

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Romanian Culture in Mahoning County Project

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O. H. 132

GEORGE RADU JR.

Interviewed

by

John Muntean

on

May 14, 1975

GEORGE RADU JR.

George Anton Radu was born in Agnita, Romania, the son of George and Anna Radu. The family moved to the United States in search of a better life and his father who was a blacksmith, found work in Pennsylvania. George was just a small boy when the family moved to Youngstown and this would prove to be the final move that the Radu family would make in search of opportunity.

George attended the public schools in Youngstown and graduated from Campbell Memorial High School and then entered Youngstown College. In 1930, he left school to find work and worked as a gas station attendant until 1936. At this time he found employment with the Youngstown Sheet and Tube Company, where his father was also employed as a blacksmith. George continued to work for Sheet and Tube until his retirement in 1972.

Being a member of the Holy Trinity Romanian Church, George is very concerned about the future of the Romanian culture in this area. The church supplies an atmosphere where people can gather and discuss the traditions, but George feels that the younger generation are missing out on a great deal by not participating. The customs, food, dances and music of the Romanian people are all important to the Radu family and George would like to see this carried out in more families.

George and his wife, Anna, live on a small farm in Youngstown and they enjoy their farming life. They grow enough to feed themselves and still have enough remaining to

store up for the winter. George is also proud of the fact that both their daughters speak the Romanian language and feel that more emphasis should be placed on learning a native language.

Julie Di Sibio

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

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INTERVIEWEE: GEORGE RADU JR.

INTERVIEWER: John Muntean

SUBJECT: Romanian Culture in Mahoning County

DATE: May 14, 1975

M: This is an interview with George Radu Jr. for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, regarding Romanian culture in Mahoning County, by John Muntean at 6224 South Avenue Extension, Youngstown, Ohio on May 14, 1975 at 7:30 p.m.

Mr. Radu is my Godfather. Romanians refer to their God-parents as Nasu and Nasa--Nasa refers to the woman and Nasu refers to the male. Therefore, when I speak to Mr. Radu I will refer to him as Nasu.

Nasu, what part of Romania did your parents come from?

R: They came from a town called Agnita, which is in Romania the part that is in Transylvania.

M: Were you born in Romania or in the United States?

R: I was born in Romania, in Agnita, Transylvania.

M: Could you tell me when your parents came to the United States and if you came with them at that time?

R: My dad came to the United States in 1909 and my mother came here with me in 1912.

M: Where did your dad, when he came to the United States, where did he go? Did he go to Youngstown or Campbell, where?

R: He came directly to a town named Elrama, Pennsylvania.

M: Could you tell me basically what was his occupation prior to coming to the United States and upon his arrival, what did he do?

R: He was a blacksmith.

M: In Romania?

R: Yes.

M: In previous talks, a few of you had mentioned that in Romania to become a blacksmith you had to learn several languages. Could you tell us a little bit about it?

R: You went to school and studied Romanian for two days, Hungarian for two days, and German for two days per week.

M: Is that over a year's period?

R: That's right.

M: When he came to the United States, what was his occupation?

R: A blacksmith.

M: How was he able to communicate with the people when he came to the United States?

R: He was fortunate in that the people that worked in the shop where he got his first job, there were a number of Hungarians and Germans working there. His method of communicating was easy. Then he picked his English up as he went along.

M: In other words, he was able to speak the Hungarian and German language to those people and know what was going on?

R: Right.

M: When you were a little boy and you came to the Youngstown area, could you tell us what you saw in Youngstown and East Youngstown. What did it look like to you as a little child?

R: Youngstown was a maze of a lot of little buildings, a lot of street cars going east, west, north, and south. A lot of businesses, quite a few of them, displaying their wares on the sidewalks and selling their wares as such.

M: Going back to one question that I omitted, what motivated your father to come, originally, to the United States?

R: Probably an opportunity to better himself.

M: Basically, why did he go to that area that you mentioned previously in Pennsylvania?

R: He had a friend in this country that was working there. So that's how he got his job.

