

EI-242
ROBERT JONES REESE
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INTERVIEWER: PAUL E. SIGRIST, JR.
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WALES, 1920
AGE 18

SHIP: "THE CARMANIA"
PORT: LIVERPOOL
RESIDENCES:
- WALES: BLAENAU FESTINIOG
- USA: UTICA, NY

SIGRIST: Good afternoon. This is Paul Sigrist for the National Park Service. Today is Saturday, January 30, 1993. I'm here in Utica, in central New York State, with Robert Jones Reese, who came from Wales he believes in 1920 when he was eighteen years old. We are at Mr. Reese's house, and you may hear a heater or something in the background on the tape. Mr. Reese, good afternoon.

REESE: Good afternoon.

SIGRIST: Can we begin by you giving me your birth date?

REESE: My birth date is February 9, 1902.

SIGRIST: So you're going to have your . . .

REESE: I'm going to have my birthday in a couple of weeks. February the 9th, yeah.

SIGRIST: How old will you be?

REESE: Ninety-one.

SIGRIST: Well, happy birthday.

REESE: Thank you.

SIGRIST: A little early. Let's begin the interview by me asking you what town you were born in in Wales.

REESE: I was born in Blaenau Festiniog.

SIGRIST: And I have the spelling here. I'll spell it. B-L-A-E-N-A-U.

REESE: Yeah. F-E . . . (he spells in unison with Mr. Sigrist)

SIGRIST: F-E-S-T-I-N-I-O-G.

REESE: Yeah, that's right.

SIGRIST: Those are two words, correct?

REESE: Uh-huh.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me where in Wales this is.

REESE: North Wales.

SIGRIST: Can you describe the town a little bit for me?

REESE: It's a small, it's a - it's a - they a-- they mine slate, it's a-- a slate quarry pla--. It's a - it's a small town. I don't know how many people that's living in there. But now the slates of- they don't use slates so much, but there's a few still working in there, a few people working in there. And it's, it's the Port Maddock. It's down below.

SIGRIST: Port Maddock.

REESE: Port Maddock, yeah. And on that's - the -- the seashore runs down in there, and that isn't too far from Festiniog. We used to take trips in there once in a while, in summertime, you know. And . . .

SIGRIST: Can you talk to me a little bit about the slate mining, how they did it?

REESE: They, I -- I did work in there before I came here. They - they - they go underground to blast or to - to -- to --blast the slates. I mean, that comes in great big chunks. And then they, then they send it by rail or ever----- a lift. And - and - and they cut it up and they work on it up on top, men working and cutting it for slates. It's - it's quite a job, I --I --I -- if I remember right. It's quite . . .

SIGRIST: Is this slate for roofing?

REESE: For roofing, yeah. And they used it for erths-- other - other things, too. They make pans and different things out of it, yeah.

SIGRIST: How deep was the slate?

REESE: Way deep. I worked in the letter M. A, B, C, the letter M, that's way down deep. Uh-huh.

SIGRIST: Tell me from your own experience what you had to do, what was that like going down there?

REESE: Well, I had to load the truck. After blasting there'd be a lot of mess in there. And we had to load all the stuff on - on a wagon, and that's what I was doing before I came here. And then they, they take it up -- up-- up-up an elevator. And all that. Then they make a dump, they dump all that rubbish that we collect there.

SIGRIST: How did they blast?

REESE: Pardon?

SIGRIST: How did they blast?

REESE: The blast? Oh, well, the, uh, they - oh gee - they - they used ammuni-or something, I don't know.

SIGRIST: Dynamite, perhaps?

REESE: Yeah. And they blast, and I can't tell you (?).

SIGRIST: What was dangerous about working in this (??)?

REESE: Oh, if you didn't wear, the miners, the miners had to make, they had to wear a mask, but they'd half of them didn't, and they'd get emphysema.

SIGRIST: Did, describe what you would wear to go to work in the mines.

REESE: My regular clothing. Well, just they are -- just like I am now, regular clothing, and that's all.

SIGRIST: Did you wear a helmet?

REESE: I never wear a helmet, no.

SIGRIST: Did, how old were you when you worked?

REESE: I was between the age of sixteen and seventeen, just before I came over here, yeah. I had, I was working on the railroad before. It was during the war, see, and there was jobs open on the railroad. So I had a pretty good job on the railroad, until the war was over. Then the guys, the guys came back, then they let me go. So I had to get a job. And I didn't like going in the quarries. I did not like it. Because you - if I had to work with a wagon. That's what I was telling you. And that was an awful job. And I worked nights for quite a while in there, yeah.

SIGRIST: How did they light the tunnels? How could you see at night?

REESE: Well, they had lights in there. Uh, well, they had lights in there anyways, a certain kind of lights. I couldn't te-- I don't remember any of that.

SIGRIST: It was a long time ago.

REESE: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Would you say that most of the people who lived in the town were employed in the mines?

REESE: They were. There was a -a - there was all clay slate mining, and Xllachwedd, Xllachwedd.

SIGRIST: Oh, dear. Can you spell that?

REESE: And then, there was another one up above in Manor. They were all over. Uh-huh.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me again the second name that you said?

REESE: X-DOUBLE L-A-C -- A-C-H-W-E-D-D.

SIGRIST: A good old Welsh name. (they laugh) Was your father working in the mines?

REESE: My father worked all his, practically all his life in -- in the quarries here. He - he never had any schooling, my father did. Never had any schooling, but he was a smart man, yeah. Yeah, he worked in the mines, yeah.

