

NPS-113

EVELYN HILL

BIRTH DATE: UNKNOWN

INTERVIEW DATE: OCTOBER 19, 1978

RUNNING TIME:

INTERVIEWER: HARVEY DIXON

RECORDING ENGINEER: UNKNOWN

INTERVIEW LOCATION: LIBERTY ISLAND, NY

TRANSCRIPT ORIGINALLY PREPARED BY: CHARLENE KEYLOR, 3/1979

TRANSCRIPT RECONCEIVED BY: CHICK LEMONICK. 6/1996

TRANSCRIPT NOT REVIEWED

CONCESSIONAIRE AT THE STATUE OF LIBERTY
BEGINNING IN 1922

ORAL HISTORIAN'S NOTE: MRS. HILL IS THE MOTHER OF JAMES HILL, INTERVIEW NPS-125. PAUL E. SIGRIST, JR., DIRECTOR OF ORAL HISTORY, 5/1996

DIXON: Today is October 19, 1978. My name is Harvey Dixon and I am talking with Mrs. Evelyn Hill who has a long association with Liberty Island. Mrs. Hill, when did you first come to Liberty Island?

HILL: September 22, 1922.

DIXON: And you lived on Liberty Island starting in 1922?

HILL: Until '33.

DIXON: How did that come to be? How did it come that you were on Liberty Island?

HILL: How I came to be living on Liberty Island? I married Mr. Hill and naturally he worked here so I moved to the Island because they gave him a house to live in.

DIXON: Right, and what did Mr. Hill do on Liberty Island?

HILL: He was first the Post Exchange, the hospital, and then he was running our place, the souvenir, he was the buyer and everything.

DIXON: Right, but he started out working with the hospital or with the Post Exchange?

HILL: At first the hospital, then the Post Exchange.

DIXON: And he operated the Post Exchange for the military?

HILL: Yes. They needed somebody in charge of the Post Exchange. He went over. And then when they saw a lot of visitors come back, they were buying stuff which the government was never allowed to, so Mr. Hill, (?) to buy it and he did. What he paid, I have not the slightest idea. Of course, ninety-five percent of the merchandise you bought had to be thrown overboard because they were broken, but he had to pay for it.

DIXON: This was stuff he sold in the PX or he sold it in the concessions?

HILL: Well, it used to belong to the Post Exchange. It was known as the Post Exchange. The only thing, people living on the Island, they could only buy sodas, you know, I don't know much about the food because I never went to the Post Exchange. I never worked in the Post Exchange. I only started to work when Mr. Hill took over the concession, so naturally we had two places. We had a small place on the dock. I worked there. After we had a man who retired. And then he had a man work at the Frankfurt House, as all the food that was sold as frankfurters and sodas.

DIXON: Right, but the people who visited Liberty Island they couldn't shop in the PX. They could only shop at--

HILL: At our place.

DIXON: Right. Was there ever a concession on Liberty Island back in that time? I mean in the Statue itself, was there one?

HILL: No, no.

DIXON: No, just the frankfurters and the--

HILL: No, nothing.

DIXON: Okay.

HILL: Then years afterwards when the Interior Department took it over, many, many, years later, I am sorry to admit I don't remember what year it was, we started to have the place at the Statue. That was many, many, years after. Then it was--I'm correct around World War Two.

DIXON: Right. And the place around World War Two, where was it located in the Statue?

HILL: I lived on the Island--

DIXON: No, no, the concession and the location in the Statue, where was it in the Statue building? Was it like on the first--

HILL: On the second floor, because the ground floor was just still, you know, built a lot of rooms with, know it as an old-fashioned prison.

DIXON: So it was on the second floor.

HILL: Yes.

DIXON: Right. When you came to live on Liberty Island right from the beginning?

HILL: Correct.

DIXON: Right from the beginning?

HILL: From 1922 to '33. What was not necessary for us to live on the Island. And I wanted my children to go to a city school, so we moved off the Island. But, we commuted to the Island.

DIXON: So you actually lived on the Island when?

HILL: From '22 to '33.

DIXON: You lived on the Island?

HILL: Correct.

DIXON: And when you came to the Island, the Island was a military base or--

HILL: Correct.

DIXON: How was it different then, I mean--

HILL: Well, where the difference was they had Army soldiers' barracks, smaller, you know, like a hospital, not a hospital, but, and they had some people, they had buildings all around. People used to live there. And naturally, afterwards all those building were torn down, and the Island was rebuilt as you see it now. What year, you know, I quite can't recall, but it was around World War Two.

