

EI-916

PEGGY ROBERTS

BIRTH DATE: OCTOBER 5, 1905

INTERVIEW DATE: JULY 7, 1997

AGE AT TIME OF INTERVIEW: 91

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INTERVIEWER: PAUL E. SIGRIST

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RESIDENCES:

- **US: GRANVILLE, NY; SCOTIA, NY; NEW YORK, NY.**

Historian's Note: US born (1905) daughter of Welsh Immigrants.

SIGRIST: Good morning, this is Paul Sigrist for the National Park Service. Today is Wednesday, July 30, 1997. I think, yes?

ROBERTS: Eh-hmm.

SIGRIST: I'm in Scotia, New York, and that's spelled S-C-O-T-I-A. And I'm here with Miss Peggy Roberts. Miss Roberts did not come through Ellis Island. She was born in Granville, New York. That's G-R-A-N-V-I-L-L-E. She was born in 1905, and she is the daughter of Welsh immigrants. Her father came sometime; she's not sure when. Her mother arrived in the U.S. in 1892, with three children. And a few years ago, Miss Roberts was very helpful to me in, in locating information about Welsh immigrants in New York State. And I'm looking forward to interviewing her and meeting her for the first,

ROBERTS: [Laughs] Yes.

SIGRIST: ...time after all these years. Miss Roberts, can we begin by you giving me your birth date.

ROBERTS: My birthday?

SIGRIST: Yes.

ROBERTS: October the 5th, 1905. [Laughs]

SIGRIST: October the 5th, 1905.

ROBERTS: 1905.

SIGRIST: You said you were born in Granville. And do you know, what do you know about your birth, or the circumstances around your birth?

ROBERTS: I know very little about that because my mother died five hours after I was born. And I was taken -- she was bapti-- after the funeral I was taken to a house. My father paid for them to take me. I was there about five years and I loved them. I really was spoiled. [Laughs] They had four daughters. And then my father re-married and I had to go back. I had to go home.

SIGRIST: How old were you when he re-married?

ROBERTS: Just about five, four or five.

SIGRIST: Well let's, before we talk about that, let's talk about what you know about your parents' life in Wales. Let's, let's, let's begin by, what was your father's name?

ROBERTS: Oh, Thomas Moses Roberts.

SIGRIST: Thomas Moses Roberts.

ROBERTS: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Do you know when he was born?

ROBERTS: Oh.

SIGRIST: That's okay you may not, you know. It's okay.

ROBERTS: Um, oh...

SIGRIST: You wanna use pencil and pen?

ROBERTS: Okay, well if you, I'm not...

SIGRIST: We're on, yes, we're on, we're recording.

ROBERTS: Oh, are we?

SIGRIST: Yes. [Laughs]

ROBERTS: I don't know if,

SIGRIST: Okay, that's okay.

ROBERTS: He died in 19-, he died in 1927, at the age --. He died in 1927, and he would have been about sixty-six at that time.

SIGRIST: What, what do you know about his upbringing and his family background?

ROBERTS: That -- I know that he had one sister. His mother and father died a few months apart, and he was the oldest. And he took care of the fam-, of the children. And he was left with, he was about fourteen. Then, the daugh-, the only girl, was adopted by English people. And then, I don't know about the uncles. But they all had to take the middle name of their grandfather, that I know. They're all Robert Moses, John Moses, Uncle Bob Moses. And there also was a Moses Roberts, but that Moses... My father's name is Thomas Moses, as I told you. I know that because tha-, now --

SIGRIST: Do you know where in Wales he grew up?

ROBERTS: Bethesda, Braichmelyn.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that?

ROBERTS: Bethesda,

SIGRIST: Bethesda like...

ROBERTS: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Yes.

ROBERTS: But the Braichmelyn is 'yellow arm', because the Welsh have to use -- their adjectives follow their nouns. So 'braich' is arm, and 'melyn' is yellow. That's all I can say. [Laughs]

SIGRIST: [Laughs] Do you know where that is in the country?

ROBERTS: It's near, Menai Bridge, or Menai, the Strait of Menai in the northern, near Caernarfon. Because my father did speak of Caernarfon castles, so... And I had a sister names Menai, after...

SIGRIST: How do you spell Menai?

ROBERTS: M-E-N-A-I.

SIGRIST: What kind of stories did your father tell, about his own childhood and his growing up?

ROBERTS: [Deep breath] Not too many. Not as many,[Sigh] I don't know. Well he had a hard life, he really did. And, then he married a second time, you know, I don't know. He didn't seem to talk about, you know, there.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me a little bit about your father's personality?

ROBERTS: [Deep Breath] He, well I'll say he was strict and I... [Laughs] Sunday paper, we got the Sunday paper. It was put on a stand. [Laughs] We wouldn't touch it until Monday. He wouldn't either; he never read the Sunday paper. He was strict and we went to church, we were...

SIGRIST: What religion?

ROBERTS: Congregational, Welsh Congregational. There were two Welsh churches in Granville. And we had to go to church. And we went to church on a Tuesday night, every Tuesday we had to go. The sermon, the minister preached his sermon on Sunday and you had a verse, and he preached that. We had to learn that verse by Tuesday. Then all of us children would go up front in the church and say our verse. If you didn't know it, or if you hadn't been to church, you didn't have that verse, they would say one that they said over, and over, and over. And, that,

SIGRIST: Were there ways that you practiced your religion at home?

ROBERTS: No, no, no religion at home. Not even grace at the table. Which, for such -- . Other ways --our vegetables were all prepared the day befo-, a Saturday. If anything happened like if you spilled something on the floor, you wouldn't get the broom, you'd have to pick it up. That part was so s--, [Laughs] I don't know what you'd say. Strict and firm, you know, about that. [Laughs] And come home from church; you just sat on the piazza there in your best clothes, for the day. And I did go to the Baptist church. My brother did too -- for Sunday school, because we wanted to go to their picnic in the summer. That was why we went there. And it was after our Sunday school we would run to the Baptist church, was near our church. And,

SIGRIST: What language did your father speak?

