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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

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ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW WITH

MR. MYCHAILO ZANICKOWSKY (UKRAINIAN IMMIGRANT)

AUGUST 16, 1976

TRANSLATED AND TRANSCRIBED BY

MRS. NATALIA B. MCDONOUGH

AUGUST 5, 1977

Interview with Mr. Mychailo Zaniczkowsky

1209 Pearl Street

Wilmington, Delaware

August 16, 1976

Interviewer: Mrs. Natalia B. McDonough

Q: Where were you born?

A: In Molodovichi near Przemysl.

Q: And you grew up there?

A: Yes. I lived there until I was nineteen, when I emigrated to America.

Q: Were your parents also from the same area? Were they born there?

A: Yes.

Q: What was your father's occupation?

A: He owned a farm and had horses, cows.

Q: Do you remember how much land he had?

A: Oh, he had about twenty morgens.

Q: Where did you go to school?

A: Nowhere.

Q: Then you were never spanked by a teacher!

A: No, no. But my brothers went to school, my younger brothers. There were four of them.

Q: You were planning to be a farmer, like your father?

A: Yes.

Q: And your brothers and sisters, did they train for any special careers?

A: They went to school. When I left for America, the youngest was sixteen, but because I left, I don't know actually how far they got in their education.

Q: Do you have contact with your family in the Ukraine?

A: No, because they were all scattered. One sister was sent to Old Sambura (Stari Sambur), another sister was sent somewhere-else. Our people were chased all over the place, I don't even know where they are. Only one sister was left in the village where we were born.

Q: Life in the Ukraine was very different wasn't it?

A: It was different. We worked in the field.

Q: Could you tell me a little how it was different from life here in the United States?

A: Sure it was different. People lived differently there from the way they did over here when I came over. Over there we lived only from the things we had on our farm.

Q: Then the differences that you noticed were due not only to the fact that you were in a different country, but also to the fact that you moved from a farm or village into the city, is that correct?

A: Yes. When I came, I first came to New York for three years, and then here (Wilmington). My parents wrote to me and wanted me to return, but here in Wilmington I had friends so I never went back.

Q: Where were you in New York?

A: In Newburgh.

Q: How many brothers and sisters did you have?

A: I have four brothers and four sisters and I was the ninth.

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

A: Yes, I brought my brother over. He died several years ago.

Q: Here in Wilmington?

A: Yes.

Q: How soon after your arrival in the U.S. did your brother come?

A: About two years. I brought him over.

Q: And the remaining brothers and sisters didn't want to come here?

A: No, they didn't.

Q: How did you hear about the possibility of emigrating to the U.S.?

A: Oh, friends talked about it a lot and some came over for a year or so, and we heard about it that way.

Also, there were agents that went around in the villages and talked about it. They recruited people to go to various places like America and Germany.

Q: Who were these agents? Were they Americans?

A: I don't think they were Americans because many people went to Germany. That's where most people went, but I don't know where the agents were from.

Q: Do you remember what these agents told you about America?

A: They said that life was good over in the U.S.. But we didn't have it so bad either in those days, because we were under Austria, not under Russia. Life was very good in those days.

Q: When you came here, did life seem to improve, or not?

A: Well, at first I didn't like it so much, but then I got used to it and it was alright.

Q: If life was so good back home, why did you come to America?

A: Oh, we went on a sort of vacation. There were four of us.

Q: At nineteen people do these kinds of things, don't they?

A: We were all supposed to go back, but the war broke out; that's why we stayed here.

Q: When you first came, did you know anyone in the U.S.?

A: Some of our people were already here. There were a couple of them. We lived in a boarding house and knew some of them.

Q: Then some of them had come over earlier, and you came to them?

A: Yes.

Q: Do you remember what you found especially interesting when you first came?

A: I liked the idea of having definite working hours. You worked your ten or twelve hours a day, then you went home and went out with your friends. Life was carefree. We used to go into town to the movies with friends.

Q: Back home in the village you couldn't do this!

A: Of course not! You could do these things in Przemysl, but that was too far away from the village.

Q: Did the agents you mentioned earlier help you come over?

A: No. They just helped us get out of our country.

Q: Who paid your passage over?

A: My father. He gave me forty dollars.

Q: Your entire voyage cost forty dollars?

A: Yes. Money has fallen in value from what it used to be.

Q: When you left your village, how did you proceed on your trip to America?

A: We went through Austria to Germany. On the border there was a checkpoint. Then we went to Myslowic and some people had to go back at that point. This was not in Poland, but rather in Germany. There they put us on a German train and we went on to Belgium. There were two ships in Belgium for us. We were actually six altogether. In addition to the four villagers there was this Ukrainian baker from Lwow. He was on vacation too and liked us, so helped us out because he knew his way around. He was very helpful on the trip.

Q: So, there were two ships in Belgium?

A: Yes. The first one came and got filled up. We had to wait four days for another one, it was a German ship called "Krowla", oh, I can't pronounce it right. We spent seven days on the ocean. On the eighth we arrived in New York, but they wouldn't let us off the boat right away. Two ships came into port that day and they couldn't unload them both, so we stayed overnight on the ship.

Q: Did you have any problems during the ocean voyage?

A: No, it was very gay. This baker from Lwow had his bakery in New York and he said he would give us jobs if we wanted to work. But we were afraid to do that, so we just went to visit our own people.

Q: What year was this in, do you remember?

A: It was in October of 1909.

Q: Do you remember how the name of the ship was spelled?

- A: No. Something like "Kronland", "Grönland" or something. The other ship was Kaiser Wilhelm, but that's not the one we came on.
- Q: Did anyone meet you in New York?
- A: No. Two of the men in our group were going to the United States for the second time, so they knew how to get places and we went with them.
- Q: Do you remember what your first impressions of the U.S. were?
- A: We wondered how it would be here. But it was pretty happy here in those days.
- Q: Do you remember what feelings you had about the country at that time?
- A: No, I really don't remember. I wasn't afraid. But the waiting room was so full, you just couldn't get through.
- Q: Did you go through customs at Ellis Island?
- A: Yes. They checked our papers, but there were no shots.
- Q: So you didn't go to work in the bakery in New York, but went directly to Newburgh?
- A: Yes, we were afraid that our friends from Newburgh would be worried about us if we didn't appear, so we just went to Newburgh. I worked there in the felt factory.
- Q: Do you remember what your job was in the felt factory?
- A: We made heavy felt. I just worked in the factory.
- Q: Do you remember how you felt about your job?
- A: I liked it. The work was clean. So I didn't want to go back to the old country because I liked it. Later I moved to Wilmington and my friends distracted me from going home. I was having a good time. I was supposed to go home from Wilmington.
- Q: Where did you live while you were in Newburgh?
- A: This lady had a boarding house and that's where we lived. There were five or six of us. She had a big house. I liked my early years in America. I like it here now, too.

Q: How was your salary at the beginning?

A: Pretty good. I made \$9.00 per week.

Q: How much did you pay for your room and board?

A: Two or three dollars a week including board.

Q: After taxes you didn't have much left!

A: We didn't have taxes then.

Q: There must have been something about your first job that you didn't like?

A: No, that's why I didn't want to go back home.

Q: You learned English, I assume?

A: At the beginning we didn't need to know English very much. Our bosses at work all spoke Ukrainian or Polish, or German.

Q: Then there were a lot of our people in Newburgh?

A: Yes. No matter what town you went to you would find some of our people.

Q: Did anyone help you with your English?

A: We didn't need English. All the stores were owned by Jewish people and they spoke our language.

Q: Is Newburg a very large town?

A: Well, it isn't very large and it isn't very small.

Q: Is it smaller than Wilmington?

A: Oh, yes.

Q: Do you feel that there were people who took advantage of the fact that you didn't know the language or the customs of this country?

A: No, I don't think so.

Q: So you never got cheated or anything?

A: No. People didn't used to do that. They didn't bother each other in those days. That's something that's new. People didn't used to lock their doors at night in those days. It's only been since the Second World War that things changed. After the First World War everything was quiet.

- Q: My family came after the Second World War and we didn't even have locks for our doors. But then we were out in the country, so that was a factor too.
- A: Nowadays, even if you lock your door, they will still get in. We didn't used to have keys either.
- Q: So you came to Newburgh and stayed there three years. Do you remember why you moved to Wilmington?
- A: I quit my job in Newburgh because I had good friends in Wilmington and wanted to be with them.
- Q: Did your friends come directly to Wilmington when they came to America?
- A: Some of them did, but others were in New York with me.
- Q: And what kind of job did you get in Wilmington?
- A: I worked in a foundry here.
- Q: Where did you live in Wilmington when you first came?
- A: On Lobdell Street.
- Q: That's near here, isn't it? There seems to have been a whole colony of Ukrainians!
- A: This used to be a Ukrainian and Polish neighborhood. There were only four black families and that was all. They used to call it the great Ukraine here. It was all Ukrainians in south Wilmington. Now the blacks are taking over everything here.
- Q: So you more or less stayed in the same neighborhood until the present time?
- A: Yes, but in the old days people didn't stay here so long. They would come for a year or two and then go back to the old country.
- Q: Were there any type of organizations here in the old days?
- A: They organized the Ukrainian National Association and they had meetings. There were some Russians in the community and there were some fights. They were fighting about the Ukraine. The Russians were referred to as

"katsapy". There were gangs. The Ukrainians seemed to win.

Q: Which side did the Poles take in these fights?

A: They stayed out of them. But they did live in the neighborhood.

Q: So it was just the Russians and Ukrainians! And it was mainly politics that caused the fights?

A: Yes, politics.

Q: Some were probably followers of Bendera, others of Petliura?

A: Those distinctions came a bit later in time. Sometimes the political fights were within the same family; one brother was a "katsap" and the other, a Ukrainian. (Tr. note: the term "katsap" is a derogatory one, generally applied to Russians; it was extended to Ukrainians who had been under the political domination of Russia if a negative term was needed.)

Q: Were there other organizations, for example sports clubs?

A: No. Aside from churches, there was nothing else. When I first came, they were just building a church. Then they built a second church, and now, recently, a third. I am now a member of the third church since my arrival here. In Newburgh we didn't have a church.

Q: Was the church on Heald Street the first one?

A: Well, there are two churches on Heald Street. The Catholic church, St. Nicholas' was the first one.

Q: So that was the first Ukrainian church and everybody went to it?

A: That church was originally built by the Russians. They were really Ukrainians from Galicia, but they called themselves Russians. Eventually, they were not able to maintain the church, and the Ukrainian faction took it over.

Q: But that was the first Ukrainian church?

A: No, the first group of Ukrainians didn't have a church of their own, so they used to worship in the basement of

St. Mary's church on Pine Street, that's on the east side.

Q: But these Ukrainians who called themselves Russians spoke the same language, didn't they?

A: Oh, yes, they were just for Russia.

Q: So, after St. Nicholas' was built, all the Ukrainians attended there. When did the Orthodox Ukrainians move into the second church?

A: I think it was in 1927. There was a big battle about that and the whole dispute was taken to court. We (the Orthodox) lost the suit. The church was locked up for a time because of the lawsuit and the Polish archbishop had no right to open it up. So it was locked up for about two years. After the lawsuit was lost, we had to build our own church and that's when the church of Sts. Peter and Paul was built on Heald Street.

Q: And what became of the first church?

A: The Catholics got it. At first they were called Greek Catholics, then Roman Catholics, but it was the same people. The Orthodox people moved across the street. Now, they (the Orthodox) have a new church on Philadelphia Pike.

Q: Did any of the skills you had from the old country as a farmer come in handy in the United States?

A: Well, I don't know how to answer that. I liked the work here. I liked the idea of working definite hours. Back home it was sunrise to sundown. Here, on the railroad at first I worked twelve hours. There were just two shifts. After the First World War they made three shifts, and everyone worked only eight hours a day. But when we worked the twelve hour shifts, we had no Sundays or holidays off or anything. If you didn't work those hours, you got fired.

Q: How much did you earn?

A: It wasn't much; fifteen cents an hour at first. This was at the railroad. At the foundry I did piece work, so it was hard to tell how much that was per hour, but it came out to

about forty or fifty cents an hour. It depended on the work, too.

Q: I notice that your wife is also Ukrainian. Could you tell me how you met her?

A: She came to America by herself without her family. She lived and worked in Philadelphia, but she used to come visit some friends here in Wilmington on weekends. That is how we met.

Q: Can you tell me what you liked especially here when you first came?

A: Well, I was making money and sending it back home. I intended to go home eventually and use that money to improve my position. But then things started going bad back there and I stopped. So I lost all that money. But I liked everything over here.

Q: Where did you live right after you got married?

A: We lived here, in Wilmington, on Townsend Street.

Q: Did your wife continue to work after you were married?

A: Yes, until the first boy was born.

Q: How many children did you have?

A: Six; three boys and three girls.

Q: Where are your children now?

A: The youngest boy lives in Washington and works for the government. The other two sons work for the railroad and the girls are at home.

Q: Do you have family in the Ukraine?

A: I still have one sister; the rest died.

Q: Do you have contact with anyone there?

A: Not anymore, but I used to.

Q: So you just have one sister there?

A: Well, maybe there is another one. She was sent somewhere and I don't know where.

Q: When did it become clear to you that you would not return to the Ukraine?

A: Oh, when I wasn't even married yet.

Q: How did you decide that?

A: Well, we got letters from home and the war broke out. I didn't want to be in the war.

Q: Then there was the revolution, too!

A: Yes, and in America it was quiet.

Q: But then after the war you could have gone back but didn't. Why?

A: By that time I was married and saw no reason for going back.

Q: What do you think of the Soviets?

A: The Soviets are very hard on Ukrainians. I had brothers there and they had no freedom. They have a hard life there. It isn't just the Russians, but the Soviets. The people have a hard life there.

Q: How did you feel about Americans when you first came here?

A: It was good here. Everyone was free. That's how it was back home, too, before the war. We had it good at home.

Q: How about the American people? How did they regard you?

A: Well, before the First World War, there was no difference in the way they treated us and each other. Everyone was nice. But after the War there was somewhat less good will.

Q: This area used to be called "little Ukraine" didn't it?

A: Yes. And now it's called "black Ukraine".

Q: Were there any Americans living in this area in the twenties?

A: Yes, but slowly, the Ukrainians bought them out just like the blacks are now buying us out. The Americans were nice to us.

Q: Has Mr. Kosowsky's store always been here?

A: I don't remember when he opened up, but it wasn't that long ago. Maybe thirty years. He had a different store but he went bankrupt and then started all over again.

Q: Could you tell me what the most interesting occurrences were in the twenties and thirties? What was happening in the Ukrainian community at that time?

A: It was quiet and nice.

Q: Was everyone working?

A: No, but people helped each other out just like they do now.
In that respect there wasn't any difference.

Q: Did most of your friends from the earlier years in the United States remain here?

A: Yes. But they are almost all dead now. There are just four of us left; Synczyszyn, Kosowsky, Marzinyszyn and myself. Most of the women died too. There are just a few left.

Q: Is Mrs. Markow one of them? I just talked to her.

A: Yes. She has a second husband. Her first one died from the flu in 1918. It was a bad year. People used to hide in their homes. Everyone was sick. It was terrible. I was sick too and so was my wife.

Q: Well, let's listen to our recording.