

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Romanian Culture Project

Romanian Culture in Mahoning County

O. H. 450

TILLIE BADILA

Interviewed

by

John Muntean

on

February 26, 1976

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

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INTERVIEWEE: TILLIE BADILA

INTERVIEWER: John Muntean

SUBJECT: Church life, Choir, Sunday school, Priests

DATE: February 26, 1976

M: This is an interview with Mrs. Tillie Badila for the Youngstown State University Oral History Project regarding Romanian culture in Mahoning County, by John Muntean, at 1932 East Midlothian Boulevard, on February 26, 1976, at 8:00 p.m.

Mrs. Badila is presently the choir director at the Holy Trinity Romanian Orthodox Church at 626 Wick Avenue. Mrs. Badila, what part of Romania did you or your parents come from?

B: My parents came from Alvajulle. It's in Transylvania and I believe it's a large city in Romania.

M: Would it be more or less of a farm type of area?

B: All I can remember is my mother saying that she came from a large city.

M: Did they ever tell you what a day was like in Romania at all?

B: All I remember is my mother coming from a large family. They all didn't get to go to school. She, being the oldest, was sent out to work. I remember her telling me she had to work for a Jewish family. She had to cook, clean. That's how I know they were a poor family.

M: Did your parents get married in Romania?

B: No, they married here. My grandfather had been here and he liked it here. He asked my grandmother to send the oldest daughter, who was my mother, here because she would be able to find work here. Mother came and I guess my father

happened to know my grandfather. They were waiting for my mother to come off the boat and my dad said, "That's the girl I'm going to marry," and he did.

M: Where did she come in?

B: New York City.

M: Do you have any idea when they came?

B: I think they came in 1912.

M: It was more or less coming to a land of plenty that motivated your mother?

B: Right.

M: When you were a youngster what city were you living in?

B: I was born in Youngstown.

M: When you were in Youngstown as a little girl, did your family live in an area which was a Romanian neighborhood?

B: No, we lived out in the country.

M: Did they teach you how to speak Romanian when you were a youngster?

B: They had Romanian school on Saturdays when I was a youngster but living out in the country, I never had a chance to attend.

M: Did your parents talk Romanian at all?

B: At home they spoke Romanian all the time.

M: Did they ever mention that they had any problems in learning the new language?

B: No, mother and dad never had any difficulties because dad learned readily at work with the fellows in the mill. Mother had to go out to work too. She learned English quite fluently very easily.

M: Your father worked in Youngstown?

B: At Sheet & Tube mill.

M: That must have been quite a gathering of Romanian people.

B: Yes.

M: What church was operational at that time for the Romanian

Orthodox community?

B: At that time there was only one Orthodox church, Holy Trinity on Wilson Avenue. That's where I was baptized and I attended that church.

M: Can you tell us anything about that church? Can you recall anything?

B: I can remember as a youngster that the church was the focal point of our lives. In those days your family put religion on the top of the social scale; it was the most important thing in their lives. Their life centered around the church; that's where all their social activities were, where they met people and friends. I have my family grown and raised now. I noticed when I raised my family that church wasn't the most important thing because you had children that were in different clubs, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts. You belonged to P.T.A. You belonged to mother's groups; you belonged to this and that. The children were so involved that the church was not the central part of their life anymore.

M: Going back to when you were a little girl, was there any Sunday school at all back then?

B: There was, but I couldn't attend. We lived so far away that we couldn't attend church all of the time.

M: Do you remember a choir at all?

B: My recollection of a choir is in 1929 or the early 1930's. My sisters belonged to the choir and then I joined the choir in about 1937.

M: Who was minister at the time back in the 1930's?

B: I remember going to church with a Father Holdar. After Father Holdar I remember Father Stanila who was our priest for many years.

M: Did those men go to another area, or were they of old age and passed away?

B: I guess Father Holdar went to another church.

M: Father Stanila must have been a very young man.

B: He was. He was very good. He was good for our church because he was a good leader. I think he was a terrific leader. Of course, he had his enemies. They had their debates too.

M: I understand that his wife was very influential in church

goings too.

B: I wouldn't say that she controlled him, but she took care of many things in the church so that he was free for religion; that was his all it seemed more or less. She was a wonderful person. Some people didn't care for her, but she would remember all of your family, remember to ask you how everybody was. We miss that. She seemed to be so genuinely interested in you.

M: She made everybody fell welcome?

B: Oh yes! She was very warmhearted.

