junk dealers and asked if they needed anyone to work for them. I would do it once in awhile when one needed to load a railroad car. He would tell me to come to work and he did pay me two dollars a day but it was hard work, mostly handling 500 lbs. bales of old rubbers; two men with hooks and handles would load these bales first on a wagon called *slaven* [sloven]<sup>1</sup> and then into a freight car. After working at it for a day I would be so tired; I was only a little over sixteen years old and never did such heavy work. And on top of the hard work I would get so dirty that I was actually ashamed to come home, not mentioning how I felt internally about my experiences in the new country — it was not what I dreamed of for quite a while.

But I did not give up. I worked at whatever I could find so long as I earned something. My aunt with whom I stayed did not want me to do this kind of work; she used to tell me that I should not feel bad that I was not paying for my room and board which amounted to two dollars a week, but I looked forward. A man promised he would take me in his cloak and suit factory to become a cutter when the season began, and a countryman of mine who was living there for a number of years was a junk peddler. His territory was Digby, N.B., [*sic*] and he came to town to sell whatever he had accumulated. My uncle who was the dealer that bought from all the peddlers suggested that he take me with him for a while and he agreed. We went to Digby, N.S. by boat; it took 3 hours to get there. He had an old bucky-horse and stayed in a cheap boarding house and was not too ambitious. He would get up in the morning, look out through the window and if it did not look good he would say it is going to rain and we would not go on the road that day. Finally we did start out and if a house was a little distance from the road he would say "oh, this farmer did not have anything to sell anyhow" and pass him and go to the next farmer. I was too anxious to earn some money so I would say to him you stay here and I would run over to the farm house and in most of the houses I would buy a little and gradually we did get some bags full on the wagon until one day we went to a place called Digby Neck. We had to leave the horse and wagon and cross a small distance by a motor boat. The people there were all fishermen and as it turned out there was no peddler there for years, if ever. Every house we went to they would lead us to a pile of heap,

1 A two-wheeled, horse-drawn cart widely used in Saint John for hauling goods.

rubber boots and some other things we bought in a short time we picked up a good load from all the houses there and we hired a motor boat to take us across to mainland. My friend knowing that his horse would not pull up the wagon loaded so we got a farmer with a team of oxen and cart and he brought up our load to the road. I was so happy because it was a very profitable trip up till then with one exception — it was on a Saturday. Although I was never a religious person I never did work on a Saturday before.

We loaded our wagon. We must have had a dozen bags stuffed with rubbers, tea, lead, etc., and we started back home. For a while it was fine as long as the road was level or down the hill but before long we came to a small hill. The horse would pull the wagon only so far and would start to back up, both of us trying to hold the wagon from rolling in the ditch by holding on the rear wheels. If the horse would only not push the wagon backward we could probably be rolling the wheels by the spokes up the hill but it was no use — my friend would take the horse out of the shafts and we would unload the wagon, carry all the bags up the hill on our shoulders and then hitch up the horse and an empty wagon he would pull up the hill. We loaded the wagon and as long as it was level we rode or walked alongside the wagon until the next up-grade and the same thing would happen — unload the wagon, carry up all the bags to the top of the hill and bring up the horse and wagon, load it and go on to the next hill.

Beating the horse did not help at all, he sure was bucky, and I began to think what kind of life this was, how a man could go on and endure such a life. True, he probably never had such a load at any one time and did not travel on this road. At any rate I just could not take it until my friend got so mad he took the horse out of the harness, led him into a wooded area, tied him to a tree and picked up a good sized limb and started to beat that horse so mercilessly that I begged him to stop. He said he would either kill him or cure him. There were welts all over the horse. It was a miracle that the horse could still stand on his feet. Finally he harnessed the horse, hitched him all the time the horse was either shaking or jumping and he pulled the load the entire distance home, not once stopping. My friend did not stop beating him either; all this time I was in agony for I never yet witnessed anything like it and I was saying to myself that Saturday I would never forget and I did not. I stayed with this man for just about a week and we shipped out our merchandise to town and after paying all expenses my share was \$35.00 but I would not go back for any amount.

