EI-33
EMANUEL (MANNY) STEEN
BIRTH DATE: JUNE 23, 1906
INTERVIEW DATE: MARCH 22, 1991
RUNNING TIME: 1:42:01
INTERVIEWER: PAUL E. SIGRIST, JR.
RECORDING ENGINEER: BRIAN FEENEY
INTERVIEW LOCATION: RIVER EDGE, NEW JERSEY
TRANSCRIPT ORIGINALLY PREPARED BY: PAUL E. SIGRIST, JR., 12/1991
TRANSCRIPT RECONCEIVED BY: JOHN MURIELLO, 3/1995
TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY PAUL E. SIGRIST, JR.

IRELAND, 1925
AGE 19

SHIP: *CARONIA*
PORT: LIVERPOOL
RESIDENCES:

- **IRELAND: DUBLIN**
- **THE US: NYC, 118 ST.**

SIGRIST: Good afternoon. This is Paul Sigrist for the National Park Service. We are here in River Edge, New Jersey with Manny Steen, who came from Ireland when he was nineteen years old. Today is Friday, March twenty-second. Good afternoon.

STEEN: Good afternoon.

SIGRIST: Mr. Steen, could you please give us your full name and your date of birth.

STEEN: Well, my full name is Emanuel Steen. My friends call me "Manny" for short. And what else did you want to know?

SIGRIST: And your date of birth.

STEEN: Uh, June the twenty-third, 1906.

SIGRIST: And where were you born?

STEEN: I was born in Dublin, Ireland.

SIGRIST: And is that where your family was from?

STEEN: Yeah. I'm one of eight children. I'm number seven.

SIGRIST: I see. Talk to me about your father.

STEEN: Well, my parents were married in Glasgow. They weren't Scottish people but they were married in Glasgow, Scotland in 1894, I believe it was.

SIGRIST: What was your father's name?

STEEN: His first name? Israel.

SIGRIST: I see.

STEEN: And they were married there and three children were born in Glasgow.

SIGRIST: Why were they in Glasgow?

STEEN: They got married. They lived there. My father, the little back story there because Father came to Glasgow from London. To arrive in London he came from Turkey. He had escaped from the Cossacks in 1891 during a pogrom in the Ukraine in a village near Odessa. The family was massacred, that is my father's parents. They, my father and his brother Jack, escaped. They hid out and they took a ferry boat to Constantinople. They worked there for a short while, got a job aboard a merchant vessel as a seaman, jumped ship in London, which was typical of the time. In New York here, too. Many thousands of people jumped ship here in New York Harbor. And, uh, jumped ship in London and exactly how long they worked there I don't know but eventually, a few years later, they came to Glasgow. And my father and his, my father at that time I believe was about nineteen, twenty, something like that. His kid brother was about fifteen, sixteen and they got work in Glasgow. My father lived in a boarding house. That's where my father met my mother and he fell in love with my mother and I wasn't around yet. I wasn't even a gleam in his eye. But three of the children were born there.

SIGRIST: What was your mother's name?

STEEN: Minnie. Maiden name was Klein. K-L-E-I-N. Klein.

SIGRIST: Now, her family was from Glasgow?

STEEN: No, no, no. Now this is a, uh, the Jews were on the run in the 1800's. They were looking for shelter. My parents, my mother's parents again were also from a village near Warsaw, Poland. That's a separate

adventure in itself because the refugees from Poland and from Eastern Europe walked across Europe to the port of Hamburg and emigrated to, they hoped, America. What did happen was there were sea captains with the boats, boats of any kind and description, unseaworthy, took these people, these refugees supposedly for twenty dollars, would take you to America. You had to provide your own food and bedding. They supplied water and toilet facilities. So they crowded these horrible little vessels in the port of Hamburg and set sail for ostensibly the United States. After about, once they got out in the harbor everybody got seasick. They couldn't care less where they were. These captains of these illegitimate boats dumped a load of refugees on the east coast of Scotland during the night in a little seaport. They just dumped them and they said, "This is America," and they took off. Now the rather, I felt, the Scotch, Scottish government, were very nice. That is they permitted these people to stay. The people thought they were in America, by the way, because they couldn't speak any English and these peculiar looking Scottish people in kilts and they had never seen anything like it. Men wearing skirts, I mean, this was, uh, coming from Eastern Europe. But my mother's family was one of the families that came and they were dumped there and the Scottish government agreed to permit them to stay provided they did not become a burden upon the government, economic burden. And they agreed that they would be self-supporting. That's how they eventually, there's a big Jewish settlement to Aberdeen, Edinborough and finally they made their way to Glasgow, which was an industrialized city. And they apparently, uh, what the, the method used by immigrants here in New York City as well as there, was that people, they would rent a huge apartment, like a seven room apartment, and the family would live in two rooms and rent out the others. This is typical. It's here in the United States, down on the East Side, that's the way they made a living. My

father and his brother were looking for, when they went from London to Glasgow, they went to the Jewish section. They got a room to stay in and there my father met my mother.

STEEN: And after a few years, after three children were born, a little depression set in in Glasgow. It's a big ship building, by the way, port. And my father, at that time Ireland was part of the colony of Great Britain, just took a ferry boat across from Glasgow to the ferry to Stranraer to Northern Ireland. They went down to Dublin and he got a job in Dublin. And as soon as he had a few dollars he brought the family over and five children were born in Dublin.

SIGRIST: All right, let's talk a little bit about the children. You said three were born in Glasgow.

STEEN: Yes.

SIGRIST: Who were they?

STEEN: What do you mean by that?

SIGRIST: Well, what were their names?

STEEN: Oh, well, there's my oldest brother. His name is Isaac. Next came my sister Sophie and then came my brother Henry.

SIGRIST: What year were your parents married in?

STEEN: 1894, see. And those three children were born then. They were born, in

those days remember there were eight children. They were born a year or two apart, a year and a half, something of that kind. I have the exact dates but it may not be of interest.

SIGRIST: What was your father doing to make money?

STEEN: Yes, in those days you took a job at anything, as I did when I came to America. I mean I worked for twenty-five cents an hour when I came to America. Anything. It didn't make any difference. The same way as there. My father, at that time, I have his marriage application and he was twenty-four at the time and it said his occupation was "aerated bottle washer." Do you know what that means? He cleaned seltzer bottles. Whatever that is I don't, but at that time and they still have permanent seltzer bottles, you know, those glass bottles and they were refillable, see, and apparently that's what he did. It says "aerated bottle washer," which I don't know whether, an unknown profession to me but that's what he, I don't know what else he did but that's what was listed when he got married.

SIGRIST: Did your mother work?

STEEN: My mother is listed at that time, she was twenty-one, he was twenty-four, and she was listed as a seamstress, seamstress, whatever that meant. I mean she sold garments, I suppose. I don't know. I know nothing about exactly what she did other than what's listed there: seamstress.

SIGRIST: So they had three children in Glasgow.

STEEN: Yes.

SIGRIST: And then your father went to Dublin.

STEEN: Yes. And a few months later, I don't know exactly how long, he had accumulated some money, got an apartment and moved the family over from Glasgow to Dublin.

SIGRIST: And there five more children were born.

STEEN: And there five more children were born over a period, yes.

SIGRIST: And who were the five children?

STEEN: After Henry came my sister Bertha. That was the first one born in Ireland. And then twins, my sister Eva and my brother Lou, Louis, Louis. Then came me and then my kid brother Saul.

SIGRIST: How many years between the oldest and the youngest?

STEEN: Uh, I'd really have to check it out. There was a short span in between. It was a sort of continuous cycle. You were, from what I understand, the mother then was constantly pregnant, if you know what I mean, were in one and out the other, that sort of thing.

SIGRIST: I see. Did they live in the same place in Dublin for a long time?

STEEN: Well, yes. We made one move. I was born on the street Saint Alban's Road and it must have been a few years later that we moved to about three blocks away to Washington Street.

SIGRIST: Is this the house that you remember?

STEEN: The house I remember. I don't remember the Saint Alban's Road but the one I remember is Washington Street because then I was about six, seven, eight, nine. I was just a, because my kid brother was born there. My kid brother is six years younger, see, so when he was born I was six years old. I do remember the day he was born. There are certain things that you remember, outstanding things in your life. You don't remember everything but you remember, uh...

SIGRIST: What happened the day he was born that you remember?

STEEN: The reason for that is because all children then were born by midwives, with midwives at home. Children were not born in hospital, only the very wealthy people. But the norm, the average person, child, was born home. And I remember waking up one morning and my sisters, all the boys were chased out of the house. I mean we were five boys and three girls, see, so the guys were all chased out of the house and my mother was screaming and crying and here I'm on the sidewalk in front of the house. It was a very residential area in the south part of Dublin called "South Circular Road." And I was terrified. Your mother crying, I mean that was, in those days, your mother never cried. And she's screaming and I guess she was in childbirth but I didn't know that, see, and I'm standing on the sidewalk. It's really, I remember it so well because it was an outstanding, it was an important incident to me at the time. And I'm standing there, don't know what's going on, "Everybody out! Out! Out!" In the meantime I guess they had sent for the midwife. I didn't know what was going on. My buddy next door, who was a man of the world at nine

years old, he knew everything, this guy. And he came out and says, "What's going on?" I said, "I don't know. My mother's crying." "She's going to have a baby." I said, "Come on. Not my mother," you know what I mean. He says, "Yes, your mother. You'll see." When we were talking the midwife came down the street. Now the midwife, we knew she was a nurse, a registered nurse, and in those days the nurses had shawls and bonnets, you know what I mean, and a little black bag. And she's walking down the street and he says," You see. You see that little black bag?" He says, "The baby is in there." Well, I didn't know, you know, and I believed him. I said, "Come on!" He said, "You'll see." So sure enough, you know, after she came and the noise stopped and everything and then my sisters, "Come on in and see your baby brother." Well, I said, "Great! The nurse just brought him. Mrs. Schultz brought the baby." What else. It took me until I got married to find out it wasn't so. Do you follow me?

SIGRIST: Can you describe the house? Was it a house? Was it an apartment?

STEEN: Yes. As a matter of fact I was there a few years back. I go back occasionally and we were there. I took Mary to see it, my wife Mary, to see the house where I lived in. Now...

SIGRIST: Describe through the eyes of a child. What do you remember of the rooms or the furniture?

