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SARAH MACKEY GILLESPIE
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IRELAND, 1910
AGE 19

SHIP: FURNESSIA
PORT:
RESIDENCES:
 IRELAND: LONDONDERRY, NORTHERN IRELAND
 US: ELIZABETH, NJ;

DIXON: Today is October 16, 1979. My name is Harvey Dixon and I'm visiting with Mrs. Sarah Gillespie--Mrs. John Gillespie who lives in Elizabeth, New Jersey. Mrs. Gillespie is going to tell us about her trip from Ireland, so why don't we begin. Tell us what year you came from Ireland.

GILLESPIE: What year I came? I was just sittin' thinking.

DIXON: I believe in your letter you mentioned it was 1910.

GILLESPIE: 1910, you're right. I think it was October, 1910, yes.

DIXON: Where did you come from in Ireland?

GILLESPIE: From Londonderry, the black North.

VOICE: The black north.

GILLESPIE: We had a wonderful time, though. The neighbors there was wonderful. You know, we were different nationa-- no, not different nationalities, but different religions, but they were all good. We had very nice neighbors.

DIXON: How old were you when you left?

GILLESPIE: Nineteen.

DIXON: Nineteen. Why did you leave?

GILLESPIE: Well, because my brother was out here and my sister, and I wanted to come out too, but then I was very sad and I didn't want to leave them home.

DIXON: Did you come all by yourself, or did you--?

GILLESPIE: Yeah. Well, no. There was another young man that had been over, you know. Come back to Ireland, then he was coming out here again. So then, he brought me back. Of course, I had a girlfriend on the boat, we met, two girls, but it was very nice. Only, it was such a rough trip.

DIXON: Did your parents stay behind in Ireland?

GILLESPIE: Oh yes, oh yes, they stayed behind. They still -- my mother is dead but my father is still alive, hm, hm, and had it very hard over there - there lately, you know, with all the -- everything going on. I wrote a letter back in March and it just got there now. The mail was, you know, they would stop the mail. So then I heard the mail was going back so I sent the letter back, in a different envelope, of course.

DIXON: Right, well, when you got on the--what was the boat's name again?

GILLESPIE: Furnessia, Furnessia, the Anchor Line, Furnessia, and we were on for thirteen days. You better picture somewhere around for thirteen days with the storm.

DIXON: When you left Londonderry did you stop anywhere else or did you just come straight?

GILLESPIE: No, we just came. Well, they had a tender, or whatever you call them, a boat from the liner, and then you just get into - get onto the boat of course.

DIXON: Right.

GILLESPIE: And then coming back. When you got back, we, what do you call it? Well, the fact -- it was -- they were very nice to us I must say. I think I said in the letter, well the only part that anybody remembered to give them anything to eat when we got there. They gave us coffee and sandwiches or something when we got to Ellis Island. They said that never happened to anybody else before. I guess it was time for us after sailing for thirteen days maybe.

DIXON: Well, when you were on the boat, did you share a cabin with a lot of people?

GILLESPIE: No, no, we had our own - we had our own little bunk. You know, another girl and me, each one had her little room, you know.

DIXON: You had a room all to yourself with just two people in it?

GILLESPIE: Yes, yes, yes. But there was a lot of people on the boat of course, a lot of nice people. And I - I met the Purser, he was nice. He

wanted to take me for a walk on the boat. I said, "If you take me on land ,I'll go, but not on the boat." (Laughter)

DIXON: (Laughter) it was thirteen days?

GILLESPIE: Thirteen days, yes.

DIXON: You said it was very rough on there.

GILLESPIE: Oh, it was rough. I'm telling you we all, the dishes were all rolling off the table. You had to hold on.

DIXON: You left in October, in the fall?

GILLESPIE: In October. I don't really know the date, it was early in October, maybe around the seventh or something. It was early in October.

DIXON: Did anything--when the boat was rocked, were people scared?

GILLESPIE: Oh, yes, you were holding on, holding on to a table or a chair, holding on from wall to wall. (Laughter) Oh, it was very rough, very rough.

DIXON: But it was rough the whole trip, or just part of the trip?

GILLESPIE: Well, about three or four days of the trip. It was thirteen days, and that's -- was three or four days of the trip that it was so rough, and everybody was scared.

DIXON: The people who were on the boat, there were other people going to America as immigrants or they were just travelers?

