

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY
ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Romanian Culture Project

Romanian Culture in Mahoning County

O. H. 457

NICK GIBB III

Interviewed

by

John Muntean

on

March 5, 1976

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

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INTERVIEWEE: NICK GIBB III

INTERVIEWER: John Muntean

SUBJECT: Church, AROY, Romanian Dances

DATE: March 5, 1976

M: This is an interview with Nick Gibb for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program regarding Romanian Culture in Mahoning County, by John Muntean at 919 Albert Street, Youngstown, Ohio, on March 5, 1976 at 7:00 p.m.

Nick, what part of Romania did your grandparents come from?

G: My grandmother came from Sebes. My grandfather came from a little town.

M: Do you have any idea when they came to the United States?

G: My grandfather came in 1916; I don't know when my grandmother came.

M: Did he come straight to the Youngstown area?

G: No. He went to Missouri first; he worked for the railroad driving a team of horses and a wagon hauling railroad ties. He got paid a \$1.50 a week, plus his meals and a place to sleep. Then he went to Gary, Indiana. He worked in a steel mill for a while. Then he came to Youngstown and he married my grandmother. He had a farm. They had the Clover Dale Dairy. He worked in Hubbard, at the Power Press Steel, for thirty-three years. He then retired and passed away in 1968.

M: Were they associated with the Holy Trinity Romanian Orthodox church at all?

G: Yes, their whole lives.

M: Could you tell us a little bit about your childhood and

early adult life in regard to your family's association with the Romanian community and perhaps the Romanian church?

G: We went to church from the first Sunday after Labor Day until about Memorial Day, and from then on through the summer we went every Sunday up to Conneaut, Ohio to Lake Erie. We swam and we fished up there. We picnicked and I learned how to dance Romanian. I was with the Romanian dancing group.

M: Who taught you to dance?

G: Mary Tillia. I was a substitute altar boy when Virgil Cript, and Teddy Mulla, and Johnny Mazilla, would go to the vat, whenever they were sick. I belonged to AROY [American Romanian Orthodox Youth]; in fact, I was president of AROY for a while.

M: Could you tell us some of the functions you performed as an altar boy?

G: I put the incense in the censer; I cut the bread; I heated the wine when Father Stanila made the communion. At Easter, I would go in and cut up the bread and mix it with the wine to make the Easter paska type thing.

M: About what year was this?

G: Oh, I would say from about 1952 until about 1959.

M: In performing these duties for Father Stanila, were the services done in English at that time?

G: No, all were in Romanian.

M: Did you have knowledge of the Romanian language?

G: Yes, I know good and bad Romanian.

M: So you were able to follow along and have an idea of where you were in the services?

G: Yes.

M: How did you learn this Romanian? Who taught it to you?

G: From my grandfather, mother, and my father. When my father married my mother, who is a Hungarian, she worked in the mill with my father. My grandmother would watch me and my sister Sally. Then when we would come home, my father and mother would come home from work. They would eat supper downstairs and we lived upstairs. When my grandmother, my Buna, would

talk to my father, she would talk to him in Romanian. My mother would always ask her, my dad, what her mother-in-law was saying. He would say, "I'll tell you when we go upstairs." Well, by the time they would get upstairs, it might be a half an hour or forty-five minutes later and he would forget it. Somy mother learned how to talk Romanian so she wouldn't miss out on anything.

M: Did she learn to cook Romanian meals also?

G: Oh, yes. She knows how to make a lot of Romanian dishes. She makes stuffed cabbage. She knows how to make Romanian bean soup, the soup with the Galuste in it and the noodle soup, and how to make coloc. But, I think she knew that from Hungary. She made the Hungarian coloc, and she knows how to pickle cabbage. She knows how to put pickles in a barrel.

M: Where was the farm located?

G: It was right at the end of McGuffey Road, right across the Pennsylvania line on the state line road.

M: Did you raise animals at the farm?

