

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Romanian Culture Project

Romanian Culture in Mahoning County

O. H. 455

ELI ROMAN

Interviewed

by

John Muntean

on

September 6, 1975

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

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INTERVIEWEE: ELI ROMAN

INTERVIEWER: John Muntean

SUBJECT: Romanian Churches, Priests, Organizations,  
Dances, Romanian Food

DATE: September 6, 1975

M: This is an interview with Eli Roman for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, regarding Romanian Culture in Mahoning County by John Muntean at 181 Roche Way, Boardman, Ohio on September 6, 1975, at 10:00 p.m.

Mr. Roman, what part of Romania did your parents come from?

R: My mother and father both came from the county of Sibiu, which is sort of like what Mahoning County is to the suburban areas in the city here. In other words, the city of Sibiu is the county seat, and my parents came from a little village. For example, like we would say Youngstown is the central part of the community and Boardman would be a suburb. My parents came from a small suburb of Sibiu, Romania, which we called Apold de Jos, Romania. Now we had two communities there: One from the upper part of the mountain and one from the lower part of the mountains. My parents came from the lower part, which is called Apold de Jos, Sibiu, Romania.

M: Was that area, more or less, a farming area?

R: It was mostly a farming area. They sowed all their own gardens; they have large gardens. They have acres and acres of farmland, and actually they were farmers. They raised everything that they ate. They had their own live-stock and this is typical living in the village, farmland and livestock.

M: Did your parents ever mention to you what a typical day might have been like in Romania?

- R: Oh, yes. I remember my mother would tell me of her life back home in Romania. As a youngster, she used to tell me that my grandfather used to get up at five o'clock in the morning and eat breakfast. After breakfast they would go out into the farms and plant the wheat, corn, potatoes, and everything that they needed for living. They would spend, maybe, four or five hours out in the farmlands and they would--just like you would in this country--take a break for an hour. You would eat lunch, and then after lunch, they would work and till the fields a little bit more. At evening they would come back from the field and take care of the livestock back at home. She used to tell me that they used to milk the cows. If they had any goats, they would milk the goats. They would feed the chickens. They had ducks and they prepared the ducks, chickens, and if they had geese, the geese. Of course, it wouldn't be a Balkan farmland or a farmer if you didn't have pigs too. So everything that they needed for livelihood--being that they had no other work or means of income--they had to raise everything to survive throughout the year.
- M: Did they sell some of the farm products, probably, to get some income?
- R: In the city of Sibiu, which is the largest part of the county, they would take livestock to the open air market, then sell it. Then this way they would sell it and then they would turn around and buy yarn and come back and knit their own clothes. If they had a little bit of extra money they would buy clothing at the department stores in Sibiu. They had all of the facilities there and all of the marketing there. What they could spare they sold and bought there in the open market. Things such as: salt, kerosene, and vinegar.
- M: Did they ever mention to you what they did for recreation over there? Did they have any type of Romanian dancing or anything?
- R: My mother and father were very lively people. They loved to mingle with the public. They were both good folk dancers and they both sang very well. The fact is that my father used to lead what was called the calus, ari. He would lead the people in the Romanian dances. He loved to be a leader and he always wanted to be in front, in the limelight. During the many evenings after work was done, they would go into the streets or out into the field and they would sing. They would dance and they would have a few drinks. They would call Ciobani (shepherd) and Tigani (gypsy). In other words, the Ciobani played the flute and bagpipe, and Tigani played the violin. Ciobani and Tigani were slang words for musicians. They would get together and they would play, dance, and sing. The fact is my father,

himself, also played the violin. Of course, he was not a master at the violin. In fact, he taught me the violin. He played the way he had heard it. In other words, he played by ear. When I was a youngster, he bought me a small size violin and he would play and I would follow him. Then the way we heard the music is the way we would play it. In other words, we used no notes. We played the way we felt. If the music was jolly, we would play in that manner. The same thing with our singing. A lot of our songs are of a happy nature or a jolly nature and we would sing it that way. A lot of songs were what we call doina. Some were happy songs, some were sad songs.

M: Were these songs written down or did you make the songs up as you went along?

R: A lot of the songs were handed down from their parents. They heard their parents sing them and they learned from them. A lot of the songs, especially Romanian songs, someone would sing a few lines and the first thing you knew, another man would join in and he would make up his own lines to the same tune. Then they would go, maybe, ten or fifteen minutes and just continually sing and do what they felt and put what they wanted to put in the music.

M: Did they ever describe to you what the environment looked like in Romania?

R: Oh, yes. I remember my father and mother both saying that many of the houses were constructed with mud and straw. We didn't have wooden floors like we have here in America. Our floors were dirt floors. Our beds were boards. They had sheets stuffed with straw and feathers. This was their mattress. Of course, they had a cast iron cooking stove in the kitchen, which also furnished heat for the rest of the house. In the wintertime, we really had to bundle up with our blankets. They used a lot of feather blankets in order to keep warm. Many times they would go to bed with half of their clothes on in order to keep warm during the night.

M: They used firewood?

R: Yes, they used a lot of firewood. They would cut their own firewood from the forest, haul it back in, and stack it there for winter use. Their forest was always cleaned of loose timber and twigs. Of course, none of the streets over there were paved. They were just like America, when it first started with immigrants. They had dirt roads, the same thing they have over there. Everything was dirt roads.

M: Did they use horse and buggy?

R: They used strictly horse and buggy. They used mules or boi.

M: Like oxen?

R: Like oxen, that's exactly right; an ox-drawn cart. They would transport back and forth this way.

