

**UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS LOWELL
CENTER FOR LOWELL HISTORY
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION**

**THE WORKING PEOPLE OF LOWELL
LOWELL NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK
MARY BLEWETT/MARTHA MAYO**

**INFORMANT: ANNE OHLSEN
INTERVIEWER: PAT COBLE
DATE: MAY 19, 1986**

**P = PAT
A = ANNE**

Tape 86.26

P: I'm interviewing Anne Ohlsen on May 19, 1986 at her home on Rogers Street. We were talking about your mother cooking and baking, and I was wondering if you remember anything special that she would make as a Lithuanian, or any special dishes.

A: Well yes, we do a lot with cabbage. I suppose cabbage was very prevalent in the old country, and potatoes, and things like that. They do a lot with stuffed cabbage, you know, with hamburger and rice, and stuff it and bake it. And they did a lot with cabbage soup. And I think in those days, I remember the Lithuanians and all other ethnics did a lot of cooking with pork, but we kind of shyed away from it after awhile. But pork was the greatest thing that, throw it in a pot with cabbage and stuff, and it really tasted good. But my mother had one little trick. No matter what she had, whatever she was cooking, she always used a bay leaf. Bay leaf, and to this day my brother who was married to an Irish girl, he got her use to that. She would throw in a bay leaf. My daughter does the same thing. And there's a lot of crock pot cookery and it doesn't call for that, but we put it in. And every time I do it I think of my mother.

P: Oh yah! So they made a lot of stews, and soups, and one casserole type thing.

A: Yes, a lot of stews and things. You know in those olden days you went to a butcher, and you could ask for a soup bone that had a lot of meat on it. You can't get that today. And they would do wonders with that. And my mother use to make very fine beet soup. She would cut up that hard beet in the cutest little strips, so uniform.

P: Is that called Borsht? Or is that another?

A: No, we don't (--) That's...I think that the Russians call it that. But my mother would do (--) She didn't, well she did it once in awhile. You do it with cucumbers and hard boiled eggs, and that, and cream and ice cubes and water. That was sort of like that. She did that. But mostly she did it in soups. Get a big bone and the beets and all. Great soup eaters.

P: Did she make anything special for holiday time? Like at Christmas, any kind of cookies or?

A: No, no, no.

P: Sweets or, no?

A: No, we used to do the sweet bread we call Piraga. And it was beautiful! You put raisins in it, or currants, and they do it today. It's the prevalent Lithuanian dish. (Laughs)

P: Ah huh.

A: And then of course potato pancakes. That was, that was a great thing. Always, that was always, it's done today. We do that at the club every Saturday. And you know, they sell them and they're very good.

P: Uhhuh. At Easter were there any (--)

A: Yes. Easter we always had sausage and hard boiled eggs of course. And we never used dyes. We used to use the onion skins. My mother would save onion skins for weeks and weeks, and then we'd dye. The eggs would be brown and that was it. There weren't any red or yellow or blue. (P: Uh huh) They were all onion skins, and it was very nice.

P: Um, do you remember any special celebrations around Easter or (--)

A: No, but it's an old Lithuanian custom that the week after Easter they go through the same ritual, and we just had it here at church. (P: Umhm) We had the same thing. And it's prevalent in the old country and we still do it today. It's after Easter.

P: Oh I see.

A: It's just a week after. We go through the hard boiled eggs, and this and that. (P: Ah huh) Yah, have the same thing.

P: What about, oh Christmas? Can you remember any special (--) Would you have a Christmas tree when you were growing up?

A: Well when I was very young we had a Christmas tree. But at that time, I remember when we first moved on Christian Hill, I must have been ten years old. If anyone didn't

have any gifts and you know, they weren't expecting any, and Santa wasn't coming, they could write to Santa Claus in the paper. So I wrote, and the two girls that lived on the other side of our house, we had a duplex, they were Scotch people. The two sisters wrote and I did. Now the day before Christmas, that morning, I had the delivery of the Christmas stocking, my parents did, and they hid it from me. The two sisters did not. Now if you want to visualize what the feeling was there, and what we had to fight all along, and I got it and they didn't. (P: Umhm, yah) It made quite a difference. But I remember, as a joke or maybe, I don't say a joke. I think maybe they did it in the old country. It was always when you hung your stocking, you had walnuts and fruit and coal. Coal, my father always put in coal. Now I don't know whether they did that in the old country or what, (P: Uh huh) we always had a piece of coal.

P: Oh you mean Santa Claus (--)

A: In the stocking.

P: When you would get up Christmas morning it would be in your stocking?

A: Yes, that was it, yah. We didn't make such a great big deal of Christmas, of the holidays. I mean the people, at least my people, you worked so hard and all, you just didn't have time to enjoy this. You know what I mean?

P: Yes, yah.

A: It was sort of played down. It was, I know, in my house. But as things progressed and we got older, of course it took on a different light, but I remember the coal. Walnuts, and an orange or an apple. We always had coal.

