

NPS-29/LOUIS KAYE

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ELLIS ISLAND: 1929-1950

NASH: Today is November 14, 1973. I am visiting with Mr. Louis Kaye who is currently a staff advisor at the Airport Security Council here in Queens. Mr. Kaye worked for forty years beginning in 1929 for the United States Immigration and Naturalization Service, and he is going to tell me about his experiences at Ellis Island. Mr. Kaye, how did you come to work for the Immigration Service?

KAYE: Well, I initially took an examination, a clerical examination, civil service clerical examination, sometime in the early part of 1929, and was actually offered a position as a clerk at Ellis Island which I accepted, and started with the Immigration Service on April 29, 1929. Although initially, I was assigned as a verification clerk in the

Records Division, which was located at Ellis Island in the balconies of the great hall, overlooking the great hall, where the manifest of the arriving vessels were kept.

And my function at that time was to verify through these records the existence of such records for individuals making various applications before the Immigration Service. You mentioned initially the Immigration and Naturalization Service, at that time it was the Immigration Service. The Naturalization Service was a separate entity. They were not joined together until several years later.

NASH:What part of the government was that under?

KAYE:At that time it was under the United States Department of Labor.

It came under the Department of Justice in 1940, as a part of, I think, reorganization plan number 5, which actually came into being in 1940. And at that time the Immigration Service and the Naturalization Service together, as a single entity then were brought within the jurisdiction of the Department of Justice.

NASH:Do you remember your first day at Ellis Island?

KAYE:Yes, oddly enough. I can remember taking the ferryboat from the slip out of Whitehall Street and taking a very delightful ferry ride and arriving at what looked like a most unusual place with the green minaret dome stretching up over the buildings, and the long sterile corridors in the lodge. The building, the main building was immense, of course, the opposite side they were designated as actually islands one, two, and three. The main island was the immigration station. The one just on the other side of the ferry slip was the United States Public Health Service facility, it was then called the Marine Hospital. And then there was a third island where at that time the Marine Hospital kept isolation cases, people who had had diseases that were believed to be contagious. Going back to my early recollection, it was quite a novel experience. To me, Ellis Island was something I never dreamed of.

NASH:How old were you at that time?

KAYE:I was just past eighteen. And I was interviewed initially, by the then assistant commissioner Byron H. Ewell, and went to work.

NASH:What was your impression of the place? What was the atmosphere

like?

KAYE:Pleasant, oddly enough. What I suppose to any other individual, or to most individuals, would be unusual in the sense that within the main building there was this large hall in which the aliens who were being detained would use as their sitting room all day long. It was a tremendous hall and sleeping quarters were up on the upper floor with a balcony overlooking the main hall, but the sleeping quarters were all around this main hall. And you saw sights of people in costumes that were unusual and this, of course, became commonplace within a short time so that while to most people they would regard this as an unusual thing I suppose working there gets one attuned to what he sees and then, of course, you don't look upon it as something that is so unusual.

NASH:Can you remember the first day anything that you saw, I mean, of course, it was your first day, that it might stand out in your mind?

KAYE:Not specifically. No, as I say, I came here in the latter part of April. The only vivid recollection that I have at this moment of some of the unusual things that occurred, there

was a regular Christmas party that was put on for the immigrants and if my recollection is accurate I think that the impresario Saul Urich had a good deal to do with the Christmas party.

NASH:Is this 1929?

KAYE:In December of 1929. And every succeeding year that immigrants were housed at Ellis Island they had this Christmas party for the immigrants. The social service people, of course, were involved in the smaller preparations, but with respect to the party itself there were artist of renown that were there to entertain, opera, and oddly enough, maybe it is not so odd, but generally speaking the artist who did entertain were prominent in the field of the arts, they were all immigrants.

NASH:Do you remember any of those people now?

KAYE:Not specifically at this time. I am going back forty years and it is kind of difficult, but I do recall that they were top-draw entertainers, generally operatic stars, symphony orchestras were there and it was a beautiful, beautiful occasion. Of course, the Social Service people

would have little stocking gifts for the children that were detained there. And it was really something because there were some people that were detained for a rather lengthy period of time. Now, I am speaking of the immigrant detainees who were housed on a regular basis and spent their day in this great hall as opposed to those detainees who were kept in another area of Ellis Island who were under deportation proceedings. So I am trying to distinguish between the arriving immigrants and those who were being brought in under arrest warrants and who were housed there subject to possible deportation.

NASH:How long were the people, not the people who were subject to deportation, but the others, how long would they stay?