DIXON: Right. And is the house that you lived in when you lived on Liberty Island still standing or is the--

HILL: No siree. The only thing left I had, when they took our building apart, somebody gave me a brick. And my son put it in a box and I still have the brick in the box, as a memento.

DIXON: And your children lived here with you until '33? Is that--

HILL: Well, they lived with me, yes, because my daughter, I had to go, what was the name of the place, Long Island at the Army hospital. She was born there and came back here. And I was lucky to get a nurse living on the Island to help me take because I wasn't used to that. My people were well enough to do that each one of us had their own nurse. And then Jim was born on the Island.

DIXON: There was a doctor who came or how--

HILL: When he was born, yes, there used to be still the Army, there was two doctors living on the Island.

DIXON: So he was actually born on Liberty Island?

HILL: Correct.

DIXON: But the house is torn down that he was born in.

HILL: Yes.

DIXON: Do you know of anyone else that was born on Liberty Island or had you heard?

HILL: I knew of Mrs. Long, and I know that she had a child born on the garage, they couldn't take her fast enough to the hospital. And many, many, years after there was a woman here, and she said, and her father was in the service, I cannot recall the years, because she was quite middle aged already, and she claimed she was the first one to be born on the Island.

DIXON: When the military was on Liberty Island, how many people, military people, was it a lot of people or a small number?

HILL: Well, they had the barracks full of soldiers. And they had a few captains, lieutenants, all of them military officers.

DIXON: Right.

HILL: Except the barracks had the soldiers.

DIXON: The commander of Liberty Island, it was called Bedloe's Island then, right?

HILL: Correct.

DIXON: Right, and the commander was a captain or a colonel or a--

HILL: I think he was a colonel. Bedloe's Island. And then they called it Fort Wood. It is an Army post name.

DIXON: Oh, they called the Army post Fort Wood?

HILL: Bedloe's Island, the man who discovered the island, his name was Bedloe and that is why they named it Bedloe's Island. And then when the Army took it over they called it Fort Wood. And then when the Interior Department took it over, it is, you know, Liberty Island, Statue of Liberty.

DIXON: Alright. Did you enjoy working at Liberty, you worked at Liberty Island the whole time? I mean, you worked on and off?

HILL: No, I did, because when the children got older, being as I had enough help at home, I was able to come here. And Jim, when he was ready to go to high school, he went to military high school, Gainesville, Georgia. It was a common name, but he went to a military school, Gainesville, Georgia. My daughter, you know, when she graduated high school and lived in New York, she went to Hunter High School. And then she, being originally from Baltimore, not originally, but she went to Baltimore College.

DIXON: When you were on Liberty Island did you meet any famous people

or did famous people come here, or what?

- HILL: I never associated, you know, like I do now. Now, I usually joke and kid. Sometimes if I am not too busy I ask them where they come from. And I enjoy every, every, minute. I talk to the customers and I enjoy their company.
- DIXON: When World War Two was going on how did it effect Liberty Island, how did effect the way that place ran? Was it different?
- HILL: No, very good.
- DIXON: The war didn't have an affect on visitors?
- HILL: No, sir.
- DIXON: The Island was open?
- HILL: Correct.
- DIXON: Do you ever remember a time when the Island wasn't open? Was it ever closed to the public?
- HILL: No, the only time it was closed was when the weather was very, very, bad and the boats didn't run. It was very, very, rare. Averaged about once or twice a year.
- DIXON: Okay, way back in say, 19--when you first started here, how many people in a day came would you say? That you saw.
- HILL: Well, just a few hundred on a Sunday. Not as many.
- DIXON: What was the best day for people to come, was it Sunday?
- HILL: Well, as you know, out-of-towners usually come during the week. City people, more or less, even now, New York and around New York.
- DIXON: That's on the weekend.
- HILL: Yes.
- DIXON: When people came to Liberty Island did they come the same way, come from Battery Park to Liberty Island?
- HILL: That's the only way you could come.
- DIXON: Right. Does the Circle Line run the concessions or was it different?
- HILL: There was a different.
- DIXON: A different one.
- HILL: Yes. What was the name, I should know. I know when they left Liberty Island, you know, they sold it to Mr. Berry and he runs it.
- DIXON: Mr. Berry with Circle Line. Do you remember what the fare was when it

first started? How much did it cost people when they first started running it?

HILL: Thirty-five cents round trip.

DIXON: And now it is a dollar fifty, so it has changed. Well, let's see, well do you remember any important things that happened, like was there ever an explosion or accident or something special that happened?

HILL: Well, not exactly, but, you know, when they had trouble in Hungary, a bunch of fellows came, chained themselves up around the Statue till United States sees that Hungary gets their freedom. Naturally, that did not happen. They had to call the police, unchained them, took them off the Island. What happened I don't know.

