

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Romanian Culture

Personal Experience

O. H. 1071

GEORGE BIRIS

Interviewed

by

John Muntean

on

May 15, 1975

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Romanian Culture

INTERVIEWEE: GEORGE BIRIS
INTERVIEWER: John Muntean
SUBJECT: Romania, Romanian culture, and Church in
Mahoning County
DATE: May 15, 1975

M: This is an interview with George Biris for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program regarding Romanian culture in Mahoning County, by John Muntean, at 885 Afton Avenue, Youngstown, Ohio, on May 15, 1975, at 6:00 p.m.

Mr. Biris, could you tell me what part of Romania did you come from?

B: I came from Transylvania.

M: What city or village in Transylvania?

B: It is a small village. They call it Acita.

M: Acita?

B: Close to Sighisoara. Sighisoara is about twenty-seven kilometers from Acita, which is more north than my village.

M: Could you tell me a little bit about your schooling in Romania? What was school like?

B: Well, we used to go to school. It was six grades.

M: What in school did they mention about United States? Did they mention anything at all about the United States at that time?

- B: Not much, only what we learned was the map of the world. That was the only way how we know. After six years we went twice a week during the spring. We got twice a week, and then after that you went on the farm and work.
- M: Did your father have a farm?
- B: Well, my father was in this country at that time. I was with my sister, and what ground they had why, my father, gave it to my sister to work.
- M: What did they grow on it?
- B: Oh, everything; there was corn, radishes; there were all kinds, just like over here.
- M: Did your sister then take the steps to market to sell it?
- B: No, just for ourselves.
- M: After you were done with your six grades and you worked on the farm, can you tell us a little bit how a typical day was like on the farm? In other words, when you would get up in the morning, some of the chores you would do, and like that?
- B: Well, mostly I was a little bit young, and I had to take care of my sister's daughters, my nieces.
- M: You mentioned that your father came to the United States while you were living with your sister. Can you tell us what year he came to the United States?
- B: My father came in 1907.
- M: Can you also tell us what motivated your father? In other words why did he want to come to the United States then?
- B: Well, he was . . . Let's put it this way, we were a poor family, and he wanted to bring us too. He came first. Then he brought my mother and my two sisters with my mother. They were going to bring me and my other sister too.
- M: The one that was on the farm?
- B: Yes, the one that was in the same village in Acita. But by the time they were ready to bring us over here in

this country, why, World War I started. They told us that we couldn't come any more in this country. We would have to wait until the war was finished.

M: When the war was going on in Romania over there, can you tell us a little bit how conditions were in Romania during that time during World War I?

B: The conditions were very bad. I remember that we couldn't get any salt. If we had to use some salt we had to get salty water. I remember one year where there was one pig so that we would have it for ourself as meat. We caught it, and we cut it to pieces, and we couldn't get any salt; so we had to get some salt water. We put that over it, the salt water, the best we could. I remember all that meat spoiled. We had to boil it and make soup out of it. I remember that much.

M: Could you tell us what country during the war controlled your village in World War I?

B: Before the First World War it was under Hungarian control.

M: Yes, but during the war . . .

B: During the war it still was, but after the First World War was finished, then they got control by the Romanians.

M: Oh, the Romanians.

B: There was Romanian control.

M: What was the reaction of the people after the war was over to Romania having control over the country?

B: Oh, they used to call them big Romania. They called them big Romania, and everybody was so happy. Everybody liked that Romania won and got control of it.

M: Did they change many of the laws after Romania got control?

B: Well, I don't remember much of the laws to be changed. All I know is that right in the middle of our village, of course, one side was the Germans and the other side was Romanians. After the war was over the children wanted over there to look. They had the tents, and, I remember, I found some guns and some ammuntion. So I

took one nice rifle and I was so glad I have it, but after the war was over they give word that all the guns had to be turned in. My sister made me turn that gun in.

M: Were there a lot of changes that occurred after Romania was taken over other than what you have mentioned?

B: Mainly we didn't change. To tell you the truth, we didn't change to much better. For us the small villages were about the same.

M: Was there any Romanian church at that time in the village?

B: Yes, that church is still there now the same one that was there when I was. . . In fact ever since I remember that church was there. In 1964 I took a trip in Romania, and it was the same church. It is still now the same church.

M: Well, since you were there in 1964 and back again maybe I could ask you right now, what changes occurred since you came to this country, when you were seventeen years old, and when you went back in 1964?

B: I didn't notice any change.

M: In other words the buildings were about the same and everything?

B: But I tell you the truth, when I went back in 1964 there were no houses there before I left. All the houses were new.

M: When you left in 1921 were most of the houses made out of mud and brick?

B: No, now there are some other villages that were covered with some kind of a hay roof, but in ours there was not even one of them. It was with slate covered. But it was made out of wood and had very poor insulation.

M: Was it about the same in 1964 too?

B: When I came in 1964, the houses were better. The houses were better than when we left in 1921.

M: Yes, but were they still made out of wood?