STEEN: It was a, they were adjoining cottages, brick cottages, red brick cottages. In front there was about a three foot garden in front with a rail fence in front of it. Backyard, there was a long backyard. Every house there had a long backyard about a, oh, about fifty feet deep and behind that backyard was a lane and that lane was where the backyards from the

houses on the next block so they were backing up to each other. In the lane way everything was delivered through the lane, such as coal for the winter. The coal would be brought up the lane and dumped in your backyard. The house, actually while it was a cottage in front but on the left side of the house there was an extension, an "L" extension, going all the way to the back so that it was actually bigger than it looked. Because Mary said, "How did you all get in there?" Remember, we were eight kids. My father and mother is ten. My bachelor uncle was eleven and my grandmother lived with us. Twelve people! And you looked, well, of course we were crowded. The boys slept four in a bed, toe to toe, you know what I mean? The girls slept three to a bed. It was rather crowded but you didn't know you were crowded but everybody was in the same condition. I mean there was a, it was a nice, working class neighborhood.

SIGRIST: Two stories?

STEEN: No, no, a cottage. A cottage has one floor. As I said the front two rooms were, one was a parlor and I can't remember what the other one was. MRS.

STEEN: Dining room.

STEEN: I can't remember and behind that was the kitchen and then came various bedrooms. Remember there was no running water, follow me? There was one tap, yes. Running water coming in if you wanted to take a bath. There was no toilet, outdoor john, and each room, of course, had a potty. My job as number seven in the family was to empty the potties. I remember that because it was a terrible job because the youngest one always got that dirty job, you understand. My job was to set the fire. Each

room, there was no central heating. Each room had a tiny fireplace and the weather there, of course, is very temperate, very moderate, and the result is that each room, before you went to bed, an hour before, you lit the fireplace so that the room would get a little bit of, and once that fireplace burned out just a few pieces of coal. Remember, we were poor people, not dirt poor. There are different levels of poverty as I can see it now. We were poor but we ate.

SIGRIST: Describe the kitchen for me.

STEEN: It was very, very primitive. The stove, which is called a "cooker," they call a stove a "cooker." It was a coal stove, an iron coal stove and my job was, of course, each day when, it was kept going all day but at night time I had to clean out the ashes. From the ashes themselves my father used to make soap because, I told you, we were poor people. We made do, see? You didn't buy bread. My mother baked everyday bread because bought bread was too expensive. We couldn't afford it. You had to pay money for that, see? And we bought a sack of potatoes. Potatoes were cheap, like a penny a pound, see, so you bought potatoes by a hundred pound sack. Flour you bought by a fifty or hundred pound sack of flour.

SIGRIST: Where did you store all these large containers?

STEEN: It was crowded with all these people, too. It was crowded. Towards the back, the last room of the extension, would be sort of a, I would say like a storage, follow me? I remember there was no ice, no refrigeration but it never really got that hot. Average summer temperature was sixty, sixty-two. You wore, I wore long johns all year. We used to go bathing, swimming in the Irish Sea. I was taking off my long johns, putting on my

bathing suit and go into the water and freeze! It was freezing. I remember there aren't too many great swimmers in Ireland because unless you bathe in a swimming pool the water, the Irish Sea, is about fifty, fifty-five degrees the temperature.

SIGRIST: I would like you to talk about your grandmother and your uncle who lived with you. Who were they?

STEEN: Well, my grandmother was my mother's. My father's parents, you see, had been massacred in the Ukraine, in Odessa. Staying with us was my mother's mother and I sort of vaguely...

SIGRIST: Having moved from Glasgow.

STEEN: Yes, yeah, from Glasgow they moved, she moved. In the meantime here her husband had died and was buried in Glasgow. I never knew him.

SIGRIST: What was her name?

STEEN: Sara. S-A-R-A, Sara. And I only vaguely remember her as a very old lady, sort of creeping silently around the house. I don't remember having much communication with her, see.

SIGRIST: Did she have her own bedroom?

STEEN: Yes, oh yeah. There was, it was customary in those days, one room was known as "grandparent's room." That was set aside for grandparents whenever they retired. Don' forget there was nobody, there was no pension, Social Security, nothing like that so when your grandparents,

nobody saved any money. I mean, you couldn't. You didn't make enough to save. So the room was set aside for grandparents. In the meantime that room was used by the family. But it was known as "grandparent's room." I know the room I slept with my brothers that was "grandparent's room" and when they came, it so happened they were there, I don't remember exactly when, (clock chimes) when I came, when I was there my first recollection, she was already there, see? And usually the baby slept in that room with the grandmother.

SIGRIST: I see. Did she do any of the cooking in the house?

STEEN: Not that I remember. No, I vaguely remember, I remember, the only one I remember is my mother cooking all day long because remember everything she had to make, like about six loaves of bread for the family.

SIGRIST: What else did she cook?

STEEN: Well, it was very interesting because we, uh, because my father made maybe six dollars a week.

SIGRIST: What was he doing now?

STEEN: At that time my first recollection of my father, he was working in a sweatshop as a tailor because I remember it was my job again, the little one got all the chores, you follow me, to do. I had to bring him his supper in a tin can. My mother would make a soup in the bottom layer and the one on top would be a little meat or potatoes, I don't know what was in there and because he worked from sun up to sun down, I mean twelve, thirteen, fourteen hours a day in a sweatshop and so towards six o'clock I

would have to go. I had to walk about three or four miles and bring him his supper, you know. And he would stop and then he would finish it and I would take the can back home and so she had to prepare that and prepare meals.

SIGRIST: Was there something that she made that you...

STEEN: Well, yeah. There was a, I remember, we had to cook herrings. One of the big items may interest you to know that the Irish are great herring eaters, both fresh and salt herrings. It's really funny when you think about it because salt herrings you associate with Jewish people but no. Salt herring, because before they go bad the herrings were salted and pickled so they would keep. Salt herring on potatoes was a very typical Irish dish. It was cheap, do you follow me? You could feed a family on it until your belly was full, so that took care of your needs. That was one of the items but not only. My job again was to go to the butcher in the Jewish section, which also was about two miles away in an area of Dublin called "Clanbrassil Street," Clanbrassil Street.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that please?

STEEN: C-L-A-N-B-R-A-S-S-I-L. Clanbrassil Street was the Jewish section down, like Orchard Street in New York but different. There was a Jewish butcher, Jewish shoemaker, Jewish draper, bakery, you know, one of each. And I used to have to go there Friday and I would, at that time the entrails of a cow were considered garbage food for cats and dogs, animals, you know what I mean? Humans did not eat like the liver, the heart, lungs and all that stuff. Humans didn't eat that. So when the butcher shop came you would pay by the gizzard, hang it up on a hook

and in the butcher shop would be the whole entrails of the cow. I used to come in, she said, "Tell him you want two pennies worth of meat for the cat and the dog." God forbid you said humans. We were going to eat it this stuff. I'd go in there and the butcher would take a big knife and cut off maybe half a liver, throw in a heart, a couple of lungs and she'd say, "Don't forget to ask for a couple of soup bones." That was it. So I came by with a big newspaper. We'd put it all in newspaper and I'd have an armful of stuff for about two pennies, three pennies. And she would make a stew, a kidney stew, liver, put the whole thing in and cook it up. Boy, you could feed that whole family for two or three days on that. You learned. It was very healthy, by the way. Until people were aware that this was excellent, very healthy food it was given away as dog food, animal food.

SIGRIST: I see, I see. Let me ask you, also, about the uncle that resided with you.

STEEN: Well, my uncle was my father's younger brother. A very nice...

SIGRIST: So this was Jack.

STEEN: Yes. He contributed to the family. He worked and I don't know exactly how much. You didn't ask. He was just there, you know. He was very nice with the kids. He loved the kids. I remember, as a kid, sitting on his lap and he would tell us stories. Vaguely...

SIGRIST: What work did he do?

STEEN: You know, I really never knew. I believe also he was in tailoring in some aspect. But he was always a dandy to look at him. My father was a hard

working man. He looked like a working man but my uncle always was there, you know, he had a shirt and a tie, which was unusual because we were, remember, working class people and he was always there. He also wore a derby. He always looked neat as a pin and I remember him very kindly. He was very nice, always give us a penny once in a while and in those days, you say, "What can you do with a penny?" Well, it was an English penny. Remember, a large copper coin. But you could divide a penny into four sections. Half a penny, there were two half pennies you could buy, get. What we did was, if you got a penny you immediately got four farthings for it and you spent a farthing at a time. Would you believe for a quarter of a penny you could go to the little, we called then "huckster shops," a little general store, and usually it wasn't really a store. It was the front room of somebody's little cottage that they converted. They sold kindling, kerosene, little bits of things to make a few pennies. I mean you have no idea what living like. Well, we, it wasn't, we accepted this because everybody else was in the same boat. Nobody had any more so you would share and, uh...

SIGRIST: You knew no other way.

STEEN: That's it. And towards the end of the week most people would like run out and that's when you would go around borrowing a half a cup of flour, you know what I mean? Like my mother says, "Can you a half cup of oatmeal?", you know, or whatever you needed because you started running out because maybe the next day would be payday. You never were ahead of yourself. We were always a day or two behind, see, and if you had you gave and the custom was when you returned it you had to, it was understood you would return it but you would always give back a little more than you got, see? Which, uh, that was the custom.

SIGRIST: Let me ask you about your religious life. Can you, you were Jewish. Talk about being Jewish in Dublin at this time.

STEEN: Oh, yes. The community where we lived was a sort of, uh, not the primary Jewish quarter. That was Clanbrassil Street. We were about two miles from there on the south side. It was like a secondary Jewish, also a working class, but a little better quality than, Clanbrassil Street was really, really a real working class. This was a little more, little better residential working class and the community was orthodox, orthodox Jewish community. Very, very religious. Everybody went to the synagogue. The synagogue was jammed every Saturday.

SIGRIST: Was this the only synagogue?

STEEN: In there where we were this was the only one. There was another one on Clanbrassil Street in the Jewish, primary Jewish quarter. There were about three or four small store front synagogues, if you can understand what I mean by that. They were small, small like wooden buildings that had small communities. These were on the North Side. There was the main synagogue in Dublin. Very beautiful structure and it was called "Englisher Synagogue" because part of the service was in English and it was very high class. The big shots there wore tall hats on Saturday. You knew you were in a high class place because they wore tall hats and morning suits, if you know what they are, like "Prince Albert" they call them, whereas where we were they were working class. They wore working class suits but it was very religiously oriented, very religiously oriented.

SIGRIST: Was your family very religious?

STEEN: Not very but they were religious, yes. I was Bar Mitzvahed in Dublin in that synagogue on the South Side, as I said.

SIGRIST: How old were you at that time?

STEEN: Well, you had to be thirteen. I would like to just interject right here because in 19..., World War One, when World War One broke out over there it was 1914. Ireland was neutral and the British government was short of metals. The war was on, World War One, and it was a terrible war. We, as kids, didn't know because we weren't allowed to read newspapers. Children were forbidden to read newspapers. I don't know why but we weren't allowed. An uncle of mine, not an uncle, my aunt's husband, my mother's sister lived in Dublin, too. She had two sisters that lived in the neighborhood. Her husband had gone into what they called the "waste trade" business, which was, uh, one of the branches of that was scrap metals. And he had a contract with the British government for all the scrap metals he could get. They needed it for munitions and et cetera. So he said to my, I guess he had apparently told my father, you know, it's a good idea to get into this and get a contract with the government. It would be better than working in the sweatshop. So my father did. My uncle showed my father the business. He didn't have to do anything. You bought from peddlers that brought in, actually gypsies but in Ireland they are called "tinkers." They used to bring in. My father opened a shop, a waste metal, all kinds of metal. That was around 1916.