DIXON: Anything else like that, I mean, any other--

HILL: Well, somebody came and tried to explode. And whatever they found I don't think there was any danger, but they did try to damage the Statue.

DIXON: The building that you are in now for concessions, when did you start using that building?

HILL: Around, I think, in the '60s, early '60s, we built it. A small place. And as the people started to come we gradually extended from the (?) to go out the front door. This was all our extension and we paid for everything.

DIXON: Right. You mean you added on to the building?

HILL: Yes sir. We kept on extending.

DIXON: Well, tell me a little bit about your background. I mean where did you come from to come to Liberty Island?

HILL: Well, May the 14th, 1921 I came to the United States. And I went to Baltimore, that's where my brothers (?). And then I came to visit a friend of mine, well, no use to say that, and met Mr. Hill. Then I went back to Baltimore. He called me up two a week till I said, yes. So I came to New York and got married September 12, 1922.

DIXON: And you came right out to Liberty Island to live.

HILL: Correct.

DIXON: When you came into the United States in 1921, did you come through Ellis Island?

HILL: No.

DIXON: You didn't come through Ellis.

HILL: No, no. Of course, my younger brother than me being, I won't say it, my mother didn't want him to go into the service, we came. Came in with the first class. My oldest met us, the one who lived in

Baltimore, and he took us straight to Baltimore.

DIXON: You came from where, where did you come from?

HILL: Warsaw, Poland.

DIXON: You are originally from Poland?

HILL: Yes, I was born in Poland. That's only, you know, me and some of my brothers, but not my background. They came from different places. My grandmother, my mother's mother, had two brothers. They were famous in New York. One was a sculptor, built a lot of things at Central Park. One was a great painter and he claimed that he painted the first picture of General Grant.

DIXON: What were their names? Do you know their names, the names of the two people?

HILL: The one she told me--I had a cousin living here in New York, and his name was Rosenleague. His parents, they were both doctors, they were asked to come to Panama when they had then different trouble with diseases, so they went to Panama and treated them. After they finished with Panama they decided to move to New York. I never met them because they went away before I came. In other words, they died before I came.

DIXON: Right. So the sculptor and the painter were Rosenleague?

HILL: Their name was DiPilhouse, but one married in England a countess. The other one a baroness. And being that my background is Jewish, they, you know, took over their wife's names and if they took their religion, I wouldn't know because I wasn't here. The only one I knew is Mr. Rosenwike whose parents were the doctors. But he had a sister, Rose Lesser, and she married a man with children and they had something to do with Ellis Island.

DIXON: What was their last name again?

HILL: Well, I don't know what name she, you know, I know her married name was Rose Lesser.

DIXON: When you worked on Liberty Island, was there any connection between Liberty Island and Ellis Island? Did they have a concession?

HILL: No sir.

DIXON: There was nothing. They were just completely different?

HILL: No. It was in immigration. We had nothing to do with it.

DIXON: Do you remember any changes that occurred in the Statue of Liberty like the construction when they were building the museum or when they were--

HILL: Well, yes. Later years they were building, you know, museum. They had to tear down all the prison rooms. There were a lot of rooms with

prisons.

DIXON: There were prison rooms?

HILL: On the main floor once like the (?), there were rooms and anybody that was a prisoner, they took them, they were (?) in there in those prisons. And the ones who had to be executed they took them to Ellis Island to be executed and they were buried right there somewhere.

DIXON: Prisoners from where? Where would the prisoners come from? Army prisoners?

HILL: No, there was something that had to do with the boats with the city.

DIXON: With the boats?

HILL: Well, the ocean liners and all that.

DIXON: Did they put prisoners here, actually?

HILL: Yes sir.

DIXON: And then they took them to Ellis.

HILL: Ellis Island.

DIXON: What else did they use the building for, I mean, they used it for a prison, the prison was run by this.

HILL: The, you know, the Army.

DIXON: It was run by the Army. It was a military prison.

HILL: Yes. And I recall, I went in one of those rooms, must have been a cold winter. I saw icicles hanging down from the ceiling.

DIXON: They had people in those rooms?

HILL: When they had prisoners they must have had them.

DIXON: Do you know how many people were in (?) lot of people

HILL: Well, they had quite a few rooms. Quite a few, but I cannot recall how many, but there were plenty.

DIXON: They had actually had like bars, like in a prison or just separate rooms?

HILL: No, separate rooms. Each one was in a separate room.

DIXON: Right. And they tore all this down.

HILL: All torn down, to build the museum, whatever they did.

