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Interview with Mr. Boleslaw Rybaltowski, 922 Elm Street, Wilmington, Delaware, June 19, 1970, by Francis Turochy. Mr. Rybaltowski is a Polish immigrant.

Q My name is Francis Turochy and I'm going to interview Mr. Boleslaw Rybaltowski. Mr. Rybaltowski, what day were you born and where?

A On [inaudible, may be February] 15, 1895.

Q Uh huh. Where was that?

A That's in the village Rapusan [sp].

Q In Poland?

A In Poland. That was under the Russian government then.

Q Oh, I see. All right, now how old were you before you began to think or dream about leaving for the United States, and why?

A Well, I was 15 years old, 1912. Then I come to Wilmington.

Q What were you doing between the time of your birth and age 15? Where were you? Were you on a farm, where you in a city?

A Yeah, I was on a farm.

Q Uh huh. What did you do?

A Well, helped by brother-in-law on the farm. Then I go to city school, but was far from our village, was what they called the Russian [inaudible, sounds like "Twelvyorstin"], in the city Driechin [sp].

Q Um hmm. What were you doing on the farm?

A Well, on the farm [inaudible]

Q What made you decide to come to the United States?

A Well, my two brothers go and my mother, then I go. I the one left by myself in the old country and then I come over there and my two brothers and my mother.

Q I see. Now, who was here first, your father and your mother?

A No, my father was first, then he come back to old country. But I had an older brother in Wilmington.

Q Mr. Rybaltowski, under what government control was Poland when you came from there?

A Russian

Q Under Russian government. What was it like in Poland at that time?

A Well, I don't know much.

Q You don't remember too much.

A No, no.

Q What was your father's and mother's name?

A My father was named Stanley, Stanislaus, and mother Kashmira [sp].

Q Uh huh. Where were they born?

A In Poland.

Q In Poland. Let's talk about the education that you had in Poland.

A Well, I was go to school in the village, then after I go three years to city school, Driechen.

Q Uh huh. What age did you start school?

A Well, when I started to school, I was about seven years old.

Q Uh huh. What languages were taught in that school?

A Well, Polish and Russian.

Q What type of a school was it, was it private or was it a government school?

A Government . . . it was city school.

Q City school. How many years of schooling did you have?

A Well, in city school, I had three years.

Q Uh huh. Was it a large school or just a small?

A Oh, yeah, a large school, yeah.

Q Um hmm. When did you first hear about America?

A When I come to America, 1912, April the 11th.

Q Oh you left Poland at that time, was it?

A Yeah, left the Poland then I come here to this country in 1912, April . . . yeah, April the 11th.

Q Uh huh. What was it, in wintertime, spring, summer?

A No, spring.

Q In the spring. And what was your age at that time?

A What?

Q What was your age at that time? How old were you?

A I was . . . well, when I came here, I was about 15 years old.

Q 15. You came, you say, alone, or did you come with somebody?

A No, I come, two of my brothers and my mother.

Q Oh, with your two brothers and mother. You already had your dad in this country, is that right?

A No, my dad was left in the old country.

Q Oh, you left him.

A Yeah, for one year, because he had a garden, big garden, 140 or 180 fruit trees. Then he have to stay there for one year.

Q Until he sold it?

A No, no. He give to my brother-in-law 'cause he and his father come to this country.

Q I see. Well, then, who was here first of your family? Your brother?

A My brother, oldest brother.

Q I see. And he was the one that brought the family here?

A Yeah.

Q Uh huh. Let's talk about your trip coming here. How did you come?

A On the Hamburg, Germany Line, and we was on the boat 21 days.

Q 21 days. How did you get to Hamburg?

A Well, we go to what they call station, Malkenya [sp], then go to Germany.

Q Was it on a train?

A No, we have to walk through the border, Russian and German border.

Q How did you travel across the ocean, in what kind of a ship?

A It was Palanza [sp]. name's Palanza.

Q Uh huh. And how was it, a passenger ship, or . . .

A Well, it was from Germany to United States was passenger. From United States to Germany was cargo.

Q Uh huh. Did you have any relatives and friends traveling with you?

- A Well, two of my brothers and my mother.
- Q What did you have to do in order to get papers and things like that before you left Europe?
- A Well, we go what they call [sounds like "nowcrapfka"], you know. We don't have no papers.
- Q Oh, you slipped across the border in Europe.
- A Yeah, yeah, uh huh, yeah.
- Q What language was spoken on the ship?
- A Well, Polish and German, Hungarian.
- Q And you say it took how long to get across the ocean?
- A 21 days.
- Q What sort of meals did you have on the ship?
- A Oh, very poor.
- Q What was it like, more or less? What kind?
- A Well, rice and you know, things like that.
- Q How were your evenings passed on the ship?
- A Oh, going on the deck and sit down on the deck.
- Q Uh huh. What kind of a passage was it? Was it rough, stormy, or was it nice, clean.
- A Rough, rough. It was in March. It was in the springtime, was awful rough.
- Q How did you travel? Was it a cabin, and how many people were in each cabin?
- A Well, in that cabin was about 80 people.
- Q Oh, my. About how many passengers were on the ship?
- A Well, I don't know exactly. I don't know exactly.
- Q Um hmm. What kind of baggage did you have?
- A Well, only clothes and things like that.
- Q Did you have any money with you when you came over?
- A Well, when we come here, my brother . . . older . . . not older, he was with [inaudible] . . . he was the boss on the money. Then he bring about 80 dollars.

