

**NPS-183**

**ALBIN MASKELONY:**

**INTERVIEW DATE: MAY 27<sup>th</sup>, 1986**

**AGE AT TIME OF INTERVIEW: SEVENTY-THREE**

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**INTERVIEWER: PAUL KENNY**

**RECORDING ENGINEER:**

**TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: FRANK BROSS**

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**SHIP:**

**PORT:**

**RESIDENCE:**

**ORAL HISTORIAN'S NOTE: Albin MASKELONY was a US citizen who worked on Ellis Island from 1934 – 1937 and again in 1954.**

**KENNY:** Tuesday May 27<sup>th</sup> 1986. I am Paul Kenny. I'm going to be interviewing Albin MASKELONY today about the years that he worked at Ellis Island.

**MASKELONY:** Well, actually all this came about in my desire to reminisce of the old days when I worked there. I'm seventy-three years of age now; I was twenty-two -- twenty-three to be exact when I started. And I worked there since August 23<sup>rd</sup> 1934 through March 31 1937.

**KENNY:** How is it that you came to know about the job at Ellis Island?

**MASKELONY:** Those were the good old depression days. And -- I wa-- before I here I got out of high school and you take anything you could get and I

NPS-183/MASKELONY

worked in the Fordham Hospital, in kitchen help for a while. And there again, this is not a life for me and I went hunting again.

KENNY: So you were born and raised in New York City?

MASKELONY: Oh yes, I was born and raised in this -- in Williamsburg Brooklyn. My father was born in Pennsylvania, only my mother and her side came from England. Well, after I got through with Ellis -- with Fordham Hospital in the Bronx, out of desperation I went to a United States Employment Service and there you can get all the good things. What did I get? I got an offer for a job on Ellis Island. Room and board. And twelve hundred and thirty -- twelve hundred and sixty dollars a year. "Room and board.", I said, "Just what I needed." I came over here, got on the train about 3'o clock. Was interviewed and hired immediately. Well after all I was already, by then a high school graduate and they didn't have that caliber yet at that time, so I was very indispensable. I was assigned; I say this now because -- having done better. I started off as a pot washer in a kitchen.

KENNY: Even though you had the high school diploma?

MASKELONY: Yes, out of desperation you took what you could get. Very shortly thereafter, I was ma-- assigned as a store keeper for supplies. Food supplies. Then very shortly thereafter, things moved rather quickly. And I was put on special diets for the patients -- In the kitchen. And I kept progressing, but it meant nothing. I still cried my heart out nights. I went -- then I decided to go to Juilliard at night; Juilliard institute of music. I studied that and I thought I'd pursue that career.

KENNY: And that was while you were still working-

MASKELONY: [superposed] While I was working on the island.

KENNY: And you said there was room and board so you were -

MASKELONY: [interposed] Room and board.

KENNY: --staying here as well?

MASKELONY: That's right. Well during the course of my visits here I met my wife, Mary McGallen[ph]. Surprisingly enough, she had just come into this country about six years before then. And we made a-- we consummated our date in the church and thereafter. We used to go regularly on the novenas. Then of course we decided to get married, but you could not get -- you could not marry and live on the island or any -- for the government, husband and wife work at the same time. One of us had to go. So the Good Lord said, "This is your time, out you go." I did. By that time things were a little better. I left and lo and behold the NRA fell apart and the social security administration came into being. I was takin' all kind of examinations and I passed.

KENNY: Well, what was it like then living on the island those three years I guess that you were living here?

MASKELONY: It was a typical -- first of all Island number one and two, rather two and three, were primarily under the United States Public Health Service. And it was hospital affairs. Patients were on the island. Number three island was contagious diseases. Fortunately, I was in a position where I could not get into any trouble, nor could the Missus got involved. We had male nurses servicing the patients. There were many psychiatric wards.

NPS-183/MASKELONY

There were about, more than twenty wards numbering from ward number one through about number fifteen. Thereafter there were the quarters. On the east side of the island, there was male quarters where you roomed and you boarded and you slept. There were private rooms shall we call them. And there was a dormitory thing. Many of the workers used to commute back and forth but a good number of us lived on the island. And—

KENNY: How was it determined who got the dormitory and who got the private rooms?

MASKELONY: I never – never kn-- knew any reason, I was just fortunate I guess. And I was teamed up with one of the guards on the island, who was also of a – of the same nationality as I. Perhaps they had that and rather worked that. And then my room faced the staff house, Dr. Weldin's house. [interposed] That was the last –

KENNY: What did Dr. Weldin, what was his role?

MASKELONY: He was – well, he was chargin' [sic] of the island, the medical officer for the island. He used to live there with his family. I had taken some photographs which will show children's, you know, playground or something there. The children used to play on the – play over there. The school, they used to go off the island for schooling.

KENNY: To (cough), Excuse me. To Governor's Island or to Manhattan?

MOSEKLONY: That I don't know.

KENNY: [interposed] Oh.

MASKELONY: [superposed] I have no idea.

KENNY: Here is a picture of you with a –

MASKELONY: Yes.

KENNY: -- organ? Is that a hand organ?

MASKELONY: [superposed] Well, at the – since -- I used to also play the piano, accordions – used to go to study my music. So there was occasions when they used to have guests in the house. I would entertain them for a short spell. On other occasions, on holidays; New Years, Christmas, Easter, and so forth, I would entertain the nurses' quarters - - dining room. And the doctors. That's the way the time was spent.

KENNY: So there's a – what looks like a swing set in the back there for the children.

MASKELONY: Yes. There's the staff house. And here to the left -- excuse me -- to the right, are the playground things.

KENNY: How many children were there living on the island at the time. Do you remember?

MASKELONY: About three. They were small, maybe about seven or something. They didn't remain too much – they seemed to be away with the mother every now and then. But primarily that's where they lived. I know we used too – when I say we, the hospital – used to furnish the food for them in these special utility trucks where they put the – and we used to deliver it to their kitchen. They had their own maid. They had their own gardener. And to this day some of the tulips and flowers, I

NPS-183/MASKELONY

recognize the spot where they were in. They're in the same place. Now I don't know what could have happened between '37 and '54 when I left, but those plants are still growing there. So that was the – the rule.

KENNY: Now you said that, about numbers – wards number one through fifteen had patients and then from that point on there were staff. Do you have a recollection of numbers of people; how many staff, how many patients, how full the wards were at that time?

