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American Optical Company

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ESTABLISHED 1833

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NEW YORK
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IN REPLY REFER TO:

January 31, 1921.

Miss Ida M. Tarbell,
Industrial Management,
120 West 32nd Street,
New York City.

Dear Miss Tarbell: I beg pardon for delaying so long reply to your letter of December 28th which came during a very busy period. Your articles in Industrial Management have interested me greatly and I should be very much pleased if I could contribute any information about our plant which would be helpful to you.

In regard to opportunities which our organization offers women for supervisory or executive positions, I think we have about two women acting as supervisors in our factories. In most of the departments the supervisor must be a person who can take care of the machinery and tools which are used by some of the operators. In our inspection departments, however, where most of the work is done by girls, women could be used as supervisors and that will probably become a more general practice in the future. In the offices we have a few women who hold executive positions, one in charge of the Billing Department, another in charge of the statistical division of the Accounting Department and a third in charge of the Ediphone transcribing room. The managers and executives as a whole are not yet sold on the woman executive, partly perhaps because we depend to quite an extent upon out-of-town labor and it is easier to import men than women.

We employ 3000 people in our factories and offices, 1000 of whom are girls. Most of our factory work is light, clean and seated and when during the war it became necessary to use women on some operations that had previously been performed by men, it was found that women were more satisfactory and they have been retained as much as possible. Since the war and until recently, we have had to use men on some jobs that women could perform because of the scarcity of women.

I can probably give you a better idea of my work by first describing the organization of our employment department. The three main divisions of our Employment and Service Department are employment, recreation and health. The employment department is the section you are interested in. Besides the manager of this department and the other activities, the force consists of two men for interviewing and placement of male applicants, follow-up of new employees and interviewing of leavers, a woman who does similar work among women, a clerk who assists applicants in filling out their applications, two other clerks, a stenographer and myself.

My position is that of recruiting agent for both men and women. This is a position which is especially necessary in a large organization like ours which has outgrown the labor market of the town in which it is located and must draw upon the surrounding towns and cities for its labor supply. We are an hour's ride by trolley from Worcester, two hours from Springfield and three hours from Boston and Providence. I do not make the final choice of someone to fill each position, but plan to bring to our door good applicants for positions which cannot be filled by town applicants who call at our office.

I gather applicants in three ways - by field work, correspondence and advertising. To the employment offices of the surrounding cities I mail each week a list of positions we have open. So far I have found that as a rule I get the best selection of candidates from advertisements. I try to describe the position as accurately as possible and to mention the fact that it is out-of-town in order to weed out at the start as many as possible of those who would not be interested. The various houses from whom the company purchases supplies, have in some instances proven good sources of labor supply. The large meat houses have free agencies for chefs and stewards and have furnished us several. The comptometer and typewriter companies have sent us operators for their machines. Some of the paper companies have suggested printers. Sometimes I deal with applicants only through correspondence, selecting those whom I think will qualify, from their letters, and inviting them to visit us. At other times I meet applicants in the Public Employment Office of some nearby city and choose certain ones to call upon us.

When the applicant calls at our office, he is interviewed by one of our placement agents and if this person thinks he is qualified for the position for which he applies or for some other opening, an interview is arranged with the proper executive who makes the final choice. It may seem rather confusing to the applicant to deal with three persons before he is chosen or rejected, but it really makes for better selection and longer satisfaction for both.

Our organization offers a great variety of positions for which I recruit - office and factory executives, tradesmen (machinists, engineers, printers, electricians, steamfitters, etc.) and cooks, besides girls for office and factory work and skilled and unskilled male labor for various optical operations. I have done some recruiting for unskilled labor among immigrants.

Our employment manager has drawn up a job description form which may interest you. We plan to have a specification of every position in our organization which will be revised whenever the nature of the position changes. These are filed for ready reference and are of great assistance to me. On each job description I have listed the sources which I have found best for that particular position. I am also keeping a notebook of sources classified by type of position and by locality.

My experience has been that it is much easier to recruit men than women. Men are more business-like in reaching decisions. Women are timid about leaving the city for our country town, but dislike on the other hand, to throw away the chance of a good position, and cause us some inconvenience by delaying their decision.

In regard to my own preparation for the work I am doing, I have taken no conscious training for employment work and had no particular interest in it until I entered this department. I am a country minister's daughter, a graduate of Wellesley College and have studied stenography. My experience before I became connected with the American Optical Company covered a period of about four years as secretary in a public school, an insurance office and a public utility company's office. I came to the American Optical Company two years ago as secretary to the employment manager and for the past year have been doing recruiting.

If I haven't given you enough information on the points in which you are interested, or if at any time you desire other information, won't you write me again?

Sincerely yours,
AMERICAN OPTICAL COMPANY
Marguerite Holden
Employment & Service Dept.

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