SIGRIST: What was his name?

REESE: Uh, Richard.

SIGRIST: And can you describe for me what he looked like?

REESE: Very short. Well, he was shorter than I am, a little bit. And he was not a, he - he got bothered with his stomach. He had cancer. That's what he died of. He died two years after I came here, yeah.

SIGRIST: You said he worked in the mines all his life.

REESE: He did, yeah.

SIGRIST: Did he do the same kind of job . . .

REESE: He done the same kind of a job, yeah. Yeah.

SIGRIST: Is that a hard life for a person?

REESE: A very hard life, a very hard life.

SIGRIST: What was your mother's name?

REESE: Anne.

SIGRIST: And what was her maiden name?

REESE: Jones, Anne Jones.

SIGRIST: Is that J-O-N-E-S?

REESE: Yes, that's right.

SIGRIST: Could you also describe your mother for me, what she looked like.

REESE: She was not - not very tall, and she was not very heavy, you know what I mean. But she had thirteen kids, thirteen children altogether. But I'm remember ten of them. I had six sisters and four brothers. Well, four of us. Would be. There was ten of us all together. She had a pair of twins before I was born, and they died. And there was another girl, born before the twins. She died, too. So she had thirteen children altogether.

SIGRIST: How do you fall into that? Are you the oldest, the youngest?

REESE: I -- I'm, I had a sister younger than I was.

SIGRIST: So you're right at the end.

REESE: Yeah, I'm -- on the end, yeah.

SIGRIST: Do you remember everyone's name?

REESE: I do.

SIGRIST: Could you tell it for us on tape?

REESE: There was Anne, Anne Ellen, Louise. I'm naming the girls now. Louise, and Priscilla. Kitty, Hannah, and Jenny. The boys Griffith, William and Richard, he was over here, and myself.

SIGRIST: That's a big household.

REESE: That--that--that was a big household, and how.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me what it was like growing up in a house with so many children?

REESE: Well, it was tough. My father had a grocery bill, well, he could, with the money that he earned, he couldn't pay all his bills. But the grocery would let it go, but we always paid it.

SIGRIST: Describe your house for me, the house that you grew up in.

REESE: Well, (he clears his throat) it didn't have no, it didn't have no cellar, but it had a kitchen and a living room, and a place to, like kitchen. I mean, do your housework, you know. And then upstairs, that's where all the bedrooms were. One, one, two, three, four. And then, up in the attic, we - we --we had beds up in the --. Well, we had to with a big family, you know.

SIGRIST: And where did you sleep?

REESE: I slept up in the attic. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: Can you describe, can you picture in your mind what the attic looked like, and just tell me?

REESE: Well, there's a roof, and there was just - just roof and a bed, and no furniture, you know, really, to brag about.

SIGRIST: Was it cold up there?

REESE: It was cold at time. The-- the-- the-- the temperature there didn't get too cold. We used to have snow in the wintertime, a little bit of snow, and it melts, and it had beautiful spring, spring and summer, and autumn, yeah.

SIGRIST: So how did you heat your house when you had to? How was the house heated?

REESE: Heated, by coal. Just one big, great big grate and coal. And the heat had to carry upstairs. Well, we - we were dressed pretty warm, yeah.

SIGRIST: Did you have electricity in the house?

REESE: We had elect-yes, we had electricity. Yeah, we did, yeah. I think, I'm pretty sure we did, yeah.

SIGRIST: Did you have running water in the house?

REESE: Running water, yeah.

SIGRIST: What was the house made of?

REESE: Stone. Uh-huh.

SIGRIST: And what kind of a roof did it have?

REESE: Uh, a regular roof.

SIGRIST: Slate?

REESE: It was slate, yeah.

SIGRIST: Did you have a garden or a backyard?

REESE: My fa - my father was a great gardener. He had a garden, and he had everything in there.

SIGRIST: What kinds of things did you grow in that climate?

REESE: Beets. (he clears his throat) Beets, potatoes, cabbage, a lot of other things. Beets and green beans and all that stuff, you know.

SIGRIST: What do you remember being the foods that your mother would cook for this family?

REESE: Well. (he clears his throat) In the morning, she -- she-- she cooked a--a--a rice pudding in a great, big dish, and then we had panc--, not pancakes, but oat-- oatmeal cake. They used to make great big ones in there*, then -- oatmeal. And we had everything to eat. Anyhow. We drank a lot of milk in there, uh-huh. Buttermilk. We drank a lot of buttermilk.

SIGRIST: Just drank it straight.

REESE: Well, and we used it with, with oatmeal, you know. Crush the oatmeal, and that's what we had for breakfast in the morning. We didn't drink too much coffee over there. It was tea mostly, and I never liked tea too well. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: Did you all sit down to eat as a family?

REESE: We did, a great big table. And then we, yeah, we did. Well, all the family was not there when I grew up. They were - they were all - all gone. I had three sisters in Liverpool, Liverpool, England. Then I had another one in Yorkshire and another in - in -- near Manchester. (he clears his throat) And then my other, my brothers were gone. But I remember quite a few of us around the table, yeah.

SIGRIST: Can you, did you have any animals? Did you keep animals?

REESE: We, in one house we lived in, we had animals. We had chickens and rabbits. And any time we wanted, my wife would kill, my -- my father would kill a chicken.

SIGRIST: Were the rabbits pets, or did you eat the rabbits?

REESE: Oh, we'd eat the rabbits, too, yeah.

