

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Romanian Americans

Personal Experience

O.H. 955

GEORGIA RADU

Interviewed

by

John Muntean

on

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M: This is an interview with Georgia Radu for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, on Romanian culture in Mahoning County, by John Muntean, on May 28, 1975.

Can you tell us about how you feel regarding your Romanian heritage?

R: Well, at present time, I am very proud of my heritage. I probably always was, but you know sometimes when you are a kid growing up, you get introduced to certain children and they will say, "What is your name? What grade are you in? What nationality are you?" I will say, "Romanian." Some people do not even know what a Romanian is. After you get to talking as you grow up and mature, I think you appreciate your heritage a little bit more. I wish people would realize that is something that you cannot change.

M: Right.

R: That you are what you are, and you should be proud with your nationality.

M: Could you tell something about your childhood and early adult life in regards to Romanian culture, such as food, language, church, et cetera?

R: Well, when I was a baby and growing up with my parents, my grandparents lived with us -- my father's parents. Basically, we kept the Romanian tradition in the family. We ate Romanian foods and we learned to communicate. My parents would talk Romanian with my dad's parents. My grandfather and grandmother would talk to my sister and I in Romanian. When we were little, we would respond in Romanian.

M: I see.

R: Then as we went to school and learned to talk English, then we sort of got away from using whole sentences. At times they would talk to us in Romanian, and we understood them. I still understand Romanian when it is spoken to me, but I would answer maybe a little bit of English, a little bit of Romanian, and then sometimes all English. So, I can say words.

M: How would you say grandfather in Romanian? Do you recall?

R: Morshu.

M: Morshu.

R: Morshu.

M: What is Nashu? What is that in English?

R: Nashu is godfather.

M: Okay, Nashu would be godfather.

R: Right.

M: Do you remember any other words?

R: Well, like milk is latka.

M: What is water? Do you recall?

R: Aba, aba. You sort of got away from it when you went to school. Like my sister, when she started school, she could not even talk English. By the time I went to first grade, I talked English some. I did not have that much trouble. But I wish now that I would have kept up with it and been able to give a fluent sentence.

M: Did you take any languages in high school?

R: I took four years of Latin.

M: Latin, oh.

R: It is a little bit similar. Some of the Romanian words are similar to Latin, so that is probably why it was easy for me. The foods, we kept Romanian foods. We still eat Romanian foods and Romanian dishes.

M: What are some of them that you eat that would be Romanian?

R: Well, tocana, which are cream stews with either beef or chicken. Chicken is more popular. We made cornmeal mush; we call it mamaliga. You can make it plain, either plain or eat it with milk, or you can put cheese in it. Mash beans, we call it fasolefrecată. Cârnots, which is sausage, and sarmale, pigs in a blanket. There is a lot of cream soups that my mom makes. We call them ciorba. Various vegetables go in that.

M: I see.

R: Some of the functions we go to, of course -- weddings, picnics -- they usually have a picnic every summer.

M: When you were a little child, did they have these functions with Romanian music and dancing, or was it more or less English?

R: No, basically it would be Romanian music. They would have your dances and, you know, social gatherings. The foods that would be served would be Romanian foods. The people would come dressed in their native costumes, the girls with their decorative blouses and decorative skirts, and the men, too. They tried to instill it in the children, you know, when the children would come. They would try to get them dressed up, too.

M: Did you dress up like that, too?

R: Occasionally, I would dress up. I have a blouse.

M: Did your mother make it for you?

R: No, I do not think she made it for me. She purchased it somewhere.

M: You mean you can buy it from a store?

R: I think you really have to order from some place. I mean, you just could not go anywhere and buy one.

M: Yes, I would suppose that, but I did not know that you could buy it in the United States.

R: I do not really know, to tell you the truth.

M: Did your sister, Judy, ever have any?

R: Yes, she had one, too.

M: Did she?

R: We used to wear them when we served the banquets.

M: What color was it?

R: They are usually white with red embroidery.

M: You did not get it dirty quick, did you?

R: No.

M: I see.

R: Like I said, they used to have Romanian Day in the summer.

