

EI-041

**FRANCES (FRANCESCA) ALDERUCCI TESTA**

**BIRTH DATE: OCTOBER 26, 1910**

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**INTERVIEWER: CARLO SCISSURA**

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**TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: NANCY VEGA, 10/1993**

**TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY: PAUL E. SIGRIST, JR., 1/1994**

**SICILY, 1913**

**PORT: PALERMO**

**RESIDENCES: CONICATTINI BAGNI**

**AGE 2**

**NYC: 150<sup>TH</sup> STREET**

SCISSURA: Good afternoon. This is Carlo Scissura for the National Park Service. It is Tuesday, April 30th, 12:45 PM, and we're here with Mrs. Frances Testa, who came from Italy in 1913. Good afternoon, Mrs. Testa.

TESTA: Good afternoon.

SCISSURA: Can you tell me your full name, and include your maiden name, please.

TESTA: Yes. I was born in Italy and they gave me the name of Francesca Manchaficco. The middle, excuse me, Francesca Alderucci. My mother's maiden name was Mangiafica. That's why I mentioned that. But my name actually was Francesca Alderucci when I came over.

SCISSURA: Okay. And, now you're Francesca Testa.

TESTA: Well, I'm married now, and my name is Frances Testa.  
I cut it down to Frances.

SCISSURA: Okay, good. And where were you born, exactly, in  
Italy?

TESTA: I was born in Canicattini Bagni, Provincia di  
Siracusa, Sicilia.

SCISSURA: Okay. And you were born in what year?

TESTA: I was born in 1913, on October 26th. No, excuse me!  
I was born, I'm sorry, I'm giving you the date that  
I came here. I was born October 26, 1910, and  
arrived here later on.

SCISSURA: Okay. Can you tell me a little bit about your  
father? What was your father's name?

TESTA: My father was Emanuel Alderucci, and he also came  
from the same town.

SCISSURA: Okay. So he was born in that town?

TESTA: He was born in the same town. And he, in 1907,  
decided to come to America for the first time, and he  
was here about a year and a half, and returned to  
Canicattini Bagni. And in 1909 he and my mother

married. She was Concetta Mangiafica. And at that time the only way they could get to Italy was by what they call the quota. They were on a list and just so many people were allowed at a certain time to come.

SCISSURA: This is to come to America.

TESTA: To come to America. Right. And my father had written for all of us, the three of us, although I was not yet born. But his number came up first in June of 1913. So my mother and I, I wasn't born yet. My mother stayed behind and he didn't see me until I came to America, which was in June of 1913.

SCISSURA: Okay. What type of occupation did your father do?

TESTA: He was a farmer. He worked for his uncle on the farm in Canicattini Bagni.

SCISSURA: Right. Did you live on a farm also?

TESTA: Did I?

SCISSURA: Yeah, when you were in Italy?

TESTA: No. We lived in the city with his mother, my great, my grandmother, and we lived in the city and we did not go on the farm at all, no.

SCISSURA: Was it a small town?

TESTA: It is considered a small town, yes. It isn't a very large town. But everybody knew everybody. It was one of those small towns when everybody knew who your next-door neighbor was. And I remember my mother always saying, in Italian, she would say they lived muro a muro. Now, that means, in English, "wall to wall." And I've seen homes like that. The first time I saw them, actually, was in Pennsylvania, but that was the type of home that they lived in.

SCISSURA: So it was a very small home.

TESTA: It was a very small home, yes.

SCISSURA: And did you live in the same apartment as your grandmother did?

TESTA: Yes, we did. We lived in the same one with them. And then came, my mother's quota number came up, and her brother also, who was Sebastian Mangiafica, and with me, the three of us came to America, and my father was waiting for us in New York.

SCISSURA: Did your mother have relatives in Italy?

TESTA: Oh, yes.

SCISSURA: Other than your brother and you.

TESTA: Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

SCISSURA: Were here parents alive?

TESTA: Her parents were alive. My father's parents were alive. And my father had three brothers. My mother had, uh, two sisters and two brothers, and left them all behind, and nephews and nieces. It was quite a sad day. My mother has often told me that she really hated to leave, but at the same time her place was with her husband, and so we came to America, supposedly, to find the gold that everyone said was out on the street.

SCISSURA: Yes, yes. Was your mother a homemaker?

TESTA: Yes, she was.

SCISSURA: So she stayed home and took care of things.

TESTA: Oh yes. She never went to work, no. While she was in Italy, I mean.

SCISSURA: While you were in Italy with your mother, was your

father sending your mother money from here?

TESTA: I beg your pardon?

