



Citation for this collection:

MSS 179 Robert H. Richards, Jr., Delaware oral history collection, Special Collections, University of Delaware Library, Newark, Delaware

Contact:

Special Collections, University of Delaware Library
181 South College Avenue
Newark, DE 19717-5267
302.831.2229 / 302.831.1046 (fax)
<http://www.lib.udel.edu/ud/spec>
askspecref@winsor.lib.udel.edu

Terms governing use and reproduction:

Use of materials from this collection beyond the exceptions provided for in the Fair Use and Educational Use clauses of the U.S. Copyright Law may violate federal law.

Permission to publish or reproduce is required from the copyright holder. Please contact Special Collections, University of Delaware Library, for questions. askspecref@winsor.lib.udel.edu

A note about transcriptions:

Of the original 252 audio-recordings in this collection, 212 of these tapes were transcribed around the time of the original recordings (between 1966 and 1978). In 2012, Cabbage Tree Solutions was contracted to create transcriptions for the remaining tapes. Corrections to and clarifications for all transcriptions are welcome, especially for names and places. Please contact Special Collections, University of Delaware Library, for questions. askspecref@winsor.lib.udel.edu

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW WITH

MRS. ANNA BAKOMENKO (UKRAINIAN IMMIGRANT)

DEC. 4, 1979

TRANSLATED AND TRANSCRIBED BY

NATALIA B. MCDONOUGH

FEBRUARY 15, 1980

Mrs. Anna Bakomenko
223 S. Union St.
Wilmington, Del.

Dec. 4, 1979

Interviewer:

Natalia B. McDonough

Q: Where were you born?

A: Galicia, in the Ukraine.

Q: What was the name of the village?

A: Brody — Stari Brody. We were about as far from the town as from here to the corner. That's where we lived.

Q: When were you born?

A: Just a minute. I want to tell you exactly. I am now eighty three years old. But I want to show you the book or the passport from when I came. (searches for paper in nearby drawer.) Oh, oh, oh, here it is. The year of birth — 1896, but can't see what month it was, but I know it was in March. Then I wanted to tell you that Brody and Stari Brody, it was sort of outside town, like here on this street. And this was my son, Roman, he was born in 1927.

Q: And your parents — were they from the same area?

A: Oh, everyone was from the very same area. We were all born in the same house. My father's name was Levko (Leo) and my mother's Eva.

Q: What did your father do for a living?

A: Well, you know, do you know Galicia?

Q: Yes, but I was little when we lived there.

A: My father worked in one of these very large buildings for the government. People paid taxes there and there was a bank there. He worked in an office there. He was a government official.

Q: How was life in general over there, do you remember?

A: Oh, life there. A lot of people long for the old country. and I tell them, listen, it was fine over there, we had enough bread and all over there. But when we came here, it wasn't much better some fifty years ago. It wasn't

all that easy under Hoover. He was very strict. My husband bought a farm as soon as we came here. If it hadn't been for the farm, we wouldn't have come.

Q: Then, he came here and bought a farm immediately?

A: Oh, no, no. My husband's brother bought the farm and then brought us over. At that time, you could come only if you had a farm. Only farmers came over. So he bought the farm so he could bring us over. It was pretty strict.

Q: How was life in general in your village back home?

A: Oh, it was normal, o.k.. We had food and we had work. It wasn't all easy, but it wasn't easy here, either, when we first came. But, let me tell you, it was nothing like it is today. In the old days, there were people who even collected rags and did something with them. And now, everyone gets everything free. You can search the whole world over and you'll never find such a country. It's a rich country.

Q: Did you attend school at home?

A: Yes, I went to the eighth grade. I can read everything, but I can't spell in English.

Q: A lot of American can't spell either, so don't worry about it. Spelling isn't easy. How did life in the old country differ from life over here about the time you came over?