B: No, they were made out of bricks and stone and things like that. They were very good houses.

M: Did you notice any other changes between those years in the village?

B: Not very much. In 1964 one of the changes was that the people didn't have their own ground; they didn't have their own land. Everybody worked for the government now.

M: Oh, the government owns it.

B: But before 1921 before I came over here in this country, why, they had their own land. Some of them had more, some of them had less, but they all managed. The poor people managed because they could.

M: How did the villagers feel about having American Romanians coming in to visit? Did they welcome you?

B: Yes, they welcomed us very, very much. Many times when I talked with some of the younger generation, they used to tell me that they were so surprised that I still can talk Romanian. After being away forty-three years. I told them I talked, but I talked the way that Romanians used to talk. So forty some years ago they didn't change. The same kinds of words are used.

M: Did you notice cultural change?

B: In 1921 or 1964?

M: In 1964, yes sir.

B: Well, not much, not much. I don't think that the people seem to be very happy now. I don't know. Everyone that I was with children, why, they all now are old people. Many of them that I went to school with are even passed away.

M: In regards to the changes that might have occurred, a couple of more questions. Were the streets paved in the village when you came?

B: No, it was mud in 1921, and it was mud in 1964.

M: What about water? Did they have water. . .

B: No water; you still have to drink it from the outside

out of the pump. The only difference they have now--I'm talking about my village--they have lights.

M: Electricity.

B: They have electric; that is the only difference between 1921 and 1964.

M: Did you notice that many people have radio or something like that?

B: Not many did. I think some of them had like a speaker, and they have a control from the village headquarters, you call them. They put their station whatever they want, and you can not change this station. Whatever the station you got the speaker, then everybody listens to the station gave you.

M: When you came in 1921, did they have policemen at that time in the village?

B: In 1921 there were the Romanian police. They had their own headquarters. In fact they had their headquarters on top of where I used to live.

M: Do they still have them when you went back in 1964, or was it the secret police then?

B: No, no, there was no police in 1964. Whatever it was, I think they do it differently. They have somebody over there to control the village somehow, but I don't know who it was. I don't think they were from our village. It was from other places.

M: When you came here in 1921, your family was already living in this country. Did you have a hard time learning the English language?

B: I learned English at the school located at Williamson and South Avenue. Everyday the principal instructed me in English for a half hour in her office.

M: Was your mother and father able to speak pretty good English at that time?

B: Very bad, not too good. My mother and father didn't speak English well.

M: Did you live in a Romanian neighborhood, or did you live in a neighborhood that there were other nationalities in

Youngstown?

B: There were other nationalities when I lived there. I used to live on Franklin Avenue.

M: Did your parents, when they would talk to the other neighbors, the other nationalities, talk in English?

B: They had to talk English because they weren't Romanian neighbors; they were English.

M: But they were still able to pick up from one another...

B: Yes, they could talk; they could understand each other.

M: Could you tell me what your father did for a living in the United States?

B: He used to be a steel worker at Republic Steel.

M: Also can you tell me what was your first impression of Youngstown? You were seventeen when you first arrived here.

B: Well, if I tell you my impression wasn't too big because when I came on the train before I came on the train, why, I didn't know these signs and advertisements and things of that kind. I was surprised; I didn't know what it was all about. The train impressed me very much; it was a nice train, a fast, good train.

M: What about the city itself, Youngstown, compared to your village? Were you fascinated with the many buildings and stores?

B: Yes, yes, I was very much impressed. Yes, I liked it very much.

M: What were you mostly impressed with?

B: Well, I was impressed with the tall buildings, but I was impressed more in other ways. I was impressed because when I came to this country--I tell you the truth now--I thought when I came over here that my father would have a big house, maybe two or three stories with plenty of rooms and beds. I found out that we lived on Franklin Avenue in two rooms. That was a bigger surprise of mine.

M: Maybe this had a little bit to do with how people in Romania thought Americans lived.

B: How they lived, yes.

M: You found out it wasn't true.

B: I found out that people have to work for a living. I kind of was lonesome for a while, but then after I got used to it because my family was here, my sister was here. I liked to be here.

M: Can you tell us something about what kind of a job you got over here then?

B: Now I am retired, but I worked in many other places.

M: I mean when you first came to Youngstown.

B: When I came first, well, I started in Republic Steel. I worked for a while over there, but it was slowing down and we were laid off so much.

M: Yes, around the Depression then.

B: Then I worked during the war for Commercial Shoring. We used to work for their defense. I worked in Truscon, and before I retired I worked for an aluminum company. Yes, I worked for fifty, sixty years life at many different places.

M: What did you enjoy most then out of all of those many places? Which one would you consider the one that you enjoyed as the most?

B: Would like better to work?

M: Yes.

B: Well, at every one that I had to work, I had to work. Every place that I went I wanted to improve myself to make more money, but I think the best job I had was in Truscon. I worked about nine years over there. In fact I had to quit because there were so many laid off. They laid me off, and then I went to an aluminum company. I worked there until I retired.

