

EI-112/NILSON

EI-112

EVERETT NILSON

BIRTH DATE: MAY 24, 1904

INTERVIEW DATE: 11/1/1991

RUNNING TIME: 54:22

INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE, PH.D.

RECORDING ENGINEER: SAME

INTERVIEW LOCATION: WARREN, MAINE

TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: NANCY VEGA, 7/1993

TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY: PAUL E. SIGRIST, JR., 11/1993

SWEDEN, 1923

PORT: GOTEBOG

AGE 19

RESIDENCES: SWEDEN: SEKINKOIL

Oral Historian's Note: On the recording Mr. Nilson has a heavy Swedish/Maine accent that can sometimes be difficult to understand. There is a prominent mechanical sound throughout the recording. Paul E. Sigrist, Jr., Director of the Oral History Project, 11/21/1993.

LEVINE: This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service, and I'm here today

in Warren, Maine with Mr. Everett Nilson, who came through Ellis Island from

Sweden in 1923 when he was eighteen, the beginning of nineteen years of age.

Okay. Well, Mr. Nilson, I'm happy to be here, and I want first to ask you what your birth date is.

NILSON: Well, you want to know when the boat came in?

LEVINE: No. First I want to know when you were . . .

NILSON: Working to go to a function.

LEVINE: That's okay. No. What day were you born?

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NILSON: 1904, I was born.

MRS. NILSON: May the 24th.

NILSON: 1924.

LEVINE: 1924.

NILSON: No. 1904.

LEVINE: 1904 you were born. And your birthday?

NILSON: The 24th of May.

LEVINE: Okay. And what town were you born in?

NILSON: In Sekinkoil, where I came from.

LEVINE: Can you spell that, the name of the town? Can you spell it?

NILSON: Oh, yes. Uh, S-E-K-I-N-K-O-I-L. Is that right? (off mike reply, "That's right.")

LEVINE: Okay. Good. Okay. Now, can you tell me about that town? Tell me what that town was like. Tell me what the town was like, that town where you

were born. Can you tell me about it, describe it?

NILSON: Yeah, yeah. Well, Albert was a kid. (he laughs) You walk around there, and his father came over the same time, in 1923. And his father was staying on the last car in the locomotives. There were five, six fellows there. We went with him. He called up this fellow that I came through. From Sekinkoil, he says, "I'm taking the train," his father, "And if you want to go with me to the station, we'll all meet there before in a few (?)." And then the train would take us to Goteborg.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. But when you were a little boy, when you were a little boy and you were growing up in the town tell me what the town was like. What was the town like?

NILSON: Well, when I was a little boy?

LEVINE: Yes.

NILSON: Well, we were playing around on the town, you know, go down to the water, see the fishermen come in. And there was a couple of fellows. They called the Levend off boys. They were a big operator, was a great friend to my father, and his father, see. My father came here 1909.

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LEVINE: Now, what was your father's name?

NILSON: John Nilson.

LEVINE: And your mother? What was her name?

NILSON: J-O-H-N. John. N-I-L-S-O-N, Nilson.

LEVINE: And her first name?

NILSON: John Nilson. That was his first.

LEVINE: Joan? No, your mother's first name?

NILSON: Her name was Alma.

LEVINE: Alma. And what was her maiden name?

NILSON: Olsen.

LEVINE: Olsen. Uh-huh. And what was your mother like? Tell me about your mother.

NILSON: Want me to spell that name?

LEVINE: No. Just tell me what kind of person was your mother.

NILSON: Well, she was like ordinary people. She had, we had four girls, two boys. She done all the cooking, all the washing, and all that. Fishing, if we had a little time, we'd go fishing, you know. We sold a lot of mackerel, a lot of herring.

LEVINE: Your mother went fishing, too?

NILSON: Oh, yeah. Well, that was a common day's work, you know, go out to fish. And you see maybe twenty-five, thirty boats anchored fishing. And that's not the (?) for all around, put them in and have a good garden. And then they had the picnics. (?)

LEVINE: What kind of work did your father do?

NILSON: He was a stone, a paving cutter. And he took in all the, he was a puller, too. He took in all the big boats from foreign country up through the channels. He used to let you go through the river. And sailboats, you know, and square rigs there, mercantines, all them. But in, way back there mostly was those.

