

ABRAHAM GLAUBERMAN
BIRTH DATE:
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INTERVIEWER: HARVEY DIXON
RECORDING ENGINEER: SAME
INTERVIEW LOCATION: ELLIS ISLAND
TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY:
TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY: IRV SILBERG

HISTORIAN'S NOTE: Mr. Glauberman was a US citizen who worked at Ellis Island

DIXON: This is January 16, 1978 and I have the pleasure of talking to Abraham Glauberman who worked at Ellis Island from 1929 through 1942 as a clerk verifier. Mr. Glauberman, could you tell me specifically who you worked for.

GLAUBERMAN: I worked for the United States Immigration Service which was then part of the Department of Labor.

DIXON: And it changed during the time you worked at Ellis Island?

GLAUBERMAN: Yes sir, it did. After President Roosevelt took office sometime later, immigration was combined with naturalization and both of them were taken out of the Labor Department and put into the Justice Department.

DIXON: We will start right at the beginning. How did you get to Ellis Island when you started a day's work?

GLAUBERMAN: By ferry.

DIXON: You took a ferry.

GLAUBERMAN: It was a Department of Labor ferry. It was marked Department of Labor, later Department of Justice, and it was a ferry that left from the Barge Office which was almost alongside the Staten Island Ferry, not very far, not very far really, and near the Governor's Island Ferry, and it went directly to Ellis Island. And the trip took about fifteen minutes.

DIXON: And you started work what time in the day?

GLAUBERMAN: We started work at nine o'clock. The ferry left at a quarter before the hour.

DIXON: And did you have to wear a uniform when you worked at Ellis?

GLAUBERMAN: No sir, clerks did not have to wear uniforms.

DIXON: You got to Ellis Island, where did the boat put you off on the Island? Where did you get off?

GLAUBERMAN: It docked right there--there was a pier, a regular dock or pier--and then we got off.

DIXON: This was near the ferry slip?

GLAUBERMAN: Right at the ferry slip, and we went our way to the right, to the administrative building.

DIXON: That was the large building, right?

GLAUBERMAN: That was a large building. I understand by -- one of the guards once told me that he got it from someone that the style of architecture was Swedish, but all I know is by hearsay. What I'm telling you, I don't know myself.

DIXON: Then you worked in the main building. Which floor did you work on?

GLAUBERMAN: I worked on the, at first I worked as a verifier two flights up in the Record Division. I worked on papers that were known as Re-entry Permits. In other words, a person who arrived as an immigrant or alien, as he was called, and who was still an alien wanted to visit this country, needed a special permit which was called a Re-entry Permit since he had not yet become a U.S. citizen. And so we were given all those Re-entry Permit applications and it was our job to verify the entry of that particular individual.

DIXON: You mean they were already in the United States.

GLAUBERMAN: They had already entered into the United States.

DIXON: And had been processed through Ellis Island?

GLAUBERMAN: Then processed to Ellis Island and they had already been living there for years, some of them. But those who wanted to re-visit their country or some other country had to have a Re-entry Permit in order to be legally - in order to be admitted again. And to show that they had affected legal entry when they became--as aliens. They had to fill in this certificate which had to show, or the applications for this Re-entry Permit, which had to show that they--and for admission. And, of course, what we did was look up the index books which had listings of the names of the passengers who came - who - who came to the United States from Europe mostly and then the ship's manifests where we would find their names and we would answer or verify whatever they--the various points that they answered.

DIXON: You actually used the ship list that they came in under.

GLAUBERMAN: Yes sir. We used at first the index books which were just as indicated, indexes, or indices, and which indicated alphabetically the names. After we had located those names it would show us where on the manifests, it would -- we would find the name on the ship's manifests, and that is what we did.

DIXON: And then the person was cleared to return to the country they wished to go back to.

GLAUBERMAN: Eventually, as a result of our findings the names on the Re-entry Permit, we would submit our - the papers back to our supervisor and, of course, eventually the--

DIXON: Do you know where they went after the supervisor got them? In other words, what did the supervisor do with the papers in order to-- did he give them to someone else at Ellis Island or did they go to Washington?

GLAUBERMAN: I - there - I believe they went to Washington because I believe it was from Washington that they were issued those permits. Now besides working on permits we also worked on--we had what was called a Certificate of Arrival. That would be, in common vernacular, to mean First Papers. Those who intended to become citizens, who applied for citizenship, had to have First Papers.

DIXON: (?) from you?

GLAUBERMAN: From us, yes. Also they had to submit applications and we, with all the data surrounding their entry at - at the port, and then we would look them up, we would make the entry indicating the number of the Certificate of Arrival, etc., and then, of course, we would resubmit them. We would give them back to our supervisor and then from Washington, I believe, they would issue the so-called First Paper.

