

[NO BACKGROUND INFO FOUND FOR THIS INTERVIEW]

EI-854

MARY ANN [PH] HENRY

BIRTHDATE: APRIL 5, 1898

INTERVIEW DATE: FEBRUARY 21, 1997

AGE AT TIME OF INTERVIEW: 98

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INTERVIEWER: PAUL SIGRIST

RECORDING ENGINEER: PAUL SIGRIST

INTERVIEW LOCATION: RIVER EDGE, NEW JERSEY

TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY:

IRELAND, 1920

AGE: 22

SHIP: CARMANIAN [PH]

PORT:

RESIDENCES:

SIGRIST: Good afternoon. This is Paul Sigrist for the National Park Service. Today is Friday, February 21st, 1997. I'm in River Edge, New Jersey and I'm here with Mary Ann Henry. Mrs. Henry came from Ireland in 1920. She was 22 years old. Present also in the room are Joe and Peggy O'Connell [PH]. Peggy is Mrs. Henry's daughter and we are in their home. Correct? Yes. I also want to say, for the sake of the tape, that we found Mrs. Henry through Manny Steen [PH], who was interview number EI-33 and who is a friend of the family's.

HENRY: Ya.

SIGRIST: Anyway, Mrs. Henry, can we begin by you giving me your birth date?

HENRY: April 5th, 1898.

SIGRIST: April—

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HENRY: Fifth.

SIGRIST: April 5th.

HENRY: Yes.

SIGRIST: 1898.

HENRY: Yeah.

SIGRIST: And where in Ireland were you born?

HENRY: In—in the west of Ireland in a village called Gurtoma. G-U—

SIGRIST: Spell that.

HENRY: G-U-R-T-O-M-A, I guess, or somewhat. Yes. It's a Gaelic word.

SIGRIST: Say it one more time slowly.

HENRY: G—

SIGRIST: Just say the word. You don't have to spell it.

HENRY: G-U-R-T-O-M-A, I guess. That's [several words unclear] but it's a Gaelic word.

SIGRIST: And pronounce it for me one more time.

HENRY: Gurtroma.

SIGRIST: Gurtroma.

HENRY: Yeah.

SIGRIST: What do you remember as a child about the town itself?

HENRY: Oh, I loved where I lived. I liked—I—I didn't grow up in that village. It was about three miles away. I loved—

SIGRIST: Why were you born in that village?

HENRY: My father and mother lived there then.

SIGRIST: And they moved?

HENRY: Yes, my father bought a place, the west, better place. I lived—that's where I grew up, just about four mile—about three miles from there.

SIGRIST: And what was the name of that place?

HENRY: Vallconraa was the name of the—the—the [unclear]. You would call it [unclear] or Vallconraa, the village.

SIGRIST: Valley Con—

HENRY: Raa. V-A-L-L-C-O-N-R-A-A.

SIGRIST: Thank you. The reason I'm asking to spell everything is because we do type these interviews up so we can read them.

HENRY: Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: And I just try to get everything as [chuckles] correct as possible.

HENRY: Yeah, yes.

SIGRIST: Do you know any stories about the day you were born?

HENRY: [laughs] Only that I was born unattended. That's all. I—my—my—the neighbors came and helped my mother. That's all. I know that much.

SIGRIST: Your mother was alone except—

HENRY: Well, she wasn't alone but my father went and got the neighbors to help. [chuckles] That's all I know.

SIGRIST: Tell me about the house that you remember as a child.

HENRY: Well, it was a [unclear] stone house and had four rooms and we used turf fires to heat the house and cook and everything. Turf.

SIGRIST: Turf?

HENRY: Yes, yes.

SIGRIST: Where did the turf come from?

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- HENRY: From the ground, the digging in the ground. They save it. It's very nice.
- SIGRIST: What is it?
- HENRY: Well, would you call it, Joe? What is turf? It's a—well, what would you call it? Like, it's a sort of turf, like, it comes—it [unclear] and then they dry it. And it makes a very nice fire [unclear].
- SIGRIST: And how was it burned in the house?
- HENRY: Like, you make a fire, like you would in there is all.
- SIGRIST: You're pointing to the fireplace.
- HENRY: Yes, yeah.
- SIGRIST: There was a fireplace in the house?
- HENRY: Yes. Oh, yes. Two fireplaces, in fact.
- SIGRIST: Whose job was it to get the turf?
- HENRY: Oh, anyone. That—we all had jobs. [several words unclear] job. [laughs] We all got the turf. It had to be cut and saved and a lot of work. Yeah.
- SIGRIST: Do you remember what your chores were, growing up?
- HENRY: Well, I had plenty chores. I used to cook a lot and I do—I did help save the turf but I didn't like—I didn't like working in the field, though. [chuckles]
- SIGRIST: What kind of fieldwork would have to be done?
- HENRY: Well, we planted potatoes and vegetables and it was a lot of work like that. We had—it was a mountainous area, raised a lot of sheep.
- SIGRIST: Did your family raise sheep?
- HENRY: Oh, yeah.
- SIGRIST: Yes, they did? What kind of sheep? Do you remember?

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HENRY: Oh, regular—we called them Connemara [PH] Sheep. Smaller breed of sheep, real nice.

SIGRIST: And what did you do with the sheep?

HENRY: Well, my father used to sell them. Sometimes, once in a while he would kill one. We'd have it for, like, to eat. It was good.

SIGRIST: Did you have witness the sheep being killed?

HENRY: No, I don't think I did—

SIGRIST: [laughs]

HENRY: —like that. No.

SIGRIST: What about the wool?

HENRY: The wool?

SIGRIST: The wool? What was—

HENRY: Oh, the wool is sold, the woolen. There's a certain time for selling the wool. We used to have quite a lot of wool to sell.

SIGRIST: Did your family ever do anything for themselves with the wool?

HENRY: Well, my mother used to knit a lot. She spin treadle. She could make—spin treadle, make [unclear].

SIGRIST: What was your father's name?

HENRY: Andrew.

