**Interviewer:** Today is May the 4th, 1978 and I am talking with Miss. Catherine Carlozzi who worked at Ellis Island from 1941 to 1954. Could you tell us, Miss. Carlozzi, what your title was or did it change?

**Catherine:** It did change. When I went in, I was what they called the matron at that time. That was a security officer. We were in charge of the detainees, the aliens that were detained there, and that we had to maintain discipline and go out, and make reports and so forth.

We worked around the clock. They had three shifts for matrons, then short time, they changed the title to security officer. We continued with that title during the War.

Now, right after Pearl Harbor, the FBI started to bring in the enemy agents of German, and Italian, and Japanese descendants in and we have quite a heavy population on Ellis Island. These people were detained there, and then were given a hearing before the hearing boards. They had one in Brooklyn and one in New York and the hearing board determined where they were to be interned for the duration of the War or whether they would be kept at Ellis.

What the basis for their decision was, we don’t know. If they had families, children and so forth, perhaps that was a consideration where they would keep in New York. They were internment camps in Missoula, Montana and in Texas and these people who were ordered, interned for the War were transferred to those places, to those camps. Generally, the men went to Missoula, Montana, and the families went to Texas.

**Interviewer:** There were children in these groups as well, not just adults.

**Catherine:** Yes.

**Interviewer:** There weren’t just adults, there were children?

**Catherine:** There were children. Before they were transferred, they were given an opportunity to dispose of their possessions, of apartments, cars if they had them and so forth. We as security officers escorted them to their homes, to the banks or wherever they had to go to dispose of their personal possessions before being transferred to the internment camps.

Now, the Department of Justice, the Immigration Service was very strict as to what they could or could not do while they were out on these details. We had to comply with every regulation otherwise, the officer would get into trouble on his way back. These people were very hostile to us because naturally, they were enemy aliens, and they certainly had no love for the American people regardless of what their status was.

Now, our government then told the [unclear 00:02:50] to comply with every item in the Geneva Convention in so far as food and diet and living quarters, and space, and so forth was concerned, and each group had its own spokesman. The German had its spokesman, the Italians and the Japanese and so forth.

If they had any complaint, they were given access to the officer on the island on Ellis Island so that they could voice their complaint and if there was any legitimate reason to change the cause of the complaint, they would certainly do so.

At that time, our central office was in Philadelphia and we used to have officials from Philadelphia come up periodically to check on everything, to be sure that all the terms of the Geneva Convention were being adhered to.

We were very, very good to these people. Perhaps they didn’t appreciate it, and I’m sure they didn’t because being interned or being detained wasn’t something that they liked but for the women, I was as a female officer was assigned to what they called the ORF, the Old Registry Floor. At one time, that was used to process the immigrants coming in.

**Interviewer:** Which floor?

**Catherine:** It was when come into Ellis Island, you go up a large flight of stairs and it’s a very huge room with a surrounding balcony that had four rooms in it. The women and the children were detained in those rooms- that was their sleeping quarters.

They had access to the main floor during the day, and then they had outdoor recreation where they could go out during the day from morning until about five or six o'clock during the summer as long as there was daylight. We could see what they were doing. They were allowed to go out.

Sometimes they had families. In some cases, they had families together but most of the time, they separated the men at night and they were allowed to stay with their families during the day so that on this ORF Floor, the Old Registry Floor, we had men and women during the day. They had their meals together, not on the floor. We had a dining room for them and they were allowed to have their meals together. They would go down.

Besides the enemy aliens, we also had seamen, a great many seamen on Ellis Island. We also had a Coast Guard training station there. We had at one time we had a population of over 3,000 people in Ellis Island between the detainees, the seamen and the Coast Guards.

Now, they had a project on Ellis Island where the seamen from Italy, most of all, were assigned ships to go back to Europe. Maybe their ship was torpedoed and then they were brought to Ellis Island until they could be reassigned to another ship. That was not done with the Germans. That was not done with the Japanese.

We had Japanese men mostly, very, very few women, and we had very few Italian women. Most of our female detainees were of German extraction and they stayed until the end of the War.

Those that were retained at Ellis Island stayed until the end of the War and there was a disposition made for them whether they wanted to remain in the United States, or whether they would be returned to Germany. I don’t know very many that went back. They all stayed. Even though they hated us, they still stayed here. It was much better for them.

**Interviewer:** Did people actually voice their dislike of the United States, or they…?

**Catherine:** Oh, yes. They told us that one day we would be where they were and they would be where we were. That’s how they felt about it. They were very, very hostile, and I remember one particular woman going before the enemy alien hearing board and they had… I don’t quite remember the full number. Maybe they had seven or eight people on the board but when she gets finished with her hearing, she walked to the end of the table, and said, “Hail Hitler.”

**Interviewer:** They kept some people on Ellis Island from 1941 to 1945, the whole period of the War.

**Catherine:** Yes, yes.

**Interviewer:** Do you know how many? Was it a lot?

**Catherine:** Well, I would say that it was … the women, maybe 75 to 100. The men, of course, we had a great many German men that were detained and they were in a separate area. We had the Japanese that were detained there until the War ended and of course, the seamen were [inaudible 00:07:37] so to speak. They would be brought in there until assignments could be made for them to man ships and then they went out.

