

EI-615/WARNER

EI-615

DOROTHY IRENE BADGER WARNER

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INTERVIEWER: PAUL E. SIGRIST, JR.

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TRANSCRIPT PREPARED AND REVIEWED BY: PAUL E. SIGRIST, JR.,
4/1998

ENGLAND, 1924

AGE 3

PASSAGE ON "THE CALEDONIA"

RETURNED TO ENGLAND PERMANENTLY IN 1935

ORAL HISTORIAN'S NOTE: Mrs. Warner is the niece of Margaret Ann Whittle, Interview EI-614.

Paul E. Sigrist, Jr., Director of Oral History, 4/22/1998

SIGRIST: Good afternoon, this is Paul Sigrist for the National
Park Service. Today is Wednesday, May 17th, 1995.

And I'm at the Ellis Island Recording Studio with
Dorothy Irene Warner, who goes by the name of
Irene, and Mrs. Warner came from England in 1924,
and she was three years old at that time. Can we
begin by you giving me your birth date, please.

WARNER: Yes, January the 22nd, 1921.

SIGRIST: And where in England were you born?

WARNER: I was born in, in a place called Lemington, Newcastle-On-Tyne.

SIGRIST: And, I should also say for the sake of the tape that you are the niece, correct...?

WARNER: Yes.

SIGRIST: ...of, of Margaret Ann Whittle [EI-614]...

WARNER: That's right.

SIGRIST: ...whom I have just interviewed moments ago. And so you were born, you were, you were the daughter of, of one of Mrs. Whittle's sisters.

WARNER: Yes, that's right.

SIGRIST: Do you have any memories yourself of life in Lemington at all? Do you...

WARNER: Not a great deal. Mostly with my grandparents. I stayed with, my, my mother was a nurse. She was a

state registered and also a certified midwife.
She was also an assistant tutor. So I used to spend
a lot of time with my grandmother, you know, and
that was quite delightful altogether, you know, yes.
(she laughs)

SIGRIST: What was your mother's name?

WARNER: Dorothy Ann Badger. That's her married name.

SIGRIST: Yes.

WARNER: Dorothy Ann Badger.

SIGRIST: And tell me a little bit about, about your mother's
temperament and, and personality.

WARNER: Yes, very saintly, very saintly. And I think revered
by almost everyone. You know, I think that's her
profession, I think, more or less portrayed all
of that, you know, the caring and understanding
and helpfulness, you know. Yeah, she was a
wonderful person.

SIGRIST: You said she was a nurse?

WARNER: She was a state registered.

SIGRIST: State registered.

WARNER: Yes, and also a certified midwife, also an assistant
tutor.

SIGRIST: Is there any incident that you can remember from maybe
your later childhood once you were in the States...

WARNER: Yes.

SIGRIST: ...of your mother practicing as a midwife?

WARNER: No, no. She, she practiced, practiced as a nurse,
private nurse.

SIGRIST: Here in the States, was it?

WARNER: Yes, yes. Only.

SIGRIST: But in England she functioned as a midwife and a...

WARNER: Oh yes, yes. She was, yes, yes.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me the role of a midwife? What does a
midwife do?

WARNER: Well, she, she assists in the birth of babies, you
know. She's, she's trained to not only assist but
to deliver the babies also, you know. Not always a
doctor was present, you know.

SIGRIST: Did your mother ever tell any stories about her
experience as a midwife?

WARNER: No, not really, no. She didn't discuss cases at all
really, you know.

SIGRIST: Do you know how your parents met?

WARNER: Well, they were practically neighbors. My father was
in the navy. He was an officer in the Royal Navy.
And I suppose they met, really, as, as they grew
older and he came home and that sort of thing, you
know, yes. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: What was his name?

WARNER: John Wilkin Badger.

SIGRIST: John Wilkin. Could you spell...

WARNER: John Wilkin. W-I-L-K-I-N, Wilkin Badger.

SIGRIST: And what do you know about your father's background?
His family background?

WARNER: Not a great deal. I, I think you find that fathers
are not as prominent as their, as their wives, you
know...

SIGRIST: They don't like to talk about things.