P: Was there any special celebration for New Years? To see the New Year in, or did you eat any special dishes or (--)

A: No. No, but of course we had the fast, you know, before Christmas. We had, and Good Friday. Oh they were very, very religious. Very...the fasting was just something. Can't do it today. I don't think people would be able to do it. (P: Umhm) The life is, living is too high, high speed, or whatever have you.

P: But when they fast, would they just stop eating all together for the day, or?

A: No, they would just have one meal. They were very religious about not eating meat at a certain time. You couldn't eat after twelve o'clock at night. Saturdays, this was not just holidays. If you were going to go to church and go to communion, it was you know, you'd go fourteen hours without eating at times. There was something I was going to say and it slipped my mind.

P: About the holidays or?

A: No, I forget what it was. Christmas time it was always a ritual with the organist in the church to have these wafers. It's like a communion wafer, but it was oblong. And that's, they would, the parishioners would go to the organist and they would request one or two wafers for the family and we would give a donation and that was for the organist. And before you had your meal Christmas, Christmas Eve, that wafer was passed from one to the other and you would break it off, break a piece off.

P: Oh yah, yah.

A: Yah, that was quite a (--)

P: Would you have turkey on Christmas?

A: Yes, we'd have turkey. Yup, yup.

P: And Thanksgiving?

A: Always, always turkey. And my mother did a very good job on the stuffing. And everybody would eat the stuffing and not the turkey. And that's true in my daughter's house today, and in my house. I don't know (--)

P: What kind of a stuffing would she make?

A: Well it was just, she would use the Royal Lunch Crackers, and she would put them through the meat grinder. Royal Lunch Crackers. She'd beat up eggs and then she'd take the heart and the liver from the turkey. She would sauté that chopped up with onion in butter. And after that sautéed, she'd mix the cracker crumbs with the eggs and add milk and put it together, and sage. But I don't know what it was.

P: Oh, so she didn't use bread crumbs?

A: No.

P: She used the cracker crumbs.

A: No, she never, she had cracker crumbs.

P: And would she stuff the bird with it then?

A: Oh yes! Yes! And she never stuffed the bird like till the morning she was going to put it in the oven. Now I know that people, there are people that stuff it for convenience sake the night before, and leave it in the refrigerator (P: And that could be dangerous), which is dangerous, (P: Yes) very, very dangerous. And then others say that once the turkey is on the table and you've taken the stuffing out, not to put the turkey away in the refrigerator with some stuffing left in it.

P: Yah, right.

A: Remove that.

P: I've heard that too.

A: Remove that. So that was always a ritual.

P: What about, are there any special desserts, or anything sweet, or breads?

A: No. No, well that sweet bread that we had, (P: the sweet bread, right) that's sweet enough. And of course there was the farmer's cheese. The cheese was done. Oh I know what I was going to say. The cheese was done with cottage cheese and cream. It was put in a cheese cloth bag, and it was tied, and it just stayed there for awhile. And then you'd take the bag out and you'd slice it. That today is a delicacy. (P: Aha) We had that. And then of course, when we were growing up on Concord Street, I remember we use to make our own sauerkraut. So they'd be one day when all the women would gather at one house, and they'd get in the kitchen and they would shred the cabbage. Shred, shred, shred, it would go in the damp cold cellar that we had, and it would be put in there.

P: In a special container?

A: A wooden, a wooden barrel that had the iron around the sides, or the tin, or whatever. And it would be put in there, a clean barrel with cranberries and cut up apple, and I don't know, I guess vinegar. And then my father had a great big board with a handle, and the board would go on and a huge rock would go on, and that would ferment. And when the time came to eat it and you went down and put your hand in that cole slaw, in the cold cellar, your hand would freeze. But it was delicious. (P: Oh!) And then there'd come a time they'd go to someone else's house and they'd do the same thing.

P: Now were those Lithuanian friends that would come in?

A: Yes, yes, yup, yup! They all had their barrels and they all pickled their own herring, pickled herring.

P: Did your mother sew? Did she make clothes?

A: Oh yes. My mother made every stitch of clothes that we had. And she knit as I think I told you. The last time she knit my father a sweater, long sleeves, my father out grew it. She would rip the yarn out. She would make my father a sleeveless sweater. Then if that didn't go, he out grew that, she would rip it out and knit my brother a sweater. That yarn went from sweater, to sweater, to sweater.

P: Sweater to sweater, yah.

A: And she made every stitch of clothes I had. She sewed beautifully. Didn't know a pattern, she just did it. Had the old sewing machine of the Singer, you know, the treadmill.

P: With the pedal?

A: Yes, which is in my daughter's home now, in her basement.

P: Umhm.

A: She's kept all that, that old stuff, very nostalgic. I was the best dressed kid in the Moody School and the Varnum School. I really was!

P: Do you remember (--)

A: She made my brother's shirts.