M: Going back to East Youngstown [Later Campbell] when you were a little boy, what school did you attend in East Youngstown? What high school?

R: Memorial High in Campbell.

M: What did you see in the schooling at that time, in comparison to what you hear about it today?

R: We were taught in those days to be learned students. I do not recall that any graduate classmates being unable to read, write or figure (math). None of my class failed to graduate.

M: In regards to that question, Nasu, what I meant is that today as you have noticed, new methods are employed in teaching and in talking to different youngsters and their parents, how would you compare the methods of instruction at your time to today's time?

R: From what I understand from some of the parents that I've talked to, their teaching has gone in a round-about-way to give a child an answer for a problem. Whereby when I went to school we were taught that three times five is fifteen and that was the end of it. We didn't have to add a lot of figures to find out whether it was fifteen or not.

M: I understand, also, that you, in the early days, of Youngstown College, attended Youngstown College for a period of time. Can you go back and tell us basically when it was and what Youngstown College was like at that time?

R: Well, it was about in the year 1929 or 1930. I took up an engineering course and there were not very many students enrolled at that time.

M: Basically what courses did you have in that engineering,

was there a lot of math?

R: I had calculus, trigonometry, . . .

M: Did you have to take any English courses too at that time?

R: Yes, English, some political science, I forget which now.

M: Can you tell us what buildings were around at that time? Some of them have been torn down today, but what buildings were basically found at that time?

R: I was going to class, I believe in a building that was a home right above Youngstown College that it is today. The home set way back.

M: In other words there was another building?

R: That's right, that's the only thing it was. We didn't have what you've got there today.

M: Was there Rayen School?

R: Rayen School, I believe at that time was being taken over by the University. I remember washing walls there for twenty five cents an hour, helping clean it up and that was applied towards my tuition.

M: In other words, it was being converted at that time to the University College building?

R: To an engineering building, that was the beginning of it.

M: At that time when you attended classes, was it basically like a high school set up, that you went every single day?

R: Right.

M: In other words, it's not like you have heard today, that people go, maybe, one or two classes a week for that course?

R: No, we went to school everyday and continued on with our courses five days a week and that was it.

M: Do you recall what the tuition was at that time?

R: No, I cannot.

M: Was it on semesters or the same course for the whole year?

R: That I couldn't tell you.

M: When you went to school did you drive to school or take the bus or streetcar?

R: A streetcar.

M: Did the streetcars go up Wick Avenue at that time?

R: No.

M: In the buildings themselves, was it set up as a regular high school type of classroom then with desks, a teacher's desk, and the American flag and so forth?

R: Yes, right.

M: Did you have a homeroom you had to go to like in high school?

R: No, we went to each class and when we'd finish we'd go over to the next class.

M: Did you spend the whole day in school?

R: Yes, the whole day except you had a period for lunch and that was it and you went back for another class.

M: Did you get a job at that time to help finance yourself through college?

R: Yes, I did.

M: What did you do?

R: Anything that I could find, it was during the Depression.

M: During the Depression, can you tell me basically, were you still living in Campbell at that time?

R: No, I was living in Youngstown at that time.

M: Where, in Youngstown?

R: On the West Side.

M: Was your father still working as a blacksmith at that time?

R: Well, yes and no. He worked at the Youngstown Sheet and Tube. He'd work for a few days and be laid off for a few months and work for a few more days and that's it.

- M: At this time, over here, what Romanian church did you and your family attend?
- R: Holy Trinity.
- M: Where was that located at that time?
- R: It was on Wilson Avenue.
- M: Can you describe vaguely what the church appeared like on the inside and on the outside?
- R: On the inside, originally it was the same as you have here at this church today, except there were no chairs of any kind to sit in. Everybody stood. The altar was basically the same altar we have today but it wasn't as built up the way it is today.
- M: Was there a lot of members at that time?
- R: Yes.
- M: Do you recall who the priest was at that time?
- R: Father Podea.
- M: Then who came after Father Muresan?
- R: Father Radu, then Father Holder, Father Stanila, Father Lazar, Father Marmureanu.
- M: Were all of these at the church on Wilson Avenue at one time or another?
- R: No. [The last two were located at Wick Avenue]
- M: As you were a family member of that church over there, did they retain a lot of the Romanian traditions that they probably practiced in Romania? In other words, the traditional types of Romanian food and maybe, culture. Did they retain it for the people at that church and your family?
- R: Naturally, we all did.
- M: What were some of the events, church events that they had at that time other than dinners? Did they have very many as they have very many at the one on Wilson?
- R: We had dinners and picnics quite often to help church expenses.

