

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Romanian Culture Project

Romanian Culture in Mahoning County
O. H. 136

AUREL GLIGOR

Interviewed

by

John Muntean

on

May 22, 1975

AUREL GLIGOR

Aurel Gligor was born July 3, 1921 on the East Side of Youngstown, Ohio. At the age of eleven, Aurel returned to his parents homeland of Romania and would live there until 1948, when he would return to the United States. When Aurel returned to Romania, in particular the area referred to as Transylvania, he entered the village school but would only stay a year, at which time he would leave school to help with the farm work.

Life in Romania was difficult and looking back on it, Aurel remembers that everything was homemade and refrigeration and electricity were unheard of. Aurel gave a brief description of village life but sums it all up by saying that it was a hard life but a good one.

When Aurel returned to the United States in 1948, he found much had changed in the Youngstown area, especially the transition from streetcar to bus to automobile. He found employment with the Youngstown Sheet and Tube Company and continued to be employed there until the shutdown of those plants. Aurel is affiliated with the Holy Trinity Orthodox Church on Wick Avenue and feels that the church has retained the important characteristics of the old Romanian ways. Aurel and his wife, Mary, currently live in Struthers, Ohio and their three sons, George, Earl and John along with their parents are very proud to be Romanian.

Julie Di Sibio

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

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INTERVIEWEE: AUREL GLIGOR

INTERVIEWER: John Muntean

SUBJECT: Romanian Culture in Mahoning County

DATE: May 22, 1975

M: This is an interview with Aurel Gligor for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, regarding Romanian Culture in Mahoning County, by John Muntean at 425 Edison on May 22, 1975 at 7:00 p.m.

Mr. Gligor, could you tell us what your Romanian first name is?

G: Yes, my first name is Aurel Gligor.

M: That's Romanian?

G: In Romanian Aurel is called, pronounced Aurel in America.

M: How would you spell it?

G: Aurel. (A-u-r-e-l)

M: Earl would be an American nickname for it?

G: More like a short name, yes, a nickname in American.

M: What part of Romania did your parents come from, Mr. Gligor?

G: Well, they came from a part in Romania called Transylvania. There was a little village named Colibi that's in Romanian. It was the center of Romania near the town of Alba Iulia.

- M: What year did they come to the United States, do you have any idea when they came?
- G: My folks, when they came here?
- M: Yes.
- G: Well, I'd say roughly in about 1910, someplace around in that neighborhood, maybe.
- M: You were born in this country?
- G: Yes, I was born in this country. In fact, I was born over here in Youngstown on the East side of Youngstown.
- M: As I understand it, later on you went to Romania to live with your folks?
- G: Yes, I went with my mother, brother, sister and myself, and with my stepfather. My dad died in the year of 1929 in this country.
- M: How old were you when you returned to Romania?
- G: When I went there, I was eleven years old.
- M: When you went to Romania what was your view of the country? In other words, what did you see in the country that facinated you, if anything?
- G: Well, really fascinations of a little kid, a young boy, living where I was, it was mostly farm and agriculture. It was a lot different from America and you'd live in a small village. The village contained, maybe, one hundred people, one hundred houses and one hundred families. You come from America with cars and this and that, and you go into a village where it's all cows, horses, and farms.
- M: They didn't have very many automobiles, did they?
- G: In fact, the village that I went to there wasn't one automobile. Nobody owned an automobile.
- M: Where was that village, what was it called?
- G: Colibi.
- M: When you went to Romania with your mother, brother and sister, did you enter any schools?
- G: Yes, we got there, and as I recall, it was around in the

fall. My parents did let me go to school from fall to early spring. You know, after the snow and stuff like that. Then, after that they put me to work as a little boy to do chores around the house and on the fields, such as taking care of cows, pigs and horses on a pasture.

M: Was the farmland that they had connected to the house or was it away from the village?

G: No, it was away from the farm house. Well, we had in every different part of this village, say, on the east end we'd have a couple acres, on the west end, maybe, three or four, and on the north and west. It was all around the village, the land that we owned.

M: What did they grow there?

G: Mostly it was corn, wheat, and oats. We grew more vegetables. We had beets, potatoes, lettuce, onions and everything that's needed for a household.

