

EI-1094/WOTHERSPOON

EI-1094

ADELLA MARTHA LIEBENOW WOTHERSPOON

BIRTH DATE: NOVEMBER 28, 1903

INTERVIEW DATE: JULY 19, 1999

RUNNING TIME: 59:50

INTERVIEWER: PAUL E. SIGRIST, JR.

RECORDING ENGINEER: KEVIN DALEY

INTERVIEW LOCATION: WATCHUNG, NEW JERSEY

TRANSCRIPT PREPARED AND REVIEWED BY: PAUL SIGRIST, 8/1999

BORN OF FIRST GENERATION GERMAN PARENTS IN NEW YORK CITY

BORN IN 1903

SURVIVOR OF THE 1904 "GENERAL SLOCUM" MARITIME TRAGEDY

ORAL HISTORIAN'S NOTE: Mrs. Wotherspoon was six months old when she was rescued from the excursion boat "General Slocum" as it burned on June 15, 1904 in New York City's East River, having been run aground on North Brother Island by the captain. In fact, she was the youngest person to survive this devastating event. Over one thousand people lost their lives, including Mrs. Wotherspoon's two sisters and members of her extended family. Her father, who also survived but died several years later of tuberculosis, kept extensive scrapbooks related to the tragedy and the ensuing trial. Indeed, Mrs. Wotherspoon still had in her possession the child's dress she wore at the commemoration of the first "General Slocum" monument in the cemetery in Middle Village, New York. I have added to the end of this interview transcript a selection from an interview conducted with Mrs. Wotherspoon's paternal aunt Mrs. Annie Weber, who was also survived "the General Slocum" tragedy. The interview was conducted soon after the event and is currently in Mrs. Wotherspoon's personal collection. At the time of this recorded interview, Mrs. Wotherspoon was one of two known living survivors of the tragedy. The other known survivor was Catherine Uhlmeier Connelly, interviewed by me for the Ellis Island Oral History Project on July 10, 1999; Interview EI-1092. Both women were identified and located by Kevin Daley, recording engineer for the Ellis Island Oral History Project. Paul E. Sigrist, Jr., Director of Oral History, 8/26/1999.

SIGRIST: Good afternoon. This is Paul Sigrist for the National Park Service. Today is Monday, July 19th, 1999. I'm in Watchung, New Jersey, W-A-T-C-H-U-N-G. I'm here with Mrs. Adella Wotherspoon. And Mrs. Wotherspoon, her

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grandparents came from Germany. She was born here in the United States and when she was six months old she survived the burning and sinking of "the General Slocum" excursion boat in New York City which happened on June 15th, 1904. I should also say that Kevin Daley is running the recording equipment and it is because of Kevin that we have found Mrs. Wotherspoon. Mrs. Wotherspoon, can we begin by you giving me your birth date?

WOTHERSPOON: November 28th, 1903.

SIGRIST: And can you say your full name, as it was when you were born?

WOTHERSPOON: Yes. Adella Martha Liebenow, L-I-E-B-E-N-O-W, sometimes spelled N-A, N-A-U.

SIGRIST: But your family spelled it N-O-W?

WOTHERSPOON: W, yes, uh huh.

SIGRIST: Okay, Liebenow. And where were you born?

WOTHERSPOON: New York City.

SIGRIST: And do you know anything about the day that you were born? Did anyone ever tell you a story about it?

WOTHERSPOON: No, I, nothing, no recollection whatsoever. And I have very few, I have no recollection of "the Slocum" either...

SIGRIST: Right.

WOTHERSPOON: ...since I was just six months old.

SIGRIST: But I was wondering, if, you know, your...

WOTHERSPOON: Yes.

SIGRIST: ...someone told you somewhere along the line, "Oh, you know, your mother had a tough delivery," or something like that.

WOTHERSPOON: No. I was one of three, the third one.

SIGRIST: Were you named after anyone?

WOTHERSPOON: My middle name was an aunt whose, who died on "the Slocum." And I think my first name was more or less a corruption of an adopted sister of my mother. In those days, when a family died and there was a young child left and no place for the child to go, the, some other family would take them in. So my grandmother took this young girl, also German, and her name was D, D-E-L-L-A. And my family, for some unknown reason, put an "A" in front of it. And I supposed that's the corruption of "Adelle," something that, that sort of thing happened.

SIGRIST: Were these the grandparents that came to the United States?

WOTHERSPOON: Yes.

SIGRIST: Yes. Which side of the....

WOTHERSPOON: My, my maternal grandparents.

SIGRIST: Yes, that's probably a good place for us to start the interview then.

WOTHERSPOON: Uh huh.

SIGRIST: Why don't we start by you giving me their names.

WOTHERSPOON: Well, my, the, the name was Wulf, W-U-L-F. And I have no idea what my grandmother's maiden, uh (correcting herself), given name was. I think my grandfather was Henry. And on my father's side, all my, well...

SIGRIST: Go ahead.

WOTHERSPOON: Well, my grandfather, my paternal grandfather, did live until I was old enough to know that there was a grandfather there. And he's the one that insisted I speak German until, of course, I went to school at seven and lost it all. (she laughs) And, but he said every child should be, bilingual. And my paternal, my father's name was Paul and I think, my, and my grand--, grandfather's name, I think, was Paul. I have a number, a lot of immigrant papers and all that sort of thing up in the attic but I just haven't had time to locate them.

SIGRIST: So both sets of grandparents came to the United States?

WOTHERSPOON: Yes, they were both immigrants and went, probably went through Ellis Island.

SIGRIST: Probably, yeah. Well, let's start with the maternal grandparents first...

WOTHERSPOON: Uh huh.

SIGRIST: ...since we started talking about them. What do you know about what they did in Europe and why they came to the United States?

WOTHERSPOON: No, I don't know anything at all about it. I do have a sampler upstairs that was made by Helen, Helen Vorhees, which is not, to my knowledge, a good German name. But, anyway, I assume...

SIGRIST: Can you spell Vorhees, please?

WOTHERSPOON: V-O, I think it's, V-O-R-H-E-E-S. And that was made in 1830. And I do have that. And that, I assume, her first name was Helen and since my oldest sister was named Helen, I assume that she was my maternal grandmother. But I have not, no proof of it.

SIGRIST: What do you know about your maternal grandparents, what part of Germany did they come from?

WOTHERSPOON: I knew, know that she came from what's supposed to be one of the wickedest cities in the world, and I can't, Ian Fleming's book, I got to think, Hamburg. And when we toured Germany, I found Hamburg a fascinating place. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: Do you know anything about their life in, in...

WOTHERSPOON: No, nothing whatsoever.

SIGRIST: Uh huh. Did...

