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ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW WITH

MRS. MARY MACEY (UKRAINIAN IMMIGRANT)

AUGUST 15, 1976

TRANSLATED AND TRANSCRIBED BY

MRS. NATALIA B. MCDONOUGH

JULY 28, 1977

Interview with Mrs. Mary Macey
410 New Road
Elsmere, Delaware
August 15, 1976
Interviewer Mrs. Natalia B. McDonough

Q: When were you born?

A: I was born in 1900, on the sixth of January, on Christmas Eve.

Q; And where were you born?

A: We lived in a village that was close to Premysl. The name of the village was Wilshana.

Q: Were your parents also born there? And did they live there most of their lives?

A: Yes, they were from there and they lived there until their death.

Q: Where did your father work?

A: He worked on the land.

Q: Did he own his own land?

A: He had some land and cows and some steers. Before the children came he could keep them, and then it became too much.

Q: How much land did your father own?

A: Oh, I can't answer that. Land was measured in morgens. (Translator:s note: one morgen = 2.1 acres) You know, when you're young, you're not interested in such things. I was only fifteen years old at the time.

Q: You were only fifteen at the time you left?

A: Yes. I came over with a cousin.

Q: Did you attend school in the Ukraine?

A: I did, but very little. You know, in those days, if there was work to be done on the farm, you were taken out of school.

Q: How long were you in school?

A: Oh, maybe two or three years.

Q: And in addition to this, you had to help at home?

A: Oh yes. We had to get up at five in the morning and go to the woods to gather leaves and bring them home to put them into the stalls for the cows. It was hard work! I'm not surprised at the prices of farm products. It's hard work.

Q: You work from sun up to sun down?

A: We sure did.

Q: How many brothers and sisters did you have?

A: I had two brothers. One died and the other one died during the war. And there were five of us sisters.

Q: So altogether there were two brothers and five sisters?

A: Yes. Plus a third brother who died young.

Q: And they all worked on the land too?

A: Yes. You know how it is. They all worked together until they married and then they went off on their own. There were no factories or anything in the area. In our area, if you worked away from the farm, you went to the Germans.

Q: People went to Austria, you mean.

A: Yes, they went to Germany, to Austria. (Tr. note: since Austrians and Germans spoke the same language and were of similar culture, both were probably lumped together as "Germans".)

Q: Aside from yourself, did any of your brothers or sisters come to the U.S.?

A: No, not at that time. Now during the war, my aunts came over, and a grandson came over, and a son's daughter came over. I went to visit them in New York; she was on Fourth Street. Her brother gave me her address. But you know, she wasn't particularly interested in being close. I showed her my sister's pictures and then she began to talk to me. I visited her twice. Then she moved but didn't leave me her address. She considered herself more educated, socially higher than me.

Q: But none of your brothers and sisters came here?

A: No, they didn't.

Q: How did you find out about the United States and about the possibility of coming here?

A: I didn't know anything about the U.S.. All I knew is that I had a cousin who was in the U.S. and she came home to visit, and she said she would take me with her when she went back. What did I know then! My aunt's daughter had been in America for six years. And after a six month visit at home, she went back to America.

Q: And she invited you to come to America with her?

A: She took me with her. She gave me eighty American dollars for a ticket. In those days tickets were not so expensive. Later I repaid her this money.

Q: With what purpose did you come to America? Did you want to stay here permanently?

A: I intended to stay four years and then come back. And then the war started and I stayed.

Q: Then your purpose was to earn some money and return?

A: Oh, it was just something people did in those days. They would often go somewhere for two or three years and then come back. At fifteen you don't think too much of economics.

Q: When your cousin came home from America on her visit, do you remember what she told you about the country?

A: Sure she told us about it. She said life was good. You don't have to carry water there. She had been in New York. They had water in the houses and electricity and gas. That's what she told us. But you know, when I came here, I cried. A whole year I cried. Every night when I went to bed I said my prayers and asked myself why I came. I was very lonesome. You know, I didn't know what people were saying to me in English. Now when people come over they learn a little English before they come. But I learned. I went to work for a Jewish family. The lady had two children, a boy and a girl. They taught me the language. They pointed to things and told me what they were. And that's how I learned.

