

EI-524

PATRICK HENDERSON

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IRELAND, 1923

AGE 16

SHIP: "PRESIDENT ADAMS"

PORT: QUEENSTOWN

RESIDENCES:

- **URLINGFORD, KILKENNY**
- **THE US: NYC**

SIGRIST: Good afternoon, this is Paul for the National Parks Service. Today is Sunday, August 7, 1994. I'm in the Ellis Island recording studio with Patrick Henderson. Mr. Henderson came from Ireland in 1923. He was sixteen years old when he arrived in America. Anyway, Mr. Henderson, thank you for taking time out from your visit to come up here.

HENDERSON: It's perfectly all right.

SIGRIST: Can we begin by you giving me your birthdate, please?

HENDERSON: Yes. August 17, 1907.

SIGRIST: My goodness, it's almost your birthday. (laughs) And where in Ireland were you born.

HENDERSON: I was born in a little town in County Kilkenny -- Urlingford is the name of the town.

SIGRIST: Can you spell the name of the town for us?

HENDERSON: Yes. U-R-L-I-N-G-F-O-R-D.

SIGRIST: And you said it was in County Kilkenny.

HENDERSON: That's right.

SIGRIST: Whereabouts in Ireland is that generally?

HENDERSON: In the southern part of Ireland.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me a little bit about what the town looked like when you were a child growing up?

HENDERSON: The town?

SIGRIST: Yes.

HENDERSON: Yes. It would be a town with about one long street, maybe two, two streets long. It had at one end a school, an elementary school. And on the other end of the town would be a church. The church of the

area which was Catholic at that time. And ah, the description was, there might be about seven or eight business houses in the town.

SIGRIST: What was the major industry? What did most people do who lived in the town?

HENDERSON: There was very little industry in the town. In that, at that particular time. Most of the, I'm trying to think of the industries that would have been there at that time. There was practically none, except they worked in the stores or in the, it was a farmin' community all around there. And the only thing, the work there would be to work in the stores in the town, like. A shop or work around the yards or something like that in the town.

SIGRIST: You said that it was a farming area.

HENDERSON: A farming area outside the town. Later, when I left, when we lost our business in the town, I was raised with my grandmother out on a farm.

SIGRIST: What business was your family in, in town?

HENDERSON: They were in a kind of a, I would call it a combination of, they rented out farming equipment. They also had a hotel and they had a liquor license. They served liquor. And ah, a regular general store.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me what memories you have of the hotel and any stories associated with the hotel and your family?

HENDERSON: Not exactly. But from, I was a little too young when I was taken to the farm. But I can tell you, from what I hear, that ah, I'm trying to

think, I really don't remember the various things on the... Because I was about a little over two when I was taken out onto our farm.

SIGRIST: How did your family lose that business?

HENDERSON: Through bad debts. Plenty of bad debts. And there was no more money to be made so they had to sell the property in order to pay off the, where they owed the money.

SIGRIST: I see. What was your father's name?

HENDERSON: James Henderson.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me a little about your father's background.

HENDERSON: (pauses) Ah, not much. He came from a farming community too. And ah, he married my mother which was left the business by her uncle. And the both of them managed the business in the town.

SIGRIST: What was your father's personality like?

HENDERSON: He was a great sportsman. He liked to go to various sports. He was a, I think he was a very lively, very active man. Ah, he was, he was also, well, when we'd have people at the hotel, maybe they'd come in for to go shooting or something, on a day's outing, he would go travel with them and show them the various spots that they could enjoy the day.

SIGRIST: So he knew the country side well.

HENDERSON: Oh, yeah. He knew the country side well. Because he was acquainted with the entire area for miles around.

SIGRIST: When you think back to your childhood, is there a story that comes to mind about your father? Maybe something that you two did together.

HENDERSON: Yes. Ah, he had a business. He also traveled for the Singer Sewing Machine Company as a salesman for their product. And at the time, I was, they told me, that at the time I was born, he was travelling away, far away from the country. They had to try and get in touch with him. Of course, communications was very poor in that day. So they had to, they tell me that they weren't able to get in touch with him for a couple of weeks before, to come back, that I was born. (laughs) That's the only thing I remember about it.

SIGRIST: What was your mother's name.

HENDERSON: Annie Henderson.

SIGRIST: And what was her maiden name?

HENDERSON: Annie Holohan.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that please?

HENDERSON: H-O-L-O-H-A-N.

SIGRIST: And tell me a little bit about your mother's background and the family that she came from?

HENDERSON: Ah, I'm trying to get it straight. Ah, she was born to a farming community. Ah, her um, her father's name was James Holohan. And her mother's name was, funny, I forget. This makes me forget the thing. I was raised in my house with my grandmother. I should never forget her name.

SIGRIST: It was your mother's mother then, that you went to live with after the family hit bad times.

HENDERSON: That was right. After she came, after they came to Amer, after she came to America. My father stayed there.

SIGRIST: Your father stayed in Ireland and your mother came to America.

HENDERSON: Stayed in Ireland, and my mother came to America.

SIGRIST: Oh, well that's interesting.

HENDERSON: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me a little bit about why they did that arrangement?

HENDERSON: I don't know. I think my mother felt that she'd be the person that could make more money I guess. That was it, and bring us all out here. The, bring the children out. There was seven of us in the family.

SIGRIST: Did all seven of you go to live with your grandparents, your grandmother?

HENDERSON: No. The older ones were put in boarding school and received a better, much better education than probably I did.

SIGRIST: So the kids were sort of split up then, after...

HENDERSON: The family was split up.

SIGRIST: How soon after you were taken to your grandmother that your mother went to America?

HENDERSON: About a year I guess, after I went to her.

SIGRIST: Soon thereafter then.

HENDERSON: Yeah.