SIGRIST: Andrew. And his last name, which would be your maiden name, was what?

HENRY: McGreth.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that, please?

HENRY: M-C-G-R-E-T-H.

SIGRIST: What do you know about your father's family background?

HENRY: Well, a lot of them in business and grocery stores.

SIGRIST: They were merchants?

HENRY: Well, I wouldn't call them merchants. There's—the two of my aunts had two stores in the town. My uncle had a small hotel and he even had an [unclear] store out in Braddock, Pennsylvania.

SIGRIST: What town did your father grow up in?

HENRY: The next town to where I was born, right outside Klefton [PH].

SIGRIST: Yeah. And do you remember his parents at all?

HENRY: Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: Yes? What can you tell me about your father's parents?

HENRY: Well, all I know, they were very nice to me. I was 13 when my grandfather died.

SIGRIST: What did he die of?

HENRY: Just a stroke and died. My grandmother lived to be 96 years old.

SIGRIST: Wow! Is there a story that you remember from your childhood of an experience that you shared with your grandmother, maybe, or your grandfather? Something that you like to do with them?

HENRY: Well, she used to teach me to make bread, my grandmother. Yeah.

SIGRIST: Do you remember some of that process, the—what she taught you specifically about making bread?

HENRY: She always taught me not to have it hard, not—make it nice and soft. We test it. [chuckles]

SIGRIST: Do you remember what she looked like?

HENRY: [unclear] tall. She had a—her hair wasn't really gray when I knew her. She had kind of dark hair. She was a tall lady—regular, not—not too tall.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what your grandmother liked to do for her own enjoyment? Something that gave her pleasure?

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HENRY: Well, one thing, she was very religious. [chuckles] She used to, oh, read [unclear] read.

SIGRIST: What language did they speak?

HENRY: Well, they spoke Gaelic and they spoke English.

SIGRIST: What—what language did you speak in your home?

HENRY: The same. My mother and father talked a lot of Gaelic. But we—we didn't. We wasn't interested in Gaelic because we weren't taught Gaelic in school. That's what got them—used to be that they—they did take Gaelic in school but they changed that. That was changed.

SIGRIST: When you were going to school—

HENRY: Yes, [unclear].

SIGRIST: —they changed it.

HENRY: Oh, yeah.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh.

HENRY: Before I went to school—my mother went to—before my mother even went to school. [sentence unclear]. [laughs]

SIGRIST: Did you—you mentioned your grandmother was religious. Did—did she ever teach you a prayer?

HENRY: Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: Yes?

HENRY: She was always teaching prayers, yes.

SIGRIST: Can you—can you—do you remember one now that you could re—

HENRY: Oh, the [unclear] father.

SIGRIST: And did she say it in Gaelic?

HENRY: Oh, no. No, she didn't.

SIGRIST: Did she ever teach you any Gaelic?

HENRY: No, no. She only talk—they only talked Gaelic among themselves.

SIGRIST: I see. That's interesting that—that the children weren't taught that so much.

HENRY: Well, we weren't taught it. No, that—and we didn't have it in school like now they have it in school.

SIGRIST: Right. Let's get back to your dad. What was his personality like?

HENRY: He had a pleasant personality. Pleasant.

SIGRIST: When you think about your father—when you were a kid, when you think about—

HENRY: I think he was very smart.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh. Why? What makes you say that?

HENRY: Well, he read a lot, read me—tell me everything about wars and he knew a lot even about America. He was here for two years.

SIGRIST: When? Within your lifetime?

HENRY: No, no, no. Not—before I was born.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh.

HENRY: Before—before he was married.

SIGRIST: Do you know why he—why he said he went to America back then?

HENRY: Well, he—he thought he'd like it and he didn't like it and he came back. He had rheumatic fever anyway.

SIGRIST: He had rheumatic fever?

HENRY: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh. Tell me a little bit about what your father did for a living. You mentioned that—

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HENRY: Was a farmer, a farmer.

SIGRIST: He was a farmer.

HENRY: Yes. He bought a lot of cattle and sold cattle. He—that was what he did. He had sheep and cattle.

SIGRIST: What did your father do for his own enjoyment?

HENRY: Oh, I [several words unclear]. Just talk at night to the neighbors and fun. It was nice, was pleasant.

SIGRIST: What was your mother's name?

HENRY: Mary.

SIGRIST: And her maiden name?

HENRY: Honleran.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that?

HENRY: H-O-N-L-E-R-A-N.

SIGRIST: And what do you know about her background?

HENRY: [several words unclear]. She was brought up something like I was. She was an—she was an only girl and a lot of boys and she was the youngest. That's all I—I don't know much background.

SIGRIST: We're going to pause just for a second.

HENRY: I'm—[tape off/on]

SIGRIST: Okay, we're going to start again. I just turned the machine back on.

HENRY: Yeah.

SIGRIST: We were talking about your mother.

HENRY: My mother.

SIGRIST: And I had asked you what you knew about her family background.

HENRY: Well, I know that she had a lot of brothers and she was the youngest.

SIGRIST: Yeah.

HENRY: And she got married young and a lot of children, a lot of—a lot of girls.

SIGRIST: Do you know how your parents met?

HENRY: Well, I—I—I guess they knew each other [unclear]. My father was much older.

SIGRIST: How much older?

HENRY: Oh, about 15 years, I imagine.

SIGRIST: Really? Was your mother his first marriage?

HENRY: Yes. Oh, yes. Yes. They were happy married, I know that. And we had a lot of fun when we were children growing up, like a lot of—a lot of nice young children grew up with us. I was happy; that's all I know. [chuckles] We had lots of freedom, you know.

SIGRIST: How many brothers and sisters did you have?

HENRY: Well, I had one brother and seven—seven sisters [unclear].

SIGRIST: Wow! One brother—

HENRY: My mother lost a—a child before I was born. So—but I had—

SIGRIST: Did she lose it—how did she lose a child?

HENRY: Well, I think in those days they lost a lot of children at birth.

