

Ellis Island Oral Interview

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Education Department
Ellis Island Immigration Museum
Statue of Liberty National Monument



Interviewee: Sonya Anna Thornblom Gillick

Date of Birth: April 28, 1909

Date of Interview: January 27th, 1993

Interviewer: Janet Levine

Immigrated from Sweden at Age 12 in 1921

Ellis Island Collection: EI-302

LEVINE: Do you remember your initial impressions of Ellis Island?

GILLICK: Oh sure. Well when Olga (her sister) and I landed on Ellis Island in August, 1921, of course there were hundreds of immigrants were there, all talking different languages.

GILLICK: Well, you know, we couldn't talk English. Olga and I, we didn't have Sandra with us there. But in all different languages they call out, so we got the idea that it was eating time, lunch. And Olga said to me, "You go and I'll mind the, our bags." Well, I went into this great big room and there were lines of people. Oh, there were hundreds of people lined up. And I got as far as I could inside the door and I saw down at, they had these big, long tables. And men and women were serving big pieces of bread and then each one had been given a bowl and they filled it with red stuff. And I go back and I told my sister, "Olga, they're serving bread and blood." I'd never seen tomato soup in my life. (Dr. Levine laughs.) "Ooh", she says, "please, we'll eat tonight when we go back on the boat." Because our 'T' was the last in alphabetically and was the second day we had to go there, you know. "Oh, we'll eat when we get to the boat," she said. We never went near it. (They laugh.)