- M: As years progressed and they developed the new church on Wick Avenue, did you see any changes that occurred in such a respect that I just asked you? In other words, in events or in tradition, was there anything that you saw?
- R: As far as tradition is concerned, everything remained the same. The services were the same. The only thing I noticed that had changed was when they started Sunday school classes.
- M: Did they have any at all on Wilson Avenue?
- R: Yes.
- M: Did they have a choir at Wilson Avenue?
- R: Yes.
- M: What about the one on Wick Avenue, when did they basically start that? Do you recall? Was that right after the church was dedicated?
- R: It was in about 1945.
- M: Can you tell us something about the church on Wick Avenue, what it was before it became a church. How they went about making it into a church, primarily?
- R: It belonged to the Arms estate and we bought the home from the Arms estate.
- M: Did it cost a fabulous sum at that time or was it reasonable?
- R: I believe they paid \$18,000. for the property at that time. Then they remodeled the church by tearing the inside of the home out and rebuilt the inside for a church, using all the lumber that was in the home for the altar in the church.
- M: What kind of wood was it?
- R: Cherry wood, all the cherry wood.
- M: Some of the pictures that they have inside, were religious pictures, can you tell us something about them? Basically they have different religious pictures and so forth, can you tell us how they got on there, in other words, are they handpainted or what?

R: Well, they're either handpainted or printed. The ones on the wall are handpainted, the ones that are on the altar are probably printed.

M: Did they bring any of that from the church on Wilson Avenue?

R: All of the pictures on the altar are from the church on Wilson Avenue.

M: In other words, they were not created originally for this church?

R: No.

M: Who was the minister, at that church, at that time, do you recall when it opened up in 1945?

R: Father J. Stanila.

M: Were services conducted in English and Romanian at that time?

R: Just in Romanian.

M: When did they start, basically, doing services half and half: half in Romanian and half in English?

R: When Father Lazar came.

M: When was that basically? What decade?

R: About 23 or 24 years ago.

M: So, that would be in the late 1950's.

R: Yes.

M: Is there anything else that you want to mention in regards to the development of the church or anything on Wick Avenue that you can think of?

R: Well, you have your choir today that you didn't have. You have Sunday school, you have the youth clubs that were started, like AROY and so forth.

M: What about the events? Do they have any kind of events now?

R: Today they have church dinners, they have picnics, and

rummage sales. They have any numerous activities there that might create unity and togetherness.

M: Have you noticed any of these activities trying to preserve the Romanian culture or music or anything?

R: Right.

M: Would you say then, the church and some of the older Romanian families have helped in carrying over the Romanian culture and tradition, then?

R: Naturally, they have.

M: In what way would you say, other than some of these events, basically for instance, in your case. Can you tell me what are some of the traditional meals that you eat at home that would be considered Romanian food, that are carried over from your parents and so forth?

R: Well, types of stews and soups, cabbage rolls, etc., style of preparation plus addition of herbs, etc.

M: What kinds of soup are you referring to, chicken?

R: Well, chicken soups and there are other soups that are basically they're sour soups, creamed soups.

M: Is bean soup one of them?

R: Yes, bean soup is one, lettuce soup, potato soup, lemon sour soup, chicken soup would be a sweet one.

M: I heard about somebody in another interview mentioning something called Mamaliga.

R: That's mush, it's a traditional meal. It's a substitute for bread and it's used in making a sort of a cheese cake. It's called mush, with cheese. It's a layer of mush, a layer of cheese, a layer of mush, a layer of cheese. It's melted in an oven and cut out for each individual to eat. It's delicious.