SIGRIST: At birth?

HENRY: Yes.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh.

HENRY: I know. Just right after it was born because I guess it was [unclear].

SIGRIST: What was your mom's personality like?

- HENRY: Well, she had a great sense of humor; I know that. Very kind person.
- SIGRIST: Is there a story that you remember that would reflect how kind she was? Something that she did for someone once?
- HENRY: Oh, she was always doing some—we lived near the islands and the people used to walk up to the town (the town was five miles, or over four and a half miles anyway). She would bring them in and make tea for them. She was a kind person.
- SIGRIST: What were some of your mother's responsibilities around the house?
- HENRY: Well, she has—we always helped her [unclear] the housework, lot of work, washing and taking care of the kids and cooking.
- SIGRIST: Can you tell me how people did their laundry back then? How did you do the wash?
- HENRY: They were in a tub and—they had a tub and a washboard.
- SIGRIST: Where did the water come from?
- HENRY: Oh, the wells and the rivers. We carried the water in. There was no water run in that house. That's the way it was in those days. [chuckles]
- SIGRIST: What about detergent or soap? How did you—
- HENRY: Oh, soap. Soap—it was [unclear] powder, Rinso [PH]. We had Rinso there at that time. Just soap powder and regular brown soap. They had fancy soap too for—for your face, like, but brown soap for—just as—that's [unclear]. It was—was a cool country, you know. That's not—you don't get hot summers like here.
- SIGRIST: How did you heat water when you needed hot water?
- HENRY: Over the fire.
- SIGRIST: How often did—I mean, that's a big family—how often did everybody take a bath, for instance?
- HENRY: Well, they—they used to take a bath, I would guess, a couple of times a week. A lot of work too, even a bath, [laughs] bring—

SIGRIST: [unclear] all those kids.

HENRY: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Tell—you mentioned that your mother cooked.

HENRY: Yes.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me what some of the typical foods were at that time when you were growing up? What was the—

HENRY: Oh, we had good food. We had meat, lots of meat and we had fresh vegetables, lots of potatoes. And we had lots of butter, were eggs [unclear].

SIGRIST: What—what food did you have to buy, as opposed to food that you produced yourself, on the farm?

HENRY: We had our own eggs. We had to buy tea and sugar and once in awhile we'd buy some bread, but we al—mostly always made the bread.

SIGRIST: What was the—what was your favorite food as a child? What your mother made that you enjoyed the most?

HENRY: Oh, she made nice cakes sometimes, which was—anything she cooked was very good. She knew—knew how to make very good soup. Anything—anything my mother made was always good.

SIGRIST: Who was more religious in your family, your mother or your father?

HENRY: I think my father was more religious in a way.

SIGRIST: Of course, you had mentioned his mother was quite religious too.

HENRY: Oh, yes. Oh, she—my mother was also religious.

SIGRIST: What religion were you?

HENRY: Catholic.

SIGRIST: And how did you practice that religion at home?

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HENRY: We used to say the rosary at night, every night. And we were taught a lot of religion in the school too, you know.

SIGRIST: Was it—was it a Catholic school you went to?

HENRY: Oh, it was a national school but they taught religion.

SIGRIST: Was there a church in the town?

HENRY: Oh, yes, a big church.

SIGRIST: And how often did you go?

HENRY: On Sundays in mass.

SIGRIST: Does anything stick out in your mind about attending church as a child, something that may have happened once in a church?

HENRY: Well, I liked church—I—I—I don't know of anything that happened, but I liked it. Like, we made our first communion. That was a big thing. Confirmation. That—that always stood out in my mind.

SIGRIST: When you made your first communion—

HENRY: Yes.

SIGRIST: —what did you wear?

HENRY: White dress.

SIGRIST: Can you describe it for me? What it looked like?

HENRY: Oh, just like something the kids wear today. White—all white.

SIGRIST: Did you receive a present?

HENRY: Well, maybe some little presents from my aunts and—not too much. Didn't get too many presents. [chuckles]

SIGRIST: What about holidays? What were the important holidays that were celebrated when you were growing up?

HENRY: St. Patrick's Day was a big holiday. Christmas, New Years.

SIGRIST: How would you celebrate St. Patrick's Day?

HENRY: Well, we didn't do much. Older people—were grown up and when I left I was 19. They have dances and parties and per—boy—young kids don't go to those things.

SIGRIST: Mostly for the older—

HENRY: Yes.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh. What about Christmas? How did the family celebrate Christmas?

HENRY: Oh, Christmas is nice.

SIGRIST: Yeah.

HENRY: It's something like we have it here. Remember my—my Mother would always cook a goose. We loved that and that was nice.

SIGRIST: How would she cook the goose? Do you remember?

HENRY: Roast it.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh. Is there—

HENRY: With nice stuffing.

SIGRIST: Is there a Christmas present that you received—

HENRY: Oh, yes. We all got little presents. Yes. Something.

SIGRIST: Was there one that you remember all these years later?

HENRY: A doll I got one time. I was very happy with a doll. [chuckles] I liked dolls. I still like dolls.

SIGRIST: Let's talk about schools. You said it was a national school?

HENRY: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Tell me a little bit about the procedure of attending school. Where was the school? How did you get there?

HENRY: Oh, it was a about—would that be a mile? It wouldn't—a mile, I think away. It would be a mile, yes. We walked to school. We brought two—two pieces of turf, about this length of turf.