Of course, after Italy joined the Allied aside, they used them. Before they joined the Allied side, we never got them but once they did they were brought to Ellis Island where they were used to man ships, liberty ships and to take them back to Italy so that they would have a fleet with which to continue the War.

Then after the War, these people were either released or returned to Germany. Then we started to get the displaced persons, the Jewish people that had been liberated and we had those coming in for a long time. They came in with families, and children, and so forth.

One thing that was very noticeable was that the women were all married to much older men because Hitler had killed off the younger ones I guess, and all of these families that came in, the girls, the mothers were young but the husbands were very, very old. When I say very old, I mean in relation to the girls much, much older.

We had some good people. We also had some sick people. I would call them mental cases. After what they had been through in Europe, it wasn’t surprising that they were mental cases. Regardless of what their condition was, once they came here, there was no way that the government could dispose of them or to send them back because they had no place to go. They were absolutely homeless.

But in order to come here, the social services of various denominations had to work as social workers getting these people homes. They would have sponsors and the sponsor had to guarantee a home, had to guarantee work for them, and pay their passage over. They had to guarantee a working home for at least two years for these people. Of course, most of them went either to farms or as domestics and they stayed.

They were treated very nicely by the immigration officials. They were given everything possible. They even used to get a basket of food besides their normal diet and meals in the dining room. Where they had children, they used to get a basket of food each week containing orange juice and milk, they always got as much as they wanted oranges and apples, fruit and celery and butter.

And a little extra special for the children, which they kept in their own quarters because we had a kitchen in that area, up on the balcony with refrigeration so that each mother could put in that refrigerator her own particular items of food that were perishable and they stayed there.

Of course, they were very anxious to get out and they didn’t … some of them stayed longer than others. But most of them went on to their sponsors after being processed being assigned to different areas of the United States. They would be taken by the social service and put on trains, and continued on to their destination. That continued for a long time.

Each one that came in had the number tattooed on their arm from the concentration camp. That is something they’ll never get rid of because whatever the Germans used, it was indelible ink that will never be erased.

Then we had another. When we had those, immigration of course, during the War stopped completely. After the War, it was only a trickle. There weren’t many people coming in. Then we had refugees from the Hungarian Revolution. We had a lot of them that came in, ‘55, ‘56 I think it was. We had those coming in where they had managed to escape, and they came to the United States.

Again, it was the same thing. We found sponsors for them where they could continue to work and have a home and a status because they had no status at that time. They were just flown over as refugees.

The Jewish people were displaced persons. These people were political refugees who had escaped from Hungary and had come to the United States, not themselves but the various social agencies had commissions working on the other side. There was a high commission for political refugees stationed, I think it was Austria, I’m not quite sure and they used to process these cases on the other side.

When they escaped from Hungary, they used to go to these various refugee camps. They would be processed there and then when they were ready to come to the United States, all they had to do was they boarded on a plane and come. All the paperwork was done on the other side but then we kept them.

They weren’t allowed to just proceed on their own. We kept them on Ellis Island until they were ready to go onto their sponsors. Some of them … it was a strange thing. These people allegedly had escaped from Hungary and they claimed that they couldn’t go back. They would be prosecuted.

Now, a few years later, the Immigration Service, or I should say Congress passed a law and the immigration service implemented it, where these people could get a re-entry permit to go back to visit various countries and then return to the United States. By that time, Congress had passed a law legalizing their status. They weren’t citizens but they did become permanent residents of the United States after a hearing.

It was strange. They allegedly had escaped from political persecution but the first country they returned to when they got re-entry permits was Hungary and apparently they were safe there but then the Immigration Service stopped that. They could go to visit any country except the country from which they had escaped because then that was an indication that they were really phonies.

Also, the Immigration Service was very generous with them in this respect. They came here and then if they didn’t like it the government would pay their fare back and they would return to their country from which they had escaped.

When they got here, the social services just pilled clothing and everything on. They came in with maybe a duffel bag, and they went back with dozens and dozens of boxes and suitcases and whatnot and the United States government, the Immigration Service was paying for all that excess baggage.

They finally put a stop to it because I remember taking a group of family to the airport. That was part of our duties too, to escort and see that they got onboard the plane. If they had excess baggage exceeding $160 besides their fare, which was a lot of money but the government realized they couldn’t do it. Then they limited the amount of baggage that they could take back. Some of them stayed. Some of them didn’t want to stay and they returned to Hungary but the bulk of them did stay here. That was Ellis Island.

Then Ellis Island closed in ’54. We did have other facilities at 641 Washington Street where they detained them but the detainees there were very few. Once Ellis Island closed, they did not detain women unless they were unusual cases and then it was just a handful.

There was no room before but they did add … the men of course, were detained even after Ellis Island closed at 641 Washington Street. They altered one of the floors because that’s a very huge building. They altered one of the floors to detain the men and the handful of women that they had.

Of course, they didn’t have outdoor recreation like they had on Ellis Island because they didn’t have the facilities for it but it was good for the number of people that they had there.

Then the Immigration Service moved to 20 West Broadway, and they had facilities there for detention. They had an outdoor recreation area on the roof of the building. Again, the women detained were very few, maybe half a dozen at a time, six or eight as the case may be but the bulk of them were at Ellis Island during those years.

