

NPS-120

PATRICK SHEA

BIRTH DATE: 1897

INTERVIEW DATE: MAY 7, 1980

RUNNING TIME: 45:00

INTERVIEWER: HARVEY DIXON

RECORDING ENGINEER: UNKNOWN

INTERVIEW LOCATION: BROOKLYN, NY

TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: GILL, LEMONIC

TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED By: IRV SILBERG

IRELAND, 1925

AGE 28

SHIP: CELTIC

PORT: QUEENSTOWN

RESIDENCES:

IRELAND: County Kincaid

US: BROOKLYN, NY.

HISTORIAN'S NOTE: Mr. Shea was sent back for alleged medical reasons and permanently entered US later from Canada (via England)...

DIXON: My name is Harvey Dixon and today is May 7, 1980, and I am visiting in Brooklyn with Mr. Patrick Shea who came from Ireland to the United States in the 1920s.

SHEA: Yes.

DIXON: So, why don't we just begin, Mr. Shea, with you telling me what year you actually came from Ireland to the United States for the first time.

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SHEA: In February, 1925.

DIXON: And you actually left from Ireland? Where did you leave from in Ireland?

SHEA: I left from Queenstown.

DIXON: Queenstown in Ireland. And when you came, how was the voyage? Was the voyage rough or was it long, or did it--?

SHEA: It wasn't bad, no, it wasn't bad.

DIXON: Do you remember the name of the ship?

SHEA: The Celtic.

DIXON: The Celtic. Do you remember the ship line it was, like it was Holland -America, or--?

SHEA: I think it was a Cunard liner. I am not sure now, and I went back in the Celtic.

DIXON: And when you came, were there a lot of people from Ireland who were immigrating at the same time?

SHEA: Yes, yes.

DIXON: Did they? Why were so many people leaving Ireland?

SHEA: Well, times weren't good and young people were always immigrating because there was nothing over there for the young people much.

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DIXON: Is that why you left?

SHEA: Yes. There was nine of us in the family, so somebody had to leave. We couldn't--we had a nice little farm but there were nine of us in the family and we had to go to work with a farmer besides our own.

DIXON: So there was your mother, father and seven children,--

SHEA: Nine children.

DIXON: Nine children?

SHEA: That's right.

DIXON: And so, when you came, you came by yourself?

SHEA: No, my brother that I showed that there--

DIXON: In the photograph, right.

SHEA: In the photograph, he came with me.

DIXON: So, how old were the two of you when you came?

SHEA: I was twenty-eight, I think. Twenty five? I was born in 1897.

DIXON: Oh, that's a long time. (Laughter)

SHEA: Yes. The year of the flood, you don't remember that?

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DIXON: The flood, in Ireland? No, I don't remember that. (Laughter)

SHEA: (Laughter)

DIXON: That was a long time ago.

SHEA: Yes.

DIXON: So, the voyage was all right when you sailed?

SHEA: Oh yes, sure.

DIXON: What happened when you came to New York?

SHEA: Well, first, before, we had to pass a doctor home and we had to pass three doctors in Queenstown, that's four. And when we came to New York, a lot of the guys passed and myself and my brother failed.

DIXON: In other words, you had a doctor's examination before you left and three doctors in Queenstown, and then when you got to New York.--

SHEA: And one home before we went to Queenstown.

DIXON: Oh. (Laughter) And you got to New York, what, did they do in New York? They took you to Ellis Island?

SHEA: Yes.

DIXON: So, when you got to Ellis Island, what happened?

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SHEA: Well, we were called up one by one and my brother was behind me. I came out and he told me I had a bad heart and bronchitis, and they gave me two weeks to live.

DIXON: Really?

SHEA: Yeah.

DIXON: My gracious! And what was wrong with your brother? What did they say was wrong with him?

SHEA: Nothing wrong with him, but they gave him the same thing, and we never missed a meal or a dance or anything coming over in the boat. We never missed nothing.

DIXON: So, after the--it was the doctor said that? I mean, what happened after the doctor said that?

SHEA: We had both three doctors there examining us.

DIXON: And they all said the same thing?

SHEA: Yes.

DIXON: Okay. So what happened then?

SHEA: What happened then is—that --

DIXON: Did they give you something in writing that said this or did they just tell it to you?

