

EI-243

THOMAS GLYNNE POWELL

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WALES, 1913

AGE 8 (as recorded in the interview)

PASSAGE ON "THE CAMPANIA"

PORT: LIVERPOOL

RESIDENCES: TAL-Y-SARN AND UTICA, NY

SIGRIST: This is Paul Sigrist for the National Park Service.

Today is Saturday, January 30, 1993. I'm in New Hartford, New York, which is in central New York State with Thomas Glynne Powell who came from Wales to the U.S. in 1913 when he was eight years old. Mr. Powell, can you please give me your full name and date of birth, please.

POWELL: Thomas Glynne Powell. February 9, 1904.

SIGRIST: And what town in Wales did you come from, sir?

POWELL: I came from the North Wales, in a small town called Tal-y-sarn. T-A-L, hyphen Y, hyphen S-A-R-N.

SIGRIST: What was the major industry in this town?

POWELL: Uh, slate quarries was the industry. And, of course, farming, sheep breeding. And there was a copper mine

not far from where I lived.

SIGRIST: Did you have family who worked in the mines?

POWELL: Yes. We moved from Tal-y-sarn to a small town called Nantlle, N-A-N-T-L-L-E, because that's where the quarry was that my father worked.

SIGRIST: And is this a slate quarry?

POWELL: Yes.

SIGRIST: How old were you when you moved?

POWELL: Moved from one town to the next?

SIGRIST: How old were you, yeah.

POWELL: Well, I would say I was, I'm just hazarding a guess, about six or seven, or maybe five or six.

SIGRIST: What was your dad's name?

POWELL: Uh, William T. Powell.

SIGRIST: Can you describe for me in words what he looked like?

POWELL: Well, he was a, he was almost six foot, pretty well set. He had a moustache. That's about all I can tell you as far as looks.

SIGRIST: What was his temperament like?

POWELL: Very easy-going, very cautious about anything he did, and very sensitive, too, at times. Yeah.

SIGRIST: Had he always worked in the mines?

POWELL: In the slate quarry? Well, yes, as far as I know there was nothing else in that village but the slate quarries. And you'd go up there when you were young and have a job. It wasn't a lifetime job because now they're all shut down, but it was steady work. But he had a dangerous job. He used dynamite to dynamite big chunks of slate off of the mountain. And my mother didn't care much for him doing that, but he changed once in a while, he'd go and slit the slates to make, well, like slate roofs. You cut it with the grain just like a piece of wood, and you get a nice piece of slate. He did that for a while, but then they wanted him to go back blasting again and my wife [sic] really put up a fuss about it because his partner died. A piece of slate from up above hit him on the head and killed him. After that my mother says, "I don't want you up there at all." So that was the end of that. Then one of my father's brothers came to this country,

and he was writing back to my father saying what a wonderful place it was, and so it got my father itchy.

He wanted to come over here. So after writing, corresponding back and forth, we decided to come over here. Mother was not all sold about it because she had a family and they all were on a farm. Some of them are married and gone away, but she liked the village. It was a nice village. You'd get to know people there, you know. And she never really cared about living in this country but, of course, she had to come.

SIGRIST: I'd like to talk about the mining some more. Can you describe for me how they dynamited?

POWELL: Only, from what I hear, because I never saw it done, they would drill holes inside of the mountain and then put dynamite in there, and that was the touchy job. You had to be, and you had to climb up a rope. They didn't have elevators or anything. You're on the outside, and you'd have to climb hand over hand maybe sixty feet. You'd have to rest half way, and come up the rest of it. It was a dangerous, tough job.

SIGRIST: What were some of the other hazards involved in mining?

POWELL: Well, let's see, all I know that they had these little carts like you see in a coal mine. They would take the slates and put them on wagons and drag them out, you know. After the men had, well, they called it "slicing them," that's what they are. I've got the tool downstairs that they used to do that. And they'd look at the slate and hold it just right and after a while it became second nature. You'd get a real good cut out of a slab of slate. And there isn't much more I can tell you about that, because then they would go to, all over the world, as far as that's concerned, because their slate was a very good kind of slate. And, uh . . .

SIGRIST: Were there health hazards involved in mining?

POWELL: What?

SIGRIST: Health hazards.

POWELL: Well, as of today you might say there was health hazards, but they didn't think much of it in those days. There would be a certain powder that would come from the slate, you know. It could be dangerous for your lungs if you were in a place constantly day after day when that dust got in your lungs.

SIGRIST: What did your father wear when he went to work?

POWELL: Gosh, I can't tell you much about that, he just,
(he laughs) something like old clothes, you know,
that were tough, and shoes with hobnails in them
because you're constantly working on rocks and slate.
And I remember that all of them wore those shoes.

SIGRIST: Was there someone in the town that produced those
shoes specifically for the miners?