SIGRIST: How did your mother prepare the rabbit?

REESE: (he laughs) I cannot -- I can't tell you that. (he clears his throat)

SIGRIST: But you remember eating them.

REESE: I remember eating them. They were very good. Everything was excellent.

SIGRIST: Your mother was a good cook.

REESE: She was a very good cook. (he clears his throat) And I remember I had a sister younger than I was. We had to go miles with a

can to get buttermilk. We had to walk miles to get buttermilk and bring it home.

SIGRIST: Where would you go to get the buttermilk?

REESE: Yeah. (he clears his throat) And the milkman, he used to come in the morning. And my mother used to bake her own bread and take it to a bakery. We had to take it to a bakery, they tally all - all the bread that, you know, so they wouldn't get mixed up, yeah.

SIGRIST: Oh, I see. She would bring the dough to bake.

REESE: Yeah. We - we -- my mother had, had them all in a can all ready to - to put in the oven, yeah.

SIGRIST: What were your chores? As a little boy growing up, what were you responsible for in terms of housework or chores around the house?

REESE: well, I didn't do much of that, to tell you the truth. But I used to go help my father. My father used to do a lot of ga-- garden work for - for rich people, and I used to go help him once in a while. But housework, I didn't do much housework myself.

SIGRIST: Did, so your father didn't work in the mines full time, or all the time. He had other jobs, too?

REESE: He - he worked in the quarries, and this is during his time off, you know, weekends, you know.

SIGRIST: Did your mother ever work for any kind of money?

REESE: No, I don't think, I don't remember my mother work at all, no. She never did. Women didn't work too much then. They were home taking care of their children like they should.

SIGRIST: Well, she had a busy, she had a lot of children to take care of. (they laugh) Tell me a little bit about what a little boy in this town did for fun.

REESE: Well, I used to go fishing a lot, trout fishing. It was a great - great town for trouts, Blaenau Festiniog. And I used to go fishing. And we used to play soccer, and we used to climb the mountain. They had a lot of mountains where I was, a lot of mountains. We used to climb the mountains, and things like that, yeah. And church.

SIGRIST: Oh, tell me about church. What denomination were you?

REESE: I was a Methodist. We had church. On Sunday, nobody go out on Sunday. We had to stay home. We'd go to church in the morning, in the afternoon, and nights. Uh-huh. And then we had church something, they were very religious in Wales, very religious, yeah.

SIGRIST: Who was more religious, your mother or your father?

REESE: My father. My father was very reli-- very religious man, yeah. Yeah.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about religion in your house?

REESE: We, on a Sunday night he'd get us all around the fireplace, the fireplace right in there. And we'd all have a Bible and we'd read a verse, and then we'd, my father would ask questions, and . . .

SIGRIST: Was your father a strict man?

REESE: Very strict.

SIGRIST: If you did something . . .

REESE: Wrong, they had a - a whip over there, we'd get whipped. He'd take us up to the attic or anyplace and give us a good whipping, and I got it a lot of times.

SIGRIST: Do you remember one instance, something that sticks out in your mind that you did that they became very upset for?

REESE: Well, they have a society meeting in church on Wednesday. And I took off with a bunch of boys, and we never came back. That's one night I got it, I really got it.

SIGRIST: It was always your father.

REESE: My father only, yeah. My mother, she was very good with the kids, yeah. My father done the whipping. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: Can you describe your church for me, the church you used to go to?

REESE: Well, it's something like our churches over here. They had a pulpit in there, and the preacher would always be in the pulpit. And they'd sing hymns over there. And, uh . . .

SIGRIST: Was the church near your house?

REESE: Near my house, yeah. That one church, we'd go, that last church we'd go was near my house. All I had to walk up the street, elevation down - down below, and we'd just -- off the main street, yeah.

SIGRIST: Tell me a little bit about school.

REESE: School?

SIGRIST: How old were you when you started school?

REESE: Well, about five, six years old.

SIGRIST: And tell me where you went to school. What did the building look like?

REESE: Well, it was pretty large, built with stones, and it was up on a hill, like. It was a pretty good-sized school. And then I had to go to elementary school when I moved from that place. We had to go to an elementary school, higher school. I graduated from status seven. That's high school, yeah.

SIGRIST: Now, you keep referring to, you moved at some point. Did you move to a different house in the same town?

REESE: Yeah. We moved from house to different places, different, in the same town, yeah, uh-huh.

SIGRIST: Tell me what your favorite subject was in school.

REESE: (he laughs) Well, I didn't like arithmetic any too well. (he laughs) But history I used to like pretty well, and geography and all that.

SIGRIST: Were you a good student?

REESE: Well, did -- I - I got by. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: Do you remember any of your teachers? Do any of them stick out in your mind?

REESE: No, I don't remember their names, but I remember the teacher. But I don't remember their names. I couldn't tell you.

SIGRIST: Is there a story that you remember that is in connection with one of these teachers, the reason why you remember them, perhaps?

REESE: The one there. I done something wrong. It was, yeah, I done something wrong in school. So we had to, he put me up on a table or a bench, like, in front of the class, and then we had to go to the principal, after he got through doing this, we had to go to the principal, and the principal had a cane. You had to hold your hand out - like--

SIGRIST: He hit your hand.

REESE: Yeah. Uh-huh.

SIGRIST: You were getting hit all the time.

REESE: Well, not all the time, but once in a while.

SIGRIST: But this seems to be the way authority was exercised.

REESE: That's the way they exercised, yeah.