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SHEA: They just told us, and when they sent us back then, we were prisoners down in the bottom of the ship. There were seven more woolies [ph] going back. Do you understand?

DIXON: Seven more what?

SHEA: Seven more Irishmen sent back too. They were from different counties. Just before we got off of the ship in Queenstown a paddy comes out to take us off Queenstown there. A paddy comes out to take us off of the ship. Do you understand? The ship wouldn't go in the whole ways?

DIXON: Right.

SHEA: So, all – all our names are called out to go up to the office, the doctor's office in Queenstown, and we had three doctors, or four doctors there, and they examined every one of us and they couldn't find nothing wrong with any of us.

DIXON: Oh really, but you were all sent back.

SHEA: But we were all sent back.

DIXON: And they never did write anything down on Ellis Island, or New York? They never did give you a paper that said that?

SHEA: I'm not sure now, but anyhow, it is so long ago I forget. But anyhow, we—we're all from different parts of Ireland and the doctors told us a-- the seven of us to go to our own doctor's home and get examined again, and send the report into Queenstown. So we -- everyone was doing that and we sent all the -- the doctors sent the reports into Queenstown. In about eight months after , the Civic Guard Sergeant and some guys come to my mother and told

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her that, "Mrs. Shea," she said, "Your sons have a good chance of getting out again." She says, "I'll get a specialist for you to examine us." Do you understand?

DIXON: Say it again.

SHEA: A specialist to examine us.

DIXON: Oh okay, right. Oh, well that would be good.

SHEA: So. In a short time after we got our money back -- twenty-five pounds, fifteen.

DIXON: Each or for both of you?

SHEA: Each. And I landed Manchester City and we drunk.

DIXON: You what?

SHEA: I landed in Manchester City and I drunk myself and another fellow.

DIXON: Oh. (Laughter)

SHEA: Not my brother, my brother stayed home.

DIXON: Ah, so you celebrated?

SHEA: Yes.

DIXON: Ah, you went to Manchester, which is Manchester in England?

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SHEA: That's right. So I worked on the buildings there. I worked on the farms. Because in the build-- in the summertime there nothing doin' on the buildings. So I worked on the farms and everything else.

DIXON: And this was in the late 1920s, in England?

SHEA: That's right. So anyway, after working in all these places all, over England and different parts of England, we were out of work for awhile there. Times were bad. And finally we said that's a -- we'd come to a -- I'd made up my mind, myself and another man, to come to Canada.

DIXON: Oh.

SHEA: So with that, myself and this guy, we went to the what-you-call-it? To the Consulate in Chester, England. We were living in Manchester, but Chester was 60 miles away from Manchester City. So, the guy that -- the guy that was with me, he failed and I passed.

DIXON: You had another physical, a medical examination?

SHEA: That's right. I had to lift 40 pounds -- 45 pounds with one hand and forty with the other, three times.

DIXON: I think I would flunk. (Laughter) I don't think I would pass. That's good.

SHEA: So anyway, I had to get another pal to pal around with until we come to Canada, you see? So, I met up with this guy who was coming out to Canada too and he -- and -- we were working on the farm this time.

DIXON: You mean still in England?

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SHEA: Oh, no, no, no, but in Canada, we went out there.

DIXON: So, you went to Canada? You sailed to Canada?

SHEA: Yes.

DIXON: After you passed the physical at the Consulate?

SHEA: Yes. I passed and my friend was turned down.

DIXON: Right.

SHEA: So anyway, in Canada then, I travelled from about 3,000 miles out to Western Canada, from St. John's. I worked on the -- I went out on the harvest excursion there. We got out at a half a cent a mile or a cent a mile.

DIXON: What was this now you were doing?

SHEA: Winter and the harvest out to Western Canada.

DIXON: Oh right, the harvest.

SHEA: But, I had no notion of going west but there were three of my friends working in an hospital and they were getting very small pay, and this time I was getting good -- fairly good pay. I was working on the buildings and was getting \$45 a week. But getting out of that small fare out there, cost only a few dollars, do you see? -- to get out there the whole ways. So I said I made up my mind then. They begged me to go out with them, out to Western Canada.

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DIXON: When you were working in Canada first, what city were you working in, St. John's still?