By the time the War broke out, of course, immigration had stopped but prior to that, they had huge groups of immigrants coming in and especially at the beginning of the century. They had people coming into at Ellis Island at the rate of about 5,000 a day. It was very, very heavy, and they were processed there. They had inspectors assigned to what they called an immigrant inspector, hearing officers.

They had them interview these people that were brought to Ellis Island and they were kept until their sponsor or some member of the family came for them if they were women alone. If they were families … but women would never [inaudible 00:16:49] but women were never let out by themselves. They just made sure that they had … either social service took them and put them in their own facilities, or a relative or friend came to sponsor them.

We did have a small group of what was known as warrant cases. These were aliens that were picked up because of the illegal work in which they were involved. Most of them were prostitutes. Of course, we kept them there until they had their hearings and then they were ordered deported. You couldn’t just take a person, put them on a plane and send them back. You had to apply to their consul for a passport.

Some countries like Russia and [inaudible 00:17:34] they never took anybody back. You could just apply until you were green in the face and they never issued a passport. Very, very rarely did they take anyone back but the other countries did. If they were satisfied that they were their own nationals they would take them back especially if they … they took back almost everybody we sent.

They really got stuck with a bad group but they went back and they took them. It took a long, long time because after the initial hearing they were ordered deported. They had to right of appeal and they could appeal but perhaps three or four times, the immigration hearing board… the Immigration Appeals Board, the Board of Immigration Appeals in Washington.

Then if that was close to their decision, they would go on to the courts. It was very, very frustrating in some of these cases. Of course, the ones that made most of money were the attorneys because they got the fees for all of these appeals. If they didn’t have money for an attorney, the various religious denominations used to assign a person, a representative to represent the alien at these different legal hearings and they were very good.

They knew the immigration laws. They had been doing that for many, many years, and they gave these people excellent representation without cost. They never charged them anything for them. They took very good care of them, gave them religious … I don’t want to call it instruction but religious services.

Each denomination had their own minister coming over including the Jewish people with a rabbi. They had one central room where they conducted all the services and the Catholics had their own and the Protestants had theirs. The Jewish people had their Torah. We even had facilities for the Muslims to pray each morning. They had the privilege of praying. They had to pray at sun up and they had to face the east so they were given this place in which to pray to Allah in the morning.

We had a school for the children on Ellis Island and we had a teacher, Miss. Pratt who was the most dedicated social worker I have ever known. She used to have classes for the children every day and her organization. She belonged to the Church World Services. They supplied books, and they supplied all kinds of games for the children.

Mrs. Pratt, in addition to the school used to even take care of some of the adults. Anything you wanted from Mrs. Pratt was never too much for her. She was the most [inaudible 00:20:29] person I’ve ever known.

The [inaudible 00:20:31] had their representative there. They took care of the Jewish people. The Catholics had Miss. Buckley and the Protestants had a Miss … what was her name? It started with a P. I’ll think of it in a few minutes but each one just took care of their own.

The Lutherans and the Estonians they had their own representative and everyone did everything they could to make those people comfortable so that the stay on Ellis Island while they didn’t like it, it was not bad considering that it was a detention facility, it was very good. They had outdoor recreation not only for the women and children but for the men. They could play a ball out there, and everything.

During the War years they had guard towers in the different corners so that the officers assigned to those towers would be able to keep their eye on the detainees while they were there, and of course, as soon as we opened the doors to the outdoor recreation an officer had to be stationed on the [inaudible 00:21:41].

Some of those German people a little cruel during those cold, bitter months. They used to go out, one or two at a time. As soon as one came in, the officer would think well now, I can go in and get warm. The next morning two would go out and they used to continue that all day long and as long as they were out we had to be there. You just couldn’t let them go out by themselves. Even though the area was fenced in they still would not let them out without supervision.

There used to have a commissary there. The Germans were the cooks during the War. They used to have work for the various men, and the kitchen was a great place for these detained aliens because those Germans were excellent cooks. They had dishwashers and they had men for preparing vegetables and what not.

They used to serve very, very good food because we had to comply with the terms of the Geneva Convention. Even during the war years where they had fashion stamps, I was then at that time, I was working in the commissary. I was the fiscal accounting clerk there. I no longer stayed with the aliens but we used to get our allotment of ration stamps from Washington.

I remember I had six accounts with National City Bank for the various types of food stamps. We had food stamps for meat and some for dairy products such as butter and sugar, and coffee and so forth. But we never run short because they made sure that they allotted us enough stamps to take care of the needs of the alien population.

At the end of the quarter, we used to get our allotment every quarter. At the end of the quarter we had to submit a report to the central office showing the disposition of all our stamps, what was left and so forth. I must say that we were very highly praised because not one stamp went astray. We could account for every one of them, at this reporting period.

At the end of the War, when rationing went out of business, we returned what we had and there was no discrepancy, which was remarkable considering what we had to deal with over all those months. We used to do our own purchasing of foods. We always kept at least a month’s supply on hand. We had a huge refrigerator and vegetables. We had all kinds of canned vegetables. We used to have fresh produce, fish once a week for them.

We also had a kosher kitchen for the Jewish people with a kosher cook. The kosher cook was supplied by HIAS, Hebrew International Aid Society. We supplied the food but they used to prepare it. They had their own little kitchen, their own pots, their own tables and dishes, and what not so that all the items were prepared in the kosher kitchen was under the supervision of the kosher people so that these Jewish refugees that came in, this was after the War not during the War. We didn’t have that.