LEVINE: Well, now, he left for the United States in 1909.

NILSON: Huh?

LEVINE: Your father left for the United States in 1909.

NILSON: Yeah. And he went home 1913.

LEVINE: Oh, he came back again.

NILSON: Yeah. And I don't know when Alfred, I mean, your father came the first time.

ALFRED: 1912.

NILSON: 1912. I see.

LEVINE: Well, did your father, when he came back in 1913, did he stay, then, in Sweden?

NILSON: Well, him and another fellow who had some, brother to old Madsen. They came home together. And he went back. We went back to this country. But we didn't want Father to go also, he didn't go.

LEVINE: Oh, so he stayed.

NILSON: I was only five years old when he left the first time, you know.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

NILSON: And then the war broke out, see. Kaiser was running the war in Europe, breaking into all the foreigner countries there, and the United States was getting ready. It took three years for the United States to get ready in the First World's War, see, before they conquered Kaiser, see? So then we had that in Europe. We had three million across in Europe to start with, and they had three more going.

LEVINE: Do you remember the war?

NILSON: Uh, yes. It was the First World's War.

LEVINE: What do you remember about it?

NILSON: Well, I remember when they had a big battle in the North Sea. They sunk seven hundred and forty-two ships, and I had that down on a paper. And we went out there to see them. They were doctoring up, you know, them soldiers. Some was American, some Italian, some British, some Greek, and all different country, see. And I remember one time there was nine piled up in a cove one at a time. We belonged to the Coast Guard so we had to help out take care of them. They buried fourteen thousand in the last war in Italy. Americans, fourteen

thousand.

LEVINE: In the Second World War.

NILSON: In the Second World War. But the First World's War, and they lost a big battle, lasted about five days. Oh, it was wicked. You could hear them bombs, if you could hear, you could hear them bombs exploding, see. It was wicked.

LEVINE: And yet you were how old? You were about fifteen or, you were about fifteen years old.

NILSON: Yeah. So that was quite a lot of excitement to put the whole (?), but unpleasant to see. And them ships were leaning this way. The other one was sinking. I don't understand it. They done it in the dark mostly, no lights. It was all foggy, you see. They had to go by the compass, and this way.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Now, was your town affected by the First World War? Did it come to your town?

NILSON: It was, there was people going back and forth, and the question was they weren't supposed to know too much, but I said there was detectives all around, you know. And there were detectives back there. Many a time you had to

take your chances, or did you know what you run into. And then there was all this mine, put out, you know, for the ship explode it, you know, going here. And that was quite an excitement, in one way, and then there was still around the other way.

LEVINE: Now, what were your brothers' and sisters' names? What were the names of your brothers and sisters?

NILSON: My older sister, she was, she died here about three years ago. She was eighty-four. And the other sister died about three months ago. And my sister was working for the United States Embassy in Sweden, and she talked seven different languages. And when Arthur Goldberger, the chief in Supreme Court in Washington was over to inspect different countries, she had to go with him to Greece, France, Italy and be an interpreter so he could understand, but they couldn't have no speech. And I had to learn what he said. He said there would be a great country if we could do in many ways what they do in Sweden. You see, everything is free, the hospitals and stuff. Now you go to the hospital for ten days it costs you eight, ten thousand dollars. And that's what he tried to enforce here, but he says you couldn't do it. That's the trouble right there. Now they're shouting, this fellow went through a hernia last month. Ten thousand dollars for a hernia. And Doctor Jameson told me, him and I were great friends. I used to

take the stonecutter to him when he had a hernia, you know. A hundred dollars. Now it's ten thousand.

LEVINE: When you think about your childhood before you came to the United States, when you think about your childhood before you came to the United States, what are the things that you remember most?

NILSON: Well, I don't know. That's quite a problem. I've been in politics for fifty years, it's quite a problem. I've been in Washington . . .

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Well, when you're, going back to your childhood first, before that. Were there things that you remember that you really liked?

NILSON: That I really liked?

LEVINE: Yeah, during your childhood.

NILSON: You see, what you like is two stories. There's always two angles. And that's what you mean.

