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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](mailto:askspecref@winsor.lib.udel.edu)

Interview with Leon Hnida, Russian immigrant, at 14 Specie Road, High Point, Wilmington, Delaware, in June, 1969, by Elaine Wells.

Q I'd like to introduce my grandfather, Mr. Leon Hnida. Geegee [sp], where were you born?

A In Russia.

Q Where in Russia?

A Volensky, Gulgaria [sp].

Q Volensky . . .

A Volensky, Gulgaria state.

Q Near what big city would that be?

A The city? Starokonstantinov.

Q Is there a city in Russia called that today?

A Yes.

Q It's still the same. What village and city were you born in?

A This is a large village of 500 numbers, a large numbers.

Q 500 people.

A 500 numbers--homes.

Q Oh, 500 homes, I see. About how big of an area was this? A couple of acres, or . . .

A Just like New Castle.

Q Like New Castle. The city or the county?

A No, it's a city, village--big village.

Q Did every person in this village have their own home? Did they have their own farm?

A Yes, truly everybody have their homes and farms and land.

Q Did you have many relatives in this village? Or were you the only family?

A I have--now I don't know how many I have--but I had two brothers and three sisters, and a father and mother. But now [inaudible] they're always dead.

Q What did your family do for a living?

- A Well they used to do--oh, mostly the farmer.
- Q Did you have your own farm?
- A We had our own land, farm, yeah.
- Q Did you produce just to feed your family or to sell?
- A Ah, to sell in summer.
- Q You sold too? Did you have livestock--pigs, or . . .
- A Yeah, we have pigs, sheeps.
- Q And sheep, too?
- A Sheeps--we'd have 100 sheeps, a couple of cows, four horses.
- Q Cows, too, horses. What did--did your parents do farming all their lives, too?
- A Yes. That's what anybody did at that time, farm.
- Q How big was your farm? How big were most of the farms--what did they grow, what size?
- A See, that state they have land, not exactly the one place, but there were four parts.
- Q Four parts.
- A Yeah. That's about--one part they got two acres, three or four acres, another part, two-four acres, see?
- Q I see. Right. Did you go to school at all? Did they have any school in your village?
- A They had a village school, yes.
- Q Was this like a one-room school, taught the same?
- A Yeah, it was a large school, one-room school. Right next to church.
- Q Right next to the church.
- A Across the street from the church.
- Q Was it a church school, did you have . . .
- A The priest always come, you know, check it every day. Every morning.
- Q Oh, really? Did everyone have to go to school?
- A Are you kidding? You have to go. Everybody have to go.

- Q They had to go--and the priest would come and check on them.
- A Yeah, sure. That would work.
- Q Did you have to learn any . . .
- A We had a teacher, a male--man, not a woman.
- Q A man teacher. Oh.
- A Mr. Poole.
- Q Mr. Poole?
- A That's right.
- Q Did he have his education from someplace in Russia?
- A No, he come from the city of Konstantiro [sp?].
- Q Oh, the big city there. Did you learn all different subjects?
- A He held it like a second class, but I've not finished half of the class.
- Q How far did you go?
- A Just a half, that's all.
- Q Would you say the American school at that time would be about the same as what your school was?
- A There's a lot of difference.
- Q A lot of difference?
- A It's harder here, because, you know, the teachers give you more. I have eighteen months at No. 14 School when I come here. And it's three months in the post office, see.
- B [Unidentified person] To get his naturalization papers.
- Q Oh, I see.
- A They asked me what I go to school for.
- Q What did you go to school for when you came here?
- A I try to get my citizen's paper.
- Q Oh, I see. You mean after you came to the United States you had . . .
- A I had to learn the Constitution and read and write.
- Q Did you learn how to read any English, or to write any English, or say

anything before you came to the United States?

A Not many, but I could ask where I was. But I can't speak very good. I just ask them to "give me," "eat," "go," "come back," and so a few words. And I don't know much. I learned in Odessa.

Q In Odessa you learned.

A That's right. In Odessa, all kind nationality there.

Q Oh, I see. Probably because it was a seaport, people coming into that area.

A Yeah, just like in New York, see, just like in New York.

Q Right. In this village, if a boy decided that he didn't want to remain as a farmer, do you think there was any chance that he could do something different?

A Yeah. He could go to high school, he could go to college. You don't have to pay much in the college. . . .

Q You didn't have to pay much for that. Did you have to have a special type of paper from your teacher at the school, or did you pass an examination, or . . .

A Yes, if you pass examination, they sent you to [sounds like Gitoma], the next city to the high school. The next school they have to go away because we didn't have no high school in our village.

Q In your village you had just the regular grade school.

A Regular grade school, yeah.

Q How far away was the high school?

A Oh, maybe like--I'd say about 35 miles.

Q And the children . . .

A You had to live there. You couldn't go every day.

Q Oh, I see. In your village did you have your own carpenters and your own blacksmith?

A Everybody--always got everything.

Q Everybody was all together.

A We had two blacksmiths to the city.

Q Two in the city.

A Yeah, and carpenters, we have it all. My father was a carpenter and my

brother, older brother, was carpenter.

Q Oh, I see.

A Sure. [Speaks Russian here.] My father was [Russian].

Q How do you say . . . ?

A Make the cloth . . .

Q Tailor.

A No, no, no.

Q Weaved cloth? Your father was a weaver?

A That's right.

Q Oh, I see. Did he have like his own business in the village?

A That's right. He had machine.

Q Oh, a loom, that he would weave the fibers back and forth.

A That's right.

Q I see. You were telling me before that the priest would come over to check on the school and everything.

A Every day.

Q Religion was really important.

A Very important--very, very important.

Q And did you have--was there a strict Sunday attendance at the church?

A Everybody believed strictly. You have to go to church every Sunday. In case that you're sick, you don't go, yes. But if you're feeling well, you have to go to church.