WARNER: Well, that's it, yes. I think he was one of five
children, I think. I think he was one of five
children, you know.

SIGRIST: Did he ever tell any stories about being in the navy?

WARNER: Oh, yes, yes, quite a lot he did. (tape disturbance)

SIGRIST: Any stories that you remember?

WARNER: Yes, all over the world, yes. he travelled all over,
really, you know, I think his favorite place was
the sea shores, he thought was the Garden of Eden,
really, you know. But he had travelled all over.
He'd been in the war, of course, you know, that sort
of thing.

SIGRIST: Tell me why did they settle in Lemington? Why, why
there?

WARNER: Well, they were, I don't know, think my father was
born there but my mother was born there, you see,
and, and that was all. That's why they were there,
you know.

SIGRIST: Were there ever any stories related to you about your
birth?

WARNER: No, not, not really, no, no, no.

SIGRIST: Did you have brothers and sisters?

WARNER: No, I'm an only child.

SIGRIST: An only child.

WARNER: Yes. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: Well, tell me why your parents wanted to come to
America?

WARNER: Well, I think it was the Depression, really. My
father had been, spent all his life in the navy and
he was in his thirties then, you see. And he came
out of the navy and he, there was, as I say,
there was the Depression. So he decided he
would go. He liked the States. He'd been before,
you know, in his travels and he went over, got a job
and sent for us.

SIGRIST: Where did he settle when he first came by himself?

WARNER: I, I think it would be around New York; Corona,
Elmhurst, that sort of place, you know.

SIGRIST: And what did he do for work when he first came?

WARNER: Well, he studied at night for electrician and
painting and decorating, which was then the thing,
you know, and that was it.

SIGRIST: Of course, he'd spent his, you know, all his life in
the navy...

WARNER: All his life in the navy!

SIGRIST: And now he needed a career.

WARNER: Yes, he needed something different, yes. And he did
quite well, he did quite well.

SIGRIST: How did your mother support you when he was in
America?

WARNER: Well, she was nursing, see? She was, she was working,
only as a district nurse.

SIGRIST: Was there a hospital in Lemington, I mean a place

where she...?

WARNER: No, they, they didn't have a hospital for district nurses. They worked from home, yes, you know.

SIGRIST: Oh, that's interesting. Like a travelling nurse.

WARNER: Yes. You were called out, you know, more or less.

SIGRIST: Did your mother ever tell any stories about her experience, experiences doing that?

WARNER: No, she didn't discuss patients.

SIGRIST: No, she didn't.

WARNER: No, not really, no, no.

SIGRIST: Did your mother want to come to America?

WARNER: Yes, yes, yes she did. Her husband was there, you see, and....

SIGRIST: Yeah, of course, her whole family is...

WARNER: Yes (she laughs)

SIGRIST: ...is right there, so I was just wondering if she ever conveyed to you any ambivalence...

WARNER: No, no, she was very, well, she was a Sagittarius and they, they are travellers, aren't they, you know, I think. And, no, of course she was quite anxious to go, I think, you know.

SIGRIST: How long was your father in America prior to your mother's joining him.

WARNER: About a year.

SIGRIST: So she was by herself for a year.

WARNER: Yes, yes.

SIGRIST: Did your mother ever relay to you any information about the about the process of getting ready to leave England?

WARNER: Oh, yes, yes. Well, nothing exact--, I know I took a, my first doll's pram and my first china doll with me and that sort of thing, you know, but otherwise I can't remember a great deal about that, no.

SIGRIST: You mentioned that you thought the name of the ship was the Caledonia...

WARNER: Yes, yes.

SIGRIST: ...that they had come over on. Did your mother ever relay any in--, incidences of being on the ship, what that was like?

WARNER: Well, we had a bit of a, a bit of a shock because about, there was an awful storm. And we were two hundred miles off our course prior to docking in New York. And we all had life belts on, fearing the worst. But when they limped into New York, they found that there was a whale attached to the bottom and that was, the ship was listing with it, you see. (she laughs) So something like that, yes. Otherwise uneventful. Well, except for my china doll. Another child broke it on the deck and a

sailor threw it overboard, so that was very (she laughs), very traumatic.

