

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Russian Immigrant Project

Memories of a Russian Immigrant

O. H. 590

ANDREW HRIBKO

Interviewed

by

Randall Dicks

on

August 17, 1974

ANDREW HRIBKO

Andrew Hribko was born in White Russia, Minsk on November 9, 1896, the son of Nikolai and Nadia Hribko. He worked as a child on his father's farm and at a glass factory in Russia. In November, 1905, Mr. Hribko was a spectator at one of the riots occurring throughout Russia during the revolution after the Russo-Japanese War. As a sixteen year old youth he came to the United States in 1912. Dissatisfaction with employment in a sawmill in Dendron, Virginia induced him to move to Youngstown, Ohio in 1914. While in Youngstown Mr. Hribko worked as a busboy in the Tod House, a baker in Hotel Ohio, and a cook at the Warren Park Hotel. For a brief period he went to New York, got married, but eventually returned to Youngstown. He hauled coal in 1926 for the Independent Coal Company.

Mr. Hribko retired in 1961 and he now enjoys carpentry work such as cabinet and benchmaking. He is a member of Nativity of Christ Church and has a son Frank and a daughter Mary.

Jeanne Ontko

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

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INTERVIEWEE: ANDREW HRIBKO

INTERVIEWER: Randall Dicks

SUBJECT: Minsk, Emigration, Revolution of 1905, Youngstown
in days past

DATE: August 17, 1974

D: This is an interview for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program on Russian Immigrants, on August 17, 1974, with Andrew Hribko. He is being interviewed by Randall Dicks.

We could begin, Mr. Hribko, if you would tell me where and when you were born and who your parents were and what they did.

H: I am Andrew Hribko and I was born in 1896 on November 9th in White Russia, Minsk. We lived on a farm. I went to school in town, which was only about two miles from our village, Igumin. I came to this country when I was sixteen years old. My life was terrible in Russia. My father had a big farm. He used to hide fifteen or twenty ladies seasonally on the farm. When I was eight years old, I used to come from school and the first thing I had to do was take care of the cows, horses, sheep and pigs. When I got up in the morning I had to help my mother and then take my books and go to school. The only time I had to sleep was never more than six hours.

In the summertime I took the horse overnight out to pasture in the woods. There was nothing but woods over there. Farms, and then around the farms were the woods. It used to be two o'clock in the morning when the kids went to sleep; at four o'clock I had to bring the horses back. If I couldn't find the horses in the woods and come home, my father got mad. He said I had to have the horses.

Sometimes I sat on the bench in my house and I would wish I would die. This is what my life was. Anyway, I wanted to

get away from the farm. I was biking 79 miles to a big city. I got a job in a glass factory and worked there for about three weeks until my father found me. When my father found me, he took me home. When he took me home, I said, "Father, I'm going to jump in the river!" We had a river right behind our house, close, only about 300 feet. I said, "I'm not going to be on the farm anymore!" Father decided that I could go.

I was sixteen years old November 9, 1912, and on December 26th I came to this country. When I came to this country I didn't have anybody here, no brothers, no relatives, no one. When you come from a foreign country, you might as well have no tongue; you have no mouth to talk. I worked in the woods in Dendron, Virginia. There were five company houses with a bunch of Russian fellows over there. We took a freight train that hauled logs from the woods to the sawmill. If it rained they would give us a boxcar; if it was a dry day we were on flat cars. At 5:00 a.m. we had to be there when the train went by, so we could get on the cars. It would take us two hours to get to the woods where we cut the trees down. It's about sixteen miles from North Carolina and Virginia. We got there about 7:00 a.m. We worked daylight. We knew what time it was, but it was not time to quit.

The trains load cars and take them to the mill and come back again. Sometimes when the engine would come in with the empty cars, there was another set of cars not loaded yet. We had to stay there until about 9:00 or 9:30 p.m. and then it would take us about two hours to get back to the station and we would walk for about twenty minutes. We got home at about 11:30 p.m. The next morning, we had to get up at 4:00 and would make a little coffee and at about 4:35 we would leave the house to catch the train.

I worked about one year then I decided that the United States is a little bigger than these farm houses, so I came to Youngstown. I came to Youngstown in 1914. The time was bad. Finally, I got a job in Tod House where I was a busboy. I worked there about thirteen months. Then Hotel Ohio was built so I went up there. At Tod House they paid twenty dollars a month; at Hotel Ohio they gave me thirty dollars a month in the bakery shop. I loved that job. I couldn't quit. In the bakery shop you have white pants and a white apron and on your shoes there was always a little bit of flour, no matter how careful you were.