Q Who paid for the passage?

A Well, my father, in the old country.

Q How long . . . oh, you said 21 days, I see. What kind of weather was it when you were traveling on the ship?

A Well, it was rainy, stormy.

Q Uh huh. Where did you land?

A In Philadelphia.

Q How . . . can you tell me more or less how it was when you were landing?

A Well, I don't . . . you know, we landed in Philly, April the 11, 1912, and from Philly I come to Wilmington.

Q Did you remain in the port of entry for any length of time, or did you come right off?

A I don't know exactly what that means.

Q Well, how long were you on the ship, or did you come right off the ship?

A 21 days.

Q No, no, I mean here in the United States. Did you have to wait there, was it quarantined, or . . .

A No, no. Same day, we came from Philadelphia to Wilmington.

Q I see.

A Same day. April the 11th.

Q Describe your trip to Wilmington from Philadelphia, from the port of entry. Did somebody come after you, or did . . .

A No, no. We go on the train . . . on the train from Broad Street station.

Q Did you have a job to come to here, or did you have to look for one?

A I was looking for one.

Q Uh huh. What sort of work did you do first?

A In Morocco Shop down at [inaudible] . . . what they call . . .

Q How long did you work there and how much did they pay you?

A Well, at that time I get \$6.00 a week.

Q Uh huh. How long did you work there?

- A Well, I work about two years, then I go to [inaudible - sounds like "Staten Department"], then I make \$12.00 a week.
- Q How many hours a day did you work there?
- A 10 hours.
- Q How did you travel back and forth to work, from home?
- A Well, walk.
- Q Uh huh. It was a walking distance?
- A Yeah, yeah.
- Q What did they manufacture? What did they make in that shop?
- A Well, [inaudible, sounds like "lashekid"].
- Q [Inaudible, "lashekid"], leather, leather in other words. Uh huh. Tell me a little bit about the second job you had.
- A Well, then I got upstairs on the [sounds like "Staten Department"], I make \$12.00.
- Q I see. What kind of clothing did you wear in your first years that you were here?
- A What?
- Q What kind of clothes did you wear? Did you buy some here in this country to wear?
- A Yeah, yeah, yeah.
- Q Were you able to save any money out of that?
- A Oh, yeah. Yeah.
- Q Did you join any church over here, or organization?
- A Well, I join to St. Stanislaus Society.
- Q How were the conditions here in this country by then against those in Poland? Were they better, or were they worse?
- A Well, it was better here than in the old country. Yeah.
- Q What was the difference here?
- A Well, was here you could speak in Polish and belong to the societies, in Poland we can't do it.
- Q Uh huh. What was the difference in the food over here, between American

food and Polish food.

A Well, it's a big difference. You could eat a lot of meat here and everything.

Q Uh huh. Where did you live first?

A On 128 Cak Street, lower Cak.

Q Uh huh. Did you board or did your family buy a home?

A We got a room. My two brothers and my mother.

Q What kind of conditions were there in the house? Was it crowded or . . .

A Well, yeah, yeah, it was crowded. No electric lights, no gas.

Q How many people slept in one bedroom?

A Well, about four.

Q About four. Did you share it . . . were there two beds, or did you share . . .

A Two beds. Two double beds.

Q Did you write any letters to Poland to anyone there?

A Oh, yeah, I write to my brother-in-law.

Q Did you help anybody over there to come here to this country?

A Well, no, because the whole family was here. One year later, my father come.

Q What did you do with your leisure time when you weren't working?

A Well, after the work? Well, we stay home. Can't go no place.

Q Uh huh. There weren't many places to go, I guess.

A No. I was too young to go to the beer garden.

Q Uh huh. How about . . . how many days a week did you have to work?

A Six days.

Q Six days. Saturday, too.

A Yeah.

Q What did you do on Sunday?

A Well, go to church and come home, stay home.

Q How soon did you marry when you came here?

A Well, I came here 1912, I got married 1916.

Q Uh huh. You married rather young.

A Yeah, yeah, I was 19 years old when I get married.

Q Where did you live after you were married, did you buy a home of your own?

A No, I rent a house with my brother-in-law.

Q I see.

A We rent a house the two families.

Q Did your wife have to work after she was married?

A Yeah, she worked for a while.

Q How many children did you have?

A Was eight.

Q How many boys and girls?

A Four and four.

Q Four even, uh huh. When did you first buy your home?