LEVINE: Well, when you think about Sweden, what do you think of?

NILSON: Well, I would like to go home. I've been, I went so far at one time I went on the gangplank to go aboard a boat. But I had some investment here and

one thing or another. You don't know when you go across if you ever come back, you know. There's a doubt.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

NILSON: So I went back again. I didn't go. In 1928 Kurt Swensen and I was going home. And I had all the tickets and everything ready, and then (?). So my father died, my mother died, my brother died in '65. It's just like a dream now, you know. Because I remember when I was a kid, you start playing around, what you're able to do. Who had the best sailboat, and who could get the most fish.

LEVINE: Now, did you know any English when you came here?

NILSON: Swedes?

LEVINE: Did you know how to speak English when you came to the United States?

NILSON: Yeah. It, you see, at that time, United States let so many people come in from different countries, and that year from Sweden came in twenty-three thousand and from Germany come in forty-two thousand. Italy did thirty-two thousand, and so many come in every month. But they didn't let in Japanese and Chinese come in. They came through that for so long. And then after a while,

well, things turned around to different.

LEVINE: Well, what was it that decided your father to come back here again?

NILSON: Well, you know, we were children and we didn't want him to come over here. He says he didn't know how long he was going to stay and so on, and we was all small, we weren't too big. Twelve, fourteen years old, my sisters.

LEVINE: It will pick that up. (referring to tapping noise Mr. Nilson is making)
Uh-huh. So then when he decided to come back, who came with him?

NILSON: Well, the same fellow he went home with. He came (?) him, and the fellow named David Anderson from (?) Haven. And they had four days to end before the boat was going to leave. So they stayed home with all people at that time. And so that's what, but he didn't go. We didn't want him to go. We were big enough to understand he'd be better off home. At that time, you know, people here in this country was working most around for two dollars a day, and (?) the railroad, all they had, two dollars a day. The gas companies had all day at two dollars a day, (?) two dollars a day. So you weren't better off to have two families, then you have to make enough to take care of the family in Sweden and then live here. So, you see, you didn't gain anything. It was all right for a single fellow to stay here, but for a family you had in Sweden, and then take care of yourself here,

you have to make double pay, and send money over here.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So then how did it get decided that you would come? How was it decided that you would come here?

NILSON: Well, we, young fellows all at home, we strikes out. I wanted to see a little difference. That was the idea, talking to each other. There was a fellow went to school with me, and a smart guy, too. And he was only seventeen. And his Norwegian ship, boat, his name was Scogerland. They were a company, they had one company in Norway, and a hundred and twenty-eight ships. Norway and Sweden had the biggest Merchant Marine in the war. The United States never had no Merchant Marine. They hired ships for foreign countries, too. When Conran, congressman from Rockland come in, President Roosevelt appointed him Marine Commissioner of the United States Marines, and they built five hundred ships, then, liberty ships. Before that the United States didn't have no marines. So Norway and Sweden had a, they had the (?) of cargo. But Britain had a bigger boat. They had boat, twenty-five, thirty, forty-thousand tons. Like (?), Cunard had twenty-one big ships crossing the Atlantic. White Star had twenty-three. But then Sweden and Norway tried to explain to the United States don't expand with big ships. There's only five ports you can go into with them big ships. That's Baltimore, San Francisco, Boston, New York and Philadelphia. These are all too

much water. You take Portland, for instance. They used to take Portland off, years ago. All those boats could go in to forty-two feet. So the big tanker, after the United States expanded so much, them tankers had to unload with Artsboro, a smaller tanker would take it on. So now the government furnished the money so they trade off to seventy-two feet. So they, the Swedish boat was only on six, seven, eight thousand tons. Well, this fellow says, "I'm going on with Scogerland." "You go over there?" "Yah, I'm going to Buenos Aires with granite paving blocks." Nobody ever saw him. They gone years and years and years and years. He never wrote home. He got three brothers and one sister. Nobody knew what become of them. So Karl Petersen. I don't know if you saw him when he was there two years ago. He was from (?). He lived so close, until he moved from (?). He moved to (?). He lived so close, him and I, we used to swap rabbits together and go too close to there, to the next town. Well, anyhow, so they was with a (?) in Baltimore and Karl went there. So we went in in this diner to have a cup of coffee. And it was piled up at the door waiting for seats. There were twelve stools and then there were three tables. They were all filled up. Karl already had his coffee, so he says to this fellow, "You can have mine." So he looked at him. Karl always had curly hair, see. He said, "You're Scandinavian?" "Yeah." He says, "You ain't Karl Petersen, are you?" "Yes." "My God, why don't you ever wrote home for over fifty years?" He said, "What are you doing?" So

you never know who you'll meet, you know.

