

DP-46  
HELEN BAXTER HANSEN  
BIRTH DATE: 1914  
INTERVIEW DATE: AUGUST 30, 1989  
RUNNING TIME: 15:00  
INTERVIEWER: ANDREW PHILLIPS  
RECORDING ENGINEER: SAME  
INTERVIEW LOCATION: LONGMONT, CA  
TRANSCRIPT ORIGINALLY PREPARED BY: NANCY VEGA, 1989  
TRANSCRIPT RECONCEIVED BY: CHICK LEMONICK, 2/1996  
TRANSCRIPT NOT REVIEWED

SCOTLAND, 1923  
AGE 8  
SHIP NAME NOT RECALLED

PHILLIPS: All right. This is Andrew Phillips. I'm just putting an identification on the tape. This is Andrew Phillips and I'm with Mrs. Helen Hansen, whose maiden name is Baxter. This Is Interview Number 420 [DP-46]. It's the 30th of August, 1989 and we're, it's Wednesday, and we're commencing this interview at 9:15 PM. Okay. Mrs. Hansen is originally from Scotland and I'll just ask you, if you would please, to tell me your name, where you're from, and what year you immigrated to Ellis Island?

HANSEN: You mean my maiden name, or--

PHILLIPS: No, the name you go by now.

HANSEN: Oh, okay. I'm Helen Hansen and we came from Scotland in 1923.

PHILLIPS: And what year were you born?

HANSEN: Where, or when?

PHILLIPS: Okay, where and when?

HANSEN: Oh, I was born in South Queen's Ferry in 1914.

PHILLIPS: Is that, South Queen's Ferry?

HANSEN: Queen's Ferry. Uh-huh.

PHILLIPS: Okay.

HANSEN: It's, I think, south of Edinburgh.

PHILLIPS: Could you tell me a little bit about what you remember of your early life. For instance, what did your father do for a living?

HANSEN: Oh, I think he worked in the shipyards for a while. Most of them did. And, um, what else. I think he was a locomotive engineer for a while, and then the work got bad. So he came over. And there were a lot of Scotch people that came over at that time. They all worked in the Gary Steel Mill.

PHILLIPS: Could you give me a little bit of a sense of what your early life was like in this town, what your house was like, for instance?

HANSEN: I can't even remember.

PHILLIPS: Can you remember any thing about your early life? Going to school?

HANSEN: In Scotland? I remember going to school, but I don't remember, you know, I just remember coming and going, but I don't remember, really.

PHILLIPS: Can you remember when you left Scotland to come to the United States?

HANSEN: Um, let's see. No. I just remember crossing from Scotland to Ireland, and it was very wavy. And, but otherwise, I just don't remember.

PHILLIPS: And do you remember coming to Ellis Island?

HANSEN: I remember being there. I remember coming into New York harbor and seeing the Statue of Liberty. And, um, but I don't remember getting off the ship. But I remember being in Ellis Island. A lot of lines and people, you know, going through customs.

PHILLIPS: And can you tell me what it was like for you? Let me get this clearer. You came with your parents?

HANSEN: With my mother. My mother and sister and I came a year after my father was here.

PHILLIPS: So your father was already here.

HANSEN: Uh-huh.

PHILLIPS: Why had he left Scotland?

HANSEN: Well, I guess the work was bad and a lot of them came over here at that time. In fact, we had a, where we came to, we had a regular Scotch colony over there.

PHILLIPS: Were these people who, in fact, you'd known back in Scotland?

HANSEN: No. I didn't know any of them there. They were just a bunch of people that came like my father did and we did, for a better life.

PHILLIPS: Do you know why your father immigrated? I guess you told me that.

HANSEN: Yeah. I guess because of the work back there. There wasn't much work.

PHILLIPS: I see.

HANSEN: He has a picture of that. (Voices off mike.)

PHILLIPS: How many of you came over on the ship?

HANSEN: You mean everybody on the ship?

PHILLIPS: No, sorry. How many within your family?

HANSEN: Oh, just the three of us at the one time. My father came the year before, and my mother and sister and I came the next year.

PHILLIPS: And can you tell us a bit about the trip on the ship?

HANSEN: Oh, I just remember running around out there. (She laughs.) Having fun. We didn't get too seasick.

PHILLIPS: You showed us a program that you were part of.

HANSEN: Yeah. We used to dance at the, um, you know, at the things they had at night. They didn't have all the movies and stuff they do now.

PHILLIPS: So you made your own entertainment.

HANSEN: Beg your pardon?

PHILLIPS: Made your own entertainment.

HANSEN: Yeah.

PHILLIPS: Can you tell us a little about what life was like for you when you arrived in the United States? You arrived at Ellis Island, and you don't remember a great deal about that, I think you said, right?

HANSEN: Right.

PHILLIPS: About Ellis Island. Or let me ask you the question. Do you remember anything more about what you experienced at Ellis Island?

HANSEN: Well, I remember for some reason they wanted to keep us over there. My mother told us they'd told them they would have to pay for our hotel if we stayed, so

they let us go. (She laughs.) I don't know why they were going to keep us.

PHILLIPS: And where did you go to?

HANSEN: We went to Gary, Indiana.

PHILLIPS: Straight away?

HANSEN: With, what was it, Illinois Steel at the time?

Carnegie, Illinois. Carnegie, Illinois, which is now U.S. Steel.

(Voices off mike.)

PHILLIPS: Did you, did your father meet you at the, uh, on the mainland?

HANSEN: Uh, he met us when we got to Gary because we rode all night on the train, and we came to Indiana, Gary,

Indiana.

PHILLIPS: And what was it like when you arrived in this strange town, for a little girl?

HANSEN: Oh, it was kind of strange. We had, I remember the first thing I ate when I came here was a Tootie Fruity ice cream cone. I thought it was the best thing I ever tasted. They don't have that now. But it was good. And, of course, my father was living, boarding with someone, so we just stayed there for a while till we found a place of our own.

PHILLIPS: And do you remember looking for that house or going with your parents?

HANSEN: No. Uh-uh.

PHILLIPS: Do you remember the house that you actually did eventually find?

HANSEN: No. I don't remember looking for it.

PHILLIPS: Do you remember starting school?

HANSEN: Yes. I started, I think, in the fourth grade, I think.  
Something, in the third or fourth grade. I don't remember.  
But, uh, of course the kids used to make fun of us talking, but we got over that after a while.

PHILLIPS: And what was like, like for your mother and father? Do you have any recollection of what it was like for them?

HANSEN: Uh-uh.

PHILLIPS: Tell me about this Scottish colony that you described, this group of Scots people that you mentioned.

HANSEN: Oh, it was just a section of town. Gary is a, was a funny town. It's different now. In the east side, where we lived, was a whole bunch of Scotch people and then, like on the south side there was a lot of Slavic and, you know, Polish and what else was there? Just, you know, the Slavic people in another end of town, and they were

all kind of clannish, you know. But they got along, but they were kind of clannish.

PHILLIPS: And did you have friends amongst some of those other groups from those other countries?

HANSEN: No. Uh-uh.

PHILLIPS: So you pretty well kept to your own?

HANSEN: Yeah. You kept to your own, until I grew up and went to work then. You know, you meet a lot of people then. But, uh--

PHILLIPS: So tell me a little bit about this Scottish clan that you mixed with. Do you remember anything about that? Perhaps your parents having people around, or having parties or social occasions?

HANSEN: Well, yeah. They had, um, we belonged to a Scottish clan and they had meetings about every two weeks or something. They used to have the dances and the bagpipes and do the Scottish dancing and stuff like that. We used to like to go.

PHILLIPS: And this happened regularly, every two weeks?

HANSEN: Well, no. They had, the meetings were every two weeks, but the dances were like on a Saturday night, and we had a good time.

PHILLIPS: And did that continue for the entire time that you were a young woman growing up to become a--

HANSEN: Growing up. Growing up, uh-huh. And I have a lifetime membership

to that organization, because I joined, my sister and I joined, and I kept on with them, and she never did.

PHILLIPS: What was the name of the organization?

HANSEN: Um, well, it was, the men's organization was called the Clan McNeil, and the women's was called the Daughters of Scotia, Clan McNeil.

PHILLIPS: And that was a, that was a carryover from Scotland?

HANSEN: No, no. Everybody just sort of met there after they came. Just made friends.

PHILLIPS: So you created these new--

HANSEN: Right, right. Yeah.

PHILLIPS: So how long were you at school? What did you, how long did you remain at school?

HANSEN: Um, well, I went through high school. And, uh, it was fine. I got along okay.

PHILLIPS: And then you finished high school and what happened?

HANSEN: Oh, yeah, I finished high school and then I went to work. The Depression was on.

PHILLIPS: And this was 1929, 1930.

HANSEN: Yeah. About 1932, I think. Something like that. And, um, it must have been later than that. It was '32, yeah. Because I graduated in '33 from high school, yeah. Oh I graduated in '34, so it must have been about '35 or '36 when I started to work.

PHILLIPS: And where did you work?

HANSEN: I worked for U.S. Steel, in the early days of computer, keypuncher.

PHILLIPS: Tell us a little bit about that. The early days of the computer. That sounds--

HANSEN: Oh, I didn't know anything about computers. We just did the keypunching. It's when they used to put the cards in the machines. Neil, was, um--

MR. HANSEN: That was before the computers came in.

HANSEN: Yeah. Before computers. And, uh, they, uh, you had to punch cards and we girls would punch the cards and the guys would put them in the machine.

PHILLIPS: Now, I, where did you meet our husband?

HANSEN: At work. He worked in the same place I did.

PHILLIPS: And were there many other people from Scotland working in this steel mill?

HANSEN: No, uh-uh.

MR. HANSEN:

In the steel mills? Sure. There were people in the steel mills.

HANSEN: In the steel mills, yeah.

MR. HANSEN: That's what he said.

HANSEN: Oh, yes.

PHILLIPS: But not with you.

HANSEN: No, not with me.

PHILLIPS: Oh, I understand, I understand. Of course, there would have been people from all different nationalities there. It wasn't like it was specifically just the Scotch people that came in. Of course not.

HANSEN: It was, uh, everybody.

PHILLIPS: Right. And, uh, so what happened at work? You were working as a keypuncher and you continued doing that for how long?

HANSEN: Till I got married in 1941. (She laughs.)

PHILLIPS: And, uh, then, of course, the war was about, was, what happened to you during the war?

HANSEN: Nothing. He was, um, scheduled to go, but then, just about then, we had our first boy, and so he got excused, didn't you?

MR. HANSEN: Well, about that time they had the thirty, thirty year  
and over were exempted. Well, I was just thirty, so I had my  
physical and everything, ready to go, and they sent me a letter,  
"We don't want you. You're over thirty."

HANSEN: (She laughs.) Old.

MR. HANSEN: So I didn't go.

PHILLIPS: So your husband didn't go, huh?

HANSEN: That didn't make me mad.

PHILLIPS: And then, um, what happened? So you stayed on. You worked. Did  
you continue working? You must have had the baby, and you probably--

HANSEN: Yeah, no. After I was married I didn't work. Later on I went back  
to work, after the kids were in college I went back to work. So--

PHILLIPS: And do you have, in terms of your, your Scottish background, I  
suppose, what happened? Did you continue your interest in the clubs, and in the activities  
related to your--

HANSEN: Oh, sure. Uh-huh. Yeah, I went to the lodge and, of course, like  
everything else, the people, you know, they pass on, and the young people then didn't want  
to take an interest in it. And then we had a club which was, wasn't, you had to belong to  
a lodge to belong to this club. So we had a bunch of these young women at the time, and we  
all used to meet once a month. It was nice.

PHILLIPS: Do you still continue that up to today, or--

HANSEN: Nobody out here is Scotch. I think I'm the only one.

MR. HANSEN: You still keep in contact with those girls that you, the  
Balmoral Club.

HANSEN: Oh yeah. Sure. Uh-huh.

MR. HANSEN: You still keep in contact with at least half a dozen of  
them, or more.

HANSEN: Yeah. They're scattered now.

MR. HANSEN: Scattered all over, yeah.

HANSEN: In fact, I just got--

MR. HANSEN: --you talked to one yesterday, down in Florida.

HANSEN: Yeah, yeah. So, but I keep in touch. Once in a while we write  
each other, you know, and then you kind of don't do it for a while, and then all of a  
sudden you think, "I'd better write." So we do.

PHILLIPS: And then you just talk about your lives now, I guess. You don't,  
did you travel back to Scotland at some point?

HANSEN: I've never been back, never.

PHILLIPS: Did you go to Denmark where your husband came from?

MR. HANSEN: (He laughs.) No. No, we've never been there either.

HANSEN: Yeah. (She laughs.) (Voices off mike.) No, it was, I never went back.

PHILLIPS: Okay. I don;t know whether there's anything else that we can talk about, unless there's anything else that you'd like to say.

HANSEN: I had cousins and relatives back there, but I don't know. I haven't contacted them for, oh, since I was real little, so I don't know if they're still living or not.

PHILLIPS: Okay. So it's 9:30. we're just going to call, this is the interview with Mrs. Helen Hansen, Interview Number 420 [DP-46], call it quits. Sorry about the refrigerator noise, but we couldn't get the refrigerator off.

HANSEN: It's a noisy one.