SIGRIST: What did you least like about school other than arithmetic? Was there some other thing you didn't like about school?

REESE: No. I - I - I liked school pretty well.

SIGRIST: Did they feed you at school?

REESE: No, they did not. They didn't feed us at all that I remember, no.

SIGRIST: Did you bring your lunch?

REESE: No. I think we did bring a lunch, a sandwich or something, yes. We did.

SIGRIST: Do you remember when your father was working in the mine, did you bring him lunch at all?

REESE: No. He carried his - his -- they had a lunch box. My father used to make his lunch before he - before he went to work. And -- and-- and--and then when he came home he had his supper, yeah.

SIGRIST: Did you have any other family in this town?

REESE: In - in Utica? Yeah.

SIGRIST: No, in, do you have any other, like, relatives?

REESE: Oh, yes. We did, yeah. We did, yeah.

SIGRIST: Who else lived in that town that was related to you?

REESE: Well, my mother had a sister, and a lot of cousins, and . . .

SIGRIST: Grandparents at all?

REESE: Grandparents, they were gone before I was born, yeah.

SIGRIST: On both sides.

REESE: Yeah, on both sides, yeah.

SIGRIST: What, growing up in this town, what did you know about America when you were a kid?

REESE: I didn't know heck of a lot. I had a brother over here. He was in the American Army during the first World War.

SIGRIST: When did he come over?

REESE: Oh, I can't tell you. He must have come over ten years before I came here. And I had, my mother had two brothers in Woodspry or Scranton, working near the coal mine. Then she had a sister in Sladenton, Pennsylvania. And then she had a brother and a sister in - in New York or someplace. Oh, I've forgotten now. Granville. Granville. That's near the, oh, I can't. But anyway, then she - then she had a

sister that was living in - in Georgia. My - my --my -- my father had a sister living in Georgia.

SIGRIST: So they actually had quite a bit of family here.

REESE: They came here ten, fifteen years before I did, you know.

SIGRIST: Which brother came? Which one of your brothers came to America?

REESE: Richard.

SIGRIST: Richard.

REESE: Yeah.

SIGRIST: And what did he do when he got here?

REESE: Well, he worked at Oneida Limited in Sherrill when I came over here.

SIGRIST: Sherrill?

REESE: Sherrill, yeah.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that, please?

REESE: S-H-E-R-I-DOUBLE L, I think.

SIGRIST: That's a town.

REESE: Yeah. It's not too far from here. I worked in there. That's where I retired from.

SIGRIST: I see, when you came.

REESE: Yeah. Not, when I came here. No, I had other jobs when I came here. Well, I worked there twenty-four years. The last twenty-four years, yeah.

SIGRIST: Was that the job that your brother got when he first came here?

REESE: I think he was, yeah.

SIGRIST: Was he writing back and forth to your parents?

REESE: Yes, he was, yeah. Uh-huh.

SIGRIST: Do you remember anything that he might have said in his letters? Do you remember ever getting a letter from him, or . . .

REESE: No. He wanted me to come. My mother used to write to him, and she must have told him that I wanted to come over. So she sent me some money, but . . .

SIGRIST: I see. So both your mother and father both have relatives here.

REESE: Yeah, they had, yeah.

SIGRIST: And your brother Richard is the only sibling who is here.

REESE: Yeah, uh-huh.

SIGRIST: Why did your brothers and sisters go to other places in England? You said you had some in Liverpool.

REESE: The -- the-- the-- the--the Welsh people, that's all they do. The English, the English rich people used to get them and work them cheap doing their housework. Uh-huh.

SIGRIST: Is this the kind of work that your sisters got?

REESE: Well, let's, what they did until my -- Kitty went to school. She came back to Wales for a while and went to school, and she - she learned to be a stenographer. And my young sister, she was a stenographer, yeah.

SIGRIST: Were they sending money to your parents, your sisters who were working in England? Were they sending your parents some money?

REESE: Oh, they did, yeah. So did I, after I came over here, yeah.

SIGRIST: I see. So this was sort of a common thing.

REESE: Yeah. That's right, yeah.

SIGRIST: Tell me a little bit about how World War One affected you and your family.

REESE: Well, all houses were house, the windows had no panes on account of the airplanes coming over. But, and then we had a camp, a prisoners camp, a lot of Germans, not too far from where I lived.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about that camp? What sticks out in your mind?

REESE: OH, it was, they had a decent place to live in, the prisoners, a very decent place to live in, yeah. And . . .

SIGRIST: Was this sort of a curiosity for people from the town to go look for . . .

REESE: Yeah, we did, yeah. We did once in a while, yeah. Uh-huh.

SIGRIST: What were you doing during the war?

REESE: Well, during the war I worked the railroad.

SIGRIST: How did you get that job?

REESE: Well, I got it through a man from the church. He was a, he had a, well, he had a good job on the railroad. And they wanted a man in there because they were taking men to the army, see. They were forced to go. So I was young enough to get that job, and I took. I was working in a warehouse all the -- and then we had to unload the trucks, you know, pushing a truck.

SIGRIST: What kinds of things were you unloading?

REESE: Everything, everything. Groceries and everything, yeah.

SIGRIST: Tell me, did the war affect your parents at all? Oh, so you had --

REESE: One brother got killed. I'm - I'm - he -- he'd life-- in the Merchant Marine. He was a Merchant Marine all his life. He landed in Scotland one time during the war - and the war -- and then he, and he thought he had to do something for his country. He joined the Scotch. So he got sent to, he got - he got killed in the battle Somme, Som or Somme or something. That's the way they pronounce it, I think, Som. He got killed in there, and that disturbed my mother an awful lot.