LEVINE: Well, now, how was it decided that you would come back here, that you would come to the United States?

NILSON: Well, I, it was just one of those things, I decided to go. We all drifted off. A lot of fellows, when they got to that age, you know, they want to sail different. They go to sea, go to a different country, but so that's what I would have done. They always had somebody that you wrote to. Well, if you write to come over, we sent you a ticket. At that time the ticket cost, at that time the ticket, I think, cost one hundred thirty-five krona, in Sweden.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Now, who did you travel with when you came?

NILSON: Well, I worked for this big construction company up in Vermont, and they were prospecting for marble, magnesium, copper, brass, gold and silver. We were six of them, also Swedes. (?) Talked that time. But I worked with them in there.

LEVINE: Now, did you know you had that job? Did you know you were going to a job in Vermont when you left Sweden?

NILSON: No. Then we worked in forty-two states in this country, and then we

went into British Columbia, Vancouver, Alberta, Canada, and all over. It took eighteen months.

LEVINE: Well, now, what port did you leave from when you left Sweden? Where did you leave from?

NILSON: We left from Lysekil at that time. We left Lysekil one time when (?), and then we went back again when there were better quotas to work at that time, see. And then we moved to (?).

LEVINE: Now, can you spell the port that you left from? What's the name of the port that you left from? Where the ship, the boat left from. (voice off mike) How do you spell that? The port where the ship left from?

NILSON: Oh, from Goteborg.

LEVINE: Oh, from Goteborg.

NILSON: That's where the ship left to come here.

LEVINE: Oh, okay. Now, were you, you were alone when you were traveling from Goteborg to here?

NILSON: Well, it took us eleven days to come across. We run up against

storms, and the storm was so heavy, so the stuff they had down on the boat was going over on one side. So they put the bow up against the wind, see, and the water was coming over it, and they didn't know, they couldn't get the boat back, again. It was a different thing, separated, washing machines, a lot of steel, a lot of steel. The United States shipping two-thirds more steel than they produced, and most of it comes from Sweden. All ball bearings come from Sweden, all army plates comes from Sweden. All surgeon tools comes from Sweden, and all this stuff. And they're shipping it in here for the steel. All gun barrels, you could fire with a cannon on it. This Navy officer in Bath, when I wrote to him nine years they told me that it can fire three times faster than a Swedish gun than they do what the gun had. They get hot, see. And then the boats would go a minute. And they had all day, shift the barrels, and they said very seldom they could do that, they're facing the war. They have to just junk it.

LEVINE: Well, were you traveling in the steerage? Were you down in the hull of the ship?

NILSON: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. I went down there many times. I like to look the ship over. That wasn't a very big ship.

LEVINE: How many passengers?

NILSON: About fourteen thousand tons, that's all they was. The name was Kungsholm.

LEVINE: Now, did you, where were you sleeping? How did you sleep on the ship?

NILSON: Well, they had like you had in the navy, you know. They had beds like that piled together. (he gestures) And then there was the second class. I was in the second class. First class had it a little better, see. But it costed you more money. Usually if you wanted to have a good drink you would pay more.

LEVINE: Now, were there other people in third class and in steerage on that ship? Were there other people? You were second class. Were there other people in steerage?

NILSON: Yes. We used to go up there on dances, when they had a dance. We sneaked over. They had a guy there, see, we weren't supposed to go there. We didn't pay for that. But nine, ten o'clock some of those fellows went to sleep themselves. We sneaked up there and had a dance, whatever.

LEVINE: I see.

NILSON: We had a good time.

LEVINE: Okay. Well, so, when you got to New York what was the first thing you remember seeing? What's the first thing you remember seeing when you got to New York?