KAYE:Well, some stayed only for a short period of time. In other cases there may have been some defects with respect to their admissibility, and some of those, of course, would stay on and on for a long period of time. I do have a distinct recollection of an individual who passed away not too long ago, one Mike Romanoff, who spent a good deal of time at Ellis Island. If you'll recall, Mike, who became a very successful restaurateur out on the West Coast, initially had come to the United States, I am a

little vague as to how he came at the moment, I don't remember whether he came as a stowaway or in any other manner, but he claimed to be a descendant of Russian nobility and was apparently not in possession of proper documents, but he was on the Island for a long period of time as I recall until it was finally established that he was just an American citizen. Apparently born in Detroit, and as I recall again, I think his name was something like Harry Gergison, oddly enough. I don't have any, again, recollection of any other specific individuals, but this was a case of notoriety and, of course, it received a good deal of attention in the press.

NASH:In other words, he had been saying that he was -- did he claim to be born somewhere else?

KAYE:Yes, yes. He actually claimed to be born in Russia as a descendent of the Russian royal family.

NASH:So this got him in trouble in the Immigration Service. So, how long did he have to stay there?

KAYE:Oh, he was there for quite a long time, and if I am not mistaken,

I think, I may be wrong, that he may have been deported on a prior occasion, but he kept bouncing back on several occasions and I do recall his last detention there was for a considerable period of time. But, through the entire period, now, we are going back to 1929, initially, and this may be of some interest to you, shortly after I came to work at Ellis Island, I can recall the immigrants who were brought to Ellis Island from the vessels, were brought on a barge, we called it a barge, but basically it was like an old excursion steamer without any means of propelling itself, and this was brought by a tug to Ellis Island. It would be brought into the slip and anchored along side of the slip, and they would go off a gangplank and then through a large, there was sort of like a large metal canopy that extended from the building going to this slip, they would enter into the great hall area where they would be lining up and the immigrant inspectors would be on duty at tables there. I remember they would be standing at these tables, actually it was almost like a podium type table. And they would go through the line and the immigrant inspectors would then be examining documents. In the main, most of these were people who were temporarily detained to determine, and they were being brought in I think, to ascertain what

relatives were expecting them. The various welfare organizations were there to see to their needs. You had the Hebrew Immigrant Aid and Sheltering Society, you had a Lutheran society, the Traveler's Aid Organization was there. There were other organizations there.

NASH:Italian Welfare League.

KAYE:Italian Welfare League, I remember well.

NASH:Do you remember Mrs. Carlotzi?

KAYE:Mrs. Angie, certainly. Is she still alive?

NASH:Yes. I met her, I interviewed her last week.

KAYE:She is a wonderful person, absolutely wonderful. Now her recollection I think, would predate mine definitely.

NASH:She says that she started there in '34.

KAYE:Well, maybe I am wrong, but I seem to remember Mrs. Carlotzi from way, way back. And my recollection of a William Newbough, who was then the highest representative there,

and had been there for many years. And I am just trying to think of others, hoping it will come back to me. It was like a city in itself. You had a telegraph office there, you had a money exchange office there, of course, there was the cafeteria for employees and a dining room for aliens. And later on, I remember, they built a special kindergarten area.

NASH:Around what time was that, do you know?

KAYE:I'm just trying to think of when that was, but I would have to say that that must have occurred sometime in the '30s, but it was up in the upper detention area. This is the detention area toward the back. And they had a Jenny Pratt, I don't know whether that name has ever been brought to you. She used to be the shepherdess of the little children there. I don't know whether she is around anymore, but a remarkable woman who could probably help you immeasurably. Before very long, and, of course, getting back to the lineup of immigrants, you would have your immigrant inspector there with his steamship manifest in front of him, checking the documents of these people, you would have interpreters standing by in case they were needed, and very often they were.

NASH:How many interpreters were there on the Island?

KAYE:I don't know how many there were at that time, but the interpreter staff today at Ellis Island, is the largest in the service and probably one of the largest interpreters staffs in government service.

NASH:You mean at the Immigration offices on West Broadway?

KAYE:Immigration office of New York at West Broadway, yes. Probably the only organization that would probably have more interpreters would be at the U.N. But, they do have an extensive interpreter unit even today, and their services are utilized in the courts, the Federal Courts, from time to time. Of course, when the war broke out, the Coast Guard, well, I am talking of World War II, the Coast Guard then became housed at Ellis Island. And the building that was built around that time, just where the ferry used to come in, at the ferry slip, and just at the foot of that ferry slip they built quarters for Coast Guard officers. Later on, that building reverted back to the Immigration Service use. The Coast Guard left Ellis Island. And I can recall having one of those offices as a special inquiry

officer, this was in or about the early 1950s. We had magnificent offices there, they were practically living quarters, each little spot there because they were utilized by the Coast Guard officers for living quarters.

And, of course, my recollections again, of the daily trips to and from on the ferry, so many hazardous trips in fog on the ferry. The ferry would often stray a bit from course. And I can also recall sleeping over at Ellis Island some nights when the ferry would not travel. They were rare occasions. Later on, when I was doing investigative work, I can recall also coming to Ellis Island and then finding I couldn't get off the Island that night and had to spend the night there. And for whatever it is worth, I met my wife at Ellis Island.

