

KECK-005

CHARLES T. ANDERSON

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AGE 19

PASSAGE ON "THE GRIPSHOLM"

GUMB: This is interview number 005. This is Dana Gumb, and I'm speaking with Mr. Charles T. Anderson on the 23rd of January, 1985. We're beginning this interview at five minutes to three. We're about to interview Mr. Anderson about his immigration experience from Sweden in the year 1925. Okay, Mr. Anderson, if you could tell us where and when you were born?

ANDERSON: I was born in Sweden on the 8th of August 1906.

GUMB: Where in Sweden?

ANDERSON: Uh, they call it Rocksässla Församling [ph] that's right near Linskaping, the main city, you know.

GUMB: Can you spell that main city? The name of that main

city?

ANDERSON: Linsköping? That's L-I-N-S-K-Ä-P-I-N-G. (?) that's with the two dots on top of the A. [Transcribers note: the likely spelling is Linköping].

GUMB: Oh, right. And what was life like in your native country? What did you do there before you left?

ANDERSON: I was born on a farm. Farm labor. And, of course, that was hard work. I start work at, I guess, as far back as I can remember, because, uh, at that time, you know, the children had to work. You helped in the barn with the animals. Then in the summer you worked on the fields. So that was hard work. And when I was twelve years old I was "farmed out" so to say, to another farm. That's where I kept on working until I left for this country.

GUMB: You were "farmed out?" What does that mean?

ANDERSON: Yes, that means that you, uh, well, that the farmer needed a helper. And then he gave you the room and board and then you worked on the farm. And you got one kroner a day. That was the pay. But you got the room and board.

GUMB: And how old were you when you were farmed out?

ANDERSON: Twelve years old. And I worked there all that summer on that farm. And then, of course, the winter he didn't need me because then there was not too much work in the winter, you see. But then I was, took another farm, because I take care of the animals for him because he was in the process of moving to some other part. So I stayed to him till he moved his animals. Then I got back to my parents place on the farm where my father worked and I was there for that summer. But then again I was farmed out to another farm and there I was stayed for two years and then to another farm for another year. Then I waited to try to get to this country.

GUMB: Why didn't you work on your parents' farm?

ANDERSON: Well, you see, that was, you know, my parents, we were six children, you see. And then my next youngest after me he started to work on that farm to help my father, see. So that's how that worked, see.

GUMB: So there wasn't enough work for all of you, for all the sons.

GUMB: No, so then, of course, I stayed to that farm for two years, and then I went to another farm for another year. But then I was supposed to get, like I told you before, allowed to come to this country. But then when I came out to the consulate in Stockholm they told me you had to have an address to a farm here, in this country. But I did not have that. I had an address to Brooklyn. And then I had another address to Hoboken.

GUMB: They told you you had to have an address where?

ANDERSON: To a farm, like a, say, for instance, if I had known of somebody up in Connecticut on a farm in Connecticut . . .

ANDERSON: Oh, a farm in this country?

ANDERSON: Yeah, to be able to go. So the consulate would let me go to. So they would send me back home again and I had to wait, this was in April, and I, of course, they don't tell you how long you have to wait again. And then you went back and start working again.

GUMB: Do you remember what year that was?

ANDERSON: That was 1925. In April I was up to Stockholm. But

then in October I got a call that to go back again up to Stockholm. And I did. And at that time they okayed me. So that's why I, so then I got the first boat to this country.

GUMB: Who, who called you from the consulate?

ANDERSON: Ah, you get the mail from the consulate. Immigration, I guess, that's American Consulate in Stockholm. They were on (street) in Stockholm, see.

GUMB: They contacted you and said that you could go.

ANDERSON: Yeah, that I could go back again and then they questioned me again and wanted to know where I was going and so forth.

GUMB: How did you convince them that this time you could go?

ANDERSON: Well, there was, I told them I had the same address I had the last time. And, but then he said I could go.

GUMB: They, they allowed you to go with these non-farm addresses?

ANDERSON: Yes, that's right.

GUMB: Well, as far as your life in Sweden, did you go to school, too, while you were working?

