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ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW WITH

MRS. EVA MARKOW (UKRAINIAN IMMIGRANT)

AUGUST 16, 1976

TRANSCRIBED BY

MRS. NATALIA B. MCDONOUGH

AUGUST 4, 1977

Interview with Mrs. Eva Markow

1213 Peach Street

Wilmington, Delaware

August 16, 1976

Interviewer: Mrs. Natalia B. McDonough

Q: Where were you born in the Ukraine?

A: In Austria.

Q: Then how come you are a Ukrainian?

A: Well, there were Ukrainian people, German, Jewish, Polish, all mixed up, like in the United States.

Q: This was in...

A: The nearest big city was Przemysl, the region was called Dobromil, and the village, Novaya Posada.

Q: Was this in Poland?

A: No, I was in the Russian zone, so was my brother. But Przemysl was in Poland. We were close to the border. Before the war it made no difference, but after the big war, they divided the area and the Russians took up to Nizhenkovitse; that was the border for the Russians. I still have the brother there.

Q: Did you speak German?

A: No, when you went to school, you could take German or Polish or Ukrainian. But you know kids don't want it. You know I was thinking I would never need it. It was tough learning Ukrainian and Polish because kids had to work on the field like older people. They don't fool around like they do here. It was too much. In the winter it was o.k., but in the summer and spring it was too much. You learn if you have the time on a Sunday, but if you take the cows and horses out to pasture, what could you learn? You could take the animals only on your own property. Then you stay and guard up there.

Q: And there were no fences between the properties?

A: Oh, no! And we had a long way, about six miles. My father and his two brothers lived together on the same property although we were in different houses. It was nice and we never had any problems. They were all Bacharas. That was my maiden name.

Q: You said that the nearest city was Przemysl. Were your parents originally from this area?

A: Oh, yes. They were born there and they died there. I still have a brother there. Maybe he died because I haven't had a letter from my sister lately. So I don't know. The children write when they want to. I hate to tell you; if you send them money and packages, they are goody with you. But if you don't send them money, they don't have time to write.

Q: What did your father do?

A: He was a farmer.

Q: Do you remember how much land he had?

A: I couldn't tell you that. I don't know. It was a big place. We had three cows, a horse, a lot of calves, a lot pigs and chickens. But three brothers living close together, you know, they worked together. They would put two horses together in one plow. They shared the horses with each other.

Q: How long did you go to school?

A: I finished elementary school. Like you would say here, I had first year of high school.

Q: How many years of schooling was that altogether?

A: We all went to a one room schoolhouse. Every year you come back to the same room, but the work was a little harder. Then three times a week they had special things like German, but I never went for that. I learned Polish and Ukrainian and that's all.

Q: So, how many years of schooling was that altogether?

A: Six years.

- Q: That was a lot for having to work in the field while going to school, wasn't it?
- A: Yes, it was. You see it was like this. Early in the morning you take the cows out to pasture. You come back around ten thirty and then you hurry and wash yourself and run to school. Even the little kids had it the same. Even in the summer we had school from eleven to two. Later in the fall they changed it and then again in the early spring. Then we had school from eight o'clock until three o'clock in the afternoon.
- Q: But originally school started much later in the morning and stopped early in the afternoon because the children had to work, is that correct?
- A: Yes, that's right. They had to work on the farm.
- Q: At about what age did they start working?
- A: At the age of seven or eight, children already minded other children. They also took care of little ducks or chicks; they could do this at home. They had to take the ducklings to the nearby stream every day. They had to take care of them. Ten year old kids in those days worked like most children now when they are sixteen or seventeen years old.
- Q: What kind of activities were available for people in the towns at that time?
- A: Aside from church, there were stores. You could buy shoes, clothes, any kind of books or papers. It was just like here when you go to Market Street and you buy what you need.
- Q: Were there any kind of group activities for example for children or teenagers, or did everybody work?
- A: No, everybody just worked. Sometimes if there was a wedding, the older people would be invited. But if you were thirteen or fourteen years old, you just sneaked in. We got under the grown-ups' feet, but we just wanted to be there.
- Q: How was life different there from the way it was in the United States?

A: There was a big difference. That's what made me sick. I didn't care for the United States at all, to tell you the truth. Over there, at night, there were no lights; there was light only from the moon and stars. If you wanted to go somewhere at night, you had to carry one of those lanterns in your hand. That's because we lived in the country. In the city, sure they had lamps. But where we were, we didn't even have cement roads. Now it's different. They straightened up the village and they have cement roads. You know those straw roofs we used to have, well, no more. It used to be the only places you didn't see straw roofs was if the roof burned down; then people had to replace it with something that didn't burn. It was a clay type of roof.