NASH:Was she working there?

KAYE:She was working at Ellis Island, in fact, she was one of the, Assistant Commissioner Ewell, I had mentioned he then became the District Director, she was one of his secretaries. And we became, of course, quite friendly.

NASH:You weren't married on Ellis Island, were you?

KAYE:Actually, I was not at Ellis Island when we were married. We were married in 1939, but I had met her there and we struck up a very rich acquaintanceship, happily married.

NASH:Were there many people who met their wives in Ellis Island?

KAYE:There were a few, in fact, Byron Ewell who was the former Assistant Commissioner, later to become District Director, met his wife there. Her name was Maude Ferris, and she was an employee of the Passport Office then, which was then, well, the Passport Officer was Monroe Kline, I remember a distinguished gentleman. It was quite an experience. We had a nice social life on the Island, those of us that worked there. There was an outdoor area which during parts of the day were used to permit the aliens who were detained there, both the aliens who were under deportation proceedings and the other immigrants, to spend their time outdoors when weather permitted, and the employees also in off times would use the same facilities so that around lunch time we would be out there playing ball.

NASH:Would everybody, everybody, I mean, would the employees, no.

KAYE: Just the employees alone, and we would, during the lunch period, the aliens were all indoors having their lunch, and at that time we were able to go out and use those outdoor facilities, and we used to play ball during lunch time.

It was a delightful camaraderie that we struck up there, in fact I know when the current District Director Saul Marks, came to work at Ellis Island he too initially started in the Records Division and, of course, worked his way up successively to Secretary to an Assistant District Director. Joseph Saveretti who was later to become Commissioner of Immigration and who has since retired, I believe is living in Miami, we struck up what you would call a lifelong friendship and we are still very, very close friends. And there have been others, but they have passed on, what can I tell you. Of course, as far as my career is concerned, I left Ellis Island in 1943, I was then an immigrant inspector attached to the Law Division, and I went, still with the Immigration Service, over to 341 Ninth Avenue in the city, the Morgan Annex of the Post Office, where the Immigration and Naturalization Service and a division known as the Special Inspections Division, as a special inspector at the time. And the basic functions of that were investigations. I was then assigned to a division of that operational unit

known as Seaman and Smuggling , and our concern then was the apprehension of deserting crew men and the location and apprehension of stowaways. During the war years, we had a tremendous problem with deserting crew men. The problem was magnified by the fact that the vessels during the war period were moving in convoy and these were vessels carrying vital supplies to our allies overseas, and anytime there was excessive desertions from these vessels it could have prohibited these vessels from leaving port in convoy. And we then had a unit of ten investigators whose function it was to seek out, locate, and apprehend those crew men who had deserted their ships. And I'm very please, one of the things that gratifies me most as part of our war effort, is the fact that we were able to apprehend a sufficient number of these deserting crew men, so that we never lost a single ship to the extent that it had to miss convoy. Over this period of the war, when this little unit was operating, we apprehended some ten thousand crew men.

NASH:Did they go to Ellis Island, were they detained there?

KAYE:They were brought to Ellis Island for detention, and through an organizational agreement reached with a governmental

unit called the Recruitment and Manning Organization of the War Shipping Administration, they controlled the allied ships moving in and out of the United States. We would make arrangements subject to the willingness of this crew man to go back to a ship of his origin, and if they expressed their willingness, no deportation proceedings were instituted and they were merely turned over to a representative of their government and they went back on their ship and out they rode. Those who, of course, balked and refused to take an opportunity to ship out were put under deportation proceedings.

NASH:Was there any particular nationality that balked more than other nationalities?

KAYE:Yes, in the main, I would say the Greeks balked more than anyone else.

NASH:Were they the most deserters?

KAYE:No, I think numerically I would have to say the Chinese deserted in greater numbers, but there were a substantial number of Greek deserters. And it became necessary, at one point during this period, with, of course, sanction of the court,

when the matter was brought to court on an issue of whether or not the Immigration Service could deport to a country in exile because as you understand, a good many of our allies were overrun.

NASH:So they had governments in exile?

KAYE:That's right, and all of them had governments in exile in England. And with the consent of the courts, we were able to affect deportation to England, which was where their government in exile was sitting. So that in essence is a little bit of the story of my efforts. I later on, as I say, came back, that is the entire service ultimately, with the exception of detention, moved to 70 Columbus Avenue. I think it was sometime in the '40s that the Service moved from Ellis Island to 70 Columbus Avenue, and combined the functions of the Naturalization Division which was initially at 641 Washington Street. And detention remained, or they kept their detention quarters at Ellis Island for some time. I can recall, of course, being at 70 Columbus oh, I would say, roughly speaking in about 1946, and then went back to Ellis Island, when we established our headquarters for Hearing offices, in I think the early part of 1950, and then, of course, we

moved back to Columbus Avenue where we remained until 196--
I'm just trying to think, I may be a little hazy on this,
but I think that we moved to the present quarters at 20
West Broadway in and about 1961, if I am not mistaken.

