

KECK-41/GALLETTA

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ANTHONY GALLETTA

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IMMIGRATION AND NATURALIZATION SERVICE OFFICER AT ELLIS ISLAND
1942-1954

GUMB: This is Dana Gumb, and I'm speaking with Mr. Anthony Galletta on the 26th day of September, 1985. We're beginning this interview at 11:40, and we're about to interview Mr. Galletta about his experience as the Immigration and Naturalization Service officer in charge on Ellis Island. His service began in 1942 on Ellis Island and extended until 1954. Okay, Mr. Galletta, if we could begin with just a little background of where and when were you born?

GALLETTA: I was born April the 9th, 1915 in Brooklyn. You want the address? 132 Carroll Street, Brooklyn, New York.

GUMB: Okay. And, um, can you give us just a little background, leads us up to when you started, let's, when did you start working for the Immigration and Naturalization Service?

GALLETTA: In, uh, October 1942 I transferred from the Veteran's Administration over to the Immigration Service with the idea of being a guard and, evidently, at the time, there was no openings, and they said we'll give you a clerical job until such time as there was opening for guards on Ellis Island. So I transferred over at the time with a little promotion, of course.

And, uh, and I was assigned to, uh, the Treasurer's Office, they call it the Treasurer's Office.

GUMB: On Ellis Island?

GALLETTA: On Ellis Island. At that time I was, uh, fiscal accounting clerk.

GUMB: When did you, do you remember when you first arrived on Ellis Island.

GALLETTA: October, it was about October the 24th, 1942.

GUMB: Okay. Do you remember your first impressions?

GALLETTA: Oh, it was kind of confused, so many different things, but evidently, the Treasurer's Office was a place by itself, was a caged-off room with a, with an adjoining room. And, uh, in that office contained a desk, tables, a safe and a vault, which, uh, had all the, the valuables of aliens detained on Ellis Island, all of them, including illegal aliens and deportees and those temporarily detained, for safekeeping. They also had, like, a sub-treasury office, like travel documents for, uh, officers who would travel abroad or needed money for travel anywhere in the United States to, uh, pick up or deport an alien. Uh, also, it was payrolls of aliens working on Ellis Island. They were paid ten cents an hour. And, uh, at the time they, uh, once a month there'd be a payroll call, or also, at the time, if he was being deported, a person being deported would be paid. Now, at the time, I was only assistant clerk there, treasury clerk. We had the, a Mrs. Fox in there. And, uh, she, she retired, and uh, I had taken the job over as, uh, fiscal accounting clerk, cashier and, uh, I had another title, too, uh, I had three titles, but only a small grade, grade five.

GUMB: Where was the Treasurer's Office located?

GALLETTA: It was on the upper, upper floor, to the rear of the building.

GUMB: Uh, upper, where was it in relation to the Great Registry Hall. Can you . . .

GALLETTA: I mean, this hall . . .

GUMB: Yeah, the Great Hall, the . . .

GALLETTA: It was, uh . . .

GUMB: If you can describe it.

GALLETTA: It was, uh, corridor, you turn, you had to turn to get to it and, and at the end, it was the end of the hall, it was, was the Treasurer's Office. But, to the old red floor, which was the old detaining place, it was, uh, oh, I would imagine to say it was one hundred, two hundred feet away.

GUMB: You mentioned the old red floor. Could you . . .

GALLETTA: Yes.

GUMB: What do you mean by that?

GALLETTA: The old red floor meant that the, the clay floors, or the tile floor, what it was made of, was all red, and they called it the old red floor. That's why, O.F., we used to have the term O.R.F.

GUMB: That's also the Great Registry Hall, right? That was the main, central space.

GUMB: It wasn't exactly a registry hall. It was just a place where, uh, civilians, not illegal, but just held temporarily for questioning and the women were held there in that place and given better quarters, living quarters, then the illegal aliens, who had more like dormitories.

GUMB: Okay. So what went on in that space, it was a, in that, we're talking about the great space with the arches that looks like Grand Central Station, um, we'll look, we'll look at a picture of it.

GUMB: Yes. It was more or less that they could walk around, roam around, as they pleased. But at nighttime they would have headcounts, they would have to walk to their quarters, and they would have the guards be around, the headcount. They had their own, there was like a little concession of candies and

coffee and whatnot on the side. Eh, they played cards, the social service worker would give them things to do and if there were children involved, there was even children involved, they would give them toys, and had a little school, they had a little school for them.

GUMB: So all this took place in this area?

GALLETTA: No, the school was separate, eh, came here, it was just the detaining place where, uh, and, uh, if an inspector had question, an officer. Immigration officer, had questioned one of them, they either took them out and brought them to a room, you know, to their office, or else they would question them in there and also uh, uh, do the paperwork in there, if they so pleased.

GUMB: You talked about, you mentioned some of the different kinds of people that were, uh, held there on Ellis Island when you started working there in 1942. Can you go through a little more detail on what sort of people were kept there?