P: Oh my goodness!

A: She made my brother's shirts and that's pretty hard.

P: Yah. Do you remember where she'd buy her material? Was there a yard good store in (--)

A: No, we had A.G. Pollard's, which was a Lowell owned store. They have their restaurant now. She'd buy the material there. And we had Bon Marche. And I can't remember any others. Those were the two department stores. She never went to a mill. She'd buy them there. And sometimes they'd have so much they'd give it to somebody else. If they'd get a hunk, somebody could use it, they'd swap.

P: Yah.

A: Yah! But she used to sit at that machine.

P: Do you sew?

A: Oh yes! I sew. My daughter sews beautifully. She makes drapes that are lined. Oh she does everything, wallpapers, everything. She's taken a lot from my mother and father. And my brother too can do anything with his hands. My father could. He used to have to fix the window cords in the office, you know, those great big heavy windows?

P: Oh yes! Yah!

A: And as I say, he had a second class firemen's license. He had to run the elevator, relieve the man. He was sort of handy with everything. And I took after him. I love to paint and putter around, because that, it was relaxing. We never went to movies.

P: I was going to ask you what you did for, you know, entertainment.

A: No, no. They'd take me up here to Fort Hill. We'd walk up and get the fresh air. We had deer up here and bear. And oh it was lovely!

P: Oh were there bear?

A: Yes! We had bears in cages here. It was lovely! We had a fountain there, get the water.

P: Oh it was like a zoo then?

A: Yes! All the way up the hill. There were deer, bear, goats. It was lovely! (P: Oh!) Yah, it was very, very nice.

P: I know when I visited you before you told me the history behind this house. Who had owned this originally?

A: This was a boarding school. The man that owned it was named Rogers. Very, very wealthy. He owned acres and acres. He owned that whole Fort Hill Park. So when he died, or before he died, he donated that for a city park, Fort Hill. It's been kept up beautifully. His two daughters made a boarding school from their home here. The sign is on the door. I think it's 1827, (P: yes) or 26 or 28, I forgot. It's one of those years. (P: umhm) So it's really, this is really an old prestigious building.

P: Who maintained the Park? Who maintained the animals that were there?

A: Well the city. It was given to the city and the city took care of it. We weren't allowed to feed, we were allowed to feed the goats. We could give them something, grass they ate or whatever, but we couldn't put our hand in where the bears were. (P: Oh yah) But they were nice bears, they weren't wild. You know, they were just nice bears.

P: I wonder what ever happened, that they don't have that nowadays?

A: Well like everything else. If they died off, then they needed money, or the city didn't pass an ordinance to...the money went somewhere else. They needed money to do it, and I don't know how it phased out.

P: Yah.

A: But then we used it to toboggan and things like that. But that was, those were happy days. We'd take a blanket, and we'd walk up there Sunday. We'd spend all afternoon up there from Concord Street. (P: Oh, aha) That was our relaxation. We'd take a lunch.

P: What would you do, just have a picnic then and just kind of (--)

A: Yah, bring a lunch and you'd meet everybody else.

P: Did they play ball, or what did the children do?

A: Ah, well they just ran around playing tag and hide and seek. Those were the games behind the trees. (P: Ah huh) They had beautiful tulips, and they had a fountain there. And nothing was destroyed. No destruction at all. That's what made it nice.

P: Did you go swimming anywhere when you were growing up?

A: Ah, I went, well I took lessons at the YMCA to learn how to swim, but in order to swim we used to take the trolley to go out to Lakeview Park. That's out in Dracut, Tyngsboro out there. Then they had all kinds of things. They had a roller coaster and all that stuff, but if you wanted to swim that's where you went.

P: Was there a lake out there?

A: It was a lake. (P: oh) Lakeview Park, Lakeview, and we'd go swimming there. You had to undress behind the bushes and things like that. But there was nothing around here. We didn't have the playgrounds that they have today with the swimming pools. Like Shedd Park here. (P: Yah) My daughter was an instructor there one of her years at college one summer. She was an instructor there. But we didn't have that.

P: What about ah, I had asked you before about the YWCA in 1891. Now you weren't (-)

A: Well they were located in Lowell where the parking lot is now for the Lowell Five. I don't know whether that's the original building or not. But as I say, I didn't use their facilities, because they had a basketball court, the gym, but there again you would have to belong to classes and things like that, and I just didn't do it. I was busy going to school or whatever have you. It was sort of a luxury really to do it.

P: Yah.

A: But when I did go to the Varnum School we had a chance to have free swimming lessons, and I did take those at the Lowell YMCA, which is torn down now and is part of the Historical National Trolley over there. That's gone.

P: Oh, I see.

A: Yah, they are now on Thorndike Street. But this "Y" here, I don't know if I should say it or not, I think is not as large, or the membership, it's not as active or progressive as it was in the olden days. The "Y" was really something in those days. It took care of a lot of homeless girls that were working, or lived out of town, that they stayed there. And,

you know, I never really got into the "Y" as to know it and what its functions were. As I say, I went to the "YM".

