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LOUIS MORRIS

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DIXON: Today is June 19, 1980. My name is Harvey Dixon, and I'm speaking with Louis Morris who's the chief of interpretation at the Statue of Liberty National Monument. We're going to begin asking Mr. Morris when he actually started working at the Statue of Liberty National Monument.

MORRIS: I started working here in December of 1956. I was hired as historian of Castle Clinton, not the Statue of Liberty. But since Castle Clinton was a closed area and inactive, I also acted as historian of the Statue of Liberty National Monument. My first tour of duty here extended from December of 1956 through the Spring of 1964, when I was permanently assigned to Federal Hall with the other historians. My duty at the Statue of Liberty consisted of historian of the Statue of Liberty and also an interpreter and park guide in the monument itself.

DIXON: And you were actually on the Statue of Liberty, or in Manhattan at the Statue of Liberty?

MORRIS: I worked at the Statue of Liberty on Liberty Island, full time during the visitation season, but after Labor Day and to the beginning of easter week, I worked three days at Federal Hall and weekends and holidays at the Statue of Liberty so that I had two weekdays off. On Saturdays, Sundays and Holidays I worked at the Statue of Liberty and three weekdays I worked at Federal Hall.

DIXON: How large was the interpretative staff during those years at the Statue of Liberty National Monument?

MORRIS: Actually, we had a group of four or five historians for the New York City group including myself. I don't know whether we had an interpretive staff per se because the uniform staff did all the jobs, all the duties, that the interpretive staff and the protection staff do today. There was no strict division, we were not only interpreters of the Statue answering questions of visitors, but we saw to it that the government property was protected from vandalism. We provided first-aid to people who hurt themselves. We kept people off the grass. We maintained order on the grounds and did other jobs that were strictly not interpretive. But we were all-around rangers doing interpretive and protection work.

DIXON: How many all-around rangers, then? Were there just four or five for the whole Monument, or how many were there employees were there that did that type of thing? Approximately?

MORRIS: Approximately ten to twelve employees worked

there. They were all permanent members of the staff. We had no seasonal employees. We had no women employees an the ranger staff.

DIXON: I suspect that they were mostly white employees as well.

MORRIS: We had two or three colored employees, too. One of them is still working for the New York group. His name is Jim Henry, who's in the uptown areas.

DIXON: When you first started in the fifties, how was the visitation, I mean quantity-wise?

MORRIS: Well, the visitation was going upwards, but it was in manageable proportions. When visitation hit seven hundred thousand the superintendent hit the ceiling because he didn't think he could manage, you know, an increasing number of visitors with the limited facilities that we had on the island. So he laid the law down to the Circle Line the boat company that brought in the visitors and once or twice he admonished them bringing more than the capacity of the boat or more than we had required them to do, especially on the last voyage, on the last trip here.

DIXON: So he was actually limiting?

MORRIS: Yes.

DIXON: Who was the superintendent?

MORRIS: The superintendent then was Newell H. Foster. He's retired since 1964, I think. We had our own counter, we had our own man at the dock actually counting by hand the number of visitors that got off the boat. Once or twice Mr. Foster, who kept abreast of the visitation on the island at any particular time, once or twice he advised the

boat company to bring only a limited number of people on the next trip. When the boat arrived, he actually stood out on the dock, had his own man count, had the people stay on the dock, at the end of the dock, until they had all gotten off the boat. When he found that they exceeded the limit the number of people he advised them to bring over he sent them all back and had their money refunded.

DIXON: What was the charge? Do you recollect what the fee was then?

MORRIS: Yes, I think the fee then was seventy-five cents for adults and forty cents for children under sixteen.

DIXON: And what was the frequency of the boats? Did they run every hour then, too? How often did they run?

MORRIS: In the off-season, they ran every hour. During the season they ran every half hour, yes. But at that time, they had two boats, the older boat the Liberty had a capacity of about six hundred and twenty-five , and the newer boat Miss Liberty, the present Miss Liberty had a capacity of about eight hundred and forty. I'm not sure about the Liberty boat, it may have had a smaller capacity of maybe six hundred people.

DIXON: Okay. Once a visitor actually got to Liberty Island, what happened to him? Where did he dock, and where did they come into the Statue?