MASKELONY: Well it used to fluctuate. There were about ten to fifteen average. About ten to fifteen bed-ridden patients. But there was ambulatory patients also because they used to parade in them -- in a mob from there – all in there individual wards to a central dining room on the island. On the right hand – on the left hand side, when we had stea– there were steam tables there. A staff used to serve them their foods and they used to eat in that dining room.

KENNY: That's on the left hand side which – if you're going which direction?

MASKELONY: [superposed] I'm sorry. Left hand – left hand side of the corridor going east.

KENNY: Going east.

MASKELONY: Towards – towards the thirty one. Shall we say? That's the last one -- of the thirty one.

KENNY: [interposed] Okay.

NPS-183/MASKELONY

MASKELONY: And then on each side; right side, left side were the other wards and hospitals. Of course, going all the way back now, all the way to the west, the corridor actually starting with number one corridor. There was the female quarters. They had us well separated. Well chaperoned. And there was no need for policing. We had a crowd of them -- each minded his own business. We had our little dates, we used to go out on the island. And everybody rushed like the hell to get back by -- that twelve o'clock boat.

KENNY: That was the last boat back to the island?

MASKELONY: If you missed that twelve o'clock boat, you were in trouble. But it was safe then to sleep in the park. Or we would crawl into the Coast Guard Station and they'd look -- they knew who it was. They says, "Ah, the devil with 'em. Let 'em sleep."

KENNY: (laughs)

MASKELONY: They knew our problem. Well, that was the nicest ones. Also at the end of that island was a sewing room -- the house where little animals were for experimental purposes. And there was the sterilizing room. They did no crematory work there, but it was just sterilizing. Sterilizing what? Mattresses! The mattresses were re-sterilized and replaced. There was also on the island what we referred to as the Bull Gang. Th-

KENNY: What was that?

MASKELONY: The Bull Gang was -- other employees who did the gathering up -- the wastes or delivering big heavy supplies of meats and stuff to individual kitchens off the barge to store them into the ice boxes for feeding purposes. And then you had service and repair people, personnel. That was the Bull Gang. The Bull Gang, they for some reason or

another, none of the Bull Gang ever lived on the island. They seemed to live in the vicinity. So they commuted back and forth. Uh --

KENNY: When you're talking about that end of the island you mentioned the -- the animal house, where the little animals were and you mentioned that mattress sterilizers. Was there not also the forensic medicine area where they conducted autopsies?

MASKELONY: Well no, you see they did that at -- at -- Island Number Three only housed the sick patients. Anything after that was not on that island. It may have been--

KENNY: [superposed] Well there's a building down on the end across from the animal house where there is -- it looks like autopsies were conducted because there are storage facilities for several bodies and there's a table.

MASKELONY: That I don't recall truthfully. At that end of the island, the other huge room recall were the [not understood] central heating plant. The heating --

KENNY: [superposed] This would be right, little west of that. A little bit further down.

MASKELONY: Going east?

KENNY: No, west.

MASKELONY: Coming back west then? Well, right in the boiler room, the -- the sterilizing room, sewing room, linen room, that was the -- are in that area. And on the other side was the animals

KENNY: [super posed] No, I'm sorry, it is east.

MASKELONY: I can't seem to place it – if I saw it I would recognize it but I don't.

KENNY: Okay. Well we'll go and have a look at it after the interview is over.  
(laughs)

MASKELONY: Yes. That room would be – I know there is a gate, a wired fence separating the end of the wards from the area of women's quarters. That much. I don't know what else can I recall?

KENNY: Well, I asked you about numbers of patients and [interposed] numbers of staff.

MASKELONY: [superposed] Oh yes I'm sorry.

KENNY: Do you have a recollection about that?

MASKELONY: Well, let me see now. Fifteen north- (mumbling) -- . Well, it could be determined how many wards there were, there would be a maid for each nurse – a kitchen maid for each ward who serviced the food. There would be a – her partner who helped her service. And for each one of them – we'll work with a figure of at least, I would say, about nineteen. The rest was various other rooms but nineteen wards where there were patients and nurses and kitchen help and ward help. In that connection, I estimate that for the eighteen wards, two each of the kitchen help and services would be about thirty-six. Each one had male nurses. You say you want to record? You can record that.

KENNY: Yeah.

MASKELONY: 'Cause there were some more figures.

KENNY: Okay. So you said there were nineteen wards that had two each –

MASKELONY: Some case—That's just about thirty-eight –

KENNY: of the kitchen help.

MASKELONY: – thirty-eight so probably not girls. They had women doing that kind of work.

KENNY: And how many male nurses? One for each?

MASKELONY: One for each.

KENNY: Ward?

MASKELONY: Yeah, one for each ward.

KENNY: And a supervisor?

MASKELONY: Yes. The – Miss Lomax was – may she rest in peace – she was quite elderly then. She was in charge of it. She drove a good work– she was responsible for the nurses, for the help – female nurses – except the kitchen crew. We were subject to dietitians.

KENNY: Oh and you said that female nurses were all on Island Two?

MASKELONY: There are – they performed their services on island number two. On hospital wards that were out there.

NPS-183/MASKELONY

KENNY: Okay, well we'll get to Island Two in a minute.

MASKELONY: [interposed] Yeah.

KENNY: Let's just finish with Island Three.

MASKELONY: Alright. And then of course the – I am speaking exclusively now of island number three because on island number two, the figures change a little bit. There was also ward personnel, nurses and doctors. And then there was a – the Bull Gang and so forth. I mean if you want an overall figure of all personnel, that's the way they start adding up.

KENNY: Okay, well let's talk about Island Two. What exactly went on in these buildings. We're sitting in one of the buildings of Island Two now.

MASKELONY: [superposed] Well, first of all, each island number one, uh – island number two and island number three had their own individual kitchens. And there were serviced by a chef, a cook. He did all the cooking. So there were two cooks. For day time. There was also night time activity so you had two night chefs and night help. But obviously it was just the – take care of the small needs, there was no elaborate feeding of patients and stuff. It was more or less to service the needs of the work staff.

KENNY: Right. So you had twenty-four hour

.MASKELONY: [superposed] Twenty-four hour activity.