M: When you came here and your family was already living over here--you mentioned that your father was also working at Republic--can you tell a little bit how you saw the Romanian people in America compared to maybe the Romanian people in Romania? Were they living basically the same way in tradition and in culture as the Roman-

ian people in Romania, or were there some differences?

B: A long time ago they used to have a cultural program like Romanian theater and Romanian dancing.

M: Can you tell me what the Romanian theater was like in Romania compared with what it was like over here in the United States?

B: Same thing. What was put on in Romania they would bring over here in this country.

M: But I mean you mentioned Romanian theater. Now was it putting on plays?

B: Plays yes.

M: And it was basically the same type of plays from Romania then?

B: Yes, they were Romanian plays.

M: Did they talk in Romanian then?

B: Romanian, yes, all in Romanian.

M: Romanian costumes and everything?

B: Romanian costumes, Romanian dances. They used to have a big choir before. Then after the choir they had a theater. Then after the theater they pick up all the chairs, and then they all started to dance.

M: I see. Those programs that they had in Romania theater, can you tell us basically what they were about? Were they about church, or were they about maybe the king in Romanian or something?

B: Well, there wasn't much theaters like for the kings like that, but they used to have stories.

M: I mean what kind of stories did they have?

B: They had them about the kings; they used to have them about all kinds, you know.

M: But it would have to do with Romanian people?

B: With Romanian people, yes.

- M: So in other words the play was more or less like the history, reacting the history of Romania?
- B: Yes, yes.
- M: The Romanian church itself, when you came over here, where was it located?
- B: It was on Wilson Avenue.
- M: Can you tell us a little about what it looked like outside and maybe inside a little bit?
- B: It was a plain, small church very beautifully decorated on the outside. When we bought that property, some other nationality had that church, and we bought it from them. I don't know what year it was, but before I came to this country they had bought it. I remember that they didn't have a cellar. They wanted to make some kind of a party or a tea party or a banquet room, but they didn't have any room to make it. I remember I went down there--not only me, members of the church--and we dug it and we made a big cellar right underneath the church. We dug for a cellar, and we made a big cellar.
- M: Where did they hold those kind of parties then?
- B: Down at the church.
- M: But I mean before they had it?
- B: Well, they used to hold them in the Romanian hall. We used to have a big Romanian hall on Poland Avenue. It was 645 the number. But now they took that hall down because they made the freeway.
- M: Yes, I remember. So in other words the Romanian hall was owned by the church.
- B: Oh, no, it was owned by the Romanian society Unirda Plugarul.
- M: Oh, and that was connected with the church then?
- B: No, it was under union league. It is Romanian organization that is all over the United States and Canada with branches all over. This branch is called Unirda Plugarul and it was from Youngstown.
- M: They don't have a hall any more or any place else in Youngstown?

B: They don't have any hall, but the Unirda Plugarul just had a celebration, a seventy years anniversary, two years ago in 1973.

M: What does that organization do then? Does it try to keep the Romanian culture and tradition going or what?

B: Yes, that organization still tried to keep the quartara program.

M: It was founded in 1903, yes. In 1973 we had seventy year anniversary.

M: Now that is not only for Orthodox Romanian, but it is for everyone?

B: Any Romanian can join. We had many Catholics; we got many Orthodox, and we got some Pentecostal, as long as they are Romanian or at least one of the parents. . .

M: I see. You people get together and plan different social events then?

B: Yes, yes, we, at least once a year, make a banquet. Right now we are working on a quartara program. We are going to work with both churches.

M: What is a quartara program? What is quartara?

B: Quartara, we are going to start it right now; we are going to start teaching anybody who wants to learn the Romanian language. They are going to have some teachers who are going to teach them, also they will teach those who want to learn to dance Romanian. We are also going to have a choir. We are just starting this. The Unirda Plugarul Society is going to sponsor this. They are going to pay the expenses.

M: Where is the society headquarters located now?

B: Well, we only got the box office in the post office. Our secretary is George Pintau. I am the president. Right now we don't have any office. We are waiting to have enough funds to . . .

M: Where are the national headquarters located?

B: In Cleveland. We have a newspaper that comes all over America.

M: Is that from Cleveland?

B: No, it is printed in Detroit.

M: Detroit. Is it printed in English, or is it printed in Romanian?

B: Well, it is in Romanian. I have one right here. They print it in Romanian, but they print it in English too. More and more weeks they print it in English.

M: Can you tell me . . .

B: Right on the front page it is mostly in English.

M: Can you tell me a little bit about the church again on Wilson Avenue? You mentioned what it looked like on the inside? What was its appearance on the outside? Did it resemble the church on Wick Avenue at present?

B: No, because that one was made out of wood, and this one is out of stone.

M: Oh, that was made out of wood. What color was that church on Wilson? Do you recall?

B: White, they used to paint them. It is just like regular siding like on a house; it has a regular siding that church.

M: Did a priest live there at Wilson?

