

NPS-99

MARCELLE BRUNET

BIRTH DATE: UNKNOWN

INTERVIEW DATE: JULY 13, 1977

RUNNING TIME:

INTERVIEWER: PAUL WEINBAUM

RECORDING ENGINEER: UNKNOWN

INTERVIEW LOCATION: UNKNOWN

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TRANSCRIPT RECONCEIVED BY: CHICK LEMONICK, 5/1996

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MRS. BRUNET'S GRANDMOTHER MODELLED FOR THE STATUE OF LIBERTY CIRCA  
1880

WEINBAUM: This is Paul Weinbaum. I am interviewing today, July 13, 1977, Madame Marcelle Brunet, whose grandmother modelled for the head of the Statue of Liberty. With Madame brunet is her husband Monsieur Andre Brunet. Madame brunet, I guess the first question I would like to ask is, how did your grandmother come to model for the Statue of Liberty and what was her name?

BRUNET: I believe the most important thing was my grandfather organizing it (?) in France for the dedicating of the Statue of Liberty, which was far more important to get money to do that then to sit for the Statue of Liberty one would say. It was alarming because the Frederic Bartholdi was a friend of my grandfather, and I

suppose it is for that he asked my grandmother to sit for the Statue, or for a part of the Statue. But I think that the thing I am more proud of is to know that Bartholdi's idea came from my grandfather as he was presented to the (?) American (?) at that time. I suppose he was asked to find out a sculptor. I think it was easier to find him out because he was well-known at the time, but he happened to be a child friend and a school friend of my grandfather's, so it came the idea of having my grandmother sit for the head, it came by chance when once it was decided and when the Statue was started.

WEINBAUM: What was your grandfather's name?

BRUNET: Salmon.

WEINBAUM: Salmon. His first name?

BRUNET: Adolf Salmon.

WEINBAUM: His first name?

BRUNET: Adolf.

WEINBAUM: Adolf. And what was his connection with Laboulaye?

BRUNET: None.

WEINBAUM: None.

BRUNET: Not that I know, none. The only thing I know is that he came often for his business to America and that's how he knew his wife, my grandmother, and when they married they went to Paris together. And then he came often since he came back to the United States. And I don't know exactly what moment the (?) was decided for and I believe it must be about the end of the first American century, but it took along time to make.

WEINBAUM: I see. I understand that your grandfather was a school mate of Bartholdi.

BRUNET: Bartholdi, yes.

WEINBAUM: Where did they go to school together?

BRUNET: Well, I can't know if it was in Mulhouse, (?) the schooling they were quite young or if it was in (?) or maybe the two.

WEINBAUM: Do you have any anecdotes in the family that are about the--

BRUNET: Alas no, I don't think so. I haven't ever known my grandfather, I met my

grandmother. So the only things I know are about my father and (?) think of any.

WEINBAUM: I understand also that your grandmother was an American.

BRUNET: Yes, she was. She was born in California and when she got married in 1875, I suppose, they toured Paris and then when there they came here for (?).

WEINBAUM: How did she meet your grandfather?

BRUNET: Because he was in business with her first husband of my grandmother. He was an American so he often came over.

WEINBAUM: And your grandmother was in California?

BRUNET: She was born in California and after, well, she was born in San Francisco, I think, I am not quite sure, but--

WEINBAUM: Does this have anything to do with the gold rush?

BRUNET: I suppose so. I suppose so. Her parents were here at that time, I suppose, of course, as she was born here. But how her father had (?), but he died very young. So her mother brought her and her five sisters up in California.

WEINBAUM: That must have been quite something in the American West to bring up six girls.

BRUNET: Little (?), yes, I guess it wasn't easy.

WEINBAUM: Are there any family stories about how her life--

BRUNET: I know she took boarders to be able to bring up six daughters, I don't know anything else. Too far.

WEINBAUM: Too far back.

BRUNET: Too far back, I think as my grandmother was born in about 1848 too, so her mother must have been about that time about forty years old. So (?) my mother goes to 1800 and too far.

WEINBAUM: Have you kept in touch with the American family?

BRUNET: Very little, no. All the sisters of my grandmother had either no children or (?), so my American cousins are (?) sometime before the war, but then everyone has his life and goes here or there so we never kept really in touch.