- SIGRIST: That's about a foot and a half?
- HENRY: Yes. And we had that for—everybody brought them. We'd have always a fire going in the winter. So in the summer, like, we don't have a long vacation like they have here. I think it's about four weeks is all we had. We had. And school was nice. It's very strict. They hit you if you misbehaved.
- SIGRIST: Do you remember any of the teachers [unclear]?
- HENRY: Oh, yeah. They hitted good. Don't worry; they were—they weren't that good. They weren't that nice. They—they made you tow the line. [chuckles]
- SIGRIST: Do you remember an instance where you made a mistake and you got punished?
- HENRY: Oh, yes. I was often punished. I was left-handed and they were always picking me for being left-handed and trying to change it [unclear]. I—I learned to write right-handed. That's all.
- SIGRIST: How did that make you feel when you were—when they were punishing you for being left-handed?
- HENRY: Well, I didn't like it. What could you do? There weren't too many left handers—peoples in those days, I didn't—but they did.
- SIGRIST: When you got out of school when—you know, your adult life, did you write with your right hand or your left hand?
- HENRY: I wried with my right hand, my—did that on my own. [chuckles]
- SIGRIST: You mentioned earlier that your mother had gone to school so I'm assuming your parents were educated—they had had some education.
- HENRY: Oh, yeah. They had. I don't think they would—there wasn't any schools when my—my grandmother was alive [several words unclear] in my grandmother's days, because [unclear] the English, when they took over Ireland, they didn't want the Irish to be educated. There was no school in the town, was quite a big town. And my father was five years old.
- SIGRIST: Does this mean that your grandmother couldn't read and write?

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HENRY: Oh, well. She—she could but I don't—well, there was no schools. She was a very smart woman.

SIGRIST: I see.

HENRY: So was my grandfather.

SIGRIST: I see.

HENRY: I—

SIGRIST: Are you talking about your father's parents?

HENRY: Yes. That's—that's my grand—oh, my grand—my father went to school and my mother went to school. But there was no schools before that in Ireland.

SIGRIST: Tell me a little bit about your brothers and sisters. Which brother or sister were you the closest to when you were children?

HENRY: Well, a sister—one sister I was close to. We're near in age and we're al—we're always together.

SIGRIST: What was her name?

HENRY: Her name was Delia.

SIGRIST: Delia.

HENRY: Delia [unclear].

SIGRIST: Uh-huh. And is there a story that you remember about something that you did with her that—

HENRY: Oh. [chuckles] We used to have a lot you fun riding donkeys—kids, you know. We used to ride donkeys, was nice.

SIGRIST: Whose donkeys were they?

HENRY: My father's [several words unclear]. So we had a lot of fun when we were growing up. Neighbor's kids—had a nice childhood. We had plenty of room to play, were never afraid of anybody. Was country. There wasn't much traffic. We had freedom.

SIGRIST: Did you ever see an automobile while you were growing up?

HENRY: Well, yeah. The automobiles came, I guess, about—I think 1910. I think that's the first—about 1910, I think.

SIGRIST: Do you remember seeing one for the first time?

HENRY: Yes, yes.

SIGRIST: What did you think?

HENRY: Well, I thought it was wonderful. [chuckles] Like [unclear]. There wasn't too many, really. Maybe some tourists. The great tourist—tourist attraction now place because the place is very pretty.

SIGRIST: Now, did you eventually get a job outside of the house? Did you—were you—were you—

HENRY: I never—was [unclear]. I can't—left—came to America and I never—

SIGRIST: Now, your daughter told me earlier you'd gone to England prior to coming to the United States.

HENRY: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. [unclear] I worked in England.

SIGRIST: How old were you when you went to England?

HENRY: Nineteen.

SIGRIST: Nineteen. This is around the time of World War I?

HENRY: Yes, at the—

SIGRIST: Yes?

HENRY: —end of that.

SIGRIST: What can you tell me about—about how the First World War affected your life?

HENRY: Oh, a lot of people—young men that I knew was killed in that. So that's where it affected me. Everything—like we couldn't hardly get any sugar. Very hard to get little things that we needed. Second World War was even worse, they claim. I was out here then.

SIGRIST: When you said you couldn't get sugar, how would you go about trying to get sugar during [unclear]?

HENRY: Well, they—we had aunts that lived in the town that had business. We—we used to get some but not enough, really. Nobody got enough. It was rationed.

SIGRIST: And how did you—how did you go to get it? I mean, did you—did you have to [unclear]?

HENRY: We had a car—a horse and car.

SIGRIST: Right.

HENRY: And sometimes they—we walked [unclear] if small [unclear].

SIGRIST: And you said that you knew young men who had been killed.

HENRY: Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: Yes. People—how did you know them?

HENRY: Well, I knew the family—the family. The family lived very next door to us, right—right, like, across the street. And he was—he went down in the Navy. He was a sailor and drowned.

SIGRIST: Do you remember how your father felt about the First World War?

HENRY: Ah, nobody liked it. They were very unhappy about it.

SIGRIST: Tell me why you went to England.

HENRY: To work. I wanted to go to—I was taking care of children. I went with a lady that I knew. I liked England, a nice country.

SIGRIST: Where did you go in England?

HENRY: Rugby.

SIGRIST: Rugby.

HENRY: Mmm.

SIGRIST: And you were working as a nursemaid?

HENRY: Yeah, yes. Uh-hmm.

- SIGRIST: Uh-huh. What were some of your—your duties?
- HENRY: Take the chil—take care of children, take them out and take—give them their food and take care of them regular.
- SIGRIST: And what did you do with your money that you made?
- HENRY: [laughs] Oh, I kept some of it. Some I had sent home to my mother if she needed it or anything.
- SIGRIST: What about your other sisters? Did any of your other sisters get jobs outside of the home?
- HENRY: Oh, they—two—two of my—three of my sisters came here.
- SIGRIST: Before you?
- HENRY: No, no. After me.
- SIGRIST: Oh, after you.
- HENRY: But they're dead now. They're not living anymore.
- SIGRIST: But—but at that time—I'm just trying to get an idea if—if Irish women were sent out to—to get jobs, you know, when they were young.
- HENRY: Oh, yes. They came out to get jobs. We did—a lot of—a lot of girls came to America.
- SIGRIST: With the anticipation of getting—
- HENRY: Yes, improving your lifestyle and everything. It's better—this is a better country.
- SIGRIST: What about in Ireland though? Were there opportunities for young women to get jobs in Ireland?
- HENRY: Oh, not—not the kinds of jobs you'd want. This was a better country. You wouldn't make much money and you'd work very hard.
- SIGRIST: What about your brother? You said you had one brother, right?
- HENRY: Well, he worked on the farm. He never—

SIGRIST: He stayed—

HENRY: He stayed there.