A: Oh, well, when we came over it wasn't bad. My brother-in-law had had a store, you know. Then he bought the farm when we came over. So we settled in and we had chickens and everything there on the farm in Pennsylvania. But then things got worse when my brother-in-law died and my husband got sick. They died one after another. They both had infections. Nowadays, they just give you a shot for an infection and the next day you get on your feet and you go home. In the old country, my husband's mother

used to go to town to get bread at a kopeek per pound. She would get ten kopeek's worth and could hardly carry it home there was so much of it. And how good it tasted! I'll never forget the taste! She used to go to Radovil, that was in Russia already. You could get bacon for a kopeek, too. When she had fifty kopeek, she couldn't carry it all home and had to pay ten to get help with it, but she tried to carry it all. And now you can't get anything for a dollar.

Q: Did you have brothers and sisters?

A: I had three brothers and three sisters.

Q: Did they also come over here?

A: Oh, no. They all stayed home.

Q: How did you first hear about America?

A: My husband was always with the military over there. Then we heard about America from our neighbor. He lived nearby. And my brother had a brother and two sisters here. They wrote to us and said we should leave the old country. My brother-in-law said my husband should leave his job, the service, and go. Other people thought he should stay; he had many years of service with the army. This was during Polish rule already. He had thirty years with the service. My mother and my sister talked about it and he worried about the decision. And then he came to the states and a year later he died. I didn't go with him right away because I had my baby, Roman; he was three months old at the time. I waited until he was a bit older; I came over four months later.

Q: So, when people wrote about the states they said it was better here, but it didn't turn out that way.

A: Well, neither my husband nor I knew much about farming, and we had to work hard. The farm was about 120 acres in and we needed equipment. You know, you can't work on a farm that size with just a shovel.

- Q: Then you came over because your husband's brother and two sisters were here?
- A: Yes. They are all dead now, all dead. I'm the only one left. Well, it's like Mrs. Lazarus says. She's the Jewish lady. The one that owns Wilmington Dry Goods, you know. She knows me because we went to school together. Over there on Lombard Street it was. When she saw me the other day, she said she didn't want to talk to me. She lives on Lea Boulevard. I asked her why and she said, "All of my people are dead now. They're all gone." The blacks got them.
- Q: Then what was the actual reason for your husband's immigration?
- A: He came here to join his family. His mother was here too. And his sister Kasya had already bought five houses. They came long before us.
- Q: Then you thought life would be even better for you here than at home?
- A: Sure. But it didn't turn out that way. It's hard to guess how things will be.
- Q: But the starvation years were easier over here, weren't they?
- A: There were no starvation years here. We always had enough bread. We had chickens and geese, too. But there were times in the old country where we ate just potatoes for Christmas. It was during the war and Christmas Eve. My mother went to buy some things, but no one would sell her anything because they didn't have anything either. But our neighbor gave me a potato. I knelt and thanked God that I had that potato. It was hard.
- Q: Who paid your expenses for coming over?
- A: My husband's family paid for everything.
- Q: Can you describe your route to America?
- A: I got on the boat, where was it, in Warsaw? On this big boat, the Leviathon (Lewyatin)? That's where I went from Brody. I think I went from Brody to Lwiw (Lwow).
- Q: Did you take a train to Lwiw?
- A: Yes.

Q: Then you went by train from Brody to Lwiw. And then to Warsaw. Was that by train too?

A: Yes, and then I got on a boat in Warsaw.

Q: But there is no port there.

A: Wait a minute, where did I get on the boat?

Q: Was it in Germany?

A: No, no, no! Good Lord! Where did I get on that boat? Heavens, I've forgotten. But it was the Leviathon, a very large boat. It was the biggest there was, an American ship.

Q: Then you don't remember whether you sailed from Germany or Poland?

A: There was a port in Poland.

Q: The majority of people came through German ports, either Hanover or Hamburg.

A: But I didn't come that way. It's likely that I came via a Polish port. Well, I just can't remember.

Q: Well, it's no great problem. Did you have any difficulties during the voyage?

A: Well, with Roman, I had papers saying he was born on the 25th of August. I know he was born in May and they didn't have his name there on the paper where mine was. It was in the states where I had trouble and had to wait two or three days extra.

Q: You mean, they failed to register him as your son on your papers?

A: Yes, and I had to wait. But here I see that it is written in. I never really looked at it very carefully.

Q: How long were you on the ocean?