GILLESPIE: No, they were all immigrants, no, no, they were immigrants. They were coming here.

DIXON: The whole boat, the big boat, or little boat? A lot of people?

GILLESPIE: Oh no, the big Furnessia, it was a liner - it was an ocean liner.

DIXON: Do you have any idea how many people were on board?

GILLESPIE: No, I really couldn't tell you. I couldn't tell you that. You know, it is so far back.

DIXON: Right. When you actually got to New York City, what happened?

GILLESPIE: Oh, my sister and my aunt met me at Ellis Island.

DIXON: So when you got to New York, the boat took you to--the boat docked and then you went to Ellis?

GILLESPIE: Yes, yes. The boat docked and then we went to open on the -- they call it a tender, I think. Don't they, the small boat?

DIXON: Right.

GILLESPIE: Well, that's what we came in on then. And my sister and my aunt met me at the - at the dock I guess. I don't know.

DIXON: When you were on Ellis Island, how long were you on Ellis Island?

GILLESPIE: Oh no, just about an hour or two. That was all. That was all. They let us go off right away when we had our transportation to wherever we were going. And some women got sent back but they had something the matter with them, a sore throat or anything, they got sent back. They didn't let them in see?

DIXON: Okay. So what actually happened to you when you got to Ellis? Did they give a medical inspection or did they check your eyes or did they--?

GILLESPIE: No, I don't think so. Well, I - well I had the touch of a sore throat too so I guess they went and they go there -- inspect it - that and I was all right, and they let me go.

DIXON: And you say they fed you when you were there?

GILLESPIE: Yes. They fed us, and as I said before, it was the first time ever I remembered anybody getting fed.

DIXON: They fed everybody from the boat or just the--?

GILLESPIE: I don't know, I really don't know, but they fed our group anyway, because our tables were knocked all over and the dishes were all on the floor. It was rough, but it is so long ago, I forget it.

DIXON: Where did you eat on--did you eat in the dining room, or did you eat out--you ate in the dining room--? Was it a large room?

GILLESPIE: I'm trying to think. Yes, it was a large room, we ate at there. I don't know whether it was a dining room or what it was but it was a room to eat off with plates and tea or coffee, I don't know.

DIXON: Was it just the people from your boat in the room or were there other people around?

GILLESPIE: No, no, there was more than that, you know, whoever could fit at the tables I guess.

DIXON: Was the place crowded, busy? Do you remember?

GILLESPIE: No, not too. No, not too busy because, like I said, they didn't feed everybody, just a certain few, see, and it wasn't -- bad.

DIXON: But I mean the whole island. Was the whole island busy? Did you see lots of people there?

GILLESPIE: No, no, we didn't, because when we got off the tender, then, as I said my si-sister and my aunt met us and then we left right away. We didn't wait for anything else. We were too glad to get over.

DIXON: Do you remember what you had to eat? Do you remember sandwiches and soup you said, or--?

GILLESPIE: Yes, I think we had sandwiches for breakfast or toast or something. I really don't know, and tea.

DIXON: And, you said you had get a ticket out, some kind of transportation ticket, or did you have to buy it on Ellis Island?

GILLESPIE: No, no, I didn't. No, they gave it to us free.

DIXON: Oh, they gave it to you?

GILLESPIE: Oh yes, they gave it to us free.

DIXON: Your sister and your aunt came to meet you, and what did you need a ticket to--a ticket to go with them? Is that what the ticket--?

GILLESPIE: No, no, I didn't need a ticket to go with them, no. They bought it right to Elizabeth. They were from Elizabeth, and they brought us right back to Elizabeth, to my aunt's house, see?

DIXON: When you got to Manhattan, how did you get to Elizabeth? Was it a train?

GILLESPIE: Oh by train, yes.

DIXON: There was a train?

GILLESPIE: Oh yes, yes, yes, the Central Railroad I guess, I've been on it for years. Yes, we came by train because there weren't many buses running then I don't think.

DIXON: Right, probably not.

GILLESPIE: No.

DIXON: So what happened after you got to Elizabeth?

GILLESPIE: Oh, I stayed at my aunt's for a few days and then my sister got me a job with her. She was a cook some place and she got me as a waitress see, in a private home. Lovely, very nice. But, of course, I was independent, you know, I didn't want to do anything anybody told me. (Laughter)

DIXON: Right, well, that is true of everybody at times.