SIGRIST: And this was around the time you were Bar-Mitzvahed?

STEEN: Yeah. But it happened the Revolution broke out. There was a problem in Ireland, the 1916 Revolution broke out. Now, I remember it fairly well because I was ten and I remember hearing all the shooting, understand? And around the corner from where we were there was a military, British military barracks, Wellingtom Barracks. I remember the name and I used to play with the kids, the soldiers in the barracks, the kids went to the same school as I did and so I used to play in the barracks and the tanks and so on there. It was a rather, looking back on, it was primitive the equipment but the Revolution broke out and there was holy Hell. The rebels took the general post office and a couple of the main hotels and, as a matter of fact, I have a picture of my mother in the garden. Some sniper had taken a pot shot of my mother. I don't know, at night time, yes, no, she had gone out, I remember, to the backyard to get a bucket of coal and somebody saw the light in the backyard, whatever it was. Anyway, somebody shot. Next morning we found a bullet hole in one of the windows in the backyard. How we took a picture of it, I don't know why then. I still have the picture, by the way. Anyway, by 1916 I think he, my father held his fire so to speak but '17 he opened up a place and did well and remember we were a big family so we decided to expand. So we went to Donegal and (end of cassette tape one side one) to Sligo, the town of Sligo, northwest of Ireland, right on the border of Donegal.

SIGRIST: And how is that spelled?

STEEN: S-L-I-G-O, Sligo. So I lived there. We went, moved from Dublin to Sligo. In the meantime, by the way, my mother died in 1917.

SIGRIST: And what did she die of?

STEEN: I understand kidney, some kidney congestion or something.

SIGRIST: What do you remember of that experience?

STEEN: I just remember, I wasn't, children were shielded those days from such things, you know what I mean? I mean children were, today I see they bring children to the funeral parlor but in those days no. Children were shielded from death and I just vaguely remember that one day my mother wasn't there, see? I remember when they came to take her in the ambulance because it was a horse drawn ambulance in those days and that was, you know, a rather exciting thing to see. And they took her away and we knew because when they took you to hospital in those days you went to die. that was it. Anyway, she died there, see, and it was 1917. We went to Sligo.

SIGRIST: When did you make the decision to come to America?

STEEN: Well, to tell you the tale I went to Catholic Seminary in Sligo called "Somerhill College" as a day student. We were, by the way, rather curiously the only Jewish family that ever lived in that part of Ireland. They had never seen a Jewish person before and here, all of a sudden, like an invasion eight kids. Looked like a whole tribe is coming, follow me? And we were just ordinary Irish kids. We didn't feel any different. An Irish kid. If you asked one of us, "I'm Irish," understand, and my whole background, the music, the, uh, everything I knew, Irish history, you know, I was Irish. Nothing else. Wasn't Scottish, wasn't Russian, you know what I mean? Jewish, well, that's a religion. That's not a nationality. So I, uh, anyway, I enjoyed life very much there. It was a lovely, wild country.

SIGRIST: And this is where you...

STEEN: I was there until 1919.

SIGRIST: I see. And then where...

STEEN: The war was over. The contract, my father's contract with the government was stopped and he came back. Now he is a man of means. He had done, evidently, very well. I don't know his circumstances. He didn't discuss it with the children, you know what I mean, and you didn't ask questions. You'd get your head broke. You'd get the back of his hand, I mean, it's none of your business. You just didn't ask those things. We came back to Dublin and there he, now he's a man of some means and he bought a small factory where we made trousers, pants, pants rather, because trousers embrace the whole area, with about ten workers. And we bought a duplex apartment right in the heart of the city of Dublin.

SIGRIST: How many of the family are still living with your father at this time?

STEEN: I think all. Oh, yes. We were all together.

SIGRIST: No one had married?

STEEN: No, no. We had this duplex apartment. We had about eight bedrooms, I mean, this was all of a sudden I saw now, I won't say we're in the money but we're living in a very nice duplex apartment. Actually, we had the second and third floors in this apartment house. Downstairs were two stores, uh, a green grocer, which is what they call them here, a food market, follow me? They call it "green grocer" and an iron monger. You

know what an iron monger is? A hardware shop. They call them "iron mongers." And those were the two stores downstairs. And we had a private entrance upstairs and we had the second and third floors and it was a big place. We bought it completely furnished. The people who lived there were going to America so my father bought the whole thing, lock, stock and barrel complete. And behind it, there was always extensions in these buildings, that's the way Dublin is arranged, in the extension was the factory and there was a rear entrance to the factory. I think we had about ten or twelve people working there. We made pants. My father had been a tailor, see, so now he subcontracted pants manufacturing. Well, in other words, when you went to have a suit made you went to a store, a tailor. He measured you but the pants came to us. We made the pants. Somebody else made the jacket, you know. I guess the vest, too, I don't know. But pants, by the way, it always struck me so funny because pants, you say, "what is that?" Well, we made Bermuda shorts, follow me? We made walking britches. You've never seen those but there are such things called "walking britches." We made britches and pants, see? We made court, for the nobility, we made court britches. They used to wear at Buckingham Palace or the Governor's Ball in Dublin, for whatever. We didn't see the people who, they placed their order in some very fine store. We were subcontractors, you know.

SIGRIST: So was it at this time that you decided you would want to come to America?

STEEN: No, no, no. I didn't decide then. I mean my father was still living. I know I was entering college, Saint Andrew's College in Dublin. That's what I went to.

SIGRIST: How old were you when you started?

STEEN: The college system is different than here because you don't have to graduate high school to go to college. You can start college at six years of age and go right through to get your Bachelor's degree in the same place. I was there, I came back to Dublin to be Bar Mitzvahed, actually. My father was terminating his business and I came back. I was then fourteen. Because my mother was dead I was allowed a year extension for my Bar Mitzvah, which should have been at thirteen. So at fourteen I was Bar Mitzvahed and entered Saint Andrew's College, presumably on a pre-med course. That was the ultimate direction. You consult with the head master and he arranges your whole schedule and program. It was a branch of, Saint Andrew's is a branch of a Scottish college. This was the Irish branch of it and I went there and in 1921 my father died in an accident.

SIGRIST: What kind of an accident?

STEEN: He was eating in a friend's house and they were joking and kibitzing and he choked on a piece of meat by the time the ambulance came because they were horse drawn ambulances. By the time the ambulance came he was gone. I remember the day because I was, it was a Saturday and I was in college and I came home, was doing my homework in the shop. You know, he'd say, "Make up the payroll," and this and so on and I was doing. I was doing my homework and the police came and it was a terrible shock and so on. Anyway, as a matter of fact, this came across in a newspaper clipping of it from my kid brother who died last year. His wife just sent me a newspaper from the incident.

SIGRIST: You were so much younger when your mother died, did you go to your father's funeral?

STEEN: No, I really don't remember. Oh, yes. Of course I did, yes, yes. It's a very vague remembrance. Both my, you see, my grandmother, my mother, my father, my uncle, they're all buried in Dublin, see, and that was 1921. 1921 we were still under British rule.

SIGRIST: And all your brothers and sisters are still living together.

STEEN: We were all together, yeah. Oh yes, my older brother, in the meantime, had just married that year and moved out of the house and the rest were all still single. Oh yes, that year my uncle had assumed command of the family so to speak and he said, "We can't go on," when they discovered when my father died he had lived it up with the income and there weren't any reserves and that I had to stop college. So I took a crash course in wireless, which was a new invention at the time. Wireless was just starting. Wireless telegraphy. So I had to have a trade. All I had was an education and I had no trade. So I took a crash course in wireless telegraphy and took the Postmaster General examination from London and passed. Now I have a certificate as a wireless telegraph operator.

SIGRIST: And did you get work doing that?

STEEN: Well, I was preparing. So my uncle says, "You're going to America. That's all there is." And here we were going to sell off things and whatever. We weren't consulted. Whatever he did, you know...

SIGRIST: I'm sorry, your uncle said this?

STEEN: Yes, yes, yes. The uncle who lived with us. He was still living, Uncle Jack, and there wasn't any money he said. So we, in the meantime, I applied and he said, "You'll apply for a passport and a visa to come to America." You couldn't get in without a visa and you have to have a passport. So I applied for a passport. You'll see, by the way, in the television thing I did, the passport is in there, picture of it, rather. I still have the original passport.

SIGRIST: Why did Uncle Jack decided that you should go to America?

STEEN: There was no money, nothing to do. Ireland was going through a terrible state. The Revolution, what had happened was after 1916 the Irish government was dissolved, I mean the rebels. By 1921 civil war broke out and it was awful. There were street ambushes and killings and murders, like what's happening in the North, almost as bad as that. And finally, in 1922 , England signed a treaty with Ireland. They had their hands full, you know what I mean? They said, "That's enough!" 1922 Ireland became not a republic, a free state. England signed a treaty. In the meantime I had applied in 1921. My uncle said, " The economy is nothing." I mean the country is shot to Hell, see? Unemployment was rife and what are you going to do?

SIGRIST: So he thought that coming to America would be the panacea for...

STEEN: Yes, right, absolutely. In the meantime my other, my brother Lou who was a year and a half older than me, as I said he's passed away, had gone to America. He was a wild one. I mean, he was...

SIGRIST: He was already gone. What year did he go?

STEEN: The year before, 19..., about 1921 or something like that. He was the wild one. Oh pardon me, 1920 he left because my father was living and he couldn't do anything with Lou. Lou was...

SIGRIST: Why do you say he was a wild one? What did he do that made him...?

STEEN: Well, he was a nice chap but he just didn't behave. He didn't, he was a "wanderlust." He had gypsy blood in him, so to speak.

SIGRIST: What kind of trouble did he get into?

STEEN: Well, he ran away when he was, I remember because he and I slept together. We had a room now we're living on Cable Street in Dublin. He said to me, "Listen, don't tell Pop." He says, "I'm running away." So he took some piece of bread or whatever the hell it was and he went away and he ran away with the gypsies, the tinkers, and he traveled Ireland. My father, finally the police got after him. MRS.

STEEN: He was a darling.

STEEN: Police got after him and they finally picked him up. There was nothing you could do so my father said, "Ship him off to Ireland. That's all." It's...

SIGRIST: To America.