POWELL: Well, I think that a lot of them did their own
cobbling, you know. I remember seeing my father, he'd
get a chunk of good leather and put it in the water
for quite some time and then, until it got good and
soaked, and then he would take a cobbler's hammer and
pound it. That makes it tougher and flattens it out.
I see, most all the people there, of course, you
could buy them, but I don't think they sold them in
our town. But that's what most of them did. They put
new soles on and put hobnails on those. And it was
really a must to have the hobnails because those
slates would go right straight through ordinary shoes.

SIGRIST: How long was your father's day? When did he go to
work? When did he come home?

POWELL: Well, I can't tell you exactly, but it was a long day, I know that. And when he came home, or all of them as far as that's concerned, when they came home they were pretty well tuckered out.

SIGRIST: What, what was your mother's name?

POWELL: My mother's name is Grace Hughes.

SIGRIST: Could you spell her maiden name for me?

POWELL: G-R-A-C-E, H-U-G-H-E-S.

SIGRIST: And can you describe her in words also for me? What did she look like?

POWELL: Oh, she was kind of an attractive woman, not very tall. And she lived with, on the farm. There were twelve children in that family. And as time went on some of her sisters married. Others were farmers, most of them. One married a baker, and he was fairly well off. And my mother used to take me there once in a while just for a visit, you know.

SIGRIST: What was your mother's personality like?

POWELL: Oh, just a general personality. She could get keyed off and she could be very loving. You know, when kids

don't behave and don't do whatever she tells you
(he laughs) then, of course, she, they don't waste
much time with kids over there, you know. Because
they don't have, either you do it or get a whack on
the fanny.

SIGRIST: How many kids were in your family?

POWELL: Just two, my sister Ellen and me.

SIGRIST: Is Ellen older or younger?

POWELL: Two years older than I am.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me what it was like growing up in this
kind of a community with your father in the mines all
the time? What did you do during the day?

POWELL: Oh, we just played like kids, climbed trees most of
the time, I guess. And we played, played ball. And
maybe take hikes in the woods. (he laughs) But we
were never, when I was little I couldn't go very far.
My sister used to take me down to the lake once in a
while, and the lake was a, they had two lakes at that
time, but one they dried it out for some reason or
another. And my mother's home was right on the
lakefront. They call it a yffridd. If you wanted a

definition of the word yffridd I think a corral would be the name of it, or an enclosure.

SIGRIST: How do you spell that?

POWELL: Yffridd? Y, which means "the", and F-F-R-I-D-D.

SIGRIST: And this is like a corral?

POWELL: Well, that is the meaning of the word, but there are many farms in Wales they call a yffridd. I can't tell you why they do that, but there's a yffridd in this town and a yffridd someplace else. And there were mountains in that place that my mother was born in, and they raised sheep, hundreds of them. And we used to watch them in the spring, the little lambs, you know, jumping around like lambs do. And then there was shearing time, and then he used to train sheepdogs for other people who had sheep. He was pretty good at the training part.

SIGRIST: Tell me how they sheared the sheep.

POWELL: Pardon me?

SIGRIST: Explain to me how they sheared the sheep.

POWELL: Well, it was all hand-sheared in those days, you know.

And it wasn't as easy as they do it, as they do today with electric shears. But they would have other people there helping, you know. Like the next farmer, when he was shearing, everybody would go and help him.

It was a sort of a community thing.

SIGRIST: Can you describe the house that you, that you grew up in for me?

POWELL: Uh, it was, like I told you, all the houses were the same. And there was a little bit of a front yard where my mother used to have flowers, and the backyard was much longer. My father used to raise vegetables there. And, of course, there was the usual outhouse at the very far end. And anyways we had two floors and they weren't big rooms. We had one, like a parlor. Nobody went in there, only if we had company or something. And then we had a couple of bedrooms upstairs and a kitchen and, of course, the old kitchen used to be where you did a lot of the cooking on the side, too.

SIGRIST: Describe the kitchen in detail for me.

POWELL: It's very difficult for me to do that because I didn't spend much time there. My mother did a lot of cooking

or whatever with wood and coal, you know. And . . .

SIGRIST: Was there a stove, or a fireplace?

POWELL: Yeah. There was a stove, but not like a, the stove that we have today. Not the modern stuff, but they were all fed with wood and possibly if you got coal you used coal in there, because there was a man that used to come around selling coal periodically, a guy with a wagon. And as I . . .

SIGRIST: I'm sorry, go ahead.

POWELL: As I say, there was an upstairs, two bedrooms, I think, upstairs. But that's about all I can remember.

SIGRIST: What was the house built out of?

POWELL: Built out of stone. And, of course, a slate roof. We had nothing else but slate. And . . .

SIGRIST: How did you heat the house?