Q: Why were you so unhappy?

A: Oh, I was lonely. I had this cousin, but she worked in

a hotel. She slept in the hotel. There were other people from the Ukraine here, but you couldn't go visit them; you had to work.

Q: What were some of the things that were different for you after you came here in addition to being in a different country and coming from a village to a city?

A: Oh, I was happy here after I learned things. I was very happy as a twenty year old unmarried girl. I went to parties and weddings. There was a Ukrainian Hall on Seventh Street. There is a Catholic church there now. Everyone went there. Maybe it was on Third Street. Nobody knew each other at first. We went to that church.

Q: When you came with your cousin, did other people from your village come with you?

A: There were three other women. One woman was going to Philadelphia, another to join her husband, the third also to Phila

Q: Then you all had contacts?

A: Oh, yes. One had the husband, the other a sister.

Q: What transportation did you use when coming over?

A: We came by ship. We were on a very good German ship. The name of it was the Imperator.

Q: How did you get to the boat?

A: We took the train. We livedtwo miles outside of Premysl. That's where we got on the train. Then we went to Hamburg. I don't remember what towns we went through on the way. We spent one overnight in Hamburg. Then the next day we got on the ship.

Q: Did anyone see you off? Any officials?

A: No. I was with my cousin the whole time. She had been here six years, so she knew her way around. When we arrived at Cassengard, she hired a carriage to bring us to the town.

Q: Did you have any problems during your trip?

A: No, none at all. The voyage was fine, but one day I didn't feel like eating. My cousin brought me some coffee and crackers and I got sick on them, but that was the onlytime.

Q: How long was your voyage?

A: Six days. We arrived in New York. We arrived pretty late in the day, so they let us stay overnight on the ship.

Q: Did you arrive on Ellis Island?

A: I don't know. But it was called Cassengard. If anyone had people meeting them, their names were called out and they went to Cassengard. My cousin still had money in the bank in the U.S., so she showed her bankbook and they let us through. We didn't need anyone to get us through. If there were any problems, you could always ask one of our own people to come and get you through.

Q: When you were being checked at the point of entry, what is it that the checkers wanted to know?

A: I don't know. But when my cousin showed her bankbook, they let us through immediately.

Q: What were your first impressions when you arrived in New York.

A: Oh, my goodness. I had never seen such a place. There were black people on the little boat that delivered us from the big boat to shore. I was afraid of them. I had never seen them before. There was nothing else particularly outstanding. My year in New York was very good. I went out a lot to the Ukrainian Hall; the Hall is still there. They had nice performances there.

Q: So, with your cousin you went right into the city and found a job there in New York?

A: Yes.

Q: How large was the Ukrainian community where you lived?

A: There were a lot of people. This church on Seventh Street was Catholic, but everyone went there. They had Ukrainian things and Polish and Russian ones going. There was a Russian church on Seventy Ninth Street. I went there once with a friend.

Q: Who helped you get a job when you first arrived?

A: My cousin. She took me to this office that gave you jobs. It was an agency. If you wanted a job in a hotel or restaurant, you had to pay a fee, but if you wanted to work in a private home, the employer paid the fee.

Q: Then you took care of the children for this family. Did you also have to clean for them?

A: Yes, they had six rooms in their house that I had to clean. There was one other girl. The lady also had two sisters and two brothers and a father who came to eat with the family. They took me home with them to do their laundry for them. But when Christmas came, they didn't give me a thing. I did their laundry for nothing. I didn't have to do it, but they never even gave me a ten cent hankie for my work. When they first asked me to do it, I didn't understand what "wash" meant, so I agreed. But it was too much for me and I told the one sister that I wouldn't do it. She said she would give me nothing to eat; I told her that her sister was the one that hired me, and that's the one I would work for, and she is the one who would feed me. So I wouldn't do the laundry anymore and left the job altogether after a while.