M: Mr. Gligor, did your parents sell this stuff or did they consume it more or less themselves?

G: Well, there was very little excess you could sell, but you really have to sell some of it in order to buy your things that weren't handmade, such as shoes and more like leather stuff. You had to buy that from one of the towns that I mentioned like Alba Iulia. We would sell a little part of this wheat and stuff like that to get money to buy the stuff.

M: Could you tell us a little bit about the schools in Romania? How would they compare a little bit to the schools in the United States at that time?

G: Oh, very different. Even when I went, I went up to the fifth grade and all of a sudden I went to Europe, and there was a very big difference in the schools.

M: Did you know how to speak Romanian before you went to Romania?

G: Well, getting back to that, my parents, both, were Romanian. I'd just speak to them in Romanian before I went to the school in the United States. I had a hard time speaking American, but I learned how to speak American. Then when I went to Europe, I didn't know how to speak Romaniam.

M: So you had to re-learn it?

- G: I had to re-learn that and then after a few years I learned Romanian and then I came to America and I couldn't speak American. Well, right now I could go fifty-fifty with both of them.
- M: Getting back to the schools, could you tell us a little bit about the schools?
- G: Well, yes. We all went there to learn, but like I say, over here, the school buildings are much larger and they have 1A and 1B. You'd have them in one room over here. Then the second and third grades in another room. Over there, they have all the children from that village in this one room. The first grade would sit in the front row, the second and third in the second and third rows. They go up to the seventh grade over there in Europe.
- M: Did you have a man teacher?
- G: Well, yes there was a man teacher, but what was something different about this man teacher, he also was our priest. On Sunday, he would preach, and during the week he'd be our school teacher, because there were so few children.
- M: Did the equipment in the school room resemble that of the United States at that time? In other words, did they have desks, chalkboards, and things like that?
- G: Yes, they had chalkboards and they had erasers. They had desks and some equipment like that.
- M: Was school compulsory in that village? Did everyone have to go?
- G: Yes, it was mandatory. You'd have to go to school and some people didn't like the idea because they could use the kids for chores around the house.
- M: Did a lot of children stay home to help with the chores?
- G: Yes, quite a few of them.
- M: In regards to Romania, when you were a little child, the homes in the village, were they of mud brick type? Were they made out of wood or what was their composition?
- G: Well, now we have the older folks. There were homes, maybe who knows, a hundred years or so old. The houses were made out of mud. The roofs were covered with straw and they'd have two rooms. One room in the house would be

your dining room, living room and bedroom. In fact, mother, father, daughter, sister, would all sleep in one room in different beds. They'd have some type of a bed like a couch where you'd pull it out. During the day, it'd be a couch and at night you'd turn it into a bed. Then the younger boys, let's say, boys maybe thirteen, fourteen, sixteen and up, they'd usually sleep out in the barn with the cows in the summer because it was warm. In the summer, you'd sleep outside on the front lawn, on the back lawn, or on the haystack and stuff like that.

M: In the house, was there any type of refrigeration system?

G: No, definitely not. We didn't have any electricity inside, in fact there was no electricity in the village that I was in. There was no electrical lines. We had kerosene lamps.

M: What year was this, when you went there?

G: It was in 1932.

M: You had no electricity?

G: No electricity. Later on, it was about in I'd say, 1945, 1946, or 1947, they started putting up telephone poles. We had one telephone for the head of the village.

M: Like the city hall?

G: Something like that. He had a telephone when I left in 1948, but no electricity yet.

M: He didn't have anybody in the village that he could call then, did he?

G: Well, he was connected to the next village. There was a notary public in one village and he'd take care of, maybe, three or four smaller villages. They were all connected to him.

M: Getting back to the electricity, what did you people do since you didn't have iceboxes or electricity to preserve food?

G: Now, that I think of it I don't know how I went through it. Over there, the tradition was that your food was all handmade. Nothing was canned or anything like that. In the fall, you'd cut a pig. You'd cut him up and smoke him and you'd leave the meat up in the attic. It would be

smoked and it would hang there until almost mid summer.

M: So, in other words, you people really had to, in a sense, consume what you could at that time that you grew or butchered the animals?