POWELL: Oh, as far as I know it was only heated by this fireplace that they used part as an oven and as a fireplace, too. That's the only way that I remember. They didn't have a furnace like we have today, you know. And in the very backyard there was a center

walk went the whole length of a terrace, and they had a picket fence there. And when I was a kid I thought that picket fence was awfully high. My father used to go and lean over it, you know. And then when I visited there afterwards, in '69, it was a little bit of a fence. And I said (he laughs) I says, "How come this fence got so short in so many years?"

SIGRIST: What kind of vegetables did your father raise in his garden?

POWELL: Well, it would be what you'd raise over here. Carrots, lettuce, a few potatoes, and anything they could get. They had rhubarb. I remember rhubarb plants. And mostly all what you would ordinarily raise over here.

SIGRIST: Did you keep animals?

POWELL: No, none at all. I don't remember we had any animals until we came to this country. I don't know why not, because most probably my uncle who had a sheep farm would be able to get us one without any problem. But there were not too many dogs running around in those places anyways.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what kinds of food your mother cooked

for you?

POWELL: Oh, yes. The staple stuff, you know, like potatoes, carrots, tomatoes and lettuce. Anything you'd cook today, nothing fancy about the meals. They were just regular meals.

SIGRIST: What was your favorite food when you were a kid?

POWELL: Well, my favorite dessert was rice pudding, and sometimes I get it now, but not often enough.

SIGRIST: How did your mother make rice pudding? Do you remember?

POWELL: I remember seeing my mother put milk in a pan, and then she would put some spices and raisins, of course, or currants, whichever she had the most of. And let it heat up and solidify, get it warm enough to solidify and that's about all there is to it. I mean, sometimes she used to put stewed prunes in there, which made the pudding taste that much better. And they used to make puddings, too. They used to hang them up in the attic. And the many, they're made out of, well, I can't tell you what they were made of, but they, too, had a lot of raisins and currants and things like that in it. And they used to keep them up

in the attic until they got good and old. And then the men would take a slice or two for their lunch to go to the quarry. That was one thing that nearly everybody made, because it's sort of a popular food.

SIGRIST: Did your mother put up a lot of food for the winter, that sort of preserving?

POWELL: Well, she would, whatever there was in the garden, you know, she would. Because it was almost a must for everybody. Everybody in there did practically the same thing. Maybe some were lazier than others and didn't do quite as much as they should have.

SIGRIST: Did you have electricity in your house?

POWELL: No.

SIGRIST: How did you light the house?

POWELL: Kerosene lamps, you know. When I went there and back in '69 I was so surprised to see antennas on every one of the houses there, you know. We never even thought of it in those days.

SIGRIST: Did you have a chore that was specifically yours when you were a boy, something that you were responsible for in the house?

POWELL: Not that I know of. I was just, as I say, I was eight when I came over, so I didn't have too much walking around to do, you know. Yes, I can see the place today. There used to be, there's a school across the way, and some relative of my father, like a third cousin or something like that, was the principal there. He had a beard and, but I didn't, I wasn't there that long either, as far as that's concerned. Then they had, the church was on one side of the road and a school was on the other side of the road, and there was a doctor that lived next to the school. And that's about all I tell you.

SIGRIST: Was the church the church that you attended?

POWELL: Yes. It was only one church there.

SIGRIST: And what was the denomination?

POWELL: I'm pretty sure it was either Baptist or Presbyterian or Calvinistic . . .

SIGRIST: What do you remember about going to church as a child?
What sticks out in your mind?

POWELL: Well, I wasn't too keen about it because the sermons lasted two hours and, you know, by that time you get

fidgety, and you'd rather be out of there. But my father was a religious person. He tried to tell me it was only two hours in one whole week, you know. But they did have church meetings during the week, but I didn't go to those. But I did go to, I had to go to church Sunday. Of course, they had two sermons but I didn't go to both of them. One was enough, I thought.

And, of course, then I had, you know, the evening sermon would be beyond my bedtime anyway, so I wouldn't go there.

SIGRIST: Why would they have two sermons?

POWELL: I don't know. The people weren't any worse than any of the other people, they didn't need it, I don't think but it was a custom. And then you had a Sunday school in between, too, you know. And . . .

SIGRIST: Your father was the religious . . .

POWELL: Yes. It tells in this thing here about he had a Bible class when he came over here, and I felt so sorry about throwing some of his commentaries on different books in the Bible. They were immaculate. He was a very immaculate person. He kept everything in good shape. And nobody wanted them, even if I knew they

wanted them back I would have sent them there,
but . . .

SIGRIST: What do you remember as a child of your father practicing religion in the home? Did you have a religious custom that you had to do in the house?

POWELL: Oh, sometimes we have a prayer meeting, a short one, you know, praying for some person who needed to be prayed for, sick or something like that. But not, it wasn't overdone. It was just a short period of time when we bowed our heads and my father would say a prayer. That's about all I can tell you.

SIGRIST: Could you describe for me how you celebrated Christmas in Wales?