NILSON: Well, the boat anchored. You see, France had his own berth, and the English have his own berth. But the other countries higher, see, so there's no boats stay in the berth hardly more than four, three to four days on load, unload, and then they take off. So the last two days we came into New York is for (?) paper. And then the fellows come aboard, and the doctors. The doctors examined us in Sweden before we came, American doctor, but there could be something wrong with somebody, so they examined them again before they come in through the three-mile territory. The United States only had three miles then. Now they got two hundred miles. Well, anyhow, so they, after those things were covered over there and the pilot ran the boat, they slowed down to three knots and you sailed in. And the second engineer, I was pretty well-acquainted with him, he hauled it off. Five more men that we see in Long Island. That's not too old. So anchors were dropped in New York, in Hudson River. And the next morning we had breakfast and the ferry came and took us over to Ellis Island. After we were examined there, I had a regular, just like in school. There was the

Scandinavian men, the Italian men, and so on. And they all had an interpreter. So then the ferry came back and took us to New York. All I had was a ticket to New York, but that fellow had a ticket to Indianapolis and Colorado and Chicago. They put the belt on her with a name on it, and send him on the trains, New York Central. But the minister came down from the Swedish Immigrant Home and he took us up there, and that was quite a few already. So there was a lot of application in for skilled labor, but they couldn't talk. They wanted a machinist, they wanted a painter, they wanted a carpenter, and then application come in from different company. And in the meantime, at night, they were a lot of Scandinavian called there. They would see if there was any friend they know. I had from, I had may twelve, fifteen different addresses from different people, but I didn't know exactly what it was in New York. But they mostly come there, see. So I went to work then. They put me on a forty-two story building putting iron frames, to put windows in. I looked down, geez, looking at them people down there. It's like ants. So I stayed there for ten days, and then this company send in application for all different kind of work for greenhorns. (he laughs) So, well, so the minister says then, "Swedish immigrants, how many you want?" "Well," he says, "I can handle twenty, anyhow." "I'm coming down." Send the man right down from the company. And then we went up to Procter, Vermont. And that was all kind of Swedes. Big bosses. And before I went out of there, I was yard

superintendent. (he laughs)

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

LEVINE: Now, do you remember where the Swedish Immigrant Home was?
(sound of crashing in the background) Do you remember where the Swedish Immigrant Home was where you first went to find out about jobs? Do you remember where that was located, that Swedish immigrant home?

NILSON: Yeah.

LEVINE: Where was that?

NILSON: In New York.

LEVINE: Do you know the address?

NILSON: No. I can't remember the street exactly, but they got two in Boston. They got, I remember that, on Liverpool Street, and Summer Street. They got two, and all the sailors go stay at them when they ship and all. And you can even live there. They charge you, at that time, eight dollars a week, board, room and wash. And so that's pretty handy many times that way, you see.

LEVINE: Well, now, how much time did you spend at Ellis Island?

NILSON: No, no. They took it into the ferry and come over next morning after we had breakfast and we'd been examined by the doctor, they took us back, whatever it was.

LEVINE: Can you remember anything about Ellis Island? Anything else?

NILSON: No. There was nothing else for us to do. When the ferry come, they was all done with us. They took us back to New York and then the shipping started off. There maybe was a hundred going to different places in this country, see. And all they do, put belts on you where you was going, to different places. And if you had the address of somebody there where you was going, see.

LEVINE: But you went to the Swedish home, the immigrant home.

NILSON: Yeah.

LEVINE: From Ellis Island.

NILSON: Yeah. And I stayed there a week.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Do you remember seeing the Statue of Liberty?

NILSON: Huh?

LEVINE: Do you remember seeing the Statue of Liberty when you first . . .

NILSON: Oh, yeah. I saw that. It was a nice thing. And, uh . . .

LEVINE: What did you think about it when you saw it? What did you think when you saw the Statue of Liberty?

NILSON: Well, it was only a statue. I'd seen it in pictures, you know, so many times.

LEVINE: Did people come out on deck?

NILSON: Oh, yeah. They came out on the deck. He says, "In a good, for three to five minutes," he says, "we'll see Long Island." Then we had to pass the statue, see. And the water was just as calm as that piece of paper." So that was that.