M: Somebody else mentioned something about cartabosi. Is that a Romanian meal itself?

R: Well, basically it isn't because all it is is a liver sausage but everyone makes it slightly different.

M: How is the Romanian a little bit different?

R: The herbs that they put in that may make a difference.

M: Regarding the culture itself, the music aspect and dances and so forth, the different events that the church have and different clubs have. Have you noticed the people carrying through with the traditional dances or has it gone more or less to the modern type of rock and roll?

R: No, they stick to the traditional dances. In fact they favor it and they try very hard to interest the younger folks in learning the traditional dances.

M: So, they encourage, the church and the families encourage it then. What would be your vision of the church basically? Some people see it as a place for prayer and so forth and some people see it, sometimes as a social gathering place. What would be your version of it?

R: As far as a social gathering place, as far as I'm concerned that's secondary to me. To me it's a religious place, it's a salvation of you and your soul. It's the betterment of your life.

M: Now, what changes would you like to see occur regarding the Romanian church on Wick Avenue? Are there any, for instance, in the language, the services or anything?

R: The services could be changed to the benefit of some of the younger people by having services alternately American or English and Romanian, alternate the Sundays.

M: I have noticed that when we have our communion around Easter time, there's a tradition that Romanian people carry out when they go to the altar to receive their communion, after confession and so forth. It has to do with carrying something, could you tell us what it is that you carry?

R: A lighted candle.

M: Has that been passed on from generation to generation?

R: Yes, and that's the correct way to do it too. The candle is lit from the first candle that is lit from the altar. It should be lit from one of the candles that is burning at the altar. Everyone gets a light from that one and then it's passed on that way.

M: Then you would say that many of the traditions are still being carried on even so though it's changing a little

bit to try to conform to the young people somewhat?

R: Right.

M: How do you and your family feel about your Romanian heritage?

R: I feel wonderful about it. I feel very good and I'm proud of it.

M: Do you think there are many young people who feel proud to be Romanians or do you think some of . . .

R: Some may and some may not. As far as I'm concerned, they should.

M: What do you think might motivate some of them not to be proud of their Romanian heritage?

R: I would say, the person that would feel that way about it is not too much of a learned person, if you ask me. Anyone that's ashamed of their heritage, there's something wrong someplace.

M: In other words, their bringing up and they lack traditional Romanian culture in their bringing up?

R: Right.

M: What changes would you like to see occur in regards to the Romanian community, perhaps? Do you think that there should be more social gatherings, less of them, or what?

R: Well, there could be more and there should be more. There should be a better coordination of some kind between some of these people and keep these young people together.

M: I noticed most of the functions, regarding the Romanian community anymore stem from the church. Do you think it should not only be from the church but, it should be from outside clubs too?

R: Well, I'll say this, the church is a good influence, I'll say that. I believe that any club or any unit of any kind has groups of young people and if it's connected with the church I think, it probably has good backing and it should produce something that we should be proud of.

M: What was your job after your couple years at college?

- R: Well, the only job that I could find. . . Well, I was a gas station attendant after I got out of Youngstown College. Then, in 1936, I went into the Youngstown Sheet and Tube. I stayed there until 1972.
- M: What was your position at time?
- R: I was a laborer, tally clerk, machinist and when I finished up I was general foreman of the foundry for 26 years.
- M: What changes did you see occur during that time, were there a lot of changes or was it basically the same?
- R: Yes, I saw a lot of changes.
- M: Can you tell us a few things you saw change?
- R: Well, for one thing, as the years went by the people got lazier and independent.
- M: How so?
- R: They wanted more for doing less. Some of the changes that evolved in the steel and other industries made it impossible for a good man to be something because he didn't have the so-called seniority to get that particular position. The unions prevented a good man from promotions or higher pay. Seniority counted.
- M: Were there a lot of Romanians who worked in the steel mills around that time?
- R: Quite a few.
- M: Going back to the steel mills themselves, the machinery they have in there, did they change the machinery itself, or have they continued to use the same old machinery too?
- R: As far as I know in the Youngstown Sheet and Tube about the only thing that wasn't changed basically, well they changed them to operate more efficiently, was the open hearth and blast furnaces. The blooming mill, there's not much of a change in it. The new mills that came through were hot strip, cold strip and the seamless, and that's basically Youngstown Sheet and Tube.
- M: Did your father work in the steel mill too?
- R: Yes he did.