POWELL: Well, not the way you celebrate it here. If I got a couple of oranges and some nuts and things like that in a stocking and maybe some clothes to wear, that was it. I never got bicycles and things like that the way my kids got. But I don't know. Christmas was not a gift-day over there. That's the whole thing, you know. People didn't have money to spend a great deal on toys and things. You might get a tin horn or something like that, and then they'd take it away from

you because you made too much noise with it.

(he laughs)

SIGRIST: Did you have a big dinner on Christmas, perhaps?

POWELL: Yes. We had dinner, turkey or goose or something like that, you know. My uncle had geese sitting on his farm, and he'd bring one over. Of course, for many holidays.

SIGRIST: Did you have grandparents living in this town?

POWELL: Yes. I had two, my grandmother and grandfather on my father's side, I've got their picture upstairs here.

SIGRIST: What are their names?

POWELL: Uh, Anne was my grandmother's name. Powell, of course. And Thomas was my grandfather. I was named for him. And . . .

SIGRIST: What do you remember about your grandparents?

POWELL: Well, he was a small man. He had a beard. I don't remember too much about him, because even though my father used to carry me on his back, he lived in another terrace, maybe, about half a mile down the road. And he'd carry me on his back at least once or

twice a week. And, or like maybe on a Saturday when he didn't work. So he'd take me there then, I mean, there was no big deal. I mean, all I did was sit in a chair. But he wanted to see his mother, see, especially after his father died. He was very good to his mother. He thought a lot of her and she thought a lot of him. There was ten in that family. One died and there were two sets of twins, but it ended up with about six, let's see, they had, uh, five boys and one girl. The girl was the youngest. One, like I told you, one came to this country and painted the country pretty elaborately, and so that might have, that's one reason why we came to this country because he didn't want me to work in a quarry. That was no future for it, you know.

SIGRIST: Did your grandfather work in the mines just as your father had?

POWELL: Yeah. He was a quarry-man. The fact is, anybody in there, except maybe one that ran the store, worked on the quarry. There was nothing there but quarries, you know. There was not only one quarry, there were other quarries around that were close by. And if you couldn't get work at one you'd go to another.

SIGRIST: How young did they take people to work in the quarries?

POWELL: Well, I think it was, they all, I'm pretty sure, had to go to school you know. Education was a very important thing, even in those little, you may not want to go to school, but you had to go to school. And then maybe after they got through grammar school there was nothing for them to do, so they'd go to the quarry, unless somebody had an uncle, maybe, in Liverpool or London and some other big place that they could go down and get into the rat race in those bigger cities, and a lot of them did that. And also a lot of them came over to this country simply because the future was not very bright for any of the children.

SIGRIST: Did you go to school in Wales?

POWELL: Yeah, but for a very, very short time.

SIGRIST: Do you have any recollections of being in school?

POWELL: Uh, not much. No, all I learned are, I mean, they had a book there. They had a picture of a cow. "This is a cow." Making you say it in English, you know. And

dogs and different animals. That's about as far as I got. So after that I came with my father over here.

SIGRIST: Were you taught English in the schools?

POWELL: Yes. That's why I say this picture business, "This is a cow. This is a horse. This is a sheep, you know. But when I came to this country I couldn't speak English at all. And that's what bugs me. Some people had to have Spanish teachers for Spanish kids. And I don't go that. If you go to this country you've go to learn the language that's prevalent in this country.

SIGRIST: When you were a little boy in Wales, what did you know about America? What did America represent to you?

POWELL: Very little, because I didn't know anybody that had been here, you know. They might go from Wales but they wouldn't come back. I think maybe a couple came back and told, then they would come back here again. He just came here for a trip.

SIGRIST: Whose decision was it to come to this country?

POWELL: My father. Well, I mean, my mother concurred because of the poor future for children there, you know. They didn't have to come to America. They could go to

England, as I say, the big cities, Liverpool. And my father went to Liverpool to work for a while. But he was wondering about my sister and I, you know. Their future was not very bright. And then we keep, kept getting letters from my uncle who was over here, and he painted, I think a little, he overdid it (he laughs) to the point that when my father finally got tickets to come over to this country.

SIGRIST: Did, what was your uncle doing in this country?

POWELL: Well, at that time his education was limited, but he could speak English. A lot of my father was very well-versed in English. But he didn't have to hagggle at all about speaking English, but my other, and I think that all the boys that were there spoke my, one uncle who was quite a singer, he ended up as a schoolmaster in a town quite some distance from our town. And he, they were very musical except one. One of the sons, they didn't, he didn't care that much about music anyway but they always would be singing in the house, you know. The girls, of course, became a very good soprano, and one of the boys that came in this country, he was a music director in Bethany Church for a long time and he was very musically

inclined. My father wasn't that deep in music, but he always sang in a chorus, and I did, too. I sang in two choruses and I ended up singing in Bob Jones' chorus. He kicked me out of there. (he laughs, Bob Jones is also present)

SIGRIST: What job did your uncle get when he came to America?