SHEA: No, I think I was working in Toronto, yes, Toronto city, and I worked there on the, what do you call it? I worked in Eaton's big department store and we had to go down 102 feet to get the rock, the cellar foundation, with guns.

DIXON: Oh, you were building the department store?

SHEA: Yes, a lugging six -- six by two, all around. The hole was fourteen by -- fourteen by twelve and nine, the large stones was fourteen, the next one was twelve and nine, you see, and I worked there for a long, long time. So finally, anyhow, the doctors told me no--

DIXON: You went to Western Canada you said.

SHEA: I went to Western Canada and came back, and I worked on the buildings then again, then I --no, in England too, I forgot about that. I worked on the buildings there in England.

DIXON: Right.

SHEA: I was a plasterer's laborer and a hod carrier -- everything. But finally, anyhow, in Canada then they told me--when I was -- when I c--. I called up my brother I said I'd be landing in the Grand Central at 5:00 o'clock in the morning.

DIXON: So, when you left Canada, did you have to get a pass to go between countries or--?

SHEA: Sure, I had to go to get a -- go the country there and pass doctors too.

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DIXON: Oh, more doctors.

SHEA: And we came to the --- to what do you call it? To Brigbur [ph], that's on the border of Buffalo, where the American officials board the train for -- to see our papers and passports. So, the three men that were with me, none of them ever tried for the States before, and they got away and I was sent back again to Canada.

DIXON: Why did they send you back this time?

SHEA: Because I didn't pass.

DIXON: They gave you another physical examination, or you didn't pass it in Canada?

SHEA: Sure I passed it in Canada but they weren't satisfied with me where I worked and what I had done.

DIXON: Oh, in Canada. So they sent you back.

SHEA: Yes. They says, "Where the work?" I says-- "You know, everywhere where you were -- when you went back?" I said, "I fell lumber for nearly twelve months."

DIXON: You what?

SHEA: Felled heavy lumber. "Oh," they said, "That's impossible." Two men and a doctor. "Where else did the work?" I said, "I worked on the buildings in Manchester city soon [not understood] at that time." "Well then, where else did you work?" I said, "I worked in Eaton's big department store. I went

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down 102 feet to get the solid rock with the guns." They said, "That's impossible."

DIXON: They were still saying there was something wrong with your heart, right?

SHEA: Yes, yes, "That's impossible." So anyway, I be brought out at 11:00 and I be -- I was questioned there with them three officials you see, and then I was --

DIXON: This is actually on the train?

SHEA: No.

DIXON: Oh, it's not on the--it is where you got off near the border?

SHEA: Yes.

DIXON: Okay.

SHEA: So anyway, they told me that [pause] they told me that I'd have to --I might be here a long time before I could get into America. So they said, "If you can -- if you're willing to pay for telegrams to Canada, England and Ireland," I said "I will be willing to pay anything to get out of here, one way or the other." So with that, I was four days there and I called up my brother and I said "I'll meet you at 5:00 o'clock in the Grand Central." So we had Knights of Columbus men coming in and our friends bringing us in eats, but all we got to eat there was hard, cold boiled eggs and spaghetti, which I was never used to and I couldn't eat it.

DIXON: This was when you were on the border, between Canada and the United States?

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SHEA: This was in Ellis Island.

DIXON: Oh, how did you get back to Ellis Island? You mean, when you first came in and they sent you back?

SHEA: Yes, yes.

DIXON: Oh.

SHEA: So anyway, they said "If you are willing to pay to Canada and England and Ireland," and I said, "Anything to get out of here." So finally, anyhow, the fourth day, at 11:00 o'clock, the doctor and two men came out to me at 11:00, and they questioned me again, and I was brought out again at 2:00, and up until 2:00 they had the telegrams, they had all the wireless from Ireland, and England, and Canada.

DIXON: Saying that you had done what you said you had done.

SHEA: Saying that I had done what I did. They shook hands with me and they brought me to the train and they said, "So long, you can go to any part of America you want."

DIXON: Oh, [not understood]

SHEA: 1929

DIXON: that was good, and so what year was this when you actually finally got in?

SHEA: 1929.

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DIXON: And when did you first start trying to come in?

SHEA: '25.

DIXON: So it took four years.

SHEA: Yes.

