

**EI-800**

**JULIA SLOANE**

**BIRTHDATE: JANUARY 22, 1912**

**INTERVIEW DATE: SEPTEMBER 7, 1996**

**AGE AT TIME OF INTERVIEW:**

**RUNNING TIME:**

**INTERVIEWER: PAUL SIGRIST**

**RECORDING ENGINEER:**

**INTERVIEW LOCATION: SPRINGFIELD, MASSACHUSETTS**

**TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: TAPESCRIBE**

**TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY: IRV SILBERG**

**RUSSIA, 1912**

**AGE 9**

**SHIP:**

**PORT: HAMBURG**

**RESIDENCES:**

- **RUSSIA: ODESSA**
- **US: DETROIT, MI; SPRINGFIELD, MA**

**NOTE: EI-800/Sloane is a supplement to EI-799/Sloane.**

SIGRIST: Good afternoon, this is Paul Sigrist for the National Park Service. Today is Saturday, September 7<sup>th</sup>, 1996 and I'm here with Julia Sloane. I just interviewed Mrs. Sloane about her immigration experience from Russia in the early 1920s and now I'm going to interview her about her experience working for the WPA in the 1930s and going out to Ellis Island while she was working for the WPA. Mrs. Sloane, if you could just say one more time for this interview, your birth date please.

SLOANE: January 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1912.

SIGRIST: Thank you, and you were born in Odessa, Russia, I should say.

SLOANE: Right.

SIGRIST: Before the interview began, you told me a little bit about why the WPA sent you out to—to Ellis Island. Can you begin this interview by telling me how you went to work for the WPA?

SLOANE: [Laughs] Well, how I went to work for WPA is interesting. It was a Depression, no jobs, etcetera, and in order to eat you have to have a job. So I went to the WPA and they put me on logarithm. That would be like putting me in a different country, and of course it made no sense.

SIGRIST: That was sort of a mathematical division with the WPA?

SLOANE: Yes, it was mathematical.

SIGRIST: Where were you living at this time?

SLOANE: I was living in New York with my sister in -- on 17<sup>th</sup> Street. No. Yeah, yeah.

SIGRIST: And this is—these are 1930s sometime. Right, you weren't exactly sure.

SLOANE: Some—somewhere around there, yeah. And, of course, you know, that didn't work out. So my field was the theater and I wanted to go into the theater division, and of course, you know, all the theater people were out of work and they were cluttered with them. So they put me in the dance. I—I was not a dancer of any kind, but my sister was a teacher of dance, so I had plenty of—of lessons and a little experience.

SIGRIST: This was the dance division of the WPA?

SLOANE: Yeah. So I was in that and after all, it was the theater. But it wasn't really my thing and I wanted to be in the art. Anyway, I was shifted from there to the art division, which was very, very exciting because the artists were just as much hungry for work and job and dollars, or even more so than any-- anybody in the arts. It was difficult. My job was to go to tax-exempt institutions and allocate (which is translated into sell), paintings. And the criteria was not the value of—of the talent, as you see Raphael Sawyer on my wall. I bought that at the—you know, while I was there. But you paid for the materials, and of course, the oil was more and more expensive because the oil paint is more expensive. And the reason that I got a print, bought a print -- is that it's cheap.

SIGRIST: So the institutions were only responsible for paying for the materials that the artists used.

SLOANE: Right.

SIGRIST: That's very interesting.

SLOANE: That—so consequently, you know, they didn't pay. You know. And when they wanted to place things in the Ellis Island, they were fearful because they had a very bad experience with the person -- representative--- previous to sending me.

SIGRIST: What was the bad experience?

SLOANE: The story is, and I imagine that every story gets exaggerated in the telling. By the time it got to my ears was that the head of the Ellis Island,

the super whatever it was, who ran the thing was a man with such a temper that he threw this representative down the stairs and broke his arm or one of those things, which may be a part of it. Anyway, they had a bad experience.

SIGRIST: Some of it might be true. [Laughs]

SLOANE: They had a bad experience.

SIGRIST: Of some kind.

SLOANE: So my supervisor was hesitant and he asked if—if, you know, if I wanted to go. I wanted to go.

SIGRIST: Why did you want to go? Why—

SLOANE: Well, I wanted to go to Ellis Island. Unfortunately, I was an idiot enough not to go into the Great Hall and see that, but anyway. I—

SIGRIST: I'm just curious, why the curiosity at that time? I mean, obviously you had been processed there a number of years before.

SLOANE: Yeah.

SIGRIST: But why were you anxious to go to it as a representative for the WPA? What meaning did it have for you?

SLOANE: Well, I suppose it was curiosity. I have a lot of it. I still do. Anyway, that man that was supposed to be such a bugaboo turned out to be a very gracious gentleman. Possibly my size and muscle, or the rest of it, contributed to his reaction because there was nothing threatening about

me. I was very—I'm a small person, to begin with and I was of course young and probably pleasant, attractive, whatever.

SIGRIST: Do you remember how you got out to the island at that time?

SLOANE: Ah, yes. I had a driver who carried the paintings in for me. Of course, you know, we took a ferry.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what the paintings were and who they were by.

SLOANE: Oh, God, I couldn't tell you because every day, several times a day, I would, you know, carry different ones. I tried to chose them according to the institution, but in Ellis Island it was a little challenging to—to choose because it had everything. It had all countr-- cultures represented there. Anyway, this guy, you know, the driver would also bring—some of the paintings were large oils and it was a little bit too demanding of me to do that. Anyway, he did that. And it was a very gracious, very pleasant meeting and he took a lot. He took just about everything I suggested. I was knowledgeable about ---- not so much—some of the artists were very, very good, too. But the point is, you know, I was enthusiastic. I mean enthusiastic about art. You can look around this little hut and see that, you know, I like 'em. The paintings in the bedroom, by the way, are my work and, you know, they're not so bad. Anyway—

SIGRIST: Do you remember where you had to meet with him?