B: No, where the church was, it was only the church, but across the street the church bought two properties. They rented one of them, and in one of them lived the priest . . .

M: Oh, I see.

B: And his wife.

M: Can you tell me basically where was this church on Wilson Avenue?

B: It was at the corner of Henry.

M: Henry and Wilson.

B: I think it is Henry, yes.

- M: Is it still there, or did they tear it down?
- B: No, they tore that down and made a beautiful stone church financed from the nationality fund.
- M: Now this church on Wick Avenue, can you tell us a little bit about the building of it, who owned the property and so on?
- B: Well, I could tell you a little bit about its history because our Father Stanila, who was the priest then, was a very good friend with Mr. Arms. Arms is the one who owned that big building. I think it was a three story building, and our priest Father Stanila wanted to build a church. Arms heard that they wanted to build a church. They gave him a very, very good price. I think--I won't say for sure--but I think they only paid \$15,000 for the home. Then most of the original walls are from the Arms building.
- M: How about some of the paintings on the altar? Are they from the church on Wilson Avenue?
- B: They brought most of them from Wilson Avenue, but Father Stanila also got more from other churches.
- M: Somebody else mentioned previously that the wood from the altar was from the mansion itself.
- B: Almost all of them were from the building of that house. They have lots of that. The altar itself is, I think, mostly from the Wilson Avenue church.
- M: What about that chandelier hanging from the ceiling? Was that new, or did that come from Wilson?
- B: That chandelier came from another church. Mr. and Mrs. Fredcau bought it and their name was placed on the chandelier.
- M: I haven't noticed that.
- B: They donated that.
- M: Can you tell us a little bit about how the church compares inside to the one on Wilson? You already mentioned that the one on Wilson Avenue was a little bit bare. Did the people have seats to sit on?
- B: Well, when they first started the church they didn't have any seats. They only had them around.

M: This is on Wick Avenue?

B: No, the one on Wilson Avenue. Around the walls one man could sit on them.

M: People stood up then.

B: People stood up, but that didn't go too long because after that they put benches in.

M: On, on Wilson Avenue you had that.

B: On Wilson Avenue they put benches, yes.

M: Was there a choir at Wilson Avenue too? Do you recall?

B: Just before they moved they organized a choir, yes.

M: What are those name plates for which are on the seats at the Wilson Avenue church?

B: Each one who donated a bench had their name placed on it. Now that doesn't mean that because the name is over there that he only sits there. Anybody could sit on the bench. The name is there because he paid for the bench.

M: In this new church was there any place in which they could have meetings?

B: Yes, they have a hall right along side the church.

M: Partitioned from the church.

B: Yes.

M: Where does the priest live from this church on Wick Avenue?

B: Across the street. He has his own house. Oh, do you mean the one on Wick Avenue?

M: On Wick Avenue.

B: Oh, Wick Avenue, they have it upstairs. They have beautiful rooms; about four or five rooms.

M: So in other words the one in Wilson they lived across the street.

B: Across the street from Wilson.

- M: On Wick Avenue they put it upstairs.
- B: They got it upstairs.
- M: Did they keep some of those same rooms then that the Arms' had?
- B: The same rooms but more . . .
- M: Modified.
- B: Modified it. There was a big room then like for the office. Then they had a kitchen and so on.
- M: Was there originally a basement for this church, or did they have to dig one?
- B: You mean the one on Wick Avenue?
- M: The one on Wick Avenue.
- B: They have a basement.
- M: But was this part of the Arms' mansion, this basement?
- B: Yes, the cellar was there, yes. But see, after they made it a church, they put more partition to make a stronger foundation on the bottom. They also spent over \$10,000 to divide them into school places.
- M: Sunday school.
- B: Sunday school classes. So that is what they use it for now. In case somebody has a meeting upstairs and they don't have any room, why, they go down into the cellar, where they also have rooms.
- M: Now with this church over here developing many years past since the time you had come to the United States when you were seventeen, did you see any changes occurring since the time you came when you were seventeen years old until 1945 when this church was built? Were there many changes in the ways of the American Romanian people in their way of culture?
- B: You mean as far as the church goes, or everything?
- M: No, their way of life. In other words they came over with Romanian traditions and you remember when you were seventeen years old. Now it is 1945. Did you see many

changes that occurred with the Romanian people themselves in the way they lived? Did they become more Americanized, or did they still keep their Romanian ideas?

B: Well, they became more Americanized. When we came say, for example, in 1921, some of them came before, some after, we were starting with the Romanian programs we used to have long before I came. My father told me that they used to have parades, Romanians.

M: Where at?

B: Well, I will tell you about the parades. My father told me they had all kinds of bands. They all went in Hubbard. I don't know what was over there, big things, you know. Every kind of a band was over there, and it was in the evening. They would sing with the band. All of a sudden the lights went out and no band could play, except the Romanian band.

M: They still played.

B: They were playing without notes, and they kept on playing because of the dark. You couldn't see anything, but they were the only band that was playing in the dark.