SIGRIST: I see. So how long were you in England?

HENRY: Two years. Just two years.

SIGRIST: Two years. Was there anything about being in England that you didn't like at that time?

HENRY: Well, I—I liked England very much. It was a nice—it's very nice country. The people are very nice. I couldn't say I didn't like it.

SIGRIST: Why did you want to leave England to come to the United States?

HENRY: Oh, my mother thought it was better for me. She didn't want me to stay [unclear]. She didn't want me to go stay in England.

SIGRIST: When you were growing up in Ireland what did you know about America?

HENRY: Well, all I knew was people would come back and tell me how nice it was and all that. And I always wanted to go to America.

SIGRIST: Did you know anybody who had been to America [unclear]?

HENRY: Oh, yes. I—I knew. I knew a lot of people that went back and forth. People used to come back to visit, you know.

SIGRIST: Did they seem any different to you?

HENRY: Oh, they always had nice clothes. That's one thing that I was attracted to. [chuckles]

SIGRIST: Well, how did you go about arranging to go to America?

HENRY: Oh, [unclear]—you always have to have a person to go to. Like, you can't go and get [unclear] and know where to go that's in [unclear]. I had an aunt that I came to in Braddock, Pennsylvania. It's a suburb of Pittsburgh.

SIGRIST: In Braddock?

HENRY: Yes.

SIGRIST: Braddock. She was your aunt. Was she your father's sister?

HENRY: My father's sister, yeah.

SIGRIST: Father's sister. Do you know anything about why she had come to America and why she—

HENRY: Same reason as I came. That's all that I can tell you. [chuckles]

SIGRIST: Was she single?

HENRY: No, she was married.

SIGRIST: She was married.

HENRY: [unclear] children.

SIGRIST: Now, did you leave for America from England or did you go back to Ireland before you left?

HENRY: No, no. I went back to Ireland and I—I—I did sail from England though—Liverpool, England.

SIGRIST: When you went back to Ireland, what did you have to do to get ready to leave?

HENRY: Oh, just—oh, was a travel agency and bought your fare, bought your passage. That's all.

SIGRIST: Do you remember how much it cost?

HENRY: I—I really couldn't tell you how much [chuckles] it cost; I don't remember.

SIGRIST: You got a good [unclear].

HENRY: I know we had—we had to have money, enough money in case we didn't pass the test, like of an exam by a doctor, you know, to go back.

SIGRIST: Did you get examined in Ireland too before you went to—

HENRY: Oh, yes. All kinds of examinations, references, you know.

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SIGRIST: Were there any diseases or problems that had been prevalent in your family—you mentioned your father had rheumatic fever—that they were checking for [unclear]?

HENRY: No, no. I—they never asked me anything like that. They just examined [unclear], didn't give me much of an examination.

SIGRIST: I see. Do you remember what you packed to take to America?

HENRY: Oh, I had regular clothes, like, oh, had nice clothes.

SIGRIST: What did people wear back then? What did a young woman in 19—

HENRY: I don't think they wore much different than they do today. It's a cool country, you know. Suits and coats, blouses and—it's the same. They're not much the same.

SIGRIST: How did you wear your hair back then?

HENRY: Oh, I think we had long hair then. The hair was long. Yes. The style was different. They didn't—everybody cut their hair back in the late '20s.

[END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A]

[BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE B]

SIGRIST: You mentioned you took clothes. Did you take anything else with you, objects of some sort?

HENRY: No, I don't think—we just took clothes and I guess a second pair of shoes. That's all.

SIGRIST: Did anyone give you a present, like a goodbye present?

HENRY: Oh, yes. A couple of people did. I mean, my aunt [unclear].

SIGRIST: Do you remember what?

HENRY: Handkerchiefs, of course, nice, fancy handkerchiefs and maybe a scarf. Not much. Something like that.

SIGRIST: Did your family present you with a dinner or some kind of—

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HENRY: Oh, we had a party in the house and a lot of my friends there. It was a party, yeah.

SIGRIST: What sticks out in your mind about that party?

HENRY: Well, it was—[unclear]—I was kind of sad leaving, you know. It was very sad. It wasn't—it's not that easy. [chuckles]

SIGRIST: What—what were you the saddest about? What—what—what were you—

HENRY: Leaving my parents and my family. That was—and it was so far away then. There were no airplanes at all in those days. It was 1920.

SIGRIST: What—what time of the year is it that you left?

HENRY: November.

SIGRIST: In November of 1920. The morning that you were to leave and you went back to England—correct—you went to Liverpool?

HENRY: Yeah. Oh, we had to go to Dublin and then take a boat back to England to Liverpool.

SIGRIST: Did any of your family travel with you?

HENRY: Oh, no. Just to the town [unclear].

SIGRIST: Just to—just to—

HENRY: That was—there was quite a cro—there was quite a few with me—people, young people like myself.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh. Did your parents go, at least, to—did they go to Dublin, maybe?

HENRY: To train—to train. No, no, no. Just to the train.

SIGRIST: To the train.

HENRY: Yes. Very sad.

SIGRIST: Yeah. You took a boat to Liverpool, you said.

HENRY: Yeah, from Dublin.

SIGRIST: And what was the name of the ship that you came on?

HENRY: Carmanian.

SIGRIST: You came on the Carmanian?

HENRY: Yeah, that's a—an English—an English company.

SIGRIST: Yeah. And what did you think when you got on the big ship?

HENRY: Well, it was nice. It was a very nice ship.

SIGRIST: Had you ever been on a large ship before?

HENRY: Oh, no, no. Not that size.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh. Where did you stay in the ship?

HENRY: In—we had, like, a room and there was four people in it, two beds down and then the beds on top. Girls. We were all young girls.