Q If the church was this important in your lives, did you have time at all to go during the week, or were there services during the week?

A Yeah, sometimes during the week, you have holidays and we have to go to church.

Q I've often heard that the way that they called you to church was by a loud and long pealing of the church bells would ring.

A Church bells? We had five bells.

Q Five bells in the church. And you would know when to come, when church was starting because of this.

- A Yeah--at the start of church, at the veriol [sp], [inaudible].
- Q Right. Veriol was when you said the Creed to the church.
- A That's right.
- Q And about how long were the church services?
- A About an hour and a quarter, sometimes an hour and a half, long service on holiday. You know holidays was long service of the weekday, you know, like [inaudible].
- Q What would happen--you had just a regular . . .
- A Like in [sounds like Baska], you know, Easter.
- Q Easter. What do you mean, they'd be longer at Easter?
- A Yeah, a little bit longer at Easter because of midnight service, processions all around and such.
- Q Did all the people from these 500 homes use this one church?
- A Yeah.
- Q It was all the same religion?
- A There was too many people to worry.
- Q And all of the villages that were right around your home town, did they all have the same religion, too?
- A Everybody got that. There wasn't any place to go.
- Q Any place. They all had . . .
- A No change, no difference.
- Q The Russian Orthodox religion?
- A We had a couple of Catholics. The blacksmith was a Catholic there. They didn't have no Catholic church. Then he'd go to the Russian church.
- Q But there were Catholics there, too?
- A They have a couple of families.
- Q Were there any other types of nationalities?
- A No, just the Catholics.
- Q Just the Catholics and the Polish. At this time did the government--was the government for religion or were they . . .

A Yes. The Czar was deep religion man.

Q A very deep religious man?

A The Czar go every day building so many churches in the Europe.

Q The government building churches.

A Government building help, yes it is.

Q That's probably why they're so beautiful.

A Oh, the Czar was deep religion man, yes sir.

Q They have so much money to build them.

A And even Moscow, they got 1600 churches in one city.

Q 1600 churches in just Moscow alone?

A Yes sir, 1600 churches, and they're big churches, too, not the small.

Q The big ones with the domes on the top . . . the London Tower domes . . .

A That's right. Yeah, they're big churches, yes.

Q Maybe we should say something about some of the different they had in the church, like the Holy pictures, they're called a certain special name-- what do you call them?

A Ikona [sp].

Q Ikona?

A Yes, sounds like here--ikona, icon, you know.

Q And these are the Holy pictures?

A Yes. [inaudible], no difference. We have some like here. It's just designed--everything is like this country.

Q Just like it is in this country.

A All one church. It is big church, you know.

Q Just like St. Michael's on Claymont Street--the same type of thing.

A Same design, yes.

Q Was--when the priest had his schooling, did he go to a monastery or did he go to college first or did he take . . .

A Yeah, he goes--before he is priest?

Q Right. Suppose . . .

A Oh, he go to school, he go to seminary.

Q And then he went to seminary, just like here. . . .

A Sure, you know where seminary in Europe or Kishingyo [sp], big city, Kishingyo.

Q Kishingyo. Where was this? Was this north, south?

A That's about next to [sounds like Goberka, Gadeutchke Bavaria]

B County in the north.

Q In the next county, north. Let's talk a little bit about the way you lived over there. Suppose you all wanted to get together to have some fun or to do things together. You didn't have . . .

A You mean to meet like summertime in the village?

Q Right.

A Well, we get together, we have homemade orchestra, you know, like, violins and [sounds like kribens].

Q And you play the violin.

A Then we have good time, you know, we have iced tea--we have tea, no coffee, just the tea.

Q No coffee at all? Just tea.

A Just tea. The young generation, I'm talking about. Then we'd dance in the yard, not in the house. And they got [inaudible], they got benches.

Q Did the church have a big influence on the get-togethers? I mean, did they have like church get-togethers, or was it away from the church mainly?

A You mean like letting in the party, or . . .

Q Right. In other words, like now we go for a church supper and dance, but then the church didn't have this?

A We don't have at that time . . .but we have parade. We have like procession in that church down here--that was procession, right?

Q Right.

A And we go--all the village walk with crosses, candles.

Q People carrying crosses and candles?

- A Everybody, walking, [inaudible], in the village all around streets.
- Q What time of year was this?
- A Week from Easter.
- B After Easter.
- Q A week after Easter. And the whole village would take part in this?
- A All the village go. And don't forget, flag first, the Russian flag.
- Q The Russian flag was first?
- A Yes, and the Czar's picture.
- Q The Czar's picture, all the time?
- A It got to be.
- B And then all the people.
- Q And then the people.
- A In every village house they have the Czar's picture, don't forget.
- Q Every house had the Czar's picture?
- A Every house, you have picture of the Czar, Nikolai--Nicholas. I mean, if you walk in the house, if you don't take the cap off, they could have you arrested.
- Q For not taking your cap off in front of the Czar's picture?
- A That's right. They were strict, I tell you that. They were strictly for the quiet, they was nice in Europe, the whole trouble of this, there was a depression.
- Q This was the quiet time, though . . .
- A Yeah, but there was depression, they didn't have too much money, they no make much money. You have to work maybe for 50¢ a day.
- Q 50¢ a day.
- A That's all we could make it.
- Q Well when most of the people could only make 50¢ a day, did they have trouble getting food to eat?
- A No, because we raise everything.
- Q Right. Your own farms would supply you in food.