WOTHERSPOON: And, uh, because of the tragedy, the accident, the "Slocum" tragedy, my mother was very reluctant to, to go back at all. And when, when people ask me what, you know, what stories did she tell me and so on, she very rarely spoke of it. I think her, she was just devastated by the enormity of the lost and so on. And my father died seven years afterwards, so she had a tough time.

SIGRIST: Do you know what year your maternal grandparents came to the United States?

WOTHERSPOON: No, I don't.

SIGRIST: Approximately?

WOTHERSPOON: No, but I would assume the, the late 1800s.

SIGRIST: Your mother was born here so...

WOTHERSPOON: Yes.

SIGRIST: ...so it had to be before she...

WOTHERSPOON: Yes.

SIGRIST: ...was born. Okay. And your paternal grandparents, where in Germany did they come from?

WOTHERSPOON: I don't know.

SIGRIST: And do you know anything about their coming over or...

WOTHERSPOON: No. I have, I have no idea except I think one time my mother did say something about the draft conditions over there, the military conditions and they just didn't approve of some of those. And it's possible that a number of those young couples just decided to migrate. (she laughs) But I, I haven't, I have no background whatsoever.

SIGRIST: Do you know when your maternal grandmother and/or grandfather died?

WOTHERSPOON: No. But I know that my maternal grandfather lived long enough so that I was aware of his presence and the fact that I had to speak German and that sort of thing. So I must have been, you know, somewhere within the seven years after "the Slocum" until my father died. Uh huh.

SIGRIST: I see. Well, tell me a little bit about your parents. Let's start with your mother because we talked a little bit about her. Her name was?

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WOTHERSPOON: Anna Cristina Wulf, W-U-L-F, and then, of course, she became Liebenow.

SIGRIST: Was Cristina with a "K?" "C?"

WOTHERSPOON: "C," uh huh. And I guess she just had a regular, normal life.

SIGRIST: Where was she born?

WOTHERSPOON: She, uh, she was born in New York.

SIGRIST: In New York City?

WOTHERSPOON: Yeah, you see, they all, well, most of the German families that migrated over here were down in Yorkville. That was a whole section.

SIGRIST: And what, at that time, what...

WOTHERSPOON: They called it "Little Germany."

SIGRIST: ...what was, where was that section at that time?

WOTHERSPOON: Well, 13th Street. I remember her speaking about Hester Street. And I think there was a school on 13th Street that I, I think, believe she went to. And there's that Tompkins Square Park down there where they have a monument to "the Slocum" disaster. And we had a memorial service there just a couple of, in the middle of June. And, so that area, all that area down there was old Yorkville. But after the "Slocum" disaster, there were, so many children were killed that people moved away by the hordes, you know, they just moved out. Left the section, the section entirely. My family moved up to 125th Street, and I can remember that house very well because I was, I, after my father died we lived there for a short time and it was one of the old brownstone houses. And I suppose it's still there but I've never gone back.

SIGRIST: Did you move up there after your father died?

WOTHERSPOON: No, no, before.

SIGRIST: Before he had died.

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WOTHERSPOON: We moved out here [i.e. Watchung, New Jersey] after my father died.

SIGRIST: When, when speaking of the German community as a whole at that time, are you talking about the Protestant as well as the Catholic German community?

WOTHERSPOON: Yes.

SIGRIST: Was it, was it a unified community?

WOTHERSPOON: Yes, it was. And the interesting thing is that one of "the Slocum" survivors, her name is Connelly [see interview with Catherine Connelly, Interview EI-1092], that's her married name, she was eleven years old at the time and she was written up in Life Magazine not too long ago as THE survivor. And so I wrote a letter and said that "she may be THE survivor but I'm the youngest survivor." And, of course, I, I have been in touch with her right along because of the fact that she had been on "the Slocum" and she would come to the services when she was able to. But she's in a nursing home now and she's one hundred and five, I think.

SIGRIST: One hundred and six. I actually, I...

WOTHERSPOON: One hundred and six?

SIGRIST: Yeah, I interviewed her last week.

WOTHERSPOON: Oh, you did. (they laugh) Well, anyhow, I saw the daughter and the granddaughter at the Tompkins Square Memorial. They came down and the day before that they said she had had a high fever and they thought something terrible was happening to her. And the next day she's, she was up and chipper as ever. She's quite a gal I understand.

SIGRIST: She certainly is.

WOTHERSPOON: Yeah. I have met her. I, as a matter of fact I have a picture somewhere of the two of us in front of the monument.

SIGRIST: My question about the, the religious orientation of...

WOTHERSPOON: Yes.

- SIGRIST: ...of the community (a clock chimes in the background), triggered your memory of, of...
- WOTHERSPOON: Yes, about her, yes.
- SIGRIST: ...Mrs. Connelly. Why?
- WOTHERSPOON: And so since, well, she was Catholic. And I said, I, when they said her name was Connelly, I said, how did anyone by the name of Connelly, you know (she laughs), go on a German Sunday school picnic? And, anyway, somebody had given, she had, her mother had sent to, as I understand the story, her mother had sent her to the store to pick up some groceries and the woman at the store had tickets for "the Slocum" and wasn't going to use them. But apparently she had only had two tickets and so that meant that her mother was going to take herself and a, this, and Mrs. Connelly's brother. And, I guess, Mrs. Connelly must have made some kind of a statement that, you know, that would leave her out and the woman gave her another ticket. So that was the way she got on. And her mother and her brother and, I think, another sibling all died. And she, she was saved. Somebody dropped her over the side of the boat into, into a tugboat or something.
- SIGRIST: That's right. There was another sister, too, who I believe...
- WOTHERSPOON: What, yes.
- SIGRIST: ...had gone on.
- WOTHERSPOON: Yeah.
- WOTHERSPOON: Yeah, I think that sister was with a, was probably a baby-in-arms, too.
- SIGRIST: Can you tell me, just bring, bringing the conversation back to the, the religious orientation...
- WOTHERSPOON: Yes.
- SIGRIST: ...of the German community. Do you remember, even within your time as you were growing up, how many different churches were involved in this?

WOTHERSPOON: No, the only church that I know that was really involved in this was Saint Mark's.

SIGRIST: But I mean in the community itself.

WOTHERSPOON: Oh, I see what you mean, yes.

SIGRIST: Like I know that St. Mark's...

WOTHERSPOON: No.

SIGRIST: ...was a Lutheran church and I know, having interviewed Mrs. Connelly...

WOTHERSPOON: Yes.

SIGRIST: ...that there was a Catholic community...

WOTHERSPOON: Catholic, yes.

SIGRIST: ...here. Were there any other churches that you can think of that made up part of the German community?