Q: What else did you have in the Ukraine that you missed when you came over here?

A: I don't know. I couldn't tell you. Life was just completely different from the way it is here.

Q: How many brothers and sisters did you have?

A: Three brothers and three sisters.

Q: Did any of them come over to the United States?

A: My older sister was in the United States. But she went back. She's still living; she's ninety. She was in the United States twice, but went back. She thought it was better on the other side. I had the chance to go back, but a girlfriend talked me out of it. I was a widow, a very young widow, only twenty one years old. My husband died from the flu in 1918. I had a little money and a chance to go back. Back home, if you have a little money, you had a better chance of marrying someone; not a city slicker, a farmer. But my girlfriend said if I went, she would steal my baby at the last minute (she was the child's godmother) and I would have to go by myself. So, I didn't go back.

Q: When did your sister come over?

A: My sister was sick. I don't remember the first time she was over here. Maybe she came over in 1910. I came over in 1912. My sister came before that, got married here, had a baby and decided she didn't like it and came back before the First World War. The War broke out in 1914. In 1921, my brother-in-law took her back to the United States.

Q: Why did your sister come back the first time?

A: Oh, she had a good bit of money and she wanted to buy land and be a farmer. But when she got there, she didn't like it. Her husband stayed in the U.S..

Q: Did she sell her land when she left?

A: She went back the third time!

Q: Did she originally come to the United States so she could make some money?

A: That's right. She wanted money because then she wouldn't have to work so hard. If she had to work hard (on the farm) it would have been different. I remember that I got married in 1917 and the flu came in 1918. I was only married one year. But my sister was on the other side at that time. The United States lost a lot of people on the flu. When I married a second time, she was in the U.S. again.

Q: Why did you come to the United States?

A: To make a better living.

Q: Did you intend to stay for always?

A: Oh, yes, I never went back. I tried to go back. My baby was only fifteen months old. I bought a trunk and started with different kinds of fabrics. There was a whole group of people going back to my village. My baby's godmother was a very good friend and she didn't want me to go, so I didn't.

Q: How did you hear about the United States when you were still back home?

A: From friends who were in the United States from our village. They were already there and wrote back. There were a lot of them in Philadelphia. But many of them died already because they got old. I am old myself already.

Q: When were you born?

A: I forgot.

Q: Well, how old are you?

A: On October 14, I will be seventy-nine. I think I was born in 1897. And I came over in 1912.

Q: Then you were very young, only fifteen?

A: Yes, yes.

Q: When friends wrote to you from the United States, what did they say about the country?

A: Before I went to America, I had never been on a train or anything, although I had seen one from the distance. But I thought it would be different in the U.S. from the way it was. When we came in New York, you know, it was like a dump on the dock. Packages from everywhere sitting on the dock, you know, it's a big port and they deliver all over the world. Our boat came in at about four o'clock in the afternoon, in the daylight. And you could see everything. And I thought, my God, what kind of country is this?! Boats here and little ones there and statues over there; what was beyond New York we didn't see, because we just came to the port. We had to stay there overnight.

Q: Was this on Ellis Island?

A: I don't know. I couldn't tell you. One lady had a little boy who had the measles. And on account of that one little boy the whole ship had to stay overnight. And the next day in the morning everybody got a shot.

Q: You came with a few friends?

A: Oh, yes.

Q: How many of you were there altogether?

- A: There were five from our village. There was a lady who was taking a little boy of about ten or eleven to the U.S. to his parents. She was their cousin. Then there was another lady who was joining her husband in U.S.; he had gone there earlier.
- Q: Did your sister pay your way over?
- A: Yes.
- Q: Your brother was supposed to come, but he didn't, is that right?
- A: Yes.
- Q: When your brother intended to come, did he want to come also because life was better over here?
- A: Yes. My sister wrote to him that life would be easier for him in the U.S.. And he thought he would go. But then he found himself a girlfriend, he changed his mind. So he wrote to my sister and told her he wouldn't go. My sister would loose a lot of money on his ticket, so (I went to the U.S. in his place) and on the ticket it said Vasyl, my brother's name and my name is Eva. That's why I couldn't get my citizenship papers. The names were different. I know I didn't come from heaven, I came to the United States, but they told me if I paid fifty dollars they would give me the citizenship, but I don't have that kind of money. So they can just throw me out.
- Q: You were very brave to come here at fifteen!
- A: I think so. Well, I wasn't a squarehead. I never let anybody get on top of my head. My mother always said I should have been a boy rather than a girl.
- Q: You were one of the earliest women's liberationists maybe?
- A: Oh, I don't know. Maybe you just see other people doing things and you learn from them.
- Q: Can you describe the transportation on your trip to the U.S.?
- A: First we were on a train for two days, going through Germany to Hamburg. I had a better ticket to the U.S. so I could get

there in only six days. But the boat was too crowded, so they returned some of my money back and I had to stay in Hamburg two days. Then we took a slow boat over. I'm not sure, but I think this boat took thirteen days to cross the ocean. It was awful slow. I don't remember the name of the ship. It had three chimneys. First I was supposed to be one with four chimneys, but they cut me off because there were too many people. Our whole group from the village had to wait for the slow boat.