M: The Romanians were part of this parade then?

B: Yes, they were a great band.

M: It was all nationalities?

B: It was really a Romanian-Gypsy orchestra. All of them have passed away now.

M: What were some of the Romanian dances that they had in those days?

B: Well, they got all kinds; they got sirba, they got hora.

M: Which one is like a Russian dance that they kick with their feet?

B: Well, that is like a sirba.

M: Sirba.

B: Sirba. Everybody gets hold of them, and they make a big, big long circle and they dance. Sometimes they go pretty fast, yes. Then there is another kind of a dance with just a man and two girls.

M: Which one is the katusha?

B: Katusha is just boys. They have bells on their feet. When they move their feet, they make like a jingle bell on their feet. They ring the bells; they have it on their legs when they dance the kotusher.

M: And would a band be playing at that time while they are doing that?

B: You mean when they have the parade?

M: No, no, no, when they are dancing with these bells.

B: When they dance, well, yes, they have a band, the Gypsy orchestra.

M: Did they have Gypsies that played that?

B: Yes, they had the Gypsy orchestra, but like I said now almost all of them passed away. They have orchestra now in Boardman. They also have one in Detroit and in Cleveland. These are Romanian orchestras.

M: Getting back to the question that I had asked about the parade, did you see much changes other than what you just mentioned now in the sense of the way people reacted? They didn't have any more parades in 1945. Did they like that?

B: It is more Americanized more and more as the time passes and the old people die. Even in other communities where you have more Romanians, they still keep it better, but our community. . .

M: Is your organization, the one in which you are president, keeping these dances and music going?

B: We want to get these in the eyes of the public because a lot of the younger people who have Romanian parents don't know the Romanian culture. We would like to see if we could show them. I know they are going to like it.

M: I know you do.

B: I know I want to teach them how to talk the language in

case sometime they want to go see where their grandfather and grandmother came from. Then they won't need an interpreter.

M: Well, in the church on Wick Avenue in 1945 were they talking the services in Romanian, or was it in English?

B: Well, in 1945 it was Father Stanila, and he made the services in Romanian. He was kind of old.

M: Yes, I know.

B: As time went by fast, why, he . . .

M: So in other words when the church was on Wilson Avenue, it was in Romanian; then when they came on Wick Avenue it was still Romanian.

B: Well, even before when Father Stanila was younger, he made the services in a little bit of English, but mostly in Romanian. Then as time went by and he got older and older, he didn't go so good.

M: When did some of the services start becoming half in English and half in Romanian? Do you recall about when that was?

B: Well, it was really started after Father Lazar came. He was a priest born in this country, and he knew the perfect language in Romanian and English.

M: Wasn't he also in his youth a member of this church in Youngstown?

B: He was a member of the church, but see, he was a priest in Mageery in the end now. Then he came to Akron, and our Father Stanila passed away. We needed a new priest over here, and we voted for Father Lazar because he was born in Campbell, and everybody knew him. Then we started to have changes.

M: The changes started.

B: He was a good priest who knew how to talk English and mix the English and the Romanian. Too bad that he got sick and had to resign on account of his sickness.

M: Wasn't the priest in Cleveland, Father Hennigan, also in his early childhood a member of the church too?

- B: Not only was he at church over here and his parents, but he was altar boy?
- M: Oh, was he?
- B: Father Hazada right in our church. Of course, he was a Wilson.
- M: Was that under Father Stanila that he was an altar boy?
- B: Yes, under Father Stanila, yes. We have a lot of, well, people, like doctors, who were altar boys in our church.
- M: Can you mention some of those people who were altar boys?
- B: I think Dr. John Guru was altar boy in our church. Dr. Guru, everybody knows him. I think many of them were, but I can't recall them right now.
- M: Father John would like me to ask this to most of the people that I interviewed. What is your vision of the church on Wick Avenue? Some people think of it as a place of worship and also for socializing. What is your vision of the church?
- B: Well, I think a church should be a church. Right now we have a very good priest, Father John. He has just been installed I think last January. It has only been about three months now. He has got a tremendous voice; he is a very good man, and he mixes the services in English and Romanian. He has a very nice voice and a very good man.
- M: Could you tell me what changes would you like to see occur regarding the Romanian church on Wick Avenue?
- B: The way that I know seems to be very good. They make the services half in Romanian and half in English.
- M: Would you like to see the service done completely in English, or would you rather have it be kept half and half?
- B: Well, as far as I'm concerned, I would see it done in both languages. As far as I'm concerned, even if you mix it with the whole thing in Romanian, it pleases me. But, see, I'm not the only member. So you have got to figure about the younger people. I go along because half and half is very good.