GILLESPIE: So one man that I had worked with - another Mr. -- they had a - they had a factory down in Perth Amboy or some place, and he would tell me something to do and I wouldn't pay any attention to him, and he'd call me an independent Irish hussy. (Laughter)

DIXON: (Laughter)

GILLESPIE: Because I wasn't used to getting bossed around, but he wasn't bossing me, he was just asking me and telling me what to do, so I didn't pay any attention to him. So, I was an independent Irish hussy. Because I wasn't used to being bossed around. He wasn't the boss, he was just there to - [not understood] - Irish hussy.

DIXON: And after that, what happened?

GILLESPIE: After that happened, I got the job and then I was here three years and I got married.

DIXON: What was your name before you were married?

GILLESPIE: Mackey, Mackey, Scotch.

DIXON: Could you spell it for me?

GILLESPIE: From what?

DIXON: Could you spell it?

GILLESPIE: Oh, M-A-C-K-E-Y. Some spelled it MC-K-A-Y, McKay, but we spelled it - we [not understood] Mackey.

DIXON: Right, that's why I wanted to check it. And you married Mr. Gillespie. Was Mr. Gillespie from Ireland?

GILLESPIE: No, no, he was from here, he was from Elizabeth.

DIXON: Right.

GILLESPIE: He was from Elizabeth, and then I had five children. I have one, the oldest son is a policeman -- has been for thirty years, and then I have another daughter, a nurse, but she is out in Michigan, and then I have another daughter in Missouri. They are scattered all over. and then one here, Eileen, the youngest one lives here in Elizabeth. She is married and lives here. Her and her husband comes nearly every day because I don't get around too well. I can't get around without my horse, as I call it.

DIXON: Right.

GILLESPIE: So she comes and she cooks for us. Of course, Al is such a help. Al never had any schooling but oh, he is -- he's got the brains. I tried to get him into different schools, they wouldn't take him. But

now they take him, see, but they wouldn't take him then. But he got along all right. He is my [not understood] - he's my memory and my worker.

DIXON: That's good.

GILLESPIE: Is any thing more I know about Ireland--oh, we had it very nice there in Ireland. My father worked for a millionaire; Bernard Caine [ph] his name was. My father was in charge of all the, you know the-- the farm, and there was all the cattle and the horses. He had an auction every year, selling the horses and the cows. And then my older brother, Johnny, he managed that for him. He used to go to Sco-- he went to Scotland every week. They landed - this man - or man - they went to travel over to pick up cows for to sell them and buy them. And my brother went with him all the time and did his whole -- book work and everything.

DIXON: You said you were Scottish. How did you wind up in Londonderry?

GILLESPIE: Oh, I'm not Scottish, I just said that is a Scottish name. You know, I was always in - in Ireland.

DIXON: Are you glad you came from Ireland?

GILLESPIE: Oh, well, I don't know. Yes, I am, because there is nobody over there now. My family is here and I'm glad I came. I never wanted to go back because I thought if I would go back, I wouldn't want to -- to come back here again; I would want to stay. So, I have a brother home in Ireland, yet. You know, my youngest brother lives there with his family, and my two nieces, I guess. They were here about a year ago, and they came from Ireland to visit and they stopped to see me. Very nice people -- were, very nice. And of course, north of Ireland was supposed to be the richest part, the north, but they called it the "Black North."

DIXON: Well, why did your brothers and your people who came before you, why did they leave? They just wanted to try a new--?

GILLESPIE: They wanted to come here, they wanted to come here because there were nothing much over there, only farming, and they wanted to come here. They got along all right. They got jobs. My brother was a foreman, you know, for the railroad, or he worked in New York on the subways I guess, and he was a, you know, I don't know what he was. Whatever they are, he was a railroad man anyway.

DIXON: Motorman, right.

GILLESPIE: And then the other brother he just worked at different jobs. He worked mostly for the city here, the other brother. And then my sister, as I said, she went to Plainfield and she got married there, and I got married in Elizabeth and I stayed in Elizabeth and she stayed in Plainfield. We see one another every week.

DIXON: Did you ever feel like an immigrant when you came?

GILLESPIE: Ever see what?