SIGRIST: These are important incidents in your life. (they laugh)

WARNER: (laughing) Yes, yes, yes.

SIGRIST: Do you know how long the journey was?

WARNER: I think it was about seven days, I think, roughly, seven or eight days.

SIGRIST: And what do you know of the process of once the ship arrived in New York?

WARNER: I remember my father meeting me, meeting us.

SIGRIST: What do you, you remember that yourself?

WARNER: Yes, I remember that, yes.

SIGRIST: So what, what do you remember about that?

WARNER: Uh, not a great deal, no, you know, no. We, we stayed with someone, I can't remember who, in Corona.

Probably his digs, I don't know. And from there we went to Long Island.

SIGRIST: What is the earliest memory you have in America? The thing you remember, the first memory you have in America?

WARNER: (she pauses) Ah, let me think now. (she pauses) I really can't, I really couldn't say, you know, anything that would form a lasting impression really, you know.

SIGRIST: Can you describe for me the first place that you remember that you lived in the...?

WARNER: Yes, well, it was in Long, Long Island.

SIGRIST: In Bayside?

WARNER: In Bayside west, yes.

SIGRIST: And can you describe, was it a house?

WARNER: Yes, it was a house that, my parents bought a house.

And it was three bedrooms, a sun lounge, a parlor,
dining room and kitchen. Back garden and
garage.

Just ordinary, yes. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: Did, how old were you when you started school?

WARNER: Well, I should have started when I was six. They start
at six here, don't they? And, but my mother was not
well and we, they said she needed her native air,
so we went back to England for a year and I was able
to sit in English schools, you know, during that
time, sort of. And then we came back, you know,
came back after, after a year.

SIGRIST: Do you know, do you know what, what malady your mother
had? Why...?

WARNER: Yeah, I think, well, they thought it was heart. I'm
not sure whether it was or not but, she, she picked
up very quickly, you know. And we went back.

SIGRIST: So how long were you in America before you went back
to England?

WARNER: Em, well, it, I would be, it would be three years,
wouldn't it?

SIGRIST: You were here for three years before you...

WARNER: And then I would be six. I, I...

SIGRIST: Right, three years.

WARNER: I came back at six, you see, and I came back when I
was seven and started school.

SIGRIST: Well, do you have memories of the trip to England and
being in England the second time?

WARNER: Yes, I do, yes.

SIGRIST: What sticks out in your mind about that experience.

WARNER: Well, as, as the boat docked in Southampton I remember
seeing, for the first time in real life, cows in the

field, you know. (she laughs) That, that sort of
thing, I mean, you don't see such a thing here,
you know, on Long Island. And the quietness of
the trains when, when we got off there and got the
train up north. The very quietness of the English
trains was very, very sedate after the subways and
the rush and the crush of everything else, you know.
Yes, it was calm, peaceful, very calm and peaceful.

SIGRIST: Did you, did, did, was it just you and your mother or
did your father go, too?

WARNER: No, he stayed and...

SIGRIST: He did.

WARNER: ...and worked, yes.

SIGRIST: Where did you go to live?

WARNER: Well, when? For this year?

SIGRIST: Yes, for that one year.

WARNER: Well, we came up to my grandmother's first and that,
that was it, really, you know.

SIGRIST: So this back to Lemington.

WARNER: Yes, back to Lemington, yes, yes.

SIGRIST: Yeah. Tell me what it was like to go to English
school for that one year.

WARNER: Yes, it was very different. Much more orderly. Much
more regimented, you know, and it was quite, yes,
got up and sang "God Save The Queen" for a year.
(she laughs) When I got back and started
school here, I remember I came home and said to
my mother, "I'm the only one that knew the words
to "God Save The Queen," because everybody was
singing "My Country 'Tis Of Thee," you know. I
was singing "God save our gracious," well,
"king" I should say, "our gracious king," yes.
(she laughs)

SIGRIST: That's a good story.

WARNER: The same tune, you see.

SIGRIST: Right.