To listen to her, I mean, you can really see the beauty of what they had there. I have asked mother many times, "Mom, why don't you go back and visit Romania where you came from, because after all, you are getting old and maybe you would love to see it. Just to go back home as a visit." Her remark is, "Son, why should I go and see what I left because the village has had very few changes. So, why go back and see. I would rather remember it the way it was and stay here in America because America is beautiful and I love it here."

M: In other words, they probably came to the United States for a better way of life?

R: They most certainly did. As different groups would come to this country, they wrote letters to their parents and their parents would tell the other parents and, of course, the children heard this. They used to tell them how the life in the United States was and how the work situation was. There was a lot of work. There were a lot of things to buy. The wages were very, very good, and at the same time they could save a little bit of money. What they did was to save a little bit of money, send the money back to Europe. Then they could bring their brother and sister over and this is how they immigrated to the United States. They would send money back and a few would come at a time.

M: Why do you suppose they came to the United States and not some other western country? Is it because the United States was known as the land of plenty?

R: The United States was known as the land of milk and honey. This was the land of opportunity. This was where the good life would be. They would have more freedom of speech, freedom of liberty, and religion. Of course, religion was no factor in Europe, in their days, because the people then were very, very religious. The fact is some of the people today are not as religious as they were in those days because we are getting farther away from it.

M: They didn't have any communist regime to suppress their religion then?

R: No. You will very seldom find, first of all, a poor Romanian, because Romanians know what it was like over there and they know what it was to struggle. They saved and put away for a rainy day. They would take care of themselves. They lived right. Secondly, check your

newspapers and see how many Romanian youths or Romanian-Americans are instigators or radicals in any of the American communities.

M: Very few.

R: Yes, very few, if any. You never see a Romanian or hear of a Romanian being sent to prison or a jail term, or causing any disturbances. They sort of keep to themselves. They like to keep to themselves, and they like to stay away from trouble. Let me put it this way, if trouble comes their way, they will not back down. They are very bullheaded. They will not back down from anybody. They don't care who it is. They don't care if they're Russians, Germans, or Japs. They're not taking anything from anybody. They are going to stand up for their rights and they are going to tell you about it too.

M: Do you have any idea when your parents came to this country?

R: I remember, vaguely. My mother came here in 1921. Forgive me, I remember now, she came during the First World War. My father came here around 1913; he was still very young. I remember him telling me about his brother being in the United States Army, but he did not go. First of all, he was not a citizen and my father came here right during World War I.

M: Did he have a brother here prior to his coming?

R: Yes, a brother John.

M: He sponsored your father coming over here?

R: Yes. His brother came over and then after my father came here, he sent money back over and his brother Mike came over. All three brothers came over. My mother came here about 1921 and they were married in 1922. I was the first son. I was born in 1923.

M: Your father and brothers came over. Did they come straight to the Youngstown area or did they go elsewhere?

R: When they came over here there was a large Romanian community in Youngstown. There was also one in Niles and in Warren. Well, most of the people came from the villages and settled in McDonald and Niles. They had their own Romanian society and Romanian Hall over there. They were all boarding. They were all living in boarding houses. They would live together. They worked together, lived together, and they spent all of their leisure time and all of their joyful time together.

M: Where did most of them work? Do you have any idea? Was it steel mills?

R: Yes, I remember my Uncle John Roman worked for the Powell Press Steel in Hubbard. The fact is he worked there around forty years before he retired about ten or fifteen years ago. My uncle John is now around eighty-three or eighty-four years old. I remember my father saying that he worked in the steel mills in Hubbard. He worked for the Sheet & Tube, the Hubbard blast furnace. He used to work in the blast furnace department. My mother worked for a few years at Ohio Leather in Girard. She also, at one time I remember when I was a youngster, while living on Moore Street in Hubbard, worked at the Powell Press Steel. My father worked there too. The fact is Mr. Nick Moga, a leader in the Romanian community in Hubbard, was a foreman in the Powell Press Steel. When these people came over from Europe, they couldn't speak English. It was hard for them to get a job. So they went to where the Romanians were working and usually they would have a leader, straw boss, or a foreman in these plants. Then each one would get him a job, then the plant would put these people with the Romanian foreman until they learned the English language. He would tell them in Romanian what to do. Eventually they learned the English language and they could get by on their own.

M: So that's how they really coped with learning the English language?

R: Right.

M: Also, it helped them to adjust to the American way of life then?

R: Yes. My dad worked in the mills until around 1932. In 1932, when the country went from dry to wet, after we had prohibition . . . my father worked during the prohibition era and there was a little bit of hanky-panky going on there. My father was a go-getter and he knew how to make a buck.

M: There were many of them.

R: He took part in it and I might as well admit it. We made a good living. It was good. My father had the guts to go out and make what he was doing.

M: He was thinking about his family?

R: That's exactly right and it was no crime unless you got caught. So then when the country went wet we had the first beer and wine liquor license in Hubbard, Ohio. We were one of the first owners of a tavern in Hubbard, Ohio. From 1923 to 1941 . . .

M: Did they serve food in there?

R: Yes.

M: Did they serve any Romanian food or mostly American food?

R: Let's put it this way, the sandwiches might have been American, but the food itself was Romanian. My mother always prepared Romanian dishes. When the customers would come in and they would smell the Romanian food, they would say, "Hey Liz, what do you have cooking in the kitchen?" She would say, "Pardon me, I have varsa impluta." Do you know what that is? It is stuffed cabbage. He would say, "Hey that smells good. Dish it out. I'm hungry." This is one of the main Romanian dishes; in fact, it is one of the special Romanian dishes. They liked it and my mother made a lot of it and believe me, we sold a lot of it in the tavern.