SIGRIST: What, tell me a little bit about what you remember about your brother dying and your mother being upset, and perhaps the funeral.

REESE: We didn't have, we didn't get no funeral for him. He got buried right there in France. I don't know where, we don't know where he got buried.

SIGRIST: It must have been very sad.

REESE: It was very sad, yeah. You know, my mother -- I remember when my mother got the letter, she started to cry. She felt awful bad, yeah.

SIGRIST: Which brother was this?

REESE: Griff.

SIGRIST: This was Griffith.

REESE: He was one of the oldest, uh-huh.

SIGRIST: Was he the only brother that fought?

REESE: He was the only brother that fought over there. But Richard . . .

SIGRIST: Richard fought.

REESE: Richard fought over here with the American Army, yeah.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me anything that you might know about Richard fighting with the army, with the Americans?

REESE: He, uh, he got a little -- gassed a little bit while he was over there, and he got sort of emphysema, and that's what killed him. He died about fifteen years ago, I think it was, ten or fifteen years ago, yeah. But he lived to be eighty-something years old, though.

SIGRIST: But he was, somehow the gas.

REESE: Yeah, he did. He had to cough an awful lot, yeah.

SIGRIST: Okay. So the war ends. When do you want to go to America? When do you . . .

REESE: I came here about three years afterwards, after the war ended, yeah.

SIGRIST: Why did you want to come?

REESE: I did not like the work over there.

SIGRIST: You had been working in a warehouse.

REESE: A warehouse - then I - then I had a job in the quarries, and I did not like work in the quarries. I did not. And my mother and father did not like to have me work in the quarries.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

SIGRIST: So you said your brother sent some money.

REESE: Yeah. So, some money. Of course, I saved a lot while I was working, see. So when I came over here, I paid him back.

SIGRIST: Do you remember how much your passage was?

REESE: No, I don't. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: Do you remember, tell me what you remember about getting your papers, having to get your papers before you came?

REESE: No, I don't, I can't remember that. But I came here on the Carmania.

SIGRIST: The Carmania.

REESE: Cunard Line. And I was in third class, coming over the ocean. I -- it took us over a week to get over here. And I was seasick practically all the way. I couldn't eat anything. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: What port did you leave from?

REESE: Uh, Liverpool.

SIGRIST: And how did you get from your town to Liverpool?

REESE: By train.

SIGRIST: Did your mother and father . . .

REESE: My mother came, but my father went to work that morning. I remember, and I said goodbye to him. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: Was he upset that you were leaving?

REESE: He was.

SIGRIST: Did, you went by train, you said?

REESE: By train, yeah.

SIGRIST: And your mother went with you?

REESE: My mother went with me. And then I had sisters, I had one sister was married to an Englishman. His name was Skinner. And we - we - we went over and stayed with them overnight, like, you know.

SIGRIST: And you stayed, you said you stayed with your sister.

REESE: Yeah.

SIGRIST: It was just overnight?

REESE: Just overnight, yeah.

SIGRIST: Do you remember having to undergo any kind of examinations before you got on the boat?

REESE: Well, my own doctor in Wales had to give me the okay to come over here, and that's all I remember.

SIGRIST: Do you remember saying goodbye to your mother?

REESE: I remember. It was very sad. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: Did she go right to the boat with you?

REESE: No, she didn't go, no, she didn't get on the boat. We - we went on the boat, and they had to stay on land there.

SIGRIST: What season is this?

REESE: Pardon?

SIGRIST: What time of the year is this?

REESE: It was fall, it was winter over here when I came over here. It was December, I think, when I came over here.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what you took with you?

REESE: Just a suit-- great, big suitcase, and my clothing. And I was, when I came over here it was very cold, below zero, when I came over here, to Utica. And I had the same clothing as I was wearing in Wales, you know. But when I came over here, after I came over to Utica on the train, I had, the streetcar - streetcar carried me over to my -- I had to - I had to go over to my aunt's house. She lived on the corner of Square and Mill Street. That's been torn down now. That's where she lived, Square and Mill Street, in Utica.

SIGRIST: Can you describe for me where you slept on the boat? You said it was third class, but what did it look like?

REESE: Terrible, terrible. (he laughs) Which is like a, well, that looks better than what I slept on.

SIGRIST: The sofa.

REESE: A lot better, yeah.

SIGRIST: Were you in one small cabin, or in a big room with lots of other people?

REESE: A lot of other people, but we had one. There was another guy with me. I forgot him. But we slept in the same cabin, like, you know. Uh-huh.

SIGRIST: Do you remember a gift that somebody gave to you before you came to America as a souvenir of Wales, something that you would always remember Wales by?

REESE: I have it in my drawer over there, yeah. The people that I worked with in the quarries made a party for me before I left, yeah, yeah.

SIGRIST: And what is it that you have that they gave you?

REESE: A Bible.

SIGRIST: That's nice that you have that. How long did the boat ride take?

REESE: Pardon?

SIGRIST: How long was the boat ride?

REESE: Uh, you mean, how long it took to . . .

SIGRIST: From the time you left Liverpool to the time you got to New York.

REESE: About a week or more.

SIGRIST: And you were just kind of sick.

REESE: And I was sick practically all the way. I couldn't eat.

SIGRIST: Do you remember being up on deck of the boat at all?