ANDERSON: The school, the only schooling really I had was in Sweden, I started at six years old and at twelve years old I was through. You only needed six years of schooling over there. That you had to have. But then, of course, then when I was through with that I, I started to work, I worked on the farm. I worked on the farm before that, really you know I had, like in the summertime you work in the field, you know, when they have those, you know, vegetable rows, like turnips and things like that. During the war time we were growing a lot of turnips in the farm and sending them up to Stockholm because there was a shortage of food, you know. Like in '17 and 1918. So, then, of course, in the fall you picked them and then you had to scrape all the dirt off them and then you had to put them on the wagon and drag the thing to the railroad.

GUMB: So, uh, why, why did you decide to come to the U.S.?
What, uh, what motivated you?

ANDERSON: Well, there was a kind of a hard life, you know, work

on those farms, you worked there from early morning to late night. And, uh, and then, of course, there was a kind of a drift that time to go onto this country. I don't know if you know about all the ships, had boatloads from Europe and, uh, coming here with immigrants at that time.

GUMB: Well, why, why the U.S.? Why not some place else?

ANDERSON: Well, like I told you before, my aunt was home in Sweden in 1922, I think it was, and I spoke to her and she said, "Oh, sure," she said, "Any time you want to come let me know and I'll send you a ticket." And that's how I got the ticket.

GUMB: Well, what sort of things had you heard about America while you were still in Sweden?

ANDERSON: Oh (?) mainly from school. In school we read all about, about this country, you see. (Swedish), that's what we call it in Sweden.

GUMB: What was that?

ANDERSON: (Swedish), that is Swedish for United States.

GUMB: Oh, oh, I see. Had you heard a lot of good things

about it?

ANDERSON: Oh, yeah, that's it, that's just it. And, of course, we always got mail from this country on account of my father's brother was over here, and his sister was here. And, uh, his parents, they were like next door to us, you see, in Sweden. And, of course, they got mail all the time and, uh, we, my parents, they had to take care of my father's parents, you see, that's the way it works in Sweden. There was no old people's home or anything like that so the young ones had to take care of the old ones. Like my grandfather. He worked on the farm until he was about eighty-nine years old. and he used to (?) take two pair of ox and pulling that thing and go up and down hill. Instead of horses, you had oxen. And, uh, you worked then from, oh, about seven o'clock in the morning and then would come back into the barn and give him water and feed them for an hour or two and then you went back again. That's how you worked on the farm. So, and, of course, so . . .

GUMB: So, uh, so what sort of future did you think you would have had in Sweden if you had stayed there?

ANDERSON: Well, that's hard to say. Of course, no, you see, things changed around there, too. When we did away with all the animals, now they don't have any animals on the farm. They don't have any horses. When we went over in 1972 there were no horses on that farm or no animals. The barn was empty. They used it for like a storage house for potatoes I think it was. And, ah, so now they use the tractors and there's one man, he, he work all the farms around there and the farmer only he gets so much for the farm. He rents his farm out to this man. Or corporation, whatever it is, you see. And, uh, they do all the seeding and harvesting and then things like that. Now they grow a lot of these (he pauses) what do you call that, they use so much nowadays, just like a yellow blossom on that. What do they call that seed, Mom, the yellow ones we had there?

GUMB: Some sort of plant, yeah, right. So when you came back down to Stockholm to the consulate and they allowed you to go at that point, did you have to tell them what you were going to do?

ANDERSON: No, no, you didn't have to tell them that. The only think you had to do is have twenty-five dollars in

your pocket when you was in Ellis Island. So that you had to have. Even if you have somebody to meet you.

ANDERSON: So, so how did you buy the ticket.

ANDERSON: My aunt sent, uh, bought the ticket and sent it to me. That was sent to me.

GUMB: And where did you leave from? What port?

ANDERSON: Goteborg, on the Gripsholm. That was one of the new ships.

GUMB: Maiden voyage of what ship?

ANDERSON: The Gripsholm was the name of the ship.

GUMB: Maybe you could spell that.

ANDERSON: Gripsholm. That's G-R-I-P-S-H-O-L-M. Gripsholm.

GUMB: And your port of departure?