These Jewish refugees did not have to worry about not meeting their dietary standards. They used to feed them before the other groups because the kosher kitchen was in line with the passage to the dining room for the other groups of aliens coming in.

But the Jewish people used to eat first so that they had the privacy of their own dining room without having anyone else go in and we used to feed one room at a time. We used to feed the ORF with the women and children and then family men was there, and then the seamen and the German men and so forth used to be fed separately.

Together they would … the dining could seat a certain number, maybe 100, or 150, and if the room contained more than that then they would eat in shifts. That was more than enough for our group because they could accommodate all of them [inaudible 00:25:50].

It was surprising to see the children. They had never seen white bread. When they went down to the dining room they would come up with a slice of white bread or two in their hands. Of course, they weren’t supposed to bring food up from the dining room but I could never take it away from the children. Even though I wasn’t following regulations, I couldn’t do it. I thought that was cruel to take a slice of bread out of a child’s hand, I’d never do that but they had never seen white bread.

Everything they ate over there, I guess, was black or brown, or wheat. I don’t know what it was but to them it was like cake. The mothers used to say, “The bread is like cake. The bread is like cake.” They didn’t speak English though. Maybe they picked up a word here and there.

But they had nourishing meals, very good meals. Maybe it wasn’t to their liking because it was American and American-cooked, and they liked the … if they were Germans or Italians or Japanese, they had their own native type of cooking, which they liked.

But nutritionally, it was everything that was expected to maintain a good diet for them and when they left, of course, that was always continued. The only thing was they didn’t have to comply with the terms of the Geneva Convention where each article stated how many ounces of meat they had to have a day and how many ounces of dairy products, and leafy, green vegetables and legumes and so forth.

It was amazing how the menus were made up to take into consideration the minimum balance that they needed of all these items. It was very good. I’m sure that when our people were interned in Germany or Japan they weren’t given anything like that but the United States complied with every term of the Geneva Convention and even space.

They were allowed a certain number of cubic feet per person, and they made sure they had it. They had a German spokesman who apparently knew everything, and he would measure it. If he thought that anybody didn’t have that many cubic space he was right there with his complaint.

He was quite articulate. He spoke English well, and he wasn’t the list but bashful about making any complaint about it but they listened if there was legitimacy to the complaint of any of these groups, they immediately rectified it, and we were periodically inspected by the officials in the central office, which at that time was Philadelphia.

There was a lady in charge of the detention facilities, and she used to come up and speak to these people. She didn’t rely on what the offices or the officials of the immigration staff said.

She used to talk to the spokesman, talk to the people themselves so that she got a first of what was going on or rapport of what was going on. If they had any complaint she made sure that she did it. We did very well though aside from naturally, you can’t run a facility like that without some complaints but on the whole, it was one very, very well, and they were satisfied. If they wanted anything changed, they would send up memorandums and tell us exactly what it was.

We had a German matron. She was cute. She was a tiny little lady. She was a Swiss-German and every time we’d get a new report she’d always come out very upset, and she’d say, “It never used to be like that,” but we had to comply and we did.

We never violated any instruction that we had, and especially those relating to details of these people, and we took them out and made sure that we did, nothing that wasn’t supposed to be done.

They were told where they were going, and if they wanted to make any other stop, before we took them off Ellis Island were would tell them we were scheduled to go here, here, and here for this purpose. Do you want to go anywhere else? And if they said yes, I want to go to the bank. I want to buy something.

We had to first get permission and that was put on our official detail before we went out because if you did comply with the instruction then the officer you were in trouble when you got back but these people had no qualms of taking favors and then reporting officer.

Anybody that did not get permission before time would get into trouble. We got that straightened out, and they took care of all their business before they went on, either they stayed at Ellis Island, or they went onto the internment camps.

They were allowed visitors every day except Sunday. Sunday they did not have visitors because they had the religious services scheduled throughout the day. They had Mass, and they had the protestant services and of course, the Jewish people had their services on Sabbath.

The Christian [inaudible 00:30:47], we had Salvation Army. They used to like the Salvation Army because of the music but we had to change our schedule, I should say just our schedule to the time that the different clergyman could come.

Sometimes they would have Mass in the morning, sometimes it would be in the afternoon and the same with the protestant and Christian Science, whatever they could be.

The children of course, went to school Monday to Friday every day. They did not miss any day, and they learned. They learned to read, and they learned to speak English write a little bit so it was very interesting for them but they had visitors, as I said, every day except Sunday.

The ones on the ORF, the women and children, they could visit with their relatives and friends right on the floor there. The seamen or those that were detained, the men that were detained they had a special area downstairs on the ground floor with screening around so that no contraband could go through.

We used to examine the visitors to make sure that they didn’t bring in anything they weren’t supposed to. They could bring in items of food, food, candy, cooking and so forth. They were more lenient with the women than they were with the men. The men, they made sure that the screen there took care of any contraband. It was those who had families there could visit … visitors and their families on the ORF floor.