SIGRIST: Were you—did you know these women before you—

HENRY: Well, I did. I knew—I knew a couple of them. Yes, I did. But I didn't know everybody and there was a big—I don't know how many hundred people was there. But it was very—we [unclear] party, had a great time.

SIGRIST: How long did the ship take to get to the United States?

HENRY: Well, it was over two weeks.

SIGRIST: It took two weeks.

HENRY: Got caught up in a storm.

SIGRIST: Oh, what do you remember about the storm?

HENRY: Well, the boat wanted to go very slow, you know. Waves were very high, you know. That's all I remember.

SIGRIST: Did you get sick?

HENRY: If I did—at first, I was sick—seasick quite a bit when I went. Everybody was sick.

SIGRIST: Well, it's November, right? It's a rough ocean in November. What do you remember about eating on the ship?

HENRY: Oh, the food—the food was [unclear].

SIGRIST: Where did you eat on the ship?

HENRY: We had a dining room.

SIGRIST: What—what class did you travel?

HENRY: Well, I guess we called it steerage on those days.

SIGRIST: What about—you mentioned parties. Were there any other kind of organized activities?

HENRY: Oh, yeah. There was party, dancing and—it was very nice, a lot of fun.

SIGRIST: Did you like to dance when you were young?

HENRY: Oh, yeah. I used to like to dance.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh. What about sing?

HENRY: No.

SIGRIST: No, didn't like to sing. [laughs] All right, so the ship took two weeks to get to the United States.

HENRY: Yes, yeah.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about the ship coming into New York?

HENRY: Oh, it was absolutely lovely coming into New York. It was a lovely, sunny day and I thought—you don't get much sun in November in Ireland, you know. And I thought it was—more north than here, you know. I thought it was lovely to look at it. You know, nice. It was—happened to be a lovely day, nice, bright.

SIGRIST: Do you remember seeing the Statue of Liberty?

HENRY: No, I didn't see it. No. I didn't happen to see it then. I thought later.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh. And—and what do you remember about Ellis Island?

HENRY: Very nice.

SIGRIST: How—do you remember how you got to Ellis Island?

HENRY: Well, first, we got out of the boat and we had to—had to walk to Ellis Island. And Ellis Island was very—they were very nice.

SIGRIST: What happened there?

HENRY: Well, we just—they examined us but not too much. We stayed there, I think, maybe a cou—three or four hours.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what they examined?

HENRY: My eyes and [unclear] my heart and that. Not much.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh.

HENRY: Not a big—they didn't even strip you. No.

SIGRIST: Did you see anything there that you had never seen before?

HENRY: Well, I didn't—everything was quite different though. I couldn't explain to you. I didn't—I saw the same kind of candies. You—a lot of candy. And, like—like, there would be a nanny—like a store. There was things to buy if you wanted to buy stuff. But—

SIGRIST: Did you get any food while you were there?

HENRY: I don't remember having any—any meal there. No. I forget that part. I don't remember having a meal there. I brought—I don't—there was very nice crackers there in Ire—in Ireland. And those cream crackers you—I often bought. And I bought a package of crackers. I thought I'd have some crackers and I was so disappointed. They were saltines and I hated them. [chuckles] I left them, just left them there. I couldn't eat. I [unclear]. To this day I hate saltines. [chuckles]

SIGRIST: Did someone come and get you at Ellis Island?

HENRY: No, no. I had to go—I went—it was evening then and at night I [unclear] on a train to Pittsburgh.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh. Do you remember anything about that train ride from—
from New York to Pittsburgh that sticks out in your mind about
maybe what you were seeing, what you saw or what you were
[unclear]?

HENRY: Well, it was dark. It was nighttime. I didn't see much. I know
there wasn't any—there—any curtains on the—on the—they
called it the [unclear] train. No curtains.

SIGRIST: No curtains.

HENRY: No curtains.

SIGRIST: Or cushions?

HENRY: And just the bare train. Of course, we were young. We—it didn't
bother us for—it was three or four girls. We all went on different
trains, you know.

SIGRIST: But all came from the same town.

HENRY: Yeah—no. The—there were so many people from every part of
Ireland going to different parts of the United States, you know.
There wasn't very many came with me. There was—there was
about three girls and a young man. He was going to Kansas City.
And one girl went to Carnegie [PH]. Another girl went, I think,
another small town near Pittsburgh. And then one girl just came
to Braddock with me.

SIGRIST: Did someone come to meet you at the train station?

HENRY: No.

SIGRIST: How did you get to your aunt's house?

HENRY: Well, first we went—this—this friend of mine, we went to her
house first. And then her—we had breakfast, a visit and then
they brought me to my aunt's house [unclear].

SIGRIST: How well did you know this aunt?

HENRY: I never even saw her.

SIGRIST: You'd invoice even—saw her?

HENRY: No, no.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh. Can you tell me what your initial meeting was like?

HENRY: Oh, she was very happy to see me. They were nice. Just nice. She had a lovely home. I was very much impressed with American.

SIGRIST: What was—what was her name?

HENRY: Annie—Annie Gorum [PH].

SIGRIST: Gorum?

HENRY: Yes.

SIGRIST: Gorum.

HENRY: McGreth was her maiden name.

SIGRIST: McGreth. Well, she'd be your father's—

HENRY: Yeah, sister.

SIGRIST: —sister. And what did her husband do for a living?

HENRY: Well, she didn't have a husband; he was dead and—

SIGRIST: Oh.

HENRY: —she was a widow. A lovely big house. She used to keep rooms. A lot of people worked in the mills and they used to room with her.

SIGRIST: Sort of like a boarding house.

HENRY: Yeah, yeah.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh.

HENRY: Yeah.

SIGRIST: How long was it before you got a job?

HENRY: A couple of weeks, I guess.

SIGRIST: What did you do in those first couple weeks?

HENRY: I stayed around with my aunt visiting. I had two aunts in the same town. They were very nice. They—my cousins were nice.

SIGRIST: What struck you as being different in America?

HENRY: Oh, I thought the standard of living was so much higher. That's one thing I liked. I liked America right away. Right away, I liked it.