I stayed in town [Saint John] to do odd jobs until one day the man that promised to give me a job sent for me. I went and he told me I could start to work but the first 4 weeks he would not pay me anything, then he would tell me how much he would pay me. I agreed and was very happy thinking finally I would be settled, learn a new trade that was in demand everywhere. I came home and told my aunt and she too was happy for she was like a mother to me. I had another aunt and uncle living there. They were poor. My uncle was a cutter in a small factory and my uncle told me that I should buy myself a new suit for the suit I

was wearing was not stylish enough. Actually it was a hand tailored suit made in Russia by a cousin of mine. I could not contradict him for he was living there for many years and since I already had some money and was going to work in a factory, I wanted to be presentable.

So we went and bought a new suit and paid seventeen dollars. To me it was a lot of money to pay for a suit. I took the new suit to a tailor to make the cuffs on the pants. When the tailor looked at the suit I was wearing, he could not get over the workmanship and material the suit was made of. He told me to keep the suit I was wearing for good wear only and wear the new suit everyday for I could not get a suit like I was wearing for any price, either the cloth or the workmanship. Only I did not have another suit and I was wearing my suit in all the dirty work I was doing. This tailor told me he would clean and press my suit and make the pants wider. It turned out that the new suit I just bought and the weather there is damp and a lot of rain and fog, the first time I wore the new suit and got a little wet the fronts got wrinkled and turned up. The material in general got so wrinkled I was heartbroken. After spending so much money and got so poor a garment, but I was going to work and learn a trade and hoped to earn good money and become independent.

I reported to work the day I was told to and was introduced to the cutter. He told me to just look around and see what he was doing and in time he would give me some work. I did watch him — how he was laying out the patterns and marking the cloth. After he marked it I told him if he would let me I could cut it. He looked at me but said nothing. One day went by and he did not allow me to do anything until I went to him and told him that if I would spoil anything I would pay for it so he gave me to cut the canvas and I tried to do it fast so I'd get other things to do but I could see he did not want me to learn much. I kept after him and he could not refuse me. He did allow me to cut a single lay and I did it good but I was idle more than working.

Besides learning to cut I did some errands. One day the boss told me to go to the wholesale house and pick up a roll of lining and I went over and got the package. A clerk gave me a book to sign my name on the bill he made out. I signed my name in Russian for I did not know how to sign it in English. A few days passed and the boss called me into his office and he told me that I would have to learn to sign my name in English or they would not accept my Russian signature. That very evening a young man came to our house and I asked him to write out my name in English. He did as it sounded to him, not the way it should really be, and that was how I adopted my name the way it is, namely Vanger which is a very odd name. I doubt there is another name like it. I practised writing my name that evening and the young man told me it was good. The next day I told my boss that I could sign my name in English and he could send me to pick up packages if he needed.

Gradually I began to cut more cloth single or double. In about two weeks I asked the cutter to let me lay out a pattern. If I didn't lay it out good no harm

would be done for whenever he laid out a pattern I would watch every part where he would lay it and I memorized it. He did allow me to lay out a pattern. After I showed it to him he looked it over and said it was right. I asked him to let me mark it. He did and I showed him. He put the pattern on a few markers and said it was correct. I cut the lay and got the canvas as well as the lining in short order but he would not give me enough to do. I was idle more than I worked. He was afraid that I would take away his job. There was little I could do. I urged him to let me do the work that he was doing such as make a lay, that is put many layers of cloth one on top another then cut it with a long knife about two feet long and there was a groove in the table with two strips of metal wide enough for the knife to put in and that was the way they used to cut thick layers. There weren't any electric cutting machines at that time, at least not in St. John anyway. That he said he would not allow me to do, but I watched him every move he made and I knew I could do it right, but to no avail. I just stayed doing nothing most of the time.

When the fourth Saturday came around the boss called me in his office. I thought he would tell me what he would pay me a week. Instead he told me he was sorry he could not keep me as there was not enough work for two cutters and although he did not have to pay me anything for the past 4 weeks, he gave me five dollars. Needless for me to say how I felt at the moment. All my hopes were gone and no more hopes to get another job. I came home and no sooner I got in the house my aunt saw something must have happened to me. She asked if I felt alright. I told her what happened. She tried to calm me and said not to worry something would turn up and lo and behold within an hour or two a man came to our house. He heard that I lost my job and he needed a cutter to cut skirts only and he told me he would pay me 12 dollars a week. I told him I would be glad to accept the offer. He told me to come in to his factory the next day which was Sunday and he showed me how to make a marker and the few patterns he had. It was very easy work but I could not speak English and the few girl operators and the presser all spoke English. The new boss introduced me to the help and he told them that I did not speak English, to cooperate with me, and he went away on the road.