P: Yah. Are you familiar with the International Institute? Have you heard of that?

A: Ah, I am. I know where it is. It's down here on High Street. And one of our Lithuanian men has been a member of that I think since it was started. And they have meetings I guess, once a year and all. But I have never gone down there until last year. You know that the senior citizens get free cheese and butter.

P: Umhm.

A: And where I'm alone and I can't use it, the first year I called the school here and asked if there was an Asian family that was, had a lot of children and could they use the cheese, five pounds of cheese. And he said "No," he thought they were quite ok. "Why don't you call the Bartlett School?" So I did and I talked to the principal. He said, "We have two hundred families that could use it." So I went over there in the pouring rain one morning at 8:00 and I gave them my five pounds of cheese. And last year I walked down to the Institute here and I gave it to a Mrs. Flynn I think her name was. And I said, "This has been in the freezer, it's good and cold," and I said, "Maybe you can allot it to somebody." Now next week we're going to get more cheese and butter. The butter I give to a Lithuanian woman who makes the sweet bread, the Piraga. (P: Oh, uhhuh) So ah, I put it to good use.

P: Oh yes! Good.

A: I put it to good use.

P: You know what? I'm not familiar with the International Institute. Do you know what the story behind it is, or?

A: Well right now I think it's occupied more or less, everyday they're there. It's more or less, not the Vietnamese, um (--)

P: Cambodians?

A: Cambodians, Vietnamese. Cambodians mostly. They are predominant there. I don't know whether they have taken the whole thing over or what, but they are predominant there.

P: Do you know what it (-- I have the date down here, 1917. Do you know what it would have done, or what they would have used it for in the (--)

A: I don't know. I think maybe it was sort of a meeting hall, or so.

P: For people of different nationalities?

A: Yes. And I think they had, it was always staffed I guess. Staffed by people, that if you went looking for something or advice. It's the same tone as my father was in the building, you know what I mean? If you had problems, or housing, or whatever have you, you probably would get help there.

P: Would get help there, I see.

A: I can't see it as any other function.

P: Uh huh.

A: You know?

P: The Lowell Day Nursery? Have you heard of that when you were (--)

A: Yes I remember that. That was way, way back. That was down near the University of Lowell I believe, on Perkins Street someplace. That, I don't think it was too, too long ago that that closed. I know it was there, and I know that people left their children there that worked in the mills, but of our nationality I knew no one that (P: That used it?) that used it.

P: Uh huh. Well that was certainly a progressive idea for that day, wasn't it?

A: It was a wonderful idea. It was a wonderful idea. And then later on with the United Fund, you know it's allotted to everybody, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts and everybody, I think the Day Nursery you know, was included there. So it did a good function.

P: Uh huh. So people that worked in mills then could leave children there?

A: Sure! Sure!

P: Oh wonderful!

A: Sure! Yah. Yah, and it was really very nice.

P: Ah, people's clubs, or any clubs that you might have belonged to when you were growing up, or (--)

A: No, I belong to them now. We had, we have a Lithuanian Club and we have the Women's Auxiliary. So I belong to that.

P: What is the Lithuanian Club? Can you tell me a little bit about it?

A: Well it's Lithuanian members. Your parents, both, or one had to be Lithuanian. And that's where we congregate. They had, they used to have card parties. They had (--)

P: Is it held at your church? Where did they meet?

A: No, it's on (--) They have their own hall.

P: Oh, uh huh!

A: Oh yes. They have very nice times. They have installation parties. They have Christmas parties. They have parties for the children. And we visit the sick, the Auxiliary, every Christmas, the shut-ins, and the men do the same thing. They give towards the heating bill at church. It's very functional. It's non-profit and they really do a lot.

P: How long has it been in existence?

A: Oh it's been there and awful long time. I really (--)

P: Would your parents have belonged?

A: My father did.

P: Your father did.

A: My father did, but my mother didn't. It's been in existence for quite awhile.

P: Umhm. What other clubs do you belong to, or that you might have belonged to when you were growing up?

A: Ah, no I (--) No, just going to school. In those days the clubs weren't prevalent. No.

P: When you were growing up did you have dolls, or play with dolls? Can you remember any toys that you would (unclear)?

A: I had one doll and one doll carriage. That's all that could be afforded. And my mother made the clothes for the dolls and the doll carriage. And my brother had one bicycle, because he wanted to finish his ninth year here when we moved from the Moody School to the Varnum School. We moved in May. So my father bought him a second hand bicycle so that he could drive, ride to school to finish and graduate from the Moody School. That was a big deal. That's what we had.

P: Ah huh. Um...

A: We had plenty of food though, and we had plenty of clothes and we were kept clean, but as for little things like that, we didn't have them, nor did we want them.