Q: Didn't you like the work?

A: Oh, it wasn't that. It's just that they never paid me anything. I just worked for my room and board.

Q: Do you have pleasant memories at all of that period?

A: Living in New York was nice. You could walk to stores and things and there were always social things happening, and wonderful parties. Parties then were different. There were a lot of them, and they were all open, you just walked over. Now everything is closed up, fenced in. I went back to visit, and it's just terrible. Frightening.

Q: How did you learn English?

A: At first from the family I lived with. Then I worked in a restaurant. There were lots of our people working there but we learned from the other workers. I washed dishes.

Q: Did you have any formal English instruction?

A: No. They didn't have night school like they have now. When we first came, they used to call us "Honkeys" just as they call the immigrants after WWII "DP" s (Tr. note: Displaced Persons). I don't know where the word comes from.

Q: How did you find your second job?

A: Oh, they were looking for people in the restaurant. Not in the kitchen, but in other jobs. Some were washing the linens, some were ironing, two washed dishes, two dried. I went to apply with another woman who came over like I did because I was afraid. That's how I got the job. But I got the job without an agency.

Q: Do you recall if any of the American workers or the Jewish people ever took advantage of you because you didn't know your way around or the language?

Q: They knew we didn't know the language and all, but there wasn't that much they could help, but I don't remember anyone taking advantage of us.

Q: How did you get to Delaware?

A: I had an uncle here. I came to live here because of him.

Q: How long were you in N.Y. altogether?

A: Six years, then I came to Delaware and got married here.

Q: Do you remember where you lived when you first came to Delaware?

A: We lived with my husband's brother, but then we moved out. It was on the corner of Taylor and Church Streets, not far from Heald Street. You know, Heald Street is across the bridge, but we lived before you get to the bridge.

Q: Where did you go when you left your brother- in-law's?

A: We rented a room from these people. They lived on Claymont, beyond the eleventh bridge.

Q: Were rooms easy to find then?

A: Oh, yes. Much easier than now. Now it's so expensive.

Q: Do you remember how much you earned in the restaurant?

A: $8.00 per week. I slept in a dormitory and paid $4.00 a month for lodging. On Sundays I had to buy my food, but on other days I ate at work, in the restaurant.

Q: When you came to Wilmington, was there a Ukrainian community in the area?

A: Yes, but it wasn't as easy then as it is now. When they were building the church on Heald Street, they came around collecting quarters from the people. People couldn't

give five or ten dollars like now. Our people had it a bit rough at first.

Q: Among the people who were in Wilmington in those days, were there any who were organizers of any sort?

A: There was some sort of society, but I don't know what it was; I didn't go to their meetings or anything. I only went to church. I didn't go to new things unless I could go with a friend.

Q: What did your husband do?

A: He worked for the "Marble Line" for the railroad. The shop was beyond the third bridge. He had to grease the wheels of the cars.

Q: Did he like his job?

A: That question never came up. You just took whatever job was available.

Q: How many children do you have?

A: Eight.

Q: What occupations do your children have?

A: The girls all got married, so did one son. He lives at Jefferson Fork. And the third girl is still at home.

Q: But what occupations do they have?

A: They all work in shops. The youngest one works for Acme. He's a butcher. The other son works in a belt factory. A son-in-law works with my son, the one who has a salon; this is a good job for him since he's not too healthy.

Q: How did you meet your husband?

A: I met him through my uncle; they were acquainted.

Q: Was he a member of the Ukrainian community?

A: Oh, I don't really know. He lived in Philadelphia and went back and forth a lot. Then he went back to the Ukraine and got killed. He went back with my brother-in-law. I don't remember what year that was. But it was after the war. But then there was another war over there. I know two other men who went back at that time.

Q: How is it that your husband went back without you?

A: Oh, it wasn't my husband that went back. It was my uncle.

Q: I see. You and your husband never went back?

A: Oh, no. Never.

Q: Do you think it would be frightening to go back?