LEVINE: And then did you go from New York to Vermont, did you stop in Boston?

NILSON: No, no, no. We went from New York right to Procter, Vermont. The

train went by. That train, at that time, North Station in Boston take in nineteen gates, and South Station take in twenty-four. But you want to go further from New York, you have to go over to North Station to get west. And that's where they congregated at that time, because it was so much better. I set granite blocks in North Station and Hanover Street and Washington Street, 1928. I know all about Boston.

LEVINE: So where did you go in Vermont? Where in Vermont did you go?

NILSON: Procter, Vermont.

LEVINE: Procter?

NILSON: Procter, Vermont.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And what was it like when you got there?

NILSON: Yeah. Procter is next to Rutland. Procter, it cost only twenty-six cents, twenty-five cents from Procter to Rutland. And that company had office in every state in the union, and they were shipping in marble from every country in the world. I get a lot of marble there. I'm in different state, you know. But . . .

LEVINE: So they were shipping marble into Procter, and then you would cut it

there?

NILSON: Oh, they're shipping in. They had a mine, you don't have, you maybe worked right over the house, the ground. The only farms, the only coal mines there owned the store. So when you get your pay, you go right over to the store. That was everything. If you had a family, move right in. Ten dollars a month. Everything furnished. So a lot of people struck there. That was around forty came there in a short time. But the other generation all stand around thirty-five, forty. From way back, 1900, 1909 and so on.

LEVINE: Well, did you like it there? Did you like being on that job?

NILSON: Well, I don't know. Off and on, you know.

LEVINE: What were you doing, exactly?

NILSON: Well, I had different jobs. They put me for roadside superintendent, for all over to put up the slab. I do a lot of improvement for him, see. And they decided that some of, every door improvement to the company would pay you. Well, sometimes you'd get owners, you know. But I had a good improvement, but I couldn't talk, and this fellow took it away from me. He got the money and all I get was five hundred dollars was, I find out afterwards it was over twenty-five

thousand.

LEVINE: Hmm. So you were putting, you were putting slabs up? You were putting slabs of marble up?

NILSON: Oh, yeah. I went to Philadelphia for him and put up a big theater. It cost three million dollars. And put them slabs up. You'd make sheet rock, see. You had to drill the hole and put the screws in there. And that was all kind of marble, blue, green, purple. So when you went in it was like lines.

LEVINE: So then did you travel out from Vermont to different places? Did you travel out from Vermont to go different places?

NILSON: Oh, yeah. I went, for this company, for prospecting for marble, see. We put in marble block, ten feet square. They had to be sawed, set to saws as you would a tree. If you go to three inches, two inches, one inch, to set them saw, and you open up the powder with sand and water. And them saws was going back and forth. One rotate on the saw, back and forth. It took seven days and nights to saw one of them blocks down. Then they put them out in the yard like this, like they haul the glass on the trucks, you know, length-ways, see. And that's why I'd come out, superintendent take care of all this stuff. But I had a Swedish boss telling me what to do, see, from the office. There were a lot of

Swedish bosses, high up. I think one fellow told me they build Procter, the Swedish did, you know, a lot of hammering. But they had a lot of, they had in South Rutland and West Rutland and Ludlow, right there in the state of Vermont. They owned that.

LEVINE: What did you mean when you said you would go out prospecting for marble? What did you do when you . . .

NILSON: Well, we had a compressor, see. But you couldn't get up in a month in the different places. So a part the compressor don't have, and you had hoses you put on, like the fire department. If you needed a hundred feet you put on another hose. If you need another one, you put on. Sometimes you had up to five hundred feet till you get to powder. Then you drill down this hole four inches in diameter and you haul this up. Then they send that in, see, to analyze it to see what was in it. If there was over forty percent you get up there and they put the seal on that, so and so by the United States government. This was government operations, see. Via Procter, the Procter took it over to do the job. And then they sealed that, sometime, with a plate of marble. This one carries so much gold, this one carries so much copper or so much brass. But if you couldn't get forty percent, they put another slip on it that says, well, in an emergency case we would open it up, see.

LEVINE: I see.