ROBERTS: Well, he spoke Welsh with my mother, unless... it wasn't my mother there. But most of the t-- but then he, with us, we taught him English. We really did. We would correct him. He tried hard and he did, you know, was learning.

SIGRIST: What language was the, the church service conducted in?

ROBERTS: Oh, Welsh.

SIGRIST: In Welsh? Can you; is there a prayer that you remember now, in Welsh?

ROBERTS: I can't say it. I mean, no. I, I can't. And, after a while it was getting more English, you know there... But in the beginning it was Welsh. And as I say, my father didn't speak Welsh to us children. But to my mother, they spoke Welsh. So that way, I lost out on the Welsh. You know.

SIGRIST: Did your stepmother speak English as well?

ROBERTS: She spoke better English than my father. And -- but it was Welsh too, you know, like that. Especially if they wanted to say something about us kids, like we all knew it was what -- you would listen then. [Laughs]

SIGRIST: What, what, what ways, what, what sort of Welsh traits did your father have? Things that made, that were typically Welsh that were parts of his personality.

ROBERTS: He had a - I have to tell you there. I wouldn't --

SIGRIST: It's a tough question.

ROBERTS: Yeah, because --

SIGRIST: Were there things that he liked to do that were sort of typical Welsh?

ROBERTS: Oh. Well he liked to go fishing. Oh, that was his big -- and he had a small garden. And he liked that little garden. Just, you know, a family plot there. But the fishing, anytime it rained -- where he worked in the slate

quarries – well, he would come home, go fishing. He always wanted a can of peas -- a certain kind of peas. We had to keep 'em in the cupboard [Laughs] in case it rained. And he'd opened that, put it in the glass jar. Vinegar, salt, and pepper. Then he'd go fishing. [Laughs]

SIGRIST: Do you remember a certain incident where he caught a particularly good fish?

ROBERTS: No, no. We always had salmon. [Laughs] And the salmon, because we'd be disappointed, you know? [Laughs] No, they were very small. In fact, I -- his fishing was I think maybe just to get away from everything, to be by himself.

SIGRIST: Can you talk a little bit about his work in the slate quarry? This was in Granville?

ROBERTS: At Granville.

SIGRIST: And, and what was his job there?

ROBERTS: Well, (oh, I don't need glasses, I wonder --). He worked in the pit. And he was a dynamite-- or he blast, you know, the slate. And that was a good job. He was the boss. The foreigners called him 'boss' and everything. And when my mother would say, 'Your father took matches today'. We knew then that he -- they were going-- he was gonna blast the slate. And that is what he did. No. If it rained, of course, they couldn't and he'd come home. And we'd always say, "Smit day." I don't know why this, "Smit day." That meant no pay, and they're home, you know.

SIGRIST: You mentioned the foreigners called him boss. Who were the other workers?

ROBERTS: Polish and -- Polish, Italian, and Slavics, you know. Because they would have to come to the house to get their pay in the little envelope. And my brother and I would stand by the porch, you know. And when they came out, they would give us mo-- they didn't -- understand money from this, you know. We did it until my father caught us. [Laughs] That was the end of our nickels or pennies, you know. [Laughs]

SIGRIST: Cheating the poor immigrants. [Laughs]

ROBERTS: Not too much, because it was just -- you know. But I -- well, I'll say it was a principle that we shouldn't have been doing it.

SIGRIST: Were there other Welsh people, Welsh immigrants who worked in, in this industry?

ROBERTS: Yes. Now where we lived, up at the head of the street there, this man had a horse and wagon. And he would take the people from Granville to the slate quarries, a few miles away. And they'd -- it was always noted that they would be singing all the time -- going to and coming home through the main streets. Singing. Because, you know, that -- that I can remember. And my -- as I say -- my father was a boss or was in the slate quarry. And this o-- and during this summer he had one of the boys (the older boys that came through) work in the quarry during the summer. I suppose he needed the money.

SIGRIST: One of your older brothers?

ROBERTS: Yes, the one that came through with -- as my mother's a baby.

SIGRIST: With your mother in 1892.

ROBERTS: And my father was in the pit. He has told me this story -- the longest day of his life, because there was an accident up above. And my brother was mangled in the machine and my father was in the pit. Usually they would come and tell him what was wrong, something broke. And see, he -- they'd have to lift him up and that was my brother's job, with a, you know, years ago.

SIGRIST: Some kind of a crank you're --

ROBERTS: Yeah.

SIGRIST: ...gesturing. So your father's down underneath...

ROBERTS: Way, way down in there. And he was there for about three or four hours because my brother was mangled in the, in there. As he said the longest time of his life, because he knew something had happened to John. Otherwise, one of the men would come to the end of the -- you know -- the pit and tell him what would happen. No one came near. So he knew that.

SIGRIST: Can you be more specific about what happened to your brother. I mean what exactly happened? Do you know?

ROBERTS: Well, he went home. This is what the story is. He went home at noon hour. They'd -- they at that time lived in Vermont, in West Pawlet or [not understood]. He went home for lunch. And the story was he was a little late coming back. And he hurried, you know, they'd start the motion of the -- and he pushed. You know the -- it wasn't going quick enough. Then when he pushed and there was no bars or any protection there, and that's what happened, I think.

SIGRIST: It was his arm or...

ROBERTS: Oh, he got right in and mangled. My father was so strict. My brother and I, we couldn't even cut a -- get a knife to slice bread. "Be careful of your arm! Be careful of your arm!" And even the sewing machine as I grew up, he'd come from the other room if I was using it. "Be careful of your hand". I couldn't sew, and you know my brother said it had marked him and his kids. He still yells at the kids fre--, "Be careful, be careful, your hand." We heard that all our life, "Be careful, your arm."