SLOANE: In his office.

SIGRIST: Do you have any idea where that was, where you—

SLOANE: It was not anywheres near the Great Hall. It was, you know, down the hall, etcetera, etcetera. I did not go into that—that Great Hall and like an idiot, I did not ask for the permission to do it. And beside going there alone there, the impression would be more threatening than when I came there, as a little girl with a crowd of people. There was no protection of bodies. I don't know whether it makes sense, but if I remember, that was my feeling. Anyway, the—the transaction was very successful and the guy had enough respect for my taste to swallow everything that I advised him to. But I don't remember. I came back another time and I saw the stuff hanging on the hall—on the walls, but I still didn't go into the Great Hall.

SIGRIST: Do you remember how the paintings—you said the driver brought them to the ferry, I guess.

SLOANE: Yes.

SIGRIST: And then of course you had to put everything on the ferry and go out.

SLOANE: No, he brought them to the car.

SIGRIST: Yes.

SLOANE: Yeah. The car went into the ferry.

SIGRIST: The car went out on the boat?

SLOANE: Yeah, on in—the car full of paintings and the driver and me, and that's how we got there.

SIGRIST: Hmm, and then what happened when the ferry docked?

SLOANE: We—I got off and I did my thing and he brought in the paintings and, you know.

SIGRIST: The car stayed on the ferry?

SLOANE: Hmm?

SIGRIST: Did the car stay on the ferry?

SLOANE: No. No, no, no, the car was on the island some place.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh. How long do you think the meeting was with the guy?

SLOANE: Oh, I'm sure I didn't know the time then, so I'm supposed to—probably an hour or an hour and a half or something.

SIGRIST: Does anything else stick out in your mind about either what it felt like to be on that island or anything that you saw?

SLOANE: Well, I did not have the connection in my mind or in my feeling that it was the same building that I had entered in that big hall, because, you know, I went through the hall and I went to—to an office and, you know, we did our business and we took our stuff back. And I got the paperwork done. You know, I did the paperwork so that he'd be charged for whatever it was. Yeah, that's—

SIGRIST: Do you remember what the average cost of a painting was for [unclear]?

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SLOANE: It was very, very little. For instance, turn around and look at that. That was painted by a friend of ours. He died, oh, God, maybe five years ago. Oh, a wonderful, wonderful guy.

SIGRIST: But sixty years ago, you know, a WPA painting, being charged just for materials would be—

SLOANE: See, the money never passed my hands. It was all paperwork. Maybe ten, twenty dollars depending. You know.

SIGRIST: That's a very interesting connection to Ellis Island that you have. You said you went out one other time.

SLOANE: Because I remember it hanging on the walls. So it was—it was after the—the initial time. That's what I remember, just hanging on the walls of the halls.

SIGRIST: Office hallways or—

SLOANE: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Yeah.

SLOANE: It was like any other office hallway, you know.

SIGRIST: How long did you stay with the WPA?

SLOANE: It wasn't very long. I guess it was long enough. Oh, the thing was that I got married and I couldn't stay on. But I got married, anyway.

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SIGRIST: Well, Mrs. Sloane, thank you very much. That's very interesting. We've never met anyone who was in that—I've never interviewed anyone who was in that particular situation.

SLOANE: Well, all the people that you meet are interesting and they have foreign stories to tell.

SIGRIST: Well, but we also do—

SLOANE: Which are always interesting.

SIGRIST: But we also do find people who worked at Ellis Island or had a connection like yours, just never that particular connection.

SLOANE: Yeah.

SIGRIST: We've actually interviewed a number of years ago one of the WPA painters who—

SLOANE: Who?

SIGRIST: You know, through this whole last ten minutes I've been trying to think of his name and I can't think of his name, but he did a big mural that used to hang in the Ellis Island dining room that was painted in the 1930s. And I know the minute I get in my car and drive away, I'll think of his name.

SLOANE: It was a mural?

SIGRIST: It was a very large mural on canvas.

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SLOANE: Oh, on canvas.

SIGRIST: On canvas, so I imagine originally it was painted elsewhere and then mounted in the dining room and it now hangs in the Brooklyn Courthouse. When Ellis Island was shut down in 1954, that mural was removed off of the dining room wall and it was mounted--

SLOANE: Yeah, the mural is—is something that's painted on the wall. This was a—

SIGRIST: This was actually—yeah, it was a mural, but it was painted on canvas.

SLOANE: Yeah, but it wasn't framed, was it?

SIGRIST: I don't know. All I know is that when it was—

SLOANE: Yeah.

SIGRIST: When Ellis Island was shut down in 1954, it ended up at the Brooklyn Courthouse.

SLOANE: Yeah.

SIGRIST: When we redid Ellis Island in the—in the 1980s, they tried to get it back and Brooklyn—

SLOANE: Wouldn't—

SIGRIST: The courthouse wouldn't give it back.

SLOANE: Let it go.

SIGRIST: And I cannot for the life of me think of the painter.

SLOANE: Yeah.

SIGRIST: As we're sitting here because you may well know who this person is.

SLOANE: I may, may not.

SIGRIST: Or may or may not. But anyway, thank you very much for letting me ask you about—

SLOANE: I—I found it fun.

SIGRIST: That was very interesting. Good. This is Paul Sigrist signing off with Julia Sloane on Saturday, September 7<sup>th</sup>, 1996 in Springfield, Massachusetts.

[END OF INTERVIEW]