G: Yes, cows, cattle, pigs, chickens, ducks, geese, and sheep. Once in a while, I had a billy goat. I used to like to watch him eat the paper off of the tin cans. They would eat the paper. We had some ginney hens and they're better than any watchdog you could find. If anybody comes in the yard, they go out of their mind cackling. Then my brother raised Bantams, the banty chicken. He started out with seven hens and one rooster and about two years later he had over 150 of them. Then in the wintertime, we used to have to go catch them because we let them run loose all summer. In fact, one time it was really cold, and the last two roosters we caught, we had to go in to get warm water to thaw their feet out. Their feet were frozen to the tree. I knew how to butcher chickens, lambs, pigs, cattle, ox, milk cows, combine wheat and oat, huck corn, clean manure. We picked fruit, tomatoes, white tomatoes, washed peppers, pickles, plow, disc, and harrow.

M: In regards to the farm over there, did you people go to any Romanian functions at that time?

G: Every year we made the Sebesan picnic. They used to have it over here off of Landsdown at Hillcrest Farm. Then they had it at the Romanian gardens out in Warren for years. We went to the Christmas dances and the Easter dances, and AROY conventions. I attended the church and AROY meetings.

M: Can you tell us a little bit about when you were president

of the AROY's?

G: It was about in 1971 or 1972 when I was president.

M: Can you tell us what the function of AROY is?

G: It keeps the Romanian youth in the church.

M: How does it go about doing that?

G: They have conventions; they have meetings; they have dances. They have football tournaments, which we won one year. We have basketball tournaments.

M: Are all of these functions done entirely in English now?

G: Most of them.

M: Are they all in American?

G: No, it's funny. All these people are supposed to be American-Romanians but they prefer to dance Romanian at the Romanian dances. In my day, we did the kissing dance.

M: How did that dance go?

G: Everybody gets in a circle and they put half a dozen girls in there and they walk around and pick somebody out and they take them in the middle of the circle and they kiss them. Then they leave and you get to pick out a girl. I did it up at the Cleveland convention and some Romanian girls from Romania picked me out. So then when it was my turn, I looked all over for my wife, but she went and sat down when she saw me in the middle there. She didn't want me to pick her out and kiss her, so I picked the girl that picked me.

M: Could you also tell me, regarding the AROY's, what their function is to the church itself?

G: It's a job-organization that is supposed to help the church as much as it can. At our church they help serve at the banquets.

M: Do they provide any banquets of their own?

G: They have a Father's Day banquet which they serve.

M: What is the purpose of these banquets?

G: So they can make money to run their organization.

M: Do they donate any of this money to the church?

G: Yes. They just recently purchased the Bible for Father John for the church. I think they paid almost a thousand dollars for that Bible.

M: Can you tell us a little bit about that Bible?

G: I haven't seen it. I just heard that they bought it.

M: Regarding your activities that you were mentioning, at the farm did your parents or grandparents try to project and teach the Romanian culture to your brothers and sisters? How did they go about doing this?

G: Well, I still say when I go to bed at night, my prayers in Romanian. I say the "Our Father" in Romanian. I know the Creed in Romanian. I know a lot of bad words in Romanian.

M: Did they teach you any songs in Romanian?

G: Yes, I know a lot of Christmas carols in Romanian.

M: So it was more or less your grandparents and your parents that instilled some of the Romanian culture in you. It was not so much the church itself?

G: Well, the church had something to do with it too.

M: What did they teach you, the church itself?

G: They taught me all about the Orthodox religion.

M: Did they teach you any Romanian at all there?

G: They taught me a little bit. We went to a Romanian school for a while. They had it on Saturdays.

M: Could you tell us a little bit about that school?

G: Well, we learned the ABCs.

M: Did you have a textbook for that?

G: I really don't remember.

M: They did teach you a little bit of the language. Did they teach you to write it at all?

G: No, I don't know how to write in Romanian.

M: Can you read it?

G: No, I can't read it. I can make out a few words.

M: But it was just speaking that they taught at the Romanian school?

G: Yes; I don't know that much Romanian. I can understand it. The funniest thing that I ever heard was after my mother learned how to talk Romanian, we were visiting the Flesher family in Hubbard and across the street was Mr. Nemeth. He was a Hungarian man. My mother walked across the street one day to talk to him and to keep her Hungarian in practice she talked to him in Hungarian. When she came back she was laughing. We asked her what happened. She said, "I was talking to him in Hungarian, and I finished up the sentence in Romanian." She said, "He was looking at me like there was something wrong with me."