P: Did your parents play any card games or any games that you can remember then? What would they do?

A: Ah, Casino, Casino, once in awhile. Casino.

P: Is that a card game?

A: Yes that's a card game. My grandchildren play it today. And all the Lithuanians play it. You put four cards down and you hold four cards. The one who has the most spades, or some diamonds and most cards, you know twenty-six is a half a pack. If you got twenty-four you lose. It was quite a, quite a thing, but that was a card game.

P: Is that what they would do for entertainment then?

A: Well a lot of them that were musically inclined, the accordion was everywhere you went. And we did have a picnic ground out by Lakeview. Blueberry Hill they called it, years and years ago. But it has since sold. But they would have picnics out there and they'd play the harmonica and probably a violin. Lithuanians, if they were musical, it was a violin or accordion.

P: (Speaks too softly - can't hear).

A: Yup. And when you went to weddings, or went to the picnic outing, that's what you have for music.

P: I see.

A: Of course they did the polkas.

P: Oh is that the dance?

A: Yah, the fast dance.

P: Fast dance, uh huh.

A: The Polish have similar. It's the similar thing.

P: Yah. What about movies? Did you go to movies?

A: No, no. Ah, as I say, I would get a dime for an ice cream cone, but never for a movie. No, no, but I do remember (laughs), I do remember the first time my mother ever went to a movie. I think I took her to the Strand. And she said to me, now this is funny. She said to me, she said, "I think I remember working here for two weeks." Some friend was sick, and this was before she went to the rectory. And she said, "We had to clean. I had to clean the ladies room and everything." And she said, "A long time ago, but she said, I think I worked here." But she didn't care for the movies. But at that time, at the Rialto, they gave dishes. When my daughter was like three or four years old, and I was working,

every Friday or Tuesday they gave dishes. And she'd take my daughter and they'd walk way up to the Rialto Theater. She'd buy the tickets and turn around and come home.

P: Oh just to get the dishes?

A: Just to get the dishes! She wouldn't go in the theater. (Both laugh)

P: Oh dear!

A: She said, "There's no fresh air in there and I don't know what they're showing." And she didn't want my daughter in there, sitting there. She says, come out and get the fresh air, but she'd get the dishes and come home. (Laughs) And you know we had those dishes for years and years and years. And there's a Lithuanian woman down here in the handicap department, who is ninety and she still has them. She went there too.

P: Oh my!

A: That was a pass time. Every Lithuanian home had dishes from the Rialto.

P: Oh, imagine that. [Both laugh]

A: So it was quite a thing.

P: Ah, when we were talking about Christmas, can you remember any special decorations they might have had downtown Lowell? Did they decorate the way they do now?

A: Not as much as they do today. They really do it up very pretty. Um, they didn't have wreaths on all the poles, but I remember something getting strung up in the middle of one street and maybe way, way up, but Lowell City Hall has always been very beautifully decorated. It's a very lovely building. The City Hall is a lovely building. And that is from year to year has been beautiful. It's really a credit to the city. I remember that. Of course they had the nativity scene there, which had ran into difficulty here a couple of years ago. But it's still there and we use to walk up to see that all the time. But the City Hall was beautiful. But I remember one streamer of lights across up where they are and one way downtown at the Square, but that's about all.

P: That's all, yah. What about the war years, World War II? Can you remember anything about that, or?

A: Yes, I started to work there. I remember it was getting in line for butter, (P: the rationing) rationing and sugar and all, but there again if you didn't use it, you'd get in line, you'd give it to someone else. I remember doing that. [Repeats] I remember doing that.

P: Was your brother in the service?

A: Oh yes! He was in the Navy. (P: Umhm) And as I say, when he left the Telephone and went in the Navy, and all that time counted for his record. Oh yes.

P: Oh that's right, yah.

A: He was in both theaters. He was in "D" Day II in Normandy, and then he was in the Pacific Theater. He was an Electrician's Mate, Second Class. He went through an awful lot like that over there.

P: Can you remember um, oh, any scarcities during the war then, other than having to wait in line for the butter, and the sugar, and the (--)

A: Well nothing stands out except we knew the war was on, and it was really terrible. And everybody was working. There were, Remington Arms was in Lowell, and that's a part of Dupont you know. (P: Umhm) And I had applied for a job up there, but I guess I didn't pass the test. We had a physical and whatever have you, and it was quick, quick, quick and I thought, oh, I just wasn't up with it that day. And at the time I was in the Electric Light. No, I had left when I got married, but then when I had my misfortune and I got separated, I had to find work. But my mother took care of my daughter while I worked, my mother and father. Then I went to the Insurance Company in the building where my father was a custodian. Then they heard about it in the Electric Light and they called me. And they said, "Do you want to come back," because the rules were a little, not so stringent. So I went back. I said, "Well I'll think about it." But I said, "I'd like to try out for Remington Arms." "Oh you wouldn't like that," they said. "You come back and be at home with us." So I went over, and he asked me what I was getting for a salary, and I remember it was eighteen dollars. He says, "I'll give you five more to come back here." So I went back.