NILSON: The United States had it, got gas wells there over three hundred they never opened up. They get short of gas, well, they used to open one up. Texas got most of them, see, but they don't open them up. Like the United States carry four billion dollars, four billion dollars of gasoline for the navy. They get five hundred sixty-two ships in the power, but they don't use them.

LEVINE: But tell me, how did you come to learn English? How did you learn English? How did you learn English?

NILSON: Well, I learned it on there, we were six men. And I had a book I bought in Sweden. And I, when they said something, they said, "You look in this book what that means." And I studied at night how to read and write. And I picked up pretty good that way.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, good.

NILSON: When I worked for the States, I build the association for the State, so they could have a union. And I got fifty-five thousand members. And I'm a general advisor in it. I build it so they could have a union. They got fifty million dollars in a pension fund.

LEVINE: What's the union called? What's the name of it?

NILSON: The union? The labor. I got paper here ever week. I can show you in there. But anyhow we got all the state police now, a thousand state police, sixteen institutions. All the retarded, you've got thirty-seven thousand retarded kids in this state, and they cost forty million dollars a year to take care of them besides state prison, see. State of Maine has the most retarded kids than any state in the union. Then we did all this. I built all that. To get them, I had to four days off and go to Portland and get it all organized and get the governor on my side so he helped me.

LEVINE: When you were organizing this, this is a union for State of Maine employees? Is the union for the State of Maine employees?

NILSON: The Maine Association. And so that's quite a problem there. Then I worked. There was nobody getting any pension. They laid down on welfare if they was all done. Some of them got thirty-three years in. I had nothing.

LEVINE: What do you think, what was it that made you do that, put in all that time and energy to get that union going? Why did you do it?

NILSON: Well, I always made more than this organizer. I organized the Bath

Iron Works. They didn't have no union there either. I had another time. But the fellow that was with me, him and I cut stone on the (?). And we worked in (?), so we know each other. His name was James Harkin. So (?) his town. We was working in that tiny (?) ten dollars a day cheaper than they did in Fall River and Philadelphia and Mississippi. I said, "This is a government contract. We should have the same money here." (he taps the table for emphasis) He said, you know what he said, "You've go to civilize them first before you can organize them." And that was the trouble right there. They was like a bunch of thieves. They didn't really know nothing, them fellows. They come in from the farms, you know. "Oh, that's the (?)? I never saw one, yeah." I organized them people. It was pretty hard." So for them fellows to get a living, back to the story, the states would pay eighty-nine percent for the pension, and they pay only fifteen. So to get the pension for six hundred dollars a month I says, "We got to put it back to 1942, and they have to pay off." Oh, I was a son-of-a-gun. "Oh, that Swede there, oh, he says everything out." So I'll put it back. And to draw six hundred dollars a month pension, they have to go borrow the money from the back and pay ten percent on it, and I put it back to 1942. Somewhere I had to borrow the nine thousand dollars to pay off till 1942, so it was all that money. But there was another question. I'd been working for social security. The five hundred dollar (?) through July, if everything goes up. I said, "Let us work for Social Security."

"No, state supposed to pay that. That's iron workers union. I'll get the (?) to pay it. "We ain't going to pay nothing." I says, "All right. Better take a vote at it, and the majority will win." So I put it this way. Five cents a day, thirty-five cents a week, a dollar forty a month, eighteen dollars a year. What would you pay? You could pay five cents a day. You can pick up a beer can side of the road. That five cents. So we took a vote at it, and they voted at dawn. Fifty-five thousand people. What are you going to do with people? What are you going to do with them? Then they go on the welfare. You pay them. Sitting over there. See, jumping on a big ball, listening to ballgame, drinking beer. "You lug wood," he says to me. "Yes, I put in (?)." "Ha, ha. He's a fool. I ain't hauling no wood. I got wood right on me. I got my deal for nothing." What are you going to do with them.

LEVINE: Let's go back a minute. Now, when you were working with Swedish people when you were in Vermont. When you were in Vermont, you were working with Swedish people. Now, when did you meet your wife?

NILSON: Oh, I met her, we've been married now fifty years. (break in tape)

LEVINE: So we can have it on the tape.