M: Which changes have you noticed that have occurred over the years in religion to the Romanian culture in America?

G: They are becoming more Americanized.

M: When you were an altar boy for Father Stanila, services were almost entirely in Romanian. When did they start becoming somewhat Americanized?

G: When Father Lazar came.

M: Did he start it all at one time?

G: No, it was gradually. The only English you ever heard from Father Stanila was when he would give the sermon for the Sunday school kids who didn't understand Romanian. He would give them a little sermon in English, broken English.

M: As an altar boy did you ever go with him when he would go baptize houses or anything like that?

G: No; the only thing I ever went to was at Christmas time, I went to carol.

M: Would you sing it in Romanian?

G: Yes, we sang "Trei Pastori" and "O Ce Veste".

M: Would that be what the AROY's picked?

G: Yes.

M: You mentioned that they started to Americanize the services a little bit; what was the reaction in the congregation itself?

G: Most of the younger people liked it. Some of the older people were a little irritated by it.

- M: Why do you suppose they got irritated?
- G: Because they want to keep everything Romanian. A lot of them kept saying to me when am I going to take a trip to Romania. I said, "All my family left Romania. They never had any desire to go back and neither do I." I want to take my wife to Greece some day because her parents went. Her father told me that if you pay her way over, her plane ticket both there and back, he would take care of all her expenses in Greece. I should have sent her, and the boys and I should have gone out to the farm and stayed with my mother.
- M: You mentioned that your wife is Greek. Have you noticed if there are any similarities between the Greek culture and the Romanian culture at all?
- G: The one thing I noticed that is different is that the Romanians are more open. The Greeks are very clanish. When we go to St. Nick's church, if it wasn't for her family, her mother's family, her aunts and uncles and maybe two or three other people in the church that I know, if none of her family shows up then there would be nobody to talk to but my wife and my kids.
- M: Have you noticed anything to be similar in connection with what you know of Romanian dances?
- G: I know a few Greek dances.
- M: Are some of the dances similar?
- G: Yes, similar. My favorite Greek dance is where the men dance by themselves; they call it the chicken dance. They are supposed to be two roosters fighting.
- M: Is there anything in Romanian similar to that at all?
- G: No. I never saw a Romanian dance where they dance alone.
- M: Do Romanian dancers always dance with girls?
- G: Yes. The ones I don't like are the calusari and the Circle Dance. Most of them are circle dances.
- M: What about in language, have you noticed some words that are similar between Greeks and Romanians?
- G: Yes, slightly; there are not that many that are the same. There are a few that are the same.
- M: Can you think of any?

G: Not really.

M: What have you noticed in the past several years that the Romanians have done to try to keep their heritage growing?

G: Well, they started a Romanian school again. They started a library where, I guess, they have a lot of Romanian books.

M: So they are trying to keep their language going? What about the customs, have they instigated anything to try to keep their customs going?

G: They've got the dances, but most of the younger people are marrying outside of the church. Most of them are moving away.

M: Were these all Romanians that have moved away?

G: Yes.

I was in the choir for a while.

M: Can you tell us a little about when you were in the choir?

G: Well, I learned how to sing Romanian.

M: Did you go to practice every so often?

G: I went, not loyally, but I went.

M: What musical part did you sing?

G: I sang tenor.

M: Who was, at that time, the choir director?

G: He lives out in California now. Then Tillie Badila was the choir director, and she is presently the choir director.

M: Would you sing the responses in church?

G: When I was young I was the first one to say the Creed in American. I was the first one to say the Creed in Romanian during the church service.

I was baptized at that church, my sister, brother and both of my sons were too. In fact, my son Peter was the last baby Father Stanila baptized before he retired. I asked him; I told him I wanted him to baptize him because he had baptized my oldest son. I wanted him to baptize my youngest one too.

M: Could you tell us a little bit about Father Stanila?