G: Oh yes, well you had to consume over there because you'd cut only so much. What you think a family like we were, with three children and two parents, five of us sort of consume say, maybe a pig of about maybe four or five hundred pounds. That would be enough pork for the whole year. Then, when we'd get this Lent business, you know, Easter Lent, six weeks well, when it was Lent you wouldn't eat any meat. That would save meat for other times.

M: Did your mother cook the traditional Romanian food in Romania or since you were in the United States, cook some of the American type meals?

G: Well, yes. She'd go with the Romanian food cooking and she'd try to make meatballs and spaghetti, but it was all handmade.

M: Did people in the village eat meatballs and spaghetti?

G: Yes, they said that looked pretty good. They looked at it and said it looked awful different.

M: Did they know about it, though?

G: No, usually the neighbors would come over and ask what we were cooking. My mother would tell them she was going to make an American dish, meatballs and spaghetti. They sort of got to like it. Some of them would cook it and some of them wouldn't.

M: In other words, some of them never heard of it before?

G: You're right. Some of them never heard of it. (Laughter)

M: Now, getting back to the village itself. In the village did you have any fire department or anything to take care of emergencies?

G: No, there was no fire department or anything in our village.

M: What if there was a fire? What did you do?

G: The people over there seemed to be closer, more friendlier. I don't know how to explain that, but if your

neighbor had a fire, like I said before, his house was covered with straw, well then the neighbors, if they were home, or any other person would run with buckets and blankets and would help you put out the fire.

M: Were there many stores in that village, itself? In other words, food stores and maybe hardware?

G: No, the village that I came from was a very, very small village. There were maybe, about a hundred homes. It was a very small village. In our village, later on, one man did open the front of his house, he made it into a store. He'd sell such little things as salt, pepper, vinegar and little items like that, but nothing big like big stores with clothing and stuff like that. We'd have to go to one of the towns, like I said, maybe twenty miles away to buy big stuff like that.

M: What did you do for recreation in that town? You didn't have any radio, did you?

G: No, as long as I lived there I didn't have a radio or TV. The kids over there my age, they are more fortunate, they know how to play a flute. Then there were some gypsies in the village next to us which was about five to seven miles away. One knew how to play a violin and we'd usually pay him by the Sunday. He'd come and play, I'd say roughly, from 1:00 o'clock until suppertime.

M: In other words, the whole village would get together and pay him?

G: Not the older folks, but the younger folks about my age then, around sixteen to nineteen.

M: Did you know how to sing and dance Romanian style before you went to Romania?

G: No, I learned everything over there. I learned how to dance over there and I grew up with the kids because I was young when I got there. I grew up with them and I wanted to learn how to dance.

M: The songs that they had, were they old folk songs that were passed down or were they American songs that they sang in Romanian?

G: I'd say, they were old-fashioned songs. In fact, like now I see over here since 1948 until 1965, there were so many types of dances, the jitterbug, the twist and the rumba. They change so much every year with the dancing

and singing. Over there, the dance that I did and the people were doing in 1932 is still being done now in 1975.

M: Could you name a couple of those dances that they did?

G: Well, one of the dances was Hatgiwea, with one man and two girls. Then, there was the Hotsigana, it takes like, one man and one girl will dance.

M: Did they resemble any of the waltzes or any of the American styles of dancing?

G: I think they're a little faster.

M: Like polkas?

G: Yes, a little bit like that. Well, polkas are more like a Pollock dance. There's another dance which men and women can do. The Americans call it the Snake Dance and it's called the Sarba. It's a very fast dance.

M: When these people would do these dances, was it on weekdays or was it basically on Sundays, when you had more of a change from school and so forth?

G: Well, I'd say mostly on a Sunday. On a Sunday after church and then you'd go and ask the people that had a vacant barn or a vacant house and you'd ask their permission. They'd probably let you dance. There was no regular place to say now this is the dance hall. It was, maybe, this Sunday you'd go in this person's house or different places.

M: Were you taught any traditional stories regarding Romania at that time, maybe, historical stories or plays or anything concerning Romania?