There I was, left in charge of the small factory. I did the cutting, gave the work to the girls. If a belt broke on a machine I fixed it. Everything worked fine. The orders came in; my copy was written in Yiddish so that I could understand how to cut them and what colors. This job lasted for a few months until we used up all the cloth. The boss came home, laid off all the help, and told me he was sorry to lay me off too but he was going out of business. He gave me a nice bonus for a good job I did and he told me that he had a job for me in another town called Amherst, N.S. They needed a pants cutter. I said I would take it. He called them on the telephone and they told him to tell me to come and they would take care of me.

By now I was able to speak a little English. I got myself a book called a

reader. Small children used them in the first grade and a cousin of mine showed me the alphabet. I wrote in Yiddish on each letter and gradually learned to read a little. I came home and told my aunt what had happened and I was leaving for Amherst, N.S. She did not like the idea but there was nothing else I could do. I got all my belongings together. I wrote to the new bosses the day and train I was coming on. There was only one train a day anyhow. They met me at the station and took me to the place where they lived. They were two brothers, both single, and they had several well furnished rooms in the same building where the factory was, and they gave me a room for myself. They had a cutter but he wanted me to learn. He was a nephew of theirs and waited to leave as soon as he could and I took over in short order for if one knew how to make a marker once, that is all that was needed.

Every lay was just the same in all respects, the sizes and the number of pants in each lay. There were over 20 operators, all girls, and two pressers, one Jewish man employed beside me. The work was not easy, for one cutter had to supply all the girls with work and some of them could make twenty pairs of pants a day; that meant I had to cut at least three hundred pair a day there to supply the girls with work. It all had to be done by hand; they did not have an electric cutting machine but as long as I did not have to do anything else, just do the cutting, I was able to supply all the girls with work. After the cutter left, either one of the bosses would help if a machine stopped or a belt broke, count the pants and bundle them to ship them to the mill that supplied us with the cloth. The mill was owned by a group as a cooperative. The farmers sent in the wool, the mill made cloth out of it and had it made into pants and charged the farmers the actual cost. We were never short of cloth; the mill knew how many rolls we needed each day and we were well supplied with cloth.

I did all the cutting and handed out the work to the girls only as long as either or both bosses were around but this lasted for a few months and I was contented for I was earning good money for that period. I think I was getting \$20.00 a week for regular hours from 8 A.M. to 6 P.M., Saturday 5 P.M. Only occasionally I had to work overtime; then both of the bosses went on the road. They decided to manufacture pants and sell to the stores all over Canada and that was when my trouble began for besides cutting I had to give out the work, take care of all minor things and when the cloth arrived I had to mark down the number of rolls and yards in each roll. We had to bring the rolls in to the factory on the 3rd floor through a window by way of a block and tackle. One man would grab the rolls and pull in and the same thing to lower the pants. I used to count them, tie them in bundles, mark down each bundle and the number of pants in each bundle.

All this took time and very often a machine would start to skip the stitch and we had no machinist in the factory or in town. We had one or two extra machines so as long as they were in working order I would change the machine but that did not last long and I had to start fixing the sewing machines; first I



only did that in evenings for I did not know anything about the sewing machines and I only would take a part as many parts I saw, made a chart to know where to put the parts back, at first it took me a long time to clean and oil all the parts and in time I learned enough about the sewing machines that I did not take apart the parts either something got loose or too much dirt from sewing would cause the trouble but no matter how little time it took to fix a machine while I was doing that I was not cutting and I did not want to have the operators idle so I started to work overtime one or two hours each evening but that was not enough for some days.