MORRIS: The boats docked at the present dock. Now I do not remember because of the alteration that had taken place since then. But that was the rotation of the dock at that point. It has been improved since then, of course.

DIXON: But they didn't use the other dock, the one that Pretrol uses?

MORRIS: No, they didn't use that dock at all, no. That dock had never been in use within my memory. We direct the visitors to the Statue. There was a man at the dock who directed the visitors to the Statue, and the administration building, in the lobby, had an exhibit area. They could go in there and see the exhibits mostly dealing with what is now known as the Statue of Liberty Storyroom.

DIXON: Where did they actually enter? Did they enter the Statue through the sallyport entrance?

MORRIS: I think they entered the Statue through the sallyport entrance, yes, because there was no entrance from the front as we have now. The elevator was located probably at the same location, but it was operated manually, we had no automatic elevator then. So we had an elevator operator, and that duty was one of the duties that everybody performed. There was the fee collector

DIXON: The fee was what?

MORRIS: The fee was ten cents, same as it is now, and we all performed that duty, too. Then there were people up on the observation deck, and we alternated with them.

DIXON: What's the observation deck?

MORRIS: The tenth-floor landing. They now call it the sixth floor. It's actually the tenth-floor landing. We had rangers at the dock. We were giving live boat talks from the shack. I was

responsible for that function. Also we had live boat talks given from the boat itself, on the boat itself. I was assigned that task, too.

DIXON: But, for example, when you at the dock, you didn't actually circle on through the ropes and someone else caught the ropes?

MORRIS: Well, I did not do anything with the ropes. Circle Line had its own men there on the dock to handle the ropes, and he was assisted, if need be, by one of our rangers.

DIXON: But that was a separate ranger grouping from the interpretive rangers? That's a function you didn't do?

MORRIS: No, that was a function that all of us, when called upon, did, but it might have been a function that the others did as well. However, we had one or two steady rangers that worked at the dock because they were experienced in handling the boat, and they were the ones that worked at the dock on a more or less permanent basis. I was the only historian who worked on Liberty Island. The other historians worked in other areas of the New York City group.

DIXON: Did the Statue itself change? Well, for example, the Emma Lazarus plaque, do you recollect where that was displayed?

MORRIS: I think the Emma Lazarus plaque and other plaques but this one in particular was displayed in the sallyport entrance where everybody could see it.

DIXON: It was simply matted on the wall?

MORRIS: It was mounted on the wall itself.

DIXON: And you never recollected the plaque being outside because many people think that it's displayed externally to the Statue.

MORRIS: No, no. The plaque, as far as I know, was always there, when I was here the first time, on the wall as you entered the Statue on the sallyport wall.

DIXON: Right. When you were here for the first time, did the Statue undergo any repairs or did they change the lighting or things of real importance?

MORRIS: The only work done, as far as I know, as far as I can remember, is the work of building the museum. That was the only well, there must have been some kind of restriction for visitors while this work was going on. This work had started in the Fall after the visiting seasons or towards the end of the visiting season.

DIXON: Which year?

MORRIS: Either '64 or '65, but 1964 was the last year that I worked here on a steady basis. After that I'm not sure what went on.

DIXON: So just the preliminary construction had begun?

MORRIS: Had begun while I was still there, yes.

DIXON: This whole base edition complex was just beginning.

MORRIS: Yes.

DIXON: Okay. When you were here, as we mentioned earlier, who, for example, would be a famous person who actually visited the Statue during your

MORRIS: Vice President Nixon visited here with his two young daughters in the nineteen fifties. Now let me think because was vice president from 1953 to 1961, so within the range of those years I don't recall the exact year, but sometime in the late fifties he had come here on a launch unexpectedly, as far as I'm concerned, because no special preparation had been made for his visit. We all thought that he had come on the spur of the moment--he had been in New York-- to show his little girls the Statue of Liberty. Very likely, very probably, other persons, other notable persons, also visited the Statue, but I do not recollect them.

DIXON: No president?

MORRIS: No.

DIXON: In the light of the recent bombing at the Statue, I was wondering in those years was there ever any bomb threats or was there any what you'd call a terrorist activity? Did it exist then?