M: When you were a little child, a youngster, did they teach you any of the Romanian heritage? For instance, did you learn the Romanian language or the Romanian dances or songs or anything?

R: Well, being raised by my parents who were of foreign element, all of the conversation during all of the visitations was mostly Romanian. So actually everything was Romanian. The little bit of English that I picked up or learned was from the outside environment, my neighbors and school. Now, I remember, distinctly, when I attended first grade, they had to teach me English because everything I knew was in Romanian. That's all I heard around the house. Every place I visited was Romanian. We went to a lot of Romanian dances, weddings, christenings, and we would go to church and everything was said in Romanian. So naturally everything I learned was Romanian.

M: At these different events that you just mentioned over here, did they teach you to dance Romanian and so forth at these events, or did you learn it at home from your father whom you already mentioned was a leader in the sense of dances?

R: My father's brother-in-law, John Isac, which when translated in the English language is John Dafin, was one of the best Romanian dancers from Romania. He was a leader of the dancers and he taught my father. John Isac was the best. He was a little bit of a man: He was about five feet, five inches tall and was real thin. I mean, when he danced, when he jumped up in the air, when he did the dances, everybody would just stand back, admire him, and let him go. He was the best.

Getting back to Romanian dancing, we had a lot of dances



where the the boys and men would dance with themselves. We called it the Calusuari. It is slapping your feet, your shoes, jumping up in the air and hitting them. My father taught me these dances. A lot of the dances my mother would teach me. Of course, going to the Romanian dances, I would see the way the other ones were dancing and as youngsters we would join in at the tail end and imitate what we saw. This is how we learned. We watched their footwork and were taught how to go out there and do the footwork ourselves.

M: I know that you have a daughter, Judy. Did you teach her any of these dances or did she learn herself or from other groups or people?

R: Here again, I don't want to sound like . . . some people say he sounds like a damn hunkey, but I am very, very proud of my Romanian heritage. I went to all of them. God bless my wife, she is not Romanian, but my wife loves the Romanian people and the Romanian culture. We went to every one of them. Even when we were youngsters. My daughters, Judy and Elizabeth, especially Judy, would get right in there in the midst with the Romanian group. Of course, my daughter also took dancing lessons. She took modern tap, jazz, and ballet. My daughter Elizabeth is the same way. At one time, they had a dance group in Youngstown at Youngstown University. Her husband, Gary Scavnicky, who is now a doctor of languages and a professor at Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan, they had a Romanian dance group in Youngstown State University. My daughter Judy was a member of that dance group. This is back in the early 1960's.

M: Can you tell us something about how some of those early Romanian weddings or different events might have been like? Do you have any idea of what the culture might have been like, the Romanian culture? In other words, what kind of food might they have served? You already mentioned about the dances and the like.

R: I can remember very, very distinctly of the very, old Romanian weddings. When you walked in that hall and you heard these Romanian bands, it made your hair stand on end the way they played their music. I mean, right away they set the tempo and put you in a mood for dancing. The minute you walked into the wedding, the first thing you know, your friends would say, "Let's go to the bar." The first thing you did was go to the bar, let's be honest. They went to the bar and they bent a few elbows. Then pretty soon, you hear an announcement that the bar is cut off and we are going to eat now. So everybody leaves the bar and goes to the table and sits down.

M: They didn't have it buffet style?

R: Buffet style, you've got to be kidding. In those days, when someone got married, all of the ladies in the community prepared all of the food, which was stuffed cabbage cured in a crock primarily, and rice, and chicken. You would roast the chicken, make the rice, and stuff the cabbage, bring it to the hall where they would have hot plates to keep it warm. Then they would start the tables. Everything at the tables was home style. It was family style. They would set the plates right on the table and help yourself. Believe me, you dug in and you ate and it was always plentiful. Nobody at any of those weddings ever ran out of food.

M: Did they have any master of ceremonies at the weddings or receptions?

R: Yes. In the course of eating, they would take their silverware and beat it against the dishes. This was the signal that the groom had to kiss the bride. They would go back and forth with this and they would drive that groom nuts. Every he heard a cling, he would have to stop eating and kiss the bride.

When you were just about done eating, the master of ceremonies would get up and make an announcement. (I have also been the master of ceremonies). He would say, "We're gathered here for the wedding of so-and-so, and we're going to have to give them a little start." Hey, it's our tradition. We dug in our pockets and pulled out a few bills and made a little donation. They are going to come around to the table and solicit with pencil and paper and a dish. They are going to take the donations. In the meantime, I call out, "Nasa," and "Nasu," who are the best man and maid or matron of honor. They make the first donation. After all, in our tradition, if anything goes wrong with the marriage, if they have any problems, they go to the Nasu and Nasa. So they are like their mother and father. First you start with their donations (the nasi), and they would mention their names. They usually gave one hundred dollars. In those days, believe me a hundred dollars was a hell of a lot of money. This is the way they would go. Then they would go to the parents on the groom's side. They would make a donation and they would announce it. Then to the bride's side. Then they would go down to all their relatives: grandmother, grandfather, and cousins. They would all usually sit at the head table with the ushers and bridesmaids, maid of honor and best man. Then at the end of the dinner and the collection, they would announce that they had collected x amount of money and everyone would give a standing ovation and a good round of applause. They would announce the table clearing and then the orchestra started playing. Their music

was just out of this world. It was strictly the Romanian type from Europe.