WARNER: (she laughs) Except I was the only one who knew the
words. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: Do you know what ship you took coming back to America?

WARNER: (she sighs) No, I can't remember that.

SIGRIST: Does anything stick out in your mind about the, the
trip back to America on the ship?

WARNER: (she pauses) Not really, no. It was quite
commonplace by that time, you know what I mean?
Nothing was strange, you know.

SIGRIST: Tell me about your relationship with your grandmother
in England.

WARNER: Oh, wonderful, wonderful.

SIGRIST: What, what sticks out in your mind when you think

about your grandmother?

WARNER: I think she was so happy, so happy, really, and so helpful. She helped everybody in sight. She fed, she clothed, she did all kinds of things. She was really like a Florence Nightingale, really, you know. She was a wonderful person. Never stopped. She knitted Fair Isle sweaters without patterns, without even looking at the needles. You could, you know, she was absolutely wonderful. I missed her when I came back, very much indeed missed my grandmother.

SIGRIST: Did your mother attempt to work in some capacity for that year when she was in England?

WARNER: Not really, no. I think she just more or less got well and saw her old friends and, and that sort of thing, you know.

SIGRIST: And, and, and did it work? Did...

WARNER: Yes, it did.

SIGRIST: So she did indeed get well.

WARNER: Yes, yes, yes.

SIGRIST: Do you remember, as a small child, having a, being
conscious of the fact that, that you were, had been
in one country for so long and were now in a
different country? Did, did, did any of that
register with you or, like did you know, did you
know that, that you had grown up somewhere else than
where you were taken to?

WARNER: Oh, yes I did, frankly, yeah. You are conscious of
your roots, you know. Very much, I think, always.
If you haven't got your roots, you haven't got
anything, really, you know, yes.

SIGRIST: I guess what I'm asking is, is, is, when you went back
to England, was it a difficult transition, even as a
child, to suddenly be in these very different
kinds of surroundings?

WARNER: No, no. Because I, everything was, was so different,
you know. Methods were different, everything was

EI-615/WARNER

different. And I just, just seemed to enjoy it,
really, you know. I quite liked it.

SIGRIST: Just like a, a vacation in a way, I guess.

WARNER: Yes, absolutely, yes. Absolutely.

SIGRIST: How come, how come one year? Why, why just one year?
Why not nine months or a year and a half?

WARNER: Well, it just, I don't think it was planned as a year,
really, but it, it took that to make her feel, you
know, feel better.

SIGRIST: Do you remember returning?

WARNER: Yes.

SIGRIST: Did you come into New York?

WARNER: Yes, oh yes. I remember that, yes.

SIGRIST: And then, and then your father met you...?

WARNER: Yes.

SIGRIST: ...in New York.

WARNER: My father met me.

SIGRIST: Was your life any different immediately after coming
back to America?

WARNER: Well, yes it was, because I started school here then,
you see. And that's a big change to, to start
with, you see.

SIGRIST: Well, you mentioned, you know, "My Country 'Tis Of
Thee" and those problems.

WARNER: Yes, yes.

SIGRIST: What other things did you come, come across in school?

WARNER: I think different pronounc--, the thing is my parents
were British. And although a lot of British people
would think I was American, uh, the Americans
always knew I was British. Do you know what I

mean? There's just that, for instance, you go to
the butcher and your want (exaggerated pronunciation)
"cahlve's livah," you see, you know and all this
sort of thing. This that stick and you don't
really lose, I think, if your parents are
talking about it, you know.

SIGRIST: You're hearing it at home...

WARNER: You are hearing it at home and so on. So you're
really half and half, you know. That sort of thing.

SIGRIST: Did you ever run across kids making fun of you for
having an accent?

WARNER: No, I don't think so, no, no, no.

SIGRIST: Tell me about what it was like growing up in America
with immigrant parents. What, what, were there
special concerns to you as you, especially like in
your teenage years, to have parents that had
noticeable accents and, and...

WARNER: But, yeah, but they didn't have noticeable accents.