MORRIS: No, there was no such thing. We never had any forewarning. It never occurred to us that there would be any threat against the Statue of Liberty. We had no inkling, we had no advice, no warning, no evidence of any kind that this would be a target for any terrorist group. There had been, but I don't remember whether I was still there. There had been a threat to the Statue of Liberty by some member of the Panther group when that group was functioning. Some noted character of that group had made this threat or was arrested. He had come in from Canada, and the FBI had learned that he was plotting to bomb the Statue and they apprehended him either at the border or upstate New York. But I don't know of

anything that happened later. I don't know what the consequences were. The charges may have been dropped. But that was the first time that there was any such thing as a violent act contemplated against the Statue of Liberty.

DIXON: Was Mr. Foster the superintendent all during your first tour?

MORRIS: Yes, Mr. Foster was superintendent all during my first tour. But at the end of this first tour he was getting ready to leave. He had brought in, or they had sent to him, a unit manager that was a new title in those days an assistant superintendent by the name of John T. Townsley. When he was training for the job here, he was learning while working. He was training on the job. When Foster retired, he succeeded him as the superintendent of the New York areas.

DIXON: In other words, with Mr. Foster was the control centered in Manhattan still, or did it change over with the new person?

MORRIS: The headquarters of the group was at the Statue of Liberty. Mr. Foster worked from here. Now in those days, we had only three areas: the Statue of Liberty; Federal Hall; and castle Clinton. But Castle Clinton was closed, it was not functioning. So the two active areas were Federal Hall and the Statue of Liberty of which Foster was the superintendent. But he had his headquarters in this area, in the Statue of Liberty.

DIXON: Okay. Well, how did the Island change between the time you you worked here first? Give me the years again.

MORRIS: December 1956 through 1964. When Townsley became

superintendent he changed the headquarters of the Group to Theodore Roosevelt Birthplace, where he installed his office. He also lived with his family in the Roosevelt home in Sagamore Hill, and he assigned his aide McLenahan to live in the superintendent's house on Liberty Island.

DIXON: And your second period of work here was?

MORRIS: From August 1976 to the present, the end of June, 1980.

DIXON: How did the Island change physically? Did the houses change? Were there houses on the Island in the fifties?

MORRIS: There were houses on the Island as far as I know. They are the same units, the same housing units, as before, that hasn't changed. Now Hill's area, Hill's concession, has changed. The patio has been enlarged, and the interior has been altered. The exterior or the sides of the building probably remained the same.

DIXON: How about the trees? Were there trees on the Island?

MORRIS: Yes, there were trees on the Island, and the landscaping was about the same, except, in those days, we didn't have any flower beds as we have today. But in those days we did not allow anybody to step on the grass or step on the lawns or to lie on the lawns, we prohibited them from having picnics or lying down or doing anything of the sort. It was off-limits. We had signs posted: "Please keep off the grass" or something to that effect

DIXON: Did the Monument it had nothing to do with Ellis Island at the time?

MORRIS: No. Ellis Island was not part of the Park Service then. It had been abandoned, and it was under GSA jurisdiction.

DIXON: Did you recollect any visitors ever inquiring about Ellis Island or about what its nature was whether it was abandoned or what?

MORRIS: Yes, they would inquire. They would like to know what that island with the green roofs were, and some people would want to know what was going on with Ellis Island. There were reports in the press about contemplated constructions for Ellis Island, and people were curious. Yes, we had questions about Ellis Island in those days. But we could tell them only what everybody else knew about the place.

DIXON: Well, did any other major events, for example, occur? I know, for example, the ladies auxiliary to the VFW, were they coming in those years?

MORRIS: Yes, they were. We had set, we had a schedule of celebrations that were standard operating procedure through the year every year. We had the dedication anniversary where the ladies auxiliary of the Veterans of Foreign Wars would donate a gift, that was a standard yearly event. We had Emma Lazarus Federation of Women meeting here and commemorating the author of that sonnet. We had the Alsatian group coming here. We had Flag Day ceremonies, this was an annual event, too. The July Fourth celebration, of course, we made note of it, but there was no special event taking place at that time on July Fourth. We had the Flag Day celebration where I think either veteran;s groups or Boy Scout groups would come and take observance of that day. Then we had informal celebrations of Park Service

anniversaries, like the founding of Yellowstone. That day, in September, I believe, I would give a talk on the boat recalling that event. The dates of establishing, or the establishment dates of the various NPS sites in New York were taken cognizance of and my talks on the boat and also of a National Park Service events in general, like the establishment day of the first park, Yellowstone, and the founding date of the National Park Service in 1916, and so on. We did take cognizance of these anniversaries in those days.