SIGRIST: How old were you when that happened?

ROBERTS: How?

SIGRIST: How old were you when that happened?

ROBERTS: Now let me see, that ha-- I was not born. We were living in Ver-, no it happened in 19, 19... My mother came over in 1892, with the two boys. You know they were two -- two years, and three, or you know around that age. And...

SIGRIST: And it happened prior to your birth?

ROBERTS: Yes.

SIGRIST: Yes, did your brother survive the accident?

ROBERTS: Oh no, he was all mangled and...

SIGRIST: No, he, he, he, the whole thing, I see.

ROBERTS: Yeah.

SIGRIST: I see.

ROBERTS: And my mother was pregnant for my sister, at the time. And she is the one that was named Menai.

SIGRIST: Eh-hmm.

ROBERTS: And I have a sister, Sephorah, so we got the Welsh names. [Laughs]

SIGRIST: Can you spell Sephorah please?

ROBERTS: S-E-P-H-O-R-A-H.

SIGRIST: And your name when you were born was?

ROBERTS: Margaret Jane, after my mother. And my father -- I us-- used to say I don't like my name. And he'd say, 'Well you were, we had planned on you being Sara Gwendola'. [Laughs] I said I wouldn't have been, I said I would have been Sally Gwen. I would have been no Sally Gwendola. That I can remember him saying, but--. And that I was baptized at my mother's casket. The funeral was --. The day I was born there was an accident in the quarry -- not my father, where he worked. But eleven men were killed in another quarry, and they were Polish and Slavic. And they couldn't be buried on Sunday. And my mother was the first one to be buried, or have a funeral on Sunday. Because they had to be, you know, there and all that. So the minister was from Wales, that took charge of the funeral and all.

And they said (oh, this my father said, too) -- he took my mother's wedding ring off her hand and put it in my hand. Well as soon as the service or as soon as I was baptized, the people that were gonna bring me up took me and they found the ring in my hand. Well, my father was -- he didn't like that at all. And I had the ring. I grew up, I never wore the ring or anything. But my niece, my brother's daughter was Margaret Jane, named after me and her grand-- . So when she was getting married, I asked her if she'd like the ring. Well I took it to the jeweler because it looked, eww, it looked copper to me. It didn't look like gold. And they said it was a very valuable, it was higher than the fourteen. It was more like twenty-something. So she got the ring to be bap-, or to be married. And the marriage wasn't good. Her mother -- not Welsh, from the south -- blamed the ring. [Laughs] So she said take the ring back, but I didn't. Mar-, Margaret Jane has the ring.

SIGRIST: Any -- when, after you were growing up, do you remember there ever being an accident in the mine? In the slate quarries,

ROBERTS: Yes.

SIGRIST: ...when you were growing up?

ROBERTS: Yes, I do. The man that lived on our street, and I was great friend of the family. He -- there was a -- the wires were down. And that's all he was supposed to tell a man -- that it was live wires there.

SIGRIST: These were electrical wires that were there?

ROBERTS: Yeah, but this is --. And they said that he was telling them all, you know, about the wiring and everything. But he picked up the wire and that -- . He was he was electrocuted, of course. And I played with those girls, so

they was their father. That I definitely, you know, that was near home. It hit me hard.

SIGRIST: Was, was, was this a, a dangerous profession with the slate?

ROBERTS: Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: ...the slate mine. Because your father's in a, sort of a manager position, so,

ROBERTS: Oh, way down in the pit.

SIGRIST: Yeah.

ROBERTS: I --. Now. When there's a water, after a while the pits were up till heads. You been around West Pawlet or any of tho-- ? Oh, well if you never seen one of the quarries. My brother was killed in the road there and one of the pits, now it's filled with water. See, when it was filled. Yes. And my father, I'm like him. We don't believe in doctors. [Laughs] I don't go. I haven't been to the doctor, taken a pill, eight or ten years. I'll take that back, I took one the other night, I don't know why. [Laughs] I said no, not again. But he got hurt once in the quarry and he had a scar all the way up to his leg, all along the way. But it healed, by itself.

SIGRIST: How did that happen? Do you know?

ROBERTS: So my stepsister said -- that he went to get his watch. We had these big watch, you know, and it was under a rock or something. And he went to get it before, I guess. They dynamized [sic], see, a little at a time. You had to watch where you were going to put the dynamite in order, that you wouldn't get too much slate up. And then the slate would come up in a big

thing and then they'd have somebody, you know, doing different jobs. Well, he had to do just so much in that place, -- you know -- the hole to get it going. Yes, that I me-- and another time I remember they were all on strike up there.

SIGRIST: Oh, talk about that, that'd be very interesting. What do you remember about the strike?

ROBERTS: Well, I only remember that --. Well, it was hard times because there was no relief or anything, you know. And, this one Sunday, one of the men had had the big slate quarries, came and wanted (oh, the strike I guess was settled or something). But he wanted my father work in his quarry. That was the Sheldon's, and my father worked for Norton's. And he came on a Sunday. My father had had nothing to do with him. He said, 'Come tomorrow'. He wouldn't discuss the job. At that time he needed a job. He needed it. I remember my mother was mad that he didn't let him in to, you know, things like that. He said, "Tomorrow". He was, hi --

SIGRIST: Were, were the quarries unionized? Were there?

ROBERTS: Not at that time, but later on, yeah, yeah. No, not at that time.

SIGRIST: Can you describe for me, like where you lived, was this some sort of company housing for the...?

ROBERTS: No, no, no. From -- well, you see. When my father got married (so they say) my mother, stepmother...

SIGRIST: Stepmother.