- A Everything we have. Chicken, we have meat. We raise a couple of pigs, you know, lambs. You kill 'em, you have meat.
- Q You hear a lot in the United States about the black bread that you would eat.
- A You mean rye bread?
- Q Rye bread.
- A You always eat rye bread in the Europe. Bake self, too.
- Q All the time. You never had the white bread.
- A My mother used to bake once a week twelve loaves bread.
- Q Five loaves of bread?
- A Twelve, rye.
- Q Twelve loaves of bread.
- A 'Cause we have pretty good-size family. Round bread, you know what I mean, like pumpernickel, you know. Yeah, and it good, too, very nice.
- Q If you had stayed in Russia, what do you think you would have done eventually. If you hadn't thought of coming over here to America, would you probably have been a farmer?
- A Well, you have to work on the farm. But I don't feel like work on the farm, I try get something else.
- Q You didn't like to work on the farm.
- A I diggin' every year . . . go a little higher, see.
- Q Well, when was the first time that you thought that you really wouldn't become a farmer and you'd do something else, and what did you do then?
- A Well, I tell you, I don't care much for--too hard work on the farm. I try to get better job, make money, see.
- Q How old were you?
- A How old was I when I left home? 15 years old.
- Q And where did you go?
- A I go first [sounds like Caselske, *Bessarabia* Basarabia].
- Q And where was that--how far from your village?
- A That's pretty close to Romania. From there I work on a farm I think it was a couple of years, I go to Odessa.
- Q And then you went to Odessa.

- A And then [when] I go [to] Odessa, I get job.
- Q Did you have any idea that you would be leaving Russia at this time? Were you working toward this?
- A I love--I never forget Russia.
- B I mean, did you know when you were working in Odessa that you some day would go to America?
- A I didn't exactly, but I come back home last, I see man was from Europe, coming from this country.
- Q A man had come to your village from America.
- A Yeah, he come from America, how he dress, I thought to myself, "I got to go."
- Q You had to go to America.
- A Yeah, that's right. Then I get passport, first I go get passport.
- Q How did you get your passport? Did you have to . . .
- A Well, my constable was friend of mine, he get for me. It cost me 18 rubles.
- Q 18 rubles to get a passport in that time. Do you know how much that would be in American money?
- A 18 rubles? That's \$9.00.
- Q \$9.00 to get a passport. Did you have to have a birth certificate to get your passport?
- A From the church? You have to have. 'Cause you can't get no passport if you don't have birth certificate.
- Q Oh, you couldn't get a passport . . .
- A You have to go first to the priest, he give you birth certificate copy. Then you have to go to like the squire and then take a pledge it's true. Then they send for this what you call a passport.
- Q You said that you had to go to the priest to get the birth certificate. That shows how the church had a real good hold on everything that . . .
- A Church got everything--priest got everything in his hands.
- Q Everything important, the church has.
- A Anything happen in the village, trouble, when he come constable for somebody--investigation, they go see priest first.
- Q Rather than to the person . . .

- A He got all the records, priest--every one person. He got a book--the Church.
- Q The Church was like our F.B.I. today.
- A Are you kidding? I like that way, because it was very good. Everybody believed--the religion, you know. They believed in the Church--that's exactly what life is like, at that time. I don't see no [sounds like 'yokess'] is wild, like it is now. It was pretty quiet.
- Q How old were you when you got your passport to come?
- A I was not quite 20.
- Q Not quite 20? Were there any other people?
- A You see, 20--I was in December to try this passport. When January come, I was in March 20. The 3rd of March I was 20 years old.
- Q The 3rd of March you became 20 and you got your passport.
- A Yeah, but I get ready first.
- Q Right.
- A January, February, you know. I live at home that time, couple of months before I left. When I left Europe, I have passport, I have ship's card.
- Q Passport, ship's card--what's a ship's card?
- A Tickets.
- Q Oh, the ticket, I see.
- A I go down to the Lubawa--I no go to Germany, you know, there, I go this way.
- Q You didn't go through Germany, you went . . .
- A No, no, Lubawa.
- Q Lubawa. That was down toward . . .
- A Russian port.
- Q Oh, a Russian port.
- A There was a [inaudible] in the port, but still Russia. And the ship was Russian Kursk, the name, ship.
- Q Kursk was the name of the--and it was a Russian ship?
- A Yes. It's real. That's real Russian [inaudible], it was. Then I ride 14 days. We stop--first stop in England, Liverpool.

- Q Liverpool. Oh, it went around there first.
- A We stop just to take passengers--we didn't stay long. From there we go to Canada.
- Q To Canada first.
- E Halifax.
- Q Halifax?
- A Yeah. From Canada come to New York.
- Q You had a long trip, then.
- A It was 14 days.
- Q 14 days and you made those two stops.
- A When we come to New York we check everyone through the doctor.
- Q You all went to the doctor?
- A They make the cross on the back, chalk. If you healthy, go to the right, or left, something wrong.
- Q They just put a big "X" chalk mark on your back if anything was wrong.
- A Then change somebody . . . change somebody, they give you lunch--piece of salami and cheese and a piece of bread. They give you big tag when you go.
- Q They put a tag on you.
- A Yeah, when you go. 'Cause you have to know which number you could take, train. Anyhow [sounds like "Cossack guard, there was a Cossack guard in the rank."] Well, we go right to Philadelphia. . . .
- Q When you started to come from your village, were there any other people with you that came, or were you the only one?
- A Huh uh, I just by myself.
- Q You were the only one. Did you know anyone in the United States at this time?
- A Yeah, but from our village, Jewish family, rabbi.
- Q A Jewish family from your village?
- A Rabbi, rabbi, [inaudible].
- Q They had gone over to the United States before you.