WOTHERSPOON: Not that I know of. The, Saint Mark's Church, the, the old one, is now a Jewish synagogue, which is interesting because some friends of mine live down in that 13th, uh, avenue area.

SIGRIST: And that was the church, of course, that sponsored the picnic that...

WOTHERSPOON: Yes, that sponsored the picnic.

SIGRIST: ...that ended up going on "the General Slocum."

WOTHERSPOON: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Tell me a little bit about your mother's personality.

WOTHERSPOON: Oh, she was a marvelous person. She couldn't have survived all the awful things that happened to her. And she couldn't have brought me up alone the way she did, and have had just one tragedy after the other happen, you know, to her so early in her married life. I, I can't say enough about what a...

SIGRIST: What are some of your personal recollections from your childhood of your mother, maybe something that you did with her or something she liked to do?

WOTHERSPOON: No, but I do remember one thing that always, it made a big impression on me. If I ever got into any kind of trouble, she was always very sympathetic. And the first thing she'd say was "What did you do?" She would never take a side until I, she got the whole story. And if it was something that I didn't do, she'd go to bat for me. (she laughs) And how. But if it was something that she felt that I was involved in, then I was the one that had to work out the solution. And that's always made a big impression because when you see what happens with kids these days (she laughs), it was such a wonderful sort of a, an up bringing. So I, I can't express my feelings enough to tell you what a wonderful woman she was.

SIGRIST: Did your mother ever teach you how to do something?

WOTHERSPOON: Yes, I learned some cooking and that sort of thing. And I guess, I don't know, I picked up a lot of things. Of course, some of the things were more or less things that we did as youngsters as a group because of the fact that we, we've lived through so many wars. World War One we learned how to can and some of the ladies in the village [i.e. Watchung, NJ], this was—is, still is a pretty closely-knit community. And in those days it was, it was just a village. Everybody knew everybody else and we all worked together if there was some sort of a thing that had to be taken care and that type of thing. So I had a wonderful up bringing.

SIGRIST: What did your mother do for her own pleasure? When she had a few minutes to herself, what would she do for her own enjoyment?

WOTHERSPOON: Well, the only thing I can remember is she (?). She, of course, with my [sic, her] adopted sister who had children, we were a fairly close family. And I can remember, I have some pictures somewhere in the house of, of all of us at a seashore place. But I don't have, nobody wrote on the back where, which place, which seashore it was so I assumed that it might be some, of one the New York areas, you know, the New York beaches. And I know that, but she was terrified of the water. And I, I always love the water and I, I'm not, was not an expert swimmer but I was a good

swimmer. And if I went into the water, she would be up at the lifeguard bench in five seconds because she was just terrified. And when we'd go to the memorial visits, you know, at the cemetery on the 15th of June usually, which she had to, we had to go over on the ferry because we took the train into Jersey City, you know, and then we had to get over to New York. And she would pace the deck the whole time that we'd, that few minutes that we were on the water.

SIGRIST: Do you, was there an event that you know of in her life that created that fear?

WOTHERSPOON: It was "the Slocum."

SIGRIST: So she was not, she didn't, as far as you know, did not have that kind of feeling until the event.

WOTHERSPOON: Well, I wouldn't know, you see. I was so young.

SIGRIST: Right.

WOTHERSPOON: No, I don't think she had that feeling until after "the Slocum."

SIGRIST: I see.

WOTHERSPOON: But she was terrified of the water. But she never did or said anything that would affect me except that business of, of, you know, running up and telling the lifeguard to be, please watch me (she laughs), you know, and that sort of thing.

SIGRIST: Well, let's talk about your father. What was his full name?

WOTHERSPOON: As far as I know no middle name, just Paul Liebenow.

SIGRIST: And where was he born in the United States?

WOTHERSPOON: In New York City.

SIGRIST: Also in New York City.

WOTHERSPOON: Uh huh.

SIGRIST: Part of the same community, the German community?

WOTHERSPOON: Yes. That's how they met.

SIGRIST: The Lower East Side.

WOTHERSPOON: I think they probably went to school together because somewhere in the house there's a, they used to carry a little book and their friends would write in it, put a poem in it and so on. And I think my father was courting my mother at the time and she didn't want to be courted. And, anyway, he apparently wrote this little poem and signed his name. He had a beautiful handwriting incidently. And then he put a, a hand in the corner with a ring on it and she was so mad about that (she laughs) that she tore it out. So I have a part, part of the, I have, have that book somewhere I hope if it hasn't been mislaid. But I think it's probably up in the attic.

SIGRIST: And do you know where they were married?

WOTHERSPOON: No, but I would assume St. Mark's Lutheran Church.

SIGRIST: I see. They were all parishioners.

WOTHERSPOON: Yes.

SIGRIST: The families were all parishioners at that church.

WOTHERSPOON: Yes, uh huh.

SIGRIST: Tell me a little bit about your father's personality.

WOTHERSPOON: Well, I don't know very much about him. The only thing I can remember is that he was very tall, very thin, very blonde and I do remember that after we moved up to 125th Street, and I have to check this with, Harold, Harold Stern [ph] I think is the Commissioner of Parks in New York, because I, in my memory, there seems to be a Mount Morris Park and I've never heard of it since I was a youngster. And I just wondered whether, you know, whatever it was wasn't big enough to preserve and they built, you know, sky, uh, apartments on it or something of that sort. But I do know that he was fond of the, seemed to be fond of the out of doors and it was quite funny but he was an amateur photographer and he did blueprints and that sort of thing. And my husband also was an amateur photographer. (she laughs) Of course, a little more expert than my father. But my father died of tuberculosis when I was seven. He just lived, he lived seven years after "the Slocum" and actually it was, they didn't, never traced it to a contagion because of, of

something that happened on 'the Slocum,' for instance inhaling smoke or something of that sort. But I have an interview taken from his, oldest, oldest sister right after the tragedy and in that she said that both her husband, Frank Weber [ph] and her brother, my father, stayed on "the Slocum" until their clothes began to burn off looking for the other children. And that's, and my mother was very, very, this aunt said she stayed on until her hair caught on fire. And my mother was all burned up one, up her left side and into her neck up to the, around the hairline. And I always had a feeling when anybody says, "How were you saved?" I always, I said, "I don't know." But my thought was that probably my mother held onto the railing as long as she could with her left hand and had me in her right arm. But, uh, in that interview my aunt says that we were all separated and that we were finally brought together on the, on Brother's Island [i.e. North Brother Island].

SIGRIST: Tell me about the circumstances leading up to getting on the boat.