POWELL: Well, he was working for the Proctors. I don't know what he did. Menial job. It wasn't, you know, a big pay job.

SIGRIST: Where did he come when he came to America?

POWELL: He came, I guess he was married. I don't know whether he was married in this country or not. I mean, he married a girl from Wales and she was working at the Proctor home. And I don't know too much about them.

SIGRIST: Well, where, did they go to, did he live in Utica or New York City?

POWELL: Yes.

SIGRIST: Where was it?

POWELL: She lived here in Utica.

SIGRIST: I see. Was your uncle sending any money to you?

POWELL: No. He didn't have enough money to send to anybody.
I mean, his job was a poor one money-wise.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

SIGRIST: But you think that he kind of fueled your father to
wanting to . . .

POWELL: That's it, yeah, because we stayed in his house.
After he was married, we stayed in his house for a
time. But that, you know, that never works out
anyway. So we had an, we rented an apartment of our
own on, I think it was on Wall Street.

SIGRIST: Did you want to come to America as a little boy? Did
you want to leave your town?

POWELL: No, because I jumped the wall and I hid behind a tree.
I didn't want to come over here, you know. I didn't
know anything about this country. And I did know I
was going to leave my friends back home. And that
didn't go over very well.

SIGRIST: And you said before that your mother was not . . .

POWELL: No, she was not content here for a long time. But

after we got married and had children things were different, you know.

SIGRIST: Well, was she more anxious about coming to America? I mean, did she want to . . .

POWELL: No. No, I don't think there was any big urge on her part to come here. But . . .

SIGRIST: It's really your dad.

POWELL: Yeah. Well, he convinced her that the kids, you know, us two, weren't going to get anywheres unless they maybe they went to bigger cities or something, and this brother of his was painting this country so rosy that he said, "Well, let's go and try it anyway." So . . .

SIGRIST: Do you remember any kind of a procedure that your father had to go through to get your papers, your passports, whatever, any of that procedure?

POWELL: I don't know too much about what he had to do, but I know he had to do something, like getting a permit to come to this country. He didn't come on a boat and go over to Florida like the rest over here. There was a quota, and he had to come when the quota was, had his

name on it.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what season you left from, what month it was?

POWELL: September.

SIGRIST: It was in September of 1913.

POWELL: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what you took with you?

POWELL: Well, you mean I personally or . . .

SIGRIST: Just everybody. Do you, what sticks out in your mind?

POWELL: Well, I know that we had a trunk with a curved top on it and my mother had a lot of things in there that she shouldn't have brought over, I don't think. But, you know, they were her things and she wanted, if the boat went down, well, (he laughs) wanted everybody to go down. Anyway, she brought those things with her.

SIGRIST: What were those things? What were they?

POWELL: Well, mostly kitchen stuff and all, kitchen knives and forks and maybe some, something that somebody gave her as a present, and then she brought the linens with

her. Things that you could pack in a trunk without taking too much room.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what you took?

POWELL: I didn't take anything that I know of. I mean, I didn't have anything to bring, you know. No. I don't think, I had no special toy or something like that, if that's what you have in mind. But . . .

SIGRIST: Did anyone give you a goodbye dinner or some kind of a celebration before you left?

POWELL: I don't recall. Of course, her friends came and said goodbye to us, but there was no big how-do-you-do about it, you know. Not that I remember, anyways.

SIGRIST: So it's your dad, your mom, Ellen and you.

POWELL: That's right.

SIGRIST: Did anyone else from your town go also at that time?

POWELL: Not at that time, but others had come before, and one man got a pretty good job. He was working for what they call a cap factory in those days. I don't know what it is now. But anyways he got a pretty good job. But . . .

SIGRIST: Where did your boat leave from?

POWELL: Where from?

SIGRIST: Where did the boat leave from?

POWELL: Liverpool.

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

POWELL: I think we had a train ride most of the time.

SIGRIST: Do you remember anything about that?

POWELL: No, no.

SIGRIST: What was the name of the boat?

POWELL: Campania.

SIGRIST: And . . .

POWELL: I think it was the Cunard Line.

SIGRIST: Can you remember your impression when you first saw
the Campania, what you thought?

POWELL: It was an awful big boat. (he laughs) That's all I
can remember. Then the gangplank and all, I was

afraid of falling off one side of it. But, and we had, we didn't go first class. It was second class. And my mother never got out of the room. She got seasick. She was seasick all the way. And don't ask me how many days it took to come over, but it took an awful long time. And . . .

SIGRIST: Can you describe where you slept in the boat, what your accommodations looked like?

