

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Romanian Culture

Personal Experience

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LOUISE GIBB

Interviewed

by

John Mutean

on

March 5, 1976

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

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INTERVIEWEE: LOUISE GIBB
INTERVIEWER: John Mutean
SUBJECT: Romanian Culture
DATE: March 5, 1976

M: This is an interview with Mrs. Louise Gibb for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program regarding Romanian culture in Mahoning County, by John Mutean, at 919 Albert Street, Youngstown, Ohio, on March 5, 1976, at 6:00 p.m.

Although Mrs. Gibb is not Romanian, she nevertheless is supervisor of Sunday school at the Holy Trinity Romanian Orthodox Church at 626 Wick Avenue.

Mrs. Gibb, what nationality are you?

G: I'm Greek.

M: Were either your parents or grandparents born in Greece?

G: Yes, both. My father was from Sparta, Greece, and my mother was born here in America. My grandfather was from Middle Asia, which is now Turkey, and my grandmother is Syrian.

M: Oh, I see. When did your father come to the United States?

G: He was approximately sixteen years old.

M: Do you have any idea about what year that was in?

G: He was born in 1905 so approximately 1921 or 1922.

M: I see. Do you have any idea if he came straight to the Youngstown area, or did he go somewhere else in the United States.

G: He was in New York for a period of time, and then he was in Texas, which he liked very well. I think if he would have had his way, he would have stayed in Texas.

M: Did he ever mention to you that they had any difficulty in coping to the change of the American way of life?

G: Well, he always found that when he was alone, Greek people wished for him to speak Greek while he was here in America. He did not wish to speak Greek; he wanted to learn the American language. For that reason he took and put a small pocket dictionary in his pocket and told people not to speak to him in Greek but to speak to him in English. He wanted to learn, and he did a very good job.

M: That is good. When did you yourself become associated with the Romanian community in mahoning County?

G: When I met my present husband about 1963.

M: Have you noticed since you have become associated with the Romanian culture, are there any similarities between the Greek and Romanian cultures? Have you noticed any similarities?

G: The foods have no similarity whatsoever. Greek people seem to like lamb and green dough and things like that. They use a lot of butter. Oil, they use a lot of olive oil, and they like olives and the Greek cheese and some other things like that. I find that the Romanian people like stuffed cabbage and pork meats. They like that, and there, there is no similarity whatsoever.

Costume wise, I think they basically have the same type of folklore-type of clothing. Basically they are the same. I don't think there is too much difference.

M: What about some of the dances that they do? For instance the Romanians do a dance called the kotashed and those kind of dances. Is that any similar at all to any of the Greek dances at all?

- G: I think so. The greek people and the Romanian people have circle dancing, which is very similar. I found it very easy to pick up. My husband is taking dancing. I think he in turn picked up a few of the Greek dancing, not the steps. The steps aren't necessarily the same but the fact that it is circle dancing, and it is not all there is. x
- M: In other words the method is a little bit similar although the exact method is not.
- G: Right.
- M: What about the language itself? Is there any words that might be similar between the Greek and the Romanians?
- G: Oh, yes, we found that a lot of words are similar. Right at this present time I can't think of any, but sometimes the referral of one question to another...
- M: Mrs. Gibb, have you yourself learned to speak any Romanian at all?
- G: No, not very much. I think the reason is my husband doesn't speak it here in the house. I can speak fluent Greek, and I think I could pick up the Romanian very easily if I had someone to speak to. I'm sure I could pick it up.
- M: You say that you speak Greek fluently. Where did you pick up Greek? Did you get it from your parents yourself, or did you go to school for that, or how did you?
- G: From when I was a baby we always spoke Greek in the house. y Then I started school they began to speak English, and therefore I learned English. Then in later years, I think I was in the fourth grade, I started Greek school which I attended for five years.
- M: When you were a youngster, did you attend Sunday school in the Greek Orthodox church.
- G: Yes, Greek.
- M: Could you tell us basically what it was like in Sunday school at that time in a Greek Orthodox church?
- G: I think we learned basically the same type of...eulogy.

