

EI-827  
ELIZABETH (BETTY) BEEKMAN MANLEY CARTER  
BIRTH DATE: JUNE 29, 1892  
INTERVIEW DATE: NOVEMBER 22, 1996  
RUNNING TIME: 29:52  
INTERVIEWER: PAUL E. SIGRIST. JR.  
RECORDING ENGINEER: SAME  
INTERVIEW LOCATION: VAN DYKE MANOR  
MONTCLAIR, NEW JERSEY  
TRANSCRIPT PREPARED AND REVIEWED BY: PAUL E. SIGRIST, JR.,

4/1998

BORN IN THE U.S.  
CIRCA ACCOMPANIED HER MOTHER TO ELLIS ISLAND TO HIRE SERVANTS,  
1897

the SIGRIST: Good morning. I'm Paul Sigrist and I'm from  
National Park Service, and today is Friday, November  
22nd, 1996. I'm in Montclair, New Jersey, and the name  
of this facility is the Van Dyke Manor. And I'm  
here with Elizabeth Carter, and Mrs. Carter is  
the, is, uh, going to tell us a little bit about going  
to Ellis Island with her mother to choose servants for  
the house. And present also is Judy Jacob, J-A-C-O-B,  
and Judy has done some restoration work for us at  
Ellis Island, and Mrs. Carter is Judy's grandmother's  
first cousin. And what makes this even more  
wonderful is Mrs. Carter is one hundred and four,  
correct?

CARTER: Yes.

SIGRIST: You are one hundred and four years old. Mrs. Carter,  
can we begin by you giving me your birth date.

CARTER: I was born June 29th, 1892.

SIGRIST: And where were you born?

CARTER: In New York City.

ever  
SIGRIST: Do you know anything about your birth? Did anyone  
tell you a story about the day you were born?

CARTER: No. No, I didn't here anything about that. I just  
heard that they did, made a registration on my birth.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me, first of all, what is your maiden  
name?

CARTER: My name was Elizabeth Beekman Manley.

SIGRIST: And how do you spell Beekman?

CARTER: B-double E-K-M-A-N.

SIGRIST: And what does the Beekman stand for?

CARTER: Dutch. It is a Dutch name.

SIGRIST: And your name before you were married was Manley.

CARTER: Yes.

SIGRIST: Your last name. Can you tell me just a little bit about your family background?

CARTER: Well, my, my father was an, an artist, painted landscape mostly.

SIGRIST: And what was his name?

CARTER: His name was Thomas R. Manley.

SIGRIST: What did, what was the R?

CARTER: Rathbone.

SIGRIST: Rathbone. Thomas Rathbone Manley.

CARTER: Yes.

SIGRIST: And your mother's?

CARTER: My mother was a Burr, B-U-R-R.

SIGRIST: Her first name was...?

CARTER: Evelyn, Evelyn, Evelyn Burr.

SIGRIST: And what were their nationalities?

CARTER: Well, the nationalities was, on my mother's side  
there  
was some German. They were, they were musical people.  
And my father's side, they were interesting people,  
they were educated people.

SIGRIST: Your mother and father, where were they born?

CARTER: My father was born in Buffalo.

SIGRIST: Buffalo, New York.

CARTER: Yup.

SIGRIST: Yup.

CARTER: And he, and they both lived during the year, Civil  
War,  
and when they were ten years old my father, who lived  
long, he, Mother was in New York City, they watched the  
soldiers go by and heard the band playing.

SIGRIST: Where was your mother born?

on  
CARTER: Mother was born, I, in Croton, Croton, New York, up  
the, on the Hudson River.

SIGRIST: Uh huh. Croton-On-Hudson, in New York...

CARTER: Yeah.

SIGRIST: New York State.

CARTER: Yes, New York State.

you  
SIGRIST: Do you remember the, the address of the home where  
grew up, where you were a little girl in New York City?

City.  
CARTER: No, because I never was a little girl in New York  
They mov--, they came right out here when I was a year  
old.

SIGRIST: And, and, you mean to Montclair...