There was a bathroom only about thirty feet from us, and everything in it was new. Everything was marble, nice, and clean. I had to go so I went up there and a Spanish fellow, heavysset, probably 25 or 28 years old, was mopping it. I

went in the booth and he saw that I put marks on his wet floor with the flour. I just sat on the bowl and he swung the mop, not with the stick but with the wet mop, and hit me over the head. He hit me again and again. I didn't even have a chance to button up my pants. I pulled my pants up, and I jumped on him, and beat him up so badly they had to call an ambulance to take him to the hospital. The baker, my boss, he heard the noise so he ran in right away and grabbed me and took my apron off and threw my jacket on me. I didn't have any time to change my pants and shoes; I had to really run from Hotel Ohio to Albert Street. That's a good 25 minutes to walk. I could take the streetcar, but I was afraid my hands were all bloody. Some drops were on my face. I had to leave that good job.

When I got home, this baker at quitting time he came up; he knew where I lived and said, "Andy, don't come back. There are about five hundred Spanish with their knives all around. They think that you're inside. Policemen chase them, but they can't chase them away." My cousin, Jake, fixed me up. He gave me this derby hat and a false moustache, and fixed me up like a monkey.

I went up to the agency and the agency gave me a job in the Warren Park Hotel. When I got there, I got a good job again. I was the second cook. I worked there when I was young and I didn't have enough friends. I quit. I worked there about a year and quit and went to New York. I went to New York and got married there. I came back here to Youngstown in 1917 in November. I got a job the next day and my wife came. We had our son, Frank, in 1917 on December 16th.

Back to Russia, we had a farm and we were pretty well off. I wouldn't say we were rich, but my father always had 18 to 20 cows and 4 horses. It was really pretty good, only we had to work too hard. We didn't have any time like our neighbor's boys to go out and play; we had to work. The people over there were very nice. Over here, no matter if you're young or old, even young people, they have to have a car. They have to have a car to go out someplace only to enjoy. Over there, it's different, all young people, even old people, they come out on the street. They have benches all summer, and in the winter, they take the benches away. By the house they sing music and they talk. Everything is different. It's like a different world. Now I'm getting old. I'm going to be 78 November 9th. Old people over here, there is no use for them. Over there, the older you get, they take care of you. If you're the same age, they say, "Hi!" But to the older people they say, "Mister." You help them. They love the old people because they know they'll get old sometime.

The government, government was all right. The government should take some ground, some land from those big, rich people that have 5,000 maybe 25,000 square miles, maybe more than that. They have one village like Youngstown, the next village would be in Warren, the next in Sharon. They only have little places around the village. Even if we have to take our stock, like cows and horses, we have to take them to the rich people's pastures, woods. You have to pay for it. Sometimes if you wanted to pay, they wouldn't let you go in their woods. That's the only trouble. If our Czar would have listened to his senate, if he changed a little bit, and eased up to the poor people, he would still be living and I would be over there too. I love that country. Now I have my children; I have six grandchildren, and six great grandchildren. If I didn't have anybody here I would go back, get on my knees, and kiss the ground, just to be let to stay there. I love that country.

Now I'm an American citizen and if I went there they wouldn't take me back there. The first thing they would say is, "Where have you been when we needed you? You helped build the United States, now you come in when you can't work; you can't do anything, and you want us to feed you." I can't go back, so I might as well stay over here until the end.

I went to Minsk and some Jew from our town hired us with two horses and two loads to bring material from Minsk to Ugumin. Now Ugumin is called Chervin; they changed the name. We stayed overnight in a hotel and they had a place for horses, like a barn. This Jew was outside and he came in and said, "Nikolai, something happened over here in this burg." I said, "What is it?" He said, "So many people, I never saw that many people in my life, just packed like sardines in a can, like flies." My father grabbed me by my hand and we went up there. We got there and it wasn't too long, maybe two minutes. There were officers running with motorcycles, "Turn around, go back, why are you going?" My father grabbed me by the hand and he grabbed that Jew by the neck and said, "Come on, let's go back." He said, "No, I want to stay here." He said, "Come on, they're going to kill you." We started to walk back and he couldn't run because a lot of people had started to run back. The blood was going past, alongside, by the curb. The blood was running just like real heavy rain. The way the blood was running was just like rain water.

We went back to the hotel and they wouldn't let anyone leave town for three days. Every street, every road, the army was all around and had sealed them. After three days we left. We had the material on the wagons already. They made us take

every piece off the road, and they checked every piece to see if we had any weapons or guns. They killed about 24,000 or 25,000 people that day. The army came in right after my father said, "Let's go back, let's go back." When the officer told us to go back the army came in with the machine guns. So many were dead. I'll never forget, I watched a fellow on a six story building; he was a painter. He painted my roof. I watched him. Pretty soon, he rose; somebody didn't even catch him on top of the roof.

Russia is different from over here. Over here if a fellow loses his job he is worried; he doesn't know whether he is going to eat tomorrow. Over there, people never lose their job. Summer and winter, summer they work on the farm, and in winter we go out in the woods and cut the trees, drag them to the river. In the spring, we pushed it in the river, tied it, and took it to Germany through the rivers.

Weather over there is different. Over here one day you may have two feet of snow and the next day we have mud. Over there, I remember in wintertime we would get four or five feet of snow. We never watched the highway or roads, wherever you went was on the sled. Just get out in the field and wherever your eyes look you were right on top of it. The horses would sink a quarter of an inch right over the top.

It's a very, very nice country. People were not against the army; they were not against the Czar. The problem was that the people got squeezed a little too hard. My father was all right, but some of it was split into six parts of what we had. Some had only three acres of ground. There was no place to go. We used to pick apples and potatoes in the fall for 15¢ a day and for grown-up men they give you 40¢ a day. If you went in the woods to pick a basket of mushrooms and they caught you, they would put you in jail. I think that God gives the land for everyone, but only a few people take it.

Since 1905, after the Russo-Japanese War, that's when it started. Most of it started from the students. They went out and snuck into the rich people's land. They put some kind of paste in the wall wherever the sun would hit it then they got out of the woods. They have a magnifying glass and when it got real hot in the daytime, especially when there was a little wind, they put the magnifying glass there and it started a fire that started to burn the places.

If a man was in the army they paid him so much a month. They gave him a horse and a place to stay, but that doesn't tie it up. Every month there's more and more so I knew . . .

In 1912 even my father said, "You are going to be lucky to get away from here. Something is going to happen." Everybody knew something was going to happen.

In 1915 or 1916 people started **going** from villages and cutting trees down. By right, they were stealing it, but they said they weren't stealing it; it belonged to everybody. The police and army arrested so many that little by little they couldn't have a revolution until war. The only time they can have a revolution is when war would start with the Kaiser. When war would start with the Kaiser everyone was busy. They went from the front, from the Carpathian Mountains--it's in Czechoslovakia--and killed the Czar. I guess they killed the whole family. They knew if they didn't kill the Czar that he might come to this country, or England, any country. Still he would have propaganda if he lived, so they decided to kill him so they wouldn't have any propaganda. I'm against that. They should have had a revolution, but they shouldn't have killed the Czar.

I'll tell you how I decided to come to this country, the United States. There were a couple of fellows that came over here and worked in a stable for Jews. They cleaned the horses, took the manure out; when they came home they had different clothes; they bragged that they could speak English really well. All they knew was "Hello" and "Good-bye". I was crazy; my father said, "Before you go to the army." I was supposed to go to the army in 1917. He said, "Well, if you want to, you can go for one year. Then you will come back and you will be able to speak English." I'm crazy so I came. I thought sure, the wars will break out in 1914 and I would go back. My friends decided that I shouldn't go. If I went I might get killed. They said, "Well, when the war is over." When the war was over the revolution started. I didn't know where my father, mother, brothers, sisters were; they were all over the country. I didn't have an address or anything.

I went ahead and got married. When I got married I had my own family and became an American citizen so I think I have to spend the rest of my time over here.

I didn't tell you how I found this city when I came from Virginia. We didn't have any electricity in the house and no one had any rugs; there was a plain floor. There were no toilets, no water inside the house. The pumps were outside. Nobody had a driveway. There was Federal Street and half of Albert Street; the rest was all mud. No matter where you went it was all mud.

In 1926 I started hauling coal in trucks. I worked for the Independent Coal Company and a lot of places they sent you, you wished they had someplace hard so that you could get in the driveway because it was all mud; there was no driveway. The roads weren't paved, but they were solid. As soon as you got off the street you sank. Sometimes you would have to carry coal to the cellar. If you couldn't get out, you called the coal yard and they sent someone to get you out of the driveway. Even over here by Truscon Steel the streetcar was really low and they had running water. They had a bridge made of planks to go to Truscon Steel.

In a short time everything changed. We had electricity; we had water; we had gas; we had everything we needed over here. If we had all of that we couldn't afford it because we didn't make much. People over here made 15¢ an hour. In 1916 they made 17½¢ an hour. They worked ten and twelve hours a day. In Republic Rubber they paid 25¢ an hour for a couple of jobs, but you couldn't get in there. There was a high man, he was a Jew; he had a couple of men that he trusted and said, "Do you want a job?" They said, "Where?" He said, "Republic Rubber." They said, "Yes." He said, "Seventy-five dollars." They gave that man seventy-five dollars and he showed you to a higher man. The higher man hired you and gave you a job and you worked for about three months and then he fired you. He fired you and put another fellow in for seventy-five dollars. He did that for a long time until finally they caught up and fired him.

I had a few friends who had a visa for ninety days and they visited Russia, even my place. They were all over Russia, White Russia, and the Ukraine. They claimed they liked it. They said the people lived fine. They have everything they need. It's different now than it was before. Before, the Czar ran the country and we had two parties like we have over here, Republican and Democrat. If you were a Republican, no matter how much education you had you got a good job. If you were a Democrat and went to all the schools in Russia, you would not get half of what the Republican with low education got.

My sister has three sons. One is an engineer in Stalingrad, the oldest one; the next one is a professor in a university in Stalingrad; the youngest one is in Moscow; he is a professional doctor. When the Czar was there you couldn't get that far. No matter how much money you spent, as long as you were not a Republican, you couldn't get anywhere.

END OF INTERVIEW