WOTHERSPOON: Well, I don't know anything about those except that in my aunt's interview she says the children were ecstatic. Her children were eleven and seven and they ran around the apartment and had a great time while she getting lunch ready and that type of thing. And it seemed to be a, a very nice family party because it was her, her two children and my two sisters and, of course, I could join those. Then I was only six months old. But they were, my one sister was three and my other sister was six.

SIGRIST: Can you name the sisters for me?

WOTHERSPOON: Yes. Helen and Anna.

SIGRIST: Helen, and those were the only other siblings at that time, your only other siblings at that time?

WOTHERSPOON: Yes, uh huh.

SIGRIST: So they're all running around. They're having a great time.

WOTHERSPOON: They, that, yes, well, then, they, when they got on the, on the boat I assumed from just, I don't know why I assumed it, I assumed they were probably on the second deck or something like that and probably in the center of it. And the

children were playing in, at one end and the adults were just sitting there, I suppose, enjoying, I suppose they had a band and so on on there.

SIGRIST: And for the sake of the tape, just tell me where the boat was going.

WOTHERSPOON: It, oh dear, I should know the name of it, it was a, a picnic ground on Long Island and they were headed for Hell's Gate. And this is, and, so the captain could have docked at any one of the docks along the shore when the boat first caught on fire but apparently he wanted to get the boat as far as he could. And I don't know whether there was a question of recovery insurance or what, what was in his mind. He was imprisoned and I have a picture in one of those books that my father kept, the scrapbooks, showing a picture of me at a year and a half sitting in my mother's lap at the trial. And the captain was given thirteen years, I think, in prison and then he was, I think, I don't know who freed him but one of the presidents freed him after about ten years, I think. And the, I don't know anything more about what they were doing on the boat except that my, my, this Aunt Martha, for whom I, I have her middle name, (correcting herself) uh, my, as my middle name, she was younger apparently and playing with the children. And when this, the fire broke out, whether they were still on the rear deck or whether they had probably gone down, she might have taken the children to the bathroom or something like that, and, but, all the children that were, and she were, were killed. And my oldest sister, you know, was never found. She was unidentified so she may possibly be under "the Slocum" monument in, out in Middle Village, Long Island at the cemetery.

SIGRIST: So how many family members did you lose?

WOTHERSPOON: Six.

SIGRIST: You lost six.

WOTHERSPOON: Uh huh.

SIGRIST: And were, were there other people who were lost on the boat with whom your parents had been friendly?

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WOTHERSPOON: I have no idea. But I assume that since it was a, a church picnic that, you know, and they were church members, that they would have a great many friends. Maybe just casual friends but I have no idea who they, who they...

SIGRIST: And, of course, the church we're talking about is St. Mark's Lutheran Church.

WOTHERSPOON: It is, yes, uh huh.

SIGRIST: That was the church that sponsored the picnic.

WOTHERSPOON: Uh huh.

SIGRIST: We know that it happened on June 15th, 1904. Do you know approximately what time this is all taking place?

WOTHERSPOON: I think it started shortly after nine o'clock because the boat was on fire...

SIGRIST: Nine A.M., in the morning?

WOTHERSPOON: Yes, in the morning. You see, they were, they were going for a full day's outing and I would assume that they would have left, you know, somewhere between eight and nine o'clock. And, so the boat was on fire long before they, they docked up there, you know, on Brother's Island, or he ran ashore on Brother's Island.

SIGRIST: Do they know what caused the fire?

WOTHERSPOON: Yes. They said there were a lot of things stored that should have not been stored in the hold. And I think one of them was charcoal. And somebody recently, I don't know where I read it, said that they had also been painting the boat and a lot of painting materials were down also, were stored or, not stored but I mean left downstairs where they should not have been under the decks.

SIGRIST: You said you lost six family members. How many family members survived other than you?

WOTHERSPOON: My, my aunt and uncle and my father and mother and me. Yeah, there were eleven of us and five of us survived.

SIGRIST: And name the people that were lost.

WOTHERSPOON: Frank, let's see, Frank Weber. Emma was the oldest, Emma Weber was my father's niece and she was eleven. And Frank Weber was his nephew and he was, she was eleven, he was about, I think, around four. And my oldest sister was six. Helen was six. And Anna was three. And, uh, Martha Liebenow could have been in her late twenties I would say.

SIGRIST: And she was playing with the children?

WOTHERSPOON: Yes, she was with the children.

SIGRIST: And the only reason that I say two aunts were lost was because among the pictures that I found up in the attic, my mother had a picture of her brother and another picture of a, a young woman I think with, in the same container. And she had written on the back "Uncle Henry's Fiancée." And her name, I think, if I remember correctly, was Taylor [ph]. And Taylor [ph] certainly was not a German name. And I looked it up. I have a list of survivors, uh, from , that was compiled, I guess, in 1906, of all the people that were lost on "the Slocum" and the unidentified, the dead and the unidentified dead, I mean, the people that survived and then the people that were lost and then the unidentified dead. And there was a Taylor [ph], a woman, that was lost. And so I assume that was the lady that my uncle was engaged to but I have never been able to find out anything more about her. I tried through Cathy and I don't think that, she was the historian, you know, of Saint Mark's, and I don't think she found anything about it. And being a, not being a real member of the family, not having married my uncle, why, naturally, my mother would say that I had lost an, an aunt because she was assumedly going to join the family.

SIGRIST: Was this picnic an annual...

WOTHERSPOON: As far as I know it was because it seemed to be a, a picnic ground that they knew about and, and usually in the, I mean, I know in modern times that when something was good you just, you know, did it year after year. I don't know whether it was a, a one shot trial or whether they had gone before or not.

SIGRIST: Your mother, you spoke earlier of her reluctance actually to talk about these kinds of things. Was there something that

she did talk about in conjunction with “the Slocum?” Some aspect of it that...

WOTHERSPOON: Uh, no. The only thing that she did say was that, and I could then understand why she would tell me this story, because my aunt said the family had been separated. See, I had, I had no idea that I, I had a feeling that I had been with my mother the whole time and that since she was rescued, I was rescued with her. But apparently that was not true because when we all got together on Brother’s Island, when the survivors got together on Brother’s Island, some woman came, came through where we were located and claimed, tried to claim me as her child. And my mother was quick enough to say, “What sex was your child?” And she said, “A boy.” And my mother said, “This is a little girl.” And that’s the only story that I’ve ever remembered.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

SIGRIST: You mentioned earlier that your mother’s arm was burned.

WOTHERSPOON: Yes, very badly, all up the left side.

SIGRIST: And, of course, this is something that would remain with her throughout her life.

WOTHERSPOON: Yes. And not only that but, of course, in those days they didn’t do anything about grafting or anything like that so it was a horrible mess.

SIGRIST: Can, can you remember how your mother dealt with that in, in her adult life?