POWELL: Well, they were bunks, you know, along the side. They weren't bad to sleep on as far as I can see. Well, of course, it didn't make much difference as far as I was concerned, as long as I got three square meals and a place to sleep. But my poor mother, she was seasick, and wished she was back home, you know. Nothing glorifying the trip over for her.

SIGRIST: What did a little boy of eight do on this boat? How did you spend your time?

POWELL: Well, I teamed up with some little Jewish kid, and we, neither one of us was seasick, we'd be eating all the while, you know, and it didn't bother us. And, but, you know, the only time you see somebody else sick, then you get sick, we both got sick, we had to go

around and make sure that nobody was getting sick, and we'd go that way, but if we were getting sick we'd go the opposite way. And he was a nice little kid. I always liked him. And there was another Jewish man there too that befriended my father, and I think he had connections over in New York City, but I don't know what they were. But . . .

SIGRIST: Do you remember being up on deck?

POWELL: Oh, yes, yes. I'd be . . .

SIGRIST: What did you do up on deck?

POWELL: Run around like any other kid would do, you know. And sometimes, there were times when you couldn't get up on deck because it was kind of tough. And that boat wasn't long enough to begin with. You know, I heard afterwards that they build these ships so that they'll take so many waves, and instead of going up and down all the while you go through them, or right on top of them. I don't know. I'm not a sailor. Well, anyways, you couldn't get up on deck there at times because, and if they lifted that hatch up, gee, water would pour in, but they had the sailors up there and they had to come down and get something to eat. Yes,

there was several rough days on that boat.

SIGRIST: Can you describe it for me where they fed you on the boat? Was there a separate dining facility?

POWELL: Where we were, you know, this was not a plush, plush deal. You had a big long table and they had sides on them because one time the dishes and everything that was on the table went all over the place and, it was so rough. But on days that were calm you could eat, no problem.

SIGRIST: So you don't know exactly how long it took?

POWELL: No, I don't. I'd been trying to think, you know, before you came. I think it took over a week.

SIGRIST: Do you remember seeing the Statue of Liberty when you came into New York?

POWELL: Yes. My father told me about that. I guess he had postcards or something from somebody. And it was a beautiful thing, you know. It was something you wouldn't see anywhere's else. And, of course, when we got to Ellis Island my father, along with others, knew somebody who worked on the docks, which was a very good thing. He vouched for us as we went through. We

didn't have to stay there. I don't know whether we were examined for different doctors examination or not, or whether we had to have that before we got on the boat from the doctor in town, you know. I don't remember about that part. But I do remember seeing people. We would be going through Ellis Island, inside there was a pathway there. People were going, but there's a lot of people, to one side. They were like, they were fenced in. And I didn't ask anything.

It was afterwards I said, "Well, gee, it must be the ones that were detained." I remember seeing several big moustaches, handlebar moustaches, you know. And I imagine they were either held up for some reason or another, but this man who I think he was there when my uncle was coming over. And there were other Welsh people that knew him. And he, we didn't even stay there hardly anyway. We just kept on moving, like with others along with us. We weren't the only one that was doing that, but there was a lot of people to one side and, of course, I didn't bother wondering why, but I assumed afterwards that they were being detained for some reason or another. Then . . .

SIGRIST: Do you remember what it looked like? Do you remember what Ellis Island looked like?

POWELL: No, no, I don't. When we got docked in there we came down the gangplank and this man met us and he just led us right straight out. I mean, it was no problem.

SIGRIST: So it all went very quickly for you.

POWELL: Yeah. And we were fortunate that way, you know, because a lot of people were held up I don't know how long or what for.

SIGRIST: Where did you go after you left Ellis Island?

POWELL: Well, we got on a train and came to Utica. My uncle was waiting for us there and we stayed with him for a while, and as I told you before we got we got, we rented an apartment and lived by ourselves, which was better.

SIGRIST: Do you remember anything either of going to the train station in New York or coming up on the train? Do you have any memories of that exactly?

POWELL: No, it's very vague because everything was rush, rush, you know. We had to get on a train and come to Utica, because my uncle was waiting for us at the station down there. But, no. I can't remember hardly anything after I got off the boat.

SIGRIST: Well, tell me a little bit about what your father did once you got to Utica, what job he got.

POWELL: Well, he got a job as a custodian for a real estate firm. I mean, jobs in 1913, 1914, the First World War started. And my father had to wait five years to get his citizen papers, so he had to pick up anything that came along. So he worked as a custodian. He didn't get much pay and it was long hours. And the man he worked for did a lot of drinking and he would ask my father to go with him places, you know. And then they'd get somebody else to do the maintenance work. He had a lot of faith in my father, and my father tried to tell him, you know, lay off, and his, this man's wife was very happy that my father was going with him to look at real estate and so forth. And because he just, he was not dependable. His brother was in the business, too, and they were both drinkers. So . . .

SIGRIST: Did your mother get a job?