N: You learned basically the same type of eulogy?

G: we have the same type of divine liturgy. We have the same type of saints and things like that. We learned the life of the saints. We learned the regular Bible stories that I taught to all children to believe. We were taught the customs of the Greek Orthodox church.

M: Were you taught to speak Greek at all.

G: In Sunday school?

M: Yes.

G: Yes, we learned the Lord's Prayer in Greek; we learned The Creed in Greek. Then as we got older and were brought into the choir, then, of course, we learned the responses in Greek as well.

M: I see. now that you have been associated with the Romanian Orthodox church itself, have you noticed any similarities between the Greek Orthodox church and the Romanian Orthodox church? What about an appearance inside? We at our church, the Holy Trinity Romanian Orthodox Church, have the icons and have the altar. Is that similar to the Greek church itself?

G: It is absolutely the same. We have an iconostasis, which is exactly the same. It divide the main which is the body part of the church from the sanctuary. In the front of the iconostasis on the right-hand side we also have a bishop's throne, which the Romanian church has. We have a vestibule where we can light candles and make a cross. Usually there is the Patron Saint of the church there on the vestibule. You cross yourself, and, of course, you kiss the icon.

M: We have a lot of candles in our church by the altar. Do the Greek churches have that too?

G: The Romanian church, my husband's church, did not begin this I think until the past two or three years. It was very odd for me to see that they did not have the candles in the church. I had seen candles in the Greek church from the time I was a baby; in fact we got much enjoyment in lighting one of the ten sets of candles, which is about the thickness of your small finger. At Easter time we carry candles and the such. We have a good many candles in our church.

- M: I see. When did you become a supervisor to Sunday school at Holy Trinity Romanian Orthodox Church?
- G: Well, I was there teaching about four or five years. With the illness of our past priest Father Lazar, his wife asked if I would take over the Sunday school, which I told her I would. That was approximately two years ago.
- M: Now that you have mentioned about various priests, can you tell us are there any similarities between the Romanian Orthodox priests and the Greek Orthodox priests itself?
- G: The priests' vestements are entirely the same. Each part of his vestment has the same name although one is said in Romanian and one is said in Greek. If you say them in English, they are both exactly the same. The priests are permitted to marry if they get married before they become a priest. But if they become a priest first, then they are not permitted to marry, which is the same in the Greek and in the Romanian church.
- M: Now did you teach Sunday school at all at the Greek church?
- G: Oh, yes, a good many years. I would say four or five years there also.
- M: Have you noticed anything similar between our Sunday school and the one that you have over at the Greek Orthodox church?
- G: I think the main purpose in Sunday school in Orthodox churches is to make the child aware of the divine liturgy, the saints, the parts of the church, the priest, and the helpers of the priest, important people of the church, and things like that. But basically they both strive to teach you Orthodoxy.
- M: Right, so that is the most important thing of the church, not that it is Greek Orthodox or Romanian Orthodox, but the most important is Orthodoxy then?
- G: Yes.
- M: Okay. what are your duties as supervisor of the Sunday school at Holy Trinity Romanian Orthodox Church?

G: I try to look over new material, not only from our own OCEC but also from other dioceses be it Greek or any of the others. I've gotten information from the Greek diocese, and I look over and I try to find what is the best text for the children to go through. I would rather choose dependable teachers that will teach the children and inspire the children to want to come and to want to stay. The most important part I think is to keep a child coming to church.

M: How would you propose on doing that if some of the children have the habit of being laxed in attendance?

G: It makes it very difficult. We have tried to talk with the parents. The priests and I have talked about the problems, and all we can do is confront the parents and ask them the reason for them not coming, ask them if it is possibly our fault, ask them if there is something they wish incorporated that maybe the child wants. We almost bend over backwards for them to try to get them to come. But then again it is always up to the person.

M: Now what age groups of children attend Sunday school at Holy Trinity?

G: We have a little boy that is as young as three in regular classes. He has been in a regular class until this year we began a nursery. We have children from all ages, a year, two years, all the way up to teenagers.