STEEN: I mean to America, rather, and he went to America and he led quite an

exciting life over here. In the meantime it was through him that I met my wife because my brother Lou was a boarder in their house here in Harlem in New York City and he asked me if I would like to write to an American girl and this was the girl that I wrote to. We were pen pals. (he gestures to Mrs.

STEEN)

SIGRIST: So Lou is already here.

STEEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: And Uncle Jack had decided that you all should go to America.

STEEN: Yes. Uh, huh.

SIGRIST: How did you go about doing that?

STEEN: Well, I didn't really do anything. He did all the, I just sort of sat back. In the mean..., the point was that I had to apply for a visa. He got all the papers and all the, I just obeyed.

SIGRIST: Who paid?

STEEN: Well, there wasn't, the cost for these items was inconsequential. The passport was like a dollar or something. I mean these were no big costs. The ticket to America, he got that, follow me, and as he paid it off, you could pay off in installments though in the meantime, while your waiting for your visa you're paying, o.k., you're paying off your tickets for America.

SIGRIST: And did he buy tickets for everybody?

STEEN: No, no, no, no. I came across with my, uh, my brother Lou came first. That same year my other brother Henry came with Lou. They were at separate times but they went. Then my sister and my kid brother came.

SIGRIST: I see, sort of one at a time.

STEEN: Yes. We didn't go all at once. They came in 1924, my sister Eva and my kid brother Saul. The following year, in 1925, I came with my sister Bertha, see, and in the meantime my brother Ike's wife had died and he went to America.

SIGRIST: So you had family here before you got here.

STEEN: Yeah, but we were scattered, you follow me? It wasn't a unified family, you know what I mean? There were, my brother Lou was out in New Mexico; he was a cowboy up in Wyoming or something and he was, he was really, I won't say a wildman, a very nice guy, but unsettled. Then, in the meantime, my older sister Sophie, second oldest one, had married some chap from London so she lived in London. In 1940 something, late forties, her husband died and she decided to come to America then to join the family, so we sort of became, it was through her that I was able to get a lot of the information I'm talking to you about. Evidently she had to have some sort of a certification of her background so she went, from London she went to Glasgow to the Registrar of Marriages and she got a copy of my parent's marriage application. This is where a lot of the data I gave you comes from. It's authentic. I have a copy of it here. I'll show it

to you.

SIGRIST: As a young man, how did you feel about going to America? How did you feel about...?

STEEN: Well, I had no ties. Remember, I was nineteen. I wasn't going with anyone. I had no ties and looked forward to it as an adventure. My brother Lou was writing to me telling me all about the wonderful things that he was doing as a cowboy out there and he was with Barnum and Bailey's as an equestrian, with Barnum and Bailey. He was, you know, a nice guy but very adventurous. Very adventurous. And I, to me, if you asked me, cowboys and Indians, that's what we knew about America. That's how little we knew, especially then. Now perhaps more, but then...

SIGRIST: Yeah, I was going to ask you, what were your expectations? What did you expect America to be like?

STEEN: Well, you think somehow cowboys and Indians and the streets were paved with gold, not actually paved with gold but we knew you could do terrific over here. You only had the good news, you understand.

SIGRIST: Were you getting good reports from your brothers and sisters who were here?

STEEN: Well, they weren't telling how well they were doing. They were, but they were making, but what they were making here, which was poverty wages, was big wages for Ireland. Remember a bank manager, when I lived in Dublin a bank manager was getting like twenty dollars a week and that's considered and here you say, "I raise my boy to be President," right? In

Ireland you say, "I raise my boy to be bank manager," because that's the highest they could think of, a bank manager, follow me? What did he get? Twenty dollars a week, roughly, you know. That's all they made. So over here you could make a decent wage. And, of course, you related to it in Irish terms but it didn't work out that way when you came over here. It was difficult.

SIGRIST: Do you remember, what did you take with you? Do you remember packing?

STEEN: Yes. I had a, I bought a suitcase, a second hand, cardboard suitcase for two dollars, which I donated to the Ellis Island Museum. And I didn't have enough stuff to fill it, follow me? All I had was the suit of clothes I wore. I had, I think, and extra handkerchief and a pair of socks. I also had my stamp collection in there, a little crummy collection of stamps and a few little family souvenirs an a few little things. I didn't fill the suitcase. I couldn't fill it. I didn't have enough stuff to put in there.

SIGRIST: How much money did you take?

STEEN: Yeah, we were required to have twenty dollars as to show financial independence. Would you believe it? At Ellis Island, when I came through Ellis Island I had twenty dollars. I had it in my shoe so I shouldn't loose it or, God forbid, loose it gambling on the ship and I didn't gamble. I didn't know how to play poker, frankly.

SIGRIST: Let's not get ahead of the story here.

STEEN: Yes.

SIGRIST: What port did you leave from?

STEEN: I left from the port of Liverpool.

SIGRIST: From Liverpool.

STEEN: Liverpool on the Cunard line. Beg your pardon?

SIGRIST: How did you get to Liverpool?

STEEN: Oh, well, there's a ferry boat. From Dublin there's a port actually, what do they call it now? Dun Laoghaire, Dun Laoghaire. There's a port about five miles north of Dublin that has a ferry boat that goes to Liverpool. (clock rings) And I, uh...

SIGRIST: And Bertha is traveling with you?

STEEN: Beg your pardon?

SIGRIST: Your sister.

STEEN: My sister, yes. We had cousins in Liverpool so we stayed overnight in Liverpool. My brother Ike, who was still in Dublin at the time, came with us to escort us to Liverpool and there we boarded the ship.

SIGRIST: I see. What was the name of the ship?

STEEN: The "Caronia." Cunard "Caronia."

SIGRIST: Could you spell that, please?

STEEN: C-A-R-O-N-I-A, Caronia. It's no longer in existence. It had been replaced two or three times over the years but now it's gone, see? The, uh, incidentally, I kept some of the menus. They're there at Ellis Island. I sent them a copy of the, I came third class. They had abandoned, discontinued the... MRS.

STEEN: Steerage?

STEEN: Steerage and now there was first, second and third class, so I came third class.

SIGRIST: What were the accommodations like?

STEEN: Well, everybody had the same thing. It was four in a cabin. Four small, tiny cabins. Two up and two down with a tiny wash basin. Toilet was down the hall, a shower, and they served three meals a day.

SIGRIST: Were you in a cabin with just men or was it...?

STEEN: Men, oh yes, oh yes. It was separated.

SIGRIST: With whom did you travel?

STEEN: Well, my sister was with some other women in their cabin.

SIGRIST: Who were the other men in your cabin?

STEEN: I have no idea. I didn't remember, you know. I really don't remember. I was friendly with the waiter, our waiter, who was a Liverpool lad, see, and he, and I became very friendly with him. So my friend, chum, my chum on the ship was a Liverpool lad. I don't remember his name or what he looks like but it was very pleasant. It was the first time I had ever been on a ship that size, you know what I mean? There were no amenities, none. But you could hear the second and first class passengers having a great time up there. But we didn't care, I mean, we were, it was ten days. Ten day ride.

SIGRIST: Was it a smooth trip?

STEEN: Well, I was a good sailor so I had no trouble. Yeah, a lot of people were sick. As a matter of fact, I come down one day for breakfast, nobody. The whole dining room and I was the only person there.

SIGRIST: What kind of food did they feed you?

STEEN: Very, very plain. Very simple. You didn't have a choice. They gave you a menu but you didn't have a choice. You just ate what was on the menu and it was all right. I mean as far as I was concerned it was very exotic because I was accustomed to home cooking. And when my mother died my sister Bea, the one I came with, had taken over the command of the family's house, of the house. And she did the cooking and everything and she was probably the world's worst cook, you know what I mean? She was a great gal but she was a terrible cook and so this stuff tasted great to me, you know. All kinds of exotic things I never even heard of. I'll show you the menu.

SIGRIST: You said there was gambling on the boat.

STEEN: Well, you know, the guys were doing, not crap games because crap was unknown, see? Doing poker, I guess, or just, I don't know what they were playing because I didn't play cards then.

SIGRIST: When you say "the guys," who, who are these people?

STEEN: Oh, passengers.

SIGRIST: In third class?

STEEN: You'd see a bunch of guys in a corner on the deck and they were doing, playing cards and I don't know what the hell they were playing. I would stand and watch. You know, "Come on," and I'd say, "No." I didn't know how to play and I wasn't interested. I had just the twenty dollars, you know what I mean, and I was hanging onto that twenty dollars because you had to show for financial security. MRS.

STEEN: Imagine.

STEEN: That was it. At Ellis Island you had to show that to get off the island, by the way.

SIGRIST: Now, did you keep your suitcase with you in the cabin or was that packed away somewhere?

STEEN: Oh no, no, no, no. The suitcase you had in your cabin, yes. It was very

close quarters. I mean it was jammed, you know what I mean?

SIGRIST: Did they supply any kind of entertainment for you?

STEEN: No, no, no. Nothing at all. Nothing at all. Oh, sometimes the passengers would sing or something. It was, uh, the ship provided nothing, follow me? Oh, up on the deck, if it was a nice night, you'd get up there and some of them would sing, have a little community sing but nobody organized anything. It was just whatever you did. Some people had concertinas or whatever and people played, you know, and it was interesting I found. I met a few people. I don't remember them at all now but, uh...

SIGRIST: Were there a lot of people traveling from Ireland?

STEEN: Oh, the place, the ship was jammed. Oh my God, there must have been two thousand people on that thing in third class. We were jammed. Now, we anchored on New York Harbor and we were tendered into the island. The ship, of course, couldn't pull up and...

SIGRIST: This is probably a good place to stop this tape.

END OF TAPE ONE, SIDE TWO

BEGINNING OF TAPE TWO, SIDE ONE

SIGRIST: This is Paul Sigrist for the National Park Service. We are now beginning tape two of our interview with Manny Steen, who came from Ireland in 1925 when he was nineteen. Mr. Steen, you've just told us about the voyage over. Let's talk about, now when did you arrive in New York

Harbor? I never asked you what season you left in, what month?

STEEN: It's a funny thing. I arrived in New York Harbor, it was August the first in a Wednesday. It's funny that I should remember the day. I'm not too sure about the date but I think it was August first. It was a Wednesday, Wednesday morning. I remember about six o'clock in the morning across the, on board the ship we were, says, "Land ahoy!" You know, the lookout had said, "Land ahoy!" Everybody rushed up on deck. We were all having breakfast or something. We were told we were having breakfast at six o'clock in the morning, to be assembled in the dining and the word came through, "Land ahoy," from the lookout and everybody rushed on the prow of the ship, you know, to see land, the first sign of America. I remember we were rushing up there looking out. We couldn't see a goddamned thing. I mean the horizon was the sea. But what had happened is the round, the earth is round, do you follow me? And as you sailed into New York slowly you see New York coming like out of the sea. And the first thing you see was the Woolworth Building. That was the highest building in the world at that time. So the first thing you saw sticking out of the water was the top of the Woolworth Building. And as we proceeded, of course, the building came out of the water (he laughs) apparently and everybody, there were a couple of thousand people.