DIXON: Okay. What would be your most vivid memory of the Statue? It doesn't have to be anything major, some who I don't know, what would your major memory be?

MORRIS: I don't know, I can't answer that question. I don't remember anything outstanding that took place, that made any special impression on my mind.

DIXON: No Marlene Dietrich, no--

MORRIS: Just Richard M. Nixon.

DIXON: Richard Nixon.

MORRIS: Richard Nixon was the notable figure that had visited here within my memory. But there have been others, of course, there may have been others. But Mr. Foster, the superintendent, was a retiring individual, he was not a publicity hound. In civilian life he lived in the rural area in Camden, Maine, and his hobbies were hunting and fishing in those days. He didn't like crowds, strangely enough, because he worked in an area where huge crowds used to come. However, he was a very conscientious man. He had two days off

during the week that were not consecutive. One of the days off was Sundays, but he never went any place on Sunday, he stayed on the Island. He was always on call. That was one of his days off, but he stayed on the Island.

DIXON: In other words, people lived on the Island then?

MORRIS: People lived on the Island, then.

DIXON: The superintendent and--

MORRIS: The superintendent was required to live on the Island, and we had the chief of maintenance, he was required to live on the Island. The other units were occupied, most of them, by personnel. People who worked on the Island and they were not high-grade employees, they were GS 3s and 4s. These units had to be occupied for maintenance purposes and they were allowed to live in them if they wished.

DIXON: The interpretive process at the museum didn't exist. Were there displays around the Island. I mean like signs or that type of thing?

MORRIS: We had a museum that I installed in the lobby of the administrative building. We called it a museum--"Statue of Liberty Story". Then the other exhibits were in this Statue building in the Statue itself. Besides the Emma Lazarus Plaque, there were other plaques. I believe that the plaques that are now in the Statue of Liberty Storyroom were exhibited mounted on the wall of the sallyport, the entrance into the Statue of Liberty in those days. Then there were other exhibit items on the tenth floor landing, and these were plaques containing the sayings of famous Americans.

DIXON: There was nothing in the crown, though, for example?

MORRIS: There was nothing in the crown, but the observation balcony had a base-relief map of the boroughs of the City of New York. But they were not identified, there were no markings, and maybe that plaque is still up there. But people used to ask questions: "Where is the Hudson River?" "Where is Manhattan?" "How do I get to Central Park?" We were asked those questions in those days, too. But that map did not give any information at all.

DIXON: Did the people ever what was the policy on the torch? Were people ever allowed to go up in the torch?

MORRIS: No, the torch was closed as it is at present, and we gave them the same explanation when they asked why the torch wasn't open as we give today.

DIXON: Okay. Since the museum area and offices didn't exist, all the employees were centered in the administrative building or, in other words, had their offices?

MORRIS: Yes, but we had also an office in this Statue building where we kept the money, for example.

DIXON: Where would that correspond now?

MORRIS: I'm not too sure, but in the area of the sallyport entrance, I would say. There was also another room on the second floor I believe it was the second floor for the use of the people who worked in the Statue. The people who worked in the Statue stayed all during the workday inside the Statue building. They were not confined here, they had their breaks, they could go to Hills for

their lunch, they could walk around because if they had a duty that what we'd call a protection duty today, walking around the Island or circling around the Island, they had much more freedom of movement than they have today. There was no such thing as an interpreter and a protection man in those days, we all did the same different duties, so we all had a chance to work on the outside and to work indoors.

DIXON: Were there any major storms or occurrences of that nature that affected the Island?

MORRIS: Well, we had storms, yes.

DIXON: But I mean, like a big hurricane.

MORRIS: Right, something like that. But whether any damage had been done to the housing units, I wouldn't know. But the Statue was never damaged in any way.

DIXON: Was the Island ever closed for any reason?

MORRIS: To the best of my knowledge, the Island was never closed in those days. That's to the best of my knowledge, yes.