M: In other words eighteen, nineteen?

G: Well, if they wish to come, they are very welcome. But we usually find that when they get up to about that age, they are pulling away from the church a little more pertaining to Sunday school. They don't like the idea of coming to Sunday school. They like to go to church; they willfully go to church and go into the choir, which is fine. I feel that the choir will keep them in the church, and that is an excellent place for them to be.

M: What is taught to the children of the nursery level? Is there anything specially taught there?

G: We try to teach them their cross while they are listening to other children say the Lord's Prayer at the beginning of Sunday school. Hopefully they will begin to recognize these words so that as they get into the kindergarten level, they can begin to learn these words and put them together and have some meaning.

- M: What about the kindergarten level itself then? What are they taught?
- G: Again, we still try to show them the cross, and they have their Bible stories, the easy Bible stories, Adam and Eve, Noah, the holidays, the importance of the holidays, the stories pertaining to the holidays, things such as that. They do have coloring and cutting and things like that they can take home and see them at home.
- M: I see. You mentioned a little bit about holidays and things like that. In looking at both Greek Orthodox and Romanian Orthodox holidays have you noticed anything that might be similar in the way that both groups celebrate those, say for instance, Easter, Christmas?
- G: Easter is almost exactly the same. The amount of services during the Holy week, the services that are held nightly, the names of each of those services, those are all basically the same. The only thing that I truly enjoy far more in the Greek service is Good Friday, where they have the sepulcher which is decorated in complete live flowers. After the service, which is probably over about 10:00 or 10:30, the flowers are taken off of the sepulcher and passed out to the people. That is the only service that I love. I would rather go to the Greek church to see.
- M: What about Christmas time. Is it entirely different?
- G: No, Christmas again is almost basically the same services.
- M: Also at Christmas time the church, through different groups like AROY's (American Romanian Orthodox Youth) and even the church itself, has different people going around to sing Christmas carols. Have the Greeks done that?
- G: Yes, the Greek Orthodox youth are called GOYA. They are the same as AROY; they are young teenagers. In the Greek church they have the junior GOYA and the senior GOYA; they do the same thing; they go carolling; they decorate the church; they decorate the trees; they are like a youth club. I don't know what year it was, but I was the supervisor of the GOYA for a year also.

G: Yes, the two major holidays we have basically lamb for our meal, and we too have a type of bread. It is a sweet bread; it is a yellow-egg bread. During easter the bread has a colored Easter egg in it, and at New Year's, the bread has money hidden in it. This is what is called glog-loaf, which is brought to the table during Christmas dinner. The way it is cut has a special meaning also. First all of the head of the house takes and makes the sign of the cross on the bottom of the bread three times. Then it is usually the father or the grandfather of the house that does this cutting. Then the bread is cut in such a manner so that the first slice that is cut goes to the house itself. From the second slice goes to the oldest person in that house at that time be it the father or the grandfather, and then it goes down the line to the grandmother if she is there to the father of the house, to the mother of the house, to the oldest child, to the husband of the oldest child to the oldest, to the second child, to the husband of the second child, and it just goes down the line including the children. Then after this bread is cut and you begin to eat it then you find that someone was lucky enough to receive the coin which it usually means good luck in the house and lood luck to the person that finds it.

M: I see. Now also around Christmas-time, at Holy Trinity Romanian Church, the priest comes around and baptizes the house right after the New Year's or around the New Year's time. Do the Greek priests come around and do the same thing too?

G: Yes, at the beginning of the year, the priest does come and blesses the house in the same manner that the Romanian priest does. Usually he goes to every room of the house and to the area where you might have an iconostasis, and he blesses that at home for the rest of the year.

M: There is one question I want to ask you regarding marriage services. I understand that it used to be that for the old Romanian weddings to have somebody like an announcer to announce about the bride and announce about donations and so forth like that. Do the Greeks have what they call like an announcer or something in which they would have for somebody to donate to dance with the bride to tell how much the parents donated for the wedding or something like that? Do they have anything like that, or is that entirely different?