ANDERSON: It was Goteborg.

GUMB: You could spell that, too.

ANDERSON: That's G-O-T-E-B-U-R-G [sic].

GUMB: Um, so what was, what was the voyage like?

ANDERSON: Oh, that was a nice trip. We had a nice trip. We had a little storm on, uh, North Sea, you know, but that wasn't much. And, uh, it's a nice trip, you know, two in the cabin.

GUMB: What, uh, what class were you traveling?

ANDERSON: Third class.

GUMB: Third class. Was that different from steerage?

ANDERSON: Steerage, I don't know. Third is the lowest and then is the second class and first class, that's all there was on that ship as far as I know. so.

GUMB: Did you, um, uh, meet any other immigrants on board the ship, meet anyone interesting?

ANDERSON: Oh, yes. We were quite a few there, but only one, uh, from Brooklyn from the states, a fellow that I met and I sort of played around with, but then, of course, there was some other ones, too, and there was some went to Chicago and some went to Boston and Hartford. Quite a few on. And then there (?). The boat was pretty filled up. But then when you came to

Ellis Island, you see, there you, you had like stalls, like booths and, you know, and so forth. And the one who stayed in Brooklyn, he was so to say split up when he got there. I never saw him any more after that, after I got there. Except this fellow here from Brooklyn. But I met up with him when I got concerned that I'm not gonna get off Ellis Island, see. But that was a mixup there because the boat, the Swedish American Line, told my aunt that to meet him at South Ferry. That was where the ferry was coming in from Ellis Island. But when, when I tried to get on the ferry to get across he wouldn't let me on the ferry because he told me, "Your aunt gotta come here and pick you up."

GUMB: Who was that who told you that?

ANDERSON: That was over in Ellis Island. My aunt met me, you see, but instead of being told that she had to go over to Ellis Island to pick me up she was told to wait for me at South Ferry, see. But, uh . . .

GUMB: Well, as far as the voyage, do you remember getting seasick or . . .

ANDERSON: No, I was hardly seasick at all, no. No, I had a

good time, I was dancing, you know, we used to have an accordion on deck and dance in the evening.

GUMB: You were travelling alone?

ANDERSON: Yeah.

GUMB: And how long did the voyage take?

ANDERSON: Ten days.

GUMB: So the ship, where did the ship land?

ANDERSON: On 58th, on 57th Street on the Pier 91, I think it is. On the west side on the Hudson River. There was a Swedish American Line pier, you see.

GUMB: And then what happened?

ANDERSON: Well, then, of course, there was one of these small ferry boats, you know, tied up with the ship. And it took all the immigrants on that one who had to go to Ellis Island. There was not too many, though.

GUMB: How did they determine who would go to Ellis Island?

ANDERSON: That I don't know. I guess it's, they claim that second class didn't have to go, but I did not know. We were quite a few on there. But it was a nice

morning, we had a nice trip down to Ellis Island.

GUMB: Were you asked questions while you were on board the ship by, did someone ask you questions as to whether or not you should go to Ellis Island or not?

ANDERSON: No, no, there was no question. We knew that, uh, the third class all had to go to Ellis Island and first, then, of course, they shipped them out like I told you before to go on the trains to, like, to different cities or wherever you went to.

GUMB: What kind of possessions did you have, were you carrying with you?

ANDERSON: What do you mean?

GUMB: What did you bring along with you for the trip?

ANDERSON: Well, I didn't have anything with me. I probably had a, I think my father gave me a small bottle of cognac in case I got seasick. (he laughs)

GUMB: Just the clothes on your back?

ANDERSON: No, I had a little suitcase, I had other clothes, but it was very little.

GUMB: Then you took the ferry to Ellis and do you remember anything about the examinations and what happened?

ANDERSON: Over in Ellis Island?

GUMB: Right.

ANDERSON: Well, there wasn't anything, it was just, uh, well, you had to strip, of course. And they listened to your, you know, your lungs and they looked in your eyes and so forth, and in your throat, that was all the medical, and that's about all, it was, it didn't take long at all. And then they asked you if you had the twenty-five dollars.

GUMB: What language were you speaking?