GALLETTA: When I came in '42 there were still, uh, German detainees. German detainees were those, uh, in the

United States who were, uh, what would you say, partial, or favorable, to the Nazi government. And, uh, and also there was, eh fascists. Some of them were there, but most of them were put to Fort Mazula, the Italians were sent to Fort Mazula, that's in out West. But detainees, German detainees were there, and they had practically the run of the place. I mean, they were given a lot of leeway. They had their own restaurant, they had their own, uh, spokesman and all. and they had, uh, money, their own money, which was wooden, wooden coins, they would exchange amongst themselves. And they ran a tight ship. And then they would work in our cafeteria. We had a cafeteria which we ran, for the government employees there, to eat, and there was a staff dining room. The Germans ran this place. They were so meticulous, they were so clean. The place was spotless.

GUMB: How many of them were there?

GALLETTA: Well, I would, I would venture, I would say about fifty or something like that. It wasn't that many because they were, some of them were being released as we go along. But they were held until after the

war, most of them, the hardened ones. Eh . . .

GUMB: Did you have any problem with them, with the Germans?

GALLETTA: Never, never. They, they were very organized.
(he laughs) And they were also very, uh,
cooperative with the service, Immigration Service.
They had a spokesman who would, eh, bring any
problems up. But as I said before they, they had
their own cafeteria, other than, of course, the main
dining room, I'm talking about snacks and candy bars
and maybe hamburgers or something like that, they did
their own cooking.

GUMB: So that was one group, the detained Germans, the Nazi
sympathizers. What were the other groups?

GALLETTA: The other groups were families who were maybe
questioned about their medical background, or didn't
have the proper papers. Eh, let's see, I don't know.
For whatever reason they had to be detained on a
temporary basis. It wasn't that they were there,
they were illegal or, uh, ready to be deported, but
they were questionable. They were taken off the
ships or the plane, by that time it was mostly the
ships, and they were brought to Ellis Island, until

such time they resolved their problems, more or less like that. And, uh, and they were, they were given these quarters because they didn't want to put them together with, maybe, hardened criminals and, uh, you know, I mean, and, uh, con artists and whatnot, and they be, being in a position, especially if they were women and children, they would keep them all there anyway. They have, uh, a special school for them, volunteers. There was the World Church Services, Catholic Services, Social Services, and there was HIAS, which was a Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society. And there were three of them that I know of, they were there to help any one of these here make, do their papers, or whatever problems they had, to help them resolve them. Meanwhile they were running a school for the children to keep them busy. Let me tell you one thing, the children --a family would come in with children, right -- a couple. By the time they got off the island, the child was doing the interpreting for the mother and father. That's how fast they used to pick up English, these children. And they were very smart, these kids. And they'd be there to interpret for their mother and father. It was amazing how they did it.

GUMB: How long would one of those families typically stay on the island?

GALLETTA: Eh, not long, because they wanted, had to be a turnover because of the population on Ellis Island, the living quarters here wasn't that large, and they were trying to get the deportees, there was a long, drawn-out situation. They had what they call the expulsion, the Expulsion Division, on Ellis Island. Those were, eh, immigration officers, who had hearings, and they would, eh, determine whether the person should be deported or not on Ellis Island, those that they can do on Ellis Island. They called that the Expulsion Section.

GUMB: What sort of people would be deported? What sort of problems, I mean . . .

GALLETTA: Deported?

GUMB: Yeah. What kind of people are we talking about?

GALLETTA: Criminals. Uh, those ship jumpers, stowaways, people didn't have the proper documentations to stay in the United States and were, uh, subject to deportation proceedings.

GUMB: Coming back to the people who were detained, who were just detained there temporarily, typically, how many of them would there, be there at any one time in your years, can you generalize?

GALLETTA: No, I couldn't tell you exactly. But there was, they were really crowded in. And, uh, they had, the guards were very good, they had good control of this whole situation there and there was never, nothing ever panicky or uprising or something like that. They seemed to be running a good, tight ship. And, uh, they had, I mean, the illegal aliens, I would call them, you know, the ones that were subject to deportation, had their own grounds to play ball and soccer, mostly soccer, of course, there was soccer teams. And, uh, the ones that were here temporarily that only had problems to be solved, had their place where they'd go out and go in the yard, back of the building, where they could walk around and, uh, be subject to a, just a call in when they needed or call out, in the event of fire they would have a guard outpost, I have a picture there, of a guard outpost where they post one guard way at the end of the pier, you know, so there'd be nobody jumping. The, the

escape was very, very, very tough. The only escape was from Ellis Island to Jersey, see. And in order to get there, you had to swim and you had to be a superhuman swimmer, because the currents were so bad there. And we had a lot of drownings and all of that, people attempted to swim across. But then when they got across, if they did get across, there'd always be a watchman on the railroads on the other side who'd pick them up and bring them back again. So they had, they had a losing battle there.

GUMB: The other groups that were there, how about Japanese?

GALLETTA: There were no Japanese there. The Japanese were detained on the West Coast, something, or something like that, but they weren't over there, in ? but we had, very, very rarely. There may have been, but they were not predominant.

GUMB: How about, uh, you mentioned Italian, they were all on the . . .