DIXON: So, what happened after you got the train and got to leave from Canada to come to the United States?

SHEA: Well, I called up my brother and I said I would meet him in the Grand central, and I got so God damned drunk after hearing all this, that I never called him up after.

DIXON: (Laughter)

SHEA: Until I landed down here on 54th Street and 4th Avenue.

DIXON: In Brooklyn or in Manhattan?

SHEA: In Brooklyn.

DIXON: That's where he lived, he lived in Brooklyn?

SHEA: Yes, and I got in there at 2:00 in the morning and I rung the bell and "My God," he said, "I bet that that's Pat."

DIXON: Well, that was good. And too, just returning for a moment, so actually you

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came through Ellis Island just the one time when they turned you back and sent you back to go back and they refunded your passage fare and all that?

SHEA: Yes, the – the –the -- shippin' company that done that.

DIXON: When you were actually on Ellis Island what happened to you actually on Ellis? The doctors examined you, and how was the food? You said the food wasn't very good.

SHEA: The food was terrible, terrible.

DIXON: How were the people? How were you treated?

SHEA: Well, otherwise, okay.

DIXON: I mean, did you have a place to sleep? How many days were--?

SHEA: We had a place to sleep, but it wasn't so very pleasant.

DIXON: Like a dormitory with a lot of people?

SHEA: Oh yes, sure, sure. But when I went over there, I was there last year sometime, myself and my son, he is there and the Peter with me. So, I wouldn't know because there were -- in them days there were no trees around it. Today there are a lot of big trees around there, aren't there?

DIXON: There are trees, right; they have grown up around the building.

SHEA: So, one lady took a crowd – was to the right and a gentleman took another crowd to the left, and we done a lot of traveling when we were there, and we

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enjoyed it. So I would go – I would -- like to go over there for the labor but I could fall down any minute, do you understand?

DIXON: Right.

SHEA: I fell here three times, and I hardly know what happened to me. I was going down to the club--we have a club at 6th Avenue and 56th Street, a senior citizens' club--and I was just here ready to go down the stairs to go to the club, and I put my hand in my pocket and I hadn't the keys. So I reached over to get the keys to put in my pocket -- down I went, and I stayed down for five hours, and my -- my arm this, and you couldn't turn this -- it's so heavy. And I -- they came this -- and I got up somehow. Down, up, down and the Mrs. was trying to help me too. So if she -- so if she -- she was alive at the time-- I said, "Leave me alone. Put a pillow under my head and a couple of blankets on me," and I stayed until about a quarter to five, and a quarter to five, or five after five I got up and I went over and I sat down on that chair and I had a smoke. I had no pains or aches, it didn't hurt a bit, and the doctors -- I had about six doctors examining me and they couldn't tell me the cause of it. They said it must be poor circulation.

DIXON: How old are you now?

SHEA: I was eighty-three last March.

DIXON: Well, the doctors weren't very right on the Ellis Island the very first time when they said you didn't have but a week.

SHEA: I wonder if there are any of them doctors any more.

DIXON: That's a good question. I kind of think maybe they are not.

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SHEA: If you can, try and find out and let me know.

DIXON: Do you remember the names of the Doctors?

SHEA: Oh God, I remember one of them – no, it's gone out of my head. I can't think much any more.

DIXON: Well, if you think of it.

SHEA: (coughs) But, I brought out--the one guy there, Patty Welsh [ph] to turn him over -- an Irish guy too and not far from me home they say, although I am Kincaidy ,he is a different county.

DIXON: This was a man you met on Ellis?

SHEA: Yes. So, he was out in – in – in January and we were – we were there in February, the second or third, or fourth, I don't know what days. But anyhow, he was out nearly three weeks before us and he – he got in – specialists ,two specialists come in to examine him, they went below to talk to him.

DIXON: But he did get in?

SHEA: He – I carried his bag three times out to the tender, you know, a long walk with a couple of bags. I helped him out with his bags and I wished him luck, and this thing and that thing, and ten minutes after or fifteen minutes after, a telegram came in. Like – like those now, when our case is turned down, you can appeal it again, you see? And that was three times or four times with this Paddy Welsh and finally the last time he got out there, he got on the tender, and from the tender onto the big ship.

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DIXON: To go back to Ireland.