SIGRIST: Was this exciting? How did you feel?

STEEN: Oh! It was exciting. Everybody was cheering, "America!" My God, everybody is yelling and crying and kissing and who could remember. You weren't aware that this was a historical moment but it was.

SIGRIST: Do you remember seeing the Statue of Liberty?

STEEN: Oh, yes. As we came in then, of course, Manhattan Island started coming up out of the thing and we saw this tremendous, remember I had never seen anything over like a five story building. And I saw the island coming up out of the ocean and as we proceeded in there's the Statue of Liberty. Well, everybody knew what the Statue of Liberty was. I mean, there it was. And it didn't have quite the significance. I didn't understand too much about it. We knew about it but in very vague terms. Very vague terms. I think mostly they knew the Statue of Liberty and maybe they couldn't tell you about it, see? Anyway, here, America. That's what we knew: America.

SIGRIST: I want to ask you a little bit about your sister Bertha. How did she feel about coming to America?

STEEN: Well, uh, she had been going with some chap, you understand, and had expected to get married and she was single at the time.

SIGRIST: How old was she?

STEEN: Bertha, I was nineteen, she must have been twenty one, twenty two, around that. A young girl. She was a, she had been going with some chap and my uncle said, "Nothing doing." First of all, he was a different religion and he didn't think this chap was right for her and besides, he was a different religion so, "You're going to America with Manny," you follow me, "and make a new life there," see? So I didn't know what the hell a new life meant, you know what I mean? I just figured come over. There was nothing in Ireland behind. I left nothing behind. I didn't have a job. There looked like no prospects so...

SIGRIST: But she was maybe a little reluctant...

STEEN: Yeah. She, uh, and she went back some years later and married this chap and then came back here again and eventually died here, see? It wasn't a, my uncle was right, by the way. That guy wasn't for her really. It wasn't a, I don't mean because he was a different religion but he just, he was a lazy bum, you know. He lived off where she went out to work, you know. He was that kind of a chap. He liked his...

SIGRIST: What was Bertha like as a person?

STEEN: Who?

SIGRIST: What was Bertha like as a person?

STEEN: Oh, Bea. Oh, she was nice. She became the family mother. She raised the family. She became, when my mother died she was twelve years old when my mother died so she took over the cooking and the cleaning and everything else and she, uh...

SIGRIST: Did she ask like that with you even though...

STEEN: Oh, yeah. She became, yeah, she became the mother. She was the substitute mother, see? We went to her when you cut your finger or whatever, you know. She was the mother and she accepted the role, follow me?

MRS. STEEN: She was very good at it, too.

STEEN: Yeah, yeah. She was a good person.

SIGRIST: I see. I was just curious. All right, so you've arrived in New York Harbor.

STEEN: Yes.

SIGRIST: Then what happened?

STEEN: Finally, the boat anchored in mid-bay, mid-harbor and then they tendered us from the ship to Ellis Island. A tender.

SIGRIST: What kind of a vessel?

STEEN: Like a ferry, almost. Like a ferry boat, similar to a ferry boat and you took care of your suitcase and by the hundreds we, on the ship, they had to go back and forth a few times and we landed. Of course, the wharf and the whole area there was not like it is now, with a wooden wharf, you understand, and a gravel walkway and there was no grass or nothing. No concrete there. The building was grimy, you know what I mean, the outside. There were other buildings. I didn't even look. We got off the boat with bag in hand and you went right into the building, the main building now.

SIGRIST: Were there lots of people there?

STEEN: Oh! Must have been, that day there must have been three, four ships. It must have been five, six thousand people. Jammed! And remember, it was August. Hot as a pistol and I'm wearing my long johns and a heavy

Irish tweed suit. Got my overcoat on my arm. It was the beginning of fall back home, see? And I'm carrying my suitcase. I'm dying with the heat. It was terrible hot. I never experienced. It must have been maybe seventy-five, eighty degrees but I never experienced such heat. Besides, I wasn't equipped for it. Anyway, we, uh, fortunately, as we got on it was morning but during the day that hall became so hat and in the hall all they had was a couple rotating fans, you know what I mean, which did nothing except raise the dust. You know, that's all. But there was thousands of people in this building. The place was jammed. And so you're not concerned. You don't realize this is history in the making. You're just an immigrant. You want to get in and get the hell out of there and get off, you understand?

SIGRIST: What exactly happened?

STEEN: The guards, as we called them there, the customs officers and immigration officials, they, first of all they slammed a tag on you with your name, address, country of origin, et cetera.

SIGRIST: They did that at Ellis?

STEEN: Huh?

SIGRIST: They did that at Ellis?

STEEN: At Ellis Island, yes. You were tagged. Everybody was tagged. They didn't ask you whether you spoke English or not. Everybody was tagged. They took your papers and they tagged you. That was the first thing. They checked your bag. They had to go through your baggage and then they

pushed you, you know what I mean? They just pushed you. They'd point because they didn't know whether you spoke English or not. They could have looked to see, I suppose, but they didn't. Nobody asked me. They had too many. Understaffed. Over crowded. Jammed. And the place was the noisiest and the languages and the smell. It was...

SIGRIST: What did it smell like?

STEEN: Foul, you know what I mean? But I am nineteen. I can stand a lot then. You'd be surprised what you can take at nineteen, you know, and I just, it didn't bother me to that extent. You know, you figure, "Get out of here fast," you follow me? Then you had to go through the physical. I think, frankly, the worst memory I have of Ellis Island was the physical because the doctors were seated at a long table with a basin full of potassium chloride and you had to stand in front of them, follow me, and they'd ask you. And you had to, uh, reveal yourself. They gave you what we used to call in the army they call a "short arm inspection." Right there in front of everyone, I mean, it wasn't private! You were standing there. And the women had to open their blouse and here this is terrible. Remember, these were immigrants from a very reticent people and here, nobody was looking or watching anyone. Looking back I can see that but I was nineteen and I was embarrassed as hell, you know. I had to open my trousers and fly and they would check you for venereal disease or hernia or whatever they were looking for, I don't know, when I had the physical. And they would, uh, oh no, I was a young buck. I was in good shape, you know, but just the same I felt this was very demeaning, even then. I mean, it's terrible with women, young girls and everyone, you know. And we had to line up in front of them. But it wasn't personal. It was very, looking back, it wasn't personalized. But never the less it's a very

unpleasant memory and I didn't, it was years later I just thought they didn't have to do it that way. But they, remember, this is the height of immigration. They were coming in by the thousands. I mean the day I was there I saw maybe three, four, five thousand. Who counts, you know what I mean? The place was jammed, follow me? And again, we're not aware this is historic and this is something you're going to tell your grandchildren about, that I would be talking to you someday about it. I just want to get through there and get out. In the meantime, finally, I got through quick and...

SIGRIST: What else did they do other than the physical? Did you have to show papers?

STEEN: Well, you have customs immigration, then you have to show your financial security of twenty dollars and so on. And, incidently, I didn't realize until sometime later but what happened was a lot of the guys on the ship, you know I told you, they were gambling. Some of the guys lost their twenty dollars, follow me? Now, but there was a little racket there, you see. There was a wire fence around it, follow me and you had to go through the customs officers there. Now in order to go through you had to show your twenty dollars. But a little further up on the fence there was a couple of guys making money. They would loan you, you could borrow twenty dollars. Cost you two bucks, follow me? And they would loan you a twenty dollar bill and you'd go to the gate and come through the gate and the guy would be there to take the twenty dollar bill back from you. Cost you two bucks. For two bucks you could show twenty dollars. And now, whether the guy was splitting it with the guard I never, I didn't know really what was going on, you know. At nineteen I never realized I was so innocent, you know what I mean? I wasn't aware of what was going on. It

was later that I realized, "Hey, that's a racket they had there." Well, it wasn't harmful. They got in, you know, so...

SIGRIST: Did you eat while you were at Ellis?

STEEN: That I almost died of thirst. Couldn't find the fountains, Could hardly find the men's room. Now I didn't know there was a place there you could eat. Wasn't only reading the history books that I knew there were tables where you could have a piece of bread. Anyway, you were so excited. It was so hot. I was more thirsty, follow me?

SIGRIST: Did you ever find something to drink?

STEEN: No, no. Never did. MRS.

STEEN: He was wearing his long johns.

STEEN: What happened was I really didn't think of eating. We had so much to do and get through. Finally I got through and my brother who was supposed to claim me, my claimant, you had to be claimed by a responsible person. My brother was down and he didn't show up so I'm waiting. They won't let me go on the ferry boat until I was claimed because he had to come across and claim me.

SIGRIST: Bertha is with you.

STEEN: Beg your pardon?

SIGRIST: Bertha is with you.

STEEN: Bertha was with me. I'm talking about both of us, the same situation. So finally they are closing. It's four o'clock. The island closed at four and the staff went home. Anyway, so they shipped me over to the depot on the other side of the island, the Ferry Building, and I was held there in a group pen for unclaimed, O.K.ed immigrants. Now when I was there, so I was there for about an hour and they closed at five.

SIGRIST: Was this outside or inside?

STEEN: This was inside the building. I think they called it the Ferry Building, I forget.

SIGRIST: Were there lots of other people?

STEEN: Oh, yeah. There were other people there. I don't know how many because you're concerned about yourself. You couldn't be less interested. My brother didn't show up and here Bea and I are wondering what to the hell we're going to do. Are they going to send us back? Anyway, we're there about an hour, it was about five o'clock, and they say, "We close up here. Where's your...?" I said, "I don't know." I had no phone or nothing. I didn't know where he lives or what. Anyway, they called up the HIAS, Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, who would be responsible, traveler's aid society like but this is the Hebrew immigrants. HIAS they called it. I don't know if you're familiar with it. But at that time they were located, I think, on Lafayette. So they call up HIAS and turn us over to them to be responsible, O.K.? And about fifteen minutes later this little, short chap came in and the funniest thing was he, knowing that we were Jewish, he insisted upon talking Yiddish. I didn't speak Yiddish, you know what I

mean? I spoke English, follow me? A little Gaelic, you know, but no Yiddish. But I did understand German. In college I had to take a couple years of German so more or less I got along and he said, "Comm mit," you know what I mean? And he come and he took us both to Lafayette. Well, first of all, from the Ferry Building to the subway, which was the other side of City Hall Park, you know, uh, Battery Park I mean, it's like three blocks across and remember by eight it's hot and here I am with my overcoat and my long johns and my suitcase and, Jeez, eh, and I'm dying and in the meantime all I had was just a little water. I had nothing to eat, follow me, and I'm getting a little weak. And he's in a hurry. He wants to get home, follow me, because this is a chore, whatever he had. He had to bring us up there, see? And he takes us to the subway. Now, I had never seen a subway. We knew that there were such things as subways, underground trains, you know what I mean, but I never seen one and when we come to the, I know if you can imagine the first time seeing a subway train, you come down the steps, the noise, the flashing lights. In those days there was no air conditioning, you know what I mean? They had little fans in the trains. It was hot down underground and I sat, I remember. Isn't it funny how I remember sitting in the subway car with my suitcase and Bea was there and this guy paid no attention to us whatsoever and I am dripping! I must have lost ten pounds that day. And those days I was only about one hundred and thirty pounds. Finally it was short up to Lafayette, I think it was just one or two stops and we get off. My God and they went up on Lafayette, up. It was one floor up. I could barely go climb up the stairs. I was really weak. And we came into this very, uh, by this time it was about six o'clock or six thirty, something like that.