M: One question before we get into that: At these early weddings, going back to when you were a child, do you recall if they had a wedding cake American style, with a bride and bridegroom on it or did they just have food served like . . .

R: As a youngster, to be honest with you, I actually don't recall any cakes being served or cut at the table. Everything served was homemade<sup>de</sup> pastry: nut breads, cheese cake, apple strudel, and all types of small pieces of pastry and cookies.

M: Is there anything else that you would like to mention about these types of events?

R: Yes. These Romanian weddings started on Saturday night, but that didn't mean that at eleven or twelve o'clock you went home. Hell no, half of them would be there until, maybe, Sunday afternoon.

M: Were the bride and bridegroom still there or had they left?

R: Some would still be there, but mostly they took off. The people however, still stayed there as long as there was food and drink and the orchestra was willing to stay. They would start singing and then they would start dancing their old dances from Europe. The men would do their dances and the women would do their dances. Then they would dance together and sing together. It would be, maybe, Sunday afternoon before they would come home. They used to tell me, in Europe when they had the weddings, they would start maybe on Friday nights and it wouldn't end until maybe Monday morning. It would be a two or three day event. The same thing with the baptisms in Europe, they were the same way.

M: Did everyone have these kinds of dinners for baptisms?

R: As a youngster I remember going to many baptisms, which had many people there. The relatives, the friends, and a lot of the more prominent Romanians attended. They would have a little bit of money and they would have a little orchestra. There again, along came the collection plate and you donated. Everybody in those days, believed in helping each other out. One way of helping each other was by making these collections.

M: Did they have any other type of function to gather money to help out?

R: In those days and even today, the church always had banquets. They always had banquets on Sundays after services. This was one way of raising extra money to pay all of the churches debts off and make extra money to meet our expenses. In the older days, the churches would also have dances on a Saturday night. During my youth, in the late twenties or early thirties, the local Romanian society, the Central Romanian Society, or the church would hold picnics, practically every Sunday.

We used to have picnics on the east side of Youngstown over on John White Road, in Hubbard, at the Pacura farm, at Mazora farm over in Yankee Lake, and Paul Jurgo's place over at Yankee Lake in Brookfield. The Romanians would gather together. They would have open bars and maybe a four, five, or six piece orchestra. In a lot of places they would have a dance platform. Some of the platforms were raised three or four feet up in the air. I'll tell you, all afternoon they danced. They had a wonderful, wonderful time. They enjoyed seeing one another, being with one another, and dancing was part of their life.

M: In other words, this was one way through enjoyment like this, that the heritage was taught to the youngsters and to other generations to come?

R: Yes, because we as youngsters, when our parents went anyplace, we weren't left at home. We didn't roam the streets; when our mothers and fathers went we went. If they came home at one o'clock in the morning, we would come home at one o'clock in the morning. This is one way we learned our Romanian culture.

M: You were associated with, I believe, the church in Farrell weren't you?

R: As a youngster, I went to the Romanian Orthodox Church in Farrell. I also went to the United Presbyterian Church in Hubbard. Many times, because my parents were in a business, I would go to the Presbyterian church in Hubbard on Sunday morning. In fact, quite a few of us Romanian youngsters went to Hubbard United Presbyterian. In fact, they would present me with pins at the end of the year for perfect attendance. We used to participate in their Sunday school picnics at Harding Park as a youngster. I remember, as Romanians, we didn't eat too many baked beans and wieners. But I'll tell you, we used to enjoy going to the Presbyterian church picnics where they served a lot of baked beans and wieners. We used to eat those like Grant taking Richmond. We were very, very happy there. We liked to join in the singing of the hymns of the Presbyterian church; they were lovely hymns. I loved singing with them and I used to join in.

M: This diversified your outlook.

R: Yes.

M: I want to ask you some questions about that church in Farrell, if you can recall. Did that church in Farrell have pews like our church presently on Wick Avenue, or did the people have to stand? At the church on Wilson Avenue, I was told the people had to stand.

R: At the Farrell church, they had pews, but then they had a stand up area on both sides like a little stall. A lot of men would stand in these little stalls. In fact, at the front, by the altar, in the stalls they would have, maybe, three or four men who were cantors, who would respond the liturgy with the priest. In other words, they would help him communicate the religious services. My father and his brother John participated in this event. They had good voices, good strong voices, and they were cantors, or else they would help the cantor in the Romanian Orthodox Church in Farrell. Truthfully speaking, seeing them there, in my later life, brought me to what we call the strana, or coming up to the front and helping the cantors. I myself now help respond the liturgy at the wakes, funerals, weddings and parstases.

M: Were the services done in English at all in the Farrell church?

R: I remember the Farrell church very, very distinctly. Father Moldovan, who had just come from Europe back in 1935, was our priest. Of course, he was speaking Romanian, because after all, he had just come from Romania and all of the services were done in Romanian; all of the responses were done by cantors.

After Father Moldovan came here, I can remember all of the pews were there and we had all these bright, vivid pictures on our walls and our ceiling of all the saints. I remember the incense being very, very strong. You could smell the incense in a Romanian Orthodox Church. He went up and down the aisle with the incense and I mean the smell that used to pour out of there. As a youngster, I remember I used to go upstairs. We had a balcony, which later on became the choir loft.

Father Moldovan was married. That's right because you had to be married in order to become a priest. His young wife, who we called Preotrasa--which was the priest's wife--knew music, so she started the choir in Farrell. As a youngster, I would sneak upstairs and sit in the choir loft to help sing, but of course, all of the responses used were strictly Romanian in those days.

Downstairs in the church hall, we held our banquets. When that got too small they had the Romanian Hall, a big hall, on the next block, on Darr Avenue. Our church was on Wallace. The hall was on Darr Avenue and it was a mammoth place. We used to have our banquets in there. Believe me, in those days, we used to pack that hall. There we would have our banquets, weddings, and our dances.

M: Did you have any Sunday school at the church in Farrell?

R: Yes. They started a Sunday school class in Farrell back in the late 1930's. I remember going through a few sessions because I remember some of my buddies from there.

M: Did they teach anything about Romania in Farrell or was it mostly about English?

R: Father Moldovan came from Europe. We started, again, with Romanian schooling. Father Moldovan had classes in Romanian, in Hubbard and also in Farrell. Now, in Hubbard, our days were usually Monday or Thursday and Saturday afternoon. Father Moldovan would come over. We had textbooks and we would start from the alphabet. He taught us the alphabet first. Then he would tell us of the Romanian culture in Europe. He taught us the Romanian heritage in Romania. He taught us Romanian literature and then he would give us poems that we would have to learn and recite. I remember distinctly that he gave us the Romanian Creed. I'll tell you, it is long. I went haywire trying to memorize the Creed in Romanian and come back to Sunday school class and recite it. Believe me, I had to know it word for word, with no mistakes, because Father Moldovan would correct me.

There was an old standing joke between Father Moldovan and I. One time when I was a youngster and a little devilish, he said that he had run out of water. He said, "Who's going to get me water?" I held my hand up and said, "I'll go get you water." I left the class that day; I thought it was the way to get out of class. I left the class and I didn't come back until class was almost over. When I came back, Father Moldovan said, "Eli, where in the world did you go for the water? In Youngstown?" I said, "Yes Father, in Youngstown." "Boy, you must have, because it took you a long, long time." Now every time Father Moldovan sees me, I don't care who I am talking to, he always remembers. "Eli, do you remember when you went to get me water?" God love him. I have to admire that man and his wife for the way he taught us and the way he brought us up in the Romanian culture and heritage in our youth. As I remarked before, I did get a lot of background and a lot of my learning from my parents. Put it this way, Father Moldovan gave me a little more in the Romanian

language, culture, and our heritage.

M: Is there anything that you would like to tell us about the Holy Trinity Romanian Church on Wick Avenue?

R: Yes. I remember the church very, very distinctly. I remember Father Stanila, God rest his soul, was a wonderful, wonderful priest. He had a tremendous voice. He was a very, very good leader. We are now on Wick Avenue because of Father Stanila. His members worked hard, strived hard, and pushed and got donations from the Romanian people to pay for this church. They put us on Wick Avenue from our Wilson Avenue Church. They were go-getters. One thing with me being born in this country, being away from Romanians, I started to forget a little bit about our Romanian languages. It was hard for me to come back and go to our church with my wife, who was not Romanian. She is Slovak and Croatian. Of course, all of our services were Romanian. We tried very, very hard to swing them the other way. The fact is, as I said before, our church music, liturgy, and everything is beautiful and was given to us in a beautiful way. Our services in Romanian were beautiful, I mean, for the ones who understood. Like I say about Father Stanila, I can say only praise of that man. He was a wonderful, wonderful priest and leader. So was his wife. She was stubborn in her ways, but a very good leader among the women, very aggressive.

M: Did they have any service at all in English?

R: No, everything was in Romanian at that time.

Back in the 1950's, I remember distinctly when our bishop was concentrated in Canton, Ohio. I was president of the Romanian Orthodox Youth, here in Youngstown. I was a very strong instigator in trying to bring the American language into our church. We argued these points out at our conventions. Bishop Valerian was the head of our convention. He wanted to find out our viewpoints, so he could bring them back to the priest and put it into our churches. First of all, he had to find out our viewpoints and what we wanted. We had very, very strong leaders. I remember very well, Gus Vincent and his wife Virginia from Detroit. They were very strong for English services. Paul Yoka, who studied to be a priest and came back, is now a deacon in the Akron Church. He was a very, very strong leader. Gus and Paul were both national AROY presidents. One of our own from Youngstown, John Oltean, was one of our leaders. We had quite a few. What I'm trying to bring out is we fought for the right to bring our American language in. What we discussed and tried to bring to our churches, some of our priests, not being as strong-headed as others, went along with theirs. Father Stanila was a little bit strong-headed and too foreign in ways and wanted

no changes at this time.

M: Did Father Stanila have a good knowledge of the American language?

R: No. He didn't have too good of a knowledge of the American language. He was from Europe, born, raised, and educated in Romania.

M: He didn't want to change anything, did he?

R: Right. He was just scared, 'What are these people going to do to me? Are they trying to get rid of me or what?' In answer to that, "Look Father, we love you; we want you; we're not trying to get rid of you. All we're trying to ask you is if you can't give us any of the liturgy in English. If you have to give it to us in Romanian, give it to us in Romanian and English or one Sunday in Romanian and the other Sunday in English." So finally, being that I love music and singing so well, I was the first of the younger groups to partake of the liturgy services and singing with the cantors. What I would do there, at the end, where I was sure of myself, on the responses I would take and speak the responses in English. Mr. Techoshun, our cantor, saw what I was trying to do but he would let me go. He would nudge me and I would start giving some of the responses in English. Well then, after he passed away, God rest his soul, Mr. Rotar came in as our cantor. He saw what I was doing. Eli Moga and John Francu joined me at the strana. Little by little we would start putting more and more American responses in there. Where it came to short responses, Mr. Rotar would nudge us and we would start giving responses in English. Finally, I think Father Stanila started to see the light. So then when it came to small places, he himself would try. God love him. He would give it to us in English. The ball finally started rolling. Little by little, before he passed away, we started getting a little more English into our services. After Father Stanila passed away, we got a wonderful priest from Akron, Father Eugen Lazar. He was born in this country, educated in this country. Of course, he got his teaching at Sibiu, Romania, where he learned to be a priest. He came back to this country and with his American background incorporated this into his services.

M: Wasn't he a member at one time of this church or this area?

R: Yes, he was born and raised in Campbell, Ohio. The fact is, like I say, I started with the cantors in English. I was chaplain of the Eastern Orthodox Men's Society which worked with the society to bring all the Orthodox of all the ethnic groups together: the Russians, the Ukrainians, the Serbians, Macedonians. Everybody was brought together to get to know one another's churches. After all, we were brothers. We



were of a different element but of one religion, Orthodox. We wanted to stress this in the community. The fact is that I was chaplain of the organization for about four or five years until Father Van Such said, "Hey, this guy doesn't wear a collar. Why is he a chaplain?" So they ousted me and Father Van Such became the first priest to be the chaplain of our organization.

Well, getting back to Father Lazar. His son Lawrence was granted a scholarship from the E.O.M.S. Society. Father Lazar was a member of the E.O.M.S. Orthodox Clergy Association. I believe at one time he was the president of the organization. He went to all of the community things that were in Youngstown. He partook in radio and television at Youngstown University. He was very, very strong. At the university, the students loved him so much. Our church is on the campus next to the Dana School of Music and the Butler Art Institute. Father Lazar said, "Look, my church is open. Come to our church." During the week they would come to our services. Then the students would come up there and meditate. Father Lazar had functions going at the university. He took quite a few of the Orthodox students of other denominations under his wing. He would say, "Show them the way of life and show them the light."

- M: In other words, he opened a church not only to Romanian nationalities, but to anyone who want to go to the house of God?
- R: That's exactly right. In other words, "It's not only my church, it's your church. Come to it. You are welcomed." Believe me, they came to it.
- M: I know you are a member of the choir. Can you tell us a little bit about it?
- R: I remember in my younger days, the bishop was a very strong mover of this American language thing in our church. So the bishop from our retreat in Jackson, Michigan, had music written in English sent to our church. It would be sung in three parts.
- M: Can you tell us the name of this bishop?
- R: Yes, Bishop Valerian, who still is our bishop. He has been our bishop for, I'm not quite sure, since 1952. He is a wonderful leader of the Romanian people and of our churches. He stressed very, very much in Americanizing our churches.
- M: Where is he located? Where is his office?
- R: The central office is in Jackson, Michigan, where our retreat is. We have a wonderful retreat there. In fact, Father John

Tocanita, who is his right-hand man or his secretary, never had a church because he never married. So he spent his life with the bishop at the retreat and would write the English liturgies. He got English publicized in our Solia newspaper. He was born and raised in Youngstown.

Father Hategan is our priest in Cleveland. He is a wonderful person, who has brought in and encouraged American language in our church. The fact is, from our church, if my memory is correct, we were all altar boys in our church at one time. Father Lazar was an altar boy at Wilson Avenue, and so was Father Hategan. From altar boys, they went into priesthood. Father Lazar's son is a priest and active among the Youngstown community. We have given the Orthodox church, the Romanian Orthodox church, three priests: Father Eugene Lazar, Father Lawrence Lazar, and Father Hategan.

M: Getting back to the choir, when did the choir start making some of the responses in English?

R: We started to make some of these English responses during Father Stanila's last few years. We started singing a few after the Creed.

George Chickerno was a very, very strong leader and I must mention his name because he was a wonderful, respectful man. He is now living in California. God love him. He was one of the very, very strong men pushing the English language in our church. The fact is, that he donated the organ in our choir loft for us. He, at one time, even lead our choir and taught us the English responses. He and Tillie Badila, who had been a choir director for years and years, taught us responses. Turi Papora also lead us.

M: Did you go and practice at all with the choir?

R: We used to practice two nights a week. We usually had practice one night a week, Wednesday night from seven thirty until nine o'clock. We would study and she would teach us the notes and the melodies. We sang the responses of our liturgy on Sunday, in Romanian and English.

M: I must make this comment: You have a very marvelous voice and I always enjoy hearing you sing the Lord's Prayer in English and when you did it in the past, a long time ago, in Romanian too.

R: Thank you. As I mentioned before, my parents were good singers. I must have inherited it from my mother and father. I love to sing and I love to sing the church songs. I love the Lord's Prayer. I always felt that the Lord's Prayer should be sung with feeling, the way you feel it. Of course, we Romanians sing the way we feel. As I mentioned before,

I love to sing the Lord's Prayer or any of the Romanian responses, but my favorite is the Lord's Prayer. I hear nothing but complaints, especially from the older people. They love it and I love to sing the Lord's Prayer for them.

- M: You were connected at one time with the AROY, American Romanian Orthodox Youth. Could you tell us a little bit about the AROY group at our church in Youngstown?
- R: Yes. My wife and later in life, my daughters Jody and Liz belonged to the American Romanian Orthodox Youth here in Youngstown, which is affiliated with all of the churches and with the bishop. As I mentioned before, I was president of it. We would have the AROY meetings once a month. We would try to figure out what we wanted and what we wanted to bring in our church. We also had functions. We donated monies to our church from these functions. We had dances, regional dances. About every six or seven years, we had the AROY convention here in our community in Youngstown.
- M: I wanted to ask you one question about the functions. Did you try to intermingle some of the old Romanian culture with it?
- R: Yes. When we had our convention, even when we had our dances, we always had a band that played Romanian music and American music. So, those who didn't know how to dance Romanian could dance the American way. We always had functions both ways.
- M: Where did you have these dances? Did you have them at the Romanian Hall or did you find other halls to give them in?
- R: We would have our convention dances at Sts. Peter and Paul Hall on Belle Vista Avenue.
- M: In other words, the Romanians were lacking a facility large enough to accommodate the mass of Romanian culture and so forth?
- R: When we had the Romanian hall on Poland Avenue, we had a large hall there. All of our functions would be held there, but then when the freeway took over our property we seemed to disband. They took the money from the sale of the property and put it in the bank and nothing has ever been done. They tried to look and buy other property, but they couldn't find other property suitable. Now they have to have their meetings a few times a year at our Romanian church on Wick Avenue. Once a year they have a banquet at the House of Valley in Hubbard.
- M: They are lacking a large hall that Romanians could use now as was the case when you were a youngster and in young adulthood?
- R: As a youngster, this was a central place for all Romanians to

gather.

M: So now they don't have a central place?

R: I have noticed that since the war, since World War II, the Romanians are moving away from their communities. They are not as closely knit now as they were years ago. A lot of them moved out to farms and a lot of them moved out to the suburbs. They got away from the Romanian community. They all have diversified. It is harder now to try to get the people together. Let's face it, they're getting away from our Romanian heritage and culture.

M: Is there any changes that you would like to see transpire regarding, first of all, the Romanian Orthodox church on Wick Avenue?

R: As far as the church service goes, this is what we fought for and this is what we are getting. We are getting more Americanized in our church. Father Lazar, who is our present priest, is giving our services in English and in Romanian, the same as Father Stanila did. There has been no change there. They gave us a wonderful service in English at the end of the services. Then after he is done, he also gives the same service in Romanian so both sides know what the services are. So they can't leave church and say, "I've gained nothing today." This is a falsehood because they have gotten it in either English or in Romanian. The idea of having services once a month in all English and in all Romanian is wonderful. This is the way we still maintain the Romanian language and this is what we want. If we don't watch ourselves, we are going to start losing this.

M: Completely, do you think?

R: In due time, we are going to lose it completely unless we get more settlers from Romania coming into this community and trying to bring us together. Of course, a lot of these ideas that these people are bringing from Europe, we don't care for.

M: Many of them, that come here, don't you think they're coming here to get the American way rather than the Romanian way?

R: That's exactly right. They're trying to get away from what they just left too. They want to get more of the American way. I still want to see the cantors retained at our church. They are part of our tradition. I would still like to see one Sunday a month, the cantors singing from the strana, from the front, answering the liturgy back and forth. This should be done in Romanian and English. Now, I know it is

hard for us, three fellows, to remember the gospels. I think we have eight gospels. In other words, eight voices that these liturgies are respondent in. It is hard for us to memorize these services. As you know, when we have a deceased member we have a memorial of the dead which is six weeks after death. We go to the Saracusta, which is the services held at the funeral home for the deceased. Then, on the funeral day at the church, we respond the funeral services. Now just the three of us are doing this with some help of the old-time cantors: S. Hulderfean, Emil Timar, John Roman, and Dan Rotar. These old cantors or the priest are going to have to sit down and teach us the Romanian and English responses.

M: Is it up to the person who is a family member of the deceased whether or not they want the responses in English or Romanian, or is it up to the priest to make that decision?

R: We have found that if the deceased is more on our side or more of our age, and if the members of the family are leaning more towards the English side, we sort of give more of the responses in English.

M: Could it be entirely done in English if requested?

R: Yes. The only thing is a lot of our hymns are long hymns, which are song in different voices. It's hard to interpret the melody in the English way. The only way that we could was instead of singing it, we would recite it. This is what we have been doing. I noticed at some of the funerals that I have participated in, when we came to that part of the response, we would recite it in English. Then of course, all of the English verses that we knew in English, we would sing in English.

M: In regards to Sunday school, do you think that they should implement anything regarding Romanian heritage in the classes or have it be done entirely in liturgy form? Do you think that they should tell a little bit about Romania since there isn't a Romanian school?

R: Yes. I think they should incorporate that a little bit. In fact, if a teacher herself knows the Romanian language, I wish that they would take and teach our youngsters in the classes, a few Romanian verses or words. Then translate them so that they will know what the meaning is.

M: The reason I brought it up is because I know your daughter Judy taught Sunday school and I recall that she taught during the time of Father Stanila. They used to teach the children to sing different church hymns or something like that or at Christmas time, carols in Romanian. I noticed that in the past this has been just a little bit lacking.

R: Right, it is. This to me is a must. The children should be taught, I think, the Romanian carols. Nothing gives us older folk more happiness than when the carolers come to our home and sing in Romanian around our Christmas tree. It not only opens our hearts but it opens up our pocketbooks.

Speaking of this point, I must mention this because Dr. Gary Scavnicky first attended Youngstown University. He got his Ph.D. from Illinois University. He taught in Illinois. He taught at Wisconsin University. He is now a professor at Wayne State University. He is a spanish professor. This is my son-in-law, Gary Scavnicky. He married my daughter Judy. He is Slovak and Italian. He has taught my daughter, Judy, and my three grandchildren, Tatania, Ileana, and Elisaveata (Romanian names) them the Romanian languages. They also speak Russian, Croatian, Slovak and Spanish. He also writes letters to my mother in Romania and at this time, now, he is debating, but they asked him to become choir director at St. George's Cathedral in Detroit. Believe me, my son-in-law has a wonderful voice.

M: Is this a Romanian church?

R: This is Romanian St. George's Cathedral in Detroit. They want him to take over the choir because he and my daughter both have sung in the choir. My daughter and son-in-law are both Sunday school teachers at St. George's Cathedral. This is one thing that they have done up there. They have taught the children to sing and talk in Romanian. At Christmas time the people were astonished because he brought those kids at the Christmas dance and put them on stage and also in the church after the services. Those youngsters got up and they sang in Romanian, their carols. My three grandchildren and daughter Judy, not only sang it in Romanian form, but they also sang it for them in Spanish, Slovak, Croatian, and also Italian. My two youngest granddaughters are now even studying French. Actually, my son-in-law, God love him, is really bringing heritage and culture into their home in Detroit. Like I say, I'm proud to say the first school he went to was Campbell Memorial. From Campbell Memorial, he went to Youngstown University. That was a stepping stone. This boy went to school all on grants. He didn't have the money to pay for his tuition. He went on scholarships all through his years of university studying.

M: I know it's kind of difficult because I even have a scholarship and you really have to study.

R: Yes, you really have to study. The little bit of a salary they give you when you are teaching, you might as well be on welfare. It's just a step above welfare with what they give you.

My wife, who is not Romanian, is loved by the people in this community. They think that she is Romanian. In fact, they talk to her in Romanian. My wife has heard so much and listened to so much Romanian that she herself understands Romanian. She can answer most of your questions in English. Like I say, don't you dare talk Romanian around my wife because she knows what you're saying. She uses a lot of Romanian words and phrases herself.

M: Does your family cook any of those traditional Romanian meals?

R: Yes, of course. My wife is a wonderful cook. My son-in-law, Gary, is a good cook. He makes a lot of Romanian dishes.

M: So, in other words, it has been passed from generation to generation.

R: Oh, yes. My daughter Judy is also a wonderful cook. She's a wonderful hostess. A lot of times they host for the professors at Wayne State University. They love to come to her home because she not only prepares Romanian food, she also makes homemade bread, cookies, and rolls. Of course, my wife taught her a lot. My daughter, Elizabeth, loves the Romanian cooking too. Her husband, Nick Petrella, is the grandson of the Vesa family, here in Youngstown. So we still have a little bit of Romanian still in our family.

M: Was it your parents who taught your wife how to cook Romanian like that?

R: No, my wife was mainly with the Romanian people and talking and watching prepared her.

M: She was very interested?

R: Yes, my wife was very, very interested. The fact is that my wife's and my interests are about the same. She loves the Romanian way of life and the Romanian music and I, myself, love the Yugoslavian people. They are wonderful people. You'll find out they're good cooks really quick. Their music is tremendous. Half of my records are Yugoslavian. I have a lot of Romanian records and Yugoslavian records. Many times on Sundays, I'll turn that thing on and I'll turn it on full blast. Sometimes if I'll get in the mood, I'll pick up the violin and I'll try to follow them with the violin. I'll even start in the family room and kick a few steps. I'll start dancing a little bit of the Romanian or the Yugoslavian dances.

M: Could you tell us a few of the Romanian dances? Could

you name a few of them?

R: Well, we have the sirba. We have what we call the Romanian colas. We also have the colasari, which is a man's dance. We have the Hastagana. Most of our dances were men and women together.

M: Do you see any way that some of these dances would be preserved for future generations to enjoy?

R: The only way this will be preserved or brought about is, it's going to have to be instigated. It's going to have to be taught continuously while we still know it. The youth today is learning so they can pass it on to the next generation. What's happening is we're starting to forget this. We aren't dancing as well now as we did thirty years ago.

M: Is there any way you can see of going about to motivate these youths to take up and want to learn this heritage?

R: Yes. The only way you can do it is, pardon me for saying, the ways the Croatians and the Serbs do. They take and instill it into the youngsters at a young age. They are brought up with this. They are brought up with the music and the dancing as they grow older. They do it better and it keeps them in the limelight.

M: In other words, it's a part of their life?

R: It is part of their life, that's exactly right. The only way you can do it is, you must start from childbirth. Otherwise, we're going to be extinct.

M: Is there anything else that you would like to make a comment on regarding the church or the culture aspects of Romanian heritage?

R: I will say this: I do miss our Romanian music and our Romanian bands. We used to have bands here locally. Nick Brott used to play the violin. I found out later that Nick Nedelka used to play in a Romanian band. He played the trumpet and clarinet. Believe me, he had a wonderful band. I miss this old Romanian music and the way they played it. They played the way it sounded and the way they felt it. It really moved you.

M: It put you in a mood.

R: It set you up and we're starting to get away from this more and more. The first thing you know it's going to be a forgotten thing. The only way we're going to get this is if somebody comes over here from Europe and brings it with them and starts it over again. Otherwise, we're lost.



M: Thank you Mr. Roman, for this interview.

R: I want to thank you. I mean this sincerely: I'm happy to have participated in this interview. This is something that I don't want to be forgotten, my heritage. I am proud, believe me when I say, I'm an American first, but I'm of Romanian descent and that's one thing I'll never forget.

END OF INTERVIEW