NASH:When was the last time you were in Ellis Island?

KAYE:I would say sometime in the early 1950s, before they closed
the Island.

NASH:And what was your function at that time?

KAYE:I was then a hearing officer, what was then designated as a
Special Inquiry officer.

NASH:And who was being detained or deported at that time?

KAYE:The detentions had fallen off a good deal, but they detained
only those people who brought in, who were coming in or
seeking to enter, where their admissibility was
questioned. And those people who were hear illegally and
had been apprehended for deportation proceedings were
being detained there. Our hearing, in the main, were not,
or I would say rather, that the majority of our hearings

were not related to the detained aliens. There weren't that many at that time, but more to aliens who were under proceedings and had some sort of relief available to them, so that the hearings generally involved applications for relief from deportation.

NASH: I know that there were hunger strikes at a certain period, I think maybe '54, do you know anything about those?

KAYE: I have some recollection of it, yes. And I recall the the Service at one time, when the detention facilities were not adequate to house all those who were detained, this goes back to the war again, did obtain during the war when we were apprehending a considerable number, maintain temporary deportation facilities at Rikers Island, which is a New York City penitentiary. They were not detained in the penitentiary per se, there was a separate area for them. But, getting back to Ellis Island, if you have been told that there were hunger strikes, I would say that it was not an unusual thing. Here and there there would be an individual or a small group of individuals that would be involved in this thing, it never really became a serious matter.

NASH: Did it ever help them at all?

KAYE: I don't think it really did. They were all treated very, very well. There was never in all my experience and I have no reason to advance this information to you, I mean it's not serving any purpose, but there was never any indication of mistreatment. In fact, the aliens who were detained there were treated well. It was not a penal institution, it was a detention facility and by and large, I would say that their accommodations were good. They were treated well. Of course, now there is a detention facility at 20 West Broadway and I presume that you have seen it. You haven't seen it? Well, you should arrange with Mr. Marke to have him give you a tour through the present detention facility, in a modern building and it is like a dormitory up on the 15th floor which has an area for outdoor walking, shall we say. They have recreation facilities, television and so forth. Of course, in the days at Ellis Island, it preceded television, but they did have radio and they would show them movies from time to time. And as I say, on festivals like Christmas particularly, the tremendous parties that were put on by the social welfare organizations. Basically, that is about the story of it. Oddly enough, when negotiations were being made to move into the present quarters, I was then president of the recreation club of the employees and I was involved in setting up plans for a dining area for the employees at the new building, that is at the quarters at 20 West Broadway, and of course, we had so little space it always became a problem, but we finally did decide on a certain

area. And my function was to enter into negotiations with vending machine companies so that we could have appropriate refreshments for the people there, and, of course, the recreation club became the beneficiary of it. We were a wealthy recreation club because unlike other federal agencies who are housed in federal buildings and under restrictions there, there are statutory requirements that only certain blind people, blind veterans or blind associations can man any refreshment facility stands in those buildings, it was held that we were not subject to any of these restrictions and consequently the recreation club became the beneficiary of that. But when I came back to 20 West, I was back getting in investigations and prior to my leaving, when I retired in October, at the end of October of 1969, I was the supervisory criminal investigation in frauds and that is a brief and succinct history of forty years in the Immigration and Naturalization Service.

NASH: Well, I have a lot more questions I want to go back and ask you. Do you remember the first time that you actually spoke or had some dealings with a person who was detained at Ellis Island?

KAYE: I would say that my first direct contact with aliens occurred in approximately February of 1941, when as an officer and immigrant inspector, I was assigned in addition to investigation

and apprehensions of aliens unlawfully in the United States. I was also assigned to conduct hearings at the time, so that that was my first reaction and, of course, the hearings were semi-formal. The immigrant inspector at that time was both the presiding officer and the interrogating officer so that he wore two hats and in most cases we had to utilize the services of interpreters.

NASH: Does that mean that in all the time from 1929 to 1943, you never ever spoke to a person who was...

KAYE: Oh, I may have spoken to them, but it would have been just casual conversation in making my rounds. There was a period when I served as the messenger for the commissioners and the assistant commissioner and I would make the rounds of the entire Island and there were times invariably when I would offer some comment or we would engage in a brief discussion with someone, but I have no immediate recollection of anything novel or anything unusual about that. As I say, I moved around the Island a good deal.

NASH: What did you do as a messenger?