ROBERTS: ...was, had bought a house. [Laughs] But she, but we used to say she -- she got married just so that he would pay for the house. [Laughs] That isn't all on tape, is it?

SIGRIST: That's, yeah, you know the tape is rolling. [Laughs] Yes.

ROBERTS: Laughs] How can the?

SIGRIST: The house that you lived in, can you -- can you just describe what it looked like?

ROBERTS: Yes. It was a double house, if you know...

SIGRIST: Like a two-family?

ROBERTS: Two-family.

SIGRIST: Ah-huh.

ROBERTS: Ah-huh. And we had the three bedrooms upstairs and a ba- not real bath -- part bath in the kitchen, a dining room, and the parlor. We never went in the parlor. Only for a funeral or some special, otherwise you didn't go in there. And that, and I can remember the time we had electricity put in.

SIGRIST: Oh, ex-, describe that for me.

ROBERTS: Eh-huh. And...

SIGRIST: What did you have before the electricity?

ROBERTS: Lamps. And I had to...[tapping noise] they were like that, you know, I had...

SIGRIST: You're pointing to a glass chimney,

ROBERTS: Just like that,

SIGRIST: ...here on the table.

ROBERTS: ...and I had to clean them every day. They'd be smoky. That was my job as I grew up, that I know, and put kerosene in that. But then, we -- the electricians were there. And they came from out of town. And excitement, you know, in our house there. And there was a piece of cloth or white thing over the switch or something. And my father had told us, you know, not to touch that, you know. That's -- and the night, there was a certain night he took that off after it was finished. And the electricity, [Deep sigh] I can remember being so excited about it. You know, the light! That was fun! It was all the time! We didn't know what they were doing there. But we -- I can see that plate thing over that we were sworn not to touch it. So that, after supper that night, we took it off. My father put the switch on and -- electricity. So that was a thrill and, you know, that time...

SIGRIST: Do you remember what year that happened? Or how old you were?

ROBERTS: Oh, I must have been about, I'd say eight years old, or nine. I, you know, young enough to-- . See my memory's not that good, I mean it,

SIGRIST: Let's talk a little bit about what you may know about your, your real mother, your birth mother. Do you know anything about her background?

ROBERTS: [Deep breath] Oh dear, I have, I have it right now, here. She...

SIGRIST: Just a little about...

ROBERTS: Okay. She was the only daughter and I understood she had eight -- or seven or eight -- brothers. And they -- her people lived in the Queen's house and they were -- her brothers were blacksmiths for the Queen Victoria. For the horse shoeing and all of that. And,

SIGRIST: Where was she from?

ROBERTS: She was from the same town.

SIGRIST: From the same town as...

ROBERTS: Bethesda, yeah.

SIGRIST: ...your father was? Bethesda?

ROBERTS: Yeah. And I was told; this lady went to Wales to -- you know -- visit and everything. And she was on a tour, and they said, that that was a white house. Only they call it in Welsh *tŷ gwyn* -- the adjectives follow their noun. And it was where my mother was born. And she said --. Or she was -- wasn't with the tour then, but she had seen my mother's house. She said everything there was carved Margaret Jane. The high chair had my na-- or her name, my mother's name -- on the bed. Margaret Jane everything near, cause they were all wood carvers -- or hor-. That's what they're, you were. And --

SIGRIST: What was her name?

ROBERTS: Thomas. Margaret Jane Thomas.

SIGRIST: Margaret Jane Thomas was her maiden name.

ROBERTS: Thomas. Eh-hmm. And they were wealthy compared to my father.

SIGRIST: Do you know how your parents met?

ROBERTS: No, I don't. And the thing I have from my uncle, the one that... They, my mother's family didn't want her to marry my father. They wanted her to marry a minister, but she married my father. [Laughs] And it -- in the family history there, that was handed down to me years ago -- it said she was a wealthy, a daughter. That her family were wealthy. So, it was tough to come to this country.

SIGRIST: Do you know any of the details about her actual crossing? You know that it was 1892.

ROBERTS: Eh-hmm, nothing.

SIGRIST: And you know your father had come before, sometime.

ROBERTS: I, see. With the second marriage, you never could speak.

SIGRIST: That's, that's typical, really.

ROBERTS: Eh-hmm.

SIGRIST: Not so unusual.

ROBERTS: Because I was playing with this one girl. And I went up, was at her house and her mother said, 'Are you going to put flowers on your mother's grave

today?' It was decoration time. I didn't know these, you know, things. And I went home, and I said what that lady had said. I could never play with that girl again or go up that house. There was...

SIGRIST: They didn't want you to know about that,

ROBERTS: My, and then my father --. He -- rather than have trouble. We could see that as-- . After he died, my sister and I used to talk about it, you know. And say, 'Boy" You know, rather than have any trouble. Because he had nothing but hardship after he came to this country. Now my brother died, as I said, and he was only twelve years old. And then my mother died at thirty-seven. And all of us kids. Then he -- I had a brother, twenty-one, that was killed. And then my sister died, appendicitis, at twenty-three.

SIGRIST: How old were you when your twenty-one year old brother?

ROBERTS: I was five years old or six.

SIGRIST: And how did he die?

ROBERTS: Well, the, he was working at Hoosick Falls. And he was, would be there all, the whole week and come home. Now I can barely remember him, because he used to save the Lincoln pennies for me. And the baker would come by, you know, everyday. And if you had a Lincoln penny, he'd give you two little cookies. But if you had an Indian head, he'd give you only one. [Laughs] So this brother always saved them for me, that I can remember him. And he was tall, and used -- and he love -- he hugged me so much. He hugged me more than anyone.

SIGRIST: What was his name?

ROBERTS: Robert.

SIGRIST: Robert. And tell me what the circumstances were around his death.