P: Was that for a day or a week?

A: A week.

P: A week.

A: A week. And so when I first started I got twelve dollars a week in the Electric Light, but they took out twenty-five cents for your insurance. So the joke was always eleven seventy-five. We never said we got twelve dollars, we got eleven seventy-five. But this is in forty-two when...

Side A ends
Side B begins

A: ...went back and told my boss. He knew about it because he had lunch at the Yorick Club with the one that interviewed me back then. And he said, "No Ann, you can't do it." He said, "I'll meet his price." So I stayed. And I was there for twenty-eight years. And

we merged with the Andover Companies. It was not a merger, really is sale. They only took two of us. So I put in forty-two years with insurance.

P: Oh, that's wonderful.

A: Well I can't say that I flittered from job to job, but I did escape the mill work and everything, and I really you know, had a good life.

P: Yah.

A: My brother too. I think our parents did that much for us.

P: Yes. When...you said you were born in ah, the little story about the stable?

A: In a little stable, yah.

P: Do you want to tell that story? I thought that was (--)

A: Well I did. I told you that.

P: Oh, but I don't think we had the tape on.

A: You didn't? Well all right, I'll tell you the story of that. Um, years ago there was a Charles Smith that was very wealthy, that had horses and teams. He sold ice and coal and coke, and he kept his horses in a stable in lower Fayette Street. He owned all the great big six family, three and four story buildings there. Eventually when he bought an automobile, when they came in existence, the horses were sold, the stable was covered over and there was a little cold water flat upstairs. And it was rented to my mother and father, and that's where I was born, in the stable.

P: So you were actually born at home?

A: I was born at home, but it was in a stable. Oh yes, at home. My brother was born at home. He was already almost two and a half to three years. There's three years between us. He was there when I was born. And he was born on Union Street, also born at home. Oh nobody went to the hospital those day, or if they could afford it, I don't know. But my mother had a very hard time, and I felt bad for her. I had a hard time myself, but you forget about those things. But I do remember the stable. And I recited that whole story on my seventieth birthday, which was my retirement. And some very quick fellow said, "Oh I've seen your picture at church, born in a stable."

P: [Laughs] Oh, can you remember the doctors that you went to?

A: Yes, Dr. Murphy was the doctor. He's passed away.

P: Would they come to your house then?

A: They came to the house. They delivered my brother and Dr. Murphy delivered me. And then after that we had Dr. Loughran who was a great family doctor. We had his son after him, who has passed away just two years ago. One of the nicest doctors the city of Lowell ever had. He was a peach. So we've had (--)

P: Were they Lithuanian? Did you stick with Lithuanian doctors or (--)

A: No, but most of the Lithuanians went to Dr. Loughran. He lived down here on High Street. His family home was here. He went to our church. And most of them had (--)
And then of course when the men belonged to different societies, the society would have a doctor, you know.

P: Oh what were the societies?

A: Well it's something from church. Some kind of a Benevolent Society, or something like that, my father belonged to. They had their own doctor and it was Dr. Loughran. And later on it was a Doctor Gaffney. I remember those names. Of course Loughran, he only passed away two years ago. A lot of Lithuanians had him. Very, very wonderful man, but born at home we were. Most of them were I guess. Most of them were.

P: In those days. What about if you were sick? Did you go to the (--)

A: Oh no!

P: Would they come to the home or you went to the (--)

A: Oh they'd come to the house. Oh yes, yes. Yah, something (--)
I'll tell you what happened to my father. One day that he was closing up the block, the Central Block one evening, and the light in the hall, the string had gone up towards the light and he groped for the string and he couldn't find it. And he went to the elevator to open it to go upstairs to put all the lights out, and someone had taken the elevator. My father fell down the elevator well. And he was (--)
We were on Concord Street. So I was not (--)
I was (--)

P: Oh, how many floors did he fall?

A: Well from the first down to the basement, but it was a high, high drop. And he broke most of his ribs and broke a leg, and he had to crawl through an opening in between wires and cables and everything. He had to crawl through the opening, crawl down the hall to where his little stove and where he washed his overalls and all. And there was a lavatory there. Brick floor it was, very rough. He had to crawl up the stairs. It's like the two story stairs. And he went out in the street and just dropped. And the police cruiser came and they got an ambulance, and they took him to St. John's Hospital in the middle of the night. And they called Dr. Loughran. He went right over. But that was a very bad thing. He could have (--)
He couldn't...But they said a man that didn't have his stamina, and his health, and his courage could never had made it. He'd have rotted down there,

got electrocuted, or what, but he knew every inch of what he was doing. Now someone had taken the elevator and left the door ajar. (P: Yah. Oh!) See they, they didn't want to walk up. They were going to use the office. And I don't know if they ever found the man. But that was a very near tragedy. We would have you know, lost my father and my mother would have had to bring up two struggling kids in the family. It would have been difficult.