KENNY: -- -- staff visiting hospitals. What –

MASKELONY: Yes. And as for kitchen help there were about eight kitchen help with the chef and the Bull Gang referred to service – the whole island. In fact they went – they did have some connection with island number one, also. To what capacity I don't know, perhaps it was in repairs and servicings and so forth. Perhaps delivering the foods stuffs that used to come in on the ferry. Wholesale meats and huge supplies of milks and cans and groceries and stuff. And they used to be housed into store rooms. It is from those storerooms that I for one used to fill their needs on a requisition basis from each island. And deliver them to each ward as the needs required.

KENNY: Which – what was the difference in the patients that were held here on Island Two and those that were on Island Three?

MASKELONY: As I said, the – island number two were contagious disease – seamen, that were being serviced and treated here. Actually, almost an isolated form – they couldn't even be housed outside even if they were veterans. I don't think they even put them in the veterans hospitals. Surprising enough eventually, I had connection with the veterans hospital in my higher capacity. And I never did get any connection. Be as it may. Now, island number two were seamen with temporary problems. They'd get off a ship that came in and so forth, they were needed hospitalization – immediate hospitalization. They were put over here. I recall very vividly, I can't place the year, when the Morro Castle disaster happened here in the bay.

KENNY: I'm not familiar with that.

MASKELONY: It burned – it was one of the most terrible fires and there was great activity over here. All the patients being were being rushed over here. And housed on island number two, not island number three. Service

then helped whatever degree they could. It was that type of personnel that – patients that were housed here. Of course, I understand, from what I know, that island number three, the only activity that such that they had over there was for persons who were being deported.

And I recall one particular case, of course I won't mention any name at this time, he was being deported because, he was a great fighter, but he was being deported because he had a very bad contagious disease. You couldn't even leave him on the isl – on the bay. So they had their own medical care but had not the connection. Back to number – island number two. They were housed by and cared for by regular nurses. Lieutenants. Status of Lieutenant. Doctors in the service. They had no connection with number two -- they avoided as such.

KENNY: Number?

MASKELONY: Number three. Number three. Yeah.

KENNY: Three. Yeah. [interposed] I understand.

MASKELONY: Yeah. In their needs -- experimental and so forth. But number two was typically a housing – it was housing hospital facilities for marine personnel.

KENNY: And this was military service and merchant seamen as well?

MASKELONY: Mostly merchant seamen.

KENNY: I see.

NPS-183/MASKELONY

MASKELONY: It was militarily rarely. The – the – the occasion. It was just a immediate drop off service part. Otherwise there were e– also even ship to Stapleton which was at that time part of our endeavors. Stapleton Hospital.

KENNY: [interposed] Stapleton. It's on Staten Island. Right.

MASKELONY: I don't know if that's still in existence.

KENNY: Yeah it is. I it's changed, it's no longer public health service. It's a private hospital.

MASKELONY: Oh, private. Because a thought occurred to me this morning that there may remain one or two more lost sheep there who liv -- worked here. I mean after all I'm s-- seventy-two now, and those people here – the youngest person I could think of would – would only be about seventy-two. So how many would there be left?

KENNY: Yeah, that's true.

MASKELONY: See.

KENNY: That's true. How full were these buildings on island number two. We're in the second of the buildings – the administrative center I believe.

MASKELONY: Oh, I'm s–

KENNY: How many patients were these – were these buildings full? Did you get into these buildings on Island Two very much?

NPS-183/MASKELONY

MASKELONY: Well, as a turn over. There was great activity. It was kind of full. But it would vary. Because you had psychiatric cases confined. Cases they would come and go. And then I said all we did was you'd stand on -- on isle number one and glance at the immigration station and see the psychiatrics there. And then pay no attention. Then you heard them that we had -- they were here -- also here on island number three obviously. Because of the nature of their ailments. They required extreme psychiatric care. Housed -- in fact each ward had a cubby hole, the room, whatever you call it -- whatever you describe it. Locked -- the patient was locked in there.

KENNY: Each ward did?

MASKELONY: Each ward had that.

KENNY: [interposed] I noticed them on Island Three, --

MASKELONY: Yes.

KENNY: -- with the bars on the windows.

MASKELONY: They had about four -- I think we'd say about four that kind of private rooms before they resorted to the wards -- in there where they housed them. But then again, I says, they didn't house them forever. It was a matter of turnover -- service to what degree they could. And they would dispense somewhere else I don't know. For some other reason.

KENNY: You were deporting people then back to Europe and other locations from the island here. Did--

MASKELONY: But -- the deportations took place everything from island number three.

KENNY: Okay. I was going to ask you, did you see any personnel from say the Italian aid originations or Jewish aid originations that came out to see the patients?

MASKELONY: No.

KENNY: Did you have any contact with people like that?

MASKELONY: The deportations that I was talking about consisted of Puerto Ricans, South Americans, in that category. But they were handled and deported and housed to island number three. We only heard about them, we didn't see it. On occasions we was surprised because, gee, read in the paper so and so is on the island. Oh goody, goody. We all ran down to see. But that's as far as you got. So we knew that they were there, but we never saw them. As for anything on this side of the island, we don't know what the activities were. As marine – as marine – marine what?

KENNY: Merchants?

MASKELONY: Merchant Marine.

KENNY: Merchant marine.

MASKELONY: They may have been housed here as an emergency, provided some cure and may have been discharged from here for deportation purposes. Or back to the ship. That I don't know. I know that you had the administration building over here where primarily all the personnel records were kept and hiring's and firings and pretty typical administration of an island number two and three. I'm not familiar with

NPS-183/MASKELONY

the – the administration building here -- took care of the needs of the island number three or not, I don't know. They may have had their own. From what I gather, in fact the – the boat that used to service island number three -- in fact they used to come around from the other end of the island for pick up and deliveries.

KENNY: Island number three or island number one?

MASKELONY: [superposed] Island number three.

KENNY: Oh.

MASKELONY: For island number one and two for a fact, I know they pulled in over here – into the – to the slip right here. And we all used to wander to our left and we were headed for island number one and two. But the corridors were open for admittance to island number three. What went on there I don't know. I – Island – Island number one, I get that mixed up looking the wrong direction.

KENNY: Yeah, I understand.

MASKELONY: Island number one.

KENNY: Island number one, yes. So you're saying what went on in island number one you don't really know –

MASKELONY: No, no.

KENNY: -- that much of. And –

MASKELONY: Only what I could see from the outside.

KENNY: Only what you could carrying on – yeah.

MASKELONY: Only once did I – on one day off, I decided I was gonna take a picture. And I took a picture of the island from the corner. (rustling) And –

KENNY: That's the picture we're looking at here.

MASKELONY: This – wh – this picture primarily gets us some question out of it. On the – [in a whisper] west, east, north – on the north side of the island, I gather that at that pos-- you have a new seawall -- even then. Prior to that new seawall, the boats for immigration purposes or cause -- the cause, whatever that they were -- used to b – dock here on the east shore. The ferry, Ellis Island ferry as such used to come into here. Into the –

KENNY: Right into the front of the main building?

MASKELONY: Into the front. There was some question here in looking over. We were trying to view, they'd see this wall here. The wall, part of the east wall and the –I'm -- east wall and part of the north wall.

KENNY: Has a vine growing on it?

MASKELONY: Yeah. We doesn't – doesn't – it seems different somehow now.

KENNY: It looks like there's – looks like there's vines or –

MASKELONY: Whatever it is.

KENNY: Yeah? Those look like greenery growing [not understood]

NPS-183/MASKELONY

MASKELONY: [superposed] So it maybe the original wall or there may have been some construction 'cause I am not aware of any new alterations that were made here on the island except for the seawall, for a fact. The seawall was being worked on at that time.

KENNY: In the mid thirties?

MASKELONY: In the mid thirties. And the slip, of course, was always on the repairs.

KENNY: But you were when the – the new ferry building was assembled weren't you? The ferry slip building that is there now. I thought that --

MASKELONY: You mean it was --

KENNY: -- was completed in 1935? Or ...

MASKELONY: About. Then that's part of the construction that was going on.

KENNY: Yeah. And were they also filling in the space between Island Two and three at that time?

MASKELONY: No, that was already filled in at that time.

KENNY: [superposed] So it was already filled in.

MASKELONY: That was already filled in.

KENNY: How 'bout back behind the ferry building? On the west side?

NPS-183/MASKELONY

MASKELONY: [superpose] The --- the Liberty side? East? North, east, west, oh that's the Jersey shore. On the west side would be the Jersey shore.

KENNY: Right. I thought there was some fill that was being put in back there. And –

MASKELONY: I don't know.

KENNY: Brought that – built [not understood]

MASKELONY: Always we used to look at that and marvel at, I think it was Bayonne, New Jersey was at that area. And we've often thought back of the – the Toms River explosion that took place in World War I. We talked about but we didn't see it.

KENNY: Black Tom explosion.

MASKELONY: Black Tom, whatever it was.

KENNY: Yeah, that's right.

MASKELONY: And we're never curious enough to get over the wall to look at that time. It was too much work to be – it's amazing that I recall some of these things that I showed some interest in.

KENNY: (laughs)

MASKELONY: See -- at that time.

KENNY: Was there any restriction on you to go to Island One or to walk around in the build – the main building or is it –

NPS-183/MASKELONY

MASKELONY: No, we were cautioned of it. The only cautions that we – that were extended to us – it was very little – is that they emphasize the point this is a contagious disease. Be careful how you --

KENNY: On Island One?

MASKELONY: No. We talkin' about Island One now?

KENNY: Oh, that's what I was asking you.

MASKELONY: Alright, let's dwell on island number one.

KENNY: [interposed] Oh, I was just – I just asked you there was no restriction or – nothing to stop you from going to Island One –

MASKELONY: No. No, no, no, no. But we never did.

KENNY: -- [interposed] other than lack of curiosity.

MASKELONY: We never did. Because if we had any time to go wandering around anywheres, believe me, as far – as soon as we got close to the bar – to the central – the slip, we were on that slip and headed for the city.

KENNY: (laughs)

MASKELONY: We had no time to spend to go looking at island number one.

KENNY: Now is this picture of – of you on –

MASKELONY: No.

KENNY: -- the roof?

MASKELONY: This was one of the boys that worked there. He happened to come out so I took his picture and he took my pic – he took my picture. At one stage over there -- with the accordion or something. And -- Now –

KENNY: And where are you standing at this point? [interposed] Or is he standing?

MASKELONY: Now. We're trying to 'cause we couldn't very well figure it out. From what we saw over there, I gathered that we're standing over here at this point, at the – [whispers] north, east -- At the northeast extreme corner of island number one. And – but if that be the case, and I look back, and if that be the case, this should give us an idea of what we are looking at.

KENNY: Yeah, the skyline [interposed] in the back.

MASKELONY: The skyline, no. It should be the skyline of Brooklyn or what have you, because to this part is -- the Statue of Liberty's right here. Well I mean from the island point of view.

KENNY: Okay.

MASKELONY: Way down here. On the – on the, uh, east, north – south, east spot [not understood]. I used too g – look out the – I used to look out the window to see the worl—the -- this house. This is the – ea – west – east -- west. And I – I look out the window and I'd see this little staff house.

NPS-183/MASKELONY

KENNY: That looks like it'd be looking –

MASKELONY: Where – Where – th-- those children's and toys.

KENNY: Okay. We're coming up with it here.

MASKELONY: Yeah.

KENNY: Here's the scene of you and with your accordion and the playground equipment.

MASKELONY: And ya see, this is the same – this is the same staff house.

KENNY: Yes, I see.

MASKELONY: As for the location, there's the water line. Oh. It'll be in the back.

KENNY: So Manhattan is over here? Is that right?

MASKELONY: I – I would think so. I'd have to look over it, lo – analyze it more closely. 'Cause I don't recall just how --. This picture was taken out --

KENNY: So we're looking at a picture of Mr. Maskelony sitting on a park bench  
–

MASKELONY: Yes.

KENNY: -- with playground equipment. [not understood]

MASKELONY: This picture was taken out of my window. And if it was taken out of my window, I would be looking at the (whistles softly) at the, uh south --

NPS-183/MASKELONY

south end of the building. To the right would have been the, what? West? See, I'd have to figure that out when we got out there.

KENNY: Okay.

MASKELONY: We took a look.

KENNY: I see that picture of – is this you sitting on –

MASKELONY: Yes.

KENNY: -- with the red sails in the sunset in the background?

MASKELONY: Well, just one of those moves I'll just for memories sake I'll keep to see it. That's when I went to Julliard. And that's when I had my – he was –

END SIDE 1, START SIDE 2 [long pause]

KENNY: -- Albin Maskelony on May 27<sup>th</sup>, 1986. So we're looking at some pictures of your –

MASKELONY: Room.

KENNY: -- the room that you shared.

MASKELONY: And to confirm the exactness of these pictures and locations, the calendar on the wall identifies it as March, 1936.

KENNY: Yeah that's right I noticed that, that's very convenient.

NPS-183/MASKELONY

MASKELONY: Yes. And there is my p- piano accordion. And that is Kashmir Hoffman [ph] in here. He was the –

KENNY: Okay. I see that you have a picture of him here.

MASKELONY: [superposed] He was the tenor. He was a tenor. And he had the organ and I had the accordion. So obviously – and this is the other – and a side of the room. When he was off, I'd sit there. And brood.

KENNY: Is that your radio?

MASKELONY: It is, yes. The old fashioned radio. The old fashioned radio. And there is our library.

KENNY: Uh-huh.

MASKELONY: Of music. Mine and his.

KENNY: And what of – what job did he do here on the island?

MASKELONY: He was a guard over at the slip.

KENNY: At the slip?

MASKELONY: Yes.

KENNY: I see.

MASKELONY: At the slip.

KENNY: Working also for the public health service?

MASKELONY: Yes. Same –

KENNY: That's his – what the uniform that he is wearing is –

MASKELONY: [superposed] That's right.

KENNY: -- Public Health Service uniform. What did – did you wear a uniform?  
Or what were you dressed --

MASKELONY: [superposed] No, no, no, no. This was my uniform.

KENNY: I – in –

MASKELONY: Laundry supplied.

KENNY: Laundry supplied whites.

MASKELONY: That's all.

KENNY: Yeah.

MASKELONY: And of co -- surprising that we used maid services, our bed used to be fixed because I never was curious enough where they got the linen from but only during the course of my reminiscing here – visiting – did I finally find a door open down stairs and I say, "Oh, there it is!" And Miss Cogen [ph] asked me "There is what?" This is the room that housed all the bed sheets, the pillow cases, for the servicing of our – now do I realize that we were being serviced there. So downstairs, in the same is, was the bed linens and so forth.

NPS-183/MASKELONY

KENNY: Did you – Do you recall what number of ward this is? Or what room –

MASKELONY: [superposed] Yes, thirty one.

KENNY: Ward thirty one?

MASKELONY: [superposed] Well too bad haven't b – we don't have that – she showed me. She, Miss Cogen [ph] showed me a chart of all the rooms and the history. Sh – and I left it here last time so I never co – couldn't even review it at home I'll have do – do you have a copy of it?

KENNY: Oh yeah –

MASKELONY: Yeah.

KENNY: We'll get another copy of that.

MASKELONY: So this was the eight – this is the last room on the island. The very end. In fact, for connection purposes, there's that radio.

KENNY: Yes.

MASKELONY: There's that radio here.

KENNY: Oh, I see it's in both pictures. Yes.

MASKELONY: See. There's the angle. There was my bed there. And there's the picture that went to the wall now, took the picture and looked at that and I says, "There should be a nail at this spot" and there was, the original nail is still in that wall.

NPS-183/MASKELONY

KENNY: (laughs)

MASKELONY: See?

KENNY: Did you have any bond or any fond recollections of some of the patients that you had some contact with. Did you have contact with them as someone who was working in the kitchen?

MASKELONY: No, just a hello and good-bye and caution. Hello and good-bye and caution. Nothing more.

KENNY: Most of them you said the patients on Island Three were – were immigrants who were being deported or had some trouble –

MASKELONY: Yes.

KENNY: -- With their papers. And they were having them stricken down or something.

MASKELONY: Well, medically treated and dispensed off somewheres from there. Whether – obviously I-I-I doubt very much that they were cured enough to be returned back to the ships. So they must have been sent to other institutions. And conceivably, n-not that I heard of any of them being military personnel or veterans that may have been removed to the veterans hospitals, I don't know.

KENNY: Oh, so these were people who were coming into our country –

MASKELONY: No, merchant marines. Merchant personnel.

KENNY: But you said that was Island Two.

MASKELONY: No, island, uh – [whispers] one, two, three –

KENNY: You're –

MASKELONY: Island number three was the marine personnel that were taken off ships because they were sick and housed and cured there. Island number two was personnel – ship personnel who got s-sick on the – on the ships and were housed here until they got well and they were put back on their own ships. Sent back to their work. There was no question of immigration reasons for island – per-personnel on island number two. In fact, I personally myself was treated -- hospitalized on island number one because of I dis-developed stomach trouble.

KENNY: We're looking at a map of Island's one, two and three, now with the ward numbers of buildings marked and noted of what their uses were so we can discuss them. Are you saying that you don't think those should be called wards, they should be called quarters? I'm –

MASKELONY: No, actually – well they list it here as wards but they weren't because they housed personnel who boarded – boarded on the island.

KENNY: This is what were being termed wards –

MASKELONY: [superposed] Yes. This is definitely thirty –

KENNY: [interposed] -- what twenty three through thirty two?

MASKELONY: Thirty-one to thirty two -- I know for a fact there was personnel housed in there -- sleeping quarters. And I think right from about here –

KENNY: That's twenty seven, twenty eight, twenty nine, thirty.

MASKELONY: [superposed] Dormi – Dormitories. Dormitories and – and individual rooms of the workers.

KENNY: Which one was the –

MASKELONY: In fact some of the –

KENNY: [interposed] the dormitory style, it was just twenty seven –

MASKELONY: [superposed] It was in this area here.

KENNY: Twenty seven –

MASKELONY: [superposed] If you find one big room somewheres without any psychiatric cubby holes, you can identi – it can be identified-- that was dormitories for personnel. Everywheres where you will see a little room with little cubby holes and obvious they're wards. They're wards. Other areas were dormitories for personnel. And here – nurses? No.

KENNY: This is uh, you're pointing to the top side of the map where it says quarters laboratory next to the animal house.

MASKELONY: The nurses' – This is island number o – number three.

KENNY: That's right.

MASKELONY: Administration building? Well. [softly] What are they doing here? –

NPS-183/MASKELONY

KENNY: I think that this is this may be a mistake or maybe just tentatively marked that way trying to determine how it was used.