SIGRIST: And this is the HIAS office?

STEEN: The HIAS office, yeah. And, uh, this guy said something to the, there was a woman there and he took off and she said, " Will sassem?" Well, I know that means, " Do you want to eat?" So I said, " Yes." So she brought, I'll never forget it because, uh, a big bowl of cold soup, follow me, with green things. Like a milky substance with some green things floating around in it. It turned out to be like spinach soup. It was sour grass soup, they call it. A cold soup like borsht, you know, something like that but it was made with sour grass. I didn't know. I'd never seen it before but it was cold and it was wet and she brought in a big pile of pumpernickel and a big pile of butter and, Jesus, I ate all the pumpernickel and Bea and I, we, we latched in, we really, you should have seen the pile. I remember back, I mean thinking back, what, how did we ever eat all that, see, and we were skinny kids, you know.

SIGRIST: Can you describe the HIAS office to us?

STEEN: Oh, this was, we were on the like dining area they called it, where they, I guess, accommodate immigrants.

SIGRIST: Was this a large building or was it a townhouse? What...?

STEEN: Eh, I guess there were offices to the back. We came in, they brought us right into the dining room and sat down. It wasn't, it was long wooden tables. It wasn't anything fancy. Very plain, very plain. I mean I was very grateful they, she was very nice, the lady that brought in, you know, and we were so thirsty and we were so hungry, with this pumpernickel. It was delicious. Fresh pumpernickel with butter, which I still love to this day. This woman, and in the meantime I didn't know what the hell it was. I said, "Bertha, what do you think this is?" She said, "I don't know." So in

the meantime we're pushing the green stuff that was floating around, you know, I was pushing it back because I wanted to get at the liquid, you know.

MRS. STEEN: It was spinach soup.

STEEN: When we got through my brother Henry comes in the door and I said, I had seen him a few years before, I said, "Where were you?" Boss wouldn't let him off. The boss says, "You want to get off? Don't come back." So he said, "You know, it's my job." So he says, anyway, I said, "How'd you find us here?" He had traced us. He had gone to the island and they sent him there and he back traced, you know what I mean, and he found us. In the meantime he had taken an, my sister Eda had been here the year before so they decided to get a three room apartment in Harlem, 118th Street, so we moved...

SIGRIST: 118th Street.

STEEN: 118th Street. So he came down and we went up the subway, I guess. I don't remember how we got up there. I forget now.

SIGRIST: What was that apartment like? Could you describe it?

STEEN: Yes. It was in Harlem in the, remember, 1925, Harlem was a mixture. It was East Harlem, 118th Street between Second and Third, Third Avenue. It was a mixture of Italian and Jewish, follow me? About fifty-fifty. And it was a neighborhood and a very friendly neighborhood. Everybody more or less knew each other, follow me, and the apartment was a typical three, uh, two bedroom apartment, I think we had.

SIGRIST: What floor was it on?

STEEN: I know, it was...(to Mrs. Steen) Do you remember the floor?

MRS. STEEN: First floor.

STEEN: First floor. See, she lived (referring to Mrs. Steen) also on 118th Street. She lived 118th Street and Second Avenue. I lived 118th Street and Third, between Third and Lex. She was between First and Second and she knew who I was but I didn't know her.

MRS. STEEN: We were pen pals. He didn't know me.

STEEN: She had given me a phony name, follow me? But I didn't really care. She was just a girl. I didn't know her. Didn't even know what she looked like. Anyway, we were there and in the meantime my brother said to me, "Look, get those long johns off and throw the goddamned things out. They stink like hell," and he loaned me a pair of B.V.D.'s, you follow me? Ah, boy! It was like getting out of jail getting into those things because the weather was terrible. And we had an ice box. I had never seen one with a big chunk of ice in there, you know what I mean? That was a tremendous novelty to think, you know, having ice because in Ireland you don't have that. The, anyway, and so...

SIGRIST: Was there a bathroom in this apartment?

STEEN: Oh, yes, yes.

SIGRIST: You could shower.

STEEN: Oh, yes and how. This was the height of luxury, you know what I mean? They had a bathroom and a refrigerator and a cooker.

SIGRIST: What was your brother Henry doing?

STEEN: (to Mrs. Steen) What the hell was he doing at the time?

MRS. STEEN: He was tailoring.

STEEN: I think he was a tailor. Working in tailoring. He worked at anything.

SIGRIST: Was Eda working?

STEEN: And he was doing cabby. He was a cabby for a while. MRS.

STEEN: Eda went to work.

SIGRIST: Eda was working also.

STEEN: Yes. I don't remember what she was working at. I, Henry, this was a Wednesday, remember? O.K., the next morning, Thursday, I got to tell you this. Thursday morning I'm up bright and early. It's like seven o'clock and Henry is up too and he's getting ready. I say, "Where are you going?" He says, "I gotta go to work." I says, "What will I do?" He says, "Today you take off. Tomorrow you get a job." (clock chimes) So I said, "All right." He's the older brother so he's the boss. I was accustomed to accepting this authority, see? He didn't order me or anything else. So I

said, "What'll I do?" He says, "Take a trolley car and go downtown. Take a look around." I says, "What's a trolley car?" He says, "Tram. That's what they call them over here. Trolley cars." I said, "All right." He says, "Remember, if you're going downtown, you're going on the wrong side of the street here. You gotta go on the right side, so you go from that corner is the way downtown, see?" I says, "How much it costs?" because in Ireland, England, we have a zone system, you follow me? You go from one zone to the next, you pay so much for each zone. He said, "No, there's no zone." He says, "One fare all the way." I said, "How much?" He said, "A nickel." I said, "What's a nickel?" You know, I had never seen a nickel. I didn't know what he was talking about. So he goes in his pocket and he takes out a coin, a five cent piece. He says, "That's a nickel." I says, "Why do they call it a nickel?" He says, "Figure it out. I gotta go to work," and he took out another one. "See this one here, the little one. That's called a dime." I said, "Why?" He said, "Look, I can't stand here all day arguing with you. That's five cents. This is a dime. Two of those, two nickels, make one dime, see? You go downtown. It will cost you a nickel, follow me? Ten cents will get you back and forth, follow me?" He said, "But remember, only pay one nickel at a time each way, see?" And then he hands me a quarter, the big shot. Not the most generous act act he ever did in his life. He was a tight bugger. Anyway, he says, "That's a quarter." He says, "That's a quarter of a dollar. Twenty five cents." So now I had a twenty five cent, ten cent, he says, "That's the money I have, see?" He took care of the twenty dollars. He was in charge. Well, I accepted it, you know, my older brother, and I didn't know. And twenty dollars, I want to tell you something, I thought that was untold wealth and I had never seen that much money in my life in my hands, see? So anyway, now I had twenty five, ten cents and a nickel and he said, "Go down and take a look." So I go get to the corner and at that

time, it was August remember, and the trolley cars were open trolley cars. I don't know if they still have them, no?

MRS. STEEN: No.

STEEN: No, they don't have them anymore. There are open trolley cars, they were, and the seats ran lengthways. You faced the sidewalk this way. (he gestures) So the trolley car stopped and I got on and I sat down and the conductor, he had a big, leather pouch here and he came over. And the conductors on the Third Avenue Railroad were all Irish and a lot of immigrants. And he says, "What are you doing, young fellow?" And I, at that time, spoke with a brogue. And I says, "Just taking a ride downtown." He says, "Is it Irish you are?" I says, "Aye." He says, "When did you get here?" I said, "Yesterday. I just got off the boat!" (he laughs) I mean, it was, you know! He says, "Why didn't you tell me that?" He says,"I wouldn't have charged you the nickel." (everyone laughs) He was going to give me a free ride, see? And so he sat down beside me and there was nobody else. It was about ten, nine, ten o'clock and he's pointing, giving me a free tour, you know, all the way down Third Avenue. He's pointing out the buildings; the Singer Building, the, this building. I was fascinated. Hey, America is a great place. Look, I'm only here one day and this guy is getting a reception, a royal reception and I was the only guy. They kept getting on and off the trolley car and he'd take the nickels and he'd come back, you know what I mean? He was having a great time. And finally we got off at City Hall Park where it terminated, you know, and he says, "Come on back and this ride will be on me. We're going up to Van Cortlandt Park," and I didn't even know what the hell that was. He says, "It's beautiful there." I said, "Well, no, I'm down here and I want to see things while I'm here." And I saw City Hall, you know, and walked across

the park and I am feeling very adventurous, you know what I mean? Here it's a beautiful day and now I had left my jacket off and I'm wearing thin underwear and I'm beginning to feel comfortable now and I walk across the park and there's a street going down that way and I look down and I look up and there's the street sign. It says "Broadway." Well, I want to tell you that was one of the most exciting moments of my life. Broadway! I'm only one day in America and I'm on Broadway. I mean, it may sound like nothing to you but I got so excited. It's a wonder I wasn't killed because the traffic was going in all directions I couldn't figure out. I'm so confused watching on the left and the right. Anyway, so I started walking down Broadway and I walk down and I look down and I see the Woolworth Building. Now I knew about the Woolworth Building and I walked down to see this tremendous world edifice. What an exciting experience to see that bloody building. I stood up and I looked up and when I looked up, it was a funny thing, the building looked like it was teetering forward, you know what I mean? It appeared to be that way. I guess it wasn't falling but I had a feeling of hallucination that the building was going to fall down so I kept going. And down below I see Battery Park, where the day I had come across from Ellis Island. I said. "How do you like that? One day in America and I'm right back here where I started from." And it was an exciting experience, you know.

SIGRIST: Yeah, your first day. Seems like...