SIGRIST: What job did your mother get in America?

HENDERSON: She was working as a cook for a very wealthy family in New York. The Saterlies. They were relatives of the Morgans. I believe they're were probably in one of those apartment hotels on Park Avenue.

SIGRIST: What was your mother's personality like?

HENDERSON: She was more business-like I guess. And used enough of money to bring us all out here, gradually, as we grew up. First of course, there was my oldest brother. And ah, sisters. Brought them out. They made a home in America. Our first home in the, New York, was a house that was going to be torn down. And they gave us an apartment there and a company called the Iselin company gave her an apartment there just to take care of it. They had to have

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somebody on the premises to cover the insurance and that was our first apartment in America.

SIGRIST: (chuckles) Was that where she was living all that time she was here by herself? Or...?

HENDERSON: No. My brother was here with her at that time.

SIGRIST: So your mother and your brother came.

HENDERSON: That's right. I'm sorry on that, I made a mistake on that. My mother and brother.

SIGRIST: Tell me what you remember about living in your grandmother's house?

HENDERSON: Oh, it 'twas very nice. Because it was a farm. And of course, I enjoyed the farm very well.

SIGRIST: What were some of the things you enjoyed doing on the farm?

HENDERSON: Of course, there was always chores. As soon as I started going to school, there was always, I had to bring the cows home. And I had to, they had to go to pasture in various areas and move them every so often. And I'd be, took, take the milk to a creamery to be pasteurized, not pasteurized, but to make butter of course. And I enjoyed that.

: Who milked the cows?

HENDERSON: Oh, as I got older, 'twas one job I had to do before I go to school, was to milk at least one.

SIGRIST: How does one milk a cow? Can you describe it for us.

HENDERSON: Oh, yes. It shouldn't be very hard. I've, I've lost the word for the...

SIGRIST: The udder?

HENDERSON: You have to go make sure you're on the proper side of the cow. Place a pail underneath and have a small milking stool to sit on so as you can reach in there to get the udders. And you have a certain way or otherwise the milk won't come out. You learn it, after they show you how it's done. And then you fill a pail of milk and when it's full, you just take it in. We had the milk to drink right from the cow. No pasteurization. (laughs)

: What other animals did you have on the farm?

HENDERSON: Oh, horses of course. We didn't have any, I'm trying to think of the various animals we had. Oh, of course pigs were raised there. Pigs for their own food. Every so often, every three months they would kill a pig.

SIGRIST: Can you describe that for me please?

HENDERSON: Oh, it's gruesome. I never wanted to even think of it. (laughs) First they stun 'em with a hammer. That's to stun him, that he doesn't, supposed not to feel the pain, but he sure must feel the pain of the hammer. And ah, stick a, a sharp knife in his neck and that bleeds him. The blood is saved and it's used for making puddings. That's

how we get our blood puddings, various blood puddings at various times.

: Was your grandmother a good cook?

HENDERSON: Yes. A very, fairly, very good. I would say very good.
What kinds of food did you eat when you were growing up with your grandmother?

HENDERSON: Oh, of course every, in the morning, there'd be, mostly there'd be oatmeal. Cereal. And ah, not, food wouldn't be very like we have here. You wouldn't have the food you have here. We'd have, we had plenty of butter, milk, and mostly the liquid would be tea. Mostly tea. Fireplace of course, there'd be a peat. They'd have a fireplace on the hearth. That was comfortable because you sit right in close to the fire in the wintertime there.

SIGRIST: Now where would you get the peat?

HENDERSON: In a local, we had a local bog. Right near is a local peat bog where it was dug out of the ground and ah, I've spent a few days on there. They put you working on there too, during your vacation in the summertime when they'd be cutting the peat. My job would be to catch, as he cut that wet sod, to be up on the bank and to catch that wet sod. Now there was a certain way to catch that. If you didn't catch it by both ends, of course it broke, it fell down and broke. And you put it on a wheelbarrow, and then there was another young boy there and he would wheel that out and spread it to dry. And you had to keep filling that barrow as fast as he could wheel 'em out and as fast as the man that was cuttin' it and you could catch 'em and put it on there. 'Twas, it was a job. It was a hard job for somebody and

you had to, you couldn't go home from there, so you took all your eats with you, that you were going to eat during the day while you worked there.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what kind of thing you would take with you to eat for lunch?

HENDERSON: Yes. It'd be, of course they would take a kettle to boil the, they would set a fire up there and they would take a kettle and put it on. And boil it for to make the tea and there'd be sandwiches in the luncheon basket, I guess, to have with the tea. And that'd be the luncheon. Yes. They would have breakfast before they leave the house and of course then they wouldn't eat again 'til they come home after, in the evening, late in the evening.

SIGRIST: Would the peat also be used to heat the homes as well as to cook the food. Oh yes, that was their means of heating. They would also travel a distance and get some coal. They'd get probably ah, coal to mix with the peat. But the peat was the main fireplace.

SIGRIST: Did your grandmother live in a big house? Can you maybe describe the house?

HENDERSON: It was a farmhouse with three rooms upstairs, a large, a very large kitchen. They all had large kitchens, and a living room. Very seldom we go in the living room. Only when we'd have company come or something.

SIGRIST: Is there a piece of furniture that sticks out in your mind?

HENDERSON: Oh yeah. They had nice furniture there. They had a sideboard with plenty of glasses, and glass work on there. And closets for to keep, corner closets as we called them, which we'd keep the dishes in. These dishes would only be used on special occasions. The other dish, dishes would hang in the kitchen for family use. And ah, one thing I remember is that they had plenty of milk. There was always milk. There'd be a gallon of milk brought in there in the morning from the cows to put away for the day, that wouldn't be used to go to the creamery. And there'd be a gallon of milk brought in in the evening after the cows milked. So there was two gallons of milk there for maybe, for my grandmother and her son was there, and he married and his wife. And me. And, we, for that many people, a lot of milk.