- M: What about maybe having the service done completely in English? Do you think some of the older people might resent it?
- B: I think some old people wouldn't exactly like it, let's put it this way.
- M: Do you think by putting the services completely in English, even every other week, it would bring back some of the younger people?
- B: Well, if they make it, say, once a month in English, all young will come that Sunday. I might be wrong but others might stay away.
- M: What about the other Sundays then that are in Romanian? Do you think that the young people might come when it is in Romanian or only when it is in English?
- B: Well, I hope they come when it is in Romanian too; they might learn a few words in Romanian, the ones who don't know the Romanian language.
- M: You had mentioned that they are going to have a class in Romanian to teach the Romanian language. Is this class going to be sponsored more or less by the club you mentioned, or is it going to be connected with the church also?
- B: The church is going to teach them. They are going to have teachers to teach them in Romanian. All the expenses the society Unirda Plugarul is going to sponsor.
- M: I see. Is it just going to be to just read and write, or is it going to be just to talk?
- B: Read, write, talk, everything. We have good, good, professors who are going to teach them. At least two or three that I know.
- M: Can you mention maybe one of them?
- B: Well, I can mention Dr. Tidorescua.
- M: Isn't he the one who is back at Youngstown State?
- B: Yes, he is the one who is going to be our teacher for the Romanian language. Milania Lav is another good

teacher. She volunteered to do the work, both of them. We had a meeting with them, and they agreed to teach them.

M: Is it going to be held during the evenings, or is it going to be held weekdays?

B: Well, somebody could come and serve at night and somebody work in the daytime. Then they could come in the evening, or they could have some professor to teach them in the evening. Some of them could come on Saturdays only and maybe Friday afternoon. They could make about two or three classes, and they make it so that everybody could come, some of them day turn and some night.

M: I see. Regarding your family over here, how do you and your family feel about your Romanian heritage?

B: I'm very proud of it; I know that much.

M: Do you think that most of the people at the Romanian church are proud of their Romanian heritage?

B: Well, not only in the church, but I'm also active in the Romanian society. I'm also active with the Americans.

M: So then would you say that the membership and the amount of people who belong to these societies and who, like you said, are going to teach Romanian language that there are a lot of people responding to it then to keep this culture going?

B: Yes, yes, there are quite a few now. I see that they put them on the bulletin board. Everybody who wants to learn the language just signs their name with the hours and what time of day in, either the evening or days, that you could come.

M: So then a lot of people have responded for it then?

B: Yes, yes, very many. Well, I think they are going to start them in the fall. In the meantime we are going to get organized with them.

M: So then that is somewhat proof that most people feel pretty good about their Romanian heritage.

B: Very proud of it, yes.

M: What changes would you like to see occur in relation to

the Romanian community in Mahoning County? In other words would you like to see anything occur?

B: In Romanian?

M: Yes.

B: I would like to have more cultural programs. Now the 200 year in bicentennial is approaching and we are working on this quartara program. On the first meeting we are going to have, I am going to bring up that we should have some kind of a Romanian demonstration to show our talent in the tentamaze.

M: That would be for 1976 then?

B: In 1976, but they will start it on Monday.

M: What would you like to have in that demonstration in that celebration?

B: Romanian dances, Romanian choir . . .

M: Romanian band?

B: Well, we have quite a few bands. Right now we are in the process. . .

M: What about the stage? You mentioned about the theater. Would you like to have one?

B: The theater, well, yes, we are going to start work on that.

M: Where would you hold all of this though?

B: Well, we have two churches. Both our priests, the Catholic priest, Father Polvill, and our Father John, from Orthodox, have already agreed on it. We had a meeting with them, and they agreed to Holycall parade with us to do this program fully. They are going to direct what they can do, who can teach the dances, who can be in the choir, who can teach anything that they can do.

M: Where would you hold it because it would be. . .

B: We have many places to hold it. We could hold it at our church here in the social hall in the Orthodox church, or we could hold them on Prospect Street church.

M: That is the Romanian Catholic church?

B: Catholic church, yes, on 73 Prospect Street.

M: What is the name of that church?

B: St. Mary. Father Polville is a very good man. He does very good.

M: Very good.

B: I think we are going to work out this program.

M: So would you be making costumes too then?

B: If they made costumes, we are even going to start making like sports like baseball, football, whatever they want. We will sponsor it; we pay for their clothes, whatever they need.

M: I noticed that there is a Romanian flag in the church on Wick Avenue. Was that flag also in the church on Wilson Avenue?

B: Yes, that is same flag.

M: Was that brought over from Romania, or was it made in the United States?

B: Oh, they made that, yes.

M: They made it?

B: They made it, yes.

M: But then that also would be proof that you are trying to cling to the Romanian culture too by having that flag on display along with the American flag too.

B: With the American flag, which is first, then the Romanian.

M: Yes. You mentioned that you were in Romania in 1964. When you went to Romania and you saw the people there--you mentioned that most of the buildings were about the same--did you go into any of the larger cities?

B: Yes, I was in many, many.

M: Can you describe a little bit what the cities looked like in the way the people lived?

B: Yes, well, Bucharest is the biggest one of all. Of course, in 1921, when I came, there wasn't one building like an apartment. They got a lot of new apartments over there, see. Now a town like Alba Lulia is a historical town. There is another one. Every place you go in Romania now especially in the big towns there are new blocks. They call them blocks, but they are really apartment houses.