M: When that church moved to the one on Wick Avenue was Father Stanila still in charge?

B: Yes, he was instrumental. Him, Mr. Fleaca, and Mr. Muntean, all of those old-timers, were quite influential to the church. They were interested in getting in that culture area; they were really thrilled to high heaven that they moved the church off of Wilson Avenue because the Serbian church was sold to the black people. We were the second church to move out because the black people bought our church. They built that little, brick complex that is there now. St. Stephen's, the church above our church, built that complex and they stayed there at St. Stephen's.

M: When did you first join the choir?

B: I joined the choir when I was a sophomore in high school and I've been in it ever since. I took time out to have three children.

M: Did the choir sing in English or was it entirely in Romanian?

B: We sang entirely in Romanian until Father Stanila's later years. He realized that he had to do something, so with Father Stanila, after the Lord's Prayer we started giving the responses in English. Then when Father Lazar came, he gave us more English. We started to recite the Creed in English. Romanian is recited up to the Creed; from the Creed it's in English. Now Father John had us doing the liturgy completely in English the last Sunday of the month.

M: In translating to English, who really does the translating of the old Romanian responses?

B: The songs that we have now, they hired this professor from Romania, Professor Tincoca. He was quite a professional man, a college professor. He majored in music so they had him translate the Romanian language into English.

M: Is he still in America now?

B: I think he went back to Romania. He went to Canada and I don't know whether he is still in Canada or Romania now.

Each church had their own music from perhaps, wherever the priest came from in Romania, so they would sing different melodies. They hired this professor to rewrite the music for all of the parishes so that we could all sing alike. We met at a congress on a Romanian Day; we could all sing the same music.

In translating, I would say one thing, the Romanian being a romance language somewhat like Latin, the words are more beautiful and easier to say in Romanian and when we translated those words into English it was just like opera; it is not as beautiful. It is harder to sing; the words are harder to say, and it doesn't come out quite as beautiful.

M: When you first belonged to the choir, were most of the members young, old, middle age, or was it a mixture?

B: When I joined the choir for the assembly we were all teenagers and some of them were in their twenties. I was just a young people's . . .

M: Do you have a lot of young people in there now?

B: No. We cannot get them interested. They will come for a few rehearsals, sing for a few times on Sunday, and then they are too involved. This one girl we had, now she was a beautiful soprano. She was a thrill to hear. We thought-- what an asset to the choir. Now she is a music major at Youngstown; she works and is so involved in other things that she can't make the rehearsals and she sometimes cannot make church. Like I said, their lives are so filled. I am 54 and I think we have a man who is 65 in the choir. We are trying to get the young people interested. It is difficult.

M: When I was involved I remember that Father Stanila used to have the children learn to sing some of the songs in Romanian, especially at Christmas time, to sing at the Christmas tree. I noticed that it is a little bit lacking now. Who would teach them to sing? Would it be the choir members like yourself, or would it be the Sunday school teachers?

B: At that time, they had some Sunday school teachers who would teach them the music. They try and still get them to sing the Christmas carols in Romanian.

M: I remember also at that time that many of the congregation would join in with the choir in singing throughout the church service, not only at Christmas time, but throughout the services throughout the year. Do you have any idea why

it has stopped? Is it because of the different priests that have come in or because the people themselves have reacted that way?

- B: I think that it is difficult music and the congregation doesn't know it. I think that is why they don't sing as much now. We have been singing it for about six years now, so I think that the congregation is beginning to become familiar with it and they should. Years ago my mother-in-law used to tell me that when she first came here and Father Stanila was first at our church, the congregation would give the responses along with the choir.
- M: They also used to have cantors in front and they used to give a lot of responses. Do you have any knowledge of why there aren't any cantors anymore? I've noticed that there are maybe one or two; the choir has taken over. Is it due to the changes that have developed in the church itself or is it due to the fact that not too many people want to be cantors?
- B: I think to become a cantor would take years of study, to know your different chants; because with different holidays your responses change and not one took an interest to learn. The cantors were all in Romanian so the men, like my husband and these younger men, felt that they didn't know Romanian well enough or couldn't read music or what have you. Our cantors were all trained in Romanian. We had no English cantors.
- M: You are in charge of the choir. Do you rehearse quite a bit?
- B: We hold rehearsals once a week; we used to hold them once a week and everyone would come. Now there seems to be a laxity in people coming to rehearsals so we discontinued. Right now we have rehearsals because they are getting ready for Lent and Easter. I think after that if very few people come, we will do away with rehearsals until another holiday comes up.
- M: When you used to have rehearsals prior to now, say at the time of Father Stanila and the beginning of Father Lazar, what was the procedure? Would people just gather and sing a song together or would you have certain people sing? Would you explain it?
- B: When Father Stanila was here we had three-part melody which was very simple. We rehearsed each part singly, and then when this four-part music came we had to rehearse or practice each part until we knew our part, and then we put the four parts together. The thing is a cappella singing is quite difficult because it is hard to stay in tune or in key, so when Bob Stanila came here someone remarked that we should have an organ. He let us have an organ drive; he was liberal in his ideas. He said that if we wanted an organ we could get

an organ for church. So we had an organ drive and got an organ. They used it in church while Father Stanila was here. In our liturgy book there is a little note in the preface that says that an organ is allowed in the Orthodox church only as background music. It should be solo. When Father Lazar came, he was more of a conservative and strict Orthodox so he said that there will be no musical instruments in the church. He wouldn't allow the organ to be played during the services. Now we have a new priest and we will have to wait and see what the outcome will be, whether we will be allowed to use the organ or not with the new priest. As of now, we sing a cappella.

The bishop gave strict orders a few conference meetings ago that from now on the organ must be removed from the church. He said there is no room for organs in the Romanian Orthodox churches. It can be used as background music. You would have to get an organist.

M: Did they play it at all at Romanian weddings?

B: Yes.

M: Who plays it now?

B: Judy Shonn and I have played it once or twice. Judy is an accomplished musician whereas I am not.

M: You are being a little bit too lax because I have heard you sing and you know what you are doing. In regards to the choir, I would like to know if you think Romanian in the future will be part of the choir responses or do you think that in the future, five or ten years from now, Romanian will be omitted and the responses will be entirely in English?

B: I am afraid of that. It has come to that, where some of our choir members are different nationalities and even the young men, Jerry Broad for instance, who speaks very little English, finds it difficult to say the Romanian words as easy as we do. I am afraid that it will just have to come to completely English in five or ten years from now. They will be very Romanians.

M: Are you affiliated with the women's club at all?

B: I've been training for about seven years for the women's auxiliary.

M: Could you tell us a little bit about that club?

B: The name of it is Carmen Sylva. She must have been a famous person or Romanian, otherwise I don't know why they would name it after a lady. As far as our purpose to the church,

we are supposed to help the men and help the church in any way possible.

M: I noticed that they have dinners which we Romanians call massas and many times the Romanian women help out in cooking. Are some of the dishes that they cook Romanian?

B: Pigs in a blanket is a Romanian dish. I think our church has American cooking more than anything else, or even Italian because we have had spaghetti and meatballs at our church.

M: When you were a young girl, did your mother teach you how to cook some Romanian dishes?

B: I just learned by watching her and then picked it up.

M: In working with this Romanian group of women when they are preparing the pigs in a blanket and so forth, do the younger teenage girls help out? Do they have any knowledge of Romanian cooking?

B: If they do they get it from the home because at church the older women do cooking; the younger ones serve.

M: They don't get the experience like an apprenticeship?

B: No, nothing in the kitchen at all.

M: Do you think that if they would help a little bit in the kitchen, it would help them?

B: They learn some.

M: Has the women's club had any function with the Sunday school or anything in the past for anything that you can remember?

B: Functions, no, except the other purpose for a few years was they used to furnish the Sunday school supplies; that was one of their functions. But the church is taking care of that now.

M: Wasn't Mrs. Stanila affiliated with that club?

B: Yes. She was president of the club as long as she was the priest's wife at our church, as long as they were at our church; she was the president of the auxiliary.

M: So then the church and this women's club were very close?

B: Definitely, yes.

- M: So this club was probably more closely associated with your church?
- B: Oh yes, because if the church needs any money we always give them the money for any projects; we always donate to help them.
- M: Where do you raise a lot of this money?
- B: The biggest, greatest majority, comes from our dinners.
- M: What dinners do you provide throughout the year? Are there any special holidays or something that you have dinners for?
- B: Yes. There's a Saint's dinner in January. There is a pre-Lenten dinner always the first Sunday of Lent, or rather before Lent starts. There's an annual Palm Sunday dinner, annual Mother's Day dinner, our church anniversary which is in September, and maybe another dinner thrown in somewhere. There are about five or six annual dinners that we have.
- M: Going back to the choir for one or two more questions, when it comes to different holidays of the year--we already talked about Christmas, but for around Easter time or Lent--are there any specific changes that have transpired in the singing or responses?
- B: Your music changes for every holiday. You have different responses and different melodies. They are written in the minor key and they are sort of mournful; they are beautiful melodies. Yes, your music does change for every holiday. That's where it is hard because if your choir doesn't rehearse enough, they won't know what responses to sing.
- M: What advice would you give to a teacher, a person in charge of a choir at church, in organizing a choir and carrying it through? You have had tremendous experience with it now. Would you give them any advice?
- B: Advice I couldn't give, but I would suggest that if they could only get them to come out and practice, they would have a wonderful choir.
- M: In other words, practice is the key?
- B: Yes, it is. How are you going to get them interested to give up that one evening every week to come to rehearsal?
- M: Was it possible to have choir practice after church or were most people against that idea?
- B: They are so anxious to get home and eat their lunch or dinner.

M: So the only practice they get is when they are singing?

B: That's right. That is their rehearsal, at church. Instead of coming to choir rehearsal one night to get ready for church, they come and rehearse at church between services. It doesn't seem right to me.

M: How many people do you have in the choir, Mrs. Badila?

B: There were only three young people then one quit coming because she was too busy, so that makes two young ones. The rest are all married women in their late thirties.

M: About how many members are there in the choir?

B: When everyone is in attendance, we have twenty-one members. If we have twelve at church on Sunday, it sounds very good, but on a holiday you will have all of them there.

M: Do you have any microphones up there to help project their voices or just your own . . .

B: Our acoustics are very good in the church. Since we are up in the choir loft, your tone, the sound, carries out real nice throughout the church. It is beautiful.

M: In the Romanian culture itself, have you seen any changes over the years that have occurred not only in our church but in the Romanian society itself?

B: Yes. I think that we are sort of getting away from it, sort of losing it. I went to a convention in Canada a few years back and I was amazed. This was a region of Saskatchewan and I was amazed at how Romanian they still were. We had dinner at a lodge or a society in a hall there, and their costumes and their dancing and their singing, their choral singing, was just a thrill to hear. When everybody came to the hall, they stood up and they all sang in Romanian; it was a thrill because we lack that feeling here.

M: You say that Romanian is a romance language. What language would it be very closely related to?

B: Latin.

M: During Father Ștanila's time, when the church services were conducted more or less in Romanian, was there any feeling at that time by the young people to do away with this?

B: Yes. You heard people give comments that we should switch to the English which is what we did when this Professor Tincoca wrote the music that he translated. It took awhile for that transition to take place.

M: What was the feeling of some of the older people of the church?

B: They resented the changes as all do. I resent change; I am older now. I think they felt bad; even today you hear people say why is the episcopal read in English, why is the gospel read in English, why don't we have it one Sunday in Romanian and one Sunday in English.

M: Do you think that the fact that many of the Romanians have married out of their nationality has had a lot to do with some of the change that has occurred?

B: Yes, definitely. I think nationwide that has been part of it. I had three children. My third one is getting married and it is not to a Romanian. But they go to the Romanian church in Washington, D.C.

M: Is that church in Washington, D.C. entirely in English or is it in Romanian too, do you have any idea?

B: It's both.

M: He has both types in the services.

B: And the choir can sing English and Romanian too.

M: They are almost in the same state as we are.

B: My son and daughter-in-law sing in the choir in Washington, D.C. They sing beautiful; the choir is beautiful.

M: Can you think of anything else that you might like to cover that we haven't mentioned at all?

B: I'll probably think of something after the tape is over.

Has anybody ever told you about the AROY organization at our church? The American Romanian Orthodox Young. Our bishop in Jackson, Michigan, started this about twenty-five years ago. It is something to hold our young people together. They have their conventions, national conventions, throughout the nation. I think that is something wonderful because they want, as I understand, the AROY's to have their choir to sing the responses to the liturgy on the Fourth of July, on that Sunday.

M: Will that be in English or Romanian?

B: I think it will be in English. I am very sure.

M: What I understand from reading newspapers and going to school, it is not only our church that has that experience of trying

to get youngsters or young adults to go to church, it is prominent in other churches also. It is probably a fad that is going on now throughout the United States. There are students who like church and there are other ones who through having different classes and so forth start questioning the value of Christianity and are saying that no such thing exists. They are welcome to their own opinion on that, but they just don't go to church at all.

B: Right.

M: Thank you for this interview Mrs. Badila.

END OF INTERVIEW