See, my father, don't forget, was very cosmopolitan. He travelled the world, so he didn't talk "north country" or "London." He sort was that in-between, you know what I mean? And so was my mother because she was professional. So she didn't talk "north country," you know. She talked, not American but she was sort of that in-between. So they were not noticeable. There was just various things that, uh, as I said, like "cahlve's livah" or something like that. But, no, I wouldn't this then. After all, you're all English spoken here and everything else, so there was no, no great problem.

SIGRIST: Were, were there certain things that your parents held onto that were sort of old country ways, ways of thinking, maybe ways of doing things that they continued to do in this country?

WARNER: No, I don't think so. They were very, very modern, you know. They moved with the times, you know. I think the only difference would be perhaps in their cooking. Things like that, you know, roast beef, Yorkshire pudding, tea and so on, you

know, afternoon tea. Isn't that, well, of course, that's English.

SIGRIST: And did they observe having afternoon tea, even in this country?

WARNER: Oh, yes. Even in America, even this country in America they, afternoon tea is the thing, isn't it really, you know. Even today, you know.

SIGRIST: Yeah, well, it may be more fashionable now than it was in the Twenties.

WARNER: Yes, absolutely, that is true, yes. Very true. (they laugh)

SIGRIST: Tell me, when did you go back to England? When was the next time that you returned to England?

WARNER: Yes, well, after I graduated from...

SIGRIST: High school?

WARNER: Yes, no, from P.S. 159 in Long Island.

SIGRIST: I see.

WARNER: I was fourteen, I think, and we returned then.

SIGRIST: The entire family returned or...?

WARNER: We all returned, yes, yes.

SIGRIST: Why was that decision made?

WARNER: I think because of the Depression, really, you know.

SIGRIST: What year was this?

WARNER: That was one of the reasons. 1935.

SIGRIST: Oh, sure.

WARNER: Yeah.

SIGRIST: How did you feel, you personally feel, about leaving
your life in America?

WARNER: Well, it was sad to leave everyone, but then I had another family to come to. I , I wasn't going to another strange country, you see. As I say, in your roots you're really coming home, aren't you, you know, but, no, I looked forward to it as another adventure, really, you know.

SIGRIST: And that time the family stayed.

WARNER: Yes, yes, more or less, yes. Some had moved around but my grandparents were still there and that sort of thing, you know.

SIGRIST: But I meant your mother and fath--, I mean this was a permanent move for your family.

WARNER: Oh yes, a permanent move, yes, yes. My mother went back to nursing, you know, and my father worked too at Vicar Armstrong's, and so on, and war broke out, of course, and, you know.

SIGRIST: How did they perceive, how did your mother and father perceive the life they had had in America? Did they, did they consider it a failure somehow that

here in America...

WARNER: Yes, of course.

SIGRIST: ...back to a rural situation.

WARNER: Back, absolutely, yes, yes, yes. It wasn't a, a great deal different, not from a, a housing or a job point of view. It's just carrying on somewhere else, really, you know. But...

SIGRIST: Do you think there's anything American about you as a person?

WARNER: Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: What, what, what are your American traits?

WARNER: Em, my outlook on life, I think, really, you know. I have a broader outlook on life than I might have done if I hadn't come to America, you know. More, I don't, it's difficult to understand, really, but yes, I, part of me is, naturally, here, you know.

SIGRIST: Did your parents ever teach you any rules to live by?
Things that they instilled in you so that you could
lead a happy and success life.

WARNER: Yes, well, they were religious. They attended church.
I, I attended church, very conscious of right and
wrong and that sort of thing, you know. Guidelines
to go by, you know, Ten Commandments, all the rest of
it, you know, yes. (they laugh) Yes, I think
that's about as, as good as you, (she laughs) you
can find, really.

SIGRIST: Sure.

WARNER: Yes.

SIGRIST: Well, Mrs. Warner, I think that's probably...

WARNER: Thank you, yes.

SIGRIST: ...a good place to stop. Thank you very much.

WARNER: Thank you.

EI-615/WARNER

SIGRIST: I appreciate you taking a few minutes. This is Paul
Sigrist signing off with Dorothy Warner on May
17th, 1995 at the Ellis Island Recording Studio.
Thanks.