WEINBAUM: By any chance on this visit are you seeing any relatives in the distant past?

BRUNET: No, I have a first cousin here, one, who is (?) no one that I know, no one left. So it is a great adventure for me to see this Statue I have always heard of. When my father came here he was eight years old, (?) his father. And as we have just seen, it was worth his mother, I didn't know, I didn't know, I thought he had come here alone with his father because as we have just seen only men were invited to the banquets. His mother stayed in New York I suppose, as we have just seen.

WEINBAUM: Right, we are referring to the article and recorded as a (?) for the fiftieth anniversary of the Statue.

BRUNET: It was amazing to see my (?).

WEINBAUM: Your grandparents were named Brunet and then--

BRUNET: No, no, that is my husband.

WEINBAUM: I mean Salmon, Salmon. You said before that you have heard many things from your father who came over here as a child and also, of course, about your parents. What are some of those things?

BRUNET: Well, I couldn't say really. I think that--

WEINBAUM: What is the most interesting story?

BRUNET: Well, of course, the dedicating, the (?) you were having. That, I can't say much, surely it is known by everyone. Nothing new.

WEINBAUM: You mentioned something about the dinner?

BRUNET: Yes, I had a menu and for the time I have lost it. I can't find it, but maybe I will one day somewhere in my house, but for the time it is lost. But I have seen it very often and my father was very proud of having his name on the menu, a little boy like that. He was the youngest of everyone, of course, and my grandfather had come on the ship which brought the Statue of Liberty, but then when it was built up on the island, I don't know how long after it was, I suppose, not a few, two years after, it must have taken him a certain amount of time, I don't know if it was one year or two years after. And at that time my grandfather took his son with him for that dedication. I think it is not more than that I can say about that Statue of Liberty.

WEINBAUM: They had dinner in the crown?

BRUNET: No, no, no. Not in the crown, as I see this morning in the, it could have been just five or six (?) in the crown.

WEINBAUM: Right.

BRUNET: No, I think it was in the hear. I (?) head (?) probably in the head, but how do you know if one could go into the head?

WEINBAUM: Well, we were in the head, we were in the top of the head today.

BRUNET: In the top of the head.

WEINBAUM: Yes. We were in this section. The forehead, we were in the forehead.

BRUNET: We went up through the head into the crown, into the crown.

WEINBAUM: We were in this section over here, in the forehead section.

BRUNET: Yes, but were you in the larger part of the head, I wonder?

MR. BRUNET: (?) father telling you that it was in the head.

BRUNET: In the head.

MR. BRUNET: It seems so now--

WEINBAUM: How many people attended the dinner? I have never seen the menu, and I am not

familiar with it.

BRUNET: I can't say, I can't say. I think there were a few, perhaps a few.

MR. BRUNET: I suppose, seeing the head this morning, I suppose that there were at least two tables, one for the youngsters to eat or two or three people, and (?).

BRUNET: Then there weren't many. It seems so now that I was astonished by it. Maybe it was a little narrower on the top at the crown where we were this morning than the cheeks.

WEINBAUM: Could be.

BRUNET: Really, I don't know. I have always heard, during all my childhood, my father speaking of the banquet in the head. And since then I thought perhaps it was in the neck, but it would be still narrower so it is impossible.

MR. BRUNET: I suppose.

BRUNET: The shoulders.

MR. BRUNET: (?) the head and the crown and they were at the (?).

BRUNET: Is there a way around into the shoulders?

WEINBAUM: No.

MR. BRUNET: (?)

WEINBAUM: Well, there were stairs from the beginning.

BRUNET: Yes, there were stairs, of course, but maybe they have--

WEINBAUM: Yes, they might have constructed something for the occasion.

MR. BRUNET: Yes, probably.

BRUNET: The shoulders would have been the widest part. I suppose it could have been in the shoulders, and from the shoulders they saw the inside of the head, yes.

WEINBAUM: What was your father's name?

BRUNET: Aime. The way it is written here, Aime.

WEINBAUM: And that's the way it would have appeared in any publication or in the menu itself?

BRUNET: Oh, he was only a child, so it is only the name of his father who would be found somewhere, and that (?) Adolf, his father.

WEINBAUM: Your grandmother posed for the Statue?