A: Well, if you live there it isn't so scary. I write to a sister and I ask them how they live. They dont say that it's bad, but they don't say it's good either. They live under Russia. I also have family who live under Poland, but these are aunts and grandsons. There is one granddaughter who built a stone house; she gets help from people in the U.S., so she has it good.

Q: Do you notice any difference in the letters of those who live under Russia as opposed to those under Poland? Is either side freer than the other?

A: Oh, they write that they are fine; they have enough bread. They have both black bread and white. It isn't as good as it used to be, but it's o.k.. Now one of my sisters is widowed, so she lives alone.

Q: After you arrived in America, were there others who came over like you did?

A: Yes there were some people (from our area) who came over, but I don't remember who they were. No one from my family came. I wrote my sister about coming, but she didn't come. I even sent her a ticket, but her daughters thought she might be unhappy here and talked her out of it.

Q: Did it take you very long to save up money to repay your cousin for the ticket to come to the U.S.?

A: No, in fact I had some money left from the ticket money and wanted to send it to my mother right away. My cousin told me to save it until I had a lot to send and I did, but then the war came and I couldn't send it. And then my mother died.

Q: But you intended to send some money home to your family when you came over.

A: Oh, sure, and I did. I sent them a thousand Austrian crowns. And then I sent them five hundred more. But then the war came and my mother died, so I didn't send anymore. But my father lived to the age of seventy two.

When my cousin went back home, she saw my father.

Q: How did you manage to buy Austrian crowns?

A: Oh, you just told them, and they changed it into crowns. They knew how to do it at the post office. When I lived in New York I saved seven hundred dollars. I kept it at the priest's, but then I decided to put it into a bank because people said it might be dangerous to leave it with the priest. So I went and got it from him. He said I should leave it with him, but I told him I was leaving and took it out. Then I took it to the post office. That was four hundred dollars and they wanted to know my mother's name. But I didn't know what her name was in English, so I finally told them what it was in Ukrainian; it was Pazya.

Q: Was it a custom to let the priest keep your savings for you?

A: Yes, many people kept their money with the priest. My cousin had several thousand dollars the priest was keeping for her. Then she went back to the Ukraine without letting me know and didn't come back, so the money stayed with the priest because no one could get it out. If she had given me all the papers, I could have gotten the money for her; the priest returned the money to whoever came to collect it. But by the time I found out about it, it was too late. I came back to New York, but there was a new priest. The old priest was poor and didn't have the money anymore. He was real old and some people were taking care of him and paying his rent. So he had to use up my sister's money too.

Q: Well, I think these are all the questions that I have. Do you have anything you would like to add to what we have talked about here?

A: No, what should I say. I work hard and that's all.

Q: In your opinion, were Ukrainian immigrants well received by the American people?

A: My goodness, yes. There was only one family where the woman wanted to get papers but she didn't know English and there were rumors that things were not good for them, but she got the papers eventually. But that's what people said.

Q: And when your children were in school, did you ever feel any prejudice from other children or teachers?

A: No, they were accepted everywhere.

Q: No one probably even knew that they were not real American children?

A: Oh, they knew, especially some of the black ones. But in those days the blacks were different. And my children were different from today's children. Now they are around fifty years old and they say they sure weren't like the youngsters today.

Q: Times have changed, haven't they?

A: Nowadays they don't take care of their old people. People used to live closer together and families knew each other. But now everyone is scattered. We first lived on Church Street, then we moved to Vandever Avenue and from there I moved here; my husband died on Vandever Avenue and I was afraid to stay there. There were black families on either side of us. The one family was nice, but the other people drank a lot and had dogs. So I was afraid. When I used to come home from visiting my daughter at eleven at night, I was afraid that someone had gotten into the house.

Q: When did your husband die?

A: In 1959. He was four years older than I.

Q: Did he continue working at his old job until his death?

A: Yes, but the last year he didn't work. He didn't feel well. He had chest problems, couldn't walk much. He kept having to stop when walking to catch his breath. He took medicine. But he had worked too hard. People used to work very hard in the old days.