- A They was three years already here, down in Marshall Green. That's where I come, Marshall Green.
- Q When you went over, did you think at all that you would ever come back?
- A I think before, beginning, that I come back. But when it started that trouble, after that revolution, you know, that war started . . .
- Q World War I.
- A Then I tried, but not allowed to go back.
- Q You weren't allowed to go back then, after that.
- A No, I decided to stay here, that's all.
- Q When you were coming over on the boat and everything, were there a lot of immigrants on the boat with you?
- A All kind.
- Q All kinds, I mean like . . .
- A All kind nationalities.
- Q What kind of nationalities were coming?
- A Oh, mostly Jewish people.
- Q A lot of Jewish people?
- A Yeah, a lot of Jewish people.
- Q Jewish people, and then Russians and . . .
- A Russians and then [Russian word], you know, some little . . .
- B Georgians.
- Q Georgians, oh, Georgia.
- A Oh, mostly Jewish.
- Q Mostly Jewish. What were your accomodations like? Did you have nice places to stay, or--on the ship.
- A On the ship? Not much good.
- Q Not good? Why?
- A No, because you know, I get seasick a couple of days.
- Q Did you share a bunk-like room, or . . .
- A Yeah, yeah, yeah.

- Q How many people were in a room?
- A In a room? We had beds like soldiers sleep.
- Q Oh, like soldiers--just line your walls with them.
- A That's right. I mean every day, every lunch, they had orchestra play.
- Q Oh, they did?
- A Dance, sometimes, if you feel good.
- Q Uh huh. What kind of a ship was it, a freighter or a regular ocean liner or . . .
- A Oh, yeah, it was big ship already.
- Q A regular ocean liner?
- A Yeah, but not big enough, see.
- Q But not big enough for as many people as were on it.
- A When you start to eat what was lunch, you'd have a table, that man'd bring you your lunch, he says, "Everybody hold plates in your hand." I don't know, what's that for?
- Q "Everybody hold plates in your hands"?
- A I don't hold, but later on it falls, everything in the floor.
- Q Oh, I see. The waves were rough on your ship and if you didn't hold your plate in your hand, you lost your lunch--it was on the floor. Did you get three meals a day? Breakfast?
- A Yes. We had good food.
- Q It was good enough food, though.
- A You got everything you want. You got herrings, you got pickles, anything you want.
- Q Herring and pickle. Did anything important happen on the boat over? Did you have any trouble? What year was this that you were coming over?
- A 1914.
- Q 1914. Were you having any trouble? Did any other ships stop you?
- A No, everything's quiet, go nice and smooth.
- Q You had a safe voyage. How ere the rest of the people on the boat? Were they getting homesick, or did they . . .

- A Yeah, so many people--most women.
- Q The women were getting homesick? Were there a lot of families, or were there just mainly single people like you?
- A Well, to tell you the truth I don't know much about it because you can't go asking everyone . . .
- Q I know.
- A 'Cause this is [sounds like "Boitch here, Gutred here]--I just stayed to myself.
- Q How did you get the money for your ticket? Was it expensive?
- A Yeah. Cost me ship's card 113 rubles.
- Q And that would be . . . let's see.
- B Two dollars for two rubles.
- Q Two dollars for two rubles, that would be . . .
- A No, for one rubles.
- Q Two dollars for . . .
- A No, no. Two rubles for one dollar.
- Q Two rubles for one dollar. That'd be about fifty-some dollars that your ticket cost.
- A That's right. And passport cost me 18--\$9.00.
- Q \$9.00, right. So that's close to \$70.00.
- A Then I give him five rubles, you know, for the constable for a tip.
- Q For giving you the passport.
- A 'Cause he was good--you know, he was friend of mine and friend of my brother.
- Q When you went from your village to Lubawa, how did you go from there?
- A We go the train.
- Q On train from there.
- A Yeah. Train take me right there.
- Q And did you pay for a ticket on this?
- A No, that was--everything's paid already. When you get ship's card, that's

paid all the way through.

Q Oh, I see, the ship's card--the ticket . . .

A See, we stay in Lubawa, like we come this afternoon, we stay all night there and the other morning we start at 11:30, to get going.

Q On the ship.

A Yeah, that's right.

Q Oh, so you just spent one night.

A We stayed there all night, yeah.

Q In Lubawa.

A It's a big place. Oh.

Q Is it a big city?

A They check and search every suitcase.

Q They checked all your suitcases? Searched them?

A Everything. I had two bottles vodka, they have to open.

Q Two bottles of vodka that you had to show them? Oh.

A That stuff the Czar's vodka--good! They had to break the seal.

Q Did they let you keep it?

A Yeah, they let you keep it.

Q They did let you keep it after they broke the seal on it.

A I just take it in case we are--I never drink much before, you know--but I told myself I gonna take in case of the ship, you know . . .

Q Sure. Did you have a lot of luggage or just your . . .

A Just one luggage.

Q Just one suitcase?

A One suitcase, that's all.

Q That was everything you had.

A Had a coat, shoes--I mean boots, heavy boots, and a [Russian word].

Q What's a [Russian word]? A cap!

- A I mean, like this, the capital hair or something . . .
- Q Oh. Uh huh. When you first came over to the--not in--did you get off the boat at all in Canada?
- A No. They wouldn't let you get off.
- Q Not 'til you got to New York. Where did you come into New York? Was that Ellis Island? Ellis Island, right?
- A Yeah. Customs.
- Q And when you first saw the United States . . .
- A What I see--they say, "Hey, hey, there's the Liberty Statue!"
- Q Liberty Statue--Statue of Liberty.
- A Everybody prayer, they did.
- Q Everybody did that. They folded their hands, and . . .
- A Yeah.
- Q I bet they were thankful to finally be there.
- A Everybody grateful.
- Q Oh, boy, I bet that was emotional. When you first decided that you were going to come over to America, did your parents say anything about this, were they, you know, glad for you to come, or didn't they like the idea?
- A I write and send them money, my mother and father.
- Q Oh, you said that you would send them money.
- A And they don't even know much about it. I just tell them at last I gotta go.
- Q You just told them you were gonna leave.
- A They know I not gonna stay, they know that.
- Q You were a pretty independent person.
- A Sure. No, they know I not gonna stay on the farm. I told 'em.
- Q That you wouldn't stay on the farm.
- A Sure, I have different clothes, different, you know, everything. I buy good clothes, you know, when I come here.
- Q Well, when you went to Ellis Island and after they, you know, gave you your tags and told you where to go, where is the first place you went from there.
- A To Philadelphia.

Q To Philadelphia to meet this Jewish family that you knew there.

A [Inaudible] Station.

Q And what was the first job that you had here?

A Oh, first job? No, first thing I stop at the [sounds like Erligh], that people, you know, where I come from. They didn't recognize me.

Q They didn't recognize you?

A He was pretty old, you know.

Q Did they know you were coming?

A No, they don't know. I just had an address, that's all.

Q You just had their address.

A Not terrible difference like now, see.

Q In other words, you knew . . .

A I say, "Hello," "I don't know you," he say. Well, I says to myself, "Wait a minute." Then I go to the corner and a cop's standing on the corner. I say, "Mr. Police, can you tell me sleep," like there, see. He say, "Yeah, right here is small hotel," you know.

Q In other words you asked him where to sleep and he told you.

A . Yeah, he told me. He come down, he tell that woman that he wanted something to eat, they give him something to eat. I didn't eat much because I was scared. In the morning I get up, I eat oatmeal. I remember, I never forget that.

Q That you had oatmeal your first morning here?

A She give me coffee, you know, I say, "What's that?" "Coffee."

Q And you'd never had coffee before.

A No I never--I only drinking tea, all time we have. We never have in Europe coffee. Not that part where I come from. Then I go back again, you know, about 9:00, 10:30.

Q To the family.

A I ring the bell. A lady come--Gitlea [sp] come. She's named Gitlea. Oh, she say, "Leon, what are you doing here?"

Q She recognized you.

A Yeah, she recognized me. She say, "Come on in the house." I go in the

house, she make breakfast. She make cocoa--like coffee, you know.

Q Right. Hot cocoa.

A Yeah, hot cocoa. And then we started talk, you know. I say, "Well, we have to look for job now." She say, "I'll give you a room on the third floor for nothing.

Q She gave you your first room on her third floor for nothing. That's nice.

A Yeah. I help--they have a business in West Philadelphia, delivery like . . .

Q Delivery business.

A They delivered things here--all kind--wholesale. I helped pack it 'cause they give a dollar a day.

Q A dollar a day, your first salary.

A Just for a while. Then later on somebody-- friends, they ask me what kind of job I do, could do.

Q Her friends asked you what kind of job.

A Yeah, I say, "I help my brother-in-law," because he was tailor and I ironed his clothes.

Q Your brother-in-law was a tailor.

A Yeah, I learned that.

Q And you learned that and how to iron clothes.

A They say all right, they have job, at 10th and Arch--sweatshop.

Q Sweatshop?

A Yeah, iron.

Q Oh, ironing, oh, I see.

B And they called it a sweatshop.

A All the women's dress, you know, skirts.

Q Oh, ironing the clothes and they called this place a sweatshop. Oh.

A They don't have electric iron like now. They have gas iron, 10-pound.

Q Gas iron?

A 10-pound.

- B It weighed ten pounds.
- Q Oh a weighted iron. Oh, my goodness.
- A And when I work all day, I can't bring a spoon in my mouth.
- Q Oh, my golly. Your arm would be so tired.
- A Sure. \$12.00 a week. Five days and a half, you worked.
- Q \$12.00 a week, five and a half days.
- A That's right.
- Q Were there any Russian churches right around here when you first . . .
- A Yeah.
- Q You were able to . . . were there many people around here.
- A I meet so many friends after a while.
- Q Were there any other people that you knew from Russia besides this Jewish family?
- A Yeah, they have. Afterward, they come after me.
- Q They came after you, though. Um hmm.
- A Yeah. I come first. 'Course there were ones before. But this fellow, he's from the other village, you know. [Inaudible] But still he belonged to our village.
- Q Did any of your brothers and sisters ever think of coming over to join you?
- A Nobody.
- Q Nobody ever did?
- A I still by myself. Nobody here besides this family.
- Q Nobody met you there, and you came here. That takes a lot of courage to come to a new country.
- A My family, all those in Europe, were killed in war--First War and Second War.
- Q Your what? All of your family? Oh.
- B All in World War II.
- A Yeah. Killed everyone. They was lost about three or four times, you know,

you heard that.

Q About when Germans ran back and forth over Russia.

A I got nobody now.

Q Um hmm. Well, what happened that you finally ended up in Wilmington?

A Well, I tell you, when I meet more people, you know, in Philadelphia, then I go to club, Russian Club, Marshall and Green, they have a Russian club. I meet so many people, you know, Russian people, they have some from Wilmington. They work in the [sounds like Malblé Iron]. They say you come down, maybe you can get job up there, you can try, you see. 'Cause there was depression, at that time. Well, I come on August the 6th.

Q August the 6th. How long was that that you were in Philadelphia, now, just a few months.

A Well, from March 3rd to August the 6th.

Q In other words, you came to America March 3rd and 'til August 6th.

A August 6th I go to Wilmington. But I got a first job at the Eastern ~~Malble~~ Iron, iron company.

Q Um hmm. And where did you live when you came here? In what area?

A Well, you get a room, board with some people.

Q A boarding house.

A Paid \$3.00 a month for room.

Q \$3.00 a month for room and board?

A That's right--no, no. Board extra. Everything you eat. And I get 16¢ an hour. That's my pay.

Q 16¢ an hour. And what did you do?

A Well, was laborer, just a laborer. Then they--from August, January I get quarter. They goin' up because war started in Europe.

Q They needed more iron and steel.

A Yes. They get a little busy, they a little busy--from 1914 I got job in the fall, 1916 and 1917, I got foreman.

Q You were a foreman by 1916 and 17, so you really pushed your way right up.

A I work about a year and a half, I get that foreman job.

*Malleable*

*Malleable*

- Q When you first came and you were still <sup>i</sup>leaving at the boarding house then?
- A Yeah, that [inaudible].
- Q What area--what street, do you remember?
- A Oh, that was South Wilmington.
- Q Around Claymont and Heald Street, around there.
- B Apple and Claymont.
- Q Apple and Claymont Street?
- A Yeah.
- B Your great-grandma's house.
- Q Whose house was it?
- B Your great grandmother's house.
- Q My great grandmother's house?
- A That's right.
- Q Oh, I see. When you first came here, were most of the people who were living right around there, in those streets, were they Russian or were they Polish, or . . .
- A Oh, they have at that time all kind of people.
- Q It was all mixed.
- A Polish, Ukraine, Russian--but not many colored people at that time.
- Q Were there like Italians?
- A Italians, yeah.
- Q Oh, there were?
- A Yeah, all kind, like I told you.
- B Jews.
- A Jewish people--the Jewish people owned most of the business, ain't that right?
- Q Were there any Russian churches yet in Wilmington?
- A It was organized in 1915.
- Q In 1915 you organized it.

- A Yeah, organized it on Claymont Street.
- Q That was St. Michael's Church on Claymont.
- A That's right. That's when I was there. Since that time to now, see.
- Q From 1915 to now. And you were one of the organizers of that church.
- A That's right. That's the one I organized church--not by self, but we have people [inaudible].
- Q How did most of the people, the Americans, like your boss at <sup>Malleable</sup> Marble Iron and the people--did they treat the people who were coming to the United States fairly?
- A I treated good my people when I was boss.
- Q Well, how did they treat you and your friends, though? Were the Americans friendly to you, did they want to help you?
- A Yeah, I have my boss--my boss, you know, big boss, Judge Kinselent [sp], he's English. He treat me good. He learn me--he give me hell some of the times, but still I know he fight for my side, see. He wanted me put in the right track.
- Q He wanted you to go straight, right from the beginning.
- A He told me strictly, you have to keep people strictly, watch 'em, because if you don't go and do it, he gonna get fired. That's the guy, see.
- Q There wasn't any prejudice?
- B No, at this time.
- A See, at that time it was different like now. They didn't have any unions at that time. I hired people in the gatehouse. I lay off people, fire people, myself.
- Q However you need 'em, right.
- A We didn't have at that time union, see. See how we do everything at that time. They go to the gatehouse, there were about 50 people, maybe more, stay there and look for job. They have to--usually have--which one you gonna pick them? You don't know which one's good.
- Q Well then, let's see. By 1916 and 1917 when you were a foreman, how old were you then?
- A A year and a half I get foreman.
- B '14 he was 20 . . .
- Q '14 you were 20, so by 1917 you were 23 years old and already you were a foreman.

A Yeah, I was strong.

Q You were strong.

A Oh, yeah. I learned every job in the shop.

Q Well, when did you get married over here?

A Well, I decided I don't go back to Europe . . .

Q Oh, this was after you decided you weren't going back to Europe.

A Then I have to look for girl and get married.

Q And where did you find a girl to get married to?

A I find her where I lived.

Q Where you lived?

A That's right.

Q This is my grandmother. Where was she from.

A She's from Austria, Galicia.

Q From Austria, um hmm.

A Yeah, she's from Austria, yeah. She speak--I take around four languages, I take.

Q She could speak four languages?

A She was German, but she speak Polish and Jewish, Ukrainian.

Q And she could speak Russian.

A A little.

Q A little, but you taught her more?

A But see, Polish and Russian, that's pretty close.

Q Right, only the accent's different.

A But she understand me.

Q She understood you, just a little bit of trouble talking.

A But after a while I learned all kind language.

Q And my 1918, then, were you able to have your wedding ceremony in that St. Michael's Church?

- A St. Michael's Church, yeah.
- Q You had a building then and everything?
- A Yeah. Oh we went right from the house, you know, where I boarded.
- Q You married in the house?
- A Yeah, that's right.
- B Church.
- Q Oh, in the church.
- A Well, in the church, yeah, yeah.
- Q Oh, but your reception was . . .
- A We don't have no hall like now. In the house everything. I have one week wedding, one week, full week.
- Q Of a wedding? One whole week?
- A Yeah, started from Wednesday to Wednesday.
- Q It started on a Wednesday and lasted a week?
- A A whole week I have vacation, they give me first vacation, foreman.
- Q And everybody celebrated all this time?
- A Everybody dance--the orchestra play every evening.
- Q The orchestra played every evening? My goodness! And all your friends came and--every evening, and did you have dinner for 'em all the time?
- A Yeah, well, sure. Every day they have everything. We have three kinds beer on the tap.
- Q Three kinds of beer!
- A Near beer--I mean root beer, birch beer, and regular beer, see.
- Q Um hmm. Well, was this customary to have a wedding to last this long? Was this the usual thing? Not usually? This was just an extra-special one?
- A Don't forget, everything was mine.
- Q You said when you first came to America you had to go to the school here, No. 14 School? And you went to the post office school to get your naturalization papers. Did you have any language difficulties? Was it hard to communicate at first, to get . . .