DIXON: This was a separate form that if a person wanted to be--

GLAUBERMAN: That was separate from Re-entry Permit. So that - that's -- those are some of the things that we worked on. We -- later, as the emergency arose, meaning the one after the First - the Second World War started, we would get visitors from - from various federal agencies, military agencies such as the War Department or the Navy Department. For instance, I remember one gentleman who was an officer from the ONI, Office of Naval Intelligence, and he would approach me or other verifiers and ask us -- give us the name and say, "Could you find this for me? Could you find the record of arrival of this person or of this individual?"

DIXON: Do you know why he wanted the information?

GLAUBERMAN: It was a - he just -- they had their - that was - they were - -It was for Intelligence purposes.

DIXON: This was during--

GLAUBERMAN: This was during the - the - our -- after we had entered the war.

DIXON: You mean early 1941?

GLAUBERMAN: Yes, or late 1941, and we entered the war on December 7th, of course, 1941. And after that. So we would have requests, all kinds of requests for entries of former immigrants or members of crew for that matter. We were also --

DIXON: You mean the crews on the boats that you--

GLAUBERMAN: Members of the -- yes, members -- who were listed as members of the crew, and there were many such. And, of course, many of them had been admitted legally.

DIXON: You mean people who worked on the boats when they--

GLAUBERMAN: People who worked on those ships, yes.

DIXON: They applied for Re-entry Permits?

GLAUBERMAN: Either they would apply or-- . Well, a very few of those applied first, but for various - for different reasons, we would also get requests for verify for the verification of arrivals of members of crew, as well as passengers. Later, of course, there were -- there were lists of passengers, alien passengers, who may have arrived by plane, so we had those too, but the fa--the vast majority were of - of people whose names we looked up -- were those who entered by the good old-fashioned steamships.

And, of course, most of them came in steerage or third class. And, of course, there was second class and first class. Now, on the ship's manifest you could tell the difference by the difference in color. The steerage or third-class passengers were listed on white paper, light colored. Second - second class would be on yellow and the first class (or sometimes known as Saloon) would be on pink. That's as far as I remember. And later they might have been also blue pages.

DIXON: Did you actually have contact with any of the immigrants or did you--

GLAUBERMAN: No sir. We didn't have any contact with the immigrants themselves. The only contact we had was through the papers that they submitted, applications for either Re-entry Permit or for citizenship or for whatever.

DIXON: These forms didn't include photographs or anything, they were just forms? There were no photographs.

GLAUBERMAN: Oh yes there were.

DIXON: There were photographs.

GLAUBERMAN: Yes there were, yes sir. There were photographs.

DIXON: You mean on the forms they submitted?

GLAUBERMAN: On the forms that they submitted, yes. There were - there were photographs. Definitely.

DIXON: The environment. Your office was located on the second floor you said.

GLAUBERMAN: At first I worked in the Record Division which was located on the -- two flights up. Now you might call that the second floor or the third floor.

DIXON: It was two flights up though from the ground floor.

GLAUBERMAN: Yes, there were two, there were two flights up. On the -- at first I -- I worked on the third floor, two flights up. The Record Division was located there. And, of course, when you - when we got out of the offices we would walk along what looked like a balcony and all the way down was a large hall where sometimes there would be a concert given by -- for immigrants or participated in by - by immigrants. And you must remember that after I had begun to work in 1929 and later years, the hump or the larger, the bulk of the immigrants had already arrived. But there were still many coming in.

DIXON: You said at first you worked on the third floor.

GLAUBERMAN: On the third floor in the Record Division. Now after working there for about five months or so, I was transferred to the Mail and File Room, which was on the floor below, one flight up.

DIXON: One flight up.

GLAUBERMAN: Mail and Files. In that - in that office my position was that of mail clerk. I don't know whether that was--well, my title was clerk. Clerk, perhaps, Mail and Files. And the supervisor of that office was Mr. Howard Jackson, Howard N. Jackson. So I had to ---I was not the only one. There were a couple of others with me and after we were broken in, what with -- our job was to go about the different offices such as the Law Division, the Bond Office, the Registry Division, the Record Division, and gather in the mail for signature that Mr. Uhl or Mr. Day, who was then Commissioner, who was the fir--who was Commissioner when I first entered the Service, Mr. Benjamin N. Day D-A-Y.

DIXON: Now he was Commissioner of what?

GLAUBERMAN: He was Commissioner of Immigration.

DIXON: And who was Mr. Uhl?