M: No, this is a custom that I was very surprised to see in the Romanian Church. For as long as I can remember it has been basically just a regular wedding, and one nice thing about the Greek weddings is when the bride and the groom are dancing, the people throw money. You would see all the young children scurry to the dance floor and pick up all this money. This is supposed to be good luck for the bride and groom. The children have a lot of fun as well. Another thing that I noticed is that Romanian people usually make money lists and such things as that. I have never come across that in the Greek church.

M: I see, so the Greek church did not have these announcers or anything like that at all?

G: No.

M: I see. So this would probably be more or less a fad from Eastern Europe that Romania and Hungary and those areas have too. Getting back to the church itself, what changes in the Sunday school in the church itself have you noticed if any since you have been associated with the Romanian community?

G: When I was very young, women always learned to go into church with their hats on. You also did not go in church with a sleeveless dress; you didn't go to church in slacks.

M: This is at the Greek church?

G: I learned all these customs when I was young. You did not make the sign of the cross with your gloves on. You did not cross your legs in church and such. But I find that now modern society is getting away from this. Women are, even in the Greek church and the Romanian church, not wearing hats. In the Romanian church people do come to church with sleeveless dresses, and they do come to church in slacks. Now I must say I have not gone to my church, the Greek church, recently, and I can not say if the women have begun to wear slacks there. But I do not think that it is a very good custom; I do not like it.

M: I notice that at the Holy Trinity Romanian Orthodox Church women have a habit of sitting on the left side and many of the men sit on the right side, is that prominent also in the Greek church, or do they mingle and it doesn't matter which side you sit?

G: Back when I was a young girl, it was the same way. The men sat on one side, and the women sat on the other side. But now they have them mingling, and now families sit together. Usually I find in both churches, Greek and Romanian, families tend to sit in the same places each Sunday. You could almost look for them in a certain place. And there you will find them.

M: Also at Holy Trinity Church there are cantors sometimes to do responses. Are there cantors in the Greek Orthodox church also?

G: Oh, yes, and the cantor is very important. Most often some churches which do not have choirs, will have a cantor instead. I was very surprised to see that even though the Romanian church did not have a cantor for a period of time they did not go looking for one because the cantor is a very important person in the Orthodox church itself.

M: What about the language itself? At Holy Trinity Romanian Orthodox Church, the minister, Father John, and his predecessor, Father Lazar, started to initiate having the liturgy half in English and half in Romanian. What about in the Greek church? Is it done in that same manner, or is it done entirely in Greek, or entirely in English to your knowledge?

G: The Greek people are very strong willed. They want it all done in Greek, but they too are beginning to change a little. I think it all depends on the priest and how good of a vocabulary he has in English. If the priest can speak English somewhat fluently, then I think he is incorporating it a lot sooner in his church where a priest is Greek and finds it very difficult to speak English, tries to stay with the Greek.

M: How many churches...Is there only one Greek Orthodox church in the Youngstown area, or are there more than one?

G: In Youngstown itself there are three.

M: Three, I see. Have you noticed any basic changes that have gone in those three churches or one of those churches in recent years, or has it followed the usual pattern of the Orthodoxy which means unchange? But has there been any changes in culture or the outlook of the people themselves in the Greek church?

- G: I think culture-wise the people are becoming Americanized, but as to the church I think the church is steadfast. I do not think there are as many changes, not in the way of the liturgy. The liturgy is still the same; that is unchanged. Small things have changed, like possibly allowing women to come in slacks. Like as I said I don't know what other churches do. They possibly have slight changes pertaining to lent, which is our fasting. x
- M: Are there any specific changes that you would like to see occur either for the Romanian church or for the Greek church?
- G: I think I would like to see them go in English completely-- only so that the churches do not lose the children who cannot speak but their mothers can. \
- M: Right. Is there anything else that you would like to add Mrs. Gibb that you might think of? / x
x \
- G: No, I really don't. \
- M: Thank you very much. x