I lost a lot of time on other than cutting so I had to work longer at night and in time I had to work all day Sunday in order to keep all the girls working and in time I began to feel so tired and no pep. The bosses had a trotter horse for recreation as there were no automobiles to speak of yet and they told me I could go out for a ride on Sunday. At first I did. The stable would hitch up the horse in a two wheeler. I knew how to handle an ordinary horse but not a trotter especially if another horse was about to take over. I was almost thrown off the seat, not expecting that my horse would not allow to be overtaken and all I could do was to slow him down. I liked to go out for a ride for many reasons — first for the pleasure and as I was working long hours and the factory was on the 3rd floor and our sleeping quarters and meals on the second floor, many days I did not go outside to get some fresh air but that did not last long, for I had so much to do that I worked all day Sunday and every evening to 9 or 10 o'clock in order to keep the factory going.

Gradually I began to feel sick from overwork. I could hardly get up in the morning to go to work. The lady who prepared the meals would ask me why I did not eat my meals as I used to, but I was not hungry I would tell her. Until one day I told the bookkeeper to write to the older brother of the bosses to come home as I was not able to continue the work and keep the factory going. He sent a telegram and told me to do the best I could and if necessary stop for a half day or so until they came home from the road. I kept working until I could hardly stand on my feet. Finally the older brother came home and when he looked at me he immediately called a doctor. The doctor came, examined me and the only thing that was wrong with me was that I was run down and he told me that if I continued working indoors I would die; I had to be outdoors for quite a while. The boss was present. [After the doctor went away] The next day when he saw what I had done while he and his brother were away and it was several months for it was already early Spring in 1911 and I started to work there early fall in 1910, he came over to me and told me that he was very pleased with what I had done and he gave me a cash present even though I got paid for all the overtime I worked. I would tell the bookkeeper how many hours extra I worked each week and she paid me, in fact the bosses wanted me to sign the payroll checks while they were away but I refused because I did not want to be responsible for it and they made some arrangements with the bank and we got our pay regularly. I had

saved up quite a few hundred dollars and I only stayed a short time. The doctor gave me a tonic and told me not to work long hours and go outdoors as much as I could and the bosses got their nephew to come and help them out for they decided to move to Montreal and start their own business.

I went back to St. John. When my aunt Ethel saw me she got scared. I told her what the doctor told me and I took it easy for awhile and I began to feel better. My aunt Ethel was a good cook and she made the food she knew I liked best and would stand over me and make me eat a little in between meals and I gained back some weight for I was very thin, and I began to look around what to do. The uncle that saw me off from home arrived in the USA. He lived in Philadelphia, Pa. I wrote him my predicament and he immediately wrote me back to come to Philadelphia and I would find what to do. That was all I had to do and I told my aunt that I was going away. She cried actually hysterically that I should not go away — I could stay with her as long as I wanted and not to pay anything for board. I just couldn't leave and I stayed on.

My uncle Meyer, the one I was staying with, also spoke to me to stay and he spoke to the boy with whom I came to Canada. He was already peddling with his brother in Fredericton, N.B. They had one horse and my uncle suggested we buy another horse and go into partnership. They agreed and I had no choice and we bought a horse and wagon from someone who gave up peddling and we started the first trip with the younger brother and I going together. There was still snow on the ground and instead of going direct to Fredericton we were advised to go by way of St. George, St. Stephen, Harvey, and Fredericton. We did very little buying as there was nothing the farmers had we could buy. By the time we got to Harvey, a thaw set in and the road being so high from all winter and in places the crust of top layer of the road was already soft. We had to hold the reins tight or the horse would fall and we had quite a stretch of woods to travel through until we reached a settlement. The settlement was about 10 miles long, then again woods 5 or 8 miles until Fredericton. We stayed overnight in Harvey. We got up early and started for our destination. We could only walk the horse or he would fall in the soft spots.

By the time we got to the settlement it was early in the afternoon and the first house we came to I told my partner to go ask to be put up for the night for I was too timid myself and he came back and was told that they don't take in strangers. And the same thing was told in every farmer's house my partner went to and asked to be put up for the night. By now it was already getting dark. There weren't many farmers near one another and we saw a farm quite a way from the road. I told my partner to drive in and I would go to talk to whoever came to the door. No sooner had we driven up that the lady of the house came to the door and before I had a chance to say anything she told me that if I had intentions of staying overnight I better keep going for they had no accommodations. I was determined to see what I could do so I told her all I wanted was to get indoors and get warm. I figured once I got in and started talking she would change her

mind. She let me in and again warned me not to plan on staying overnight. I asked her to let my partner in to get warm too as both of us were outside from early morning. She let him in too and as we were warming ourselves I started to talk to her and told her that my intentions were to plead with her to allow us to stay. If she would allow us, even the kitchen floor would do and again she told us there was no chance.