CARTER: Yes, to Montclair.

house  
SIGRIST: ...New Jersey. Uh huh. Did you live in the same  
while you were growing up?

CARTER: Yes, we lived 151 Midland Avenue.

SIGRIST: 151 Midland Avenue. And you must have moved in 1893, you were a year old?

CARTER: No, I'll tell you, they moved other place before they found, found the place on Midland Avenue.

SIGRIST: I see. How old were you when they moved to Midland Avenue?

CARTER: I imagine I was about two or three years old.

SIGRIST: Uh huh. 1894, 1895, sometime in there. Wow. Well,

I

would like you to tell me what it was like, first of all, to grow up in a house that had servants. How many servants did you have?

CARTER: Oh, we only had one servant.

SIGRIST: And what were the responsibilities of this person?

CARTER: I'll tell you, the servants who came, they were, they came from all, and, all around. Some of them were Swedish. Some were, were black. They were all different nationalities. One was a, was an English

woman. And I remember them well.

SIGRIST: How often, how long did they stay with the family, usually?

CARTER: They would stay different lengths of time. They came because they wanted to live in America and they wanted to learn how the American people like their food. That was one thing. How they liked to keep house. So they came for very, very little and they were given a, a room on the top of the house and they were pleased with that.

SIGRIST: (referring to Judy Jacob, who is present) Now, Judy told me remember going to Ellis Island with your mother to choose a servant.

CARTER: At least once I did that.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about that?

around  
CARTER: I remember a waiting room and people all sitting and then Mother would talk to the head person there and they, uh, pointed out perhaps who were the brightest or who understood English best. And so she would interview them and then decide and they would come back

with her. She would bring them back with her. They had their satchels with them and, and then she would show them. She didn't know how to cook but she would, she would read the books to them.

SIGRIST: You mean your mother wasn't, didn't know how to cook.

CARTER: Yes, no.

SIGRIST: So, so she couldn't teach them how to cook.

CARTER: No.

read  
SIGRIST: Is that what you're saying? Right. But she would  
to them.

CARTER: Yeah, she'd read to them.

SIGRIST: Well, that one time you were at Ellis Island, how old were you, do you think?

five.  
CARTER: I should say I was about five years old, four or

SIGRIST: So you were very young...

CARTER: Yes.

SIGRIST: ...when you went there. Does anything stick out in your mind about either going there or what you saw when you were there?

CARTER: No, I was kind of fascinated by the whole thing. I just don't have any strong remembrance.

SIGRIST: Do you remember which servant it was that you chose that day?

CARTER: No, because every year this thing happened. Every year or so it happened.

SIGRIST: You mean every year your mother...

CARTER: I didn't go with her. I didn't go with her except those first two times.

SIGRIST: But this was something your mother would do every year, to, to...

CARTER: Yes.

SIGRIST: ...to get a new, to get a new girl in the house.

CARTER: Yes, that's right.

there SIGRIST: Uh huh. Which, uh, you said that, you said that  
was an interview process, you know, that, that the  
servant, your mother needed to interview the servant.

CARTER: Yes.

for SIGRIST: What kinds of things were, was your mother looking  
in a servant?

CARTER: She was looking for somebody who could speak a little  
English. That was important. And she thought about,  
we children, she wanted to have people that you would  
like to have with your children.

SIGRIST: How many children were there?

CARTER: My sister and me.

SIGRIST: What's your sister's name?

CARTER: Carolyn's...

SIGRIST: Carolyn.

CARTER: C-A-R-O-L-Y-N.

SIGRIST: And is she older or younger?

CARTER: Younger. One year younger.

SIGRIST: She was younger. What memories do you have, as a small child, of your interaction with the servants, with, with the woman who was helping?

CARTER: Well, I was interested in them. I liked to talk with them, find out about the, the lands they live in. Uh, that seemed to, fascinated me. And my sister was a, a little impy imp and she loved to dance and in the kitchen I can see her dancing around with her young, our young cook.

SIGRIST: Do you remember some of the things that you learned from these women who came into the house to work? You said you were interested in other countries...