Q: Were there many people on the slow boat?

A: Oh, yes. It was loaded. We didn't understand the language these people talked, so we didn't know where they were from. I was too young at the time to pick up where they were from.

Q: Did you have any problems in Hamburg or on the boat?

A: No, we had no problems, but I was awful sick on the boat. I was so sick I couldn't lift my head. My friend, she was older, the one who was already married. She said that if I stayed sick, they would put me in a giant empty egg crate and drop me overboard. They really scared me, but I didn't want to go to the ship hospital because I was afraid of being dropped overboard. I saw them dropping one of those crates over. We were in very big rooms in the ship and I was on the top of two bunks. Because I threw up so much, I apologized to the lady below me and she suggested we switch bunks, and we did. After I got to the U.S., I got typhoid fever. For six weeks I was awful sick. I arrived in mid-November. At Christmas they had a big party. I went upstairs where the men boarders slept, my sister had boarders, and hid under my pillow and wanted nothing to do with the party.

Q: Did any of your friends meet you in New York upon arrival?

A: No, the ticket included everything, including transportation to the house. A man from New York brought us all the way down. No, it was from Philadelphia.

Q: How did you get to Philadelphia?

A: By train. Then we only got off in Phila. on the market and this man took us. We were all going to "Nicetown" including the woman who was delivering the little boy. The man put us on the streetcar.

Q: Do you think the man who helped you was connected with customs?

A: Oh, yes. He was. These men brought you to the door of where you were supposed to go and wouldn't leave you until someone greeted you. I don't know how they do it now, because more people speak English and German.

Q: When did you get your first job?

A: Six months after I arrived. I couldn't get a job at first because I was sick. Then my sister put an ad in the paper and I went to take care of children in a family. There were five children including a three month old baby. I didn't know what they were saying to me because I didn't know the language. I just grabbed two in each hand and the baby in the carriage and started in. I talked to them and cursed them in Ukrainian. I didn't know what to do with them. I stayed there six week. I didn't like my job, my God, I didn't.

Q: So what did you do next? Did you get another job?

A: My sister sent me to a restaurant. There was a nice woman there. She was English. She said she came over from the other side. She tried to teach me English. She was real nice. I was there a good while. She taught me how to prepare oysters and cook soup and many other things. The lady had a husband and a boyfriend. I was only there two months.

Q: Both of these jobs were in Philadelphia?

A: Yes. But then the lady left her husband and he sold the business, so I lost my job. But I liked it and cooked well.

Q: Was there anything that you didn't like about the job?

- A: No, there wasn't. I loved that place and I cried for that woman. But, she did wrong, she did have the boyfriend.
- Q: Did you like the first family you worked for, or couldn't you tell?
- A: The people were nice, but those children! I could understand nothing! I just couldn't manage them, there were too many.
- Q: Aside from this lady in the restaurant, did anyone else help you with English?
- A: Then I went to the Wrigley house where they don't care if you talk or not as long as you do your job.
- Q: Then your next job was as a housekeeper?
- A: No, no. You heard of Willow Grove? My sister sent me so far away that I couldn't come back home. She was already disgusted. I worked for a man there who had a very young wife. I cooked. He was a widower and had a son older than me and he was already married. The man was very good to me. He helped me with English and he talked to me and showed me how things were written. In the evenings she used to sit and laugh and he would help me with English; he would write things for me in big letters, and he taught me how to cook. I remember how I learned to make peach dumplings in old salt bags! I thought the man was crazy at first, but he made me promise I would make them for him alone the next time. So the next time they wanted peach dumplings I made them Ukrainian pyrohy with peaches instead. He was surprised but liked them, and I made them every day for dessert because we had a lot of peaches.
- Q: Was there anyone that took advantage of you or was not nice to you because you were a foreigner?
- A: No, everybody was helping me. Even when I went on the street car to my job from my sister's house, the conductor made me sit right next to me so he wouldn't forget to tell me where my stop was. He even made other people move if they sat next to him. People helped me because I didn't know anything.

Q: How did you get to Delaware then?

A: I was a widow the second time.

Q: You lived in Philadelphia with your husband?