SIGRIST: How long did you live with your aunt?

HENRY: Oh, just about a—about a year, I guess.

SIGRIST: About a year. Can you describe the room that—that—where you slept? You know, [unclear]—

HENRY: Oh, regular room. Very nice house, like—like—like any nice house [unclear]. Nice house.

SIGRIST: What—did your aunt have electricity in the house?

HENRY: Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: Had electricity. Did she have running water in the house?

HENRY: Oh, yes. Everything.

SIGRIST: So that was an improvement from Ireland.

HENRY: Yes!

SIGRIST: [laughs]

HENRY: That's what I said. The standard of living was so much better.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh. And, all right, so—so you didn't have a job for the first couple weeks.

HENRY: Yeah.

SIGRIST: What was the first job you got?

HENRY: Oh, I got a job in a store for awhile.

SIGRIST: Doing what?

HENRY: Selling stuff. I don't know. [chuckles] It was a dry goods store, you know. I had that for awhile and I used to work with my aunt. She had a store too.

SIGRIST: She had a store as well as—

HENRY: Yeah.

SIGRIST: This is the same aunt who had the—

HENRY: Yeah.

SIGRIST: —has the boarders and—

HENRY: Yeah—no, no. Other aunt, another aunt.

SIGRIST: Different.

HENRY: Another aunt.

SIGRIST: This is the other aunt.

HENRY: Yes, there was always a job there to get. I worked in the house. I used to go to school. She wanted me to go to school. I used to go. I liked [several words unclear].

SIGRIST: What kind of school?

HENRY: Business school.

SIGRIST: Business school?

HENRY: Uh-hmm.

SIGRIST: Was that in this town?

HENRY: In the town of Braddock, yeah.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh. That's interesting. Can you talk a little more about business school and maybe who else was attending business school?

HENRY: Oh, there was a lot of Amer—mostly American children going there.

SIGRIST: What about men, women?

HENRY: No, no. Not men. Just young people.

SIGRIST: All women.

HENRY: Young people, like—well, some were older than I was. Much older.

SIGRIST: But they were all female.

HENRY: Yes.

SIGRIST: Oh, that's interesting. Were—were they immigrants.

HENRY: No, they were not. They were just from business school.

SIGRIST: Were any of the other students that you remember an immigrant, such as yourself?

HENRY: No, that's—no, not at that school.

SIGRIST: You just remember it being the—being the—

HENRY: Uh-hmm.

SIGRIST: That's interesting. When you worked in the store—that was your first job—what did you do with your money?

HENRY: [chuckles] Bought some clothes and, well, like any girl do with money, you know, I need [unclear] clothes and at Christmas I sent some to my mother and father, present.

SIGRIST: What about the passage? Who paid for the—for the ship?

HENRY: My father and [unclear].

SIGRIST: Were you under any obligation to pay that money back to them?

HENRY: Well, no, not exactly. But I did pay it back, yeah. I brought my sister out and I think it was very nice to get here. My—my sisters liked it too [unclear].

SIGRIST: They came later [unclear].

HENRY: Most—most—most everyone likes America that comes here.

SIGRIST: Sometimes they don't. [chuckles] Every so often someone doesn't.

WOMAN: Somebody doesn't.

HENRY: Huh?

SIGRIST: Somebody doesn't. Your first job was in the store.

HENRY: Yeah.

SIGRIST: And you were there for how long?

HENRY: Oh, about six or seven months then.

SIGRIST: And then what happened?

HENRY: Oh, then I got a job down in Spring Lake in New Jersey and I—I never went back to Pittsburgh to live again.

SIGRIST: How did you—how did you find out about—

HENRY: I had an aunt in Trenton. I went to see an aunt in Trenton and I got a job there. Then I—I—now, only to visit. I went back to visit several times. But I liked down here better. I figured it was nearer Ireland. [chuckles] When I was young that's what I always thought about Ireland.

SIGRIST: What did you do in Spring Lake? What was the job that you got?

HENRY: I took care of children.

SIGRIST: Sort of—not unlike what you did in England?

HENRY: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh.

HENRY: [unclear].

SIGRIST: And did that last for a long time?

HENRY: Oh, until I got married.

SIGRIST: Which was when?

HENRY: Oh, I was married in—oh, 1929.

SIGRIST: 1929. Oh, so you did stay there for a chunk of time.

HENRY: Mmm.

SIGRIST: When did you go back to Ireland for the first time?

HENRY: 1932.

SIGRIST: So you were married by then?

HENRY: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Right. So you were married in 1929. What was your husband's name?

HENRY: Walter Henry. Henry.

SIGRIST: Walter Henry.

HENRY: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Henry was his last name.

HENRY: Mmm.

SIGRIST: How did you meet Walter?

HENRY: Oh, at a par—a girlfriend. He was—I had my girlfriend and this was her brother and we met at a party. That's all. Same as anybody. [chuckles]

SIGRIST: And what was his nationality?

HENRY: Irish like me. Same [unclear].

SIGRIST: Born in Ireland?

HENRY: Yes.

SIGRIST: Where in Ireland did he come from?

HENRY: Sligo.

SIGRIST: Sligo.

HENRY: Mmm.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh. Was there a large Irish population where you [unclear]?

HENRY: Well, not—not as much as New York. We lived in Trenton for years. I liked Trenton, New Jersey—was a nice town.

SIGRIST: So did your husband go with you in 1932 when you went back?

HENRY: No, no.

SIGRIST: He didn't? Tell me, when you went back, how did—how were you affected by the trip going back? How did—did it look any different to you when you went back to Ireland?

HENRY: It did—it—every place looks different when you're away from it awhile. I wouldn't want to stay there again. I always want to come back to America. I like—

SIGRIST: What about your parents? Did they seem—

HENRY: Oh.

SIGRIST: —different to you in some way?

HENRY: They had grown older, you know.

SIGRIST: Well, my goodness. It had been how many years? Twelve years since you—almost 12 years. How long did you stay?