GLAUBERMAN: Mr. Byron H. Uhl, U-H-L, was the Assistant Commissioner. Later when the Commissioners were done away with, Mr. Uhl became, and others who succeeded him, became District Directors of Immigration. They were no longer Commissioners. But I remember that Mr. Day was the Commissioner when I first came and there were Commissioners after him, and one of the Commissioners who I am sure would be--whose name would be remembered or recognized by many of the listeners was Mr. Edward Corsi C-

O-R-S-I. Mr. Corsi used to be a member of --an officer of the New York State official family, and he was the Industrial Commissioner. Later he became - he was appointed Immigration Commissioner. He was one of the last ones, one of the last Commissioners we had. But Mr. Uhl was, in fact, he was the - in fact, he was the boss because he knew his laws, he really knew. He knew his immigration laws inside and out. He was a man who was a master of English, style, vocabulary and in other ways.

DIXON: Do you remember what offices were adjacent to you? In other words, how was the layout, the physical layout.

GLAUBERMAN: Yes sir, I do. Our office - our office was on the--

DIXON: We are talking now about the second floor.

GLAUBERMAN: The second floor, the mail office, the Mail and File Room. On that floor were also the Treasury - the Treasurer's Office. Mr. Wyman, John Wyman W-Y-M-A-N, was in charge. He was the man in charge. There was also an assistant, Mr. O'Donahue. He was one of the assistants. There was Miss Ethel Clarke C-L-A-R-K or K-E, she was one of the workers there and there were a number of others. On the other sides there was the Bond Office, which was adjacent to us going towards the Commissioner's Office. And then the Passport Office. The man in charge of the Bond Office was Mr. Charles W. Bryant. Mr. Monroe Kline K-L-I-N-E was in charge of the Passport Office.

DIXON: This is the whole time you were there?

GLAUBERMAN: That was while I -- most of the time while I was there, yes, most of the time. And then passing the Bond Office and then passing the Passport Office, then there would be the Commissioner's Office, and adjacent to the Commissioner's Office, and I believe they could -- there was a door, an interconnecting door, was the Assistant Commissioner's Office or the Office of the District Director as he was later to be called, Mr. Uhl. Then on the other ends of the - of the floor--

DIXON: Do you remember whether that would be the north or the south?

GLAUBERMAN: I believe it was going west -- going west, was the Deportation Office or Deporting Division. Then there was the Special Inquiry Division. Mr. Wasson was in charge there. The man in charge of the Deporting Office or the Deportation Division was Dr. Schlaar S-C-H-L-A-A-R, Dr Schlaar. And each one, of course, had his own staff. And I remember that in the Special Inquiry Division there was a gentleman by the name of Joseph Savoretti S-A-V-O-R-E-T-T-I. Mr. Savoretti later became one of the Commissioners or Deputy Commissioner in Washington as we were approaching the high '30s and lower '40s.

DIXON: Do you know how many people approximately actually worked on Ellis Island while you were there?

GLAUBERMAN: There were several hundred.

DIXON: Those were actual employees?

GLAUBERMAN: Yes. There were guards, custodial workers, there were matrons, of course, they had to serve the needs of the female immigrants, female aliens. I am not sure about the kitchen because that may have been a concession, I'm not sure, or a concessionaire. And, of course, there were clerks, as I said before, guards, immigrant inspectors. Later--

DIXON: Medical personnel?

GLAUBERMAN: I beg your pardon?

DIXON: Medical personnel?

GLAUBERMAN: Medical personnel, yes, there were medical personnel attached because they had to examine the--but I believe that they were on the staff of the Public Health Service, which occupied the other side of Ellis Island. In other words, getting off on the pier or getting off on the slip from - from the ferry, one would turn left to go to the offices and the hospital itself of the Public Health Service, whereas if you went to the right then you go to our offices where the administration offices of Immigrations Service itself were located, you turn to the right.

DIXON: So a couple of hundred would be the Immigration and Naturalization Service and not--

GLAUBERMAN: Yes, there were several hundred.

DIXON: And these people, they rode the ferry daily or did any of these people live on the Island who worked on the Island?

GLAUBERMAN: If there were anybo- if there was anyone living on the Island, it was -- must have been an exception. Must have been special reasons. Because the guards who came there and the laborers--oh, I mustn't forget the laborers, and there were many of them--the laborers would come in, not at a quarter of eight, but even I think at fifteen or twenty minutes even earlier. Because their hours were from seven-something or other to three-fifteen. They left on the boat leaving at three-fifteen. Now when we employees were ready to leave, we would leave on the--on the - on the -- we would work till 4:30 and then by 4:40 we had to be on the ferry leaving - leaving for New York, leaving for the Battery. Otherwise we might miss it and have to wait another hour.