SHEA: To go back to Ireland. In the meantime, before the ship sailed, his uncles got him off of the ship and got him a job and got specialists to examine him and he passed. The following day, we were out.

DIXON: You left, you had to go back to Ireland.

SHEA: We had to go back because our case, we appealed it several times but all to no use. We were too far gone. There were a [not understood], the lot of us and the man, he put money and he put up his home for us.

DIXON: That was nice.

SHEA: Wasn't that nice? So, all to no use, we were sent back anyhow.

DIXON: When you appealed, how did you appeal the doctor's decision? Did you go before a board or did they just send a--?

SHEA: No, they worked on that from outside.

DIXON: Not on Ellis Island?

SHEA: No.

DIXON: So, what did you actually do? Did you talk to somebody and they called somebody, or what happened?

SHEA: Oh gee, I really forget now it was so long ago.

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DIXON: But you did appeal?

SHEA: Oh, several times.

DIXON: Well, how long were you on Ellis? How many days?

SHEA: Seventeen days.

DIXON: Oh, you spent seventeen days on the Island before they let you --?

SHEA: Yes.

DIXON: They turned you down the first day, and then you spent the rest of the time asking?

SHEA: That's right, that's right, that's right. And cold hard-boiled eggs and spaghetti and that's is all we eat there, only for we would starve to death. I didn't know what spaghetti was and I never liked cold boiled eggs, or soft boiled eggs, but our friends brought us in several good lunches and dinners. They were allowed to speak to us.

DIXON: Were there very many people held that long on Ellis?

SHEA: Of God, there were. There were I—the Irish was there, the English and Scotch was there. Germans, Belgians. Everywhere -- the whole ways all around it till--

DIXON: You are talking about the big room?

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SHEA: The circle, the whole circle, they were from every part of the world there.

DIXON: So they grouped you by countries you came from?

SHEA: That's right.

DIXON: So when you were there during the day, what did you do for seventeen days on Ellis Island?

SHEA: Looked at one another and disputing and -- what was what, and this thing and that thing, the other thing.

DIXON: Did you have games or did they have movies?

SHEA: We had nothing.

DIXON: No radio even?

SHEA: No.

DIXON: Nothing? They just let you sit? (Laughter)

SHEA: Yes, just walking around here and there.

DIXON: And you say that people treated you nicely though? The doctors turned you down but they treated you well?

SHEA: Yes, yes, yes.

DIXON: Well, let's see, that is an interesting story. It is a long time to spend on Ellis.

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Do you have any remembrances of seeing the harbor, what happened in the harbor, or what went on on the Island? Anybody else that you remember who was anybody -- well known who got sent away, or you saw other people, or stories that were interesting to other people?

SHEA: Oh yes. I seen --m I seen one man there, I declare to God Almighty, who was about seven foot. He had shoulders and what like that.

DIXON: Very broad?

SHEA: Oh Christ, a powerful man. I don't know what country he was from, but he had big tits here, bigger than a woman, both of them.

DIXON: So, what happened to him?

SHEA: Everybody was looking and laughing at him.

DIXON: Oh, but did he get into the country or did they send him back?

SHEA: He was sent back.

DIXON: But you don't know where he was sent back?

SHEA: We didn't know what country.

DIXON: Did they seem to send a lot of people back?

SHEA: Oh boy, there were at least -- there were at least millions sent back since it opened. Do you know when Ellis Island closed?

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DIXON: It closed officially in 1954, I believe, but it had been gradually winding down. They closed it, I think immigration stopped about the end of the Twenties. You were kind of toward the end.

SHEA: In 1925 there were no more immigration on Ellis Island.

DIXON: Right.

SHEA: 1928, '25 -- the end of 1925, if anybody came from England or Scotland or Germany or anywhere, if they passed, they had nothing to do with Ellis Island..

DIXON: Right, yes, they were closing the Island down when you were there.

SHEA: That's right, that's right.

DIXON: The buildings, when you were there, the buildings were still in good condition?

SHEA: They were, they were, but, did they -- did they remodel it? When I was over there a year ago, they were remodeling it or doing something to it.

DIXON: They are not finished but they are still working.

SHEA: Is that right?

DIXON: Yes, they are working.

SHEA: Of late, I'd have gone over there but I was afraid I might fall down. I have two canes.