M: Were only Romanians allowed to go?

R: No, it was pretty much open to anybody else. I mean, you could bring outsiders if they wanted to come. They would advertise. So, if anybody would be interested, they would not stop them from coming.

M: Where did they have it when you were young?

R: Well, when I was real young, they used to hold it at Idora Park.

M: Oh, really?

R: Since then they have had it at various private places, like at lakes. Then it would be open to the surrounding area, not just Youngstown. It would be Warren, Canton, Akron, Salem, you know. Everybody in the surrounding community would be invited. Sometimes they even had it at Yankee Lake. I remember going out there.

M: Would they dress up in costumes there, too, some of the people?

R: Yes.

M: I do not mean all of the people, but some of them.

R: Not all of the people, but some of them would. The ones that would be doing most of the dancing. They would dress up in their costumes. But basically it was Romanian music. It was not too many other types of music.

M: Now, you know what Romanian music sounds like, and you know what music today sounds like. Can you compare it to any of the music of today? What would some of that music might have sounded like? I know that is a tough question.

R: Some of the music we have today is just noise. I cannot really describe our music. It is just the feeling that it gives you. I am not the kind of person who can listen to our kind of music and stand still.

M: You mean the style of the music?

R: Yes, the livelihood makes you tap your foot.

M: Does it compare to the Greek music, or Russian or anything?

R: Yes, some of them are very similar. Some of the Greek numbers are similar to some of the melodies we have, and also some of the Hungarians might be similar.

M: I see.

R: I can hear some of the Greek's music that will sound similar to ours.

M: Can you recall any of the kind of dances that they would dance, any names of them?

R: For all I know, they all had names, but I would just get up and dance. I mean, you just sort of go when you are young and are learning to dance. They just sort of grab you by the wing and pick you up. You just imitate; you just imitate whatever you see going around you, and that is the way that you learn.

M: I see.

R: There are probably at least a dozen or more different types of dancing. Some you do just by the two of you, and some of you do with a whole group. They would do it in a circle.

M: Like square dancing.

R: Right.

M: Have you done any of that lately?

R: Not lately, because we just have not had much occasion. We usually do most of it at weddings, or when we have the conventions, if they are in this area and we go.

M: I see. What is your vision of the church, the Holy Trinity Romanian Orthodox Church, that is? What is your vision of the church? This is the question that Father John liked me to ask a lot of the people.

R: He is not just talking about the Orthodox Church, but our church specifically?

M: Yes, the Romanian Orthodox Church, to be specific.

R: Well, in my opinion, any church is dependent upon the people that are in it. So long as you have an interest there, you have young people coming in, young people staying in, marrying, having children and teaching the tradition, you will always have a church. Now the point being how do you hold their interest? I feel that the Orthodox church has a lot to offer because we have a tradition, we have our Canon laws, and we are not going to change the service that readily, just to meet everybody's whim. I think this is the highlight of the Orthodox church. If you can explain to somebody what we really believe in and why we do the things we do, it creates in you something very beautiful. Once they come to our church, they can feel the tradition there, the oldness of the church. If they instill this into the children, this law for tradition, I think the church will always be.

M: What do you think the younger generation's vision of the church is? What would you say of, well, the younger teenagers and so forth? What do they view the church as, since you are previously a Sunday school teacher?

R: Well, at first when I talked to some of the children -- first it was the older children in seventh grade and up -- they were, to my surprise, very interested in the church. They were asking questions, not in relationship just to themselves, but it seemed to me that they were being asked by other children, perhaps in their school. What does your church believe in? What does your church do? These answers were necessary for them to be able to communicate to others. I think the interest was there, and they really wanted to know about the feast days, and they wanted to know about fasting. They were interested in the vestments that the priests wore. They were very interested in the laws of the church concerning marriage, divorce, children, et cetera. They had an interest, and I really feel that they would instill that to their children when they had them. We also had gotten into a lot of other little discussions.

M: Could you tell us a little bit about your Sunday school? What a typical teaching kind of day might have been like in the morning, I should say?

R: Well, basically, you started the class off by saying we would meet in the hall as a group. We would say our opening prayer together. Then we would go into the rooms and, pertaining to the lesson of the day, whatever it may be, sometimes the lessons followed the particular reading from the gospel for that Sunday. Sometimes they did not coincide.

M: Did you have a specific prayer that everybody followed when they all came to class?

R: Yes, it was an opening prayer that everybody said together.

M: I mean the other classes, too?

R: All the other classes, too, yes. Well, we read through the lesson first. Then there were usually a series of questions that followed the lesson.

M: Did you read it out loud to them, or did you just have them read it silently?

R: With the younger children, we usually took turns reading out loud. Then we would discuss what was read, and then there would be a series of questions pertaining to that lesson.

M: Was the material furnished to the children, or did they have to buy it themselves?

R: No, all the material was furnished to the children, and they tried to keep the books according to their age groups. They did not try to give a book that was under their age group or over their age group. Then they had other exercises in there, outside projects you could do to help them learn, such as making mobiles and coloring and making art projects which, you know, would be religiously oriented. You could also suggest they right term papers.

M: Did they enjoy writing term papers? Did they look down on it, since it was outside school?

R: I know in some of the other classes they did not particularly like it, but the age groups that I had, I did not give them any term papers.

M: I see.

R: But we did get in a lot of discussions, you know. Sometimes it was quite interesting to myself.

M: You learn from your classes.

R: I learned a lot from teaching, yes, because you never know what kind of questions they are going to ask. Sometimes you just take your religion for granted. You never really see it until you see it through their eyes.

M: Was there any discipline problems or anything with the children?

R: I did not have any; they were very behaved.

M: They were?



R: Yes.

M: That is wonderful.

R: Right.

M: Could you tell us what the classroom looked like inside? Was it old, or was it a modern type of set up?

R: No, they were relatively modern, the classrooms were in the basement.

M: Oh, where?

R: Of the church hall. We had tables with folding chairs. The teacher had a desk. She could sit, or she would hang about a blackboard. If it was necessary to use any maps to point out certain areas as you were talking about Palestine or whatever, then these were to the disposal of the teacher.

M: Those were maps that were pertaining to that time, or was it modern maps of now?

R: No, they were ancient maps.

M: I see.

R: Maps of the time.

M: Did you always say to understand a little bit of the history of that time?

R: I think if you pointed out the geographic location method, they had more of an insight of what you were trying to tell them. You will say the Jordan River. Now that does not mean too much, but if you would take out a map and actually show them, you know, where the location was, they could almost put themselves there. It made it much easier for teaching.

M: I see. Did you have chalkboards?

R: Yes, we had chalkboards, yes.

M: Is there anything else that you would like to tell us about Sunday school that you did not mention?

R: Not right now.

- M: How long did Sunday school last on each Sunday?
- R: It was one hour.
- M: One hour.
- R: From the way our set-up was, it was from 10:00 until 11:00. Then from 11:00 to 12:00 the children came up and came to the church to hear the rest of the liturgy.
- M: I see. Now, is Sunday school compulsory for all the children of your church, or is it up to those who want to attend?
- R: It was not compulsory; it was highly suggested that they bring the children to Sunday school to learn about their religion, learn about their church. Sunday schools went from the beginning of October through the first part of June.
- M: Now, did you teach, more or less, Orthodoxy, or did you teach also some Romanian culture aspects to the children?
- R: Basically, you were teaching Orthodox religion with accent of the Romanian.
- M: So you correlated a little bit.
- R: It was correlation.
- M: What did you teach them about the culture, may I ask?
- R: Well, we would mention about the foods that we eat and why we have certain costumes; we explained to them about baptism and what each function of the rite was, the use of the water, and the use of the oils. We explained to them the marriage ceremony and Holy Communion was highly stressed and Holy unction.
- M: Did you have that in a teacher's manual? How did you find information for it?
- R: Most of it was in a teacher's manual. It was kind of repetitious. Each class should have gotten a little bit of that because you never have enough. So you could find most of that material in your teaching manual for that particular issue. But if you wanted to delve into it a little bit more, there was also other books that the priest would give you that you could read as a teacher, to be able to delve into it more.
- M: Alright, Georgia, did you have any meetings with the minister or priest and find out basically what he wanted to be done in Sunday school?

R: Right, before the classes started, he had a meeting with the teachers and would assign each teacher a specific class. He would give your reading material to you, and then periodically throughout the term, he would have meetings with the Sunday school teachers to see if there were any problems with the children or if you were having any problems or whether there were any suggestions that you could make to make it a better year. This would be talked about.

M: Did you ever have the children do any drawing or anything?

R: Yes. They made drawings; they made mobiles. We also had other little projects going. The smaller children, I think it was necessary because you have to keep their attention span.

M: Yes.

R: The older children, you could get by with just lecturing or discussing and reading.

M: What about singing? Did you ever sing any songs in Sunday school? Did you teach them any songs?

R: No, not from my class. No, we did not do any singing.

M: How about any other classes? Do you know?

R: Yes, they did, because they used to sing songs at Christmas time and put on plays.

M: Those would be the old ones, then?

R: Sometimes they were younger ones, too. Of course, they practiced for this.

M: Would they sing in Romanian or in English, or both?

R: Both.

M: Do you think the children knew what they were singing in Romanian? Or was it just a bunch of words that they were saying?

R: They probably explained it to them.

M: So they had an understanding, as far as what some of the words meant.

R: Right.

- M: In the Sunday school class itself, to determine the direction of the children, were there any types of examinations of anything given to them? Were they progressed according to age level?
- R: Smaller children, they did not give examinations. I think this was arbitrary to the teacher. When I was teaching Sunday school, Father Lazar denounced that they be given tests. We had one teacher who gave his class tests; two tests, like a midterm and a final. This was arbitrary -- it was not necessary. Usually, if you asked them a question at the end of the term that pertained to something that they should have remembered from the beginning, that was enough proof whether the message got across.
- M: Did they receive anything at the end of the church to show that they had completed a year of Sunday school?
- R: Yes. They got a certificate of attendance.
- M: I see.
- R: And recognition that they came.
- M: You mentioned that they liked to sing some Romanian songs for different events, like Christmas time. Where did they sing these songs? Did they sing them in church, or did they sing them at parties?
- R: They sang them at church, in the social hall. We usually had a little play. They would sing songs, and then they would also sing them in the church proper, around the Christmas tree that was near the altar.
- M: Now, those plays that they put on, were they referring to the birth of Jesus?
- R: More or less, they were religious plays.
- M: They were religious.
- R: Usually about the birth of Jesus.
- M: Did you teach them any Romanian words at all, other than singing Romanian words in Sunday school? Did any other teachers teach them some of the words?
- R: No. I do not think we were that much emphasizing teaching the Romanian language. We were there to teach them about the church's teachings.

- M: I understand, but do you think that if they would teach a few words ever other Sunday, or every Sunday, one or two words, that it might help the children when they go inside church and hear the liturgy done in Romanian? They might pick up a few words instead of tuning out what is being said.
- R: Yes, it would probably be very, very beneficial. Some of the younger children do not understand any Romanian, not even to hear a Romanian word. They do not even understand hearing what they words mean.
- M: In other words, maybe if they would be taught a few words, they could listen to see how many words they could pick out, even though they do not understand what is going on exactly. That would hold some of the younger children's attention as well.
- R: Right.
- M: How would you try to get some of the teenagers to attend Sunday school because, as we were just talking moments ago, their knowledge of the Romanian language is almost nil. They do not want to go and listen to something they do not understand, and many of them do not even attend. Would you have any idea of how it could be that these children could be, as many teachers say, motivated to attend Sunday school?
- R: Well, we have a young group organization here that we call AROY [American Romanian Orthodox Youth]. They are highly encouraged to join that. They get involved socially.
- M: Do you know how old they could be to join?
- R: Something like 12 or 13.
- M: I heard it was about 12.
- R: 11, 12, something like that. Up to early 20's. I mean, you could be in it now if you wanted to.
- M: I am a member.
- R: They get them active in service to the church, number one -- serving at banquets, helping clean up. Then they also have their own parties that they sponsor to make fund raising. So this gives them responsibility of how to organize a picnic or a party. They have to learn how to organize the food, the beverage, the entertainment, the clean up. Then they also go on field trips.

M: Do they teach them any Romanian culture, do you know, like singing or dancing?

R: Yes, they are also getting that now. I try to get them together as a group to learn to sing so that they can be very definite if they want to go into choir. They also teach them by going around to different functions as an AROY group. They learn to do the dances and they learn the culture this way. If they encourage the young group to stick together like that and have activities all the time that they could go to not just once in a while, because they lose interest by that. If they have them active and let them make their own fun, I think this will keep them in the church and also, maybe if there are other teenagers that are not coming to church, they may say, "Hey, come along; we have a lot of fun." Just by talking to one another, they may get other children interested in it.

M: What if some of them decided that they want to have fun downstairs and play ping pong while the services are going on instead of going to Sunday school and to the service?

R: They would really abruptly be told about it. We do have some of those functions there to help the children be entertained during a banquet or something because they sometimes serve the children now in the classrooms. But ping pong would definitely be after the church services. Some of them would be told about it.

M: Are you sure?

R: I am sure of it.

M: Regarding what I was asking pertaining to Sunday school, it is basically that you try to motivate the children to come because there could be some problems that develop once in a while. I was just wondering if you could think of anything that might motivate the parents and the children to participate a little bit more fully in it? When you were first teaching, what was the motivation of the children then? Were they eager to come to Sunday school?

R: Well, my first class, I had seventh grade and up. They were very eager to come. There were several times when it was time to go up into the church proper to hear the rest of the liturgy. They were kind of hesitant to go up. They wanted to stay. I had their interest, and I do not know if it was their age group, that they were thirsty, or what. Then the attendance just sort of dropped off.

M: Did it drop off during the winter months, or was it toward the end?

R: NO, that class stuck it out, and they enjoyed. They were eager to come back the next year, and I had them two years in a row.

M: I see.

R: All the attendance fell off the third year, even the younger children.

M: I see.

R: So it is a problem. We do not know what to do about it. You have to motivate the parents because they are the ones that bring the children.

M: Do you think that by having the children putting on plays a little bit more might motivate the parents to bring the child so that the child could practice so that he could see his child's performance and say, "Oh, look; there is my child over there." Do you think that might help?

R: Well, it might; I do not know. I think it might be beneficial to have an adult Sunday school.

M: Do you think so?

R: Once the parents realize that there is a benefit in being a pupil themselves, they might be motivated to bring the children to learn the same thing and not wait until they are an adult.

M: Do you think it might be advisable then, as some public schools have teacher aides to help out in a classroom, that maybe Sunday school provide or get a few mothers, or maybe a few dads, to come and act like teacher aides and work with the children and so forth?

R: That is a good suggestion, if we can get all the people involved that would be needed.

M: I see.

R: That is the problem. They usually say that they love to help you out but that they do not have time. I mean, it does take a little preparation on the teacher's part to really do a good job. You cannot go into the class and just sit and read.

M: Right. Did you prepare it the day before?

R: Usually a couple of days before, I would read over the lesson and look over the questions, and if there were any material that I needed such a paper, scissors and stuff like that, I made sure that all those materials were available of Sunday.

- M: Did the church provide, or did you have to provide for that?
- R: No, the church provided all of our equipment, most of equipment. If I wanted to do an extra project and the materials were not available at the church, I would provide it.
- M: What changes would you like to see occur in relation to today's Romanian community in Mahoning County? Would you like to see any changes? Would you like to see it continue or revert back to what it might have been when you were small? Do you have any ideas on that question?
- R: Well, I would like to see more intermingling of the different nationalities. I have been to other functions where different nationalities were, and they played music from the different nationalities. It was really enjoyable. When you sit down and talk to the different nationalities about their foods, about their particular customs, you learn to appreciate people more. I think we could grow if we had more community affairs, social gatherings.
- M: In other words, share the Romanian culture with others and learn their culture a little bit, too.
- R: Right, and keep it alive.
- M: I see.
- R: Keep it alive.
- M: What about the church on Wick Avenue, the Holy Trinity Romanian Orthodox Church? Would you like to see any changes occur regarding that? I know there has been some changes now in that the language has changed, more or less, from a complete liturgy in Romanian, to half and half or Romanian and English. Would you like to see any of that further?
- R: I think it would be beneficial if the priest took out maybe one Sunday a month and explained to the whole congregation one aspect of the service.
- M: I see.
- R: Father Lazar, when he came, started doing that. The people really enjoyed that. I am not against having the service in half English and half Romanian, because I think everybody is pleased then. The older people who basically talk mostly Romanian, get their share, and then the younger people who do not understand Romanian that well get their share in English.



- M: Would you like to see it done entirely in English or do you think that might be a hardship on the elders?
- R: Oh, I think it would be a hardship. I do not really have a preference, really. I enjoy the way it is, maybe once in a while to have a change, to have the service in English, would be something to hear.
- M: Can you describe a little bit for us what the church looks like inside, where the altar is and all that? Can you visualize that a little bit?
- R: Well, you walk in either from the side door or the side door, from the social hall. You encounter a little foyer there that has two stands of candles that you can light for whatever purpose you want.
- M: I see.
- R: Then there is a stand there with an icon that you should venerate before entering the church proper. Then we have a series of pews. Then the altar is designed with a lot of wood sculpturing around the doors and around the icons. There are two doors that open up into the altar in the back. They have icons of angels. Then we have the Patron Saint on one side, and there is a series of paintings with Christ and his mother. Then above that there is a series of icons portraying the life of Christ from his birth to his death. Above that are icons of the twelve apostles. Then in the back, which is shown on the dome part of the altar behind the doors is an icon of Christ sitting at the right of God. For those that do not know what an icon is, it is not just an ordinary painting. There are certain stipulations to painting an icon. Some of them are painted by monks. They have a series of things that they do before they prepare to paint. They fast and they pray and there are certain elements that go into the paint. It is more than just a painting; it is alive. It is very beautiful.
- M: I see. Did your grandparents or parents ever tell you anything about what the church on Wilson Avenue appeared like?
- R: I have heard them talk about the description of the church inside.
- M: Does it compare to this church a little bit?
- R: I could not tell you. I do not think they really stressed that upon me that much. I knew it was a smaller church.
- M: Could you tell us something about your job?

R: Well, I work at St. Elizabeth Hospital in special chemistry in the laboratory. I am a medical technologist. Primarily, I work just five days a week and one weekend a month. The test that we do in my apartment, not that they are special, but they are lengthy tests, diagnostic clinical tests.

M: For different diseases?

R: Right. We would test blood and urine, sweat, and most of the procedures are only done a couple of times a week because of the time involvement. They take anywhere from 45 minutes to two days to do. They are screening tests for lipid studies. This is to diagnose cardiovascular diseases. We do iron studies to find out if there is a problem there. We do most of the work, or what we call electrophoretic work, where you apply your sample that you are examining on a type of media and put it into a solution which you call a buffer. Then we submit current to it so that you have a movement of particles. Then all you have to do is stain it and quantitate it and be able to give a result to the doctor. So we have a lot of electrophoretic methods in there. This is where time is involved in the work.

M: What hospital is this again?

M: St. Elizabeth's Hospital.

M: St. Elizabeth's.

R: It is very rewarding, not only in my regular work, but I am involved in a teaching program. We have a school of medical technology. Right now we have 12 students. With my department, they spend one month. So you are involved in teaching them.

M: They watch you?

R: They watch us; they ask questions. They perform.

M: So it is like student teaching.

R: Right. And they also are given oral and written exams in the department. So this is an added feature to your job. You have a student with you every day because of the involvement of having twelve students.

M: Well, is there anything else that you would like to add that you could think of?

R: Not really. I just enjoyed the interview.

M: Thank you very much.

End of Interview