Then at night they used to go upstairs about eight o'clock, 8:30. Each room had its own shower stall and toilet facility so that they did not have to go out. If they went to their room, they took their showers or baths, whatever they wanted to do, and then they were all finished we took a count and at the beginning, we used to lock them in their rooms because we had officers stationed on the balcony. That was the duty station for the officers after the aliens left the floor.

We always had during the day, the officers were assigned on the main floor but then they used to tour the area upstairs because the women had access to their rooms all day long if they wanted to rest, if they wanted to lie down so that the officers used to make periodic checks on the balcony off of their rooms.

Then the kitchen was there, refrigeration, tables, and so forth, and stove for the aliens if they wanted to prepare special food for their children [inaudible 00:33:19] whatever the case might be so that officers were up and down all day long.

Once they went to their rooms at night, then the officers stayed on the balcony until the next morning when they would awaken them to get dressed and go down for their breakfast. Then they stayed down on the main floor, or they went to the outdoor recreation area. They were free to do that as long as we had the outdoor area open they could go in there. If they wanted to stay there all day long we didn’t stop them but we had to have someone on duty out there.

We had a library available for them. They could be taken to the library where they would select whatever books they wanted. There were books in the different languages, and they could take them. They had people coming in with magazines and sometimes they used to sell candy and things like that but not too much. They did have at the beginning … they used to have American Express where these people, the immigrants. That was for the immigrants. They could go on to their destination, buy their tickets there and so forth.

They also furnished bonds for these … not the enemy aliens but the immigrants. If they were released on bond, this American Express would furnish the bond. But then after the War started these warrant cases that we pulled, these prostitutes and so forth, if they were out on bond then they’d have to get, their lawyers would have to get their bond from a place on the landside.

[Pererra 00:34:58] was a great one for furnishing. That was a … what would you call it? It wasn’t a brokerage house. It was more or less a money exchange, and they would furnish funds too. They would have funds when coming in but in those days the biggest feat any attorney could perform was to get his client down on bond. They weren’t that generous.

Later on, when there were detained as far as the women were concerned, they let them out on their own recognizance. They didn’t detain them but after the Island forms and we did go to 641 Washington Street, and Ellis Island was November 14th, 1954, and then we went to 641 Washington Street, and we stayed there until 1957, fall 1957.

Then we moved up to 60 Columbus Avenue and they detained the aliens in the house of detention, the men’s house of detention, or the women’s house of detention but that wasn’t very feasible because they had to go and pick them up, and bring them to the offices for their hearings and take them back.

They set up detention facilities at 20 West Broadway. It was a brand new building, and we moved in there in December of 1959, and they stayed there until this year when they moved to 26th Avenue Plaza but about three or four years ago, the men were transferred to the navy Yard, the set up facilities there.

They altered one part, not the whole thing. They altered one building to take care of detainees, and they are still being detained there but that is also only a temporary thing. Women were not detained. They had to be put into the ... I guess, it’s that place. They closed that place on 37th Street.

The women now are really a problem. I guess they have to put them up at some private place because the Women’s House of Detention. No, they still have the Women’s House of Detention. I don’t know if they closed that or not. They used to keep them at that Alimony Place on 37 Street where they had civilian there, prisons but they closed that down.

Now, if they have women perhaps they keep them at the Navy Yard too. I’m not too sure but they so rarely detain the women. Passengers, immigrants are never detained. If they are it’s for some medical reason and they go to a hospital but the airline or the steamship companies charged with the responsibility of producing them … that’s all right, when they have to come in for any hearings.

If they are held because their passports are not valid or there may be some questions about their Visas it’s the responsibility of the airline or the steamship company.

But it’s not greatly implemented because they don’t detain. It’s a very, very rare thing unless they have to look after somebody and they feel if they are involved in some kind of international illegal traffic, they don’t detain women.

The men too, immigrants themselves are not detained [inaudible 00:38:19]. They still have the seamen who jump ship. They’ll never get rid of them. They’ll always have them, and of course, the warrant cases. When I say warrant cases these are men who have done something illegal in the United States, and that means we have to split them up. Sometimes they got here. Sneaked in the United States for several months or several years, and they are working.

They could be picked up at their place of business if the investigators perform any kind of a raid and they picked them up because they don’t have proper, documents, and they would be detained because if you let these people out they never come back again. They have nothing to lose by disappearing.

**Interviewer:** When they closed Ellis Island, how did they close Ellis Island? Did they …?

**Catherine:** We knew ahead of time it was going to close. They had set this target date of November 14, and then the aliens that were still there they were transferred to the Federal House of Detention on this street. The women went, at that time, they went to either the Women’s House of Detention if they were warrant cases. If they were immigrants, if they could possibly release them, they did. If they had to keep them for any reason, they either put them in that civilian jail where the Alimony men are kept, or if it was for a medical … they were hospitalized but when they closed they had very, very few.

I don’t think that they kept any immigrant. The warrant cases, yes, they kept those because we used to get a lot of Cubans and Dominican Republicans and so forth, Haitians. Those they kept in a women’s house of detention. Not to any great number but the men all went to the federal detention facility in [inaudible 00:40:00].

Of course, once the last alien was gone, then that was the end of the Ellis Island. They had to move furniture and so forth but that took time afterwards. There were no more trips made to that except to pick up.