HENRY: About eleven months, I think it was.

SIGRIST: Oh, a good chunk of time.

HENRY: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Did you have children at that time?

HENRY: Yes.

SIGRIST: Yes? Can you name your children for me?

HENRY: This one here. [chuckles]

SIGRIST: Say their full names for me.

HENRY: Mar—Peggy.

SIGRIST: Yeah, Peggy.

HENRY: John Andrew.

SIGRIST: John Andrew.

HENRY: [unclear].

SIGRIST: John Andrew was one person, right?

HENRY: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Yeah. So you had two—

HENRY: Two—two children.

SIGRIST: So who was—who was around in 1932?

HENRY: My mother and father and my sister. You know, it was—

SIGRIST: Were—but were both of your children born at that time?

HENRY: Yes.

SIGRIST: So they were in Ireland. Peggy was in Ireland, right? [chuckles]

P. O'CONNELL: A little bit. [chuckles]

HENRY: She was in Ireland last summer too.

SIGRIST: So you stayed 11 months.

HENRY: It's a hassle to get back. That's why I stayed a little while, to get a rest. [chuckles] But I'm telling you, it's a big job to take two children anywhere.

SIGRIST: Well, and they were small children.

HENRY: Nervous too about anything would happen to them. [chuckles]

SIGRIST: Did your parents ever have any desire to come to this country?

HENRY: Well, my father was here when I was young.

SIGRIST: Right, but he left.

HENRY: In his early 20s. He—he didn't stay.

SIGRIST: But I mean, later on [unclear]—

HENRY: My—I wanted to see—my mother was married. She—as a rule, people didn't come. They had the farm at home. They wouldn't come. That—there was—they were happy where they were.

SIGRIST: And did you say two sisters came, of yours?

HENRY: Three or four—three sisters came.

SIGRIST: Three sisters.

HENRY: Well, in fact, four came but now they're—two—three of them are dead. One went back to Ireland.

SIGRIST: I never did ask you to name your brothers and sisters for me. Can you do that?

HENRY: Oh, my—my first sister's name, Delia.

SIGRIST: Delia. You did tell us that.

HENRY: And then Margaret.

SIGRIST: Margaret.

HENRY: And Patrick, my brother.

SIGRIST: Yeah. Is he the oldest in the family?

HENRY: No, no, no.

SIGRIST: No, okay.

HENRY: And Julia.

SIGRIST: You're the oldest in the family.

HENRY: I'm the oldest. Julia and—and Kathleen and Eileen and Frances.

SIGRIST: And your mother lost a child too.

HENRY: Yes.

SIGRIST: [unclear]. What did you like about America the most? What was the thing that you really liked about this country?

HENRY: Everything like—I liked everything about it.

SIGRIST: Is there one thing that—that—that you were particularly fond of?

HENRY: Well, I liked—the standard of living was better—now—than—than Ireland.

SIGRIST: You've mentioned that actually a couple of times in this interview. That must be something very important to you.

HENRY: Yes.

SIGRIST: To live well.

HENRY: To live well and everyone was better dressed, like it was way different. But I mean, if—it's way different than it--than Ireland was.

SIGRIST: Did you become a citizen?

HENRY: Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: When?

HENRY: Oh, way back a long time ago. I couldn't remember.

SIGRIST: Was it before you were married or after?

HENRY: Oh, before.

SIGRIST: It was before you were married. Does anything stick out in your mind about the procedure of becoming a citizen, what you had to do?

HENRY: Well, I really was glad, like, because you're better off to be a citizen, you know, when you're here. When you come here, you might as well be a citizen. That's the way—you can vote and—

SIGRIST: Do you remember, was it difficult for you to—to learn [unclear]?

HENRY: Oh, no, no, no. No, no. Nothing like that. Nothing was difficult.

SIGRIST: What do you think—when you think about yourself as being an Irish woman, what do you think about you is the most Irish? What aspect of your personality do you think of as being particularly Irish?

HENRY: [chuckles] I don't know. It's hard to tell. I really don't know. There's so many Irish people in New York. [chuckles] Where I live is all Irish.

SIGRIST: What do you think would have happened to you, had you not come to America? How do you think your life would have gone?

HENRY: Well, I don't know. I—I always wanted to come to America. I never—was any intention of staying in Ireland. I grew up with that idea that I'd go to America. And I never—when I went back I liked it and I enjoyed it while I was there but I wanted to come back here. Still want—still like it.

SIGRIST: How—how many times have you gone to Ireland?

HENRY: Several times. Seven or eight times.

SIGRIST: Wow! When was the last time?

HENRY: Three years ago.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh.

HENRY: So—

SIGRIST: What did you do in your life that you're the most proud of?

HENRY: [chuckles] Oh, raised my family, my children—the most—the most thing I'd say I did that I—I have good children, good grandchildren.

SIGRIST: How many grandchildren?

HENRY: Sixteen.

SIGRIST: Any great grandchildren?

HENRY: Ten.

SIGRIST: One was born—

HENRY: Last Sunday.

SIGRIST: Was that a great grandchild that was just born?

HENRY: Last Sunday, wasn't it?

P. O'CONNELL: Say her name now.

HENRY: Huh? Elizabeth.

J. O'CONNELL: Elizabeth. She was born on Sunday.

HENRY: What—what day was Sunday, Peggy? What day of the month?

P. O'CONNELL: [unclear] 16th.

J. O'CONNELL: Today's the 20th so—

P. O'CONNELL: Sixteenth.

J. O'CONNELL: The 21st.

P. O'CONNELL: February 16th.

SIGRIST: Well, I guess this is probably a good place to end. You have a great memory. Thank you.

HENRY: [chuckles]

SIGRIST: [unclear] ask you these questions. This is Paul Sigrist signing off with Mary Ann Henry on Friday, February 21st, 1997 with your daughter, Peggy O'Connell, in attendance here in River Edge, New Jersey. Thank you.

HENRY: Well—

[END OF INTERVIEW]