GALLETTA: They went to Fort Mazula. Then, during the war, of course, the war, they surrendered, they were released. They were brought back to Ellis Island and eventually released. But the, the Nazi sympathizer

were kept on there. Matter of fact in '40 to '45 I went into the service, and then I came out in '45, the end of the year, so it was only one, less than a year lost, the time I was on Ellis Island. But during that time the detainees were still there to greet me again (laughs), because they used to be in the Treasurer's Office and they used to come up to get their pay and whatnot. Our biggest loss was when they were released, and then we had to hire people from outside to run the kitchen for us. We had the, we had two places for, uh, to, uh, eat. That was, uh, the staff dining room, which only the, the staff people, you know, the chiefs and the, of detention, and all them, ate in their own staff dining room and they were served there. And we had a cafeteria style where you went through the line and then paid, and I was the cashier at the time. And I used to collect . . .

GUMB: Oh, there you are.

GALLETTA: I started, when I was, in '42, I started with thirty-five cents for a full course meal. And then when they closed, it was sixty cents, a full course meal. And, uh, they, they had, there was no, uh, no

complaints about that.

GUMB: (Dr. Gumb laughs) So your service from '42 to '45 was in the Treasurer's Office?

GALLETTA: Uh-huh.

GUMB: And then when you came back . . .

GALLETTA: I resumed it again.

GUMB: You were again in the Treasurer's Office.

GALLETTA: Picked up again, right. At that time, uh, I was only the assistant at that time. And, uh, I was also cashier for the cafeteria. But, uh, but then when I came back the woman there, Mrs. Fox, she retired and I took the position, and, uh, I became head man in the Treasurer's Office. It was a lot of involvement. I had all the responsible the revolving fund of, at that time, eight thousand dollars, from the, the Fed Reserve Bank. I had to go there and replenish every time I was low in money because you needed money for the different reasons. I had to have the money at hand, cash on hand. I, uh, I also, uh, had, uh, all that money I told you that they, uh, safekeeping, whether they be deportable aliens or just

questionable aliens, problem aliens, we had the money in there for safekeeping, and, uh, some, one time at that time, don't forget now we're in the '40s, the auditors would come in and check on me all the time, and they would look at these, uh, property envelopes.

One time they added up one hundred and fifty thousand dollars in safekeeping, not counting the jewelry, and, uh, other valuables that they had, including work equipment, things like that. That's why we had the vault. We put all that stuff in the vault, but the safe was where the money went, and the valuables. I can never say that the, in safekeeping there was a gold ring with a diamond on it, 'cos I don't know, I wasn't aware, so I would put the yellow ring with a white stone, you follow me, and a wrist watch the same way. So I had to identify it, it was common use, but not exactly what the valuation was of the, of the valuables.

GUMB: Do you have any idea which, uh, detainee or potential deportee, had that much money, one hundred and fifty thousand dollars (she laughs)?

GALLETTA: No, well, there was so many of the people, don't forget it was a wide . . .

GUMB: It was a lot of different people.

GALLETTA: Yeah, right, and it added up to that much.

GUMB: It just added up. Yeah.

GALLETTA: There wasn't that much of it, the only one I remember, I think she was a spy and they caught her, and they put her on the, caught her for, her last name was Knapf, K-N-A-P . . . H, or something like that, and, uh, she had a box of jewelry, I'm telling you, it weighed a lot, but, to me, just plain jewelry box. But, uh, that's the only one I know had valuable, high valuable. But other than that, money was just, people that worked hard and got picked up, they get their salaries and they put it there for safekeeping. I also had to control gambling. Now, the only way I could control is I had treasury call early, once in the morning, and once in the afternoon, and they were only allowed to withdraw so much, in order to prevent any gambling. But they, if they went on a detail to buy, say, luggage, or things like that, go outside, then I would give them a little more money and they would . . .

GALLETTA: Cards. They were allowed to play cards and, uh (he laughs), the Chinese, there was a lot of Chinese on Ellis Island and they, they don't know why they used to buy crates of oranges. So I found out that they would be on the orange. They would get the orange and split it in half and hold it and say which side do you want, had more seeds on it, and the other side more seeds. And they would bet on the orange cut in half, and which seeds had more, more, which side, which half had more seeds. And that was one of the gamblings. Besides, of course, the roaches, like they do in prisons and all that, the roaches, you know.

GUMB: What was the gambling with the roaches?

GALLETTA: Well, they get two roaches, they put a line, a ring around it, and they bet which roach will go across the line first.

GUMB: Why were there so many Chinese there?

GALLETTA: Well, at that time they were very strict on the Chinese, immigration here, and they would come in through Canada, maybe, or all points, and they would detain them, of course. They, uh, most of them, most

of the ones were like Greeks, Italians, uh, Portuguese, Spanish, mostly from the Mediterranean area, ninety percent, I would say.

GUMB: These were the, uh, detainees or the deportees.

GALLETTA: Deportees.

GUMB: Deportees.

GALLETTA: As far as the other one, I was saying, they were so much mixed, you couldn't single out any one ethnic group, actually. Eh, if you had papers that were questionable, a passport that was questionable, and, uh, maybe sick, because they had public health service on one side of the island, they would detain them. And then, we had our own doctor who would examine them, and then, if they felt that they would need to, they would put them temporarily in the hospital there, they would do it. And then we had the public health hospital. That public health hospital was also, also used by marine, merchant marine, and they were held, mostly TB cases, things like that.

GUMB: Just to follow your career through in 1945, when you

again, after your military service, after you picked up work again at Ellis you, you became, uh, you were working in the Treasury Office and, uh, got a higher position there, what happened in, uh, did you get other positions after that, up till 1954?