SIGRIST: Was there some way of keeping food cool in the house?

HENDERSON: No. That 'tis a problem. The climate there, the food would keep for at least a day without any problem and for butter they would put it in the coolest part of the house and it would still keep. They'd take in butter, they'd make butter there in a roll of about seven pounds at a time so there was always plenty of butter. Yeah.

SGRIST: I see.

HENDERSON: Butter and milk there was plenty.

SIGRIST: What religion were you?

HENDERSON: Catholic. Irish.

SIGRIST: And can you tell me, how did you practice your religion at home?

HENDERSON: At home, it'd be to, usually the rosary would be said every night. Given out by the oldest member of the family which were my grandmother. And that we had every night in the house as long as I remember. Unless there was some special occasion that we had to go somewhere else.

SIGRIST: There was a church near your grandmother's?

HENDERSON: We had, we traveled to church by walking across what they called the mass path, which instead of walking all around the road, you cut through fields.

SIGRIST: And what was that called?

HENDERSON: The mass path.

SIGRIST: The mass path.

HENDERSON: Yeah. Which you walked to. And sometimes this field would be very large and the path would be in the center.

SIGRIST: Was your grandmother a religious woman?

HENDERSON: Yes. Yes. Very religious I would say.

SIGRIST: Um, can you tell me how you celebrated Christmas?

HENDERSON: Oh, yes. Christmas was a special morning. Most of the years we'd eat pork, but on Christmas my um, my uncle's wife, she was new in there, he married since I was taken out there. And his wife would get up very early in the morning and cook special things, special

meats that she had got from the butchers like, which we wouldn't have during the week. And she would cook 'em and have 'em ready by the time we got up. That'd be a special breakfast ah, which we wouldn't see again 'til next Christmas. (laughs) And of course for the dinner, we would have goose. That was a special treat. Our neighbor raised geese. So every Christmas they would bring one up to our house. And in return, they would have the use of our pump for water. They had a deep pump for water. So they would have to come up and get their pails of water at our pump. That I remember, yeah.

SIGRIST: Did you exchange presents for Christmas at all?

HENDERSON: My fath--, I did get one present from my oldest brother. That was before he came to America. I was very small. And I remember very well, it was a pipe, imitation tobacco. And I think I had a penknife, but I remember it was a pipe. To make me look big. And I'd put this pipe in my mouth, of course, pretend I was smokin' like the rest of the family.

SIGRIST: What a great memory to have. Tell me a little bit about school. How old were you when you began school?

HENDERSON: I probably was five.

SIGRIST: And was school taught in English or in Gaelic?

HENDERSON: No. In English, in that time. I'd be probably in what we'd call um, there they call it the little infants and the big infants. They had 'em in one room. It was a schoolhouse, had the boys and the girls were separated. There was three rooms for classes for the boys and

there was three rooms for classes for the girls. And they were taught by mostly women teachers. But in my, in the boys' school, for the younger set, they had a woman teacher. Eh, I remember my first day which I went to school there. Every bit that happened that day.

SIGRIST: What sticks out in your mind about the first day of school?

HENDERSON: I wouldn't sit in my desk. The desk I was, they'd be two in a desk, and I wouldn't sit in the desk. So she chased me all around the room. And she was wearing those hobble skirts at the time. And she, I could get through the desk much faster than her because I was small and skinny and I was running so she couldn't do anything with me. So she went out and she brought in the principal. He was there in that third room. And he come in and he sized up the situation and he took a bigger boy than me, and he sent him down to the town, to the town to a candy, where they sold candy. He gave him some money. And the boy brought back the candy. And he showed me the candy and he put 'em on this desk and he put me in this desk with this boy, and we had a lovely time between us eatin' the candy. No problem for the rest of the day.

SIGRIST: (laughs) Did you like school, when you were growing up?

HENDERSON: Oh, I loved school. My greatest love was math. I like mathematics. But I never went very far. But I liked math.

SIGRIST: Was your grandmother, I'm assuming your grandmother was really the biggest influence on you at this point.

HENDERSON: She would have been, yes. Or, or what I call my aunt, the lady my uncle married.

SIGRIST: Was education important to your family?

HENDERSON: Oh, yes. Because we had to be educated. We knew from the very beginning that we had to go to America.

SIGRIST: Was your grandmother able to read and write?

HENDERSON: Oh, yes. Very good.

SIGRIST: So the women were educated as well as the men in your family?

HENDERSON: Yes. And she knew something about education because in Ireland before I went to school, we had to write, I had nothing to write with, only a slate pencil. It was a thing you write on a slate. You take a slate and you put that on that. And when she saw the figures I made and how I wrote them and how I formed 'em. She tackled up the donkey and cart and drove into town and bought me a book and a pencil. (laughs) So I was able to write when I went to school. So she knew that it was important to be educated.

SIGRIST: Sure. That shows the importance that she knew.

HENDERSON: If there was anything extra being taught in town, I had to go in and learn it.

SIGRIST: Do you have any recollections of how your family might have been affected by World War 1?

HENDERSON: Let me get that?

SIGRIST: Was your family affected in any way by the first World War, that you can remember?

HENDERSON: Yes. Of course there was a scarcity. I remember very well that ah, the bread was very black, instead of a white, nice loaf of bread. It was very black. The processing was fast and turned out. And ah, I'm trying to think of the, the food. Yeah, the food was rationed of course because it was world-, in the world war. But ah, we were always able to get enough, even with the rationing, enough to keep hunger away.

SIGRIST: Did any of your family members have to serve during the war?

HENDERSON: No. Because we were all under age at that time.

SIGRIST: What about your father?