STEEN: Ah, fantastic. I walked across the park, Battery Park there, and I sit down on the bench and nobody is bothering me. No one could identify me as a foreigner, you know, and everybody's acting like I'm a full blooded America. And there was a guy with a pushcart. They don't have pushcarts there. Well, they do have pushcarts but not, they were selling

food and this guy was selling hot dogs. Now I had know about hot dogs from watching American movies in Dublin. I knew that the people ate this thing here. Well, honestly, they were sausages, follow me? They don't have hot dogs in Ireland. They have sausages. So, look, it was only five cents so I figured I would speculate, you know what I mean? So I asked for a frankfurter and he gave me a frank and he wanted to put all the stuff on it. "No, no, no," I say. And the people there were buying. They were, with the mustard, were scooping mustard on it and I was accustomed to English mustard. You know what that's like, Coleman's mustard? Did you ever have it? That's enough to burn your guts off, you know what I mean? And I said, "How can all these people eat with all that mustard on there?" So I didn't have anything on it. I ate it and it tasted nice. It was garlicky, you know, and it had a nice taste. I had never tasted anything like it. And I was there eating my hot dog and taking the world in with my eyes and I say, "Eh, one day in America. I got it made," you know. And as I walked I saw there was one guy selling ice cream. A nickel a sandwich, They used to sell, in those days, ice cream sandwiches, follow me? Five cents. I think I would speculate. I really had a ball out here. I had a hot dog and an ice cream and I sat down and walked around the buildings I was seeing and seeing all the foreigners coming in from Ellis Island (he laughs), you know. It was a great feeling. Absolutely.

SIGRIST: Did you feel like an American then?

STEEN: Oh, I felt like I had the world on a string. I mean, this was my day, see what I mean? Well, I figured I had to remember how to get back, follow me? And I was trying to remember different marks of identification to make sure I got on the proper trolley car. And after a little while and so on, I finally went back and got back to, back to Harlem and I had an

exciting day. It was the afternoon when I got back and my brother came home and I said, "I had an exciting day." I tried to tell him. He thought it was dull and dumb but it wasn't to me. It was one of the most exciting days. And that was my first day in America.

SIGRIST: What a great way to start off your life here.

STEEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: When did you get a job?

STEEN: The next day. (everyone laughs) The next day my brother says, "Get a job." So I say, "Where?" Anyway, he was working for American Express. I think he was driving a truck. I don't know what he was doing with them.

SIGRIST: This is Henry?

STEEN: Henry.

SIGRIST: I thought he was working as a tailor?

STEEN: (he pauses) Maybe. I'm really not too sure what he was doing. Maybe he was a tailor then, whatever it was. Anyway, he said, "Try American Express," or whatever he said, American Express. So I went down there and they hired me as an hourly worker. Twenty five cents an hour.

SIGRIST: Was this in the neighborhood or was this...?

STEEN: No, no, no. I had to go downtown. They put me, at that time American

Express, American Railway Express it was called, where they delivered packages. They were packages, like Federal Express and so but not overnight. They delivered. Pick up and delivery service they had on packages. I got a job at 28th Street and Madison. Sidewalk, they had a sidewalk system of pick up trucks, merchandise. The sidewalk, we would chalk on sidewalk "Hoboken," "Pennsylvania Railroad," different railroads and, as a matter of fact, it was the lamp shade district. The shipping clerks would bring the stuff down. I was a tally clerk, follow me? And they'd bring the bags, the packing cartons down. I'd give them a receipt for it and then I would lay it out according to the depot that it's going to go to. Going to go to Hoboken or...

SIGRIST: Tally clerk? Tally clerk?

STEEN: Tally.

SIGRIST: T-A-L-L-Y?

STEEN: T-A-L-L-Y, tally clerk. That was my official title and there was a guy there who was showing me what to do and where this goes and I would pile the stuff up there and in the afternoon the trucks would come by for American Express. The Hoboken truck would come and pick up from Hoboken and he would deliver there. There were all separate trucks for separate destinations, follow me? Railroad depots mostly they were taking them to and then, when the truck came, he would give me a receipt for what he would take, you see. (end cassette tape two, side one) The truck drivers for American Express were all Irish, too, and they were kidding the shirt off me because I had an Irish accent, very strong accent at the time. And, uh, anyway, I worked there for twenty five cents an hour and within a month I

was getting forty cents an hour and I had no ties so I would work six days, seven days a week. I worked sixty hours a week. It didn't make any difference. And here, like I work sixty hours a hour, I got forty, it was twenty dollars a week or some damn thing. I mean I worked. I really worked.

SIGRIST: Now, did you contribute money...?

STEEN: Oh, yeah. Oh, we all chipped in. Absolutely. I turned over everything and just kept what I needed, you know.

SIGRIST: Do you remember how much the rent was on that apartment?

STEEN: Jeez! (to Mrs. Steen) You might remember. No.

SIGRIST: No.

STEEN: Twenty dollars I made. I mean it was about twenty dollars probably.

SIGRIST: What did Bertha do?

STEEN: Well, Bertha kept the house. Yeah, she fitted right and then, a little while after, she got a job as some, a nothing job. I really don't remember.

SIGRIST: So there were what, four people living in the house?

STEEN: Now we were, yeah, four.

SIGRIST: Because Eda is with you, also.

STEEN: Eda, Bea, Henry and myself, see. Lou was out in the Wild West someplace.

SIGRIST: Yes.

STEEN: My kid brother Saul who was here, because he was a little boy, he was young, he was ten or eleven, my aunt had moved and lived in Montclair. That's the aunt that lived with us in Dublin. Not lived with us but in Dublin. She, they had gone to America, see? As a matter of fact they were neighbors of their's (he gestures to Mrs. Steen) originally in Harlem and then they had moved to Montclair, see? So we arranged, because there was nobody to look after, Bea got a job and nobody to look after Saul. He was a kid. We didn't want to leave him alone so my aunt agreed that we would all chip in a little bit and he could live with them and that's what we did.

SIGRIST: Describe to us religious life once you came to America.

STEEN: Uh, I, we, none of us, once my father, my mother died and my father died more or less I, not participated to any great extent in religion. We came here. Again the same. We were drifting away. Not in every respect, I mean to say. I had no interest to us. (referring to Mrs. Steen) Mary's folks were pretty orthodox and very religiously oriented and because mu aunt was their next door neighbor, they had a hand laundry. Do you know what they call a hand laundry in New York is? Well, there are steam laundries and, but a hand laundry is where shirts are ironed by hand. There used to be small hand laundries in New York. Wet wash, hand laundries and so on and that's what her folks had. Next door to him was a dry cleaner and

suits and cleaning and pressed. That was my aunt and uncle where they were next door, see, and they were friends. Well, anyway, so I met her family and they were quite religiously oriented and they took me in and I met her and I liked her (referring to Mrs. Steen) and they used to invite me over to dinner. I used to go over there and get a good meal. I always said I married her for her mother's cooking.

SIGRIST: Describe what dinner was like. Tell us about as evening.

STEEN: Oh, her mother. Oh, her mother was a great cook, particularly first it was Friday night. Friday night is the big festive dinner among Jewish people. Chicken, of course. Boiled chicken, soup, you know what I mean, uh... MRS.

STEEN: Chopped liver.

STEEN: Chopped liver, oh yeah. Her mother was a great cook and I was like about one hundred and thirty pounds bit I ate like a, you wouldn't believe it. Unbelievable. MRS.

STEEN: He ate the whole dinner. (she laughs)

STEEN: I mean and her mother was like, "Eat, eat, eat," you know, first you eat, then you'll talk, you know. And Mary has two brothers and two sisters. No, a sister and two brothers and they were so accustomed to this that they were picky and choosy where to me this was the only decent meal I got the whole bloody week, you know what I mean? And I would eat there and her mother would be delighted, you know what I mean, and she'd keep heaping my plate with food, you know what I mean?

MRS. STEEN: My mother was a fabulous cook.

STEEN: I don't know where I put it, you know what I mean, 'cause my eyes were bigger than my stomach. I used to eat, God, I couldn't eat for two days afterwards.

SIGRIST: Well, and Bertha was not a good cook.

STEEN: And Bertha was not. (he laughs) And now she has little or no time for it so I enjoyed it very much. Her mother, while they were people of very modest means, but food was the number one item among poor Jewish people. Food was the essence of life, follow me?

MRS. STEEN: Not only that but if you meet a stranger you would bring in to the...

STEEN: Anyway, uh...

SIGRIST: When did you marry?

MRS. STEEN: 1928.

STEEN: Three years later. I'm looking back, by the way, and it's pretty interesting to look back. And I said to Mary, "You know, in three years look what I had accomplished." You know, September, 1928, we were married. I was here three years. At that time I didn't realize but now, looking back, because all I had was the twenty dollars and the clothes on my back. Now here I am, marrying this lovely young girl, had a big wedding. And now, by this time I'm set in the business world because what had happened was

American Express, I worked for them until the week before Christmas. They laid off all their temporary workers.

SIGRIST: In what year?

STEEN: 1928. 1925, pardon me. 1925. The week before Christmas and that's when they came down with tips, you know what I mean, for the factories, you know, the week before. When you get a little extra gravy we were laid off. Not only myself. All the temporary, the hourly workers. I was as mad as hell because first of all there was a juicy bonus coming in. Not so much, you got a dollar tip, you know, for this one but there were a lot of factories, you know, there. And I was as mad as hell and I decided, and this is rather curious, interesting, my uncle in Liverpool was manager of the Cunard Line, of the office there and he had given me a letter of introduction to Edison, New York, New York Edison employment manager. He said he had known him in Ireland, see, or England or wherever. And the letter of introduction, "This is, will introduce my nephew, Manny Steen," you know, "Of good character," et cetera. So a week, a few days after this I figures the hell with American Express. I'll go down, listen, I've got this letter of recommendation. I went down to Edison on First Avenue, I think it was. First or Second Avenue, all the way downtown, the main office, and to get the employment manager you must have had to go through about three secretaries to get in to see him and by the time I got in and , finally, I got in. I had sent a note in advance and when I came in, oh, it was this beautiful mahogany office and he treated me like a long lost brother and said, "How's your uncle?" and this, et cetera, and he says, "Oh," he says, "You'll do well here. We're looking for people like you," and so on. I said, "How do you like that." He's a big man. This is, look at this. Here I am welcomed with opened arms like I'm a relative or some damn

thing. And he says to me, "When can you start?" and I said, "Now." Now, remember, it was a Friday. He says, "No, no. Take the weekend. Start Monday morning." I said, "O.K." And he says, "Well, you have to fill out the form," the application. So this is 1925. So I fill out the application and I'm sitting there and I'm glowing. God Almighty, I can see where I'm going. There's no end in sight. I gave him the application and he's reading it through and he's taking to me and we're having a...All of a sudden his face fell down to here (he gestures) and he said, "Didn't you make a mistake here, young fellow?" It says "religion" and I put down Hebrew. In Ireland Jews are called "Hebrews," see? I said, "Oh, no." He said, "Your father or your mother?" I said, "No, no. Both parents are Hebrews. "Ah," he said, "Ah, that's too bad." He says, "You know, I don't make the rules here," he says, "but they don't hire Hebrews." This is 1925 and he takes the application and he's tearing it up and all of a sudden like an area of ice in between. Freezing cold. I said, "I don't understand." This is my first contact with open anti-Semitism. MRS.