I spoke English quite well then and I began by saying to place herself in my mother's place for that moment, that it was her son in a foreign country trying to make an honest living, and he was not allowed to stay overnight by the entire settlement. What would you think of them. There was a girl about 18 or 20 years old in the house. She started to cry and said mother I'll give them my room and let them stay. The mother told her to be quiet and at the same time told her son to go and take the horse and put him in the barn and feed him and she went to the kitchen and made something to eat. And before long young people began to arrive as they were having a dance there that evening. They had a fiddler and they danced square dances. They invited us; I did join for one dance. Only after a while she asked us if we wanted to go to sleep and we asked if it was OK with her we would and she led us upstairs to a beautiful room and we slept there. Next morning we were fed a good breakfast and the horse was fed too. I asked her how much we owed her and she said nothing, she would not accept any payment. I insisted she take at least 2 dollars and she did and at the same time told us that if at anytime we were in this neighborhood not to hesitate and stop in. We met in the market many times and became very friendly. This was one more experience I'll never forget.

We got to Fredericton alright and started to peddle from house to house in town and we did quite well although I hated it and when roads dried up we started to go to the country away from Fredericton. We would start out on a Monday morning and managed to come home on Friday. We would buy all kinds of hides and some woolen rags. Then we started to buy scrap iron and load in cars. We went as far as Doaktown and we made out very good but it was hard work and I had to gain my strength back. I worked at it until the fall of the year and went visiting my aunt in St. John and while there the very man who started me learning cutting needed a cutter and he asked me if I would come to work and I told him I would if he would pay me twenty dollars a week and he agreed. I told my friends they could have my share of what we paid for the horse and wagon and I was not coming back to Fredericton.

I started to work with the same man who was there when I first started a year and a half before only by now he became the designer to make new styles and help me do the cutting for a short time for I knew how to mark and cut. I just had to get to know the styles and he really did cooperate with me. The factory was not a large one. There were four men operators who made the coats and three girls who made the skirts and other things that did not require great skill. Then there were several girls as finishers and two pressers.

There was a big pile of ends accumulated from a long time laying on the floor and one day I saw a certain peddler come in and he bought the entire lot for a little sum of money. When I saw what took place after the peddler left, I went to my boss and told him he made a mistake to sell all the ends for I could make him a lot of money out of it by making boys' knee pants out of the most of the pieces. All I needed was a set of patterns. This place besides making cloak and suits, used to buy a lot of men's coats, pants, so when the salesmen went on the road and they sold to a lot of country stores they used everything. I also suggested my boss get me a set of patterns for men's pants and order the cloth from the same mill which supplied the factory in Amherst where I worked and I showed him how much it would cost him a pair — a lot less than he could buy them for and there was a big demand for this type of working pants. Every farmer had to have them especially in the winter for they were pure wool and very warm.

He went to Montreal and when he came back he brought a set of patterns for boys' knee pants and also for men's pants. I cut up all the small pieces I could find in overtime and gave it to one operator who was at one time a pants operator and he made them up and I showed a girl how to finish them and when they were finished and pressed I showed them to the boss. He was well pleased, and now I said to him to order a dozen rolls of pants cloth and I would cut them and get in a green girl and teach her how to make them and he could make an extra dollar instead of ordering 12 rolls he ordered only two rolls as he was afraid it would not work. When I saw the two rolls of cloth I said to the boss it is not worth bothering with so he assured me he would get as much cloth as we needed once we got started working.

I inquired from the girls that worked in the place if the[y] knew a young girl who wanted to learn to become a pants operator and one of them told me she had a sister she would talk to. I told her to have her come in and I would talk to her. She did come and I told her that within a month I could assure her she would make one dollar a day. That was good money in 1912 and she said she would try. She came in and I gave her a machine, took out the needle, gave her two pieces of cloth and showed her how to hold the cloth and how to press on the foot pedal and keep practising. She was a very willing girl. She practiced for a while then I put in the needle and threaded the machine, put in a bobbin and told her to practice sewing as though she was making a seam and she kept on practicing. I would come over to see how she was doing and then I showed her how to make a back pocket. Gradually she caught on and in the course of two or three days she began to work on pants. First I gave her odds and ends that I cut up even if they did not match front and back, just so long as she would learn to make them well. At first she was very slow but before long when I made a lay and cut out big bundles she worked at it and became a good operator. She made out very good.