CARTER: Yes.

what  
SIGRIST: What kinds of things stick out in your mind about you were being told?

CARTER: Well, what was Sweden like, for instance. I got an impression about Sweden and Norway and all those

Scandinavian countries, but that's about all.

SIGRIST: Did, did the women who worked in the house, did they ever teach the children a little Swedish or a little Norwegian?

CARTER: Well, if you asked them. I, I remember things. A German girl taught me to, to count in German. That was a lot of fun.

SIGRIST: Do you still remember it?

CARTER: (she counts) Eins, Zwei, Drei, Vier, Fünf, Sechs, Sieben, Acht, Neun, Zehn!

SIGRIST: That's wonderful. (they laugh) I bet you haven't though about that for a long time.

CARTER: Oh, every now and then I think about it. (they laugh)

SIGRIST: (laughing) Oh, that's good.

CARTER: I think it's fun.

SIGRIST: That's how you keep it in your memory.

CARTER: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Is there one, one of these serving women, that stick out in your mind; whose name you remember and of whom you were very fond?

CARTER: Yes, the English woman. The English woman came to this country. She was separated from her husband and she brought with her her little boy, Cedric, and when they got here they, my mother found that there was a children's home and the little boy was put in the children's home. And Ada could see them, him every, every, all, once in and a while.

SIGRIST: Ada was the name of the English woman?

CARTER: Ada. Ada Barker.

SIGRIST: Ada Barker. How old were you when Ada came to work for you?

CARTER: I imagine I was about ten or eleven.

SIGRIST: Do you remember anything about Ada's little boy, about Cedric?

CARTER: Yes, I remember seeing him but he was not in the house. And then she met a, a man who, they used, in those days they used to come and get the order for

the day.

SIGRIST: Like food order?

CARTER: This was, this was the, uh, the lamb or ham or whatever. And gee, what do they call that?

JUDY JACOB: Butcher.

CARTER: Butcher. He was a butcher. And he, uh, she married him. (a knock at the door) She married him and he took care of the boy. (Judy speaks quietly with a staff member of the nursing home in the background)

SIGRIST: What, what were some of Ada's duties around the house? What were the servants responsible for doing every day?

CARTER: They did not have to wash. She had somebody else wash, wash and iron. But, you see, they were, my mother was a, taught music. She was a, she played beautifully.

SIGRIST: What did she play? What instrument?

CARTER: All the classical, classical things.

SIGRIST: But which instrument did she play?

CARTER: Played the piano.

SIGRIST: Played the piano.

CARTER: And she could play just, oh, wonderfully. She loved the classical things, uh...

SIGRIST: Was it....

CARTER: The German, the German classical things. Music is, is, uh, (?) German.

SIGRIST: But what were some of the, uh, you said the girls were not responsible for washing, but what were they responsible for?

CARTER: Cooking, and helping around the house. Sweeping. But Mother did a lot of that herself but, see, she had a class in music in Montclair. A very popular one and so she was very busy. And she needed to have somebody she could leave in the house and trust. There was only one time that there was a little thievery.

SIGRIST: What, what do you remember about that?

CARTER: My father happened to, when this girl was about to go, he went and looked over the silver in our drawer, knives and forks and spoons, and they were gone. So he didn't say anything, but he went out in the backyard and down lower he found them in a, in a bag that the woman owned. So she got, he got them and brought them back.

SIGRIST: Had she already left your service by that point?

CARTER: Oh, abs--, she was leaving.

SIGRIST: She was leaving.

CARTER: She was leaving. That was the thing.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what, what nationality she was or anything about her?

CARTER: (she pauses) No, I don't. I can see her face but I cannot tell you what she was.

SIGRIST: Did you ever have a servant in the house that you, Elizabeth, didn't like, for some reason?

CARTER: No, I don't think I did. I was so delighted to not have to do it myself. Unfortunately, I learned how

later!

how  
SIGRIST: When you said your mother didn't teach these women  
to cook, who did teach them how to cook?