M: At Sheet and Tube?

R: Right.

M: What was his position at that time?

R: He was a blacksmith.

M: What did he do in there? Did he press metal?

R: He worked in the blacksmith shop.

M: What was his function?

R: Well, he had to make repairs of any kind that came out of the mill; something broken or he'd even make something new.

M: Were there other people working in the blacksmith shop?

R: There's probably 140 or 50 people in the blacksmith shop at the Youngstown Sheet and Tube.

M: Do they still have it?

R: They still have it now. They have the big steam hammers there. They forge their own shafts and all kinds of bars, rods, tools, and equipment of all kinds.

M: I understand that later on you moved to the South Side of Youngstown. You have a nice little farm over there. Can you tell us basically what you grew over there and perhaps still grow?

R: We've grown all the vegetables that anyone ever needed for home use, for family, and for winter use. We've grown pumpkins, watermelons, corns, sweet corn and field corn. We had our own apples, pears, peaches and cherries.

M: So, you have your own assortment?

R: Right.

M: Is there anything else that is important that you would like to add in regards to this interview, in reference to the culture, the events of the Romanian people, or maybe something that you . . .

R: Well, the only thing that I can say is that I'm happy to be able to say anything about it and the only thing that I regret is that I can't do too much about making it a little

better.

M: If you could make it a little bit better what would you want to make a little better, if possible?

R: Well, it's pretty hard for me to make something better if the parents of the children don't chip in and help, in this betterment.

M: In other words, it's referring to the advancement and the prolonging of the culture?

R: It's your mother and father that have to teach you all these things. The women have to learn the traditional meals which basically there's nothing wrong with them. They're good substantial meals, well balanced because, if they weren't well balanced we wouldn't have this many Romanians around.

M: Do you speak Romanian?

R: I speak it and write it and it's an easy language to learn because you write exactly the way you speak. There are no letters missing in any word.

M: Could you give us an example of a few words in Romanian and tell us what they are in English?

R: Before I get into these words, I'd like to mention something about my two daughters. Both of them, up until the summer before they started to school in the first grade, neither one of them spoke English. We had to teach them English that summer to go to school in the first grade. The simple reason was there were no neighborhood children around for them to pick up the English language.

M: Were they able to retain their Romanian language?

R: They retained enough to understand it. They speak it occasionally, but not too often.

M: So, in other words their knowledge of speaking it has deteriorated through the failure of use of the language.

R: Right.

M: Some of the words that you have over here in front of you that you jotted down while speaking to you, could you mention what the word is first in English, then tell what

it is in Romanian, and perhaps, if you can, spell it for us?

R: Table in Romanian is masa. Home in Romanian is casa.

M: That's like in Spanish, casa?

R: Right. Stew is in Romanian tocana. Cow in Romanian is vaca. Pig in Romanian is porc.

M: You don't have "K" at all in the Romanian alphabet.

R: Right.

M: As you mentioned over here a lot of these words do seem to spell almost the way they are pronounced.

R: They are. It's an easy language to learn either to speak or to write.

M: Then you think it might be a good idea, maybe, at church they might have classes in the evenings or something to teach the younger people or the younger generation who cannot speak or write it to get a basic idea?

R: They are starting classes for that, this fall.

M: At church?

R: Yes, at church.

M: In other words, it's for people who would be interested to learn?

R: Yes, if they are interested in going to learn. I believe my two girls are going to join the class. I think it'll be interesting and you might pick it up pretty quick because basically, once you've learned it you might have forgotten a little bit but, you'd be surprised how fast it'll come back to you.

M: Do you have anything else that you might like to add?

R: Not at this moment.

M: Okay, well thank you for the interview Nasu.