WOTHERSPOON: She never mentioned it as far as I know.

SIGRIST: And what about in terms of, of showing it or...

WOTHERSPOON: No, no, nothing like that.

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SIGRIST: I was wondering if she always wore long sleeves through her life or...

WOTHERSPOON: No, well, I guess that was normal in those days because, uh, my mother was always to me an older woman (she laughs), you know, so she always dressed differently but I, they, she, she was what we would probably say now quite old fashioned.

SIGRIST: Do you know how old she was at that time?

WOTHERSPOON: At "the Slocum?"

SIGRIST: In 190--, middle of 1904?

WOTHERSPOON: No, I don't. I have, I have her obituary in the, somewhere in the den but I have, I have no, she lived to be seventy-five. At one time when I was about twelve, I think it was, they, they, the doctor she had said that he would give her a year to live if she didn't slow down. And he, and so she made all arrangements with this adopted sister for my education and that sort of thing. And then she lived to be seventy-five. So (she laughs) it was a, a wonderful surprise that the doctor was wrong. He may have just said that to scare her into not working so hard.

SIGRIST: You mentioned your mother's burned arm. How, how were people killed in, I mean, there a couple of different possibilities here in this particular disaster.

WOTHERSPOON: Well, it could have been smoke inhale, inhalation. Most of them, I think, were drowned rather than burned. But the reason my oldest sister was never found makes me think that they might have been in some section of the boat that was difficult to get away from. And that's, that's my own feeling about it. Because my second sister, I have the shoes she wore that day in that box (she gestures to a box filled with "General Slocum" related items and papers kept by her father) and when she was found she, they had, wore those old fashioned sailor hats, sort of patent leather that were on a string, and the hat was still hanging on her neck when my father found the body.

SIGRIST: Where did he have to go to find the body?

WOTHERSPOON: I don't know because the bodies were stretched on the shores of the islands up there. And then, I assume that they, you know, later on had a morgue somewhere close by. But my mother did say that he walked the streets for days, never changed his clothes just looking for the girls. And so, there's a possibility that that contributed to his ill health or it, or he may have had scorched lungs or something like that. But I never heard what actually caused it other than probably he was infected some way. Of course, that's the way you get tuberculosis.

SIGRIST: When, when the ship, when the ship was in full flame, was it actually docked at that time or was it still in the East River?

WOTHERSPOON: No, no, it was docked. He ran ashore there around (?) island and, uh, as the, I've heard, you know, in recent things. I have a book over there that was written. I haven't read the whole book but it mentions my father in there. And in that book ...(microphone disturbance)

SIGRIST: Watch the...

WOTHERSPOON: What's that? Oh, I'm sorry, yeah. I, I don't, I, I don't think he stopped and that, that was the reason that they imprisoned him, I guess because of the, such, you know, endangering the lives of so many people. And I don't think if he had gone ashore at any one of those possibilities or even drove or ridden into a harbor, I think there was some question about, he was not sure, for instance, what the other ships in the harbor were carrying. And he thought that he would endanger them more by stopping than continuing. There was, the big question, I imagine, at the trial was the fact that he should have stopped sooner but, of course, that's something that wasn't brought out until that time.

SIGRIST: Do you have any first hand recollections of being at the trial? How, how old were you, do you remember?

WOTHERSPOON: Oh, no. I was only a year and a half...

SIGRIST: Oh, a year and a half. Oh, you wouldn't at that point.

WOTHERSPOON: No. Maybe I was two years, I can't remember when but the date is on the picture.

SIGRIST: Did your mother even speak about where you were taken when, when you and your mother, where they were taken immediately after being removed from the...

WOTHERSPOON: Well, to the, there was a, I think the Brother's Island was contagious diseases and there was a hospital there. And I think the nurses and doctors did wade out and try to help some people ashore. And, of course, a lot of people did phenomenal things like putting out row boats and having people hang onto row boats and bringing them in, you know, and that sort of thing. So, no, she never said anything that would tell me where they, you know, where, except the fact that, that was on the islands.

SIGRIST: I was wondering if she had any recollections of going to a hospital or...

WOTHERSPOON: Oh no, no. Well, she remembered being in the hospital, of course, when they all got together, you know, after, after they'd all gotten, the ones that had survived. They were, they were kept at the hospital, I suppose, until they could transport them home. But she never told about how she got home. I don't ever remember her ever saying anything about that.

SIGRIST: Is there anything else that you've been told, before we get on to what happened afterwards, about the actual event itself? Anything else that sticks out in your mind or, or a story or something?

WOTHERSPOON: No, I, I can't think of anything.

SIGRIST: Tell me about, within your family, the effect that this had immediately after, what you've been told about, you know, maybe the next year afterwards.

WOTHERSPOON: Well, I don't think, I, I don't have any, any clear recollection of, of their reaction because, of course, as you know I was so young.

SIGRIST: Quite young.

WOTHERSPOON: But I, I don't know whether I, I can't remember but I know that my mother did try to have another child. And a little boy was born but he didn't survive. And I don't know how many years that was after "the Slocum." And that is the only thing that I remember and I thought, well, it was very wonderful of

her to try to build a family up again. And that must have been, probably, before my father became ill. But I, I don't have any record of that.

SIGRIST: Now you have, which we're going to look at afterwards, a scrapbook that your father kept...

WOTHERSPOON: Yes.

SIGRIST: ...began keeping. Can you talk at all about the kinds, before we actually look at it, the kinds of things that he was interested in, that he, you know...

WOTHERSPOON: Yeah.

SIGRIST: ...preserved...

WOTHERSPOON: It was anything and everything that mentioned "the Slocum" in both German and English. I think he took every newspaper he could find. And he, it's a very, I think it's, the people, the reporters that have gone through it, I had one, one, well, the first one that did a video, Bill Stiple [ph] is a, a Civil War buff so he is very much interested in anything like this. And he brought a three by three Xerox machine up here and Xeroxed practically the whole, the two scrapbooks. He spent the whole afternoon up here. It was a hot afternoon. (she laughs) I can remember he worked out on the porch with this machine and the, and the books. And we've become very close friends because of all of this.

SIGRIST: Well, I mean, those are very special objects.

WOTHERSPOON: Yes.

SIGRIST: Your father was keeping that scrapbook at the time.