STEEN: Never had it in Ireland.

STEEN: And, uh, I said to him I didn't understand this. Remember, I was nineteen. Ireland was a free society, I mean. We recognized our different religions and that's all. I mean, so you're Jewish or you're Protestant. So what's the difference? There wasn't the bitterness then that there is now in the north of Ireland, for instance.

SIGRIST: Well, how did you feel about this?

STEEN: I felt terrible. Anyway, I said to him, "I don't understand. I'm the same guy I was five minutes ago. What are you telling me?" He says, "We don't hire

Hebrews. 'Jews' we call them here. We don't hire them. I said, "Why?" He says, "It's a company rule. I don't make the rules." But he said, "Look," he says, "a friend of mine up in Pittsburgh, Westinghouse employment manager, a friend of mine, I'll give you a note to him." He wanted to get me the hell out of there and I left there and I want to tell you, you know hoe desolated I felt? My God, here, because good things have been happening and all of a sudden pow! You know what I mean? And I didn't recognize it as anti-Semitism. This was a new experience and finally, this was like I told you on a Friday, so I said, "Enough, enough with this crap." I told you I had taken a brush up course on wireless telegraphy, O.K.? I had a certificate, a diploma. Now this is a brand new field, O.K.? Monday morning, Saturday morning, the next day I go down, I look where's the center. The center was Courtland Street, New York, which was the center of the radio industry. So I went down to the corner, "How do you get down there?" When I got down there I walked down Courtland Street and it was a mad house. It was Saturday, first of all. The stores were jammed. This novelty radio, at that time you had to build your own set. Now I had the technical training in this and while I was in wireless telegraphy, my Morse code and so on. But never the less the basic radio, at that time, was a very simple phenomena and I understood it. I came down and I looked around and I said, "Well, where can I go?" One called "Walthall's," sixty one Courtland Street. That seemed to be the busiest place. The busiest place, that's the best place to go for a job. So I couldn't get into the store. The store was jammed. There were salesmen shoulder to shoulder behind the counter, about fifty salesmen, about two or three hundred people jamming the store. And at the end of the floor is the floor walker. You could hardly see him and I see this bald headed guy. I said, "Hey, I'm looking for a job." So he says, "What do you know?" I says, "I'm a wireless operator." He says, "When can you start?" This is

over the, uh, I said, "Now." He said, "It's too busy. Come Monday morning." "So, Monday morning," I said," what time?" "Eight o'clock." Eight o'clock Monday morning I'm down there and they hired me on the spot. I was the only guy who knew anything about it. Those guys were selling it but they knew nothing, see? So they put me in the parts department where they sell kits. At that time you used to have to build your own radio, what we called "bread board." It was a "bread board set," they were called and you bought the parts, the condensers and the tuners, et cetera, et cetera. Well, I knew this stuff. It was very simple really but they didn't know it and the owner of the building was a fellow by the name of Nussbaum, Walter Nussbaum. That wasn't the guy I spoke to but he was an ex-wireless operator and he and I took to each other like a duck to water because we were both pros, you understand? I was a commercial operator and so was he. Anyway, he put me in the parts department because I knew all the parts and everything else, what they were and I sold blueprints, you know what I mean, and parts and I was getting eighteen dollars a week salary plus commission. "PM's" we called it and I would take, Jesus, I am now taking home twenty some odd dollars a week and the first thing you know I'm in charge of the department and the guys that are coming in who were building it would screw it up. They'd bring it down and they'd say, "It just doesn't work," so I'd fix it up for them and they'd slip me a buck or two, you know, a tip. And I'm taking home twenty five dollars a week. My God, I never saw such money in my life, you know what I mean? Now I can see my fortune is here. Within a year I was assistant manager of the store. The purchasing agent in the store, Philip Masters, he knew nothing about when they would come in selling parts, you know, supplies, wholesalers. He would call up for consultation and I'd tell him, "No, we couldn't sell that. It's too much," or this or that. Anyway, within a year I was assistant manager. When I got married in 1928, that's

the point I'm leading up to, Nussbaum calls me in and he says, "Manny, for your wedding present I'm going to give you your own store." He gave me a managership and this is 1928. By that time I was making sixty, seventy dollars a week. At this point... MRS.

STEEN: Sounds like nothing now.

STEEN: By this point I figured another ten years I am going to have enough money, I'm going to go back and going to buy Ireland and throw all the Irish out and just Mary and I will live there, see?

SIGRIST: Well, you certainly have had a charmed life in a lot of ways. Isn't it interesting that...

STEEN: I was willing to work, without quibble, any hours. I would do anything.

SIGRIST: Right.

STEEN: It didn't matter, you understand. He would tell me to pick that up. I'd pick it up, not "Not my job!" I would do it, you understand. And I was eager, bright and willing and not stupid, you know. Maybe not brilliant but not stupid and, anyway, we were off and running. It was fantastic. In the meantime, as I said, I was manager of the 86th Street and Lexington Avenue, we had a store there. Then I was transferred to Astoria, Long Island. He had great confidence in me, Nussbaum, because he was opening up stores and he wanted about twenty stores. And there was a little hanky-panky apparently going on in some of the stores so the result is that he would send me out sort of to clean up the hanky-panky and it was a wonderful experience, I can assure you.

SIGRIST: It's interesting that a very negative experience that you had on that Saturday morning, whatever it was, turned to such a positive experience when you went to the radio place.

STEEN: Well, I didn't...

SIGRIST: Because you wouldn't have gone there had you gotten the job...

STEEN: That's right. I might still be reading gas meters, who knows, for Consolidated Edison Company.

SIGRIST: Exactly.

STEEN: Uh, so sometimes, but I, this incident didn't turn my life around. It's just that I was very angry. First, I didn't understand what was really going on, understand, and fortunately it was a lucky stroke of genius that I had taken that crash course because now I had an expertise to offer and it turned out to be, by the way, it was the heyday of radio, you understand? It was an absolutely incredible experience the people I was meeting: Schickeling, DeForest, Doctor DeForest, all of them. They used to come. Remember, this was the center of radio and they would come down. I met, what's his name, uh, from Radio Corporation, anyway, I can't remember the bloody names there. But so many of them, remember, now I'm the store manager, follow me, and I'm invited to all of the affairs, Manufacture Philco or Fada or these various companies would throw a big party in the Waldorf or some place. I was the store manager. Now I'm an executive and I was invited. And I met many, many, many of the pioneers in radio.

SIGRIST: This is a good point for me to ask a final question because we only have a couple minutes left. What do you think would have happened if you stayed in Ireland?

STEEN: Well, that, very interesting that you asked that because what happened; I was here thirty years, thirty, thirty five years when we decided to go to Ireland. I hadn't been back at all. I'd more or less kept, I had a buddy there, a chap I grew up with and we had correspondences infrequently and finally about 19...thirty years, the 1950's, late 1950's some organization started here in New York, a travel organization. You paid, it was an idea somebody had. You paid in twenty five dollars a month a person and at the end of the year you got a two week trip anywhere in Europe. It was like three hundred dollars a person and the two week trip, all expense paid. They had their own plane, see,and they went to very exotic places. Oh, no, that was before, though what am I talking about, yes.

SIGRIST: So you went to Ireland?

STEEN: Yeah, went to Ireland but, no, that was before that I had accumulated, I was working and I had accumulated about six weeks vacation, so we decided to take a six week tour of Europe. At that time a chap by the name of Frommer, F-R-O-M-M-E-R, had written a little pocket paperback. "Europe On Five Dollars A Day." You may have heard about it, but if you haven't. So I said, "How about that. If we can get a fare, a cheap fare, five dollars a day, that's per person, that's with meals," you know what I mean? You can imagine. That must have been 1950 something, '55. So I took six weeks I had plus two. I took eight weeks and I took a map of Europe and as we do here, we go there and I, I will show it to you

sometime. It's incredible. No reservations. I said with Frommer's book it was a self guided tour, you know, once you had the book. It really was terrific.

SIGRIST: We only have a couple minutes here.

STEEN: Beg your pardon?

SIGRIST: We only have a couple minutes here.

STEEN: Oh, O.K. Anyway, what I did want to say was we flew into London and from there I was going to Copenhagen. While I was in London Mary says, "How about going back to Dublin and meeting Sam and seeing your family?" So I called up Sam and he said, "Sure, come up."

SIGRIST: Sam was your friend?

STEEN: Sam was my friend. So we went to Dublin. We flew and, uh, that's when I saw Sam, who had been a very poor boy like I did when I left and was now living in a beautiful home right behind the prime minister's house in Dublin, in the middle of Dublin, and we were his house guests. I said, "Sam, where did this come from?" He says, "Manny, if you had stayed here you, too, could have had this." From a poor boy he now had this. He had a five story building and two factories and this home and everything else and it was just. I was delighted for his sake. I said, "Well, I haven't done so bad either," you know, but he had done well. Retired, by the way, to Mallorca. That's where he is now. I spent a holiday with him in Mallorca some years ago.

SIGRIST: Well, it's great everybody turned out well. (he laughs)

STEEN: Turned out well. Yes, indeed. (clock rings)

SIGRIST: So, ultimately, are you glad that Uncle Jack shipped everybody to America?

STEEN: Oh, there's no question. The Irish economy even now, the unemployment in Ireland is rampant, absolutely terrible. As you know, the illegal immigrants now by the thousands are coming over here and they're hiding out in New York and the Boston area. And the reason for it is because the possibilities of getting someplace are rare. My nephews, I still have a niece living in Dublin. She had five children. Three of them are up in Ottawa, you know, because they couldn't make it out there. One is a commercial artist in "the Irish Times" and he said thirty, thirty five dollars a week is all that he could get. He opened up his own advertising agency in Ottawa and he's doing fantastic, you know what I mean? The other chap is a banquet manager. He was a pub manager there. Banquet manager with the Holiday Inns of Canada, you know, this kind of thing. It was a wonderful training in Ireland that they got but that was it. I don't know how I would have done. Sam seems to think I probably would have done all right. I don't know. But what's wrong with what I've done here? I've created my own dynasty, you know. (everyone laughs)

SIGRIST: Well, on that very happy note I want to thank you very much for one of our most detailed and informative interviews.

STEEN: I hope you find it of interest.

SIGRIST: Oh, I'm sure I won't be the only one finding it of interest. I suspect this will be an interview used over and over again for different purposes.

STEEN: O.K.

SIGRIST: Anyway, thank you very much. It was a pleasure.

STEEN: Thank you.

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

END OF INTERVIEW