KAYE: I would deliver mail to various sections of the Island. The Island was spread out as you know, And as a messenger I was also assigned to the mail room for a spell, then

after going through the mail, which incidentally, we used to open on the ferryboat. There was a cabin and byron Ewell, who was then the Assistant Commissioner, later to become the district director, I have said that again, I have said that before rather, the mail would be, most of the mail, of course, came out of Washington, a good deal of it anyway, and the mail would be opened on the ferryboat so as to save time. It would be put under a time stamp and then it would either be immediately sorted for various sections that we had at the time. And it was one of my functions with others, was to deliver the mail to the various sections.

NASH: There was mail there also for the aliens?

KAYE: The mail for the aliens did not come to us at all. That was rooted into the social services area for distribution to the aliens who were there, we had nothing to do with distribution of mail. There was no censorship of mails by the Immigration Services at all. Any mail that was addressed to these people went directly to them through the social service people that were there.

NASH: When did you begin as a messenger?

KAYE: I can recall being a verification clerk or in the Records Division for possibly, oh, possibly a year or so, and then I was transferred to the mail room and it was while I was in the mail room that I, of course, performed mailing functions, file functions and I did indexing, a little bit of everything, you know, and, of course, would make the rounds. We were all pretty muck jack-of-all-trades in the sense that we would be pulling files to attach to mail, we would be distributing it, we would be doing countless things. And one of the things that I always used to, that I always recall, the file room was located on the same floor where the offices were, on the second floor and we had double-tier ladders with rollers on them so that we could get up to the top tier on this thing. And it was a lot of fun as a youngster, you know, riding the rail so as to speak. That was a lot of fun.

NASH: Did you wear a uniform?

KAYE: No. The only ones who wore uniforms at that time were immigrant inspector. When I became an immigrant inspector, I did wear a uniform and it was required that we wear uniforms, so that even when we were holding hearings, that is while you were on duty at the Island, if you were doing investigation in the city you, of course, were operating in civil attire, but while we were holding

hearings at Ellis Island, the requirement was that you wear your uniform. You know, in discussing recollections of my early years at Ellis Island, I can't put out of my mind an experience which will, of course, always have a tremendous impact upon me. Sometime in December of 1933, while processing on the level of the Great Hall, just immediately outside it, I backed into one of the elevator shafts there and fell some distance of about fourteen feet.

My only recollection, or my earliest recollection after that was being on a stretcher and being wheeled over to the hospital and hearing someone say, "It all right, Dr. so and so is here with you," and I ended up in the Marine Hospital for quite a spell with a rather serious injury to my hand. I had a fractured skull which apparently healed well, I've apparently got a hard head, but I spent a good deal of time at the Marine Hospital at Ellis Island.

I came out initially for a brief period in February, went back for an operation on the hand and then had to go back in April for a second operation on my hand, so that the year from December '33, and actually carrying through most of 1934, it wasn't until about August of 1934 that I came back to duty. Of course, I was reporting to the hospital for physiotherapy after the last operation in April.

NASH: So, you were living at home for much of this time, but you would go to the hospital for treatment?

KAYE: That's correct.

NASH: Was there, there was an outpatient, wasn't there at the Marine Hospital?

KAYE: There was an outpatient at Marine Hospital then. There was also another outpatient at Hudson Street.

NASH: Why didn't you go to the one on Hudson Street?

KAYE: Well, they were apparently happy to have me come to Ellis Island to outpatient. If you are talking about my post-operative physiotherapy that was required, they had a therapist there who was working on me trying to get my fingers to respond to manipulation and this was a big Swede by the name of Anderson and he did a tremendous job as best that he could. And I enjoyed getting back to the Island, it would give me a chance on the two or three days a week that I had to go there to, of course, visit with my associates and friends.

NASH: Did you see the Island in a different way when you were there as an outpatient rather than working there?

KAYE: Not necessarily, although I did, while I was a patient, come into contact with aliens and with American crew men. You know, the Marine Hospital then under the Public Health Service, was obligated to furnish medical care for the merchant Marines and I did meet some very interesting individuals who were in the Merchant Marines at the time and, of course, saw some rather horrible cases that were brought in from accidents that happened aboard ship. I became, of course, very familiar and friendly with the staff at the hospital, other than that I don't think that there is any impression that I gained that would be of a lasting nature that might be of a historical import.

NASH: You say you spoke with aliens who were in the hospital at the time?

KAYE: Yes, you know, aliens who were detained and who became ill, of course, were moved over to the hospital for treatment, and unless they were aliens who had to be segregated in so-called safe keeping areas, they were generally in the wards. It was a mix, actually. You had

employees, you had Merchant Marine, you had some of the aliens who were being temporarily detained, so that they were not isolated to that extent. The only ones who, as I say, were isolated, were those who were under deportation proceedings. No, again, no lasting impression there that would be of interest really.