ANDERSON: That was Swedish. No, he spoke some Scandinavian, like the Norwegians and the Swedish and the Danes, I understand either one of those three, so . . .

GUMB: Were they, how did they, did they have a translator that came in to handle . . .

ANDERSON: No, no, there was no, except the one who examined us, I guess he was, I mean, was able to talk to, I guess he was able to say a few words in Swedish, that's

about all. The examination there was not too much. All other people said, "Why did you take us over here for, you don't do anything here anyway." But that, but they did away with that right after because when my Dr. came in 1929 he didn't have to go there. We just went up to the boat and picked him up there, that's it.

GUMB: There, there weren't in Sweden, before you came over, there weren't any examinations, I mean . . .

ANDERSON: Well, there was some up in the consulate in Stockholm, yeah, they went, they looked at you, too. But that was, well, about the same, not much to it. Yes . . .

GUMB: Okay, well, what was your overall impression of the Island?

ANDERSON: Ellis Island?

GUMB: Yeah.

ANDERSON: It, uh, I had no complaint about it. The only thing that got, like I said, that got me worried, was whether I was going to get off the Island. But, uh, everything went fine because, uh, I spoke to this

fellow and he said, uh, my friend, and he said, "Oh, my brother is coming." He said, "I asked him to take you along because you're not gonna get off here if nobody come here to pick you up." So that's what happened.

GUMB: Do you remember seeing the Statue of Liberty when you came in?

ANDERSON: Oh, yes. The statue. Oh, yes, everyone was lined up at the rail, you know. Yeah.

GUMB: Okay. Okay, so how long do you think the whole examination process took?

ANDERSON: Oh, on Ellis Island? It didn't take long at all. I don't think more than an hour or so before I was all done. Then I was sitting there on the bench and, of course, it was a nice sunny day and, you know, there was a lot of glass and the usn went through. And then, of course, when the ferry come in you looked to see if anybody come to pick you up. And then nobody came and some of them, they left, you know, and you, you stay behind. That last ferry left at four o'clock, so that's the time I got off.

GUMB: And that's when you went with the fellow from Brooklyn.

ANDERSON: Yeah, yeah. See, we got on Ellis Island early because we were docked up there and we had to stay on the boat overnight, you see. And we left in the morning about nine o'clock, we left the boat, on the ferry, to Ellis Island. And that is only a short ferry ride, you know, from 57th Street down to Ellis Island.

GUMB: So, as far as your new life in the country, what were your first impressions of the city?

ANDERSON: Oh, everything was just fine over here. I started off, got a job in a factory because winter was ahead of me, you see. And I worked in there with American Machine and Foundry in the blacksmith shop. I got, that was also an experience. I walked the streets, you see, and looked at the down on Second Avenue Brooklyn where the Lutheran Medical Center is, and saw this big building there and there's a big sign, "employment office." So I walked in there and asked for a job. And, of course, he couldn't speak any Swedish and I couldn't speak much English, but I

could tell him that much, that I wanted a job. So he said, "Wait a minute," he said, "I'll get one of your countrymen." So he got the blacksmith foreman and he was, he was a Swede, so he said, "Oh, I can use a young fellow like you." So I stood there during the winter. And then when the summer come along then I wanted to get out in the construction because I had met up with a friend of mine who was a carpenter and he got me into the union and from there on I went to school at night in Brooklyn Technical High School there at Flatbush Avenue Extension. I went there for four years.

GUMB: Where, where did you first stay when you, when you arrived in the City?

ANDERSON: The first day? I, I arrived here in the 30th of November. That's when I arrived here on Ellis Island.

GUMB: Right, and where did you first stay, where . . .

ANDERSON: Oh, that, my first address was 726 43rd Street up in the Sunset Park section, you know.

GUMB: In Brooklyn?

ANDERSON: Yeah.

GUMB: Right, right. You stayed with your aunt?