REESE: Yeah. We used to go up, we'd get on the second floor, the second, and the first class. We used to, but we weren't supposed to.

SIGRIST: What did you do when you got up there?

REESE: Just look around. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: How did that strike you? What impressed you about seeing the people in first and second class?

REESE: Well, I figured I was very poor. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: Were they well-dressed?

REESE: They were well-dressed, yeah. They were, yeah. Uh-huh.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what they fed you on the boat, what they fed you?

REESE: No, they didn't talk too much. I don't think they talked to me too much, no.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what they fed you on the boat?

REESE: No, I don't.

SIGRIST: You were too sick.

REESE: Yeah. (they laugh) Well, they had everything to eat, it was everything good. But I couldn't eat it.

SIGRIST: Do you remember seeing the Statue of Liberty?

REESE: I remember seeing that, yeah.

SIGRIST: Can you describe, you know, set it up for me? Did you come up on deck, or what happened?

REESE: Well, we, no, I can't. I can't remember. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: It's December, you said.

REESE: Yeah, uh-huh.

SIGRIST: It's very cold.

REESE: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Did you go to Ellis Island?

REESE: We - we went to Ellis Island, yeah.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about Ellis Island?

REESE: It's a lot of people in there from the, and no, I can't remember. But they let, they let the Anglo Saxons out. I wasn't there only a few hours, but the other nationalities, they - they - they kept them there for quite a while.

SIGRIST: Do you remember, did you have to undergo any physical examinations or anything like that at Ellis?

REESE: No, I don't remember that. No, I don't.

SIGRIST: You just kind of went in.

REESE: Yeah. And then I, then they had a small boat, a small boat that carried us all the way from the Ellis Island to New York. Uh-huh.

SIGRIST: And then what happened? What did New York look like to you?

REESE: (he laughs) Well, I think it was night time when I got to the, I'm not sure now. No, I can't tell you what --. But everything looked so different, yeah.

SIGRIST: Because that's a big city. Of course, Liverpool is a city, too, but it's looks different.

REESE: We did—we didn't - we went right from the, from the boat onto the station, the U-- Grand Union Station, yeah, yeah.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about the train ride? You came up to Utica?

REESE: Yeah, I did, yeah.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about the train ride up to Utica?

REESE: It was very long, a long ride. There was one guy that worked on that railroad. He was a Welshman. He came from We-- Street. His name was Richard. And he helped me to get to Utica. He was a porter on - on there, or whatever you want to call him. And then he told me what streetcar to take, and then from the streetcar on Miller and J—and on - on Eagle we got - got off, and then I had a few blocks to walk on Mil--on Miller Street to my aunt's house when I come.

SIGRIST: What are you feeling like during all of this?

REESE: I was homesick. I was really homesick. If I had enough money, after I stayed here a while I didn't get a job. I couldn't find a job here. I couldn't even find - find a job. But if I had my money, if I had, about three or four weeks after I came, if I had, I'd have gone right back. I liked it here, but there was no job. And the first job I had was working in Waterville on a farm. And, boy, I hated that. Five dollars a month and my board and room. I got out of there in a hurry. I got out of there four weeks. I -- I-- I-- I-I didn't wait to get the five dollars.

SIGRIST: How did you get that job?

REESE: Uh, a fellow that was s-board - a fellow that was boarding with my aunt, the woman that I stayed with, he told me about this job, and I went over there. And they liked me, I guess. I don't know. The man that owned the farm, he was crippled. Something wrong with him. And his wife was Scotch, real Scotch, right from Scotland. And they had a lot of cows, and I had so many cows to milk every day, and a lot of other work. And I slept in a bedroom upstairs, no heat up there at all. Windows all taped up. And . . .

SIGRIST: Did you speak English as well as Welsh?

REESE: Well, not as well. I spoke Welsh better than I did English. But we - we had to take English in school, though. English and Welsh both, yeah.

SIGRIST: You're talking about in Wales.

REESE: In Wales, yeah.

SIGRIST: Oh. So you, I mean, you knew a little bit of the language when you got here.

REESE: Oh, I did, yeah.

SIGRIST: What was your aunt's name?

REESE: Pardon?

SIGRIST: Your aunt, what was her name?

REESE: My aunt? Ellen. Ellen Jones.

SIGRIST: So she's your mother's sister.

REESE: My father's sister.

SIGRIST: Your father's sister.

REESE: Uh-huh.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me a little bit about the house that she lived in and the boarders that she took in?

REESE: Well, (he clears his throat) she only had one boarder in there because her husband was alive. It was same houses they have on Corn Hill right now, the same ones. That's what it looked like, yeah.

SIGRIST: Did she . . .

REESE: Upstairs and, we lived upstairs and then the other people lived down. There was a little store that was next to it, yeah.

SIGRIST: What kind of a store?

REESE: Grocery store, uh-huh.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me a little bit about what your aunt was like, what was she like as a person?

REESE: My aunt?

SIGRIST: Yes. What was she like?

REESE: She - she was short, like my father. But she was a wonderful cook, a wonderful wife. Uh-huh.

SIGRIST: So is this the first time you've ever seen her?

REESE: That was the first time I ever seen her. (he clears his throat)

SIGRIST: Were you welcome . . .

REESE: Oh, yes, I was welcome. She had a son about my age, a year younger than I was, and his name was Newton Jones.

SIGRIST: That kind of gave you some company.

REESE: Yeah, he did. Oh, we had a lot of good times together. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: Well, tell me. What were some of those good times that stick out in your mind?