M: Now that, say, you mentioned a historical city, what is it known for its history? Is it for the royal family, or why is it known as a historical city?

B: Well, see, our history goes back where they had Horio Clostar and Cleachant. It goes way back; I don't know how many centuries back, and they are buried right in that big cathedral. It is a Catholic church, an old one. They don't use that for services.

M: Were those men priests or something there?

B: They were like heroes.

M: Were they war heroes then?

B: Yes, they were heroes, yes. They are buried right over there in that big monastery.

M: Were they heroes of war in around the 17th and 18th century?

B: Way, way, way, back.

M: When was that?

B: Farther than that, yes. It is only the history now. They called them Horio Clostar and Cleachant.

M: Did they save the city or the country or what?

B: They saved the nation.

M: From being taken over?

B: From being taken over. I think they were fighting with the Turks.

M: The Turks?

B: Yes, before many, many years ago.

M: And then they used to have celebrations too for these men?

B: Yes. They have a big feast.

M: When you went back in 1964, and the Russians were in control, were the people willing to talk to you in regards to how things were?

B: Well, I will tell you when I went over to Romania, they didn't want to talk about history. They wanted to know and learn how much an automobile costs in this country, and how much you have to work so that you can buy an automobile. They wanted to compare ours with their country.

M: When you were in Romania at that time on your tour and visit, what were some of the cultural changes that you saw in the big city?

B: Well, my brother was a shoemaker in Sighisoara. So I went into that town, and right in the middle of the town, they used to have a market. A market where you sell potatoes or lettuce or tomatoes or whatever you want.

M: Like High Street market?

B: Like High Street market, but it was right in the middle of town. Now in 1964 when I went, do you know what they had then? It is a park with beautiful flowers and benches to sit down. That is what they have.

M: What about the place itself, the lakes and like that? Here in the United States they talk about being polluted, for instance Lake Newport here. They talk about how beautiful Mill Creek Park is. You go and look at the beautiful water at Lake Newport and you see it is kind of polluted. Do they have such problems in Romania that you saw, or does the water look real clear?

B: The water doesn't look bad because when I was in Romania we were at Mamaya right at the Black Sea. We were there on vacation. They have nothing but motels and . . .

M: Beaches. . .

B: Beaches just like they got over here.

M: Like Prescali.

B: Yes. It looks clean; the water looks clean.

M: Do they keep the city pretty clean too?

B: Well, I tell you in Bucharest--I don't say it about other towns--but in Bucharest they wash it every day.

M: Oh, they wash the town?

B: Everyday they got a big tank of water with a sprayer in the street and covered two or three ladies with brooms, and they go and wash it everyday. I know this because I stayed in Bucharest a few days too.

M: Were you there in the summertime?

B: Summertime.

M: Is it real hot there in the summer?

B: In Bucharest it is very hot, very nice and warm, and it was in August that we were there. Farther down from where I came from and where my wife came from it is much colder. In fact my wife caught a cold there.

M: You mean the southern part?

B: Well, it is farther north. I think it is almost western part.

M: Almost western?

B: Western part, yes where we came from. Bucharest is more in the eastern part.

M: When it is warm, do the people have any fans or air conditioning or anything?

B: No.

M: So they just suffer it out then?

B: Well, now that I think of it, they don't even have much screening over there. The flies go all over. You got to have kind of a piece of paper to get the flies out of there.

- M: Do they have running water in the city too?
- B: They usually have their own water, but not every house.
- M: In the city they have their own wells too?
- B: Well, in the city they have some running water. If it is a big city, they have running water. But even the cities that are not so big, they don't have running water. Some of them have to use it from the well.
- M: What about the stores? Prior to 1921, would you compare the stores in the big city to what it was like in 1964?
- B: Well, I tell you the stores don't have too much. Of course, we didn't buy too much because we ate mostly in restaurants.
- M: What about clothing stores?
- B: Yes, they have clothing stores, but I don't think it is the quality of America.
- M: But could you tell us a little bit about how it was like before you came here? What the outside of the stores looked like? Were they modern, or were they the same old buildings?
- B: Well, the stores in the big towns were pretty modern. They have almost everything, but still they don't have as many things like they have over here. I will tell you an example. Right in Constanta--Constanta is a port close to Mamaya--my wife wanted to buy a pair of shoes from Romania. She took her shoes off to try on a new pair. While she was trying on the pair, two ladies asked her if they could buy her old shoes. I told them they couldn't buy them because they were my wife's shoes.
- M: Before you came here in 1921, what did the stores look like inside? Did they resemble a country store?
- B: Well, in the village they had one carismo. Let's put it this way like we say saloon, but it is not a saloon to sit down to drink. It is a saloon for yourself to take a glass of whiskey, but you get your container and you take it home. There are some like that, and there are some places that you could take it when you came there.
- M: That is 1964?

B: 1964, yes.

M: What was it like before then?