DIXON: Feel like an immigrant when you came? Did you ever feel different because you hadn't been born in the United States?

GILLESPIE: Oh no, no, no, because of my family see? No, I didn't feel different. I spoke pretty good English. It didn't take me long to catch on, see, because I - I had been to school for thirteen years in Ireland. And my father was afraid they would take us and put us some place and he made us stop when we were thirteen years old, stop school, but we learned enough then. We had good teachers. And then I have a -- my son is a policeman here in Elizabeth, and I have a grandson and a lawyer, and a [not understood] is a lawyer. One grandson and the other one is a policeman in Westfield, and then I have a grandson out in Missouri, a lawyer too, Barry, the name is. So, I am well taken care of.

DIXON: Were there other immigrants who settled in Elizabeth from--?

GILLESPIE: No, not that I knew of, no, no. I just made friends with this one girl and then we separated when we got to Ellis Island and that was the end of it. I never heard from her again, but I had a friend coming. The people in the boat was very nice, very nice, on the trip. So, what else can I say? What can I say?

DIXON: Do you remember seeing the Statue of Liberty when you--?

GILLESPIE: Oh yes, yes. As soon as we got here, we seen it, yes.

DIXON: Did you stand on deck and watch it or was it too rough?

GILLESPIE: Oh, it was too rough I guess. But I have been to the Statue of Liberty. I wouldn't go upstairs. I sat downstairs till the others came down. I didn't want to go up. Oh, I've been to a lot of places.

DIXON: Did you ever go back to Ellis Island to revisit it?

GILLESPIE: Oh no, no, no I didn't. There was nothing there for me to go back to. My family was here.

DIXON: Did you see any of the people who worked on Ellis Island when you were there?

GILLESPIE: No, no, no, just the ones that was at the table with us, or something like that, waiting on us or something like that, but no. I didn't make friends with any of them. But everybody was nice, I must say. Everybody was friendly.

DIXON: They treated you well? There was no--?

GILLESPIE: Huh?

DIXON: They treated you well?

GILLESPIE: Oh yes, yes, we were treated the best, yes. We were, we were well treated.

DIXON: Do you have any stories to tell about?

GILLESPIE: No, no.

DIXON: No stories?

GILLESPIE: Only that we got tossed all around in the boat. That was the only story.

DIXON: Did anyone get hurt when the boat was--?

GILLESPIE: No, I didn't think anybody got hurt. Not that I know of at the time.

DIXON: Have you been on a ship since? Did you ever go on a boat like that again?

GILLESPIE: Oh, I went on a ferry boat from here to Staten Island, back and forth, but I never went on another trip. But I've had train rides out to Michigan and Missouri, not Missouri, but Michigan. I used to go to Michigan every year to see my daughter, and she would come here. She still comes every year to see us, her and her husband. She has two children but they are married. And the other one, he just retired from

Voice: Chrysler.

GILLESPIE: Chrysler because of Chrysler was going bad, you know? Everything was going bad so he retired. But my other son-in-law works for American, he travels all over. He goes to England and to Scotland and to Germany. He goes all over. That is Barry. He is always in the air. He is always in the air--Dick Barry. His father was a detective here. So, so, that is about all I know. And I had five - we've had five, and , as I said, one was a policeman, and another a nurse but she is retired now, and then the other is married to Barry, and then the youngest one, Daley, she lives here, she lives in Linden and is married to Bob Dale.

DIXON: When you were on Ellis, did you see any people who didn't get to come into the United States, people who were--?

GILLESPIE: Yes, there were a few turned back, yes, but at the time I didn't know them or anything. There were a few turned back, you know, some had something the matter with them, bad colds or something else, I don't know. But they got sent back.

DIXON: They actually got put on the boat and sent back?

GILLESPIE: They didn't get off the boat at all, I don't think. You know, they kept them on the boat.

DIXON: The tender or the big boat?

GILLESPIE: The big boat, yes.

DIXON: Did everyone from the big boat go to E-- oh, you don't know. You just got a small boat in a group.

GILLESPIE: We got on the small boat, the tender, yes, but there were quite a few people on it. You know, it was crowded coming into where we were coming to. We came to Elizabeth, of course, by train. So, what else now.--I'm talking too much.

DIXON: No, that's what we came for, that is what I came for. When you left Ellis Island, did you take the same boat you came to Ellis Island on, or was it a different boat?