HENDERSON: No. My father, he was probably old, too old for the service at the time. No. He didn't have to serve.

SIGRIST: Did you see your father much while you were living with your grandmother?

HENDERSON: In my latter years, before I came to America, I saw quite a lot of him.

SIGRIST: What was he doing during this time?

HENDERSON: He went into the building business. Building trades. He had a, he knew all about buildings. In fact, some of those people knew so

much about buildings, they could build a house, put the key in the door, put the lock on, put everything. Different tradesmen.

SIGRIST: And he was like that?

HENDERSON: Yeah. Very handy.

SIGRIST: That facility. Um, was he in the same town as his business had been in before or did he move away somewhere.

HENDERSON: No. He moved closer to where he came from. It's only a couple of miles away. Yeah. Short distance.

SIGRIST: Did he get along with your grandmother?

HENDERSON: Not very well. (they laugh) Well, got along such as it was.

SIGRIST: They tolerated each other.

HENDERSON: But ah, see, they were different people. One side was the Holohans. The other side was the Hendersons. They were two different [taxes?] all together. (they laugh)

SIGRIST: So, your mother's in America. You're growing up with your grandmother. What did you know about your mother while you were growing up with your grandmother?

HENDERSON: I had a slight picture of her in my mind of course. I didn't, I was too young when I was taken out there. But I had a slight picture of her in my mind. Yeah.

SIGRIST: Did she ever write to you?

HENDERSON: Oh, yes. Yes.

SIGRIST: What did she tell you about things in America?

HENDERSON: Well, the first, the first gift I got from there was a silk handkerchief and a pair of sandals. Which sandals was very poor on the farm because when they cut the corn, the sandals was cuttin' my feet. (laughs) Otherwise it was nice. But silk handkerchief. Silk was something new for me to have, silk handkerchief. From America.

SIGRIST: These very impractical gifts, she's sending you for your life.

HENDERSON: I for one, that lived on a farm, yeah.

SIGRIST: Did you have any, before you got to America, did you have any pre-conceived notions of what America was going to be like?

HENDERSON: Oh, yeah. What I always thought of America is when I'd go there I'd be in a nice office and just sittin' down doin' nothing. (laughs long, without any noise)

SIGRIST: And it probably didn't work out quite like that.

HENDERSON: Oh, no. No. No. Not when I went to work.

SIGRIST: Um, when was it ah, that, that you were getting ready to come to America? How old were you and what was that process like?

HENDERSON: Well, when my mother wrote that she was bringing us out here, the last of the family, bringin'...

SIGRIST: Were you the last of the family to go?

HENDERSON: My sister and me, yeah. We were the last of the family. The others were already here. Of course we had to prepare. Go to the tailor and have a nice suit made up to at least look respectable landin'. But the suit was made of material that your chauffeurs would wear here. A gray material. I often see it in chauffeurs here. And I, it was a knickers. And after arriving here, with the short pants, my mother took me out to a tailor to get a long, a pair of long pants. And we tried to eradicate this mark they gave me in Ellis Island, but it never came out of the material. So I only wore it (laughs) for a short while.

SIGRIST: Um, how did you feel about leaving your grandmother and the life that you knew.

HENDERSON: My grandmother had passed away before I came out here.

SIGRIST: I see. How many years before?

HENDERSON: Just a year, yeah.

SIGRIST: So not that long.

HENDERSON: I think that's why my mother decided to bring us out here. Yeah.

SIGRIST: I'm just curious. How did your grandmother feel about all her grandchildren, you know, one by one, being sent over to America.

HENDERSON: Well I guess she knew that would happen at all the time. But she had died before the last one. I was the last one lookin' after her, taking care of her.

SIGRIST: Had your grandmother ever been to America?

HENDERSON: No. But she seemed to know more about it. She had an instinct from the different relatives. She had several relatives here in America. So she knew, she always worried about what happened to her sister. She used to say, I don't know. I don't hear from my sister in Poughkeepsie. But later I found out when I was here and in Poughkeepsie, her sister had married a, an owner of a hotel in Poughkeepsie and she had died. And that's why my grandmother probably wonderin' why she wasn't hearing from her. But that story I heard when I got here.

SIGRIST: Sure. Your grandmother didn't even know that she had passed away.

HENDERSON: She didn't know that she had passed away.

SIGRIST: Huh. Can you tell me ah, what luggage you took? How much did you take, did you take a suitcase or did you have a whole bunch of luggage?

HENDERSON: The suitcase I had, probably had very little it. Because we were told when we reached American I'd have everything I wanted. And when I got down to Queenstown, of course the American government had a place there where they processed the immigrants before they got on the boat, and what I had in my, a very small case I had, probably it might have had two shirts in there to the most. We didn't have

even underwear. We didn't wear it in Ireland. Just long heavy shorts. And ah, I had my suit on me. And maybe a tie in there. And I had, someone had given me a gift of a new pair of shoes. So I had a new pair of shoes. (laughs) So the hotels were in with the shipping company, and they knew. They sent you right down to the American where you had to pass a test. I went down there and there was a terrific mob there, just like there was trying to get over here to see Ellis Island. And it was so crowded and they were so rowdy, that one of the medical officers there came out and he said, clear the hall! And I was the first one obeyed him and left the hall. And he came out a side door and he grabbed ahold of the first couple of people to leave and brought us in a side door. Now, he said, you were the first to leave, you're going to be the first to leave here, me. He brought us in, and of course we had to have the case with us. So he looked in the case and he had to okay the clothing that was clean. He passed me on that. He passed me on everything, only the eye test. I had astigmatism of the right eye. And he told me to come back on Sunday and see the eye doctor. Not to come through the regular procedure but to the eye doc. He gave me a red ticket, which I had to see the barber. He looked to my hair and gave me this red ticket. Now, when you presented the red ticket at the barber, the barber gave you a GI haircut. Took everything off. No problem. (laughing) So I didn't have to get a haircut in America for about two months. (they laugh)

SIGRIST: We're going to pause just for a second and Peter's gonna flip the tapes over and we'll get you on the ship and we'll get you to America. So just hang on for a second.