NASH: I guess it was the only time when they sort of were on a very equal basis, everybody together, patients sick or whatever in the hospital.

KAYE: That seems to be the case in the hospitals.

NASH: Democratizing of them.

KAYE: It certainly does. It's a way of bringing those who were up and down and those who were down up. Well, it's sort of a middle ground where there is a commingling and differences generally are put aside. Everybody is concerned with their own individual welfare and, of course, sometimes people are concerned with the welfare of their fellow, fellow human being. I can't think of any other episodes or anything else that would be of interest.

NASH: You mentioned that you had seen several people that Saul

Urich brought over as entertainers or curiosities, performers and I suppose they were coming only on a temporary visa of some kind.

KAYE: Yes, well, you know, the immigration laws have always permitted artist and entertainers to come in under certain conditions. And I do have a recollection that Saul Urich the impresario, was apparently the foremost individual who brought countless people to this country for various exhibitions in the entertainment arena. If I am not mistaken, he probably brought to this country or it was through his agency, that there came pygmies, tall people, fat people who were then appearing with the Ringling Brothers Circus. I have a recollection of the Ubangi Tribe representative that were brought in and, of course, they were so unusual with these sort of plates, the disc plates that were in their lower lip, that even to those of us who worked on the Island, this was a novelty. And, of course, the costumes that were worn by the immigrants, as late as 1929, when I first started working there, were not quite as colorful as those which were depicted in the earlier pictures, but here and there you would see some assemblance of the old world from time to time and, of course, as I said, with these people brought over here for performances for exhibitions and so forth, similar to this Ubangi Tribe, as I recall, this always...

NASH: ...the approximate dates of people trying to escape from

Ellis Island.

KAYE: Well, I don't think I can give you any specific dates nor can I give you any approximate dates. I know throughout the entire period, while Ellis Island was used as an immigration detention station, that there were attempts to escape. Some were successful, some were not. I can recall, without too much clarity, but I can recall attempts by aliens to jump off the ferryboat, some did, some were recovered, I am not sure whether others were unsuccessful or lost their lives in that attempt.

NASH: These would be people who were trying to commit suicide rather than face deportation? Is that the ones who would jump?

KAYE: I don't know whether it would be a suicidal attempt so much as an attempt to escape that was uppermost in their mind and that might have resulted in their ultimate death. I don't have any recollection of anyone actually losing their life in that respect although it may have occurred. I can recall too where some aliens who escaped or made their way off the Island by swimming across the channel which was in back of Ellis Island and it was a very, very dangerous area too. There may have been some that

ultimately lost their lives in that attempt and there were, of course, some who were ultimately successful in escaping but only to be apprehended at a later time. there were always attempts to escape and the detention officers, who were then called guards, in the old days, who would take them out on details for various purposes, into the city, where always had to be on their (?) and there were escapes from the custody of the guards on occasions. I would say that there were a number of such situations, although I can't recount any specifics on that.

NASH: Well, around the period of 1935, what were you doing.

KAYE: In 1935, I was a clerk in files, I was actually Mr. File Clerk actually and my job then was filing and pulling files, hooking up mail with files, moving it out for delivery. I remained in the file room until approximately 1937 when I transferred, at my request, over to the Naturalization Division at 641 Washington Street, where, incidentally, for a brief time the Immigration Service also maintained detention quarters. If you know the Federal Building at 641 Washington Street. And there I was involved in basic clerical functions, handling application for refunds, persons who had made applications for citizenship, serving at the information desk, typing declarations and petitions both in New York and in Brooklyn.

I remained with the Naturalization Division until I was appointed as an inspector at Ellis Island in February of 1941.

NASH: What do you remember of the transition from a peacetime to a wartime situation, as far as Ellis Island in particular is concerned?

KAYE: Well, it was dramatic in the sense that the Island then became the headquarters or the local detention area for alien enemies who were being rounded up. And my early recollection of involvement in this, was in the roundups, the successive roundups, rather, of a number of Standard oil crew men who were of German origin, citizenship and a number of foreign nationals who were of alien nationality, that is enemy nationality, the Germans again, who had come here initially during the World Fair in 1939, I believe it was and who at the moment had been employed in the various hotels, the finer hotels and restaurants in and around the city of New York. And I was involved directly in a joint effort, as an individual, you know, with other men, both the immigration officers, they brought in a number of border patrol officers to assist us in the apprehension of these alien enemies, and they were detained there pending their hearing before

alien-enemy Review Boards.

NASH: Could you recount any one example, let's say, one place that you went to where you found someone?