ANDERSON: Yeah. I stayed with my aunt until my brother came, and then, of course, I had to get out. He took my place. And he took it until he got married. And I got a room over on 46th Street and I was with a German couple there for a number of years. But then, of course, we had depression, you know. And there was a lot in the construction business because nothing going on. So I got a job with B. Altman and I was there for a couple years, I guess, but then there was a layoff there and I went upstate up in Sullivan County. I was there for a while. And there was no much pay there either. I just got twenty-five dollars a month and room and board to work in that place. But, it tided me over, you see. And then when i come back I was walking the streets again and then I got in with the BMT. And I was in, got in there in 1935 and I was there until 1938 when they start to organize there. You know, that Quill come over here, you know, you ever hear of him?

ANDERSON: I think, the union leader for the subway workers?

ANDERSON: Yeah, and, uh, well, he, he got the raise, I think we got, we used to get, I think I got around thirty dollars a week. We got an increase of thirty-two, of thirty-two dollars a week, but they start to increase the payroll, the BMT lay so many men off. Unions couldn't do anything about that. So I was one that got laid off. And, uh, then I walked the streets again. And then we started the World's Fair, you know, Flushing in 1938? Well, I walked the streets, I got up there and I met some friends who I used to work with before depression on the schools, you see. A fellow by the name of (name), he was the foreman up there. "Oh, yes, sure, you come on, come with your tools tomorrow." So, of course, at that time I had lost out on the carpenter's union so I said, "Well, I haven't got the union card." So he said, "Don't worry." He said, "You go up to Flushing and get yourself a card and join the local up there. It's gonna cost you ten dollars. (he laughs) So I came back into the union and I've been there ever since.

GUMB: But, ah, your first job, after going through Ellis, was blacksmithing?

ANDERSON: Yeah, that was in the blacksmith shop. You see, the American, the American Machine, you know, they made a cigarette machine, cigar machine, and they had those machines for cutting up the tobacco. And they had some kind of knives in there, it was just like an "S" shape. And first you had to grind them down to sharpen them, see, and that was my job, I sharpened all those things at the grindstone. You had to have a mask on and that type of thing.

GUMB: And where was that located, that shop?

ANDERSON: Down on, uh, 56th Street, and Second and First Avenue. Where the American Medical Center is now.

GUMB: American Medical Center?

ANDERSON: Yeah, the Medical Center bought that building from American Machine and Foundry.

GUMB: How did you get into that line of work?

ANDERSON: Well, that I didn't know anything about.

GUMB: Yeah, after being a farmer . . .

ANDERSON: You know, I didn't know anything about that. It's very hard to sharpen those things.

GUMB: Why did you happen to go there?

ANDERSON: Well, I just happened to try these different places, that's all. Someone, you know, you talk to someone, there are young fellows around and, uh, so somebody says, "Oh, American Machine, they're hiring, they're hiring." Of course, they hire (?), you see. And I thought probably I just got in there sweeping floors of anything like that, you know. But the blacksmith's shop, he took me in there and he put me by the grinding wheel and showed me how to grind those things. It didn't take me long to learn that.

GUMB: Did you miss the farm at all?

ANDERSON: No, no. (?)

GUMB: Well, how did your expectations of the United States, while you were in Sweden, compare with what you found?

ANDERSON: Oh, I think it was great, everything I, everything, this country has been good to me all the way through. That's one thing I can say. Of course, there was a little bit drawback during depression years, but nothing, nothing like some other people had, you

know. I always got some kind of work. Like B. Altman there was seventeen dollars a week, but it was a job. And so, and then when I was up in Sullivan County got so much a month and room and board, but you got something to eat and you had a place to, and it was an experience, too, you see. And then working with the BMT I was a maintenance carpenter and I had a little toolbox and used to go, you know, the elevated structure, you know, like the Fulton El, all those doors had to be painted, you know. Like the ticket agent, she call up and she says, "Oh, the door doesn't close, the door is so on and so on." And you had to go fix it. That's what I did there in those years.

GUMB: This is the end of side one.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

GUMB: This is the beginning of side two of the interview with Mr. Charles T. Anderson. Okay, we could go back to your time in Sweden, uh, how did you feel about leaving?

ANDERSON: About leaving?

GUMB: Right, did you have friends that you were leaving behind, or . . .