A: It took us five days to get to London. There we got on another ship. But wait. I know I was on the Leviathon for five days on the way to the states, but I can't remember about England.

Q: That's no problem.

A: But I was very sick.

Q: and your son?

A: Well the nurse came every day and said that if I didn't

manage to hold my food down, they would have to feed him to the fish.

Q: What port did you arrive in in the U.S.?

A: It was New York. Good Lord, when I arrived and saw the blacks! I had never seen them before. They fixed up my papers about my son in London. And in New York, I was afraid the blacks would steal my baby. But they don't do that — they give their own away.

Q: Who met you at the port?

A: My husband and his brother. They were both there.

Q: Did you have any other startling impressions like about the blacks, or maybe the tall buildings of New York?

A: I was so engrossed with looking at the blacks that I didn't even see the buildings. They just walked around like other people and I was so upset by them that my throat closed up and I couldn't even drink water.

Q: Hadn't you ever heard about blacks before?

A: Yes, but to see such people is something else.

Q: Then your husband preceded you to the U.S.?

A: Yes, he came eight months earlier.

Q: Did you go directly from New York to the farm?

A: No, first we went to Wilmington by train, he had a store there. And then we proceeded to the farm.

Q: Where was the farm located?

A: Oh, here, in Pennsylvania. My son took me for a ride there once and pointed it out to me. Black people bought it and still live there.

Q: What was the name of the town nearest your farm?

A: You know, I can't remember. All I know is that it was near a road and there was a catholic church nearby where I went.

Q: Was it near Kennett Square or Westchester?

A: No. But it wasn't far from here.

Q: How many hours did it take to drive there from here?

A: Oh, about half an hour maybe.

Q: Did the farm have a name?

A: I should know that, let me see. You know, when I arrived, I didn't recognize my husband. We were apart only eight

months. But he changed. He got so thin! And I thought right away that he didn't have enough to eat here. But there was so much food here that we gave leftover bread to the chickens and the pigs.

Q: Was he maybe working too hard?

A: No. He was just worried about what happened to me. He wondered if I would be allowed to come here and worried and worried. Then he got sick, he got the infection.

Q: And how did you like life on the farm?

A: Oh, we had chickens and geese and everything. And he used to bring things home from the store.

Q: Did he have someone to help him with the farm work?

A: Sure.

Q: How many workers?

A: We had blacks who came to work for us. They used to chop wood for us. But now machines do all the chopping. And my husband tended the store.

Q: Was there anything that you didn't like about your life on the farm?

A: Sure. When my husband couldn't drive me to a store, it was bad. There was just no way to get anything. You couldn't walk to anything. My husband couldn't drive.

A: Were you on the farm a long time?

Q: About two years.

Q: And then what happened?

A: Then we returned to Wilmington. I got a job with du Ponts right away.

Q: Did you work in the hotel?

A: Yes, I was there for twenty five years. I liked working there. And I had mother at home. My husband's mother lived with us. She watched the children for me. We had a large house. I lived downstairs and we had other people living upstairs. They had a little beer garden across from St. Mary's. They only slept at our house because

they were in the beer garden all day. It wasn't bad with them. They paid me.

Q: Where was your house?

A: It was on Pine Street.

Q: How did you learn English?

A: I went to school. I lived on Pine, and just a distance away was the school. Bancroft, you know. They had classes for English there. Clara went there with me. So did another lady who was older. She is in her nineties now and is sick. I saw her in the hospital. She doesn't talk anymore and doesn't know anything.

Q: I went to a school like that too. Did your friends and neighbors help you in any way?

A: I had good neighbors on Pine Street. There were Irish and Polish people there. I really liked it there. They were good to me. There's this Otto who came to visit me. He worked for du Ponts too, but now he doesn't work anymore. My goodness.

Q: Did you move from Pine Street to here directly?

A: No. I had two children there, a son and a daughter. But then the blacks came to Pine Street. I don't even want to say much about that. They were nice people. I can't say they were bad. But my brother-in-law didn't like the children playing with the black children. But you know, children have to play with other children. They used to play and then sit on the steps and lick each other's ice cream cones. He just didn't like that. The kids would share bites and when he saw that, he said he was moving out even if I wasn't.