- A It was pretty hard to spell. Spelling.
- Q It was hard spelling.
- A Yes, very hard spelling. From Russia to United States, you know, reading and writing, it's pretty hard. Of course this spell like now--like Philadelphia does, for instance, we have to put "f" not "p." See, that's all mixed up from the beginning. Now I know, but before it was awful tough.
- Q I know, because we put down letters for different sounds and everything.
- A And the post office they didn't want only Constitution and the history book, each state they asked read for each state what state grow, what raised, every single state in United States.
- Q You had to know all this.
- A You had to know everything. They was hard, really. Teacher was a man, Mr. Poole was name. Boy, I tell you, he's . . .
- Q When you first founded--the group of you founded St. Michael's Church, was this the first church around here like that, the first Eastern Orthodox Church?
- A Yes.
- Q That was the first one? And then later on there were some other churches on Heald Street. What were they?
- A Well, they was Ukrainian, see.
- Q Now, tell me something. I heard that Ukrainian people don't like to be considered with the Russian people and the Russian people . . .
- A See, this Ukrainian people, they all most come from Austria, see.
- Q Oh, I see.
- A Austria, Galicia, they call. See, that's difference--idea--they're all the same people, you understand but they don't like Russians because Russians is hard--Russians. You know what I mean.
- Q Strong, courageous people, uh huh.
- A That's what they don't like that way, see.
- Q And that was the only thing, really.
- A But that's all the same people. I don't see no difference.
- Q But when they were away from the Church, did you mix, were your families together? It was just the one idea of the Church?

- A Oh, yeah. When we go like to a party or someplace, I used to play in orchestra, the violin, in the party--we didn't have no difference. We had a good time, you know, with Ukrainian people everyplace.
- Q Um hmm. You played in an orchestra over here, too.
- A Yeah, I play orchestra, the violin. We have four pieces, orchestra. Coronet, violin, and accordion and a bass.
- Q Bass fiddle, um hmm.
- A Bass fiddle. Zoom zoom.
- Q Did you--in other words, during the day you would work at the steel factory and then in the evenings . . .
- A In the evening we go practice, you know. We play every evening almost party.
- Q And this would be extra money for you?
- A That's right.
- Q Coming in, and at the same time you liked to do it. Did the people still get together--did they all get together and play their instruments and sing like you said they did in the village in Russia?
- A Yeah, sure.
- Q The same type of thing, they enjoyed this?
- A Yes. Sometime they sing, dance and old-time Cossacks and polkas. You know, they have very different.
- Q When they had World War I and you heard about the revolution and the Czar being taken out.
- A Well, I was here. I don't know much about that.
- Q Oh, you didn't--this is what I want to know. You didn't hear much about that?
- A When I come here, they was quiet like I told you. I come here March 3rd, and the war started in Europe August 6th. 6th of August the Kaiser declare war in Russia. 1914. You see how lucky I am to get away from that trouble.
- Q So it didn't really have any effect on your life.
- A Then I don't know. Maybe because I was not old enough a year ago, the army was 40 years old. This country, I have to go, but when I work defense at Malble Iron, I was foreman, they hold me down. They don't let me go.
- Q In other words, you were exempted because you worked in the steel factory.

- A We do some war defense.
- Q Right. Just like today if you work for a government place you get exempted.
- A I told my superintendent, I say, I got a first-class you know, the card. At that time it was in the classes, see, first-class. I showed him, he said, "Let me see. Leon, I'm afraid we don't let you go." I said why. "'Cause we need you."
- Q And they wouldn't let you go into the army?
- A About two weeks after that I got fifth class. And you know, fifth class, that's far wait--they don't take you.
- Q Right. How long was it--this was in 1918 you got married, did you always continue working at Malble?
- A I work at the Malble Iron until 1932, June 2nd--6th or 2nd?--I get sick, I quit.
- Q Oh, just quit just like that.
- A 18 years I work up there. I have a reference, good reference from the company. I still have someplace.
- Q Well, what did you decide to do then?
- A Well, we have already that cigar store--we bought in 1927.
- Q In 1927 you bought a cigar and candy store.
- A Mom would stay in the daytime, I help in the evening. There was a little bit too much for her, see.
- Q Well, how long did you have the candy store after this?
- A Well, from '27 to '35, eight years.
- Q 1935.
- A That's eight years.
- Q What happened at that time?
- A Then we decided--Roosevelt elected and we decided to get the license--they come back beer and whiskey.
- Q Oh, this is after Prohibition.
- A Yeah, we decided to get a license for a taproom.
- Q And to have a taproom, um hmm.
- A Yeah, we have a taproom of our own, for 26 years we operated. In 1961 we

sell.

Q All that time.

A Now I'm in retirement.

Q In good old retirement.

A Take it easy.

Q So really you had quite an experience and a varied life here. You had worked for the steel factory and then a candy store and then back to the taproom.

A Didn't you ask me how many children I have?

Q How many children did you have?

A Well we have so far six nice lookin' girls.

Q Six girls, no boys.

A No boys, no.

B No sons.

A And we have ten grandchildren, and one grandchild is married already, is teacher, go to school.

Q Um hmm. I bet I know who she is.

A I don't know what else I could say.

Q When your children were growing up in America, did you try to impress upon them the history of the Russian people, and did you--were you as strict about the Church as your parents had been with you?

A I try, but in this country you can't be strict like in Europe, you know. 'Cause you could tell 'em nice way, children, they do more if you holler, you know what I mean.

Q Right. But were you able to teach them the Russian language, and could they . . .

A I try at the beginning. But later on I forget myself.

Q Oh, really?

A Because, you know, it was always American language in the business, you know, you can't remember everything. Another thing, I built up so many languages. I speak seven different languages.

Q You speak seven different languages?

A That's right. Sure.

Q Russian, Polish, . . .

A Ukrainian.

Q Ukrainian, you speak some German, I know that.

B Jewish, and Yiddish.

Q And some Italian, I know you speak that too.

A Oh, yeah, I capice Italiano all right.

Q Then you really got around. But when the children--I remember you saying something about that you went to church school.

A They went to Sunday school, yes.

B Yeah, a Russian school after they were finished in the regular . . .

Q After they went to the regular school, the American school during the day, public school, then they went to church school after this, even during the week. This is plus their Sunday school?

B That's right.

[Mr. Hnida speaks to other person in Russian.]

Q What? Why don't you tell me, [sounds like Boppa].

B Geegee wants to say that they went to Russian school after public school and they went--attended church all the time and they still attend choir. They sing in choir but they can't hold a Russian conversation.