They had packed all of their paperwork, and files, and so forth, and all the office files, and all the office equipment was moved to 60, 70 Columbus Avenue. That’s where the immigration was. In 1943, most of the offices where up there, and then when we closed Ellis Island the rest of us who were working on the inside were transferred to 70 Columbus Avenue and we stayed there until they opened the building on 20 West Broadway and then we moved down there.

Of course, the aliens were kept also at 641 Washington Street. They were there on 54 to 57. Then they closed the female quarters there. They didn’t bother with any more.

They kept them in a for a while, and then they had this detention facility at 20 West Broadway for many years, and then finally about three years ago, they moved them to the navy yard and that’s where the men still are and they are going to build something … still find different quarters for them. They are going to build something. When that will be done, I don’t know but they did remodel this building in the navy yard to house the detainees.

**Interviewer:** How long had they planned to close Ellis Island? Was it a long-term thing or did they just decide …

**Catherine:** The reason they really closed it, at one time Public Health Service had their hospital there for the seamen, and during the War, they were very busy because all the seamen who were injured were brought to Ellis Island.

They were hospitalized there and of course, we had the facilities too for our aliens. If they got sick, we used to take them over to the clinic, and if they had to be hospitalized over there. Coast Guard was on Ellis Island, and they also used the Public Health Service for their men if they were sick, or if they just needed treatment but then the Coast Guard closed their training facility.

That left only Public Health and immigration, and then Public Health closed and for that reason it was too expensive for Ellis … for the immigration service to stay on Ellis Island because in those days it used to cost over a million dollars a year just for the ferry.

They had a crew of about 40 or 45 men because they had to have three ships even though they didn’t run it all around the clock. The midnight ship used to clean, and repair, and so forth, and they still had to have a crew onboard. They used to dock at Ellis Island overnight. No, I’ll take that back.

Used to make the 11:30 trip back to the mainland with the 4:00 to 12:00 group and then it used to stay on the barge off the side until the morning when it took the first group of officers and workers to Ellis Island and it continued all day but it got too expensive.

A million dollars in those days was a lot of money. Today, it doesn’t mean anything but they felt that the boat was also deteriorating to replace it and continue, which they didn’t feel was feasible, and they decided to close Ellis Island.

When it closed, they did have guards stationed there for a while but it was vandalized, something terrible. They ripped up everything that could be taken away. I don’t know how they got there, probably from the Jersey side, it was much neared but they had a man, one or two men stationed there but they couldn’t take care of the vandals.

There were too many buildings. They knew where the men, the guards where, and I guess they could just go into another building because even if the guards went through the area, it was so large, you could never, never keep track of everything.

They took everything that wasn’t … even what was nailed down I’m sure they ripped up but let me say, they took everything that was moveable. They took it out and they really left the island in shambles and then time took its toll. I went there with Mr. Hendrickson and a couple of men about a year and a half, two years, and it was appalling.

The ceilings were coming down. These great big casement windows that just come off the floor, off the wall, and were lying down on the ground. Everything plastered and what not. Then I went back last year, and it was really beautiful because they had fixed up a certain area that was open to the public. They had cleaned that up and plastered and did painting and what not. It was such a difference from the time we had originally been there. We didn’t know what was going to fall down first.

They used to have their own generating plant. They had a big engineering staff there. They used to generate their own electricity, and they had these water towers on Ellis Island. The water, I guess, came from Jersey. I don’t know whether it had 3,000 or 5,000 gallons of water, each tank. It was huge. Fortunately, during all the years we were there they never broke because I think we would have flooded right out of the harbor had they broken but you couldn’t have water from the mainland unless you stored them in the tanks but there was no shortage of water.

They always had it, and of course, the generating plants they gave them plenty of steam and hot water. The Coast Guard had [inaudible 00:45:56] on their training station. They also had their brig on Ellis Island where they used to keep the boys that were being disciplined for some reason.

Public Health had a large staff. They had their clinics and they had all facilities, medical and surgical and neurological and psychiatric and so forth. It was a very big branch. Then after they closed, everyone had to go to the Public Health Service on Staten Island. They took in. We even had to take our annuals there if they needed any examination.

If they just needed x-rays, we could take them to the Public Health Service at Hudson Street, Hudson and Barrack Street. That has closed since but that used to be a part of the-

**Interviewer:** Well, did any of the … they were called, enemy aliens, is that what they were called?

**Catherine:** During the War, yes, those were the three groups.

**Interviewer:** Did they try and escape or something?

**Catherine:** No, no, they didn’t but the seamen, the seamen would all be … not during the War so much because they really had no place to go but these warrant cases that we called, they of course did but there was no place for them to go. The nearest shoreline would have been Jersey, and they would have been spotted but they did try.

Of course, if you took them out on detail, the officer took them out on detail, there was always a possibly that they could breakaway because we couldn’t handcuff them. It would have to be a very unusual case to take them out, and escort them around in handcuffs.

In fact, at one time the airlines would not take anyone that was brought there in handcuffs because that would frighten the other passengers, and when you are going through a crowded place, it’s very possible they could escape.

They tried, and some did succeed if they were taken to their place of business or their home where they knew the facilities, and they knew the escape routes, and the officers did not. They could break away from him and get away.

Sometimes they were picked up, sometimes they were not and they were loose for a long, long time. Whether they made their way home or just got lost in the crowd nobody ever knew but that was most of the time when they could make an attempt and have it succeed.