For me it meant that I had to work overtime whenever I was cutting pants and I got extra money. I was earning more than any cutter that was working in two

other small factories for years, and the boss was happy too, when the salesmen went on the road and sold pants to every store they went to for he could undersell others and still make a good profit. In a small factory there was no foreman so I would give out the work and look after any specials which had to be done quickly. We were all happy.

We used to work from 8 A.M. to 6 P.M. five days a week and Saturday 10 months of the year and until 5 P.M. in July and August. We used to work one half hour a day extra five days a week and get off at 12 o'clock on Saturday until September in 1913. I started to talk to the men that we were fools to work until 5 o'clock on Saturdays. Nowhere else in the big cities did they work these hours and they got more money than we did, the men were sympathetic but when it came to the girls there was a problem. For one thing they were all Catholics and they told me they would have to ask the priest if it was right to make the demand from the boss to work shorter hours and get the same pay. I kept after them and during the summer months all the help agreed to talk to the boss and tell him that beginning with September we no longer would work on Saturday after 12 o'clock and neither would we work one half hour extra 5 days a week to make up for the four hours; if he agreed, fine, if not we would go on strike which we would rather not. He refused to give us our demands and we did not start to work. It was not an easy task but once all of us were out we were sure that our requests would be granted for he knew we were justified in our demands. We were out 5 days and he called us in and told us to go to work on the basis of five and a half days a week and at the same pay we were getting before. Naturally we were happy over our achievement and because of us the two other factories in our line got the same as we did and everybody was contented.

Just about this time I got an idea. I had some money saved and after the experience I went through that I did not feel good, if I had an insurance policy and something did happen to me, I could assign my insurance to someone and get them to take care of me. I knew an insurance man and told him about it and he agreed with me. He asked me my birthday, something I did not know as we never knew of such a thing as a birthday Party children have in this country but I needed a birth date and remembering mother telling me I was born two weeks before Passover and in that year it came out on the 15th of April so this became my legal birthday, April 15, 1894, and I did take out insurance fortunately. I did not have to use it for other than insurance and when at maturity cashed it.

There was a small group that called themselves socialists and they had a meeting room and used to advertise in the local papers and I got interested as it was appealing and joined and became active and attended all the meetings. I got all the literature they had and read it and met a family who had a young man and a young girl. They both were going to McGill University and whenever they were home they attended our meetings every Sunday evening. I became friendly with both of them and when they went to the university occasionally the girl would write to me and I would answer her. She would correct my grammar as well as

the spelling. This did a lot for me to learn better English. I also met a violin teacher and he belonged to the Party and helped me with my English also. It was something I cherished very much for I had someone that I could talk to who was an educated man and others too, for we used to have a speaker at every meeting. So inevitably I learned a lot just to listen to real English spoken and enjoyed hearing the different speakers as well as the questions and answers in particular. This went on for a number of years. After I left St. John, in 1914, gradually the activities died down and in time there were no public meetings at all and the entire movement discontinued.

Another episode took place about the same time. Reading about the activities in New York in the Workmen's Circle organization I got in touch with the head office in New York and got all the literature they had, of all the benefits derived from belonging to this organization. I really got interested in it and spoke to several people and in time we called a general meeting. The turnout was very good and many signed up to become members. The best attraction was a free doctor to the whole family for a very small quarterly payment as dues, and the New York office granted us a charter. We functioned for a number of years but this too gradually lost the interest of the members mostly because there wasn't enough young men who would give of themselves to collect the dues and more than anything else was the fact that we could not get a doctor to take care of our members and their families for the money each member paid, and the abuse the doctor received. For any small thing the doctor was called and in many instances when the doctor arrived the child or adult was not around to be examined and this organization too fell apart either in 1914 or 1915. But in the USA where the activities are not as great as in early inception it is still in existence and they did a lot for their members, especially elderly members....