SCISSURA: Was your father sending money from America to your mother?

TESTA: What little he could, yes. He wasn't earning too much, because he was just a laborer here. There were no farms in New York City, which is where he settled. And he was just able to find work. I remember he said he used to work on the railroad, and then he went to work in a shop. I don't remember which one it was. And what little he could he did send to us, yes.

SCISSURA: But you were living with your grandparents, so it was fine.

TESTA: Yes, yes.

SCISSURA: Do you remember anything about Italy, about being there?

TESTA: No. I'm sorry to say I don't. I don't remember a thing. I don't even remember the boat we were on. I do remember my mother telling me about it, though.

And she said that the trip over was rather stormy, and she became quite ill. And I, it seems like I got some kind of a rash on my face, and for a while there she was worried sick because she knew that they were not allowing anybody through unless we were healthy.

And she just couldn't make it up on deck because she was a little bit seasick. But my uncle would take me upstairs, and somehow the air got rid of that mess on my forehead, the pimples. They were just pimples that came out. But when we got to the Battery, as my mother always . . .

SCISSURA: If I might interrupt you for a minute, just to find out, if we could go back a little bit to Italy. You said you left in June of 1913.

TESTA: Right.

SCISSURA: Your mother's quota came up, her number came up.

TESTA: That's right.

SCISSURA: Do you remember what port?

TESTA: Yes. We came from Palermo, yes. And I'm sorry, I can't remember the name of the boat. I have it on the passport and I looked at it a few times, and I

thought what a pretty name, and I just cannot remember it now. It's been a long time since I saw the passport.

SCISSURA: So did somebody take you from the town to Palermo?

TESTA: Oh, yes.

SCISSURA: Or did you take a train?

TESTA: Uh, well, we went by train, I'm sure. From Canicattini Bagni to Messina, to Palermo, I mean. And we boarded the boat there and came right through to New York.

SCISSURA: Right. And it was you, your mother and her brother.

TESTA: And her brother, right.

SCISSURA: And so your mother left all her relatives.

TESTA: Oh, yes, yes.

SCISSURA: Was she upset? Do you remember her telling you?

TESTA: Oh, yes. She was very, very upset. And I remember, even after we were in New York, I do remember the apartment that we lived in. It was one of those tenement houses with a courtyard in the center, and I

can remember the back porch, and I can remember the clotheslines from one porch to the other, and I can remember my mother sitting in the kitchen many times crying, and wishing that she could see her family. She was very, very lonesome.

SCISSURA: Really. So she didn't have any relatives in America?

TESTA: Not, only her brother.

SCISSURA: Right, her brother.

TESTA: But, see, in New York City we didn't have too many, but my father knew that in Hartford, Connecticut, we did have relatives, and he was anxious to get there, but until he was able to work and save enough money for us, all three of us to go there.

SCISSURA: So you left in June of 1913.

TESTA: Right.

SCISSURA: Do you remember them telling you how long the trip was, exactly?

TESTA: Yes. Well, I don't know exactly. I remember my father saying that the first time he came over it took him a month to come over. And then the second

time was something like almost a month. But when my mother and I came over, I understand that it took us maybe about twenty-five days, something like that. It was a rough voyage and it was a long one, but it was not as long as my father's first voyage over.

SCISSURA: And were you in the steerage section? I mean, were you . . .

TESTA: Yes, we were. We were in the poor section. We didn't have that much money to buy anything different.

SCISSURA: Were there a lot of Italian people on the ship?

TESTA: Well, a few. But, again, I say not too many relatives. Or there were a few friends that came from Canicattini Bagni, but I'm sorry, I don't remember who they were.

SCISSURA: And did your father, when your father came to America, did he know anybody here? What made him decided to come over?

TESTA: He must have, he must have. Because he went directly to New York City, but I don't remember who it was. See, he was the oldest in his family, and he did have

a brother that eventually came over, but he went to, well, in fact, he had three brothers and eventually all three of them got here. But one went to Venezuela. The other one came to Connecticut, yes, came to our house, to my father's house. And the other one only came years later, and he also went to Hartford, Connecticut, didn't go to New York.

Because by that time, we lived on Front Street in Hartford, Connecticut, which was the Italian section, and there were so many people from our town, from Italy, that it was like old home week really, as far as my parents were concerned. And I can remember meeting them, and I still see, in fact, we had quite a celebration Saturday night. I met a lot of them that have come from the same town that we do.

SCISSURA: Now, when you got to America in 1913 was your father here to meet you at Ellis Island?

TESTA: Yes, he was. And my mother was so afraid that we were not going to be able to get through, showing in the film there how they put us through a physical and all that, and they did question the, a few pimples that I had around my eyes, but the doctor decided that it was nothing serious and that it was all

right. And as for my mother it was just sickness, seasickness, and we were allowed, but we were kind of held up a little bit, and my father was very, very anxious. He didn't know what was happening, of course.

SCISSURA: Of course.

TESTA: And my uncle stayed with us all the time. He was clear. I mean, he was all right, but he wouldn't leave us, and so he stayed.

SCISSURA: Were you detained here overnight?

TESTA: No, no. We weren't detained overnight. No. That I remember my mother saying, because I think that would have just about floored her, I think. ( she laughs )  
No, we came, and my father was very, very happy to see us, of course.

SCISSURA: He had never seen you before, had he?

TESTA: He had never seen me, no. The first glimpse he had of me I was two-and-a-half years old.

SCISSURA: Do you remember anything about Ellis Island, or what your mother told you about, what it was like being

here?

TESTA: No, I don't remember but, you know, I've seen movies and I've heard so much about it I could almost visualize it. And now seeing the movie today makes me think how horrible it must have been for my mother in those days, you know. And it sort of brings back a little bit of what she talked about, and I think I could understand the anguish and the pain and all the tears that she had.

SCISSURA: So she didn't speak any English, did she?

TESTA: No, not a word.

SCISSURA: Did your uncle?

TESTA: Neither did my uncle, no. Which made it very hard for them, you know.

SCISSURA: Sure.

TESTA: And my father, I guess, picked up just one or two by the time we got here. But on the boat, really, my mother, neither my mother nor uncle knew anything.

SCISSURA: And what was your uncle's name?

TESTA: He was Sebastian Mangiafica.

SCISSURA: So your mother spent most of the time on the boat sick, did she?

TESTA: Yeah, she was. She actually, she says she didn't go out on deck very much. My uncle used to bring, I do remember she said my uncle used to bring food to her because she couldn't even get up to go upstairs and even breathe the air that she was . . .

SCISSURA: Right. So there was a dining room upstairs that people could go and eat?

TESTA: Yeah, yeah. My uncle used to take me up, would leave my mother in her, I remember all this. Not only my mother, my uncle also told me all this. And my mother would be too sick to go up, but he would take me up. And then he would leave me. Evidently there was somebody on the boat that he knew quite well. He would leave me with that person while he went down to bring some food to my mother and to check on her and make sure she was all right. This was the way my mother came over.

SCISSURA: When you got to New York, did your uncle tell you

about seeing the Statue of Liberty or going up on deck when you first got here?

TESTA: I don't remember that. Whether or not they did, I honestly don't remember. I wish I could.

SCISSURA: Okay. So let's talk a little bit about what happened when you met your father. Where did you go after that?

TESTA: Well, as I remember it, my father had one of those, they called them tenements in those days.

SCISSURA: Can you tell me a little bit about that? What you remember . . .

TESTA: Well, it was one of those big buildings. I don't know how many people lived in the building, but it was one of those huge ones that must have been, well, when we lived on Front Street had eighteen families, and this had at least eighteen if not more.

SCISSURA: And this was in New York City?

TESTA: This was New York City I'm talking about.

SCISSURA: Do you remember where in New York?

TESTA: Yes, around 150th Street. I'll tell you, 150th and Morrison, Morrison Avenue. And, because I used to remember my father saying that a lot. And I remember the building with more buildings like that all around, and I can remember sitting on the back porch and my mother would come out and feed me there, and at the same time I can remember clotheslines that were hanging from, and clothes hanging on them, from our porch to the ones on the other side. It seemed like there was some sort of a small courtyard in between, and the clothesline went from one porch across the courtyard to our porch, and she knew the people that lived on that particular floor in that particular apartment. And I can remember her talking to them. And this is about all I can remember of New York.

SCISSURA: So she used to talk to them through the windows.

TESTA: Yeah. Well, right from the porch, because they had back porches also. The porches were all looking down into the little courtyard that was there.

SCISSURA: Did your uncle move in with you also?

TESTA: Yes. My uncle was with us. He stayed with us, in

fact, until we moved into Hartford. He came along with us.

SCISSURA: And what was your father doing in New York?

TESTA: What was he doing?

SCISSURA: What type of job was he doing?

TESTA: Well, at that time he was working in some shop, I don't know which one it was. He was a laborer. I mean, he didn't have any skills, let's say. But he was a laborer, and he was a very good hard worker, and he tried his best to make the best of everything for us, naturally.

SCISSURA: Were there a lot of Italian families in the neighborhood?

TESTA: Yes, yes. Where we were there were a lot of Italian families.

SCISSURA: Most, would you say it was most, predominantly Italian?

TESTA: I would say, yes, yes. And then that's really all I can remember of New York. I don't remember anything else. And then we moved to Hartford, and . . .

SCISSURA: Now, did your mother have other children while living in New York?

TESTA: Oh, yes. I'm sorry. My sister Nellie was born in New York.

SCISSURA: In that apartment?

TESTA: In that apartment.

SCISSURA: And how long did you live there for?

TESTA: We lived there two years. So it was 19, uh, 1914 when we moved to Hartford, because my brother was born in Hartford, and then we had another brother, I mean, another baby in the family. That was my younger sister, was born on Front Street in Hartford.

SCISSURA: Now, what made your family decide to leave New York and move to Hartford?

TESTA: Well, he had been told that he could get better work in Hartford than he could in New York, and he did. He was able to go into a shop and get a full week's pay, which was something he wasn't getting in New York.

SCISSURA: Right. Do you remember what his pay was in New York, or did he ever tell you?

TESTA: Oh, he was lucky if he was earning ten dollars a week.

SCISSURA: Really.

TESTA: That's how little it was in those days, yes. And even when we moved to Hartford, fifteen dollars a week was a lot of money. And my mother had to do with all that. And we lived in a three-room apartment.

SCISSURA: Was it bigger now than where you lived in New York, the apartment in Hartford?

TESTA: No, no. It was three rooms, just the same. And it was just a kitchen in the center with two bedrooms on either side. We did not have a bathtub. We didn't have one in New York either, by the way.

SCISSURA: In New York there wasn't a bathtub or a bathroom, so you shared with others.

TESTA: We just had, no, we had a toilet, just a toilet bowl with the chain and the box up on top. I don't know

how many people will remember that. And there was no bathtub, no. My mother had the old galvanized tub. She washed the clothes in it, that's what we took our baths in, and that was it. And we didn't have hot water either. We had to heat it on a coal stove on top, on top of the coal stove. And the same thing in Hartford when we moved to the three-room apartment in Hartford that was the same thing. Again, no bathroom, except just the toilet. Not even a sink in there. All we had was a sink in the kitchen.

SCISSURA: So you'd wash in the kitchen.

TESTA: Oh, yes. We had to. And . . .

SCISSURA: So there were now four children and your parents living in this apartment.

TESTA: Right.

SCISSURA: So it was tight.

TESTA: It was tight. But then my youngest sister was just not even a year old and we moved away from there to a four-room apartment, much nicer. We still didn't have a bathtub, but we did have, no. We didn't even, come to think, we didn't have hot water there either.

We had one of those, it was an old house and it had old black iron sink with one faucet, cold water running. And, again, we were still bathing in the galvanized tub. And, but by that time my mother knew a little bit of, a few words in English.

SCISSURA: She never went to school while she was here.

TESTA: No.

SCISSURA: Did your father ever?

TESTA: Well, I take that back. Well, my father went to school in Italy. He had three years of schooling in Italy. And when he came to America he tried his best to learn English. But, of course, he was working so much and bringing up a family and all that. But he was all for studying. He loved books and he loved to read. And when I started going to school he was learning along with me in the American way.

SCISSURA: You started grammar school.

TESTA: Oh, yes.

SCISSURA: You started first grade in Connecticut.

TESTA: I started here, first grade in Hartford.

SCISSURA: Was that when you were still living on Front Street, or had you moved?

TESTA: Yes, on Front Street, in the old Brown School in Hartford, Connecticut.

SCISSURA: Did you speak any English when you went to school?

TESTA: Oh, just a few words, not really. Because I spoke Italian to my mother and father, naturally.

SCISSURA: Was there a large Italian population in Hartford at the time?

TESTA: Yes, oh, yes. It was, that's why my mother just loved it there because she felt like she was in Canicattini Bagni again, because there were so many of the relatives and friends from there. When I say relative, we had like cousins that had come over in the mean time, and we met some of them in Hartford, but others branched out to New Britain, for instance. We had a big family in New Britain. And my other uncle, my father's second brother went to Waterbury, so we did branch out a little bit, yes. But mostly my father and my mother stayed in Hartford.

SCISSURA: And then you moved to the four-room apartment.

TESTA: I beg your pardon?

SCISSURA: Then you moved to the four-room apartment.

TESTA: Oh, yes, the four-room apartment. Then, of course, from there we did move into six rooms and there we had a bathtub and hot water and everything. Then we were definitely Americanized, as we called it.