It was on the street but if their homes, or their places of business especially if they worked in a restaurant they knew where the exits where, and the officers did not. He would go in with them, perhaps be in the kitchen. They may know that this door would lead out into an alley and they would try to escape. Sometimes the officers caught them, sometimes they didn’t.

It would depend on how young the detainee was, and how old the officer was, and then when you don’t know the facility, and if you have more than one alien you are handicapped because you can’t very well run. They did try at airports. They did attempt to escape. Sometimes they succeeded. Sometimes the officer caught them going in but it was always a danger.

There was always the possibility that they could go away, they could run away when the officer took them out on detail and he had to be very, very careful because at one time they were very strict. If an officer lost an alien, they really disciplined the officer. Then later on like everything else- I don’t say they became lenient but they were more understanding that these things would happen.

If people can get away from the FBI and the police certainly, a detention officer is not any better qualified than those law enforcement officers but it was tension all the time the officer was out with these aliens because they had nothing to lose. If they did escape, and they picked up it wasn’t that any added sentence was put on their record. They just continued from where they left off. They knew that and any attempt they made to their health, and to their aid, and not anyone else’s.

**Interviewer:** Did you ever hear from … when they were bringing the people in during the War, did they ever say how they decided which people to bring?

**Catherine:** Apparently, the FBI had a list of all of these enemy aliens who were active in the various organizations. The Germans had the Nazi organizations. They had the Bund and so forth. Apparently, the FBI had prepared and knew just who they were going to bring in because two or three days after Pearl Harbor they started to bring in these enemy aliens. They brought them in at night. They made their raids during the evening hours. It was a lot. Most of them worked, and they brought them in maybe 2 or 3 O’clock in the morning.

Of course, when they brought them in we had to search them. We had to process them, assign them to their rooms, and so forth, take the necessary data concerning their case because that would go on to the Enemy Alien Hearing Board and the Immigration Service. The FBI was very, very efficient in that manner, and they must have had all these lists prepared to go out, and pick them up neatly.

I think the first week after Pearl Harbor the bulk of them were brought to Ellis Island. That’s how fast the FBI worked. There was one interesting group. During the War, these Jewish refugees were in Shanghai. They had to leave Shanghai. They came allegedly in transit through the United States but of course, they were hoping to stay there.

They boarded a train. They came in by a ship and they boarded a train on the West Coast but they were brought in sealed cars all the way to New York. Then we had them for a few days in Ellis Island so arrangements could be made to transport them to Europe, to the countries to which they were going.

The most interesting part of that group was they had so much jewelry with them, gold and of course, we had to take every piece from them and itemize and put it in a secure place. Then when they went it was returned to them but they managed to escape with Jewelry from Shanghai and take it with them wherever they were going.

I think that these people where more of the wealthy. It wasn’t the poor, ghetto Jew because he never got a chance to go any place until after the War when the Allied Troops liberated these different internment camps, or concentration camps and let them free, and then process them from there on because High Commission for the Refugees. This group from Shanghai must have been wealthy to come in with all that. They would have liked to stay but they wouldn’t let them.

**Interviewer:** Where did they go from New York?

**Catherine:** Various countries. England, France, not the Nazi or Italian group. What did they call those during the … I’m trying to think.

**Interviewer:** [inaudible 00:53:29].

**Catherine:** The enemy alien countries. They had a name for them. I’m trying to think of it. They [inaudible 00:53:42] and Germany and Japan.

**Interviewer:** In World War II, you mean.

**Catherine:** In World War II. It may come to me later on but other than that group, that was the only ones that came in who were not interned by the United States but the FBI did a magnificent job during that War. There was no delay. They just pounced on them and brought them in.

**Interviewer:** The other thing I was going to ask was you mentioned the Hungarian refugees running in trouble. After ’54, they didn’t go through Ellis Island, did they?

**Catherine:** No. We had … let me see now. They came in the Displaced Persons came to Ellis Island but they Hungarian refugees came in ’56, and we had them in 641 Washington Street. That’s where they were processed, and then of course, we had them 20 west Broadway. They had facilities for women too up there, not too many.

They kept it to a minimum because it was only the ones that they couldn’t let out that they detained but with the refugees, with the refugees from the concentration camps. Those were the really big group of people that were retained on Ellis Island until they were completely processed.

We had a trickle, of course, we always immigrants. As long as Ellis Island was operative, we always had people detained there but once they’ve closed when they had to be very selective as to who they detained because of a lack of facilities. Even for the men while they always had facilities to house them, the number had to be limited. They could not just crowd them in.

They had to watch who they picked, and their cases were detained or if they were persons who were likely to escape, or had bad criminal records then they used to take them to the Federal House of Detention on this street because that place had a few escapes too, not of immigrants are of criminals themselves.

**Interviewer:** Do you have anything particular else about Ellis Island you’d like to say?

**Catherine:** I remember it was about … let me see. We has one detainee there, she was a German. She had two children. Her husband was an American. He was a surgeon stationed at the Roy Hospital in there. He used to come to see. That was an unusual case because he was American. The children were American but she was a rabid Nazi. She was such a dive in the wool German Nazi. She was very uncooperative, very hostile but it was hard for her and I’m sure not for her so much but for the husband and the children to have her there but they didn’t release her because of her background they kept her there.