G: Yes, when I went to school over there we did give a play, but I even forgot the name of it. It was something that as I recall was about a shoemaker. It was something that had to do with an old shoemaker dealing with people. You know, fixing shoes and I thought it was a pretty comical play, but I've forgotten quite a bit of it.

M: What about the church itself. Did they have any theatre type plays that they presented regarding Romanian culture?

G: Well, the church consists of the people from the village, and the same people that went to the church went to the school. The church was one kind of people. The church

didn't give a play by itself. It would be the people in the village.

M: I understand too, since the minister was also the teacher and he didn't want to put on the same thing twice.

G: That's right because he was both of them. Like I said, it was a very, very small village.

M: Was religion part of the school curriculum too?

G: Yes, I'd say so.

M: Did they tell you anything in the school, at that time, about the United States? Did they ever mention anything regarding it?

G: Well, like I said, I went very shortly to school. In fact, I mentioned it before from fall to spring. Well, in fact, I was just learning how to speak Romanian then, and they did have history and stuff like that. That this was the United States and such things like that. Yes, they were teaching that.

M: What was the villagers' opinion of the United States at that time?

G: They used to call the United States the land of God. They had people that used to come here from the United States and from Europe. At that time, people wouldn't stay very long. They'd stay, maybe a year or two and they'd go back. Then, they'd say, "Why did I make that mistake to come back from that country to come back in this country." Everything was hard work.

M: In other words, many people from Romania would get a chance to come to the United States, make some money, and then they'd go back home with that money?

G: That's right. Very few people then came to the United States and stayed. Like my mother, she did stay about 25 years and they really thought that she spent almost a lifetime away.

M: When she went back to Romania, do you recall her ever mentioning having a hard time readjusting to living underneath different conditions from what she was used to in the United States? In other words, did she ever complain about not having running water and things like that?

G: Yes, plenty times. Like over here, you just go turn a

spigot and there's hot and cold water. Now, over there to get hot and cold water, you've got to go outside, pull it out of a well, bring it in the house and fire it up with wood and straw. To get hot water, it's a little more work than just turning the hot water spigot on.

M: So, she was used to a little bit of luxury from the United States?

G: Oh, definitely, but like they say, you live a long time with that, you sort of get used to the bad. It takes time.

M: What year did you return to the United States?

G: I came in 1948.

M: Therefore, you were living in Romania during the time of the German Occupation and the beginning of the Russian Occupation?

G: Yes, right.

M: Did you see any changes that occurred during that time that you could tell us a little bit about? In regards to the people's way of life?

G: What I really could remember is being occupied by the Germans first. Like any other nation, when they have troops in different countries, they do have to take care of the troops with feeding and stuff like that. There's something that I do remember, I don't want to go against the Germans or the Russians, but I don't know, as a little kid I thought that the Germans were more lenient than the Russians were.

M: Can you explain that a little bit?

G: Well, I'll try to explain as best as I can. Say, that like over there, you have a pair of cows for your chores such as pulling a wagon or to plow or just work animals. If that was a pair and you had one extra one, and the Germans would say that you really don't need the third one, it's more like a luxury so they'd just take it. Say that this one extra cow was selling in a market for \$1000. I'm just assuming with even numbers. Well, if that cow was selling in the market for \$1000. that's what they would pay you. Now, we lived under the Russians also. Now say that the Russians also did the same thing. I had the two cows and an extra one and this cow was selling for \$1000. They would sometimes take it away and give you nothing or give you half. I remember a little bit about that.

- M: Did the Germans or the Russians put any restrictions upon your heritage or culture? You mentioned the dancing that you did on Sunday. Did they still permit you to carry on with your activities as such?
- G: Well, I'll put it this way. In the village that I was in there were no restrictions on entertainment, as you put it. I did hear in the bigger towns, well-known towns, that they wouldn't like for you to go to your church or to dances, or to a beer joint. I heard something like that, but it wasn't in our village.
- M: So, your culture, any type of dancing or plays and things like that were still allowed to continue then, without being interrupted?
- G: Right, that's how it was.
- M: Did they force the people to sing your songs more in Russian or German? Were you still able to sing them in Romanian?
- G: We sang them in Romanian. There was nothing to change the language that I know of.
- M: When you came to the United States in 1948, what part of this country did you return to, to the eastern part of Ohio or what?
- G: Yes, I came right to the town where I was born.
- M: Youngstown?
- G: Yes, Youngstown.
- M: When you came to Youngstown was there a vast amount of change in the Romanian community as a whole?
- G: I think that there was one particular change that really comes to my attention right away. When leaving America, we left from the East Side, that was 1229 Hill Street, the house that I was born in. So, naturally when I came back to this country, I wanted to go to see that house where I was born. At that time, when we left that whole community, that neighborhood was all like Romanian. The house next to you, your neighbor, the flat was all Romanian. When I came back I wanted to go and see that home and I was surprised because all your colored people took over.
- M: So, the Romanians had moved out and dispersed throughout