WOTHERSPOON: Everything in there, and one of the things that was, it was very interesting, one of the letters in there was written by Charles Deutch, D-E-U-T-C-H, I think, who was the president of the Association of Slocum Survivors. And he wrote it on my, I guess it was my eighteen month old birthday, my year and a half birthday or my two year birthday. And he, he said that he thanked the Lord that my parents, that I was spared for my parents and so on and so forth. And he wished me a long and happy life. And, so when I had my ninetieth birthday party I was looking for

something a little bit unusual to use and I happened to be going through this with one of the reporters, I think, and I saw that letter. So what I did, I took the, the letter and had it Xeroxed and then at the bottom of it wrote an invitation to a birthday party. And I said since I've reached ninety years of this "long and happy life," you know, come and help me celebrate. So everybody thought that was very clever. And I, I didn't use it for my ninety-fifth but I could have. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: So at the time you were the youngest survivor of the event also.

WOTHERSPOON: Yes.

SIGRIST: Are you mentioned in any of the newspaper coverage...

WOTHERSPOON: You mean in the, in the...

SIGRIST: Yeah, in some of the scrapbook, in some of the newspaper articles that your father...

WOTHERSPOON: Oh, yes. All of them. I mean, I shouldn't say all of them, a great many of them. For instance there's a huge picture in there of my mother in a funny hat and me at "the Slocum" trial. And then, of course, I unveiled the monument and there's, I just took that picture out and I've had, I had some Xeroxed copies made and I took it to the memorial service at the church in, in Middle Village and showed it to several people there (a clock chimes in the background) and they were very impressed. And I just put it back in the scrapbook this morning. And I could, I have my dress there and I've always taken it to the, usually taken it to the memorial services but I thought I, I'd taken it so many times and I didn't take it this time and I should have because, I can't think of his name off hand but he's the Consul General at the U.N., German Consul General, but he's still an American citizen and he was educated in America. And his father [sic], it's a very interesting story, his father [sic] was a Hessian soldier in the Revolutionary War and he stayed over here. And his great uncle died in the Civil War. So this man is still, is still working for the U.N. and he happened to be at one of Cathy's exhibits and I met him there. And he was at the, at the anniversary out in Middle Village this year. And he presented... (microphone disturbance)

SIGRIST: Be careful, the microphone.

WOTHERSPOON: Whoops. I'm sorry. The, uh, Association gave me a letter of appreciation for all I had done over the years, you know, to help keep the memory of "the Slocum" alive and he presented it. And, and then, when he finished it, you know, and congratulated me, he said, "You should have brought the dress." (they laugh)

SIGRIST: Well, that leads me to ask you, because we haven't really talked about it yet, about the, the monument and, and, and, because you said you unveiled it...

WOTHERSPOON: Yes, yes.

SIGRIST: ...and all that sort of thing.

WOTHERSPOON: Well, that's all, that's all in the scrapbook. And the monument has been there, of course, since 1905.

SIGRIST: Well, what do you know about the background of the monument?

WOTHERSPOON: I don't know anything, except...

SIGRIST: Who designed it or...

WOTHERSPOON: No, there, well, there, it might be in the, in the book. I think it's probably written up in the scrapbook because there, there are pictures of it and I knew, I do know from the picture that there were a couple thousand people at the first service. But I know that when I was growing up, my mother went religiously every June 15th or, or when they, the memorial service was held. I mean, it was almost always held on the date. And I've been going, I went for years and years and then there was a space of time in there when I didn't go. And then, I think it was around my eightieth birthday when I thought, "Gee, somewhere along the line I'd better find out what to do with these 'Slocum' things." And I wanted to go over and see how, how firm that Association was. And I, it was run then by a Tom Schweitzer [ph], and he did a very good job. He was a schoolteacher and he did a thorough job. And then it got into the hands of a man by the name of O'Harilon [ph]. I couldn't understand how anyone with a name like O'Harilon [ph] got into the Association but I think he just, O'Haliron [ph] was just using it as a prop for his own

advancement. And finally a, a very nice man by the name of, he says Leib, L-E-I-B, Kenneth Leib. And he has something to do with the Long Island Historical Society. And I think it's in good hands now.

SIGRIST: So this association has a long history. It's been...

WITHERSPOON: Oh, yes. Ever since "the Slocum."

SIGRIST: ...ever since it actually happened.

WOTHERSPOON: Yes. As a matter of fact, there's some cards in there (she gestures to the scrapbooks) showing that we were members of the, the Association.

SIGRIST: Was it the Association that raised the funds to build the monuments in the first place?

WOTHERSPOON: I don't know. It's possible.

SIGRIST: Do you know anything about that, about the, the collection of money...

WOTHERSPOON: No, I don't about that but I, I do know that the one in Tompkins Square Park [i.e. memorial monument] shows a couple of children. And that was donated by some association of women that felt so badly, you know, about so many children having been killed that they had that monument done and paid for. But I don't know about the one at the cemetery. The one at the cemetery had a bronze plaque of the burning, of "the Slocum" burning and that was stolen. And I know that Mr. Austin [ph], who is now the president, is thinking about having a new one and having it replaced. He said now he thinks there's the kind of adhesive that will, you know, keep it safe so that they can't dig it off the, the monument. Now, at the moment, it's just a cement outline of "the Slocum."

SIGRIST: So on, on June 15th, in your childhood, there was always a ceremony...

WOTHERSPOON: Yes, uh huh.

SIGRIST: ...at one of these. Can you describe what the ceremony would entail, what you remember of it?

WOTHERSPOON: Well, it would, well, I think it's the same as we do, do it still now. It's always a church service first. And the church service is the, like the Catholic service for the dead. It's the, you know, the Lutheran is very close to the Catholic religion. And it's, it's my recollection of it is that it's that type of service. And then, after the service, we would go to the cemetery and they would place a wreath at the, at the monument. And over the years they always lowered the flag and raised it and over the years I've done that. And I've always been there to present the, the wreath even though there have been, other people have done it with me. And then after that we would, of course, we were from out of town, so we'd go to the Niederstein's, the old restaurant there in, on Metropolitan Avenue for lunch or supper or whatever we, whatever time the service was over.

SIGRIST: Now in the cemetery, is that where your, where your family members were buried also?

WOTHERSPOON: Yes.

SIGRIST: That was in the cemetery.

WOTHERSPOON: Yes, and I, I have just, this, not this year but last year, I have bought a monument with the two names, Liebenow and Weber. It's the Weber family, my, my father and my uncle had, after "the Slocum" they bought the plot and they had a number of people moved from other places in the cemetery over to the plot. We have a double plot. It's quite a big area. And Mr. Austin [ph] has been very great and he told me about a monument firm there that would help me and they did. I'm not quite sure that I like everything that's on the monument. I tried to specify what I wanted them to put on because they always, you know, have to decorate it some way. And I wanted the dogwood but I didn't, I don't think I got dogwood but it doesn't matter. It's, the, the important thing is to have the names recorded.

SIGRIST: You mean dogwood in relief on the stone?