GILLESPIE: The - the tender, you mean? Oh, it was a different one, I think. It was a different one, I guess.

DIXON: And there were other people who had come in, and their relatives were on the boat and stuff?

GILLESPIE: Yes, nearly everybody that came on the boat had somebody to meet them at Ellis Island, other than the ones that were sent back, and there was a few sent back. That is so long ago, and back then I wasn't paying much attention to them. As long as I was where I was going, that is what I wanted.

DIXON: Excited about coming?

GILLESPIE: That's what I wanted. So, what else?

DIXON: And you're glad you came?

GILLESPIE: Oh yes, I'm glad I came. I -- as I said, I never wanted to go back because if I got back I wouldn't want to come out here again.

DIXON: Did anyone say that you sounded like you were from Ireland? Did people know you were from Ireland?

GILLESPIE: No, I never had a brogue see?

DIXON: You have a little lilt.

GILLESPIE: Lilt, yes, not too much. Some of them, you know, from Ireland, they can hardly understand them. But I guess we are from the North and that wasn't - and, you know, they all spoke good English.

DIXON: And you didn't have any trouble, and you got right into living in the United States?

GILLESPIE: Oh no, no trouble at all, because, as I said, my sister and my brother was here, and I had no trouble. Then I lived with an aunt for awhile, and her family.

DIXON: And everyone that you met in the United States was nice to you?

GILLESPIE: Oh yes, everyone, still are, always nice. Several are - always nice. I like the last -- this is my son's house--I am only here two years. The last place I lived on Reed Street, I was there thirty-four years in the one house. I hated to leave it but it was so--Cubans bought it. And then my brother had this house ,so he said to come and live with him, so I did. It is a small place of course, but it's home. What do we need? Oh, I miss -- . What do we need? I always say all we need is a bed and a--what was that one of the doctors used--only it was a bed and a chair and a table. 'A bed, a chair and a table one doctor used to say, when you get older.

DIXON: Do you remember anything else from Ellis Island other than, the way it looked or the island, or the crowds?

GILLESPIE: No, I don't really remember what it was- what it was like. As I said, we just got off the big boat onto this other small one, and then had a meal and then headed to wherever we were going. I wasn't there that long to know anybody or see anybody.

DIXON: So, it was just kind of a stop along the way to going.

GILLESPIE: Yes, it was a stop along the way, that's right.

DIXON: Okay, well, have we left out anything you want to add in like stories, recollections, people you met?

GILLESPIE: Where, here?

DIXON: Immigrants, other people anywhere?

GILLESPIE: Well no. I just met this one girl that I was with.

DIXON: And you never heard from her?

GILLESPIE: No, I never heard from her. I forgot her name and then I never heard from her again. She was from a different part of Ireland than I was coming from. She was from a different part.

DIXON: But all the people on the boat were Irish?

GILLESPIE: All Irish?

DIXON: Were Irish?

GILLESPIE: Oh, I imagine so, unless one of them was coming back, see, from this country, or visiting or something.

DIXON: You said it was the last voyage of the ship.

GILLESPIE: Yes, the last voyage of the Furnessia

DIXON: What happened?

GILLESPIE: Because it was so old, and it was falling apart.

DIXON: Oh, it brought you over, and did it go back to Ireland?

GILLESPIE: I don't know. That was its last trip. It was junked then, I think.

DIXON: Oh, it was that old?

GILLESPIE: It was that old. And then with the beating it took with the storm, it wasn't fit for anything I don't think. It was the Anchor Line--I remember that--the Anchor Line -- Furnessia, her last trip.

DIXON: Well?

GILLESPIE: Well?

DIXON: Anything else to add?

GILLESPIE: Not that I know of.

DIXON: Okay, well, I enjoyed talking to you, Mrs. Gillespie.

GILLESPIE: And me too, I enjoyed talking. And I waited for you to come, I didn't know--

DIXON: I'm sorry I was a little late.

GILLESPIE: Oh, that's all right. Sorry you had to come around the back deck - the back entrance. The family -- see, my son owns the house and my daughter lives downstairs on the next floor, and then up on the third floor, see? The whole family up there.

DIXON: Thank you for talking with me.

GILLESPIE: Oh, you're welcome, thank you.

NPS-119/GILLESPIE