Q: Did he live in the same neighborhood?

A: He lived with us. My daughter had gotten married and had two children. He (daughter's husband) was a fireman. Things went well there for us. He's a good man. They went and bought a large house in Maryland.

Q: And when did you move to your present address?

A: That was twenty five years ago.

Q: Were there a lot of Ukrainians in the Pine Street neighborhood?

A: No, it was mostly Polish and Irish people. And then the blacks started moving in more and more. There was one lady who sold her house on the corner to blacks. Everyone blamed her for starting the black move into the neighborhood.

Q: Were there any kind of groups or organizations in the neighborhood?

A: Yes. There was a Polish group because we were near the St. Stanley Church. They had organizations.

Q: Did you go to church there?

A: No, we always went to the old church, my mother-in-law and I, every Sunday.

Q: Was that on Heald Street?

A: Yes. I still go to my own church. But the children went to school to St. Mary's. They finished there, then went to high school on Fourth Street. That was St. Paul's High School. And the last two years they went to a public high school. They had a commercial course there.

Q: Then, your husband died very early and you supported yourself?

A: Yes, I went to work. I asked Mrs. Boyer to figure out how much we made an hour. She did. It was \$0.24 an hour. But when I got paid and went to the market on Front Street, My son couldn't carry all the groceries I got for \$5.00. He begged me again and again to get one of those carts. After two years, I got him one. We waited because it cost \$6.00 to get the cart. But what can you get today? But it paid off because later I used to send my son to King Street to the Market and he used to get me wooden crates and brought them home in the cart. I used the crates for firewood. I'll tell you, life wasn't easy

then, but I didn't want to complain to anyone.

PLEASE REVERSE TAPE

She is going to school now and my daughter says she's learned a lot already and she's only three years old. She goes to the Elkton school.

Q: How did you meet your husband?

A: We were neighbors, so meeting him was no problem.

Q: Was there anyone else here in the states that was helpful to you at the beginning?

A: No, just my husband's brother and sisters. But I didn't need any help.

Q: Do you still have contact with anyone in the Ukraine or Poland?

A: All my family over there are dead. All six brothers and sisters. One brother wrote for a long time, but then he stopped. But I know they're all dead because I got pictures sent of their burials.

Q: Did you continue to correspond with them even during the Stalin years?

A: Yes. We even sent packages to one brother. We continued sending packages to his wife after he died; she lived in Poland. And then she got sick too. They had two children, but I don't write to either of them.

Q: From you immediate family, no one besides you came to the states?

A: That's right. Nobody. I had so many friends back home. But there don't seem to be any people from the Brody area here. Only once somebody said they knew someone from there in Philadelphia or New York, but I never found out for sure.

Q: I've already interviewed eight other people. They all seem to be from the same general area except for you.

A: How about that. But we were not far from Brody, it was about as far as to First Street. It took us about five minutes to get to Brody. There were two fine churches there. There was a very large one that was made of wood. It

burnt down. Now there is a church there, but it is not maintained well.

Q: How did you happen to find this house?

A: My son-in-law found it for me through a neighbor who was also a fireman. He lives three houses down. His name is Joe. He's a very fine person. He told us that an elderly couple was selling this house; this was twenty five years ago. The traffic doesn't bother me here, especially now that the traffic is one way. So I came to look at the house. The elderly people had it in good shape. But I had to put in new wiring and new piping throughout. I put in a bathroom in the basement, too. There were the children and he and I. In the mornings we all had to get ready to go to work. One bathroom just wasn't enough. We paid a hundred dollars for the bathroom.

Q: Your son-in-law was always a fireman?

A: Yes. He was with the department for twenty five years. He's retired now and everything is going fine for him. I don't need any help from them and they don't need it from me. After he left his job he went to work for the racetrack, selling tickets. So they're doing very well. He bought himself a condominium in Florida.

Q: Maybe they'll invite you down there, too.

A: Oh, I've been there, but I don't like Florida. It's too cold there. They had terrible snows there last year.

Q: Well, I think this is the end. Would you like to listen to what you said on tape?

A: (LAUGHTER)