KAYE: Yes, in fact, my first assignment and I was given a partner, a tall individual whom I later became quite friendly with, who came in from one of the border stations fully attired, with a ten gallon Stetson. His name was Lenix Kanzler and he later worked side by side with me as a hearing officer, subsequently moved up into the regional administration and unfortunately passed away about, oh, four years or so ago, but both of us were assigned to the Promenade Cafe in Rockefeller Plaza. And we were after a specific chef there and, of course, brought him in. It was very unusual, here was this big, tall guy coming out of a patrol in Texas and little me, a difference in height, you can picture with me being about five-five and this fellow being about six-foot-two.

NASH: Well, what did you do, for example, did you just walk in there or did you have to stake out the place for a few days?

KAYE: There was no stake out necessary. We merely went to the management, identified ourselves and we verified the fact that the individual we were looking for was employed there and after the

preliminaries were disposed of, we then identified ourselves to the individual we were looking for and told him he would have to come along with us. It was as simple as all that.

NASH: Did they ever resist?

KAYE: No, never had any real problems of resistance, in that particular area of operation. In the alien enemy roundup, it was, I say the smoothest operation that was ever performed and I don't think there was ever, that is to my knowledge, any situation involving any resistance at all. I suppose they reasonably expected something like that would happen, considering the fact that we were at war.

NASH: What other kind of place did you go to?

KAYE: I don't have any recollection of any other place at this moment. We all had our assignments and I know that that was my first assignment. I know that we did meet, we rendezvoused in various police precincts later on for the apprehension of some of the German crew men that were working for the Standard Oil Company on their tankers. In those situations, of course, we went to their places of residency to make the apprehensions.

NASH: How about the Italian and Japanese?

KAYE: They were also involved in the same thing in this initial drive. And when I am talking of the Promenade Cafe at Rockerfeller Plaza that I went to, it was an Italian subject that we went to bring in.

NASH: Oh.

KAYE: The Japanese were brought in also. But, as I say, since there was so many and the assignment were spread out. I can't think of any other area or place of prominence that might have been involved in, but we did cover every major hotel and every major restaurant in the City of New York and, of course, outside New York within the environs of the district.

NASH: Did they ever get anybody that was like really prominent?

KAYE: I don't have any recollection of it. All of these actually were prominent in the sense that they were top-notch people in their fields. They were top-notch chefs for example, working in these posh restaurants and hotels. As I recall, the top political figures in the alien enemy group were handled somewhat differently by the

State Department. And you may, well, you won't remember, but...

NASH: Fritz Curren?

KAYE: No, Fritz Curren was something different. He went through a deportation proceeding. He was the leader of the German American Bund, if you remember. And, of course, they were espousing the cause of Nazism here. Fritz later became the subject of deportation proceedings and, of course, they were ultimately successful in deporting him. But the diplomats that I am speaking of, the Italians diplomats, the Japanese diplomats, if I recall correctly, they were put aboard the Gripsom on a reciprocal basis and they were sent overseas on the S.S. Gripsom.

NASH: To where?

KAYE: To their countries, they were returned. This was at the outset, if I recall correctly. And this was all part of a reciprocal basis, our diplomats came back and then we sent, I think these were mainly second echelon anyway, they were not top, I am not certain of it, though, but again, I am taxing my recollection and it is kind of difficult.

NASH: Were there ever German jews who were considered enemy

aliens?

KAYE: I would say that in all likelihood there were. The country of origin was the determining factor subject to a determination by an alien enemy review board, they were given hearings. The FBI had the sole jurisdiction of doing background investigation in connection with it and presenting that as evidence to the lawyers. The U.S Attorney was involved in it. So that initially while they might have been classified as such, the restrictions were removed from these people if it was found that in fact that they were not justified.

NASH: I have heard rumors about a certain posh quarter, it's at Ellis Island, for some who are celebrated detainees.

KAYE: The posh quarters were not posh, believe me, I have used them. There were times, as I said, where I was unable to return to the city because of weather conditions and I have slept in those rooms. They're far from posh. There were adequate and that's about all anyone can say for it. The only one who may have had some quarters that might be better, there was a short time when one of the buildings over in the second island, which was the hospital island, one of the buildings was used to house the district director and later on it housed the man who was in charge of detention and deportation

at Ellis Island.

NASH: What period was that?

KAYE: I am vague as to the specific year, but I think, if I am not mistaken that when Ed Shaunessy was District Director, Edward J. Shaunessy, he lived at the Island for a while. And later on his quarters were then and that was ne of those buildings that I spoke of, the officer who was then in charge of deportation and detention was a Phillip Foreman, he lived at the Island for a while, but I have no other recollection.

NASH: Was that after the war or before the war?

KAYE: You know, I'm not even certain of that, actually. I would rather not say, I'd just arbitrarily pick anything. I can't be too certain of when it was. I'm just trying to think back and I can't.

I reason to believe that Shaunessy was the District Director while we had alien enemies on the Island and Phil Foreman was in charge of deportation while we had alien enemies on the Island.