A: No, I was single for five years, then I married a man from Chester, and I moved there. We were married in 1918, and he died. My baby was born one week, and he died the next week. So I was in Chester only one year. Then I moved back to Philly because I didn't know many people there and in Philly I knew people all over. And the second time I married, my husband was from Delaware. My luck was bad because I never married a Philadelphia fellow.

Q: Your second husband came to Philly to meet you?

A: He came to Philly to visit the people from the other side; he knew them. I lived a couple of doors away from his friends and he saw me up there. And the woman there told him I was a widow. That's why I married him.

Q: And he brought you to Delaware?

A: Yes. He was a widower too. His wife died in the old country through the war.

Q: So there were many Ukrainians in Philadelphia and when you came here, there were a lot of Ukrainians here?

A: Yes, and I came to this same street, only across the street. We moved to this house in 1927.

Q: Were there any social activities here at that time?

A: Yes. There was the church and then there were clubs and parties. But I never went to any of them. I wasn't a good time girl; I never cared for that. When I had the children, I didn't go out. My husband went out more.

Q: How many children did you have?

A: Six. One by the first husband and five by the second.

Q: What did your husband do for a living?

A: He worked on a boat; he was a carpenter. He came in 1912 and he worked on that bridge. I didn't meet my second husband until 1920. I married my first husband in 1918.

Q: Did you ever go back to the Ukraine after your first husband died?

A: No, I never did.

Q: Did you work after you got married for the second time?

A: Yes, I worked in the leather factory during the depression. You know work was slack for the men at that time, so I worked, but not real long.

Q: And then you had five children of your own to care for!

A: I'll never forget; it was so bad! I used to wash three times a week. There was no wash machine, so I did it on the wash board. I'll never forget one place; there was this Jewish woman. She had a colored woman who left her. So she came to the corner of the street and asked people if anyone would come work for her for one day. She was a young woman and had two boys. Then she went to the grocery lady and this one told her about me, that I sometimes worked because it was depression. So I went out to her place and she had a big wash. I dried it in the basement around the heater while she and the boys went out. I worked from eight o'clock until two-thirty. I didn't have a cup of coffee or tea. She didn't have any crackers or sugar or anything to eat in the house! All the first places I worked for when I came were nice, but that Jewish lady, I'll never forget her. When she came back she asked if I was done. I said yes and that I was starving. She said she was supposed to leave sandwiches for me but forgot and apologized. She said she would make sandwiches then, but I said never mind, since there was nothing in the frigidaire. Maybe she hid it. Across the street was another Jewish woman I worked for. She invited me to have something to eat at her house, but I said thanks and told her I could stop in the five and ten cent store on the way home and buy something there, maybe a cup of coffee. But you know how it is, you get off one bus and on to another, so I didn't eat anything until I got home. I never went back there. That was the only place that was bad. Jewish people are somehow bad.

Q: When you first came to Philadelphia, did you have problems of any kind? Were jobs easy to get?

A: No particular problems. There were enough jobs although they paid only about two dollars a week. But people didn't care whether or not you spoke English. They just put your lunch on the table and you did your work, ate and went home. I understood what they said when they gave instructions for work, but I couldn't answer.

Q: How about housing. Was that easy to find?

A: I don't know because I first lived with my sister. Then, after she left, I did housework for people and if I worked for them, I slept there. Every Thursday and every other Sunday I had off. Then I went to visit Ukrainian friends from my village. Even if I lost a job, I would go to them and stay with them until I found the next job. I didn't get involved with anybody else; only with people whose parents I knew from the other side.

Q: So you kept in contact with your friends and family from the old country?

A: Yes, before the war broke it up. Nobody heard anything from home until 1920.

Q: Did any people from your village come to America after you?

A: Yes, but not many because the war broke out. Like my sister went back with her baby in 1913. As soon as she got there the war broke out, and she couldn't come back until 1920. She was there through the war.

Q: Did a lot of people come again in 1921 or so?

A: Oh, yes, a lot of them came back to U.S..

Q: Did you ever feel any prejudice against you because you were a foreigner, a Ukrainian?

A: No. I used to be friends with a Polish girl. She worked for the people next door. Then there was an Irish girl a few houses down. We used to wave to each other when we happened to see each other outdoors and became friends.

We went to moving pictures and dances together. No, we had no problems getting friends.

Q: But how about the American people?

A: No, we didn't mix with the English people like you do now. Where we lived, there were hardly any English speaking people. They were Germans, Polish, Italian, Russian, Ukrainian. It was loaded with us.

Q: Excuse me, but I didn't catch the name of the section where you lived in Philadelphia. Was it Heightstown?

A: No, Nightstown. That's on the way to Willow Grove Park.

Q: Well, I think this is all we need.

A: Maybe I talked to you too much!

Q: Oh, no. It has all been very interesting. It's just fine.

*Wicetown,
[unclear]*