WOTHERSPOON: Yes, on the, on the stone. And it's quite a modern stone. It's just a big square about thirty six inches square and then they put it on a platform. And I asked Mr. Austin [ph] if there was anything that they would let me plant and he said yes, anything that was dwarf and wouldn't, you know, obscure

anything else. So I have to talk to him about what types of things he, he'd let me plant.

SIGRIST: Were, did many families bury their dead in the same cemetery?

WOTHERSPOON: They, it seemed to be the idea. That was the, I don't know whether that started it or not but it was called at one time, you know, the German Lutheran Cemetery.

SIGRIST: I see.

WOTHERSPOON: And now it's, I guess it's the All Saints.

SIGRIST: And what was the location of it?

WOTHERSPOON: Metropolitan Avenue in Middle Village, Long Island.

SIGRIST: I see. (addressing the recording engineer) Could we just pause for a second, Kevin? (break in tape) Okay, we're now resuming. Mrs. Wotherspoon, we were talking a little bit about the memorials and, and the observances and that sort of thing. How old were you when you sort of stopped participating in these things? I'm wondering when interest sort of waned.

WOTHERSPOON: Well, it, it was probably after I was, sometime after I was married because I, I couldn't, couldn't make up my mind whether to retire from teaching or not. My husband wanted me to.

SIGRIST: At the time you got married?

WOTHERSPOON: Yes.

SIGRIST: Which was in what year?

WOTHERSPOON: 1930. And I, then we went through the Depression, which just sort of kept me going and then I got so interested that I just kept right on. And I was afraid to retire because I thought I'd be bored. (she laughs) I've learned differently.

SIGRIST: So throughout your whole young adulthood you still...

WOTHERSPOON: I didn't go after my mother's death. Up until then I went pretty regularly. Then there was a period, probably of twenty

years or so in there, that I didn't go. And then I went again, I, you know, on my eighty-fifth birthday. I, I went after I happened to discover the books [i.e. her father's scrapbooks]. I rediscovered the books.

SIGRIST: How did you rediscover, these are the scrapbooks that you father had?

WOTHERSPOON: Yeah. They were up in the attic probably and I just happened to find them one day. And then, then all this interest, and then, of course, then "the Titanic" brought up all this interest and then reestablished it after the picture was made [i.e. the film "Titanic" directed by James Cameron]. So that the, I have been interviewed so many times in this, the last few years, probably the last two or three years just because of that, of "the Titanic" and bringing the interest in this sort of thing.

SIGRIST: Yeah, this whole interest in, in maritime tragedies.

WOTHERSPOON: Tragedies, uh huh.

SIGRIST: When you were a young girl, say between the ages of seven, eight and twenty, were you ever interviewed at that time?

WOTHERSPOON: No, no.

SIGRIST: Was there any attention given to you, that you remember, that was...

WOTHERSPOON: None whatsoever, no. It had, the, the thing had completely slipped the memory except for the people that were closely, you know, connected with it. I think it's, the memory of the public has died completely and it's just been revived now by all this interest in, interest in the "the Titanic" and so on.

SIGRIST: You said your father died when you were seven...

WOTHERSPOON: Uh huh.

SIGRIST: ...of tuberculosis. Can you talk a little bit about your mother after he has died? Now she's lost quite a lot of family by that point.

WOTHERSPOON: Well, she had friends out here in New Jersey. And there was a family that had a, a hotel on the main street downtown. It's gone since then, of course.

SIGRIST: Here in Watchung?

WOTHERSPOON: No, in, in Plainfield.

SIGRIST: Plainfield.

WOTHERSPOON: And I'm trying to think of their names. And, I should remember it but I don't. But anyhow, I since, since the, the hotel strikes a, a note of memory, I think possibly it was her friends who ran the hotel that induced her to come out for the Fourth of July weekend after my father, my father died in April. And she came out for that Fourth of July weekend in 1910. And my father died in April, 1910. And she, these friends said to her, "It's so much easier to bring up a child in the country. Why don't you move out?" And so she did a little investigating. She liked it out here and she moved out. And it was the best thing she ever did. And I just loved it because we lived on a farm and I tell everybody now that I planted my first radishes on, on Watchung Avenue (she laughs) in Watchung.

SIGRIST: Do you think that there were ways that, looking back on your interaction with your mother as you were growing up, do you think that there were ways that she treated you differently because of the experiences she had gone through and losing children and...

WOTHERSPOON: I don't think so. I think I was a very independent child. She, she never tried to sway my opinions or anything. And I, I think that, I wasn't allowed to do things that weren't good for me but I was allowed to participate in anything that I wanted to participate in that, you know, that was okay, as it were. And, as far as I know, I had, I don't remember any restrictions. I may have had advice which I probably took or didn't take.

SIGRIST: And a nervous mother watching you swim. (he laughs)

WOTHERSPOON: Well, yes, that sort of thing. But then that's understandable. I'd be more than nervous, I think, if I had lost all that she had lost.

SIGRIST: Did she ever talk about how she may have felt about the, the "hand of cards" that she had been dealt, if you will, after your father died?

WOTHERSPOON: She, no, she, she just, she was a fabulous person. I think she just sort of just accepted, I don't know. I can't, it's not exactly accepted but she was able to cope with it. And I think that, I hope that I've inherited a little bit of that. I haven't had too many things go wrong but I have had some things. I lost my husband and he died very suddenly and unexpectedly and I think it's always a shock when it comes that way. But, uh...

SIGRIST: Are there ways that you, are there, are there certain things that you hold onto that help you get through this, or that, or things that your mother held onto to get her through her tragedies?

WOTHERSPOON: Not, not, no, nothing except that you just assume that you've got to go, go on living and you just go on living. I, I just kept myself busy and, of course, I've had a, a wonderful life with, I've had fantastic friends. And the, I've had a lot of support and I've kept my, and I've, I had a lot of interests. The interests have always been there.

SIGRIST: What are some of the things that you are interested in in life?

WOTHERSPOON: Well, I, I did a lot of gardening. And, after I retired, I, I, as a matter of fact, I've just been given a very high honor from the Garden Club of New Jersey. I served on their board for thirty years. And at the last conference, annual conference, I was not only, I expected that I'd have a presidential citation but I was also given their Medal of Honor. And the New Jersey Medal of Honor, the Garden Club of New Jersey Medal of Honor, is the highest thing they give anybody. And they usually give it to somebody who has written a book or has been the head of a conservation school or something of that sort. (she laughs) I didn't expect it. And it, it was most unexpected, as I can say, but most appreciated. And, so I, anything I've gotten into, I've gotten into rather heavily and I've enjoyed it. And, and, of course, I'm now working with the historical society up here in Watchung and that's going to be quite a good interest of mine. I like that very much. And then, of course, I've always done gardening. And then my husband and I traveled and I, and when we first were, when he was, when I first met him, he was interested in fishing and

I was interested in bridge. And he would say to me at that time, some of the people, it was couple's bridge, and some of the gals were pregnant and my husband smoked a pipe. So he was very unpopular. And he used to say, "Get somebody to take you to bridge on Saturday night and I'll come out Sunday and fish." And I said, "Uh huh (neg.). You come out on Saturday night and play bridge and I'll go on Sunday and fish with you." So that's the way we did it. And he became a good bridge (she laughs) player and I became a good fisherman. I have a salmon I caught in Norway hanging on the wall in the hallway. (Mr. Sigrist laughs)

SIGRIST: Do you think that, when you look back on your life, do you think that there are certain ways that having this title of being the youngest survivor of "the General Slocum," do you think that there are ways that having been that have affected your life?