BRUNET: That I don't know much of. I have always heard she had sat a few times, I think, not very often. My husband said this morning he thought she looked very much like the rare photos that I have from that.

MR. BRUNET: I am sure.

BRUNET: So probably it looks like her.

MR. BRUNET: I'm sure. Something in the mouth, (?) around and she looked like this.

BRUNET: Yes, I think so.

MR. BRUNET: (?).

BRUNET: I think so too. It has been interpreted by the (?), of course, I think she looks very much like--

MR. BRUNET: Your cousin Sonya has the same lips.

BRUNET: Yes, (?) something as he asked her to sit for it as I suppose he had this idea and he wanted to make something of her, if not everything, something.

MR. BRUNET: I suppose he was (?) otherwise he wouldn't have asked her.

BRUNET: No, no.

WEINBAUM: But she sat for, on a few occasions?

BRUNET: Yes.

WEINBAUM: Is there any particular anecdotes that is related to that?

BRUNET: No, that I know, none. I suppose my father was too young to know more about it, or he forgot or he, I don't know. I suppose he forgot a lot about it. But the most (?) I think, is coming here for the first time. He was quite a child and for the dedication. It is a great thing and that he never forgot.

WEINBAUM: What did he say about his visit here?

BRUNET: Oh, he was, of course, I think he had to be very excited. Years and years after when he spoke of it, he only said he had to.

WEINBAUM: He didn't spill his soup or do something--

BRUNET: No, no. I think he was a very good little boy. He had been threatened, I suppose.  
If he wasn't good he wouldn't come to dedicate another Statue of Liberty.

MR. BRUNET: There is one in Paris, no? A small one, no?

WEINBAUM: Yes, there is.

MR. BRUNET: There is.

WEINBAUM: There is a Statue of liberty in Paris.

MR. BRUNET: In Paris?

BRUNET: Yes. I have seen so many dozens of small ones, in all sizes.

MR. BRUNET: I suppose it could be the small one he made himself y (?)

BRUNET: That's possible.

MR. BRUNET: And then it has been enlarged.

BRUNET: You see, my husband is a sculptor himself.

MR. BRUNET: He carved it in wood.

BRUNET: He knows more about that than I do.

MR. BRUNET: I do better, right?

BRUNET: That depends, they are not so big.

WEINBAUM: (?) six inches long.

BRUNET: There are now so many sculptors who make things as big as this.

MR BRUNET: (?)

BRUNET: Really, I think it said somewhere it is the biggest in the world.

MR. BRUNET: In the world.

BRUNET: Maybe it is.

WEINBAUM: At the time it was built it was the biggest in the world, and I am familiar with it.  
Let's see, what was your impression when you came here, well, now that you have seen the Statue and made the exhausting climb--

BRUNET: Oh, it was wonderful, it is wonderful and very surprising, even having heard so much about it. (?) very, the way it--

MR. BRUNET: It is well made and it is a symbol.

BRUNET: Yes, yes. It is very impressive, very impressive. One feels more about America when one has seen this, really. I didn't think it would impress me that way, but it really does.

MR. BRUNET: Yes, I felt that too, but it was.

WEINBAUM: Did your father save any newspaper clippings of the dedication?

BRUNET: No, no.

WEINBAUM: He just told you about it.

BRUNET: He just told me about it, (?) much more things (?).

WEINBAUM: But you do have a picture of your grandparents?

BRUNET: Yes, I have. I have many of them, many of them. One day I compare those that I take back of the real Statue.

MR. BRUNET: We have a (?).

BRUNET: Yes.

MR. BRUNET: (?)

BRUNET: It is a great event to come here. I had hoped I could come last year, but it wouldn't have been (?). I had to be taken around like that so you and your colleagues are nice to have given us all your time. You spent hours with us.

WEINBAUM: Thank you. Is there anything that I haven't asked that you would like to add that I just haven't thought about?

BRUNET: I don't think so. I really don't think so. You have been very (?) taking care of us, very kindly, showing us everything you could show. I feel quite satisfied with everything I have seen. I am quite astonished with the warm and beautiful view one can see, you know, from here, and the walk we had on the Statue of Liberty, lovely walk. And I think we had just right weather.

WEINBAUM: Fine. Well, thank you for the interview.

BRUNET: Thank you for asking us.