MASKELONY: This administration building is – is the central point where the ferry used to come in.

KENNY: On Island Two. Yes. That's right.

MASKELONY: Ferry came in here. And then there'd be an administration building here. With the staff.

KENNY: [interposed] Right.

MASKELONY: Recreational shelter, I'll go along with that. That was one psychiatric. The laundry was here, I'll go along with that. Recreation hall, yes, but I've never known it to be in – in use as such. Perhaps they did on their own but I never – we never knew of anything -- recreation going on. Nurses? No. The nurses were housed here. Where's the kitchen?

KENNY: The kitchen's right there.

MASKELONY: Thi – Right here's the nurse's quarters. Upstairs.

KENNY: Nurse's quarters on the second floor across from the kitchen.

MASKELONY: Yes.

KENNY: I see.

MASKELONY: You got that down there?

NPS-183/MASKELONY

KENNY: Well we don't have it marked here.

MASKELONY: Yeah. Nurs – the – nurses. Also on the personnel being housed did consist – how – [not understood] the male patients. Male nurses.

KENNY: Male nurses.

MASKELONY: In that area too. See. And the lieuiers [ph] were in here. Doctors, no they – they weren't. They may have a – had a room for emergency purposes or something but I don't know of any particular place that they had a-- rooms and board. The nurses used to eat here. Nurses, doctors.

KENNY: Across from –

MASKELONY: [superposed] Kitchen help. We used to eat here. On-on a f – on the ground floor, we ate. That was our dining room. Upstairs was the nurse's quarters for st – living purposing. On the other side was a dining room for doctors and nurses.

KENNY: I see. And your wife, would she have been on the first floor of the – her facilities?

MASKELONY: She would be upstairs on the second floor in this area here. Now – only now do I find out, yeah we caught up in here. 'Cause he used to comin' down here. The animal house. Huh!. See what you don't know no wouldn't hurt you.

KENNY: (laughs)

NPS-183/MASKELONY

MASKELONY: I knew about the power house. But never occurred to me look back what they housed there. So this may have been a morgue, if there be chubby[sic] holes that was the morgue then.

KENNY: Yeah, I'm sure it was used –

MASKELONY: See.

KENNY: -- for forensic medicine purpose.

MASKELONY: Mary – You know what we did? Laundry. Suck at it. Of course there again on -- on the ground floor –

KENNY: [interposed] Of Island Two?

MASKELONY: -- was a store room. Supplies. Food supplies. Staple -- can foods, cans, foods and so forth. And the refrigerators, one or two refrigerators housing all the big beefs and hams and meat and so forth.

KENNY: That's here on Island Two.

MASKELONY: On Island Two. And it was from there that we used to – I used to make – then they put in requisitions. Dietitians would approve it. I'd have to go be service to them. But underneath.

KENNY: Uh-huh. Yes. There is a corridor that runs all the way underneath the hospital.

MASKELONY: [superposed] Yeah, underneath the hospital. But that except for the psychiatric care – that's all I know. This -- in our review over here, I don't recall too much of it expect that we used to see from the outside

NPS-183/MASKELONY

like Pilgrim's hospital, climbing the walls. We'd take a glance and think nothing more of it. so I knew of its existence but I didn't know to what extent. Or what degree.

KENNY: Between Islands Two and Three here there's the recre- the uh recreation shelter and there we're now cutting back all of the --

MASKELONY: [superposed] On the Jers – Jersey side. Yeah

KENNY: We're now cutting back all of the trees between Islands –

MASKELONY: [superposed] Yes.

KENNY: -- between island's two and three. Was that pretty clear cut between –

MASKELONY: Oh yes. It was a field. An open field, no trees no obstructions.

KENNY: And how was it groomed, who took care of that?

MASKELONY: The Bull-Gang. We'll get their job descriptions lined up –

KENNY: Basically a maintenance crew then?

MASKELONY: Yeah.

KENNY: Maintaining the grounds –

MASKELONY: [superposed] Right, right.

KENNY: And the buildings.

NPS-183/MASKELONY

MASKELONY: And of course the gardener was exclusive for the staff house. Oh, shrubberies and [not understood]. Beautiful.

KENNY: That was around Dr. Weldin's house?

MASKELONY: Yes. Fortunately I was able to share in the aroma of the flowers and stuff. Yes, wonderful.

KENNY: You said that he was in charge of the operations on Island Two and Three for the Public Health Service.

MASKELONY: Right

KENNY: Were you also aware of a commissioner or superintendent for the island – from Island One?

MASKELONY: No. No.

KENNY: You weren't aware of who was in charge or who was working over there?

MASKELONY: No.

KENNY: I see.

MASKELONY: [not understood]

KENNY: So it was pretty much his – Dr. Weldin's domain over here then.

MASKELONY: Yes. At that time. Because they would fluctuate. And back in '54, when I got off the ferry, everything was gone except the caretaker.

KENNY: Well lets go on to talk about '54 then. What about – how you happened to come back to be on this island once again.

MASKELONY: Yes. I'm looking now at the little resume that I made for myself. Thinking back what happened up until the time of my return. After I left the island in nineteen-thirty seven naturally I resumed my work with the government in Washington D.C. and progressed in (while in Washington D.C.) I went into military – military services. Well National Guard, that's what it was. So military service, Washington D.C. Then I had military service in '40. By that time I was back in – after Washington, I came back to New York in the forties to the regional office of the Social Security Administration.

And there I wen-- pursued normal clerical duties, bringing proportional stages and then I started gaining little bits of importance and – and advancement. In nineteen for– in about the nineteen forties, when the agencies changed to the United States Employment Service, the War Manpower Commission office of emergency management, all those activities because of war purposes. There were federalization of agencies to serve the purpose. After all that ceased and the federal security agency as such more or less stabilized and they became a little more organized, there still remained the United States Public Health Service under our jur – immediate jurisdiction.

By that time I had been made management supervisor. procurement officer for the regions one: Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Connecticut, and Rhode Island. And then one day out of a clear sky my boss told me that I hope you realize Ellis Island is under our care,

the metro – the United States Public Health Service and they liquidating their activities. They advised me that it was my job therefore to go to the island, make a complete survey of the remains of the equipment and supplies and everything on the island. And make recommendation as to what disposal should be made of it, of that equipment.

KENNY: What year was this?

MASKELONY: Hm? When did they start the closing? 1 954. So it'd be about – and the final days of it ended when?