G: He was a very nice man. He had a heart of gold. The biggest kick I got out of him, he would never take a vacation because he was afraid they would lock the church and never let him back in!! His wife was a wonderful person too. When you would tell her something, she would say, "Don't tell me."

M: How long was he in the ministry?

G: He just celebrated forty years of the priesthood in Youngstown. He was there a long time.

M: Who came after him?

G: Father Lazar and Father Marmureanu. They had four priests come in: Father Marmureanu, Father Lipovan from Philadelphia, Father Marinescu from Indiana, and Father Nathaniel, the monk, came down. They picked Father John Marmureanu as a priest.

M: Who picked him?

G: They had a meeting and they voted on him. He was supposed to become our priest; he and Father Vserio were up for the job. The bishop was in charge of the meeting. Mr. Badila said, "If we don't want either one of the priests, can we vote without none, or no?" His Grace said, "No." He said there were 162 of us that were allowed to vote and he said, "If I get two votes for Father Lazar and one vote for Father Vseriv and 158 no's, then Father Lazar is the priest." He said, "I count the votes. The no's mean nothing to me." In fact, I didn't even stay to vote. I said, "Well, if that's the way he is going to run it, I might as well get up and leave." I left and went home. I was on church council for a couple of years. Also, my wife and I were the janitors for about two or three months.

M: Did you do all of the custodial work down there?

G: It irked Father Lazar because he only got \$60 a month when he and his wife did it. When we did it we were getting a \$100 a month. I guess Father John does the janitorial work now, but they were looking for a janitor. I heard they were going to pay whoever took it \$150 a month. They never had that trouble when Father Stanila was there because there was an old, retired man that used to sleep where the office is now. He used to live there and he took care of all the . . . My wife used to go a couple days a week during the daytime and we would go at least twice a week at night. Then I would mow the grass on Saturdays and we would go Sunday. People would say, "How come this isn't clean or this isn't done right?" So I told them that I didn't need the headaches. I said, "The next council meeting I go to, I'm going to tell them we're not going to be janitors anymore," and I told them and we're not janitors anymore.

- M: You mentioned that prior to being a janitor you were on the church council.
- G: Yes, for a couple of years.
- M: Can you tell us what the function of the church council is?
- G: They do the running of the church.
- M: In other words, it's financial running?
- G: They pay the bills.
- M: How do they raise the money to support the church?
- G: Through donations. The donations that the people make on Sundays and their membership dues. Sometimes people die and they leave money to the church. There is always more going out than coming in. At the last meeting they voted Father John a \$100 a month raise.
- M: So they would have to take in more to supplement that, and to pay the utilities and so forth.
- G: It doesn't cost him a cent to live there; the only thing he has to buy is his food. How many black suits can you wear out in a lifetime?
- M: What changes would you like to see occur regarding the Romanian church on Wick Avenue?
- G: I would like to see it go all American, all English.
- M: Does that mean not only the priest, but that is for the choir and everything?
- G: The one nice thing about Father John ever since he has been priest, instead of having one or two boys be altar boys, now he has all the boys in the church be altar boys and they all get a chance.
- M: Are your sons altar boys?
- G: Both of my sons are altar boys. Peter is a little altar boy and Nick is a middle altar boy.
- M: Do they have any knowledge to Father John's responses in Romanian at all?
- G: No, I don't think they do.
- M: So it's done more or less from memory?

- G: Yes, they know a little bit of Romanian and a little bit of Greek.
- M: What changes would you like to see occur in relation to today's Romanian community in Mahoning County?
- G: No, it's nice the way it is.
- M: Would you like to see it become more Americanized or do you think . . .
- G: No. They should keep their culture, most of it, except their English.
- M: How should they go about keeping it?
- G: Well, they have the dance group to teach the young ones how to dance. They have the Romanian school for the younger ones to go to and for the ones who aren't Romanian so they can go learn a little bit of Romanian.
- M: So you feel they should have different organizations and societies to try to teach them some of the culture?
- G: Yes.
- M: Is there anything else you would like to say about being on the church council or AROY?
- G: I enjoyed being on the church council and I enjoy being married; I enjoyed being on AROY; I enjoy being a father.
- M: Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW