

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Smoky Hollow Project

Personal Experiences

O. H. 670

GENEVIEVE ROSS

Interviewed

by

Annette Mills

on

June 3, 1976

## GENEVIEVE MARY ROSS

Genevieve Mary Ross was born in Youngstown, Ohio on April 15, 1914. Her parents were Mary DeThomas and Alex Ross. At the age of two her mother passed away and Genevieve moved in with her grandmother, Anne DeThomas, in Smoky Hollow on N. Watt Street and lived there until the home was lost to the state for back taxes.

Miss Ross left the Hollow with regret at the age of 23. Miss Ross retired in 1974. She enjoys cats and dogs and is the owner of five dogs at the present time. They are named Precious, JoJo, Baby, Rusty and Mitzi. Her hobby is sewing and crocheting. She makes her own patterns and then works them out. She still designs her own dresses. She enjoys sewing and crocheting for other people, friends and relatives. She loves to read and spends hours in books.

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INTERVIEWEE: GENEVIEVE ROSS

INTERVIEWER: Annette Mills

SUBJECT: Depression, nationalities, customs

DATE: June 3, 1976

M: This is an interview with Genevieve Ross for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program on Smoky Hollow. The interviewer is Annette Mills at 58 North Bonair on June 3, 1976 at 2:30 p.m.

Miss Ross, would you like to begin please?

R: The only thing I can remember is living with my grandmother at the age of two when my mother died. I remember my grandmother telling me about Smoky Hollow and how she was one of the first settlers there. She told me different things about it, how we had a pond, which I never remembered, but she did. There was a forest back there. The people were friendly. I grew up with the 'League of Nations' you might say. We had every nationality under the sun in that neighborhood. They were all wonderful people and everybody was willing to help everybody else. We were raised during the Depression. We went to school with holes in our shoes, but nevertheless most of us went to school. I didn't finish school because I didn't have the clothes.

M: Could you tell us a little bit about some of the culture that you remember in your own home?

R: From Europe?

M: Yes. Some of the rules that you had to live by.

R: They were very strict. I had to be in at a certain time. I didn't have the privileges kids have nowadays.

- M: Could you tell me what some of the activities were that you played as a youngster?
- R: Most of our activities were roasting potatoes at the curb, and taking walks. We used to walk from Watt Street all the way to Bridge here in Campbell. We took a salt shaker with us and picked apples on the way and ate them. The only activities were that the people would get together and have a jolly, old time. We had picnics, mostly in backyards.
- M: Can you tell us something about what were some of the foods that you recall during your childhood that were most frequented in the homes then?
- R: My grandmother had a garden and we had plenty of vegetables and she had some chickens. We had fresh eggs. We didn't have the best, but most of the food that we ate was pork.
- M: You say chickens, did you raise these chickens right on the property? Was that permissible?
- R: Yes, it was.
- M: The neighbors didn't complain?
- R: The only thing that the neighbors did complain about was that we had an outhouse in the back of our yard. We got a nice whiff of it every summer.
- M: Was this common during that time?
- R: As far as I remember there was only one outhouse.
- M: Was that changed later on?
- R: I moved away from there, but I think it was still there. I think it is still there now.
- M: You never had indoor plumbing?
- R: We had it indoors, but this family next door didn't.
- M: This wasn't your own outhouse?
- R: No. We had one in the basement.
- M: How long did you stay in Smoky Hollow.
- R: I think I left when I was twenty-three.
- M: Could you tell us a little bit of what you did? Were

you pretty much taking care of your grandmother or was your grandmother taking care of you?

R: She died when I was eighteen. I lived alone for a while and then my cousin came to live with me. After that I moved out of the neighborhood into Briar Hill.

M: You stayed on then even after your grandmother died?

R: The bank sold the house for taxes. I had to get out of there.

M: You were forced to leave Smoky Hollow?

R: That's right.

M: Would you have left otherwise?

R: No, I liked it there.

M: Could you tell me some of the things that you remember that stand out mostly in your life?

R: There wasn't anything special.

M: I realize that during that period things were tight all over. How do you think that the people of Smoky Hollow, in general, fared during that period?

R: They fared pretty good. We didn't have the best, and the children went to school with holes in their shoes, but they all got along and they all seemed to have a good time. They helped one another.

M: They all had the same thing in common then?

R: That's right.

M: They were all on an even keel would you say? Could you tell us a little bit more, Miss Ross, about some of the other things that stand out in your life? Were the schools pretty much the same?

R: I think they were stricter.

M: Could you elaborate on that a little bit and tell us in what ways you feel they were stricter?

R: We had to dress a certain way. We couldn't go to school the way they do now. I think the method of teaching was all together different.

M: What do you mean they don't dress like today?

R: You had to be neat.

M: Was it uniform?

R: No, it wasn't uniform, but a nice pair of pants and a shirt for a boy. A girl wore a neat dress.

M: They couldn't wear slacks or jeans?

R: No.

M: That wasn't the style then.

R: We did wear slacks. We didn't wear them to school, but that was common. Slacks were invented then, only we called them farmerettes in those days instead.

M: Did you wear those during school?

R: Not during school, at home. We were not allowed to wear them at school.

M: Do you remember anything about the winters?

R: The winters were much colder than they are now.

M: How did you get to school, did the bus pick you up?

R: No, we walked.

M: How far did you have to walk to school?

R: I walked from Watt Street up to the old St. Columba School; that was way up there on Rayen Avenue. We all walked; none of us had cars. We did an awful lot of walking in those days.

M: What did you do, when you got older, for entertainment?

R: I went to the movies a lot. I worked too. We would see at least three movies a week.

M: When you worked what kind of work did you do?

R: I did alterations and repair in the drycleaning and alterations business.

M: Do you still do this for your own pastime and pleasure?

R: That's right.

M: I understand, too, that you like to make your own patterns and follow through. Can you tell us a little bit about

some of the things that you've made of your own design?

R: I've designed afghans and capes, stoles, sweaters. I've designed my own dresses.

M: When you say you make your own stoles, can you tell us a little bit about some of the materials that you use and what you do to make them?

R: I think of a pattern and start on it and that's it.

M: What do you use, do you make them out of cloth?

R: No. I use acrilan and yarn.

M: Do you crochet these or knit them?

R: I crochet them. I don't knit.

M: Would you say that this is one of your greatest interests?

R: It is.

M: Can you tell us a little bit about the people of Smoky Hollow?

R: They were very nice, friendly people. They were always willing to help.

M: Could you elaborate on some of the things that the neighborhood did?

R: Their own entertainment would be to get together in one of the neighbor's yards. They wouldn't think anything of someone knocking at the kitchen door for a cup of coffee in the morning. There was always visiting back and forth.

M: Was it a close-knit neighborhood?

R: Yes. The only trouble we had was when we had storms; we had an awful lot of flooding.

M: Can you tell us a little bit about the floods?

R: Our cellar would get full and the street would flood over. They say that was the result of a covered up pond.

M: Was this situation ever corrected?

R: Not to my knowledge. When I left it was still the same way.

M: Was this all of Smoky Hollow?

R: No, just on Watt Street.

M: That's where the pond was originally?

R: Yes. It was right in front of our house.

M: Do you remember what the address was where you had lived with your grandmother?

R: No.

M: What street was it located on?

R: It was on Watt Street, right around the corner from Adams.

M: Is that house still there?

R: No. The house has been torn down.

M: Was there anything else that stands out in your mind? Do you remember when the first radios came in?

R: Yes.

M: Could you tell us something about that?

R: I was about twelve years old when the first radios came in. My grandmother was talking to a friend of hers and I told my grandmother not to talk too loud because the people would hear her. I thought the next door neighbors could hear what was going on at our house through the radio.

M: Did you have your own radio during that time?

R: I didn't get a radio until I was on my own.

M: Did you have a telephone?

R: No. I don't think there were very many phones in the neighborhood.

M: Was this kind of a luxury thing at that time?

R: Yes. I think there were only two or three families at that time who had phones.

M: What happened if you needed to use the phone?

R: We would have to go to whoever had a phone.

M: Were they pretty generous about letting you use it?

R: Yes.



M: Can you tell us some of the things that you remember during the time that you were in Smoky Hollow?

R: I told you most of the things. We didn't have a bad life. We didn't have any money. We all seemed to be happy.

M: Can you tell me a little bit about what your life was like with your grandmother in Smoky Hollow?

R: As I said before, we were poor. We were on relief. My grandmother and I were only getting \$1.75 a week. After she died I only had \$1.75. Then the WPA (Works Progress Administration) came in and it wasn't too long after that that they put me to work; that's when I was earning \$15 a week. The WPA was truck driving, book-binding--which I did--sewing, and also housekeeping. I also did both sewing and housekeeping. For the boys it was truck driving, and different odds and ends. From that it got a little better for the rest of us. I think what they should do is put something like that on nowadays. Put some of these people to work. It wasn't very much, but to us \$15 a week was a fortune.

M: Were there any other projects that you recall?

R: The only other things I can recall is the CCC [Civilian Conservation Corps]. That was mostly for boys and they put the boys to work in the forests. They fixed streets and other stuff. Then the war came along and the boys went overseas.

M: CCC also maintained our forests and parks?

R: That's right.

M: Can you tell us some reasons for having these kinds of projects today?

R: It kept the boys off the streets; it kept them busy. It gave them a little income. They got off the relief line. I think they were much better off than some of these people are nowadays that are on relief.

M: When you worked for the WPA did that automatically take you off of welfare?

R: Yes.

M: You told us you did bookbinding, can you tell where you did this?

R: I worked at the Main Library and we repaired old books. We put new covers on them. That was a pretty nice job.

They used to give us different types of jobs. From there they put me in sewing. From sewing they put me doing housekeeping. I would go into homes where old people weren't able to help themselves. I would do washing or cleaning, mostly for these old women that couldn't help themselves at all.

M: You were helping somebody that needed help and still you were helping yourself.

R: That was the whole purpose of WPA was helping yourself by helping others.

M: It's too bad that we don't have something like that today.

Did you enjoy your work at the library?

R: Yes, I did. I enjoyed it very much. In fact, when I was a child my biggest thrill was that I was able to get a library card. At that time you had to be in the second grade to get your first library card. That was a big thrill for me.

M: Were you able to get to the library often?

R: Very often. My girlfriends and I would spend most of our time up at the library. At that time they also used to have a little library down at the square. They removed it and I don't know why.

M: This was a branch of the Main Library?

R: Yes. It was a branch, but it was so handy because it was right there in town.

M: The library that you worked at, was this located at the same location that it is now on the corner of Wick and Main?

R: Yes.

M: Did you walk to this library?

R: Yes. As I said before, we walked everywhere. We didn't know what it was to ride. There were two families that had cars though.

M: Smoky Hollow was pretty centrally located to downtown, the library, the schools.

R: It was. You would walk from Watt Street up to the Warner Theater. I almost forgot to tell you that the Warner

Brothers were born in Smoky Hollow.

M: Could you tell us a little bit about them?

R: I don't know much about them, but the older people knew them. I think they were born on Walnut Street.

M: Could you elaborate on that? Do you remember hearing anything?

R: The only thing I heard was that when the Warner Theater opened they did send a train through Youngstown to celebrate the opening of the Warner Theater. That is now known as the symphony center.

M: Do you remember their names or anything at all about them?

R: The only one I can remember is Jack. That was before my time. They went to Hollywood before I went to live in Smoky Hollow. It was more or less in my mother's time.

M: Was there anything else that you could remember?

R: About my old neighborhood, yes. When I was a child we used to have a little candy store down the street, about three houses from our place. There was a little, old lady and every month she would gather up these pieces of candy and make scrap bags of them. We would stand around and wait for that day. For 2¢ you would get a great, big bag of candy.

M: That would be her candy that she was trying to get rid of?

R: No, it would be the candy that would break in the box. She was very generous and she would throw one or two good pieces in the bag with all the little bits. We seemed to enjoy that.

Another thing that we enjoyed in Smoky Hollow was the ice man. We would get up on the back of the truck and steal ice. (Laughter)

M: What would you do with it?

R: We used to make ice balls out of it.

Another things that was very funny was the fish man. We used to have a fish man come every Friday and he had a horn. He would blow the horn and yell "Fish".

M: What would happen when he blew that horn?

R: All the housewives went out and bought fresh fish.

We also had a vegetable man come. We would get our fruit and vegetables off the truck. I remember one year that the fruit was so abundant that they were selling peaches and plums for 10¢ a bushel.

M: You don't see that today, do you?

R: No, you don't. You can't even get one peach for 10¢.

M: When they came on the trucks were these refrigerated trucks?

R: No, they were ordinary trucks. The fish were on cakes of ice. In those days nobody had refrigeration, but they had wooden iceboxes. They used to buy ice from the ice man.

M: Was that a truck or horse and buggy?

R: No, it was on a regular truck. I don't remember too many horses and buggies. We had plenty of cars at the time, but not as many as we have now. We had quite a few wrecks at the corner.

M: Can you tell us a little bit about those?

R: We lived at the crossroads and we passed quite a few wrecks. I don't know if they were speeding or not.

M: Were people usually hurt in these wrecks?

R: No, very few people got hurt.

M: Can you tell us about some of the foods that you remember?

R: The people baked their own bread in the outside ovens. It was very delicious bread. We used to have what was called Deluxe Market. My grandmother used to go down there to get hog's head. Our cheapest meat was pork and beef. Chicken was very high.

M: You say you got a hog's head?

R: My grandmother got it for 25¢.

M: How would you prepare this?

R: She would mix it with beans or cabbage and slice it. You would be surprised at how much meat you could get out of one of those.

M: What else would you have besides beef?

- R: My grandmother used to make her own noodles. She used to can her own tomatoes from her garden. We never bought spaghetti; she always made it herself. She used to cook plenty of vegetables, cabbage, beans, potatoes. Everything seemed to be much tastier than it is now, although we didn't have very much. Whatever we ate was very tasty.
- M: It seems like they had more boiled foods during that time?
- R: Yes, they did. We used to have barbecues too, but in a different way. We used to have barbecues on wood fires. We would barbecue a slab of bacon or weiners. We didn't get very much hamburger. There was plenty of fruit. My grandmother was a great believer of plenty of fruit and bread.
- M: Can you tell me something about some of the other families? I realize that you didn't live with the other families, but could you tell me something about their methods of cooking?
- R: I had this Hungarian girl I ran around with. They ate an awful lot of fine foods. She had nine children and they seemed to live on fried potatoes. They seemed to survive. They got along well. They raised rabbits.
- M: Was this quite common, to raise rabbits?
- R: Yes, they raised rabbits or chickens in the backyard. That was allowed.
- M: There weren't any neighbors complaining?
- R: No. In fact, these Hungarian people had the rabbits close to their front porch. I don't know how many they had, but there were quite a few.
- M: Did they have coops?
- R: They had hutches, but they had spaces fenced in where these rabbits could run around.
- M: Do you think you could get by with that today?
- R: Not today you can't. There are too many rules and regulations nowadays.
- M: You mentioned earlier in the interview a Hungarian family. Could you tell us some of the other nationalities?
- R: We had Hungarians, Italians, Slovaks, Jewish people. On Watt Street there were three or four colored families. We had two Polish families. All in all it was just a

mixture of all races.

M: Were there many black people in the neighborhood?

R: No, not at the time.

M: Were there prejudices during that time?

R: There was no prejudice whatsoever. Everybody got along.

M: Do you remember when prejudices started?

R: I think it started not too long ago. It started about fifteen years ago.

M: Was this prejudice against one type of people or was it prejudice among all nationalities and people?

R: It was really one people because I think they brought that upon themselves. They felt they were badly treated. A lot of families had their names cut so you couldn't tell what nationality they were.

M: Was this true of all nationalities?

R: Mostly Italians. As far as this country is concerned, every nationality that did come over had a hard time. When my grandfather came over here he was only making \$1.10 a day. My grandmother kept boarders for about 10¢ a day. In fact, my mother and my aunt, when they were girls, they only had one or two dresses. They would take the dress off at night and wash it and put it back on in the morning. The Depression was bad enough, but in my mother's time it was even worse yet.

M: Was this one dress for school?

R: Yes. Those people did work awfully hard.

M: Would you say this was true of most of the people in Smoky Hollow?

R: Yes. It was true of all of them. They all worked hard to raise their families, put food on the table, and to make sure that their children were kept clean. That kept them pretty busy. I know a lot of the younger generation, people close to my age, they thought that their parents were being unfair, that there wasn't enough love to go around. I don't see how those women had a chance to take every one of those children and give a pat or kiss them. They were really too busy making sure there was food on the table.

M: Were big families quite common then?

R: Oh yes. That was quite common.

M: It wasn't any one, isolated family that had a big family?

R: Most of the families had about five, six children and up.

M: I would imagine it was hard being raised by your grandmother that you were probably constantly worried about. Could you tell us a little bit about that and what your own home was like?

R: My grandmother was so strict with me. When I did something I shouldn't have she would always say, "You're going to be sorry when I'm gone." That stayed with me and every time I would come home from school down Adams Street I used to think that I would find a wreath on the door. That's the way I was raised. Now that I am older I realize that those people didn't know any better really.

M: When you say a wreath on the door, is this a thing that happened back in that time?

R: Yes. The people never went to funeral parlors at that time; the funerals were held at home.

M: They were right in the home?

R: Yes.

M: They put a wreath on the door wherever the person was deceased?

R: Yes. That's how you could tell who died and who didn't. They used to collect for flowers. I think they have stopped doing that nowadays.

M: They just don't have these things in the home anymore.

R: No, they don't. My grandmother's funeral was held in the home. People wouldn't think of having the funerals in a funeral parlor.

M: Because they kept their loved ones with them until the very last day.

R: Right. I think it is better now.

M: I'm sure you and your grandmother used to have some good times too. Can you tell me anything of that?

R: Yes, in a funny sort of a way. My grandmother was too

involved in her religion and her friends that went to church with her. Of course, she used to drag me to church whether I wanted to go or not. She was a very religious person. I wish I was half as religious.

M: Of course, today I think we need more of this.

R: That's right.

M: When she wasn't at church was she still . . .

R: Oh yes, I can always remember her sitting by the side window in her rocking chair reading her Bible with her cat in her lap. After she died, every time I would walk down the street I would think I would see her in the window reading that Bible. She loved that neighborhood. Although she came from Italy, she never wanted to go back. She always raved about this country. Although she never had an awful lot, whatever she had she appreciated very much.

M: Do you know how old she was when she came to America and when she settled in Smoky Hollow?

R: Yes. My grandfather came first and he got a job in the mill. He sent for his family. I think my aunt was three years old because my mother was born here. He came first though and then sent for her. In fact, our house was just a three room shack until they built. Then they built it into a seven room house.

M: Do you have any idea how old your grandmother was when she came to America?

R: She was married at the age of twenty-six. She married rather late in those times because by the time you were twenty-six years old you were considered an old maid. She might have been around thirty when she came to this country.

M: She lived here all her life?

R: Yes.

M: In fact, she lived in Smoky Hollow all her life?

R: She lived in Smoky Hollow ever since she came from Italy. As I said before, they were one of the first settlers.

M: Do you have any idea how many families were in Smoky Hollow?



R: There were about three families living there.

M: Did you happen to hear who the families were?

R: I think my grandmother, and I can't remember the others.

M: What was your grandmother's name?

R: Her married name was DeThomas.

M: She was one of the first that settled in Smoky Hollow and then there were two other families at that time?

R: They started coming in and before you knew it the neighborhood was filled up. It didn't take too long. By the time I was born the neighborhood was filled up pretty well.

M: Your own mother then moved away from Smoky Hollow and then you moved back with your grandmother after your mother's death?

R: That's right. The Cooks were one of the early settlers too. They had one of the biggest houses in the neighborhood.

M: Was that one of the three families?

R: Yes.

M: Is there anything that you can remember about Smoky Hollow that stood out during that period?

R: I don't think there is much more to say.

M: Do you want to tell us anything about the baptisms or weddings that took place during this time?

R: Yes. It was almost like a block party.

M: They had a big celebration?

R: That's right.

M: Even for baptisms?

R: Baptism, first communion, confirmation, and weddings.

M: When you say block party what do you mean?

R: A block party is like the whole neighborhood would go in and have a good time.

M: Everybody was invited?

R: Yes.

M: Do these things exist today?

R: No, they don't. They did away with that.

M: If your neighborhood was to have anything like that would you be part of it?

R: Yes, I think I would enjoy it. Those days will never come back; they're gone forever.

We also used to get together and go to Idora Park once in a while. We might go as far as Milton Dam for a picnic. We used to pile in cars and trucks, grown-ups in the cars and kids in the trucks.

M: When you say trucks where would you get them from?

R: My uncle was in a contracting business and he would have a truck.

M: Was this all the neighborhood kids or just your own family?

R: Not the neighborhood, but close friends of the family.

M: Milton Dam was quite a distance to go in those days wasn't it?

R: We used to have a grand time.

M: Did you go camping?

R: No. Everybody brought something. It would be quite late when we got back.

M: It would be a whole day event?

R: That's right. We would leave early in the morning.

M: Is there anything else you would like to add?

R: No.

M: I would like to thank you very much for this interview and for taking the time to give it to me.

END OF INTERVIEW