NILSON: Helen.

LEVINE: And your wife's maiden name?

NILSON: Boggs.

LEVINE: Can you spell it?

NILSON: Helen. She's asking you.

LEVINE: No, you. How do you spell, how do you spell your wife's maiden name?

NILSON: Well, they spell it so many different ways, I don't know which one is the best.

MRS. NILSON: B-O-G-G-S.

LEVINE: B-O-G-G-S. Okay. Okay. So how did you meet Helen?

NILSON: Well, we went together four years before we got married, so we know each other pretty well. Then we bought this farm in 1942, and we raised one hundred and twelve head of cattle besides horses and sheep, stuff like that. She put, helped me put up nineteen rows of iron, Helen. I'm standing on iron stove, she was holding the pole, and I drove it on big hammers, pour it right down. And

it holds nineteen rows, no eighteen rows, we put in nineteen rows that summer. That's the whole farm in. We cut the hay outside. We had three big trucks.

LEVINE: Did you have children?

NILSON: And she wasn't working all the time with me, and she worked in the sardine factory. Jesus, she put in so many hours, many a time we didn't go to sleep at all. I was on twenty-four hour duty when I worked for the state, and the hurricane. And the hurricane in 1955 was I didn't take my rubbers off for ninety-two hours. No sleep whatsoever. The bridges were washing out. The cars was falling down, everything closed. Keep on going, no limit to (?). Keep on going. Going so fast you didn't know when you got the state police with you, seventy-five, eighty miles an hour, the next one down, the next one down, the next one down.

LEVINE: So did you have children?

NILSON: No. No, we decided we wasn't going to have no children. I see so much struggle, so I says, by God, I says, I wished many times I was never born, too. Things weren't always green where I was.

LEVINE: Do you remember by any chance the name of the ship that you came

here on? Do you remember the name of the ship that you came on?

NILSON: The name? Kungsholm.

LEVINE: Could you spell it?

NILSON: Huh? Kungsholm. That was the name.

LEVINE: Do you know how to spell that?

NILSON: K-U-N-O-H-O-L-N. Kungsholm.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Now, is there anything, before we stop, is there anything that you'd like to . . .

NILSON: Huh?

LEVINE: Before we stop, is there anything you'd like to say about growing up in Sweden, deciding to come here to the United States, and the life that you've had here.

NILSON: I had money with me, so I could go back if I wanted to. I had enough money with me, but I didn't go back.

LEVINE: Why didn't you go back?

NILSON: Well, there were three of them on the boat, never left the boat. They went right back. But he said, one said, "I'm also machinist. I don't know anything. No sense for me," he says, "to land." So they went back. And then the other two, well, they didn't go right. They ended up there to Procter, Vermont, with all the Swedes up there, they could get a good job. But they decided they wanted to go back. They had a good job home. But they had one that was a telephone operator.

LEVINE: Were you glad that you came here?

NILSON: Oh, I don't know. I couldn't hardly answer that question. Like I said, I wished some places I was never born, too. Through the Depression. I saw enough of it through the Depression, oh, I'm telling you. People who were laying on newspaper, policeman kicked him in the teeth, said, "Get up." And they had a spoon of oatmeal, half a slice of bread. People were digging in the garbage can all over. (he taps something) I hitchhiked from Pendelton, Texas to the Wyoming border, six hundred miles.

LEVINE: Why did you do that?

NILSON: No work. You couldn't get no work. Twenty-eight million people out

of work. And I met this German, I was, I had a little bag, I washed my face, and I saw a log and sat there. So he was hitchhiking too. He came opposite side of me. "Hi," he says, "you have that noise?" "No. I don't." There was a big rattler laying on the other side of that log. He says, "That's a big one, but they ain't very good company." So he says, "I'll tell you what we do. I start out walking ahead of you, and you're going to have the first chance. A truck coming," he says, "he'll pick you up, but be sure to tell him pick me up too." My God, one went by me and picked him up. I never saw him again.

LEVINE: Okay. Well, I think we've covered enough. I thank you very much for talking with me.

NILSON: You're welcome.

LEVINE: And this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service, and I've been talking with Everett Nilson here in Warren, Maine on November 1, 1991.