Q They can sing Russian songs in the choir but they can't hold a Russian conversation!

A No, that's exactly like I told you. But anyhow we have half and half now in the church--half Slovatic and half American.

Q Now the church services are half in Slovatic and half in English. But this is still the same church. No, there's a new church.

A Yeah, it's the same church.

Q But there's a new building.

A Yeah, I know, but same church. No difference. Well, young generation want it more American, see. We serving more Americans now in church.

Q When the Depression hit the United States, did you have . . .

A In 1930 and '32? Yes, we have a Depression. It was pretty bad.

- Q Did it hurt your business? You had the candy store then.
- A It hurt a little the business, but I don't mind because I still was on my nickel paid, you know.
- Q From the steel factory, um hmm.
- A From the closed shop, you know. And I don't feel the Depression at that time, because I make out all right. But people who worked two or three days a week, you know, never forget that time.
- Q Didn't you also take in boarders at one time?
- A We had a few at the beginning, but later on--they was so much work, you know, to Mom.
- Q With six girls, um hmm.
- A That's right. We don't get much.
- Q I can imagine there was.
- A That's the whole trouble, see.
- Q In your family today, do you still try to remember some of the Russian customs, especially the religious ones, like at Christmas and Eastertime.
- A That's right. I remember that.
- Q Like at Christmas time, I know you don't celebrate the holiday on December 25th but on January the 7th.
- A We still celebrate the Little Christmas. That's right.
- Q And when you celebrate the Christmas, I've been to a program they put on called a yolka [sp].
- A Yes, that's right. We have every year.
- Q What does yolka mean?
- B Christmas tree.
- A Christmas tree, that's right.
- Q And I know this is a favorite thing with . . .
- A They sing church songs . . .
- Q Carols.
- A And last they sing a couple of folk songs, then they go over.
- Q I know the children always like to do this.

- A We sing all the months before, I remember, European song, like birch tree, Beroza [sp]. Yeah, it's a white birch tree.
- Q This was a favorite song of yours, in Europe.
- A [Says phrase in Russian.]
- Q And what does that mean?
- A That's "on a field, birch tree stands." Oh this is very important in Europe.
- Q This song is very important over in Europe.
- B Birch trees are.
- Q When you mentioned birch trees, I remember you told me once that you used--didn't you use horses' tails or something for a fishing rod.
- A Yeah, we make self the rods.
- Q You make your own rods.
- A Horse tails are very good, you know, long. Because they never break and they never rotted, never gets bad.
- Q They never broke and they never rotted. Right. The horse's tail was the line and the pole was made out of the birch tree.
- Q How do you feel about Russia now that you know that you can't return to it?
- A I feel very--it's very important to me, you know. But this children, you know, they don't know much about it. Like this talkin' about fishin', you know. I been fishin' from a little boy, you know. I don't have nobody [inaudible] no boy now. They don't know what it's all about. Well see, this young generation, they ought to see this, 'cause they never see it.
- Q Just like you were saying in Russia in the wintertime, what did you use to get around? Sleights?
- A Sleds. Homemade sleds.
- Q Homemade sleds?
- A That's right. Skates--homemade skates, too, we make.
- Q Everything homemade. Did your children have any of these homemade things in America? Or was it all bought for them?
- A They bought everything.

- Q Everything bought, so in a way they kind of missed out on all this fun that you had.
- A Believe it or not, in Europe, if you get shoes, they get licking.
- Q If you got wet shoes you got a licking?
- A Yeah. 'Cause you go in a sled. You know what we do?
- Q What?
- A We take the shoes off and put another heavy . . .
- B Burlap.
- Q Burlap around your feet?
- A Yeah, that's what they use it for.
- Q And so you did so you wouldn't get your shoes wet!
- A Then we'd change when we went into the shed, put the shoes on, come in the house.
- Q I see.
- A 'Cause they holler because you get wet.
- Q Um hmm. If you were told that you could--you would have a passport and you were allowed to go back, would you want to go back and visit your village now?
- A I could go anytime, tourist, take. 'Cause I'm citizen now. But still no, I don't wanta go--I don't know nobody now. I don't have nobody there.
- Q It'd be so changed.
- A I maybe find somebody, but they far away, like maybe my . . .
- B Distant cousin.
- A Cousins, maybe some of, neighbors, somebody.
- Q But all of your family, your direct family . . .
- A I don't know. Because I have to write a letter sometime to find out, but it's pretty hard to find out now.
- Q Did you keep in contact at all?
- A I did before, but . . .
- B He used to send money.

- A My sisters ask [inaudible] for [sounds like Old Man Henry].
- Q For what, the money?
- E Sending money to his family.
- A They want citizen to send 'em steamship tickets. Send the money to Europe, you could buy the ship ticket.
- Q Oh, steamship tickets. In other words, you would give him the money and he would . . .
- A Old Man Henry--not--that's Father's--you know, Henry.
- Q Right. Lawyer Henry. And he would send the money for you.
- B Agent.
- A I could show you the receipts sometime.
- Q O.K. When you stopped contact, was it because you had to or just because, you know, there wasn't anybody really to keep in contact with? Or did you have to?
- A When the war broke out, they weren't allowed that time writing. They can't correspond with nobody.
- Q So you had to stop.
- A Sure, you have to, because what are you gonna do.
- Q Right. That kind of ended it all.
- A I used to send 'em two dollar bills in a letter. They write me don't do it because they get punished if they find out.
- Q They would get punished over in Russia.
- A Yeah, if they find out that I send them some money.
- Q Oh, really.
- A Sure. At that time, they did it. Now it's changed so much.
- Q Well, Mr. Hnida, I really thank you for your cooperation and for telling us your story.
- A You're quite welcome.
- Q Thank you very much. I'm sure we'll all enjoy listening to this years and years from now. O.K.? Bye.

[END OF INTERVIEW]