POWELL: No, no. My mother never worked.

SIGRIST: You . . .

POWELL: See, my mother's English was not half as good or one, no part of my father's, because she was not, she always spoke Welsh to us kids until we brought kids in, then she would get a few words of English. But she was not a student of the English language.

SIGRIST: Did that intimidate her? The fact, would that keep her at home, for instance?

POWELL: I believe, I believe so, yes. But we were very fortunate to have people living either upstairs or downstairs to us who were, who understands, you know. Maybe their father, their parents came from the old country and they knew the ropes. Yeah.

SIGRIST: Tell me about how you improved your English.

POWELL: Well, when I went to school here I didn't know any English. And I think they put me, they didn't put me in the kindergarten, but they put me in the first grade, I think. But it was surprising how quickly I learned to speak English because I was playing with the kids, you know, and even to this day I can't quite understand how I learned English.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what your first word was, when the light bulb went on, when you suddenly, when it all

clicked in, do you remember what the first word was?

POWELL: No, I don't. I know, of course, my father gave me a slip of paper with my name and address on it and my age, and I gave that to the teacher. So from then on it was up to her. But as time went on I skipped a couple of grades, you know. Getting on to the English and getting on to the lessons that we had, and I finally found myself coming along very good. I mean, only when they put a test in front of me, they put a paper in front of me with questions on it, I had that idea in my brain that they're trying to trick me. And the teachers, two or three of them come up and say, "Tom," he says, "I don't understand you. Your daily work is tops, but when I put an examination in front of you you fail. Why?" I says, "I don't know. I just think every question is put there to trick me." I don't know. I had that phobia. My son is a teacher, and I've told him. I says, "There may be some kids in your class and you should help them."

SIGRIST: Tell me, did you ever experience any kind of prejudice or bigotry when you were young, in your young life, because you were not American, or hadn't been native-born?

POWELL: No, that didn't bother me too much because when I first went to school, as I say (he laughs) I was eight. Well, I got a couple of puffed lips two or three times and, you know, the bullies in the school. And there were two boys that came up to me and they spoke Welsh. Well, that was something from heaven. See, because I didn't speak English then. And I got to talking with them, and so they, there was one kid that was always after me. So one of these two boys, one of the boys, was a pretty good-sized kid, and he went up to the fellow and said, "Look, lay off of him." And so they never bothered me after that.

SIGRIST: Your mother missed Wales when she was . . .

POWELL: Oh, yes, very much.

SIGRIST: Did she correspond with anyone still in Wales, perhaps?

POWELL: Oh, yes. She would correspond with some of our sisters, you know, who had married. And most all of them married farmers, and she would write, too.

SIGRIST: What did she dislike about America the most?

POWELL: Well, I think the dislike, it wasn't America that she

disliked. She would dislike the fact that she couldn't converse well enough, you know. But during the war I remember she used to knit those sleeveless sweaters for the men in the army and socks by the dozens. And then people, like the Red Cross people, they'd come there and pick them up. She learned some English language. But, you see, her heart was not in learning English, because she didn't have to, in order words. We spoke Welsh with her until, as I say, kids came in to play with us and so forth. She had to do the best she could with them.

SIGRIST: Did your father like America? Did he like what he found when he got here?

POWELL: Well, he didn't like his job until later on after, you know, he didn't care that much for it. But when he found out, you see, we had, this is what helps a lot. There was a Welsh church there, and there were Welch people, and they had Welch sermons both morning and night here. And he would converse with these people that came from Wales. Some of them he knew, and some of them he found out came from a village close by. I mean, it meant a lot to get in your own family, like.

SIGRIST: Did your father ever toy with the idea of returning to

Wales?

POWELL: No, but he did return. My mother and father visited there twice, and my sister went along with them, but I didn't go. And so . . .

SIGRIST: But did they ever entertain the thought of actually moving back?

POWELL: No, that never entered their mind because, simply because there was nothing there for us unless they went, as I say, to Liverpool or London, and then you'd be working for peanuts there.

SIGRIST: Tell me what was the first job that you got in America?

POWELL: That I got? Well, after graduating from school, some man that went to our church asked my father if I would be interested in printing. Actually, I wasn't interested in printing, but it was a job. So I went there as an apprentice, and after six years as an apprentice I went away to Albany to work for about seven years. And then that, do you know Albany very well?

SIGRIST: Yes.

POWELL: Well, J.B. Lyons, there used to be a publishing house there, one of the biggest in the east. And if they worked, if they bid on magazines, fine. They were fine, and they did a lot of state work. So the work was good there all the while. Well, I got to learn a lot about the printing game that I didn't know when I was an apprentice in Utica. And there was an Irish man that took a fancy to me, I guess. I was younger than the apprentice there. So he says, "Where do you live, son?" I says, "I'm staying at the YWCA, the YMCA, rather." And he says, "Would you like to have a room in a house?" I says, "Yes." Well, he had a friend up on, I forgot the name of the street. Well, anyways, I got a big bedroom in the front room for five dollars a week, so it was fine.