P: Right! When ah...oh did they have any hucksters or anything that came around selling vegetables, or a milkman, or breadman, or anything that you can remember?

A: Oh well...well we...well we had the ice, and we had in the wagon, I don't remember. We had a breadman, but he was a Lithuanian baker, and he'd come in a horse and a buggy. And they were on Ames Street. It was only the Lithuanian baker. The round rye bread, like that. And of course the milkman came around. In those days they left everything. You know, you didn't have to go anywhere but to the bakery for the cupcakes that my mother had every Saturday morning after...

P: Yah, and that was the Lithuanian bakery that you went to, or (--)

A: No, no, no it wasn't. No, no. No, no. It was right on our street, on Concord Street. (P: Umhm) We did have people coming around taking pictures of children on a pony. You know, these photographers, they would walk around with a pony. And we'd have to ask our parents if we could have whatever it costs, a quarter or fifty cents. If they said sure, have the picture taken. And they took my picture aside of a saloon, and I had one hand on a beer barrel. This is on lower Concord Street. It was Terry's Salon and all the barrels were there, and I had my hand on my hip and one on the barrel. And I had a chinchilla coat, and I had a velvet hat with rabbit hair around there. And I'm standing there with the beer barrels.

P: Oh no!

A: I have the picture someplace, but I don't know just where to look for it. That was (--)
That was (--)
And my brother was on the pony. He had bare feet and blonde, blonde curly hair. He's bald now, but he was leading the horse away. So he didn't get any of that beautiful background. But can you imagine a photographer taking pictures and posing you? Well that was Concord Street. The saloon was there, the bakery was there. I think there was a tailor shop there. This is all before I was nine. [Laughs]

P: You have a good memory.

A: Well I look at the picture once in awhile. I don't know where that is, but if I see you another time I'm going to have that picture out.

P: [Unclear]

A: I have asked a friend on mine, she has pictures taken over in Lithuania, you know, of the thatch roof cottage and everything. She's going to kind of look up some for me.

P: Yah, okay.

A: But now what about, you said that...you going to put articles in a glass case or what?

P: Yes, we'll have things on exhibit, right.

A: You're going to have (--) You said some could be loaned, some could be given?

P: Yah. (Tape shuts off, then on again)

P: Just ask you if you want to conclude with any reminiscence about Lowell and growing up in Lowell, and how maybe the changes you've seen for the better or the worse?

A: Well the changes of course are worldwide, not only in Lowell. And I think that that takes preference to any change around here. As far as the nationality and our people, as I said before, we're very few and they're dying off, and pretty soon it will be just a memory. So it's...

P: How many were there at the peak say, when the most Lithuanians were here?

A: Well I think at one time we had two thousand three hundred parishioners.

P: Oh!

A: Yes!

P: And you say now it's down to three hundred going all right.

A: Yup, yup. But you see they've inter-married, they've died off, they've left, gone into the suburbs and all. But (--)

P But it sounds like you had a very happy life, (A: Yah!) your childhood and growing up. It was a good place to grow up.

A: Oh yes, yah. Yah, it was! And you know, you may not have had a lot of things that others had, but as I say, we never wanted them or needed them. (P: Yah, right) And it's the nice things you know, that you remember. We always had nice clothes. My mother made them. We had plenty to eat, and we had good times together. As I say, we'd get a blanket and go up here and roll around. But we had hard times. My father got hurt that time. Then he had double pneumonia at one time, and a lot of things like that. So I've been lucky that he's still with us and kind of helped my mother. But my mother lived

nineteen years after my father went, and I never left her. See, she took care of my daughter while I worked. And it was my turn to take care of them! And I did.

P: So she lived with you then?

A: Well I lived with them.

P: You lived with them.

A: I lived with them.

P: And do you feel that the (--) Even we've talked a little bit about this, about growing up with different ethnic groups, and that on a whole maybe you got along. That there might have been a little conflict.

A: Well there was with the, let me put it, English speaking people. That's where the hardest part came.

P: The old Yankee New Englander you mean?

A: Well it was mostly people that didn't think they were foreigners, and they were. Don't like to name them, but that's what it was. I know they built the canals over here, but they came across the ocean. They weren't born here. They had to get citizenship papers like the rest of the immigrants. But just because the language was English, or American, whatever, they felt as though they were a little better. And they're not. Because history will show you that presidents, and generals, and a lot, a lot of people have foreign names. And when they're educated, they're really educated. They were way above this class that think they are. You can see all the athletics. Every, every race, every Olympics, you can see the foreign names. And that tells you something.

P: Umhm. How about when you attended Moody School? Were there a lot of different nationalities there?

A: Oh yes. Yah, we came from all around.

P: Yah.

A: Yah, we came from all around.