ROBERTS: Well, it's -- what I know is that --. Well, he was coming home. He was -- I don't know how -- it was over the railroad track. And they found him. But he -- they figured that somebody --. He wasn't, I dunno whether he was robbed or what. But at the hospital he never gained con--. The only thing he kept putting up two hand, two fingers. And in the back. So they figures two people must have come in the back and threw him over.

SIGRIST: And attacked him.

ROBERTS: That is what they figured it out, or thought it was. That was in Troy hospital, it's American hospital. He died.

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SIGRIST: What job did he have in Hoosick Falls, 'cause obviously he didn't go into slate quarry?

ROBERTS: No, no, it wasn't. No I don't know, never too much.

SIGRIST: And, and you mentioned a sister, too, who died.

ROBERTS: Menai.

SIGRIST: Menai. And how old was she?

ROBERTS: She die-- she was twenty-three years old, and she was just a few days over. She died at Ellis hospital here.

SIGRIST: In Schenectady?

ROBERTS: Yes. And she did work at the -- at the GE.

SIGRIST: And how old were you when that happened?

ROBERTS: I was eighteen. Because my sister, Sephorah, was to be married that November. And Menai was supposed to be the bridesmaid. And Menai died. And then my sister Sephorah didn't get married for a year later 'cause she was sick. Because it was very sudden -- her death, appendicitis. And so then, I was a bridesmaid for Sephor -- for Seph. We always called her Seph there.

SIGRIST: So, you're father, actually, has lost three of his children, plus his wife, right?

ROBERTS: Yes, in that short time. Never complained. That's what my sister and I used to say. [Deep sigh] We always called him *Tad*. [Laughs] And when I said -- we'd say -- he never complained. Never heard him, you know, say, you know, anything like that.

SIGRIST: You called your father Tod?

ROBERTS: *Tad*, T-A-D, or *Tada*.

SIGRIST: *Tada*. Is that a Welsh?

ROBERTS: Oh yes. That's father, or daddy, or *tada*, yeah. And that is, we had called him. I think when we wanted something, *Tad* we'd just call, you know. But if we wanted something, I think it was 'dear' or '*Tada*'. [Laughs] I

really do. I, we would use that all the time. So it must have been when we wanted something.

SIGRIST: When you were growing up, was your father, obviously he didn't really talk about his, his,

ROBERTS: No.

SIGRIST: ...his, you're mother, and that part of his life. But was he anxious for you to understand your Welsh culture at all?

ROBERTS: No, no. He came to Amer-- but my brother used to say to him, he said, 'Oh, forget that. You left that country.' [Laughs] you know. And we would, we taught my father English and things like that. Oh, we would correct him. Yeah. He had -- he had a habit of saying he'd 'put things' to you, if he [Laughs] gave you something. And he -- he had some tomatoes he was going to give to the neighbor next door, his little garden. And he said, 'I'm going to put them to', you know. And we said, '*Tad*, give them. Don't say put.' And the window is open, and my brother and I were listening, you know. We went over there, "I put 'em to you." [Laughs] You know. But no, we taught -- . That annoys me sometimes with all this fuss of these, have to teach these -- the Spanish and all this extra things and the tapes. We went down, I was down in Atlanta there. You know. Not Atlanta, but President Roosevelt's home. And there everything was in Spanish first and then the English came on. I was so annoyed that time.

SIGRIST: Could your father, because he worked with Slavic people and Polish people, could he speak any of that?

ROBERTS: He only said 'Ashy mash' [*jak sie macie*] . And they'd say 'Goberee' [*dobrze a ty*].

SIGRIST: Which means?

ROBERTS: How are you? That's the only thing that my brother and I used to say when the -- when the men came for their envelopes. We used to say to them, 'Ushy mush'. [Laughs] So they -- I suppose, that's why we got the money 'cause we said 'ushy mush'.

SIGRIST: As children, what, were you allowed to play with the children of the other immigrant groups?

ROBERTS: They, not too much.

SIGRIST: Can you talk,

ROBERTS: We could...

SIGRIST: ...a little bit about how the, of the various groups that lived in this one town, and how they interacted.

ROBERTS: Well, see there was so many Welsh and then -- but the Welsh and the Irish, we got along very good.

SIGRIST: Did, did, did you live in a certain section of town? All the Welsh in one part of town?

ROBERTS: No, no it was --. Well, mostly was -- where I did live. But that, yeah, let me see. I'm trying to figure out where. Yeah, I think we were separated a little. I mean, we -- I do think we were.

SIGRIST: I guess, I guess I'm just curious if the popu-- the Welsh population in this town socialized with the Slavic population...

ROBERTS: Oh no, they couldn't speak.

SIGRIST: What kind of interaction?

ROBERTS: No. They didn't, none of the Slavish. Those children were like us in school, we could see. But no, we didn't --. Because even when I was fifteen or sixteen, I had -- you know how -- a boy. You think he's pretty nice? And he was Italian. I wouldn't dare let my father know, you know, like that. I'd have to go to the next house, you know, just to say hello to him. [Laughs] No, no, no.

SIGRIST: What, what, what ethnic group in town was the lowest on the totem pole? The, the group that was,

ROBERTS: Yeah.

SIGRIST: ...the least liked of any, anybody in town?

ROBERTS: Well, I -- I can't -- couldn't tell a Slavish from the Polish up there. But they were the ones that, you know...

SIGRIST: They were the most...

ROBERTS: Yeah.

SIGRIST: ...undesirable.

ROBERTS: And now I think they got beautiful homes and children. When you go to Granville, [laughs] he'll say one of the Polish names and it'll surprise you.

SIGRIST: Talk a little bit about going to school in this town because you've got a mixture, you've got a mixture of children from different nationalities.

ROBERTS: Yeah.

SIGRIST: What, what was the school environment?

ROBERTS: No,

SIGRIST: Or describe the school itself.