GALLETTA: Uh, no, I stayed there till '54 and, uh, of course, I closed up Ellis Island, 'cause I was the last one off and I had to make sure all the valuables and money, my safekeeping, was taken off. When I get off there I became what they call an administrative officer, you know, or assistant because I became, uh, the treasurer's, by the Treasurer's Office they had no opening for me. So I became assistant. They sent me up to Burlington, which was a regional office at that time, and when I came back I still became an assistant administrator. They sent me to Ellis Island. At the time I was fifty-five, I think it was to get beddings, mattresses, blankets, that was left there, they just went off the island, and left everything intact, everything. And they, and I went there, and they said a guy had a detention facility, they want so many beddings there, 641 Washington Street has a detention facility they're gonna open

there, they want so many beddings. And I would have to get all this there and count 'em, and then get the Coast Guard cutter to take us there, and hire movers and, uh, and bring 'em back. Most of the movers were for the birds. They were derelicts and the moving company would hire these there and they were, they were bad. But anyway, we got the stuff off. Another time, I get a call from Washington. Get this. So they tell me, "Go on Ellis Island and pick up a set of, a set of silverware for twelve." I said, "Silverware?" So I got hold of this guy Amos who was a, you know, was the caretaker on Ellis, he took care of all supplies and services down, down below. I says, "Uh, Amos, is there any, uh, any silverware on that island?" "Yeah," he says, "you got up this room, and you go up this alley, and there's a door, and you go in there and there's all the silverware there." I went back to Ellis Island, I got up this driveway, I come to a big door, look like a stable door, and I open it up, and, he had given me the key at the time, and I, you know when you're going through a mine, or a cave, where they've hidden silver and all that there, gold or whatever, well, I open this place and there's all the silver, laying

all on the floor around, and each piece was numbered, each set was numbered. So what I did was I got a set of twelve, of all this things. Now, it was told to me that this there silverware was from an old battleship, 1890, or turn of the century, that they used during the Spanish American War. There was a scuttle, so therefore they took all the silverware and put it in this room. Now, I took what was there, I said, be careful, because everything is numbered, eh, the pieces. It was very, I says, I have to just take all these pieces out, and I did, and I shipped to Washington. Now, who was it, I don't know, I don't remember, rather. What happened to that silver, I don't know. What happened to all those beddings and clothings and, uh, what was, blankets and all that, I don't know. But there was a lot of stuff. I had one of those clocks like that, beautiful, in my office and left it there, everything was gone. I don't think there's anything, I haven't been there after that, but everything was gone because there was, guys with boats go there, and raid the place. Coast guard cutters, they would go there and whatever they needed for their office they would go there and get it. I mean, they would get

permission to take off whatever they needed for their coast guard on Governor's Island.

GUMB: Everything was gone when you went back in 1955. I mean, or . . .

GALLETTA: Most of the stuff was, uh, was gone. Actually, they didn't know about the silverware. Silverware in this room, or the rest of it, that would have been gone, too. Because there were poachers, you know, they'd go there and, uh, and raid the place, you know. All you needed was a boat to go there and get off . . .

GUMB: To go back to when you were working there, did you live there while you were working there?

GALLETTA: No. There was two living quarters there. One was for the chief detention officer, this guy's name was Forman, and, at the time, and the one, the other one, was for the district director, who was the head of the New York district office of immigration. They had living quarters there, and they would have the supplies brought to them.

GUMB: So how did you, um, how did you get to Ellis Island every day?

GALLETTA: We took the Ellis Island boat, every hour on the hour, the boat would go there till a certain time at night, of course. And, if you missed that boat, you had to wait a whole hour. In other words, if you were late in the morning, you had to wait an hour before you'd get that boat again. And, uh, (he laughs) many guys tried to jump from, from the pier onto the boat and never made it. They went down with the boat. But a lot of them, they used to take chances and jump on that boat before it'd move out. ON the other side, on Ellis Island, there was a guard to make sure that only the, uh, for the proper person to get off on Ellis Island.

GUMB: Do you know where the Ellis Island ferry, the famous ferryboat that took immigrants . . .

GALLETTA: Where it is?

GUMB: Where it was at that time, was it being used at that time, or the famous ferry, there was a famous Ellis Island ferry?

GALLETTA: I know. But what do you mean by, uh . . .

GUMB: Well, in those years, in the '40s and '50s, when you

were there.

GALLETTA: Yeah, they used it.

GUMB: It was being used?

GALLETTA: Yes, and I have pictures there of, uh, of the boat, Ellis Island. They, uh, they left it tied up at the, at Ellis Island, which later on was submerged, sunken.

GUMB: Yeah. It sunk. But what was it, uh, what was it, uh, being used for at that time?

GALLETTA: The Ellis Island boat?

GUMB: Yeah.

GALLETTA: It's that ferry boat. It was back and forth.

GUMB: Oh, it was the ferryboat. Oh, the boat you rode during the day.

GALLETTA: Yeah. The only time we used, uh, we hired a boat, uh, maybe, just to, to bring us over, because the Ellis Island boat would break down, or something would happen, there was, uh, when it broke down. Then we would use the side of a boat that would go on

the side of the Ellis Island and then we would get off there and walk on. But, uh, years before the Ellis Island boat I think they were using these here, uh, like a, like a barge boat, you know, coming and taking the people off and on.

GUMB: Right. Let's see. End of side one, tape one.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

GUMB: Okay, Mr. Galletta, can I ask you, why was Ellis Island closed?

GALLETTA: We had a commissioner at the time called Commissioner Swing, S-W-I-N-G. He was a general, and all, and he thought he had military ideas. He felt that, uh, Ellis Island didn't serve no purpose, and that it should be closed for economical reasons, and therefore he closed up.

GUMB: You mentioned that the Daughters of the American Revolution were active there?

GALLETTA: Yes. The Daughters of the American Revolution, DAR, were there to help, or, uh, aid all the ones, merchant marines, that were on Ellis Island, for

medical purposes. And once a year they would invite everyone, including the aliens or whatnot, they would have an affair, uh, entertainment, and they would have celebrities, like Jimmy Durante and others at the time, that was very popular, and, uh, the head DAR at the time was Ed Sullivan's wife, a wonderful woman, and very dedicated, and she did a lot on the island, for those merchant marines, to make it comfortable for them. But she included us into their, uh, different, uh, what would you call it, entertainment. So that was good.

GUMB: Looking at an aerial photograph of, of Ellis Island, um, and actually an older aerial photograph but, all right. You mentioned a lot of different things that were going on, a lot of different activities. Maybe I could just name a few and we could kind of locate them on the map.

GALLETTA: No, this would be, wouldn't be the one I can tell.

GUMB: Really can't talk through this one.

GALLETTA: Through this picture, no. Because there was a lot of change in our building, a lot of changes. Maybe the first floor is, O.R.F. is where this oval thing is,

right up there.

GUMB: What did you call this building, the main building with the four turrets on it. Was there a name for it?

GALLETTA: No. Just the main building.

GUMB: Main building.

GALLETTA: Just the main building. You had to walk from, there was a, there was like a pass from the, from the entrance, you walked right, see this is a more recent, I think it was built by the WPA, you went, you got off the, off the boat, and then you went on a pass, right along there, until you came to the main building, you just walk in there.

GUMB: Was the Treasurer's Office in the main building?

GALLETTA: Yes. It was right at the end here.

GUMB: That would be the western or, no, the eastern end of the buildings? You know, the ferry came in like this, right?

GALLETTA: Yes, yes.

GUMB: So it would be the Eastern end, the Brooklyn end,
'cause this would be the New Jersey end.

GALLETTA: No, no.

GUMB: The other way around?

GALLETTA: This is, this would be, uh, facing Manhattan.

GUMB: Oh, okay, I see, all right.

GALLETTA: Jersey would be in back of this. In back of that.

GUMB: Right.

GALLETTA: This would be facing maybe towards the Statue of
Liberty.

GUMB: Okay, okay. What, uh, you have quite a collection of
photos here. Can you tell us how you got them?

GALLETTA: Well, at the time, when Ellis Island was being closed
I was, I asked one of the, one of the officers what
to do with these photographs and all. He says, uh,
there's no use for them. Throw them away. Discard
them. Do what you want with them. So I said, gee
whiz, you know, a momentum, being I worked on the
island. I hate to throw them away. So I, uh,

retained them.

GUMB: Do you know what period, uh, when these photos were taken, do you have any idea?

GALLETTA: Well, some of these photos were taken in the '40s. I know because I recognize some of the people on there. But some of them, really, way back. But most of them are 19-- , in the '40s, taken, 'cause there was no more completion, that was it, on Ellis Island.

GUMB: Why don't we, let's go through some of the other ones. Oh, yeah, other scenes of, of the main building. Some more scenes of the main building and the hospital. Okay, there's some pictures of the ferryboat. Do you know what time period this is?

GALLETTA: Eh, this is in the '40s, in the '40s, because, eh, I mean, I remember the, the, I wasn't taking, I wasn't photographed in there, but I knew some of these, from the backs of 'em. But I don't r their names. I remember some of them.

GUMB: Do you remember any of the names of the people who were running the ferry? The officers on the ferry? Did you get to know any of them?

GALLETTA: No, there was only one, there was only, uh, one captain that ran it, and then there was one who, two of them who tied up the, the ferry as it docked. That's about all I remember. And, oh, incidentally when I, when I was working there, when I first started, before they gave me the treasurer's job, I told you they gave me a clerical job, they says, you have to be there, say, the eight-thirty ferry goes, go out, you had to be there by eight o'clock, pick up a mail bag, right. I picked up the mail bag, and we had to go up to the captain's quarters there and sort out the mail. Before we arrived on Ellis Island, I had an officer in charge named Jackson, very tough, very crude, very rotten, in other words. He was a tough man and, you know, you have a whole sack of mail, and you have about, say, a half hour to get over to the, you had to sort out all this mail, who it goes to. And if you happen to read it, he would holler at you for taking your time with that piece of mail. And you had to do it so fast. He, uh, so by the time you got on the other side, where Ellis Island was, from the Battery, you had to sort the mail out. And we had to do it knowing where this goes, where that goes, and what part before we got

to, thank God, from there, I went into the treasurer's office, because I know I would lock horns with him.

GUMB: And let's look through the other photos here.

GALLETTA: This is what they call the Old Barge office. The Old Barge office is where the boarding inspectors had their quarters, and passengers going on to Ellis Island would wait for the ferryboat to come in and board it.

GUMB: Where was this located, the Old Barge office?

GALLETTA: The Old Barge office is, was located where now is the Coast Guard headquarters on the Battery.

GUMB: Between the Staten Island ferry and Battery Park?

GALLETTA: Right. Right at the edge there where the, they built it there knowing that we were going to get the quarters above the barge office, when they built the new one up. But it never materialized.

GUMB: And what, when do you think this, uh, these pictures of the Old Barge office were taken?

GALLETTA: These look very recent to me, very recent. It looks

like the '40s, and the '40s.

GUMB: Okay. Another picture of the Ellis Island ferry.

GALLETTA: Oh, this is taken from the Ellis Island ferry, and there's the Coast Guard cutters tying up here, and there's the Staten Island ferry.

GUMB: Right. Probably on the Battery.

GALLETTA: Yeah. These are, um, trucks. These were trucks that, hand trucks and regular rolling trucks, that they would have, uh, what we say, some kind of a tractor or a machine, to couple it on and pull the supplies and whatnot on Ellis Island.

GUMB: From, where is this? This is, oh, from the ferry they would just carry supplies off of there.

GALLETTA: Right, right. They would put it on boat, and then take it off on the, on the Ellis Island side, or vice versa.

GUMB: Okay.

GALLETTA: This is still the Barge Office. This is the Ellis Island side of the, of the, Ellis Island boat, would tie up here, and you go through this archway, on this

side.

GUMB: The building built during the WPA period, the last building built on e.

GALLETTA: Yes. More recent, yes.

GUMB: Right.

GALLETTA: Eh, these, on this side here, it was all U.S. Public Health Service, eh, also in, I forgot to mention, in '40, in the '40s, when I was there, it was almost the, the end of, the U.S. Coast Guard had their headquarters on Ellis Island, too, and they would have drilling, drilling and all that, they would have, uh, I don't know what you'd call it, eh.

GUMB: Marching?

GALLETTA: Yeah. You would hear them, in the band, and all that, and, they'd have, actually, they were recruiting, and they would train them on Ellis Island. And they, that was only a temporary, and then they moved on.

GUMB: Sounds like it was a crowded place.

GALLETTA: It was. It was. Very crowded and chaotic.

GUMB: Do you, do you remember any especially interesting cases, uh, people that were detained there? Did you have much contact with the people that were detained, or . . .

GALLETTA: Of course. I had the payroll time, most of the time, or if money came in, checks came in, or letters came, not letters, but money, anything of value, came in, I had to go down and see them, or go into the old red floor and see the passengers. And, a funny incidence, the FBI got record of it anyway, I was in the treasurer's office, I told you, it's only two treasury calls in order to curtail any gambling, right? So, it came to a time when they said, well, this man is going on, the guards would come up, a guard would come up and say, "This man is being deported," and all of that, he has to go out and buy stuff, and all of that, he needs so much money. I would give him the money. Of course, they're going on detail. All of a sudden, you know, I had a room, I told you, I had a caged room, and then next door to us there was an adjoining room, the FBI was in there, you know. I came in and (?) said, "Tony, you mind if we're using your room?" I says, "Okay." We, uh, he

was using it and watching. I didn't even know what he was watching, what was going on, the transactions. They would come up and say, yes, there was a, going on a detail outside, he needs the money. Lo and behold, I hear the story of what happened. The guards, some of the guards, I would say, a couple of them, it wasn't many of them, most of them were very good people, but they were, you always find a couple of apples in there, bad apples. They were saying, do you want to gamble out there, I need money. All right. Put, say, a five dollar bill in the matchbox, because some of it goes to me, some goes up to the treasurer's office, the man in the treasury, because he won't release the money. So they go him to put it in the matchbox, and something like that, and they come up and they get the money. I never knew this was happening, you know. And before you know it, that's why, the FBI found out that I wasn't involved in this thing, you know, and that's when they caught them and they had them fired and all that.

GUMB: It was a kind of bribe.

GALLETTA: Yes. To go up and get money so they can gamble. Some of the few instances like that, just I can't

recall. But, of course, the counterfeits, I used to catch the counterfeits, you know, and call the Secret Service and they come in and confiscate the money and all that. But, uh . . .

GUMB: Were there any really dangerous people there, I mean . . .

GALLETTA: There was. As I said before, there were criminals, those illegal and those that, of course, if you committed a crime, and even if you had your green card, or we say your permanent card, you were deportable if you made within the area of time you had the green card, two arrests, criminal arrests, you were deportable. And also, uh, those stowaways, they'd bring 'em and they'd put 'em on Ellis Island, the first time they were deported, and people, that came in from all parts, not knowing how visitors overstayed, you know, how some few found working, well, we went through the ones that were there before.

GUMB: Yeah, right. The different groups. Okay. Well, getting back to the, to the pictures, what was, is this also the Barge Office, this one?

GALLETTA: Uh-huh. Eh, yes, yes.

GUMB: That's another shot of the Barge Office?

GALLETTA: Yes, yes. You could come in, you had to come in and then identify yourself, yeah, before you go through. I ran in back of this with customs, I mean, immigration. Customs also had their quarters there in the Old Barge Office, customs were involved there. There's a corridor you go down to the boat.

GUMB: At the Barge Office.

GALLETTA: Yes.

GUMB: Okay. We've seen that.

GALLETTA: You've seen that.

GUMB: Yeah. This is a different one.

GALLETTA: This was a very little used door when I was there, very little.

GUMB: At Ellis Island?

GALLETTA: Right, at Ellis Island. Because you had to come off the Ferryboat, go through that, there, there, uh, pass until, in to the main building. This is the way

it looked. Customs was over this way, yeah, in this area. Customs was, see, I mean, I know this, this Sylvia Rapkin, I know her, I remember her because her husband was good friends of mind.

GUMB: These are all from the '40s.

GALLETTA: Right. Definitely. Has to be, has to be.

GUMB: All these pictures.

GALLETTA: Uh-huh. Here's the waiting room, for the Ellis Island boat.

GUMB: Oh, on the Barge Office.

GALLETTA: Yes. This is the family quarters, you know, they had cribs there.

GUMB: At Ellis Island?

GALLETTA: On Ellis Island, yeah. Remember I told you, the upstairs, the old red floor?

GUMB: Oh, this was, uh . . .

GALLETTA: The family quarters.

GUMB: This was above the old red floor?

GALLETTA: Right.

GUMB: Was it on the mezzanine? Along the . . .

GALLETTA: Like a mezzanine type, yeah. There was rooms up there.

GUMB: Yeah, they used those rooms for family quarters.

GALLETTA: This is for the cases, I told you, only problems, only detained temporarily, until such time documentation was sufficient for them to be released. And this was the dining room.

GUMB: And you mentioned the, the murals, what's the . . .

GALLETTA: Those murals were, here about '37, or something, was painted by WPA. The WPA had a lot of work on Ellis Island. They did a lot of paintings, which I don't know what happened to, but, framed paintings, besides the murals.

GUMB: You have a collection of photos of those paintings.

GALLETTA: Yes. I have a collection which, sites the whole area of the wall where the dining room is, for the temporary detainees.

GUMB: I didn't get clear where that dining room is.

GALLETTA: The dining room was, it was on the upper floor, right near the old red floor. This is the way it was, see, see, they would sometimes, they would question them, the officers would question them, and write whatever they need, and they would just hang around, while their time away.

GUMB: So this was the old red floor.

GALLETTA: Red floor, yes.

GUMB: And the family quarters were on this mezzanine above.

GALLETTA: Right. As you could see, there's different rooms there and all.

GUMB: So the old red floor was just kind of a . . .

GALLETTA: A gathering.

GUMB: A gathering place.

GALLETTA: Of all the temporary ones. Most of, they were mostly women and men, and children, that were there just temporarily, and not, not for, uh, for, uh, legal purposes, questionable problems, maybe medical. This

is the inspection room. The, uh, they would come, there's Charles Bryant, an inspector, they would come down here and, uh, and he would fill out their forms and papers and all that in order to release them. Charlie Bryant.

GUMB: Where was the . . .

GALLETTA: This was on the ground floor.

GUMB: Below the old red floor.

GALLETTA: Right. More or less the entrance that, the entrance that I showed you that they don't open any more. Right in, right there. See, that's the same thing.

GUMB: This is the inspection room?

GALLETTA: Yes. The same as that. See, the entrance there?

GUMB: Right.

GALLETTA: This is the old red floor again, which are the quarters, large office. Plenty of seats here.

GUMB: These pictures of the old red floor are all from the '40s?

GALLETTA: I would venture to say yes, yes. You know the, you

know the, eh, Italian, eh, singer, Enzo Pinza, South Pacific? He was detained because every time, he was an opera singer, and every time he had to sing he would want the fascist national anthem played. So, naturally, the sympathizers, so they arrested him, they locked him up. He was detained on Ellis Island, separate from the fort Mazula crowd. So he was brought up one time to go on detail and, uh, to go home to his wife and I think pick up, whatever he wanted to pick up and, do whatever he wanted to do, on detail. So they had two guards, he went with two guards there to his home. More or less, some way or the other, he talked them into him going upstairs to check up with his wife, right? When he came back to Ellis Island he, he started talking about what happened, and how he went upstairs and they left him alone upstairs. P.S., the two guards got fired for letting him out of sight. For being good Joes. I don't really, I never, ever really review in my mind what went on, you know. But as I said before, things are all coming to me now.

GUMB: What, do you have any, with the overall atmosphere of the place, was there, were there a lot of sad people

there?

GALLETTA: Of course. If you were detained you'd be sad, too. Nobody was happy. The only ones that were happy were the children, because they don't know any better. I mean, there were kids there. They were wonderful, those kids. Amazing how they learned English so fast. There was a woman there who was very good to the children, social service worker, she worked for the Church World Service. Her name was Jenny Pratt. She was wonderful, wonderful to the families and all that. And Miss Buckley, who was for the church World Service, and, was one, I forgot the name, a wonderful man, but they were good social workers, I mean, dedicated, when I say dedicated. Then we had a room, I think, I haven't got it here, but it's there, where you, you shipped, you got your luggage to ship out, there was a baggage master there named Benny Sprung. There was a bondsman there, and there was also a ticket office to buy tickets to go where you want to go. Now, those are the ones that were temporarily detained. If you were deported, the deportation was picked up by the immigration, or else the steamship lines were responsible, and they were paid for the

tickets. The bondsman, I don't know who it was, his name, I can't remember, the Ft. Mazula crowd came back to New York and they had money, savings, in there, and they gave it to the bondsman to hold. Some way or another the money disappeared, and, of course, the bondsman was questioned and as far as, he was no civil service employee, he was just a regular man there and he was working for a bonds company, and he got fired, eventually, all that money missing, God knows what the heck he did. Person would be deported, he was supposed to pick up his bond, if he was deported, if he had a bond on, they'd deport him before he even had a chance to pick up his bond. And things like that were very, that's about the only thing that I would say was irregular. But other than that everything was really smooth. There was, as I said before, this Charlie Chandler, he was, he was more or less like a public relations man, good man. He would go to get the passports, renovated, or get, pick up passports, for those that didn't have no papers, travel documents, he would make sure that deportees were, had their tickets and all, to go on. He was, he was an exceptional man. He was a good PR man to the service. He had a good personality and

was wonderful and we'll never forget him.

GUMB: Was there money exchanged there?

GALLETTA: In what way? Not with the civil service employees, no. The only money that was exchanged was my office. If there was any money to be exchanged, it had to be done in my office and, uh, I venture to say that, geez, I had my nose clean throughout the whole thing. Matter of face, over forty years, I worked out of that place, out of the service, without worrying about nothing, thank God for that.

GUMB: Was it depressing working there? I mean, with all those sad people, were there depressing days, or . . .

GALLETTA: Uh, you get, you roll with the punches, you get used to it after a while. I mean, so you, it was sad, but, if they were being released you saw happy moments when they were being released. But as I said before you get hardened after a while. And, uh, you just, I don't know what to do. The Germans were good. They were good people on that island. I mean, they held that island pretty good. They used to, potato, potato skins, they used to get the potato

skins. Of course, there was no alcoholic beverages on Ellis Island, so naturally, leave it to the German interns that were there, they would find a way of doing things. You'd get the potato peels, right, and, of course, , what else would you do, you'd make alcohol out of it, and they would drink it, until they were discovered, of course. They were wondering why they never threw potato peels away.

GUMB: The, you mentioned the Italians were sent out to Fort Mazula? Why were they sent out there? Why weren't they kept on Ellis Island?

GALLETTA: Oh, I, I really don't know. They were sent out there before I came on Ellis Island. Actually, I wasn't there at the time when they were shipped out. I guess they couldn't hold that many on Ellis Island so it was decided, who should they keep, the Germans or the Italians. They, uh, I can't remember anything else I was going to say, except that, it was a, I had a responsible job on that island, I know that. Because there was so much money exchanged and all, and, uh, valuables. And, uh, I had, subject to auditing all the time, and I had to keep my nose clean. Oh, I liked doing that. One time, I told you

Miss Fox was there, and Miss Fox was the head man, woman, there, when I first came in to Ellis Island. She was in the cage there. They said, well, you got a fox in the cage, now you got a wolf (he laughs) when they put me in there.

GUMB: Oh, oh, she was the, oh, I see, right.

GALLETTA: You had a fox, now you got a wolf. (he laughs) Anyway, oh, no, no, they did it, they only took those things. (break in tape) Oh, it was 70 Columbus Avenue at the time, one of the offices. And, uh, that's what they took off, only those that they felt, I had to turn it in. I had also a, an assistant to me. He was an armed guard, an officer, his name was Murphy, and he would go with me every time I'd go into the federal reserve, or he would just pitch in to me every time I, I had to, uh, take off, and he would be an assistant, you know, take over. We had a, a chief, an assistant chief, of a treasurer's office, at 70 Columbus Avenue. When I couldn't make it, he would come down and relieve me, when the assistant couldn't do it. Any time I would go back again and count my money it was always a ten dollar bill short. So, you know what trouble it is to have,

to say that the ten dollars was short. So I got a hold of my pocket, and put the ten dollars in, and avoid a lot of problems. Lo and behold, all of a sudden I hear, his name was Harry Curry, he got, he got caught. He was shortchanging the treasurer's office, doing, manipulating different things, and making money and all that, he got arrested and all that, later on. I used to dread the thought when I knew he had to relieve me. I, when Murphy died, I had another assistant called Joe Gallo.

(he laughs) No relation to the Joseph Gallo. And he was good, he was good. I, sometimes I couldn't get a relief, one time I got an attack of, uh, kidney stones. And, uh, I couldn't get no one to relieve me in the treasurer's office. So I called 70 Columbus, they couldn't do it, and I'm there with pains, you know, if you know what kidney stones will do to you, the pains that went through, I couldn't get off that Island, I couldn't get off it, pains. I was hospitalized right after that. That's how important that damn thing was, that nobody couldn't, you just can't sit down and say, well, you go and relieve, you had to be a responsible person, or somebody that was bonded. Because I had to be bonded at the same time.

I had, to pay to be bonded. They wouldn't pay for it, because they felt, if they pay for it you wouldn't give a damn, because they were the ones responsible for the bonding. I had to pay my own bond. And what was it, what the hell was i getting at that time, one thousand four hundred and forty dollars, or one thousand six hundred and twenty, a year, one thousand six hundred and twenty dollars, a grade five.

GUMB: End of interview, tape one, side two.