DIXON: Do you remember the name of the ferry or was there more than one or was there just one?

GLAUBERMAN: There was one ferry and it was marked Department of Labor at first. Later it was changed to the Department of Justice.

DIXON: It didn't have a name or anything?

GLAUBERMAN: I don't recall, I don't remember. And, of course, on the ferryboat itself, on the ferry itself, you have captains, several

captains. They took turns, of course, and there were many deck hands and oilers and engineers. Those who worked downstairs in the - I don't know - in the -- with the machinery of the boat -- ship.

DIXON: Did Ellis Island change while you were there, the physical setup, or did it stay mostly the same?

GLAUBERMAN: The physical setup was mostly the same.

DIXON: And you actually worked--let's get the dates, you worked from--

GLAUBERMAN: I worked from February the 8th, 1929 until the time I was transferred to the War Production Board in Washington, and that was the middle of December of 1942.

FEMALE VOICE: NOVEMBER>

GLAUBERMAN: Maybe it was November, but not before then. I remember that the day I left there was a big sendoff for our District Director, Mr. Byron H. Uhl, who had completed at least 45 years of service.

DIXON: Was Ellis Island a good place to work? Was morale high, were people happy with their jobs or was it just like any other office or was it different?

GLAUBERMAN: Well, I would say the morale was mixed. Since I was attending college at night and since I am the type of individual that accepts things as they come, I did not--it didn't affect me adversely. I kept on plugging, working, doing my - my work day in and day out. There were quite a few of us, however, even I was among them, not - not satisfied with the very - with the very low salaries that we were getting which were not keeping pace with salaries in other agencies, notably in the Customs Division.

But aside from that, well, of course, we did get a chance to get promoted by taking tests for higher positions, Immigrant Inspector, for instance, or Naturalization Examiner. However, in my case I was not well-prepared. So I remained as a clerk and my chance for a promotion arose or came when I - when I was transferred to the War Production Board as a result of my having taken a Junior Professional Assistant series of examinations. Many of my - my fellow clerks did - did get promoted. They passed the -- whatever tests were necessary and some of them went fairly high, such as Sol Marks M-A-R-K-S, who when he started, I believe was a temporary, known as a temporary. And he worked alongside me in the aisles as a clerk verifier. However, he was a very bright young man and he - he really went to higher positions.

DIXON: Do you remember anything that was unique that happened at Ellis Island or any special event that you specifically remember that was--

GLAUBERMAN: Well, there was a man who was known as Red Johnson. The papers were -- would write about him, I think there was a flurry of

newspaper reports about him. He made himself notorious or he became notorious because he was - he was undesirable as far as the government was concerned . I -- I didn't have anything to do with that, however, a few times, several times while I was working in the mail room, I was asked to conduct visiting parties to the Island. And on one of those - one of those parties I was asked by them if I could - if they could see Red Johnson. They had read about or heard about him. And so the guard very kindly permitted us to take a look at him. That's -- that's one of my - that's is one of the--oh, I don't know whether to call it a highlight, or it was one of the interesting incidents, put it that way.

There was another highlight as far as I was concerned. Commissioner Corsi used to work after office hours. I was assigned to work after office hours. I came later in the morning because the mail - the mail accumulated and somebody had to work late. And so on one of those evenings, when I came to the Commissioner's office to collect the mail from him he asked me what I intended to do, what my ambition was. And I said well, I thought I would go into teaching. And so he pooh-poohed the idea. He said, "Oh, why do you want to go -- why don't you go into Social Service.

He said here, I'll give you a letter to Miss Lillian Wald who was then in charge of the Henry Street Settlement. He gave me the letter and I had gone over to Lillian Wald's place. Unfortunately she wasn't in. The man who was there did not encourage me or for some reason I felt disappointed. So I took the letter back and I mentioned -I did not mention it to the Commissioner. I think that someone else in my place would have -- who was really ambitious would have continued, would have gone the next day or the next week in order to show the letter to, to get introduced. Well, perhaps I was shy, I don't remember. And I would like to say that in favor -- to the credit of Mr. Corsi who gave me the impression that he was a very serious man.

DIXON: Do you remember anything that happened that specifically was relevant to the immigrants or to yourself in connection with the immigrants or anything else that you want to add about your work time on Ellis Island?

GLAUBERMAN: No, I cannot -- I cannot think of anything at the moment.

DIXON: Well, I have enjoyed talking to you.

GLAUBERMAN: Thank you. I enjoyed -- your visit, this conversation.

DIXON: And I hope you get to return to Ellis Island to visit again if you would like to do that.

GLAUBERMAN: Yes sir, I would like to do that.

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