B: Well, before like. . . That was in 1921 when I said that.

M: Oh, the last ones.

B: Yes, in 1921. Then in 1964 there was a little difference.

M: Would it compare these stores to K-Mart?

B: No, no. They were littler stores. You go over there, and you have to ask them what you want. You know, you tell them what you want, and then if they got it, they go and get it.

M: Oh, they go and get it for you.

B: Yes. No, you don't pick up anything over there. No, there is no such thing.

M: I have heard from somebody else who was in Romania that even when you purchase eggs, you have to bring your own bags.

B: Not only eggs. Oh, yes. While I was in Sighisoara, my wife sent me to the market in the morning. I walked to the market, and I wanted to buy many things, fruits and everything. I said that I wanted to take them. They would ask me how I was going to take them because I had no container. You had to have a bag, and I forgot to bring a container with me because I thought I was back in this country, you know. I had to go back and get my container.

M: Shopping bag.

B: Shopping bag. Well, it was a little stronger than a shopping bag. It has got a handle. You could put anything in it because it is very strong. You have to buy that to have it. I forgot to bring it, and I went back, and I put everything in there. See, the next time I know.

M: Did you have any trouble at all getting change from the stores?

B: Well, no. . .

M: Because I was told that some stores don't like to give change out. They try to get it at the exact price. If you want to get something, you try to pay for it as clear, close to it as possible without getting change.

B: Well, you know how it is.

M: What about the drinking water in Romania?

B: Well, the drinking water, I tell you the truth, I didn't drink any water in Romania while I was there because I heard it wouldn't be good for me. So I drank some kind of bottled water. It was not pop; it was like distilled water that we bought in a bottle, like big bottles of pop.

M: Oh, they sell that there?

B: They sell that there, and I drank that.

M: Did they have coca-cola and those kind of stuff there?

B: No, I tell you what I did while I was at the palace on that mountain in the Carpathian Mountains. Well, I went to see the palace, you know. Then we went into a restaurant, and I found Juicy Fruit chewing gum in that restaurant. I wanted to give the driver some chewing gum from America, and they sold it over there. You know how much I paid for a pack of five sticks?

M: No, how much?

B: 50¢ in American money.

M: Oh, boy.

B: 50¢, yes. I gave it to the driver.

M: Did most of the people ride buses in Romania, or did they a car?

B: They ride buses; they don't have any cars. Even in big villages very seldom do you see anybody with a car.

M: And the people in the bigger cities, do they live in apartments, or do they have their own houses?

B: They live in apartments.

- M: And the government owns the apartments?
- B: The government owns all the apartments.
- M: And the apartments are they kind of big, do you know, or do they suit the people that live in them?
- B: Yes, they are small rooms. They call them blocks. It is a big building, and many families live there, but the room is not too big.
- M: In other words there are maybe only one or two rooms for that family.
- B: A couple of rooms, yes, and I went to some while I was there. You had to go up the steps; there was no elevator. You got to walk up no matter if you stayed on the fourth floor.
- M: Well, were those buildings more modern compared to the United States?
- B: This was very small. Now I don't talk about like going to a hotel. Hotels have elevators. They are like in this country especially the Leader Hotel, the Ambassador; they have everything, elevators, everything, but I am talking about blocks that people live in.
- M: In the cities like in Bucharest over there most of the people do they work in factories, or what do they do?
- B: Yes, they mostly work in factories, some of them in the office.
- M: When you were over there, did you notice what some of their major industries would be over there?
- B: Well, in Fagaras they make all kinds of fertilizers for the farmers. In Bucharest they got people in another field. The biggest book maker in all Romania is so big that they call him Scantila.
- M: Oh, so they make a lot of books.
- B: They make books over there. That is a big, big building. A lot of people work over there. They have offices.
- M: Now when the Romanians go to work, you said they take the bus. Did you notice what they do for recreation? Do they do anything special, dance or something?

- B: They have theaters, especially in Bucharest.
- M: Movie theaters?
- B: Movie theaters. They like cowboy movies over there. It is always full. All the time they have lines to get in.
- M: Is it more or less American made movies?
- B: Yes, they like cowboy movies. That is what they told me. I didn't go over there to go in the movies. I want to see something else, but yes, that is where they go.
- M: So they try to associate a little bit with the American way of life then?
- B: Yes, they like American way of life. In fact, they like everything about America.
- M: Do you have anything else that you would like to tell us maybe about your visit to Romania that you can think of?
- B: Well, I tell you that I enjoyed myself. Everybody treated me right.
- M: Would you like to go again?
- B: I would like to go again if I had the money. Now that I am retired you can't do everything that you want to do.
- M: Is there anything else that you would like to add to what we talked about today?
- B: Well, I am glad that you picked me to say this. Of course, if anybody listens to this tape, why, not to think that is kind of a broken English and like that.
- M: No, you are doing good.
- B: I can express myself, and I can read and write in English. I learned to do Americanization.
- M: Well, thank you, Mr. Biris.

END OF INTERVIEW