DIXON: Okay. What was, actually, the nature of the base of the Statue. You say there was offices. Where were the offices? Were they part of the old port? Why were the offices here?

MORRIS: We had an office in which we kept the money, the fee collection. Exactly where it was, as I said before I don't know. It was near the sallyport entrance, so we didn't have to walk far from the office where the money was contained to the elevator, you know, to fee-collection station. Now, as far as the other offices are concerned,

I'm not too sure about that. We had a storage room between the second and the third floor to the best of my knowledge, and maybe we still have that storage room where we kept our pamphlets, where we kept our literature and for general purposes.

DIXON: But these were actually in the fort, or there was a structure within the fort between the Statue and the fort?

MORRIS: It must have been within the fort or in the pedestal, but I'm not sure.

DIXON: Did the there was once a drawbridge at the Statue that wasn't operational when you were here.

MORRIS: I don't remember the drawbridge at the Statue, I don't remember that at all.

DIXON: Okay, well we've covered right much. Let's see well if you have nothing else to add, I think I've about asked the questions that occur to me.

MORRIS: Well, now in the old days, we had many more fringe benefits than we have today. Morale was higher in those days than it is now. We did not have a turnover problem that we have now.

DIXON: But you had no seasonal employees?

MORRIS: We had no seasonal employees, but there was hardly a vacancy open during the time I was here. The pay was low, and one or two people quit because they could not make ends meet. But outside of that, we had no labor problem or turnover. And the fringe benefits that I was talking about, we could ride the Circle Line to work in the mornings, same as the concession people still do today. We were given time to

change into our uniforms. Then we could go to Hill's for refreshments. In those days, at the beginning, we did not pay anything for food or drink at Hill's. Then at night, we would change into our civilian clothes before we would close the Statue. In the morning, when we came in on the boat, Mr. Foster, himself, would open the Statue building for us, Mr. Foster and the chief of maintenance that lived here, and he would prepare the monument for visitation before we could take over. And then, when we were ready to operate, he'd leave. Closing time, we were given time to change into our civilian clothes and then close the Statue. Closing was little simpler job than it is now because we did not have the museum to worry about. But on the whole, on the whole, the closing procedure was about the same, clearing the island, clearing the Statue upstairs and the crown and the landing. We still had to walk down the spiral staircase. What changed it was Townsley, Townsley changed it. Townsley was a park Service man, belonged to the Park Service family. His father had been chief ranger at one of the western parks. He was so imbued, you know, with this Park Service business, that I don't think he could put two sentences together without injecting Park Service matter into it. But he's the one that changed the operation of this place, probably because he was very ambitious, he wanted to make a name for himself. So he was the one that sold the idea to Washington to use Park Service launches to transport employees back and forth. And he was the one, also, that changed the procedures of opening and closing. We had to do everything in uniform. I think he also changed the of fringe benefits. We now had to pay a discount rate to Hills for all our refreshments. Then later on we had to pay full price same as visitors, but I don't know when that came into effect. But, I think, Townsley changed the whole

procedure. I would lay the blame on him--for good or worse.

DIXON: The concession was still run by the Hills family?

MORRIS: Yes. Now Hill's had run this concession throughout my first tenure here, and from what I understand, his father had started it many years before while he was still in the Army. The Army had possession of this place. He was given the concession, which he started in a very small way, probably a ho-dog stand, outside the Statue. And then it grew up into the operation it is today.

DIXON: The Island, when you were here first, was solely the domain of the Park Service, there was no Coast Guard, there was no military here at all?

MORRIS: No, right. It was solely under the domain of the Park Service. The Army had left in 1937, and the Statue had been operated by the Park Service, I believe the Statue alone, from 1924 to 1937. But the Army was still there all that time. Then in 1937, the Army left, the whole island was turned over to the Park Service.

DIXON: Okay. It seems as though one of the major changes has been in the number of visitors and the staff. If that's all you have, It is there anything else you'd like to say, to add?

MORRIS: Well I have a few ideas, but I don't want to say them over the microphone.

DIXON: Okay. Well, I've enjoyed talking to you, and we'll add this tape to the AMI Oral History Collection. Than you.

MORRIS: You're welcome.