Incidentally, the alien enemies that were detained on Ellis Island and as I say, a good many of them had tremendous backgrounds as chefs and cooks and so forth, at their own, you know, voluntarily asked for work and they were paid a small amount which was then specified

under whatever international agreement existed for detention of these people. So they took over the operation of the cafeteria and for that matter the feeding operation at the Island, but particularly the employees' cafeteria that became the beneficiary of some excellent food at a very modest price. The going rate for a luncheon then, I think, was something like thirty-five cents or may have gone up to about fifty-five cents for a full course luncheon. And I recall some of the desserts that were just out of this world.

NASH: German pastries?

KAYE: Yes, German and French pastries, well, it was basically that type of pastry. It was good, excellent. I can remember flan puddings and, oh, it was beautiful, particularly since I have a fondness for desserts. But then I had experiences working on ships as an immigrant inspector postwar, in a period from approximately 1946 to the early part of 1948.

NASH: That would be like when they would first come into New York Harbor, you'd go on a ship?

KAYE: That's right. Well, we would board the ships usually down the bay. We would board from a Coast Guard cutter and in some cases

we would board at the pier, but in most cases the boardings were made while the vessel was proceeding down the Narrows. And while the vessel was coming in, the Coast Guard cutter would come up along side and both would be travelling, we would go up either through a companionway or up a Jacob's ladder or up what other type of ladder arrangement they had on some of these C-4 cargo ships that we used to transport aliens at the time. And we would conduct our inspections on the ships, and, of course, this is immediate postwar we are talking about when we were getting a tremendous amount of refugees coming in. And my personal experience, of course, was inspection of the war brides coming in. And I can remember, oh, by the hundreds of them on the old S.S. Washington of the United States Lines and the Queen Elizabeth. Of course, the ships had not been restored to their pre-war opulent situation, they were still rather austere because they had been used as troop transports. But I can remember countless war brides of every description and nationally with squalling brats all around me and working maybe ten or twelve hours on these ships to process these people because during the war, of course, there was practically no immigration coming in and so, of course, with the postwar acceleration of immigration being restored, we were getting, of course, a tremendous amount of these war brides. If I am not mistaken, maybe I am off, but I think that we admitted somewhere in the neighborhood of about fifteen-thousand war brides in that short period of time. So it was a rather

interesting chore. And that is a brief capsulized description of my activities as an immigrant inspector serving aboard, that is doing inspections aboard the vessels.

NASH: Do you remember the closing of the Island?

KAYE: I do not have specific recollection of it, no. As I say, there was so little fanfare attached to it and the Service's activities on the Island had diminished to the extent that there was only detained there for that time. And so consequently, there wasn't anything that would have been so outstanding that it would sort of be the type of thing that I would have a specific recollection of. I was just one of those thing, the passing of an era. I suppose that we have to treat it because little by little the functions of the Immigration Service came off the Island. And so when the time came and it was decided it was much too expensive to maintain the Island and by this time what was left was detention, well, they just closed that up and, of course, they moved some detention facilities at that time to 641 Washington Street. And that, of course, was the end of Ellis Island, with the exception, of course, of the vigil that is maintained there at the present time by a few German shepherds and a, what is it, a parks, is it National Parks Administration that looks, oversees, because I noticed from time to time there was some photographs of her appearing in the (?) of a ranger on duty.

NASH: Sitting.

KAYE: Sitting. And the ferry sinking slowly into the pier at the slip. Of course, there were marvelous recollections over the years of our daily trips to and from, racing to meet the ferry, going to the Island. We never had to race to make it going off the Island.

NASH: Do you remember the hurricane of 1938?

AYE: Yes, I remember it quite well, but I don't remember that there was anything dramatic that occurred while I was there at the Island.

But I remember that I was married in 1939 and made my honeymoon trip through New England, the Mohawk Trail and ultimately to Maine and went through a large portion of the area where the hurricane had cut a swath through the countryside. And that was something to see, it almost looked like a bulldozer had gone through the country, but as far as the Island is concerned, I can remember being on the Island and I can remember, oh, we used to see storms out in the Harbor frequently and the waves piling up on the shore and fogs that would come and boats that would get stranded on the rocks right after, particularly these excursions boats that would ply between the Jersey highlands and downtown Manhattan, that would get caught

on the rocks and times that the telephone cable would be cut on the Island. These little things that you just can't help but recall.

NASH: Is there anything else that you would like to say about Ellis Island?

KAYE: No, I have nothing but fond memories and it is an experience that I, of course, treasure. Looking back, as a youngster when I decided to except my position as a clerk, I suppose I said I would try it temporarily and see if I liked it because the thought of working for the government at that time, hardly entered my mind, but I guess I had a long trial period ending up with over forty years of service, in the Immigration Service. Further deponent saith not.

NASH: Thank you very much, Mr. Kaye.