REESE: Well, the girls, drank a while, smoked. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: Rebels.

REESE: I was a rebel. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: Okay. So how long were you here before you got the first job, the first farm job? How long?

REESE: Oh, about two weeks.

SIGRIST: Oh, very fast.

REESE: Then when I came back I got another job on - on corner of South and St. Vincent's Street, Wheelworks, making automobile wheels by hand.

SIGRIST: Tell me a little bit how you did that.

REESE: Well, I - I did -- it was only one certain man that was doing that. All I done was help with the pressing tires with a, solid tires on wheels for trucks. And, gee, then I had to file the spokes. There was wooden spokes in the wheels then, you know. File them and ready for the guy that was making the wheels. And his name was Chauncey Weir. His two sons were on that place on St. Elizabeth, no, Elizabeth Street, I think. They had a place, after this. Yeah. Yes, they -- they did. They took the, well, he died anyway, the -- the--the guy that was, Chauncey. He died. But then the sons took over. They moved over from South Street onto Elizabeth Street, yeah.

SIGRIST: Did you have this job for a long time?

REESE: I had it for about two years, yeah.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what you got paid?

REESE: Twelve dollars for ten hours a day, twelve dollars a week. So I went over and asked him for a raise, so he give me a two dollars raise, twelve, thirteen. And I had to pay five dollars for board and room.

SIGRIST: Now, are you still living, are you living with your aunt?

REESE: I'm still living with my aunt. And then, then I quit that job because he wouldn't give me no more. Then I worked in a grocery store on the corner of Square and Miller for John I. Morris. And then he - he got another store on Steward Ave in South Utica. So he moved me over there with another guy I knew well. So I worked there, oh, a few weeks.

SIGRIST: So you were kind of going for . . .

REESE: I was going all the time, going from job to job all the time, yeah.

SIGRIST: Were there a lot of Welsh people in Utica?

REESE: Oh, they're loaded on -- on-- on-- on--on Corn Hill. Irish and Welsh both. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: And they got along.

REESE: They got along, yeah.

SIGRIST: Did you pretty much, were your friends all Welsh, the people that you . . .

REESE: No, Irish.

SIGRIST: Irish.

REESE: Mostly Irish. Yeah. Because I worked with them, you know.

SIGRIST: Can you remember any instance in those early years when you were in this country where you felt that it was bad to be an immigrant? Did anyone ever give you a hard time?

REESE: Well, yes. My, that boarder that my aunt had. He told me, "You better get your citizen." But you had to be here a year before you get your citizen papers, didn't you? Well, and he says, "You better get . . ." I got them in Buffalo. I was working in Buffalo at the time, and that's where I got my citizen papers, in Buffalo.

SIGRIST: And we were just looking at those. That was in 1930.

REESE: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Tell me a little bit about what Utica was like in the '20s. What kind of a city was it?

REESE: Downtown was always loaded. Bleeker Street, you couldn't - you had excuse yourself every time -- people in there, you hitting them or kicking them or something. Downtown was always loaded. But Corn Hill, where I lived, in the summertime, people would be sitting on the porches or walking.

SIGRIST: It's always a bustling community.

REESE: It's a community, yeah.

SIGRIST: Did you still miss Wales?

REESE: No, I don't. But I . . .

SIGRIST: I mean, in the early years.

REESE: I did, I did miss Wales.

SIGRIST: Did you write to your parents?

REESE: Oh, yes. I even, when I got a job, and I used to send 'em money every month. Yeah, yeah.

SIGRIST: Did any of your other brothers and sisters who were living in England, did any of them come to America?

REESE: One. My -- my-- my-my brother was here.

SIGRIST: Richard was here.

REESE: Yeah. But my -- I had one sister, she - she didn't live, she was married, but she didn't like her -- she got, her and her husband never got along. So she got away, she came over here. But she didn't live very long after she come over here.

SIGRIST: What did she die of?

REESE: Uh, stroke.

SIGRIST: And which sister was this?

REESE: Priscilla.

SIGRIST: Did she live with you when she came over?

REESE: Yeah. She was here. And she was very, her and I were the best of friends, yeah.

SIGRIST: Were you still living with your aunt at that time?

REESE: No. I was living in another place then. And, of course, my brother got married, you know.

SIGRIST: Richard.

REESE: And then after my brother got married, I went over to live with them.

SIGRIST: And was that in Utica also?

REESE: Yeah. He died in - in - in Florida.

SIGRIST: Oh. But when you went over to live with . . .

REESE: Oh, yeah.

SIGRIST: He was in Utica.

REESE: Yeah, in Utica, yeah.

SIGRIST: In America, did you still continue the religious . . .

REESE: I did. I went to Moriah Church. You know where that is, don't you, Moriah?

SIGRIST: I'm not familiar with this area.

REESE: Yeah. Moriah Church, it's on the Corn Hill section.

SIGRIST: Was that a Welsh church?

REESE: Presbyterian church, yeah. Uh-huh. That's what, I joined that, and I sang in the choir there. I liked it over there, yeah. And I met a lot of guys my age, and --.

SIGRIST: Had a lot of the people who went to that church, had a lot of them come from Wales?

REESE: Oh, yes, a lot of them come from Wales. Bob's, Bob Jones' son come from Wales. Bob's, Bob Jones's father came from Wales.

SIGRIST: And this church had a lot of those people.

REESE: Oh, yes. And English at night. They had Welsh ceremony in the morning, and English at night. They had two - two services, yeah.