A I bought the home . . . I bought the home here on Jackson Street, 310 South Jackson, that was about 1925.

Q Uh huh. Then there wasn't too many years that you were renting.

A No, no.

Q Did you occupy the home by yourself, your family, or was there someone with you?

A No, by my family.

Q Uh huh. When did you become a citizen of this country?

A It was 1923.

Q When did your wife become a citizen?

A Well, she was born in this country.

Q Oh, she was born here, I see. After how many years in this country did you become citizen?

A Well, I took my citizenship paper in 1923.

Q In 1923, that was before . . .

A '23.

Q '23, in other words, before you were married.

A Um hmm. No, no, after I was married. I married in 1916.

Q Oh, that's right. Did you have to know English pretty well before you could get your citizenship papers?

A Well, I go to night school, learn the Constitution and all them questions.

Q Now we come to the period of World War I. Compare the conditions in this country as to that [inaudible] . . . during the war. How was it here . . . in other words, during the war as it was before the war.

A Well, it was better conditions during the war, because there was a lot of work, and make good money.

Q Did you serve in the Army, in the United States Army?

A No.

Q Were jobs more plentiful during the war?

A Oh, yeah. I work on shipyard, make good money, too.

Q Uh huh. About how much difference was there between your working in a morocco shop and in the shipyard? How much difference in pay?

A Oh, about double.

Q Were you able to correspond with your people in Poland during the war?

A No. After the war, yeah.

Q What was life here like after the war?

A Well, I don't know.

Q Slowdown in jobs and all that?

A Yeah, yeah . . . well, slowdown and was depression.

Q Uh huh. What was life here like after ten years in this country? Did you see much improvement?

A Oh, was a lot of improvement. Yeah, was a lot of improvement.

Q Did the country return back to pre-war days or did the prices and things, wages and all, continue on at a higher level?

A Yeah, it was continuing on a higher level.

Q When did you buy your first car, Mr. Rybaltowski?

A What?

Q When did you buy your first car?

A Well, I think it was 1927. 1927.

Q Uh huh. What make was it?

A [Sounds like "Dirt, Dirt."]

Q [Sounds like "Dirt"], uh huh. Did you keep it for many years?

A No, I keep it until I work for that Polish lodge, and after that I sold it to Janus [inaudible].

Q Uh huh. Did you gain any more education in this country?

A Well, yes, I go to night school . . . and afterwards, when I was in the insurance business, I travel to Erie, Pennsylvania, to New Britain, Connecticut, to Baltimore, to Reading.

Q So you were in the insurance business for a while. For about how many years?

A It was since 1921 to 1927.

Q Uh huh. Did you establish a business of your own of any kind after that?

A Well, a candy store on Read and Harrison first, then on [inaudible] . . . after that.

Q Uh huh. Did you do pretty good in that?

A Oh, yeah.

Q You made a comfortable living?

A Yeah. Then after I bought that house on Jackson Street, then my wife, she go to work and help me.

Q Did you gain success in your business?

A Oh, yeah. Yeah.

Q And did you continue letter-writing to Poland all the time?

A Yeah, yeah. Right now I received a letter from my brother.

Q Uh huh. Tell me about the education that you gave your children in this country.

A Well, my daughter, she has only St. Hedwig's, that's all.

- Q 6th grade?
- A Yes, she graduated from St. Hedwig's. But the oldest boy, Stanley, he got-- what they call that business college?
- Q Goldey?
- A Yeah, I think it's Goldey, yeah. He was graduated from Goldey, and now he works down at Shellhorn and Hill, and he's a boss in the office and vice president of the company. And the other one, Bill, got drugstore.
- Q Uh huh. The other one is a druggist.
- A Yeah. And the third one, he works down at . . . he's a junior chemist. He works down at Gates Engineering Company, and got a good job.
- Q How about the girls?
- A Girls, there was only one.
- Q Oh, just the one girl, I see.
- A Just the one, yeah.
- Q Uh huh. So therefore, your children made out pretty good in this country. You gave them a good education.
- A Um hmm.
- Q Did you ever visit Poland back again between the years?
- A No, no.
- Q No? Never had the desire to go back?
- A No, I don't think so.
- Q What were the relations between the Poles and the different parts of Poland? Like for instance, one county to another, you know, what were their relationships there? Were they friendly or were they . . .
- A Well, I don't remember much, because I come to here young. I was down to Diavistok [sp], but I was only little boy. And my grandfather's brother was priest [inaudible, Polish] . . . and I see the colored man first time in my life in Diavistok.
- Q How about that? You saw it in Poland, um hmm. Give me your full name.
- A My full name? Boleslaw Rybaltowski.
- Q Um hmm. And your present address is what?
- A 922 Elm.
- Q Um hmm. Well, I'm going to conclude this interview, Mr. Rybaltowski. I

want to thank you very much for the privilege of having done so, and I wish you all the success in life and your future. Thank you very much.

[END OF INTERVIEW]