the Youngstown area?

G: Yes, they spread out.

M: When you returned, also, what church was in existence in 1948 for the Romanian people? Was it the one on Wilson Avenue or the one that's presently on Wick Avenue?

G: The one on Wick Avenue. I can remember a little bit about the church on Wilson Avenue, very little.

M: In comparing the church on Wilson Avenue and Romanian churches in Romania, what difference can you point out that might be found?

G: The church on Wilson Avenue and the church in Romania were somewhat similarly connected together in the ringing of the bells. Well, I don't know how to say this. In Romania like, there's the hitting a board we call that a Toca. It's some kind of an announcement on the bell and this Toca tells you what they are doing in church at that time, when these bells are ringing. The church on Wick Avenue has the chime. They don't have the big bell up in a tower or that board.

M: Now, also the church on Wilson Avenue and the church in Romania, did they have seats for the congregation to sit down?

G: No, the church on Wilson Avenue, I think, I recall that they did have seats. Now, the church in Romania was two large rooms and the tradition over there was if that the men, as they're going into the church, they go in the aisle and they'd go in a front room where the altar was. The women would come in and they had the room that was in the back, but you could still see the priest and the altar. It was like a little partition about maybe three or four feet high that you could look over. It was partitioned off, like this room was for the men and this room was for the women.

M: Did the altars in the church on Wilson Avenue and the church in Romania resemble the altars set up in the church on Wick Avenue?

G: Yes, they resembled about the same. Of course, your church on Wick Avenue is more modernized and it has better sculpture work and so forth. In Europe it was a poor little village and they couldn't afford the fine art that they have over here in different kinds of churches.

- M: The services in Romania, I take it, were held in Romanian. What about Wilson Avenue, do you recall if it was held in a Romanian ceremony or was there a mixture of English too?
- G: I don't think, now, we're talking as when I was a little child, nine or ten years old, because at age eleven I left. I think that, from talking to my parents too, my mother rather, that all the service was done in Romanian.
- M: Do you have any idea about when, was it in the 1950's or 1960's, that a little bit of the service started to change to English?
- G: It was after 1948 that Father Stanila, he started talking to the children a little bit in English around, maybe, 1949 or 1950 and so on.
- M: Do you know whether or not at that time there was Sunday school held at the church on Wick Avenue, after 1948? Was it a recent invention?
- G: I don't really think that it was because later on, I know it was after 1948, that they did start building a Sunday school down in the cellar of the church. The cellar, at one time, was out of this world. There was dirt and the walls were all stone, as I recall. In fact, I even helped a little bit when they paneled and all the church group did the cleaning up and stuff like that. It must have been, I'd say after the 1950's.
- M: Prior to the time that you went to Romania, when you were a little child of eleven, do you recall whether the Romanian community in Youngstown would sometimes get together and hold different events, in which they would try to have a Romanian type of dancing and plays and so forth? Do you recall if they had any in your area?
- G: Well, that was before 1932, their entertainment, as we all know, they didn't have a television. Radios were probably just coming out then and everybody didn't have a radio. The people then, would probably get together, maybe, just neighbors, for a night of entertainment to drink wine, sing, and stuff. They would have entertainment like that.
- M: Do you know whether of not there were any organizations, such as Unirea or the Society in existence at that time?
- G: I think Unirea Plugalul was in existence then. They held their big meetings and their big doings at the Romanian

Hall on Poland Avenue. I think that was called then, Unirea Plugalul.