DIXON: Do you have anything important, I mean, like what else would there be

just changes that occurred or things that happened?

HILL: Not when the Interior department run, everything was splendid. It was running the way the Island should run.

DIXON: The Coast Guard had a place here on Liberty Island for a while didn't they? Or was the Coast Guard here?

HILL: Well, when they had the Army post there were a few, you know, but

DIXON: It was mostly Army while the Coast Guard was here.

HILL: Yes.

DIXON: When people came to Liberty Island then how did they come into the Statue, they came through a different entrance right?

HILL: Yes, through the front. They didn't have the back. Through the front there is a door. They came in through there.

DIXON: Right. And so when people came that way, where was your stand located? Was it there?

HILL: I told you, one flight up.

DIXON: Right. But you said there was a stand at first on the dock. Was it the old dock?

HILL: The old dock, yes.

DIXON: And the man who sold the hotdogs and stuff, where did he sell them?

HILL: At the round one, not on the dock. But then outside our building there was a little room, not wide just, and that's where they sold.

DIXON: So that was the same place, but the stand was on the old dock.

HILL: Yes, yes. The old dock was only for souvenirs.

DIXON: And you say it was on the second landing. It was like where the museum is now?

HILL: Yes. It was right near the door.

DIXON: To where the museum is?

HILL: Yes.

DIXON: Did anyone work at Liberty Island who went on to become somebody noteworthy? I mean, was there anyone here like a famous person who worked here or someone you knew?

HILL: Well, whoever lived at the Army post, like I said, they had officers and just the small barracks for Army. But no outsiders, no civilians.

DIXON: The military people that lived here, they had their families actually live on Liberty Island.

HILL: Yes.

DIXON: Why?

HILL: They lived here, but the majority worked Governors Island and would, and then they had a building in New York where some of them worked there. It is all torn down now.

DIXON: The people that worked on Ellis, none of them lived on Liberty. I mean, there was none?

HILL: Just the officers. You know, the ones, all the officers who lived on Liberty Island, they worked on Governors Island.

DIXON: How about Ellis, did any of them work on Ellis?

HILL: Nor siree.

DIXON: But people who lived on Liberty Island worked on Governors Island.

HILL: Yes, the officers.

DIXON: And the families on Liberty Island, the military families, they had a PX. Did they have a grocery store or did they have

HILL: Not much of a-- just like I said, maybe sodas and candy and not too much. The main shopping that they do is at Governors Island.

DIXON: And let's see, about on--

HILL: That's where I had to go to do my shopping.

DIXON: When you came to Liberty Island, was the land the same way it is, was there a sea wall around it, and were there trees or was it different or flatter?

HILL: Well, naturally, when the Interior Department took it over, where the green (?) front, they remodeled that. And they put trees around. They modified it for people to enjoy when they came here.

DIXON: But there were trees and stuff when you came.

HILL: Yes.

DIXON: There weren't any rabbits or anything like that, or squirrels?

HILL: No. We had a lot of dogs, everybody had dogs. There was one dog buried that use to belong to the Army post and he is buried between the sea wall and the main door going to the Island, somewhere between it. When you go from here to that door, it is to the left side. They had big ceremony. I remember there was a sergeant, Mr. Meyer, that was his favorite and he saw that he had a good burial.

DIXON: When was this? Can you remember what time? Was it before World War One, I mean, World War Two?

HILL: Yes, around that time.

DIXON: Well, do you have anything else that you want to add?

HILL: No. As long as I don't tell my family background what is there

DIXON: Well, is there anything about your family background that you think would be of interest or you want to add?

HILL: Well, as I told you, my grandmother, whose brothers were famous. They all came from Birmingham, England, you know. My father's father they were not in New York. He came from Russia. He lived near Austria and he made a (?) took her to Russia, and he had a lot or orders so he built a factory near Warsaw. And he had over three hundred people to work. But, as you know, years ago Russia bought a lot of stuff. World War One broke up, Russia didn't pay back, so naturally my grandfather went broke. My father actually went broke, because my mother had the money to furnish it, but then it was--as my mother's background was very, very, wealthy. Very wealthy.

DIXON: Well, we are going to talk to your son at a later date, but when did your son actually become involved with Liberty Island? When did he start? He was born, I know

HILL: When he came back from military school. I wanted him to go to college. He started, but he had a lot of friends who didn't. And they used to meet him by the subway and not let him go. So he gave it up, to my disappointment.

DIXON: Well, I have enjoyed talking to you. It was nice to share all of your memories.

HILL: So have I.

DIXON: Thank you.

HILL: That's all? Where is my penny?