We had several. There was a whole group with this woman, a whole group that came in, the FBI brought in that were really rabid Nazis. They were so hostile to us. They had to be civil but not to the point where they would even bid you the time of the day if they didn’t have to. Then we had one woman there, her husband. She was detained at Ellis Island. Her husband was one of those Nazis that had landed somewhere in Chicago, I think, around the lakes in a rubber raft. Do you recall that, or don’t you? There was a group I think they were seven or eight that came in this rubber raft.

They were all saboteurs. What they wanted to do, we don’t know because they were apprehended before they could do any damage but the wife of one of them was on Ellis Island. He was not brought to Ellis Island. They went to jail because they were very, very dangerous. They couldn’t let them stay, and then after the War they were deported, and sent back to Germany because they were Germans.

Germany took back the people that wanted to go back. They didn’t make many bones about it. They took them back as long as they could prove that they were German citizens. As I said, the Russians and her satellites wouldn’t take back. It wasn’t the satellites so much. Russia wouldn’t permit the satellites to take back anybody, and Finland took back some because she maintained a certain semblance of independence from Russia but that wasn’t very many but the other countries like Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Poland, Hungary they couldn’t take anybody back because Russia wouldn’t let them.

They were no use so they wanted no part of them. They just wouldn’t take it. I don’t remember in all the years I worked for immigration, I don’t ever remember being sent back except a spy where they changed.

This man Abel, he was a Russian spy, had been in jail in this country for maybe five or seven years and then they exchanged him for I think it was Powers, the U-2 pilot. They exchanged Abel for Powers, and of course, he went back to Russia but other than that, I don’t know of anyone who was ever taken back by the Communists. They weren’t. What their policy is now I don’t know because I don’t handle records anymore.

**Interviewer:** We appreciate that much speaking with you.

**Catherine:** All right. I’m just glad to do it, and I don’t know, if you are interested in … I don’t think you are interesting anymore of the jobs that I had during the time I was on Ellis Island because they [inaudible 00:59:48].

**Interviewer:** Sure.

**Catherine:** Would you?

**Interviewer:** Sure.

**Catherine:** From being a matron, the position has changed to security officer. Then I became fiscal accounting clerk in the commissary, and then I became the admitting clerk at Ellis Island and from there I went to personnel. From there to the administrative office, back to detention/deportation I went to information unit as an information receptionist.

Then I became supervisor down there, assistant supervisor. Then I went to assistant chief records and information, and then I went to records and information specialist for the New York District and the Immigration service. From that position, I retired in 1973. I had quite a few jobs and that’s why I had access to all of these records.

**Interviewer:** The people who worked at Ellis Island, did they stay there? Was there a rapid turnover? Did the people who worked there stay?

**Catherine:** No, no, no. They stayed. In fact, the old timers stayed until they retired. After the War, we got a lot of veterans in because the jobs, certain jobs were restricted to veterans, and of course, when Ellis Island closed a great many people lost their jobs because they weren’t veterans. The maintenance section under the engineers, all the people in that section were laid off.

The detention/deportation they had about 210 officers, and supervisors and they went down to 22. They all went. Some of them had eligibility to be transferred to clerical positions depending upon their background. If that was the case, and they could bump someone else, they were transferred to a clerical position.

Some were not eligible and they had to leave the service, which was very hard. Some of them had been there maybe 15, 20 years. It was very difficult but the civil service still runs the same way. The veterans had preference, and regardless of how many years of service you may have had, if you were not veteran and there’s any riff, the veteran can bump you providing he’s eligible to take over your job.

There was quite a bad period for the employees when Ellis Island closed. A great, great many lost their jobs and whether they went to other agencies, I don’t know but most of them that worked on Ellis Island jobs were selective. The detention and deportation officers … well, the detention officers at the time that was one of the titles too.

They were skilled in guarding these aliens, escorting them, and so forth. Not many agencies in New York had need for that type of men. You could be a guard, guarding a building with the General Services Administration but they certainly couldn’t absorb that many people.

Public Health had some guards assigned to their facilities especially in their psychiatric ward and their entrances and so forth, admitting office but it wasn’t enough to absorb. Many of those men and women had to go out into private industry again. I was fortunate that I was eligible because I had been a grade 4 in those days.

That was a very high position as a fiscal accounting clerk. That qualified me for other clerical positions because I was not a veteran, and we did have some women who had served in the [inaudible 01:03:29], and we had a couple of widows veterans’ widows who also had preference over anybody else.

But because of my background and the positions that I had worked in they could move me around where I was not at any time let go even when they closed Ellis Island. I was reassigned to the personnel office. Then when they closed 641 Washington Street, I went back uptown in the detention/deportation office, so that I did have a position that was steady all along that was while I was rift I bumped and I was able to be kept on.

**Interviewer:** Which was your last position on Ellis Island?

**Catherine:** Records and information … on Ellis Island, that was the … let me see. I was with the admitting office. That was it. We used to keep records. It was part of the admitting office. We used to keep all the statistics and the records for Ellis Island and that was my last position, and then that same job was transferred uptown and we went up there.

**Interviewer:** Again, we’ve enjoyed talking with you.

**Catherine:** Thank you very much. I was glad to come.

**Interviewer:** Very informative.

**Catherine:** I’m glad you enjoyed it. What time is the …