CARTER: She read aloud to them a, a, about the recipes and  
they learned and used the, the "Joy Of Cooking." It's  
a cookbook that I used afterwards. And it's a great  
cookbook. And they simply were told what to have.

to  
SIGRIST: Did any of the women that came into your house have  
be taught to wash and groom themselves, uh, any  
personal things they had to learn?

They  
CARTER: Oh, I think Mother did have to do it about some.  
left their hair hanging down, you know, carelessly,  
and she didn't want them at the table, uh, serving us.  
They served the meal and they learned how to do  
things, and it was a process. And they didn't do it  
unless they wanted to learn how to live here in this  
country.

SIGRIST: And, and you think that that was very important to  
them?

CARTER: Absolutely.

SIGRIST: Uh huh. Do you remember something in your house that was particularly difficult for them to clean or something, some process of cleaning that everybody dreaded in the house?

CARTER: No, I can't remember.

SIGRIST: I'm, I'm thinking like once a year the portieres in the parlor had to come down and everybody dreaded having to do this or something like that.

CARTER: (she laughs) No, honey. I do not remember.

SIGRIST: (Judy Jacob and he laugh) Okay, good. Was, you mentioned, you've mentioned Swedish and Norwegian and English...

CARTER: Yes.

SIGRIST: Were those, were those your mother's favorite people to choose or were there other nationalities you remember having in the house?

CARTER: We had people who were black.

SIGRIST: Did you? Can you talk a...

CARTER: Negroes, negroes.

SIGRIST: ...little bit about that? Uh huh.

CARTER: And they were bright, too. Just as bright.

SIGRIST: Where did they come from? Your mother wasn't going  
to  
Ellis Island to get them, probably.

CARTER: Yes. They were there.

SIGRIST: Yes.

CARTER: They came from, uh, Africa.

SIGRIST: Yeah, well, they, some, there was some African  
immigration. There was also some people from the  
Caribbean coming through...

CARTER: Yes.

SIGRIST: ...Ellis Island.

CARTER: Yes. (a creaking sound is heard in the background)

SIGRIST: Were there different, did, did the black women, uh,  
learn in a different way than the white women did who

were working in the house, that you can remember?

CARTER: No, I can't remember that. I remember that they were so anxious to learn how to do this thing that they just, uh, I, I, they behaved themselves.

SIGRIST: Did your, did your mother her, her domestic servants to wear a uniform of some sort?

CARTER: Yes.

SIGRIST: Can you describe what that uniform was for me?

CARTER: Well, I think they were white. (microphone disturbance), white. And, uh, they would, told to keep their hands clean in serving the food.

SIGRIST: And how many days a week did they work?

CARTER: Every day until they had two days off a month. Now that's the truth. Two days off a month.

SIGRIST: What would they do on their days off?. Do you remember that?

CARTER: No, I don't know. They, I think they, I think Mother'd sometimes give them a little extra money to

go to New York. They were anxious to see New York.

SIGRIST: Did, uh, did you ever, like at Christmastime, were, were the servants given a present at Christmastime?

CARTER: Oh, yes. The servant that was with us got a present, with a Christmas tree.

SIGRIST: Did, did you ever meet, did you ever meet, you mentioned Ada's son that she brought to America, did you ever meet any other relative of one of these serving women that, that came to the house for some reason or maybe stayed in the house for some reason?

CARTER: (she pauses) You mean somebody that had children?

SIGRIST: Well, or, for instance, say, say you had a serving woman who was going to bring over from Europe one of her relatives. Did, did that ever happen, that you can remember?

CARTER: No, I don't.

SIGRIST: Or did one of them have a mother who came and stayed?

CARTER: No.

SIGRIST: 'Cause the girl stayed in the house with you, right?  
Up on the attic?

CARTER: Yes, yes. And it only lasted a year. We had them  
one after the other.

SIGRIST: Why, why only a year?

CARTER: What?

SIGRIST: Why only a year?

CARTER: Unless they wanted to stay. Some of them wanted to  
stay and then they could stay. That's all right.  
They were delighted if they would do that.

SIGRIST: But a lot of them just stayed a year and went on, is  
that...

CARTER: Yes.