END SIDE A

BEGIN SIDE B

SIGRIST: All right. We're now continuing with Patrick Henderson. So you've got your haircut and you're all inspected and everything.

HENDERSON: Yeah. No problem.

SIGRIST: How long did you stay in Queenstown before you got on the ship?

SIGRIST: I had to be there, I think I was there for about three days. Because we had to get a visa. And the visa was only given, you had to have a reference from a clergyman and a businessman in town. You had to have two references from the town in which you were born. And ah, you had to have a letter from the one, from my mother, which was going to claim us. And that was presented at the consulate and then they issued the visa.

SIGRIST: Are you traveling alone or did you say you had a sister?

HENDERSON: I was travelling, a friend of my mothers was with us.

SIGRIST: A friend of your mothers, that was going to be going to America with you?

HENDERSON: Yeah. She was, she had been in America for many years, but she hadn't been a citizen. So of course she took us, we, we, she had to go down to the board of health just the same as I had. She had to go through the same process. The only difference in what, what we went through, this man was very nice to us because he cleared the

hall. I went down later about five hours later, and they were go, putting them through the showers. And they're screaming. They were going through cold showers inside, every one of those people that was raising this rumpus in the hall.

SIGRIST: See. It pays to follow directions.

HENDERSON: Of course. I've learned that.

SIGRIST: What was the ship that you took? The name of the ship?

HENDERSON: It was the President Adams.

SIGRIST: And um, can you recall actually getting on the ship?

HENDERSON: I can recall before we got on, when we went out on the tender to the boat. It stayed out at the ocean and we had to take a tender out. One fellow says, I think we should stay on the one we're on. It, the ship was so small. (laughs) Yes. I remember when I got on board, they gave, they had a beautiful meal ready for us. So we all sat down and enjoyed this lovely meal. It was very good. And then, after that, when that boat started moving, everybody got seasick. They weren't ready for a meal for a long time. They didn't have to serve another meal.

SIGRIST: (laughs) And you said the President Adams was a small ship?

HENDERSON: It 'twas. It was United States line. It 'twas a ship that was captured in World War One from the Germans.

SIGRIST: Oh, and then had been converted.

HENDERSON: Converted, yeah.

SIGRIST: Tell me where you slept on the ship?

HENDERSON: Oh, I had a, I could say the berth was nice. There was a, four one on top of another, and I was in the upper berth. 'Twas very nice.

SIGRIST: And um, do you remember how long the crossing took?

HENDERSON: Yes I left there on August 27, which was Monday and I arrived in at Hoboken on Labor Day, the following Monday.

SIGRIST: What sticks out in your mind about being on the ship? Any, oh...

HENDERSON: Oooh...

SIGRIST: Is there a story about something that might have happened while you were on the ship?

HENDERSON: I'm trying to think. Yeah. It was an interesting trip all right.

SIGRIST: Mostly Irish people on the ship?

HENDERSON: Yeah. English people as well as Irish people, which got on at Liverpool. There were mostly English speaking people on this boat and I'm tryin' to think. Of course there was church services on the ship. They had priests traveling on second and third, on first and second class. And we had ah, church service during our trip. And it was interesting. Ah, yes. I do remember, after all the sickness on

the boat, I felt better. I felt good. And everybody else in where I was felt terrible. They were still seasick. And I fake, told 'em, I'll go into the dining room this evening. I think I'll be able to eat, no problem. And when I went in, the waiter gave me a look. I was the only one in the dining room (laughs). He gave me a look. And I was able to pick up some food and bring it back to the others. Yeah. They weren't able to get, to go there, walk there.

SIGRIST: Do you remember how they treated the people who were seasick? What kind of medicine they gave them?

HENDERSON: Oh, I don't think they got any type of medicine at all. There was no such thing as seasickness pills in them days, I don't think. They only thing they were, most of them stayed at the guard-, siderails of the ship to be ready to get rid of it.

SIGRIST: (Laughs) Do you remember seeing the Statue of Liberty when the ship came in?

HENDERSON: At first I remember coming in by a wooded area. I don't know where that was, it might be Jersey along the shoreline. And later of course, I remember seeing the Statue of Liberty, before they pulled in to Hoboken. That I remember very well. Of course everyone is impressed by the Statue of Liberty. If they, especially if they've heard anything about it. Most of America I'd heard about from my oldest brother, which had traveled back and told us quite a lot about it. In fact, he described the house as to be, the buildings to be so large in our mind that even when I looked at them, they were even smaller than I thought they were.

SIGRIST: You had imagined them to be even bigger than...

HENDERSON: Now, we pulled in to Hoboken and there was a band down there to play, "Yes, We Got No Bananas". That was the tune they played for us when they come down at the dock. But we were kept there because there were no room for us in Ellis Island. We had to wait there. But I liked that. Because we got wonderful food. It was brought in to the ship from the outside in Hoboken, and besides that, our relatives, when they came to see us, we set up a rope line between the ship and the dock and we would send them out our dirty laundry, and they would send us in the goodies they brought us. We were, I was wishin' it'd never end.

SIGRIST: How long were you kept on the ship before you were brought to Ellis Island?

HENDERSON: Seven days.

SIGRIST: That's a long time.

HENDERSON: The Monday we landed, and the following Monday early, the Ellis Island ferry come over and picked us up. Early. We just had finished breakfast when they took us to Ellis Island.

SIGRIST: Tell me what you remember about going to Ellis Island and what happened there.

HENDERSON: Oh, I enjoyed the trip across. The people were going to work from Jersey, they were going in boats across and they were waving to us and shouting at us because they knew we were all new immigrants. That I remember. And I remember when I arrived in Ellis Island, I

remember exactly everything I, that happened from the time I landed on Ellis Island.

SIGRIST: Oh, well why don't you tell us what you remember.

HENDERSON: Yes. I remember when we got off, that there was a, one of the representatives there, he was counting the boat load. And he would count to a certain number and when he got to that number he would give 'em a chalk mark on their jacket. Then when you went further on the line, we, the fella, there was another man and when he saw the chalk marks, he pulled the chalk mark people out. I was one of them. And we were ushered into a room, and I haven't seen as many doctors around me since as I saw that day. We were stripped naked. Men in one area and the women that was pulled out in another area. We were stripped naked and the doctors come around as each one examinin' different parts of it. So I got an okay. And the boat load, they were praying that we would pass because if we didn't pass, the entire boat load might be held over if we had anything contagious. So we got through with flying colors. No problem. I remember then we were brought into that large hall which I've seen today. I knew I'd see that thing again some time. (they laugh) And we were seated there. There were different nationalities. There was English speakin' people in one area. German speaking people in another area around. I don't know. It was the biggest hall I'd ever been in and ah, I saw that hall emptying. Everyone taken out of there. And the only one left, everybody had left, only my sister and myself. So I was wonderin', I was sittin' there wonderin' what had happened. And finally, I said to my sister, Well, I'm goin' to see what's goin' on here. We were left here all alone. We're here quite a while. Oh, yes. I got up to look around, this big burly guy in the back, I don't know where his voice

was come....He said, sit down there, you. Well I sat down very quietly. I was afraid to move after that. And I was sittin' there for about an hour, and finally, a fella, a dressed up gentleman come in and he went to one of those desks. He opened up some papers, and he called out our names. So we went up. He, I know one of the questions he asked was, have you got any money with you? How much money have you got on you? And I had just in my pocket, five shillings. And my brother, when he was back had told me that in America they were all crooks. I remember that. I said, now, this fellow wants my five shillings, so I told him I had no money. I said, I lied right away (he laughs), cause I didn't want him to get what I had in my pocket. (laughs) So he said, after he signed every, filled in the form, he had to ask different questions, then he filled them in. He said, now you go down, two of you go downstairs, he gave me directions. You go downstairs he says, and I didn't know, I went down, I got lost. And I was, I found myself out amongst a bunch of immigrants that were speaking Italian as far as I understand. And this lady knew we were lost and she knew she couldn't communicate with us, so she grabbed us by both hands, my sister on one hand and mine on the other. And she took us to a door. She opened that door and inside the door was this large colored man, which took us, the two of us, and opened a cage and put us in this cage. Well, I felt at home there, because there were three, a couple of people that I knew on the boat were in there also. So I figured we're in a good place. We're all right. And they called everybody out of that cage then, and took 'em to another cage, but we were left alone then, when it was almost empty. So we were there a while. See, my mother had to come across from New York, and she had heard it was late, and she got over late, and my oldest brother. So after a while we were called. This man that was taking care of the cage. He come over and he locked us. He made sure it

was locked, that we weren't going to escape or go out anywhere. So he opened the lock and he took us out, and he took us down by another cage. He opened that and he locked that again. And then we could see our mother across at a desk, claimin' us. They asked her certain questions, and then they come over and they asked us the same questions to make sure that we were with the proper people. Now, we were all okay then. Then he let us out of the cage and we joined our mother and our oldest brother.

SIGRIST: What did you think when you saw your mother? I mean, you hadn't...

HENDERSON: Oh, it was quite a big, it was surprising, it was really a big day.

SIGRIST: What did she look like? Can you describe for me, the woman that you saw, that was your mother?

HENDERSON: Yes. Yes. She was a small, little woman. With a nose just like mine. And features. And ah, very business like.

SIGRIST: And is that how you greeted each other? Was she...?

HENDERSON: Oh, she, treated us, that she hadn't seen us in so long, since we were babies, since we were young, small. And she just grabbed ahold us, of course, like any mother would. Yeah. That I never forget.

SIGRIST: Did you leave Ellis Island with your mother? Or did you have to stay there.

HENDERSON: With my mother and brother. He took my case right away, the suitcase, and we left on the ferry for Staten Island. Not Staten Island, but for New York. And we boarded the elevator train there. And I didn't know we were boarding an elevator train, until I looked out the window and I saw the people down below. But my thoughts were, I thought the stores were built down below. I thought I was riding on a level surface. I never seen a train that runs in the air, so I said to my brother, I'm lookin' out here, I said, and the people are all under ground. I said, what do they do here? And he said, no. He says, you're up in the air. The people are down stairs. The people downstairs. What you see is they're down on the level. Now, my biggest problem was when we got off of the elevated at 116th Street on Eighth Avenue. They lived in 118th Street on Eighth Avenue in the middle of Harlem in them days. This was very beautiful area. And when we got off of the train, they had to go to the back to an elevator to take us down. But I thought they were taking us back for to get some drinks. They were going to get some nice drinks because I thought it was a little snug in the back where you were served liquor. And I go into this thing and then this colored operator got on and he pulled it, it 'twas a cable car and he pulled the cable, oh, I thought the floor fell from under me. I didn't know it was an elevator. First elevator I was on. (laughing) So we got down on the street level and then they took us to their apart-, where they were living. They were living up on the third floor in an apartment house. And my brother pressed the bell. Well, I had seen electric bells that you press, and he said, there's somebody home. I said, how do you know? Nobody came down to this door. Oh, he said, there's somebody in the house. He said, he said, they let us in. I didn't see anybody here, I said. I didn't know that it was answered by a buzzer in the apartment. (laughs) So I was learning.

SIGRIST: Tell me a little bit about the apartment and what it looked like.

HENDERSON: The apartment was like, I would say like a railroad flat with about ah, kitchen, dining room, two bedrooms and a front, a living room in the front. And a corridor, which you walked through to get from say, you're walkin' from the kitchen to the living room.

SIGRIST: Did you have electricity in the apartment?

HENDERSON: They were just puttin' in electricity about a week after I arrived there. And they were also puttin' steam heat.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about the process of them installing the electricity and the steam heat?

HENDERSON: Well, I saw, I was watching them installing the various things. Electric was really new to a lot of people. We'd have friends that would come up there just to see what electricity was like and steam heat, because they were accustomed to the gas light. When I went in there first, the gas light, they had the gas light. And ah, my best memory was, a few days after I was there, my mother was goin' out to the store and she took my sister with her. I, she was buyin' her some things. And she says, now, I was readin' somethin' and she come in and she said to me, says, listen, I'm goin' to the store. And she says, the ice man will come. And he'll put ice on the dumbwaiter and you take it off and put it in the ice box. It was all Greek to me. I started repeating this in my mind after she had left. And I said, what did she say, she says about ice? And she said she'll put a quarter. She left money on the table, I left money on the table which you'll put on the dumbwaiter for the ice man. When I, when the buzzer rang, I opened every door in the house, because

I'm lookin' for this thing she called the dumbwaiter. So finally I opened the right one, and I saw this dumbwaiter. And I saw this cake of ice. I took the cake of ice off and I put it on the kitchen table. I didn't know anything about an ice box. I left it there on the table. And the fellow was still ringin'. I said, this must be what he's ringin' for, the money. So I put the money on, then the thing, he pulled that thing down. I went in and continued reading. Left the ice on the table melting 'til they got back home. (laughing) There was still some ice there. (laughing)

SIGRIST: Mother must have been a little unhappy with you.

HENDERSON: Oh, she probably was irritated but she didn't say so.

SIGRIST: Were you expected to get a job right away?

HENDERSON: As soon as they had us in shape to walk us around. Oh, I remember my brother taking me out the first Saturday I was in the country. And I was dodging in and out of cars, which I wasn't used to that kind of traffic. And then it was mostly cabs, you know? I was scared even crossing the street. I used to, when I'd be alone, I would just walk around the block. It 'twas a triangle block where they met, three, two avenues and the street met together. And I'd just walk around that triangle so I couldn't get lost, you know, and get back to the door. Yeah. It 'twas ah, the first Saturday, I went out walking with him. We walk a long distance. I guess we walked about from 118th Street, down to a friend that was in the '70's to see him. And I tell you it was a scary walk for me, because I'd never been through that kind of traffic before as I had in New York.

SIGRIST: There's just a new discovery around every corner for you.

HENDERSON: Yeah.

SIGRIST: How long was it before you did get a job?

HENDERSON: I arrived in September and I had a job in October, early in October.

SIGRIST: What was the first job that you got?

HENDERSON: My first job was in the Underwood Typewriter Company. My job was a parts boy.

SIGRIST: How did you get the job?

HENDERSON: We went out, my mother saw the ads in the paper. And we went out to the first job, I didn't get hired in. And the second one, she took me down to Vesey Street, where the Underwood Typewriter Company was. There was a, they needed a boy there. So I was interviewed by a gentleman there, and he took me right on. So I was to work in a couple of days. He set the date for me to come in to work. I'll never forget my first day goin' to work. I had to travel alone, down on that elevator. I found the place, because I remembered it from the trip with my mother. She made me remember where I was. And I had to go up to the office, and he took me to where I was to work. I was work, to work, they had a foreign department there, repairing typewriters and they all, the mechanics in there spoke different languages. There was a few speakin' English and some of them understood English but they didn't speak it. And my job was to go down to the stockroom, see they couldn't waste the time with the mechanics go down to the stockroom and get whatever they ordered and put it on their order

sheet, bring it up to them and put it at their bench. That was my first job. Got twelve dollars a week for that. That was very good and I didn't only have to work a half day on Saturday.

SIGRIST: Now, were you expected to give your mother that money?

HENDERSON: Of course! My mother got all the money and she dished me out just what I would need.

SIGRIST: Do you remember how much she gave you to...?

HENDERSON: To live on for the week. And I had to be very frugal with that money. I couldn't spend it anywhere I want to. (laughing) I had to spend it on what it 'twas issued for.

SIGRIST: Now, how long did you stay at that job?

HENDERSON: Oh, I guess I stayed there about a year. Maybe a little more than a year. When that particular job. I got a job with a bank as a junior clerk.

SIGRIST: That was the second job that you got?

HENDERSON: Second job, yeah.

SIGRIST: Well, that must have been a step up for you.

HENDERSON: First a page, and then a junior clerk. A junior clerk at that time, I think I was the highest paid junior clerk. I got about \$78. But I got a beautiful meal every day, waited, with waiters. In the bank. They had a dining area.

SIGRIST: What bank was it?

HENDERSON: It was called at that time, The Guaranty Trust. Now it's the Guaranty Morgan.

SIGRIST: Um, were you in communication with your father in Ireland at all during any of this?

HENDERSON: Ah, we did have communication of course. My oldest brother used to make the, my brother used to make the contacts mostly with my father. Yeah.

SIGRIST: Tell me about what, in that first year in America, what you did for fun. What you did for entertainment.