KENNY: It closed in November of '54.

MASKELONY: Okay. So it was [not understood], that's the date that was oddly questionable because you look at it, take care it and leave. So, I point out in my report at that time, by that time was a grade nine in that [not understood] government from a pot washer. That's the connection. You know what grade nine is?

KENNY: Um, hm.

MASKELONY I pointed out in my report that it was very obvious to me that none of this equipment should be treated lightly. There were all the – materials: tables, chairs, primarily beds. And things that were being housed and used by the contagious disease personnel for as long as I know, when I -- up to the point that I left. But in 1954 I did personally, physically, recognize some of this equipment. And with great concern I immediately made recommendation of destruction by fire. Not to be removed from the island.

KENNY: And why were you recommending that?

MASKELONY: Because of the disease infected things. From there on they could have performed the additional investigation as they saw fit, if they wanted to check each and every piece if it was free of germs or anything like that, it was up to them. That was my conclusion.

KENNY: How many people were on the island when you came back to see it?

MASKELONY: About six.

KENNY: And this is on the whole island, including Island One?

MASKELONY: No. [super posed] And island – I had nothing to do with island number one.

KENNY: [interposed] Or are you just talking about islands two and three.

MASKELONY: That was in the midst of other services, I was re-- concerned about island number two. That was the equipment. There was o-- other services where -- [not understood] – there was a lot of stationery, tremendous amount, it was amazing. What would they do with so much stationery? Be as it may, that was distributed to the various constituents of the Federal Security Agency so to suffer no loss without any. And – and off in the – an awfully lot of shelving, wooden shelving which served no purpose here was also sent to the General Services Administration for their disposal.

That was type of me – items were not questionable as to its health hazards. The others remained. I understand after I left that my

recommendation for the disposal of the other property was approved in some manner, shape or form. I knew no more about it.

A very interesting thing has happened for what purpose it might serve. All because I wanted to reminisce on the island and dear Mister Kenny really started the ball rolling for some reason or another. I welcomed it and I'm glad to share it with him. There was at the time of the re – various reorganizations back to 1954 when I was assigned this, there was another g – chap, a Mr. Cataldo [ph]. Charles Cataldo, myself and Ms. Rebecca Vogel [ph] who were then under the organizational set up as the following manner. I was [not understood] officer, management services. Charles Cataldo was fiscal man and Rebecca Vogel was made personnel.

I salvaged from Ellis Island about two people into the regional office -- for a re – for continued employment. That lightened their hearts. Charles Cataldo -- connected himself with the surplus property division also under the Federal Security Agency at that time. And he served his purpose and more recently ended up here in the city. Then – now that I made arrangements visit to the island I said, "Might as well gather up all my friends, see what happened to them". I located Mr. Cataldo who by now, surprisingly enough, became a very big man under the Service Surplus Property Administration and is now in State of Colorado. And –

KENNY: He's still working for the federal government?

MASKELONY: No, he – he retired as well as I did. And we're sittin' and talking about the equipment and he says, "Yes, I know Al about that equipment your recommendations and everything else. We tried to dispose of that property for Ellis Island and nobody wanted it." "What?", says I. I got it

NPS-183/MASKELONY

still layin' in the storeroom. Well its none of my business, I have nothing to do with it. So that's what happened -- got that out of -- out of the past—came--.

KENNY: So Mr. Cataldo said that it was – some of it was removed from –

MASKELONY: [superposed] None of it was removed.

KENNY: [interposed] None of it was removed?

MASKELONY: [super posed] Nobody would accept it.

KENNY: Yeah.

MASKELONY: Nobody wanted it.

KENNY: But your recommendations were to destroy it.

MASKELONY: My recommendations were (how foolish I see it now) there may be something there for better brains than I.

KENNY: (laughs)

MASKELONY: F-For the purpose for what it's intended.

KENNY: For the historic purposes.

MASKELONY: Yes.

KENNY: Yes.

NPS-183/MASKELONY

MASKELONY: But as for long table – uh – long tables where they ate, steam tables and things like that. Surely, I accept they want to save the pieces of wood and say somebody ate from it. Don't give them furniture to anybody to use it again. Put it in the cage and say, "Here" and let it turn to stone.

KENNY: (laughs)

MASKELONY: But this is where somebody ate. But by now I don't think that even if there – there were any disease infected it'd be active in any matter, shape or form, but who knows.

KENNY: Well that's very interesting to hear that you made that recommendation thirty years ago. Most of --

MASKELONY: And I am surprised that no action was taken accordingly.

KENNY: Most of that material was still lying here when –

MASKELONY: [not understood]

KENNY: We took over ten years ago and started to put the museum together. I'm interested in –

MASKELONY: Eighty-six [not understood], oh that's when my wife died.

KENNY: And we –

MASKELONY: And that's when I was retiring.

KENNY: Well, we reopened Ellis Island for the bicentennial in 1976.

MASKELONY: Yeah.

KENNY: So we started work here in 1975, to gather materials –

MASKELONY: Yeah.

KENNY: together.

MASKELONY: She died and I retired. And I left –

KENNY: Did your wife stay out working here for a few years after you left in thirty-seven? How much longer was she here.

MASKELONY: [not understood] . About six months when I got to Washington, I says, “Please Mary, quit.” I took away – after I left, maybe about six months.

KENNY: And was it – were -- you were married already at that time or—

MASKELONY: No, no. It was for marriage purposes. ‘Mary, let’s get married--

KENNY: [interposed] Oh I see.

MASKELONY: --Let’s get out of here.’ I didn’t want to leave her behind.

KENNY: And you said you were married by a priest who used to say ---

MASKELONY: Father Donavan.

KENNY: --that used to say Mass on Ellis Island?

MASKELONY: Yes. He said mass and he was the, uh, what do you call them?

KENNY: Chaplin?

MASKELONY: Chaplin for the hospital. Yes. Father Donovan. And -- now all the other personnel I -- I don't know what happened. Only -- well, there was an incident for whatever purpose again it might serve. Some of the personnel people, they were old timers who worked there on the island long before I came here. I gathered this information at the time that I was clo- closing up or making the inventory with Mr. Al Backman [ph] who was the man I was suppose to see effectuate the closing. I was asking him what happened to so and so and so and so. What happened to Mr. Morgan who was in charge of the male nurses. He was a very religious man. He died in prayer at his bedside because of this change and the termination 'cause they were there for years. He died in prayer with -- with rosary beads in his hands. Befo-- just before I left--

KENNY: Had he died at the time that the island was being closed, is that what you're saying?

