ANITA POTHEIR (1899—1983) &
ANTOINETTE POTHEIR (1897—1979)

“My mother, Anita, was one of seven girls in her family, but only five survived to adulthood. Her father died about 1963, and her mother died about three years later. They both died in Lowell.”
~ Anita’s son, Raymond Giard

ELEVEN MONTHS BEFORE ANITA AND ANTOINETTE WERE PHOTOGRAPHED BY LEWIS HINE, they would have witnessed the grand opening of the Ayer Mill, with its huge clock tower. Five months later, Antoinette started working there, at least according to Lewis Hine’s caption. Anita likely followed her sister through its gates shortly after. In 1929, she was working there in the office as a bookkeeper, and Antoinette was a spinner, according to the census.

The following are excerpts from that interview:

“My parents married in about 1923, in either Lowell or Lawrence. My father, David Joseph Giard, came down from Canada with his parents when he was 14 years old. His oldest brother married Yvonne, one of my mother’s sisters. So that’s how my parents met. I was born in 1929. At that time, my parents were living in Pittsfield, Massachusetts. They had moved there because my father was looking for work. He got a job there as a weaver in a woolen mill.”

“My father had just built a house, but then he lost his job in 1932, and he just walked away from the house. We moved to Colrain (Mass). It was a little town that had a weaving mill. My father had a brother living there. He also had a brother in Heath (Mass), and we lived with him while we were preparing to move to Colrain. My father bought a little farm there. I had three sisters and five brothers, and my parents raised a cousin who had lost his parents. My mother was a city girl, but she had to move out to the country and raise a large family. She was a strong woman.”

“My father was working away from home at factories much of the time. In 1938, the big New England hurricane wiped out the farm. He was working at a mill in Greenfield (Mass) then. He finally bought another farm in Colrain, and he ran it as a dairy farm. My brother and I were in high school, and that’s when my father started raising hens. But he still kept working in the mills. My brother and I were the ones that did the chores and raised the cattle, until we had enough cows to start selling the milk.”

“My mother was very frugal. She was a good seamstress. She learned to cook and can. We would butcher the animals, and she would can the meat. We would pick berries every Sunday during the berry season, and she would make jams and jellies. She was a hard worker. When I graduated from high school, I went into construction, and then I went into milk testing for farmers. I went to work on a farm when I got married. That job didn’t work out, so I went back to Colrain and got a job in the bleacher at Kendall Mills.”

“When most of the kids had left home, my father was still farming, but my mother didn’t have a lot of responsibilities anymore. That idle time took a toll on her. She started getting Alzheimer’s and she couldn’t do the housework. My youngest brother was still living at home. He had just come back from the service. They hired one of my nieces to come in and care for my mother. She died in 1983. My father died in 1988.”

“Aunt Antoinette and her only child, daughter Rena, used to come up to spend a weekend with us. My husband was a weaver. My aunt was very straitlaced. She never drank a drop of alcohol.”

Antoinette Pothier was born in Lawrence on January 29, 1897. She was the second child of Joseph and Leda (Desrochers) Pothier, who came to the US from Quebec about 1890, and married in 1892. Antoinette married Alcide Marquis in about 1924. They had one child, René. Due to health reasons, she was unavailable for an interview. Her only child is deceased. Antoinette died in North Andover on October 8, 1979, at the age of 82.

Anita, the third child, was born in Lawrence on December 30, 1899. She married David Giard about 1923. They had nine children. She died in Holyoke (Mass) on October 2, 1983, at the age of 83. I interviewed her son, Raymond Giard.

Left: Louis Hine caption: As of the family of Antoinette Pothier, 32 Eastern Street. Father and tallest girl in back row of the picture work. Antoinette is the center of the group in the front row. Her sister Anita is 15 years old. Location: Lawrence, Massachusetts, September 1911.

Joe Manning caption: Leila and Joseph Pothier with their children (L-R) front row: Anita, 11; Antoinette, 13; Irene, about 5; back row: Blanche, about 17; Yvonne, about 15.

Left (insert): Louis Hine caption: Antoinette Pothier, born six months at Ayer mill. Has a walk of nearly 30 minutes each way to work morning and night. Leaves home at 6 A.M. and gets back 6:30 P.M. Location: Lawrence, Massachusetts, September 1911.

Joe Manning caption: Antoinette Pothier, Lawrence, Massachusetts, September 1911.

Below: Anita Pothier Giard and husband David, 50th wedding anniversary.