ROBERTS: No, I don't. Can't remember any of the Slavish or Polish. I can't remember any of them in school with me.

SIGRIST: Who was in school with you? What, what, what ethnic groups were in school?

ROBERTS: Irish, mostly Irish. And the only ones I can remember, the Welsh of course. The Welsh, some of the Welsh teachers, you know.

SIGRIST: Do you remember if most of the Welsh in town were immigrants or were they born here?

ROBERTS: Most immigrants. Just --

SIGRIST: Were they still coming in at that time? When you, when you were in school?

ROBERTS: Yes, a little. But not, you know --. Sometimes you'd hear of some Welshman going over to Wales and back with a wife, you know. And then it's going over to Wales to get a wife, you know. That [Laughs] I can remember.

SIGRIST: Was the Welsh Congregational Church that you attended, was that the only Welsh church?

ROBERTS: No, there was a Welsh Presbyterian Church. We had, Granville's full of churches: the Baptist, the Methodist, Presbyterian.

SIGRIST: Probably Catholic because the Slavic,

ROBERTS: The St. Mary's. And then there's a Polish church, Catholic Polish church. And then there was a little church I didn't know way out, but I didn't know what that was.

SIGRIST: Eh-hmm, eh-hmm. In my experience interviewing Welsh people, music seems to be an important part of the culture. Was that an important part of, of your family in growing up?

ROBERTS: We got gypped. Not one of us can sing a note. My father's brother -- all -- or hi-- brother lived in New York -- wonderful musicians and all. And then others in the -- in those -- distant, you know. Everyone music, except not one of us kids had. I don't know. That we -- I really got gypped on that. [Laughs]

SIGRIST: What about your father?

ROBERTS: No. I never remember him singing or even humming a tune or anything. Go to church, he'd hold a songbook and cut along with it. But that was it.

SIGRIST: Can you talk a little bit about the period around World War One, 1914-1918, and how the war may have affected you life?

ROBERTS: Let me see. My father's brother, Moses -- Will Moses -- was killed overseas.

SIGRIST: William was his first name?

ROBERTS: Yeah.

SIGRIST: William Moses.

ROBERTS: Yeah. And that, I can remember at the time, you'd get the letter edged in black. You know we had, we had --. I can remember getting that letter edged in black, you know, if somebody had died. And otherwise...

SIGRIST: Do you know what, what, what group he fought for? Was he fighting for America or for...

ROBERTS: No, Wales.

SIGRIST: Wales.

ROBERTS: He was in Wales.

SIGRIST: He was fighting for Wales.

ROBERTS: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Hmm.

ROBERTS: I have a little clipping about that. I don't know where, but that's how many years ago? And...

SIGRIST: How did your father feel about the First World War? How did your father feel about the First World War?

ROBERTS: He never, I don't know. We had to get the paper. We'd have to go uptown to get the latest news, you know, to get the paper all the time there. And that, I couldn't tell you. But I remember that time there was a time of, was a time of the flu, too. The flu epidemic was --.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about that?

ROBERTS: Yes, I do, because my brother and I both had the flu. And we, they had a doctor, when we had the flu. His wife used to say he'd call me the little girl, his little girl. And he used to say many people who were dead, weren't as sick as we were. And we couldn't -- . My sister Menai and Seph were working in the GE and we couldn't get castor oil up at the drug store -- was all out of it. So my father would go with a suitcase. Now, he'd get the suitcase. Menai and Seph would take it to Troy. It had a bottle of castor oil in it. And my father would be at the station at seven o'clock to get the castor oil and then send the suitcase back.

And they'd empty, and that was it. And that's, they did that with things. And I can remember people coming to see us with one orange, you know, as you were getting better. Or two eggs, you know. If they had chickens and things like that. Gives weight. And some of -- my stepsister's husband died in, during the flu time. And I can remember that. And a lady said to me, uptown one, 'Oh I thought you died'. You know. Because we,

I think my father had to come out of a service for one of them. Because I guess we were very sick at that time. We definitely were.

SIGRIST: When you say your father came out of the service...

ROBERTS: Well, for somebody. Oh a funeral. There was a funeral everyday almost up home, you know for some...

SIGRIST: You're talking about military service?

ROBERTS: No, no, no.

SIGRIST: Oh, you mean coming home from work.

ROBERTS: No, from the regular church service.

SIGRIST: Oh, the church service. Oh, I see. Ah-huh

ROBERTS: Yeah, Eh-hmm.

SIGRIST: Ah-huh. Did your father keep in contact with? He had a brother in New York, you said.

ROBERTS: Yes.

SIGRIST: Was that the brother that died, during the First World War?

ROBERTS: No, that was his -- no, no, that -- he was in Wales. This brother lived in New York. He's the one that met my mother, 'cause my father was working in the quarry. Evidently, he didn't have the money, and he didn't have, know how to get from West Pawlet to New York. And this brother

was working on the docks, in New York, and he has told me the story 'cause I lived there for a while with him. And, he said he had to meet the boat. And he went. And there would be three children. And they waited standing there.

And this lady, very tall, and she is looking bewildered and two little children. One holding her skirt (she had the lined skirt) and the other -- one boy on one side and one on the other -- clinging there. And he said, he didn't know what he would do. He -- how he was gonna tell Tom that his wife didn't come through. Now whether Uncle Bob knew her or not, I don't know that part. But Uncle Bob said, 'Oh, I was thinking what am I gonna tell Tom?' Then he felt sorry for the lady, he said. He looked one more time at her. And sh-- nobody had come after her or anything. And they were going through, you know, the Ellis Island there.

And so he went up to her, to see if he could help her in any way, and there discovered it was my mother. The baby, eight weeks old, is under the shawl. So he only saw two children all the time, because my, the baby, Catherine, was born there. So, Uncle Bob told me that many times when I lived there. That was, and I loved to hear it because I was older then. I was about eighteen or twenty then.