HENDERSON: Oh, yeah. I'm tryin' to think. Sometimes my brother would take me out. My oldest brother would take me out to a movie on Sunday. That was quite a thrill. We did have movies in Ireland once in a while, when they come into town. But he took me out on Sunday. Loews Theater there on 125th Street. That was the ah, Broadway of the uptown area. It was a very classy area. And there were several movie spots there. I do remember my first haircut though, because I told you I didn't need it for a couple of months. Was this fellow put me in the chair and he must have known I was still a greenhorn, so he gave me everything there was for a haircut and it cost me a dollar thirty two. That time, you could get a hair, for about thirty five cents. So the next day was Sunday and I said to my mother, I need some money. I was goin' to church. My mother says, what do you need the money for? I says I need it for to go to church. She said, didn't I give you money yesterday? I said, yeah, but that barber took a

dollar thirty two. She took me by the hand and she took me up by the barbers that used to open on holidays then. He saw her comin', he went to the register and he got to give her the difference between a haircut, and I got everything for nothin'. (He laughs.)

SIGRIST: That makes me think, did you ever experience any kind of prejudice because you were an immigrant?

HENDERSON: Oh, no prejudice at all. With that many race of people there. There was all, in one area there was Jewish people livin', all along 110th Street in the area. There was no prejudice. Doctors lived along there in front of Central Park. Beautiful area. I palled around when I got older with ah, people from even Norway. Norwegians that I got to know. I would say there wasn't any prejudice of any type whatsoever.

SIGRIST: So, so...

HENDERSON: There was even, our ah, what do you call him, our superintendent, our manager, our janitor as they called him in the day, was a black woman and when she was ill, my mother took her down soup to make up for, to take care of her while she was sick. And one thing, we made all our own firewood. We went out and got crates and wood, and stored the, stowed the firewood away in the basement. We had a locker where you stored your firewood for the stove. And it was a big day when my mother went out and got a gas stove from the gas company. And the biggest day was when they went down to get her Victrola. In Wannamakers. To, I think most of them went down there. I didn't happen to go with 'em, but they went down there to pick up a Victrola at Wannamakers.

SIGRIST: Was that sort of a symbol of making it? When you went...?

HENDERSON: Yeah. You were getting up in the world! We were all working and making a little more money and everybody was getting' happier and happier by the days.

SIGRIST: And so to buy the Victrola was a major purchase, probably.

HENDERSON: Oh, yeah. That was a big purchase.

SIGRIST: What kind of music did your mother like back then?

HENDERSON: Huh?

SIGRIST: What kind of music did your mother like?

HENDERSON: Oh, of course, Irish music. Bein' Irish born.

SIGRIST: And you could purchase...

HENDERSON: And then any one of us'd go out every so often and everyone would bring in another record, or another record when they have a little money over. McCormick was the big singer in them days. And I don't think if they had any records. Of course, Caruso was still in them days. But I think they had music by Fitz Kreisler, a violinist. But they had very nice music.

SIGRIST: And so your mother, you had classical music in the house.

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HENDERSON: That was a treat. We went to the living room and turned on the Victrola. We had to wind it by hand. His master's voice. (Mr. Sigrist laughs.) With the records stored in the cabinet underneath.

SIGRIST: Did your mother ever want to go back to Ireland?

HENDERSON: No. No, I don't think she did. But I come in '23 and my brother died, my oldest brother died in 1925.

SIGRIST: Oh, soon after you got here. What did he die of?

HENDERSON: Ah, today, it would be curable. Acute nephritis. A kidney disorder. And they had no cure for it in them days. Today, they have the dialysis.

SIGRIST: Can you talk a little bit about what you remember about him being sick and when he died.

HENDERSON: Oh, yes. They took him, of course. First they thought the illness, he went to a rest home up in the country for a while, a hospital and rest home. Then he came back and they put him in a hospital in the Bronx. I think they called it St. Joseph's Hospital, and he didn't like it. He wanted to come home. And after they brought him home on a Saturday, he died about a couple of days after, home. They had a doctor in to try and ease the pain, to give him something to ease the pain.

SIGRIST: And of course, he's the one family member that has been with your mother since...

HENDERSON: Yeah. Since she initial, yeah.

SIGRIST: Did she take it very hard, when...

HENDERSON: Very, very hard, yeah. Because he was the oldest boy, yeah. And the, I'm thinking of the year after, 19-, he died in 1925 and she died in 1926, in the fall of 1926. Ah, she had a, got, I try to think of what happened to her. First she thought it was fallen arches and we used to walk her out in the air. We'd always be some of us with her. And then, later, she discovered, it 'twas very late when ah, some young doctor in Roosevelt hospital discovered that she had a blood disorder ah, pernicious anemia. And at that time there was no cure for it. We did give some blood. One of my sisters, we all had to go to be checked for our blood to see if we had the type, her type. But one of my sisters had the closest and they gave her that. And I believe what happened was, it clotted. They didn't know enough in them days to give the proper type of blood. It clotted and she, she had a nice death. She died very easy, no problem. Just went in to see her that morning. It was a Friday, on our way to work. And I just got down to my job and I got a call that she had passed away. That she was passing. That she was dyin'. I rushed up there, and I was there just when she died. Hmm.

SIGRIST: Hm. We're going to be ending in just a minute. I want to ask you one final question. Are you glad that the decision was made for you to come to this country and that you actually did come here?

HENDERSON: Oh, yes. Right now, when I look back at it all, I think, even though I went through a rough time in the Depression and the good times after that made up for it all, I think that the entire family made out much better in America than they would have done in Ireland. By far. They couldn't have had what they had here. Not the living

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conditions and the food and the, everything else, the same as we have here.

SIGRIST: Mr. Henderson, I want to thank you very much for taking time out from your visit. You said you came from California.

HENDERSON: It 'twas a pleasure talking to you.

SIGRIST: Good. This is, this is Paul Sigrist, signing off with Patrick Henderson on Sunday, August 7, 1994 here at Ellis Island. Thank you.

END INTERVIEW