SIGRIST: How much were you getting paid?

POWELL: Uh, I was doing very well because they asked me if they were slow in one department would I want to go to another department. That might be working nights, you know, or lobster shift, maybe, from twelve to six in the morning. And they knew they could get me, and that was a plus for me because I had no place to go anyways, so I'd be working days on these different

shifts, depending on what they want, where they wanted me.

SIGRIST: The parents who wanted to get the kids out of Wales so that they wouldn't go into mining . . .

POWELL: That's right.

SIGRIST: What did they think about this career-wise?

POWELL: Well, I'll tell you, at that time my father said to me, "How much money do you make?" And I told him. "Well," he says, "you should be able to put away thirty-three dollars every week." This is back in 1926, '27, and that was good money. So I had to give him thirty or thirty-five dollars, send it to him, you know, or maybe bring a whole bundle if I visited at home, and he'd put it in (?). That's where I had my account there. So when I got through, when I, Nesta and I got married, I had enough money to pay the whole works, you know.

SIGRIST: When did you get married?

POWELL: 1935.

SIGRIST: And what is your wife's name?

POWELL: Nesta. N-E-S-T-A.

SIGRIST: And her maiden name?

POWELL: That's her, Nesta Edwards.

SIGRIST: E-D-W-A-R-D-S.

POWELL: That's right.

SIGRIST: And tell me the names of your children.

POWELL: Well, I have three children. The oldest one is Anne, and she lives in Wilmington, Delaware. The second girl is Sally, and she lives in Scotia, and my son is William, named after my father, and he lives in, well, on the way to Vernon, and he teaches school right close by here.

SIGRIST: I see. In our few remaining minutes I have just a couple of questions to ask you. One is what do you think is inherently Welsh about you? What aspect of you is true Welsh?

POWELL: I love music, and that's about all I can tell you. Anything else, of course, I always liked the out of doors. That was my one thing I liked. I liked to hike in the woods, in the fields, and hunt. I had

hunting dogs and I'd hunt all kinds of animals. But the biggest joy was being outside. It doesn't make any difference if I shot anything or not, but I did many times. But that, being, well, I sang in two choruses when I was living in Utica here.

SIGRIST: And this is important to Welsh culture, the music?

POWELL: I believe so. I think it's in-born in them. In most of them, I wouldn't say every one. I know Welshmen who sing out of tune. But it's in-born in them. Now, just the other day I put on the Orpheus Chorus in there, North Wales. (referring to his stereo system) It's a beautiful chorus. I mean, it's just a wonderful thing to sit here in a chair and nothing's bothering me and just listening to it. Bob brings some cassettes down to me. That reminds me, I got to give it to him back.

SIGRIST: Do you speak any Welsh any more?

POWELL: Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: Could you say the Lord's Prayer for me in Welsh?

POWELL: Well, I don't think I can go that far. (he laughs)
But I most probably would take too long to recite it

to you.

SIGRIST: Okay.

POWELL: Well, anyway, yes. I can carry on a conversation. Bob and I very often carry on a conversation. He's good, too. You know, he's good for a person who wasn't born in Wales.

SIGRIST: Just for the sake of tape, the Bob that you're referring to is Robert Jones who is the president of the St. David Society in Utica, assuming that someone listening to this may not know about it. But let me ask you a final question. Are you glad that your parents did indeed make that decision to come here?

POWELL: Oh, yes. Although I like the out-of-doors, and there was a lot of out-of-doors in Wales, you know. As I grew up I know that I would appreciate good climbing up Snowdon and going to these different places. As I say, I liked the out-of-doors and there was a lot of out-of-doors there, but there's a lot of out-of-doors here, too, as far as that's concerned.

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

POWELL: Well, I don't know what I would end up doing. Maybe farming or sheep farming or something like that like my uncle was doing. I don't know of anything else. I don't think I'd like to go to the quarry because it was a no-no for my father, so I imagine I wouldn't like it either, you know.

SIGRIST: So you're happy they came?

POWELL: Yes, I'm very happy they came. I would have met a lot of people down here, and they've been real friendly towards us ever since, anything, during sickness the friends that we had made are always there ready to help, you know.

SIGRIST: Your life would have been very different had you stayed in Wales.

POWELL: Indeed it would, yes.

SIGRIST: Well, Mr. Powell, I want to thank you very much for letting me come here for an hour and pick your brain about your immigration experience. I do want to apologize for having problems with the equipment.

POWELL: Oh, no apology necessary. It was a joy doing it for you.

SIGRIST: Well, I appreciate that, thank you. This is Paul Sigrist signing off for the National Park Service with Thomas Powell in New Hartford, New York on January 30, 1993.