SIGRIST: Well, and your mother being such a mystery, in a way,

ROBERTS: Hmm?

SIGRIST: Your mother being such a mystery to you in a way,

ROBERTS: Yeah.

SIGRIST: ...I mean, here's an actual story about,

ROBERTS: Oh, I know.

SIGRIST: ...about this person.

ROBERTS: And then, when I was living home, you know -- well I must have been about eighteen years old or so. I had -- oh no, wait a minute. My sister Menai died in 1923. And she was twenty-three.

SIGRIST: That was appendicitis right?

ROBERTS: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Yeah.

ROBERTS: Right after, a month after she died, I got my first attack of appendicitis. And, I was going to go to Albany. That's where they would, for to see a doctor. And I evidently was taking pills or something, because I had a nightmare. And through the window my mother came into me. And she had this beautiful wand there, and she just went like that. And she said, 'Do you know who I am?' And I said, 'Yes, you're Ma.' And she said, 'How do you know?' She was, had a black dress on and I said, 'Cause you look like Seph.' And they always said Sephorah, my sister, looked like my mother. And she said, 'Wherever you are, I'm with you, but be a good girl.' And she went three times with that wand and said, 'Be a good girl, I'm with you.' She went out the window.

I ran into my father's bedroom and we never would have disturbed him. And tell him, 'Hurry up,' that ma was in my room, ma was in my room. It was so real. Now that is the only picture I have of my mother. They had no photos or anything. My father said they had plenty, but people would

come. My sister, see, was keeping the house and she was only fourteen. And they'd say, 'Oh I want this picture, remember your mother', and they were gone. So I never had a picture of my mother. Except that, and that's beautiful because I think that is the way she loo-, would look. [Laughs] I may be wrong, but the way they said she looked like Sephorah, you know, and all that.

SIGRIST: Did you ever, in later years, meet any of your mother's relatives? Or did your father keep in contact with any of her relatives?

ROBERTS: No.

SIGRIST: No.

ROBERTS: No, I never. There was something, maybe he wasn't well liked. I don't know, because they were disappointed in my mother marrying him. So, no, no. He went back to Wales when he got married to my -- 19-- . I was back at the ho-- it must be, I was six years old. It must have been about 1910 or so.

SIGRIST: In 19-, he went back to Wales?

ROBERTS: Wales, with...

SIGRIST: To live?

ROBERTS: No, no.

SIGRIST: Just to visit.

ROBERTS: For a visit with his new bride, and, they didn't stay too long or anything. But I guess he wanted to show, I don't know.

SIGRIST: Did you ever go back to Wales?

ROBERTS: No, I've never been to Wales.

SIGRIST: Did you ever want to go back to see the town where, where your family came from?

ROBERTS: Well, I've been to Europe several time-, well not several, about three times. But see, I was on tours and we didn't go. And everybody, we were going -- we weren't going to Wales. So I never did. Then later, I wished I had. But now I don't. Because people that have gone have told -- oh, my sister (the one that was a baby) she went back to Wales. Just, she and her husband were going to go and he died suddenly, but there was a friend down in Florida that was going, and she went back. But, her tales, when she came back, didn't tally with what my father had. I mean,

SIGRIST: So you never, never went?

ROBERTS: Nah.

SIGRIST: Never really...

ROBERTS: No.

SIGRIST: Did, did your father become a citizen, of the United States?

ROBERTS: Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: Do you remember any of that process?

ROBERTS I remember him talking about it. He worked at the, as I said, at the slate quarry. He worked for Norton and that was the biggest one.

SIGRIST: Norton, can you spell that for me?

ROBERTS: Norton, N-O-R-T-O-N.

SIGRIST: That was the name of...

ROBERTS: Of the man that owned the quarries,

SIGRIST: Yes.

ROBERTS: ...and he's got this beautiful house, up in Granville. That's now the Masonic home. Well, he said that Norton here, would take (and he must have been a Republican) [Laughs] and he would take the men from the quarry to Hudson Falls to get their citizenship. That's how my father got it. And there was one man there. Then they; they had a big meal at the restaurant. And he always said about this man, that the plates were tipped over -- this restaurant that -- years ago. I guess that's how they did have them. This man put his potatoes and gravy in everything -- never turned it over. They were all Welshman that, you know, and hadn't been in this country too long. But he was getting them to be Republicans because he -- . That's what of a—he must of think because he was a Republican. So I do remember my father saying about this one man that didn't turn his plate over eating. But that --

SIGRIST: That's a great story actually, because that shows you how, how some of the people coming to this country, really were not educated,

ROBERTS: Oh, no.

SIGRIST: ...or sophisticated people in certain [not understood]

ROBERTS: No, 'cause one man would come to our house. And he'd, and he'd say to us kids, you know, or to my father, you know. He'd have his watch and it needed a crystal. He always said, 'Window on my watch. Take it, I want a window on my watch.' He wanted us to take it uptown for him to get a crystal. It was always, 'Window on my watch.' [Laughs] I was, we never, you know, would say, 'A window on my watch.' We...

SIGRIST: Do you remember when you were a kid, how you thought about the, the immigrants especially the men coming to get their pay? You know, what, what, what was your idea of these people?

ROBERTS: Well, I thought I was a little above them, I will say that. And because we had the outside Johns that, you know, the whole town did. And it was always one of these men my father would have to come to clean it out, or you know that. That part I thought, you know, we were--. And, but otherwise I had no feeling of them. In fact, there was one girl at work. Oh, I liked her, but I wouldn't dare have her come to the house. I knew my father wouldn't like that.

SIGRIST: And do you remember what nationality she was?