MASKELONY: Yes.

KENNY: And you think it was --

MASKELONY: Just prior. Just pri -- I -- I did find from Mr. Beckman that lot of the personnel were upset, disturbed very much. And as what happened to Annie the sewing person, she was -- let me see, Mr. Moran -- he must have been about -- in the seventies at the time that he died. Little Annie was a sewing -- sewer, sewer, what do you call them -- seamstress for the hospital sheets and stuff. She must have been up

in years. She died out of grief in her room. And Al Beckman was revived. No, but the incident I want to mention, while I was still there, just before I left, what encouraged me to get out of there. Some of the personnel were not quite right. They were – they're gone little by little. The older ones start showing the strain. One evening, I heard a lot of mumbling, talking and I went next door, to my room in [not understood], another man was mumbling in prayer and he went out – he was out of his head. They removed him from there, and he died when they took him to the hospital. Again as a result of the forthcoming experiences. That's the morbid part.

KENNY: What was it like to live there, was there – was there some semblance of privacy? Did you have a lock for your door or –

MASKELONY: You didn't have to lock the doors. They were all trustworthy in that respect. Those were the days were you could walk through Central Park at midnight and nobody bothered you. In fact for a fact many a date on my off day I sat in Central Park and just -- no fear. So internally, living the same life, we trusted one another. Well, we had to get up very early in the morning, about six – at least six o'clock and report for work before seven to get things rolling for the rest of the staff. And there we'd keep on going until we had a break after the turmoil of the morning was over by one o'clock. We had a – we had a swing until four o'clock, until resumed all our activities again: feeding the pers – people and making the cooks and delivering supplies. The activities started again at four o'clock in the afternoon

KENNY: [interposed] So you --

MASKELONY: [superposed] Until about seven at night.

NPS-183/MASKELONY

KENNY: You had the time off between one and four --

MASKELONY: Yes.

KENNY: - to spend in anyway you wish?

MASKELONY: I me – Yes. Mostly we'd try to rest. (laugh) Once the boys appeal to me, "Albin, grab the boat. Run down to so and so here. And we'll have a dri – we'll have a drink of beer." At that time, you can get them in a container or something. And I would get the beer, rush back on the boat, and we'd have time to have a glass of beer before we started out last shift. I missed the boat. But I had the bear.

KENNY: (laugh)

MASKELONY: And the beer, when I came back, the guy said, "Where have you been? You gotta report for duty." "I just came in on this boat, I missed it." "Well, alright." "I got the beer here." "Well I'll keep it cold." "What ya got—" Well they put dry ice in – in the jug and left it there. Came six o'cl – seven o'clock, everybody is rushing around, getting dressed. "Where's the beer?" We all got together. "I wanna make the boat." "Well the beer is over here." You opened it, "Oh my god!" they says. "Who put the dry ice in there?" All there was left was some solidified stuff on the bottom and liquid on top. Well I says, "Look, I'm not going out." Some of the other guy says, "Well we'll wait until it de-thaws. You guys, you going? Have it." So they pour off the top. They never left the island. You understand why. The alcohol content. That didn't freeze, but it was alcohol but good. So we spent our time that way. Other than that –

NPS-183/MASKELONY

KENNY: You said between one and four you had some time off and then you went back to work for four until –

MASKELONY: Till about seven o'clock. Until we finished our duties. Our works and clean ups and got ready for the next day.

KENNY: Made a pretty long day for you then.

MASKELONY: Oh yes. In the morning, one of my duties when I was assigned a diet care and food care, I used to await the big milk can that used to come in. Then they didn't have milk in little containers or bottles. They deliverer a big, huge, forty, fifty can full of milk housed with cream on top the old fashion way. And it had to be stirred up before it was used. Well, when that milk can came in, it stood there until a dietitian came in. And in their presence I would open it up, stir it up. She would test it and then it was in use. So that was one – daily duties. Occasionally, for some reason or other, dietitian or something didn't show up, some of the cream disappeared before it was stirred. Bu, that's [not understood].

KENNY: So you said that you did have a chance to – to go on little walks or dates with your wife on the island.

MASKELONY: That – yes. That was a time when some of these pictures and photographs were taken at that time. Then we did get a day off.

KENNY: One day a week?

MASKELONY: One day a week.

KENNY: And was it usually Sunday or did it rotate?

MASKELONY: Oh, no Rotation. As of days you – certain day you got that was it.

KENNY: So you worked six days and you had one day off.

MASKELONY: Yes. Six days, one day off.

KENNY: Well looking back on the whole experience, I know you met you wife here so that was obviously a very good product of having worked here, but how do you feel about the time you spent as an employee at Ellis Island.

MASKELONY: I look back at it – it's – it's quite an experience. I cherish it for some reason. By nature, I am inclined to be (cough) charitable and helpful even to this very day, so I understood that workings and goings on here. I look back with memories, pleasant memories about the whole thing. (cough) Sad memories because of the kind of life some people can live that but wasn't destined for me to pursue that kind of life alone. But, on a bases of that, surprisingly enough; all my life, for some reason or other, I've always ended up in the medical aspects of life. Ellis Island. Fordham Hospital. Federal Security Agency. I closed out after thirteen years as a disability expediter under society security. Visiting numerous hospitals, veterans administrations Maimonides Hospital, Brooklyn. Takin' cases – case histories of illness, of sicknesses and it was something that I was contented to do.

I was very grateful for the privilege of being allowed to reminisce -- never thinking that out of this pure reminisce of wandering down a corridor to see my old room, did I end up making this kind of a tape. Nor sharin' – nor sharing this kind of experience with Mr. Kenny and I'm very thankful for Cogen who spent so much time with me visiting all

the little nooks, explaining things to me and sh-- I sharing whatever I have to offer to her. But after three hours I'm sure we're both very tired walking back and forth for three complete hours. I thank you very much, Mr. Kenny.

KENNY: Well thank you, it's been wonderful having an opportunity to talk to you about all this and receive your pictures by way of donation and to learn a great deal about you about how the hospitals worked on Islands Two and Three back in the mid 1930's. Thank you.