ANDERSON: Well, I had my family, otherwise I didn't have anybody else, no. And, uh, no, I was glad to get a chance, that's all. The only one I remember who cried was my mother, that's all. And, uh, otherwise, but then we corresponded, but I never got to take a trip over there before I retired in 1972, I retired and I took a trip over there to see my, I had two sisters and one brother over there. We were six children all together. And three of us went over this country and three of us were left over there, so.

GUMB: Okay, okay, that day that you spent on Ellis, do you remember, did you have to eat, did they serve you lunch there, do you remember?

ANDERSON: Where, when you mean?

GUMB: On Ellis Island.

ANDERSON: No, I don't think we had anything to eat when I was there because we could, we could, you see it only took about an hour, we could leave any time because

we could have gotten out on ferry. But there was a cafeteria there. I think I remember I had a cup of coffee, I think, or something like that and a sandwich. But I think we had to pay for it. I don't think we got anything free, you know, so.

GUMB: Right, do you remember anything about the cafeteria, what was your impression of the cafeteria?

ANDERSON: Oh, that was, it was something like you had on the boat or in Sweden, about the same thing. A coffee shop, and get yourself a cup of coffee, so that was nothing different.

GUMB: Do you remember the Great Registry Hall, the main space there where the examinations were?

ANDERSON: Oh, yes, that's, that big, like big glass windows, the sun was shining in. I remember it was a nice, sunny place.

GUMB: Do you remember something like that in Sweden, was that a special, was that a different kind of place?

ANDERSON: No, no, no. The only time there was anything big was when I went up to the consulate in Stockholm. That was a, that was a, the tallest building in Stockholm

at that time. I think it was about ten stories high.
The only big building I'd seen.

GUMB: So for that period of time that you had to wait, that you were waiting, for the ferry, for your aunt, actually, to meet you, where did you wait?

ANDERSON: You mean on Ellis Island?

GUMB: On Ellis Island.

ANDERSON: Oh, there was benches there, you could sit there. We sat there in the sun and my friend, my friend and I, we were there and, and you sit and talk and wait, that's all.

GUMB: Outside?

ANDERSON: Yeah, we took a walk around, look at different things, you know, that's about all.

GUMB: So you waited, just waited outside?

ANDERSON: Yeah, that's it. There was, you can be inside, too, in the big hall. There was no special space in it, but you could sit on the benches in there. There wasn't many people there, not that crowded, or anything like that.

GUMB: Was there anyone around who could help you?

ANDERSON: No, no, there was hardly anybody around. There was, it was kind of quiet, must have been a quiet day when I was there, because we were there early and, you know, we got pushed out, you see. Like the one of us, goes to the train and you were taken right out. And, uh, but also, when I had to go to Brooklyn, to the city, we had to wait for. When was a lot of people, of course, who had their friends there to come and pick them up. It just so happened that my aunt didn't come and it was the same thing with his brother. He was supposed to be there, too, so he was a bit anxious also. But, uh, then, uh, when he came, he came in on the last boat, see, and then he told me, that this is the last boat, if you don't get off on this one you, you won't be able to get out.

GUMB: Who told you that?

ANDERSON: The, uh, my friend's brother, you see, he told me that.

GUMB: The person you met you the boat?

ANDERSON: Yeah, his brother was supposed to come and meet him

and he had gotten the same information that my aunt had, see, and that he was supposed to meet, but when he didn't come on the boat on the middle of the day, then he got suspicious. So he hotfooted over to the customs office and got a special permit to get over to pick him up. But nobody told my aunt because I guess she was told from the Swedish American Line that I was supposed to come in on the ferry and she could meet me when I come in on the ferry. And he had been told the same thing. But when he didn't come in he got suspicious. So that's only a short walk, you see, from South Ferry over to the customs office. So he walked over. So he was the one, so he said, "If, uh, they told me that if you don't get somebody here to pick you up, you stay here." So I said, "I'll come with you." And then I did. So when we knew what's going on in the boat then he said something to the guard, you know, that I was with him. He requested it. So that's the way it worked.

GUMB: Do you remember exchanging your twenty-five dollars on Ellis?