ROBERTS: She was either Polish or Slavic. I could never tell the difference, you know, what they were. They had the light hair, to me. And you know, you could tell them.

SIGRIST: But, but it seems to me, like there were very distinctive class,

ROBERTS: Yes.

SIGRIST: ...divisions here.

ROBERTS: Oh, yes. Eh-hmm.

SIGRIST: That's interesting. What do you think about, when you think of yourself, what, how do you think of yourself in terms of nationality?

ROBERTS: You mean then, or now?

SIGRIST: Now. When you look back, when you think of who you are...

ROBERTS: Oh, yeah.

SIGRIST: How do you think of yourself in terms of nationality?

ROBERTS: I'm proud to be a Welshman now, I really am. And at that time, it was hard because the kids would tease you about, you know, you can't speak English or some. We could but you -- they'd say your father can't or you know, like that. The ones that had been born in all, you know, in the country there. No, now I am. I would say, I'm a Welshman, like, like [not understood]. Now my niece, now she, yeah, my sister Sephorah's daughter, she married. Well she married an Irishman, real Irishman, and, [Laughs] if you know what I mean. And but when Janie had Debbie and John, for St. David's day, she went --

SIGRIST: She's Welsh?

ROBERTS: But she'd had the Welsh ribbon – hair ribbon on Debbie to go to school and John, a little red bow tie she had bought him. John came home. He said to her, 'They don't know what the Welsh wear in school.' He wasn't going to wear that again, you know. Well, that I can remember Janie telling me. But she did of course -- St. Patrick's Day, she got the green for him, you know. [Laughs] But I remember him saying, 'They didn't know what the Welsh wear.' [Laughs]

SIGRIST: Are, are there certain aspects of your personality, that, that you think are truly Welsh? Or things you like to do? Or...

ROBERTS: They say they're stubborn, and I'm stubborn. [Laughs]

SIGRIST: [Laughs]

ROBERTS: Yeah, I don't know-, I think they're honest. I really do. I haven't -- I don't know of anyone that of, you know, my friends (have a lot of Welsh friends, up in Granville and all --not too many around here, a few) and, but yeah, I think we-- I'm honest. I would say that, definitely. [Laughs]

SIGRIST: Great, well Miss Roberts.

ROBERTS: I don't owe any of them any money, so I can say it. [Laughs]

SIGRIST: It's not everyone who can say that. [Laughs] Well I think I've asked you everything.

ROBERTS: Ooh.

SIGRIST: That was wonderful actually, especially the information about what you remember about your father's job in the slate mines.

ROBERTS: Oh, ah-huh.

SIGRIST: That's wonderful information. And I know that so many Welsh people worked in that industry.

ROBERTS: Yeah. Well that's what his [not understood] was. And...

SIGRIST: Do you know what he did in Wales, before he came here?

ROBERTS: I think he worked in the slate because he said that he worked in -- . Oh, what is that quarry? Henrin? I think he worked in the slate quarry in Wales, yes.

SIGRIST: That's a major industry in Wales, too.

ROBERTS: Yeah, that...

SIGRIST: What do they use the slate for?

ROBERTS: Well, now, well okay...

SIGRIST: Then, when you were growing up. What did they use it for?

ROBERTS: Oh, it was on, well we had the outside Johns, I said. [Laughs] We even had slate on that, slate on the houses and slate walks. We had the big slabs of slate. Even the cellars a whole wall had slate. That's how we kept things cold in the winter. We had that slate here. All our -- all our cellar floor was slate. And now it would cost a lot of, expensive...

SIGRIST: I'm sure it seems almost extravagant...

ROBERTS: Yeah.

SIGRIST: ...for now a days. But of course, I suppose you had it around.

ROBERTS: I know. Well, even now I think you can go up into the slate -- what they call -- the dumps, you know. Where all the slate is. Or--. You can go and pick up pieces of slate like that. In fact, I've gone with a party that wanted some off the dumps there, you know. You just go and pick it up. [Laughs] And that was that. And as I say, my, my fa--, yeah, he was -- he knew his job I guess. Because as I say, that man wanted him on a Sunday, [Laughs] you know, to come over into his quarry there. I don't know. There must have been a s-- or he wasn't working then, so it must have been a time of a strike.

SIGRIST: Yes, that's what you said. That it was a strike.

ROBERTS: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Well great, let me sign off. This is Paul Sigris, signing off, with Miss Peggy Roberts. Here, on Wednesday, July 30th, 1997, in Scotia, New York. Thank you very --

ROBERTS: Eh-hmm, Welsh.

SIGRIST: Well, we're gonna start. Miss Roberts remembered a very funny story, now you have to tell the whole thing again. [Laughs]

ROBERTS: Okay. We had to go to church on the Tuesday night and say the, and learn the verse that the minister preached on Sunday.

SIGRIST: The children did.

ROBERTS: Yea. So there'd be about thirty, thirty-five children up in front and we'd all say the verse if we remembered, or we would say another verse. Well this one night in church, this young boy didn't know, didn't have the verse that the minister, so he said *cofio gwraig Lot*, which was always the one we all -- we relied on, 'remember Lot's wife'. But he went on what his grandmother had taught him at home, [long Welsh verse]. Well he said that in, of course, the grandmother was so upset about it. She licked the boy in the hall there. And, all the children were laughing, because we knew what it meant and everything. [Laughs]

SIGRIST: Can you say what it means?

ROBERTS: Huh?

SIGRIST: Say, say the translation, what that means.

ROBERTS: Oh. 'Remember Lot's wife, my grandmother's on the pot, the pot is broken, my grandmother's co-- [Whispers]. The pot is broken, my grandmother is drowned.' [Laughs] So that was it. That was one of the funny things that the Welsh [not understood], the Tuesday night service, okay.

SIGRIST: Great, thank you.

ROBERTS: Okay.

END OF INTERVIEW