SIGRIST: Was the church also an important social outlet?

REESE: It was. They did have, yeah.

SIGRIST: Do you, -- came to this country did you go to night school or anything?

REESE: I did. I went to - I went to the academy. I got in the academy. I was an apprentice. And then I had to learn, you know, how to read blue-- the blueprints and drawings. I went to school for -- nights.

SIGRIST: So you're working during the day . . .

REESE: I was working during the day, and I went in at nights, yeah. And then I joined another school in Pennsylvania, and I can't think of the name right now. From Pennsylvania. It was another school, it's -- it's to correspond, by mail, yeah.

SIGRIST: What were you hoping to learn from that school? What were you . . .

REESE: Well, a little, well, learning how to read the drawings and things like that, yeah.

SIGRIST: Were these, was this a happy time for you, or was this a difficult time for you, those early years in America?

REESE: They were happy and difficult too, both, yeah.

SIGRIST: What was the hardest thing for you in those early years? What was the hardest thing for you to adjust to?

REESE: Well, I couldn't tell you, really.

SIGRIST: What did you like about America the most? What was the most wonderful thing about America, the thing that you liked the absolute most?

REESE: Free, one thing. And people were different from the way they are now. Religious, people were really religious, and, but I never had any hard, I never had hard feelings about the United States. No, I didn't, no.

SIGRIST: In our few remaining moments, can you just kind of tell me what career you chose for the duration of your life? Just quickly, what job did you have for . . .

REESE: Carpenter work, carpenter work. I even went to Florida one time with my aunt and my cousin and I learned carpenter work over there, too, yeah.

SIGRIST: Turbine work is what you're . . .

REESE: Carpenter work.

SIGRIST: Oh, carpenter work, I see. And is that what you did for most of your life, then?

REESE: No, no. I worked in Buffalo for two years. I worked in DuPont, rayon. I worked in Utica. I can name you . . .

SIGRIST: Yeah, you've worked a lot of . . .

REESE: I worked in a lot of places. I did, yeah.

SIGRIST: Let me also . . .

REESE: But the best place I ever worked was Oneida Limited, Oneida Limited in Sherrill. I worked there twenty-four years, going on twenty-five. But their pension is lousy. (they laugh)

SIGRIST: What did you do there?

REESE: I polished - polishing. Silverware, and stainless steel, both. Yeah. See, they had a policy over there, after six-after sixty-five you're done. And I still, they still do the same thing over there. But you can work now if you want to, after sixty-five. And their pension was lousy, sixty-five. About seventy dollars a month. That's all I'm getting.

SIGRIST: That's where you retired from.

REESE: But it was a good place, the best place I ever worked in. Yeah, I did.

SIGRIST: Well, you were there a long time.

REESE: I was there a long time, yeah.

SIGRIST: Let me ask you when you married.

REESE: When - when I --

SIGRIST: When did you get married?

REESE: When I - when -- thirty-four years old, I got married in Utica.

SIGRIST: How did you meet your wife?

REESE: In a party. (he laughs) They had a lot of house parties years ago. They didn't have automobiles taking you all over.

SIGRIST: And what was your wife's name?

REESE: Mildred. Mildred Ruth Wilson.

SIGRIST: W-I-L-S-O-N.

REESE: W-I-L-S-O-N, yeah.

SIGRIST: And name your children for me, please?

REESE: Two. Donald and David. David is a pharmacist, him and his wife both. That's where he met his wife, in Albany School of Pharmacy. And he's down in Myrtle Bea-- Surfside. It's a little town beyond Myrtle Beach.

SIGRIST: So they turned out very well.

REESE: He's a millionaire.

SIGRIST: And was your wife Welsh?

REESE: No. Her people, they traced them back on the Mayflower. Uh-huh.

SIGRIST: So of English extraction.

REESE: Yeah. Wilson and Harriet, her mother's last name, before she got married, was Harris, and her father's name was Wilson.

SIGRIST: Those are good English names.

REESE: Welsh too, Wilson.

SIGRIST: Also Welsh.

REESE: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Let me ask you. Did you ever go back to Wales?

REESE: I never did. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: Why? Did you ever want to?

REESE: My mother came over here to see me. She didn't come over, yeah. We - we - we paid her way over here, but she didn't like it. We wanted her to stay and keep -- make a home for me, but she didn't like it over here.

SIGRIST: Was that hard for you when your mother wanted to go back?

REESE: It was awful hard, yeah. Yeah, it was awful hard.

SIGRIST: Well, I have one final question for you. I want to ask you if you think that when you came to America you made the right decision.

REESE: I did. I made the right decision.

SIGRIST: How do you think your life would have been different if you had stayed in Wales?

REESE: I'd have been a very poor man. I wouldn't have a job. I'd be on the dole, or whatever they call it. There's a lot of them people that's out of work in there now. The slate mines are not working like they used to, you know.

SIGRIST: That's a hard life.

REESE: It was a hard life. It was a hard life, yeah.

SIGRIST: So you, so you're happy you came to America.

REESE: I'm happy I came over here. It was the best thing I ever done was come over here, yeah.

SIGRIST: Well, Mr. Reese, I want to thank you very much.

REESE: Well, I hope I . . . (he laughs) I hope -- I'm a little absent-minded at time.

SIGRIST: No, it was a wonderful interview. It was a wonderful interview. This is Paul Sigrist signing off with Mr. Reese in Utica, New York on January 30, 1993.

EI-242/REESE