ANDERSON: Twenty-five dollars? I didn't have it. I told him I had it, but I didn't have it. I had spent it

already. (he laughs) I didn't have a red cent in my pocket when I landed on that boat.

GUMB: They, they didn't check?

ANDERSON: They didn't check, no. He just said, said something like, "Have you got twenty-five dollars?" So I just said yes, and that's it. I had nothing. That's one thing I put over on them.

GUMB: So you really had to meet your aunt.

ANDERSON: Oh, yes. Yes, I was kind of concerned there once, at a time. But you stayed there, and the next day she had to come and pick me up. Because she would have questioned it, I guess. So that's that.

GUMB: Okay. Well, in summary, just, uh, if I ask sort of a general question, how, how did it, how has it felt to be an immigrant in this country? Your overall impression of . . .

ANDERSON: It's really no problem because there was quite a few, you know, Scandinavians around Brooklyn, you know, and you make a living with them. You started off, first I went to my aunt, aunt and uncle's church, they belonged to the Methodist Church up on Seventh

Avenue, and I went there, and then I met some people who belonged to the, uh, Vasa, you know, and you had the meetings and you joined with them.

GUMB: What was that?

ANDERSON: They had the Vasa, they called it. That's a society in this country. And, uh . . .

GUMB: Can you spell that?

ANDERSON: Vasa. That's V-A-S-A.

GUMB: What sort of society is it?

ANDERSON: Huh, that's more or less what they call, uh, sick benefits society, helping (?) health insurance, that's about all there is for it.

GUMB: For Scandinavian people?

ANDERSON: Yeah. So, no, it didn't take long before I got all mixed up and then. It didn't take me long to learn English either because I started off going to school right away and I picked it up very good. I had no problem.

GUMB: Did you study any English in Sweden?

ANDERSON: No, no, there was nothing there. There was, well, really, they had, what do you call, correspondence courses over there, but they cost money and I didn't have money for that anyway. Because money was scarce over there. You didn't get much, you know, working on the farm, you know. And the clothes over there was expensive. You worked almost four months to get, to buy a pair of shoes. And so . . .

GUMB: Was there, I remember you mentioned that you settled in Sunset Park. Was that a particularly Scandinavian area at that time?

ANDERSON: They called it Finn Town. There were a lot of Finnish people up there, you know. And I, I guess it's still up there, probably. They had a Finn restaurant down on Eighth Avenue and, uh, it's quite a section up there.

GUMB: Mr. Anderson, did you ever go back to Ellis Island, in later years?

ANDERSON: Yes, I did. When I worked for the BMT. They were organizing. The union was organizing. And they were afraid of a strike. So we had, we were taken over to Staten Island, to Ellis Island, to fix up some

quarters for they were supposed to use for the strike breakers, I guess. So we spent a day there fixing things up, but the strike never come about, so it was nothing done about that thing, I guess.

GUMB: What year was this?

ANDERSON: 1937. In the later part of '37. And, uh, 1938, then I was laid off, but ah, the unions got us an increase, I think of five percent, but we never got that because to keep the payroll on the same level we were told you laid so many men off in our department.

GUMB: What was your impression of Ellis, of Ellis Island on the second time?

ANDERSON: At that time, it didn't look much at that time, no, because it started to get dilapidated, you know. So I never knew that they were going to do this at Ellis Island because the only thing you read in the paper that it was going downhill, that place. So, nobody seemed to be. Was the Department of Parks still, uh, in charge of that thing, or what is it?

GUMB: Yes, the National Park Service.

ANDERSON: (he laughs) Oh, that is the one, they've always

had Ellis Island?

GUMB: They have just gotten control of it actually since 1965.

ANDERSON: Oh, I see. Well . . .

GUMB: Have you been back at all in recent years since it's been reopened?

ANDERSON: No, not in, not Ellis Island. We were trying to get there in 1973, when my brother was here, but it was not open then. You couldn't get there. You can't get there now, can you?

ANDERSON: No, no, it's closed now. Can you tell us what BMT stands for?

GUMB: Brooklyn Manhattan Transit.

GUMB: This ends our interview with Charles Anderson and the time is four o'clock.