SCISSURA: Of course. Do you remember going to school, what it was like to start school and not being able to speak English that much?

TESTA: Well, I can remember the first grade was a little bit tough, and I can remember that the teacher would have to ask one of the other children who knew English to translate a little bit. But that didn't take too long. I caught on very easily. I went to the Brown School through the first, the second and the third grade. In those days they used to advance you every six months rather than just once a year, and I had progressed so well that I had gone right up into the high third, as they said it, the high third grade. While I was there we moved from there to Retreat

Avenue to five rooms, five rooms there. And they put me in low third when they transferred me to the Chauncy Harris school to see what I was doing, but I was doing so well they put me right up into high third again. In the meantime, as I say, my father was learning English along with me, and reading the newspaper once in a while. And my mother was learning a few words. My mother did finally go to evening school in English.

SCISSURA: Did she really.

TESTA: And she got, she was so proud the day she came home and showed us that she could write her name in full, and she could tell numbers and she could say numbers and she could read the letters on the, in those days it was trolley cars, so that she knew that when she went downtown which trolley to take so she could get home okay. And that was a very proud time for her.

SCISSURA: That's wonderful, because she had never gone to school in Italy.

TESTA: No, she had never. So what she learned she learned here in America.

SCISSURA: I'm sure she must have been very proud.

TESTA: Yes, she was.

SCISSURA: Good. How much farther did you continue in your education? Did you go all through grammar school?

TESTA: I went, in those days we went from one through eight, and I graduated from the Chauncy Harris School in the eighth grade, and I was going to go to the Hartford Public High School. But during that summer a friend of ours who was a teacher spoke to my father about sending me to the secretarial school where they would teach me in ten months to be a secretary and guaranteed me a job. Well, in those days it was still hard for my father, you know, and my mother . . .

SCISSURA: What was he doing now?

TESTA: I beg your pardon?

SCISSURA: What type of business was he doing now, what type of work?

TESTA: Oh, he was still, he was a laborer. He was working at what used to be the, I know what it is. I can't

think of it right now. The little silver balls, what do they call them? ( she pauses )

SCISSURA: But he was a laborer.

TESTA: SKF, SKF Ball Bearing Company. And he was a laborer there, and he was earning enough. We were paying, at that time, thirty dollars a month for rent.

SCISSURA: For five rooms.

TESTA: For five rooms, and it cost my father twenty dollars a month for ten months to send me to the secretarial school. And at the end of the ten months I was able to get, I was able to work as a secretary. The school did as they promised. They got me a job as a secretary. And I worked as a secretary from then right up until six months after I was married. And my father, in the meantime, was a laborer. My mother, after my little sister, my youngest sister was old enough so that she could leave her with the lady downstairs, she went to work in a, nowadays they call them sweat shops, but that was a very nice shop where my mother worked, where she, on the sewing machine. And it was from somebody that was from our province. Not our town, but from our province, and

he treated my mother very nicely, so she was able to work for a while.

SCISSURA: She was able to make some money, good.

TESTA: And that's it. And I worked right through until, as I say, I was six months after I was married. That was a long time. I worked from 1925. I graduated from the Hartford Secretarial School in June of 1925, and I worked until October 1936.

SCISSURA: Did your parents ever return to Italy?

TESTA: No. My mother's, unfortunately my mother's father died just a few years after we were here, and then my father's father died, but both grandmothers were still alive, and my mother had hoped that some day she could get over there, but she never did. And my grand, first her mother died. And then my mother became sick. She had heart trouble, and my father had talked about going back to Italy to see his mother. At least his mother was still alive. But my mother passed away in May of 1950, and my father didn't get to go to Italy that summer, and that fall his mother died, so he never went back. So they never did go back to see their parents.

SCISSURA: I'm going to ask you a last question. Do you remember your parents ever telling you whether they were happy they came to America, or whether they wished they would have stayed back?

TESTA: No, no. They were very happy here. In fact, during the First World War somebody asked my father if he would go back to Italy and join the Italian Army. My father said no. He was here in America, and he would be an American. He was not going to go back to Italy. My mother would have gone back for a visit just to see her family, but that's it.

SCISSURA: So they were American . . .

TESTA: They were. They were both Americanized here.

SCISSURA: Well, wonderful. I thank you for sharing a little bit of your history with us.

TESTA: Well, it was a pleasure. This was really unexpected. I had dreamed about coming here so often, you know.

SCISSURA: And something paid out. Wonderful, wonderful.

TESTA: I thank you for the interview.

EI-041/TESTA

SCISSURA: Thank you. This is Carlo Scissura signing off for  
the National Park Service.