- M: That organization has been more or less a help in projecting some of the Romanian culture and activities, I presume?
- G: Right, yes, in fact, I think it's going fairly strong even today.
- M: What organizations, now, in today's Romanian culture would be active in keeping the heritage of the Romanian people growing? Do you know of any or is it really up to the church?
- G: Actually it's up to the people. I'd say, your Unireas are doing fairly well. You start from the youth and try to keep the youth together and they'll get used to being together, but I'd say, they're doing fairly good.
- M: Would you like to see any changes occur other than what has happened in the church?
- G: No, I think, their system now, say like a fifty-fifty, a little bit of Romanian and a little bit of American is on account of your mixed marriages. Today, not everybody will marry in the same nationality. If you're Romanian, you'll marry a Romanian. Say, you're going into a different nationality, what I mean, at least he'll get a little bit of the ceremony and the language that he does understand.
- M: How do you and your family feel about your Romanian heritage? Are you proud to be a Romanian?
- G: Yes, I'm happy, I have no problems. There's one church that when we could go that's where we go. This Sunday, next Sunday, and the Sunday after, there's no such thing as today we're going to go to this church and next Sunday we're going to go to the other church. We're sort of falling behind on account of my working schedule.
- M: In regards to the cultures in Mahoning County, the Romanian culture, have you seen a lot of changes that have occurred regarding this culture? For instance, you mentioned that prior to going to Romania, you did not know how to sing or dance Romanian. Have you noticed whether or not it has to a certain extent ceased this knowledge of learning and dancing or whether or not it has once again started to pick up? Have you noticed any change one way or the other?

G: I think the people of the Romanian church keep in the tradition of trying to dance the Romanian dances and singing. Something strange over here is that your Romanian people in this country all come from different places in Europe.

M: Different areas of Romania?

G: Yes, different areas, and over there every area they have a different way of dancing.

M: In other words, they have their own traditional types?

G: Yes, there's a step or two, like in the Sarba. Some parts they'll do it one way and in some parts of Europe they will do it a different way. Maybe another part will do it a different way. So, all these people that came over here together in Youngstown do it a different way. You keep on practicing and practicing and pretty soon you get into the habit of doing it the wrong way and you think you're doing it the right way.

M: Do you know of any attempts being made to help increase the knowledge of the Romanian language in Youngstown?

G: No, not that I know of.

M: In other words, parents are not teaching their youngsters the Romanian language?

G: No, not too many because I take that upon myself because I'm Romanian, my wife is Romanian and the home is American. My children, themselves, they do not know Romanian very, very well. Romanian language isn't spoken too much.

M: Is there anything else that you think is important that we have not covered, Mr. Gligor, that you can think of?

G: I think we've covered it pretty good. Part of it, like I say, most of my life, I spent it in this little village and it's nothing real important. I don't think it's important, you know, what goes on in a small village. Nothing high class or anything like that.

M: There's one further question I'd like to ask. When you did come to Youngstown back in 1948, was there anything that fascinated you about the city itself from the time as a little child until you came back?

G: Yes, as a little child I remember a streetcar going

around on the East Side all the way to downtown. It was coming, they had a change, they had a bus. Pretty soon even the bus was old hat and everybody got their own cars. That was something big for me because in Europe I never dreamt of owning a car. Now, at this age, we have two or three of them. There's quite a bit of difference.

M: Could you tell us a little bit about your job?

G: Well, I've been down at the mill now for 27 years. I've been in the same spot.

M: Have there been any changes that have occurred in that time in the machinery?

G: Yes, it affected me. I worked in the Skelp mill and I worked there for about nineteen years and we were going through some kind of pipe. We were making coils for a pipe. They came up with a new machine. They modernized it and they shut our place down, and I had to get a transfer to another department in the open hearth. They keep on changing even down here in the open hearth. We have regular furnaces and we had jet furnaces. They are talking right now about changing to BOS, something more modern. Yes, they change it.

M: Well, thank you for this interview. If Professor Earnhart, when he listens to this tape recording, comes up with some ideas or questions I've forgotten to ask, I hope you don't mind if I come and ask you a few more questions.

G: Sure, sure anytime.

M: Thank you very much.

G: You're welcome.

END OF INTERVIEW