WOTHERSPOON: No.

SIGRIST: Either in the middle of it or now?

WOTHERSPOON: Well, now it has affected it because now there has been so much interest in keeping it alive. And up until, well, I would say my eighty-fifth birthday, it was just there and I always, you know, accepted and went. But it, no, it has never made any difference (she pauses) as far my, you know, just living is concerned. And a lot of people don't even know it. A great many of my friends are not, not aware of it.

SIGRIST: My final question for you, to someone listening to this tape two hundred years from now, what kind of advice can you give them on how to lead a long and happy and satisfying life?

WOTHERSPOON: Keep busy. The best thing is just to always have too much to do (she laughs) because if you're, if you're busy you haven't any time to get into trouble or to worry about things too much. You just have to keep going. I, I have really, well, of course, I've had a wonderful role model in my mother, too, having seen how wonderfully she handled things. And I think she sort of instilled that into me. I don't know how she did it but she managed. She managed a lot of things.

SIGRIST: Great. Well, Mrs. Wotherspoon, thank you very much for letting us come out here and conduct this interview.

WOTHERSPOON: Well, I hope you got enough. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: Oh, I think we do. This is Paul Sigrist signing off with Adella Wotherspoon on Monday, July 19th, 1999 here, tucked away in the woods in Watchung, New Jersey. Thank you.

ADDITION TO TRANSCRIPT: SELECTION FROM AN INTERVIEW, EDITED BY JOHN WESLEY HANSON, CONDUCTED WITH MRS. ANNIE WEBER, PATERNAL AUNT OF ADELLA LIEBENOW WOTHERSPOON AND SURVIVOR OF THE TRAGEDY. THE INTERVIEW WAS CONDUCTED VERY SOON AFTER THE EVENT IN 1904 AND BEFORE SHE KNEW FOR CERTAIN THAT HER TWO CHILDREN HAD PERISHED. THERE IS ALSO A BRIEF QUOTATION FROM MRS. WEBER'S HUSBAND FRANK AT THE END:

"...There never was a happier party than we were when we boarded the boat Wednesday morning. We are members of St. Mark's Church and had looked forward to this outing. The children danced around when I was preparing the lunch the night before, and we started early. My husband and myself, and my children, Emma, ten years old, and Frank, seven, and my sister Martha Liebenow, met my brother Paul Liebenow and his wife, with their six-month-old baby in her arms [i.e. Adella Liebenow Wotherspoon], and Helen, six years old, and a baby girl three years old at the dock. We had invited them to go with us to the excursion, and we went on board laughing and talking, the children romping with my sister. We went to the middle deck, near the forward part of the boat. The sun was shining and the boat glided through the water so smoothly that the children could play around without danger, and were told to remain within call. The four little ones, my two and my sister-in-law's older children, romped back toward the stern of the boat with my sister. We were sitting in a circle talking when a puff of black smoke came up the stairway leading to the deck below. It was a big puff of smoke and startled everyone. 'Don't mind that. It is the chowder cooking,' someone said, and then we laughed at our fears, but the laughter changed to a cry of horror when a sheet of flame followed the smoke. I cried for my children, and my sister-in-law, with her baby, ran back to search for her two little ones. The flames kept sweeping up in puffs, each one growing higher and spreading. My husband and my brother had gone to look for the children. Then we were all separated. I rushed here and there, looking for my children and saying to myself that my husband had found them. The flames were sweeping back as the boat raced on, and it was like the breath of a red-hot furnace. 'Get life preservers,' said a man, and we stood up on camp stools and on the benches and reached for the life preservers. Some of them we could not budge, and the others pulled to pieces and spilled the crumbs of cork over our heads. The heat was blistering and the flames swept along the roof of the deck and scorched our fingers as we tried to snatch down the life preservers. The

flames drove those who were standing around me back and over the side of the boat. Nobody could live in such heat as that. My face was scorching and my hair caught fire. I went to the side of the boat and swung myself over the side by a rope. Every time my hands, face or body would come in contact with the sides of the vessel it would blister my flesh. 'Drop or burn to death!' someone cried to me. I don't know whether I dropped or whether I was pushed off. I found myself struggling against the water, and it was hot. There were others struggling in the water all around me, and they were pulling each other down. I cried for help and heard a man, who was in the water, tell me to come nearer, that the water was too hot where I was for him to swim on to me. I think I must have caught a rope. I was pulled in shore on North Brother Island and then went back into the water to look for my children. Before I let go of the rope, the vessel was one mass of flames. I knew that the children couldn't live there and thought I might keep them from drowning. I found my husband, with his clothes burned off, looking for the children, and then they took us both to the hospital. At the hospital I found my brother and his wife. Someone restored to them their six-months-old baby, which had been pulled from the water. My two little children and her two little girls are missing. I pray God that they have been all been saved." FROM MR. FRANK WEBER: "When I ran back to look for my children, the flames seemed to follow me. I could not find them. It was useless in a moment to look, for the flames were all over the boat, and no one could live. With other men I tried to lower away a lifeboat. We could manage the ropes, but found that the boat was fastened on by wire and could not be lowered. The life preservers were as useless as a handful of sawdust, into which they seemed to crumble at the touch. I jumped to the deck below. There was a man there with a hose, which seemed to be split and broken, and I heard him shout, "Where's the water? Where's the water?" Then he dropped the hose and jumped for his life. The deck-hands and crew of the boat were absolutely no aid in saving lives. No one even warned of the fire. I remained on the boat until my clothing was aflame and then jumped into the water. It was boiling hot near the boat. I swam around looking for my children and then made it to shore."

END OF SELECTION FROM AN INTERVIEW CONDUCTED IN 1904 WITH FRANK AND ANNIE WEBER, EDITED AT THE TIME BY JOHN WESLEY HANSON, AND NOW IN THE PERSONAL COLLECTION OF MRS. ADELLA WOTHERSPOON.