SIGRIST: Yeah. Your mother went back to Ellis Island to, to  
get a new one. (he laughs)

CARTER: Yes, yes she did.

SIGRIST: Uh huh. Did you ever stay in contact with any of  
them after they left your service?

CARTER: I don't think so. I don't remember. We heard of Ada because she married in Montclair. Now, I don't know whether she was legally married or not but she had left it way back in England and it was just the same as though it had never happened.

SIGRIST: She, she came to America to make a new life for herself, you think.

CARTER: Yes.

SIGRIST: Do you remember how much your servants were paid?

CARTER: Oh, I try to think and to give that accurately, I don't know.

SIGRIST: Okay.

CARTER: I think it was about one hundred and fifty dollars a month. Of course, one thing is that you've got to realize, that money was not the same as it is now. They had the five and ten cent store and you could go to the five and ten cent store and buy worthwhile things.

SIGRIST: That's right. Do you remember, uh, my mind just went blank, uh, I'm sorry, my mind just went totally blank.

CARTER: Oh, I do that all the time. (they all laugh)

SIGRIST: Oh, I know what I was going to ask you. Did you ever have any Irish help in the house?

CARTER: Well, I'll tell you, no, I don't think we had Irish help in our house but in the house of the man I married they had one Irish girl. Her name was Nelly, Nelly.

SIGRIST: What sticks out in your mind about Nelly?

CARTER: Well, the thing was that they called her "Smelly Nelly." (they all laugh heartily) She didn't, she wasn't "all there." They had a good one that was over her and, but she did all the, the rotten things that nobody wanted to do. Poor Nelly. Nelly, Smelly Nelly! (they all laugh heartily)

SIGRIST: Oh, that's very funny. (he laughs) Well, just, just for the sake of the tape, give me the name of your husband, the man that you married.

CARTER: He was John L. Carter.

SIGRIST: And what year did you get married?

CARTER: 1928.

after  
SIGRIST: Uh huh. And did you have servants in your house  
you got married?

CARTER: Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: Yes. Immigrant girls?

CARTER: What?

SIGRIST: Were they immigrants?

CARTER: No, I don't know anything about them.

SIGRIST: Well, what...

CARTER: They probably were but there was money in that  
household.

SIGRIST: No, I meant, I meant the girls that you hired, your  
servants after you got married. Were they, were they  
from Europe?

CARTER: Well, I wasn't alone. Unfortunately, I came into a

house that was, had been occupied by other people.

SIGRIST: I see.

CARTER: And, uh, I just had to take things as they came, for awhile. Then we just, (she pauses) my husband's name was John Laurence Carter.

SIGRIST: Laurence Carter.

CARTER: L-A-U-R-E-N-C-E.

SIGRIST: Well, this has been very interesting. You've got, you've got a great memory and we're just about to end but I just, I want to ask you, you're one hundred and four...

CARTER: Yeah.

SIGRIST: You look great. You have a great memory. What, what's it feel like to be one hundred and four?

CARTER: Oh, sometimes you think it's enough, it's enough.

SIGRIST: When you were thirty, did you ever think that you would be one hundred and four?

CARTER: No, and I often think I wish my mother knew. I wish my father knew. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: Great, well, Mrs. Carter, thank you very much. This has been...

CARTER: I'll tell you, my father is, proved to be in recent days, I always thought his things were wonderful...

SIGRIST: His paintings, you mean.

CARTER: And, yes, the New York (correcting herself),  
Montclair

Art Museum had a, a painting that he did that they bought and that was the first thing he ever bought...

JUDY JACOB: (correcting Mrs. Carter) The first thing that the museum bought.

CARTER: And now it's gotten, it's gotten to the point that people are asking for his things.

SIGRIST: He's been rediscovered.

CARTER: Yes.

SIGRIST: Well, great. Well, thank you very much. This is  
Paul

Sigrist signing off with Elizabeth Carter, with Judy Jacob in attendance. And today is Friday, November 22nd 1996 at the Van Dyke Manor in Montclair. Thank you very much, Mrs. Carter. (Mrs. Carter laughs)

□