DIXON: Well, when you get to be eighty-three you have a right to use two canes.

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(Laughter) You can use four if you want.

SHEA: (Laughter)

DIXON: Well, let's see, do you have anything else that you remember? You've told us your story and it is a nice story. What happened after you--did your wife come as an immigrant? Was she a--?

SHEA: Yes, yes, she came. She died there about two years ago, or a year ago.

DIXON: She also came from Ireland?

SHEA: Yes, she came from a different-- from the North -- came from the South.

DIXON: Where did you meet? I meet, did you meet in New York City?

SHEA: I met her on a -- on a boat ride to Lake Ronkonkoma.

DIXON: Lake, Ron, where is this, I don't know?

SHEA: Out on the island. Out in Long Island, Lake Ronkonkoma. So, I was going with her for about six months before we got married.

DIXON: And how many children did you have?

SHEA: The three of them are there and myself.

DIXON: You had three sons?

SHEA: Three sons. One of them is a policeman, and he was in the Air Force for four

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years, and he was a nervous wreck when he come out of there, but anyhow, they were after him for -- to join up for two more years, to make it six years, so they were coming week after week, and he got disgusted and he joined up for two more years. And he came out then and I think he went into the -- he was in the IBM, or whatever you call that. I remember he worked for IBM and then he left that then and he joined the police. He is in the police twelve for over fourteen years.

DIXON: That's good.

SHEA: And my other son that's there, the heavysset guy, the oldest, he was in Korea. He was on the big guns, and he got [not understood] , and he was deaf when he come home for about twelve months. So my third son stayed home you see.

DIXON: That is a nice family. And you have always lived in Brooklyn?

SHEA: Yes.

DIXON: Did you ever go back to Ireland afterwards?

SHEA: In 'six-- 1962.

DIXON: That was the first time after you--?

SHEA: No, 1963 because we landed in Dublin. Who was there that day and we never knew it until we seen him in Dublin, is President Kennedy.

DIXON: Oh, you went back the same time President Kennedy went.

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SHEA: That's right.

DIXON: That was the first time you went back?

SHEA: That's right.

DIXON: That was a long time. Did anyone else from your family come from Ireland to the country after you came?

SHEA: Yes, my – my two brothers.

DIXON: The one who had been turned back before with you, he eventually came too?

SHEA: No, he stayed home all the time. He never -- he is on the farm home now.

DIXON: Ah, you mentioned that I think. But two of the other brothers came?

SHEA: Yes, yes.

DIXON: And they live in the country now?

SHEA: That's right.

DIXON: And you said that some of the rest of your family went to Australia?

SHEA: That's right.

DIXON: How many went to Australia?

SHEA: I had two sisters and a brother there, and my older sister and my brother died a

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couple of years ago, and my younger sister that I showed you there, she is coming here either this month or next month to visit us.

DIXON: So, how many people did that leave on the farm in Ireland? It just left--how many brothers and sisters stayed in Ireland?

SHEA: I had the one sister in Ireland, she was married to a, I forget now, Hispartuc, I think, was the name, and then my son – my brother got married and he had a daughter and a son. And the daughter was a school teacher (coughs) and she married a school teacher, and my stu—my son stayed on the farm.

DIXON: You mean your brother.

SHEA: My- brother's son.

DIXON: Oh, your brother's son.

SHEA: Yeah. Yeah.

DIXON: And this is where in Ireland? What is the place?

SHEA: County Kilkenny, Kiltalihan [ph] Windgap County Kilkenny.

DIXON: So, you've got people in Ireland, people in Australia, and people in the United States?

SHEA: Yes.

DIXON: Nobody in Canada?

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SHEA: No, but I was in Canada a long time though.

DIXON: Well, that's a nice story. Do you have anything else you want to add, or--?

SHEA: I wonder, do you think I should be entitled to a gold medal?

DIXON: A gold medal for coming from Ireland or for what? For all the trouble you went to to come to the United States?

SHEA: Yes, yes.

DIXON: It sounds like you should get a medal. I think maybe not gold, gold is so expensive now. Maybe they would give you a brass medal or something.
(Laughter)

SHEA: (Laughter)

DIXON: It was nice speaking to you Mr. Shea.

SHEA: Nice speaking to you, friend.