P: Was that the only grade school in Lowell at the time, because (--)

A: Well yes, from the fourth grade up. (P: Uh huh) See, I went down there to the Pond Street School. It's the Adult Center now. The Retarded Adult Center. Rah Rah they call it. And yah, that was it.

P: Several other people that I interviewed said they went to Moody School. And that's why I wondered if that was the only school in Lowell at the time.

A: No. No, no this is it. Varnum, and Butler, and Bartlett, they were the biggest names. They're the ones that we use to play baseball with, against. And then of course the basketball, the boys had basketball teams during school. And we use to go and cheer at the annex. I was a cheerleader too. [Laughs]

P: Oh were you? Oh good.

A: Of course I loved sports. My brother was on the track team. He was a short putter, and javelin thrower, and a discus thrower. Very athletic. I loved, I loved sports.

P: Girls didn't have teams like they do today though? They didn't play baseball did they?

A: Well we did in the summer playgrounds.

P: But you didn't have a team as such?

A: Oh yes! (P: Oh you did?) We had a team.

P: Oh ! Oh!

A: Oh yes! Oh yes! Oh yes! I remember Ruth Liston was the teacher, the summer school teacher. And ah, oh yes, we had nine on each team. And I remember a Greek girl, her name was Jennie Mattapan, Malapan. Until this day, if she ever sees me, and I don't see her for years and years, she kisses and cries and hugs. She remembers way back in the playgrounds what fun we use to have.

P: Yah.

A: I played first base and I pitched. I remember that. I don't know how well I hit, but whatever.

P: Did they have Girl Scouts, or anything like that when you were growing up?

A: Well no, not when I was. No. Maybe they had Campfire Girls.

P: Oh, Campfire Girls.

A: Something like that, but I didn't belong. Nothing like that. I remember those things when my daughter was little, you know? (P: Yah) And she'll be forty-seven. So going back there, but beyond that I don't remember anything about that. But my father, as illiterate you might say, as he was, he loved sports. I took him to every football game at Lowell High till he was eighty-three. And I'd have to take him to the rest room and wait for him outside, because he couldn't find his way back. You know, he'd get confused. I

remember getting on the bus and going to the Lowell Lawrence game which was very, very crucial. You know, Thanksgiving morning? My mother would be home cooking the turkey. My Uncle John would be listening at the radio. And my father and I would go. I'd have a thermos of coffee, and a raccoon coat, and we'd go. My mother thought he was crazy! She says, "You're" (-- He loved it! See he, that was his life. He loved sports and he loved listening to them and all, but the others would probably, a lot of our nationality would be in the club playing cards or whatever. We had a little different, different outlook.

P: Had your father ever played in any sports?

A: Oh no, no.

P: He didn't have any... (A: No) He just enjoyed watching them.

A: Came over to go to work. Oh no, he just loved them.

P: One thing I forgot to ask you about. Had you heard of any bootlegging during Prohibition?

A: Oh indeed, indeed! Everybody made their beer. Covered it over with a cloth and it would ferment and everything. And a lot of people made their own (Hooch?) you know? (P: Ah huh) A lot of people did. They had copper (-- I remember (-- Well they'd get together you know, everybody was afraid to do it alone. They'd get together someplace. And I remember at one time, seeing this in a barrel and I remember saying something to my father. I said how funny it was. It was copper coils. It was all like that and it was just discarded. And I said, isn't this funny. It was the top of the barrel, you know, before they'd collect. In those days, the rubbish was not tied up like we do today, you know? He says, "Oh I know what that's for," and he told me. We never, I know we made beer, I remember that. Excuse me. The other stuff I don't know. I don't think so, because I would have been there. (P: Yah) And they wouldn't send me away for a week somewhere and do it. [Both laugh]

P: Did your parents ever have a garden other than flowers? Did they grow vegetables?

A: No we didn't have (-- We did on Christian Hill, of course, we did. We had a Victory Garden, you know, when (--)

P: I remember that during World War II.

A: Okay, and I remember my father was saving this gorgeous big cucumber for my brother to return home from the war. It was there under the leaves. And he said, that's going to be when Charlie gets home, which was very, very soon. And one of the boys on the hill stole it. He came down and stole it. So my father knew who it was. He was told who it was. So he marched right up to the house and he told the father. And the father

said, "I'll punish him for it." He said, "It's here, do you want it back?" He said, "No you keep it." He said, "I wanted him to pick it."

[Tape turned off, then on again]

Oh well, it was baseball. As a matter of fact we competed with the Butler School, and the Bartlett School and the South Common, the North Common. And that there were many, many days I'd go in the morning and I wouldn't come home for lunch. I'd get home late in the afternoon. I was tired and dirty, and I'd get spanked for not coming home to eat, but we loved it.

P: Did they have swings, and sliding boards, and that type of thing?

A: Oh yes, yes. They had that for the children. And we had cooking classes, and we had sewing classes. They don't have that I don't think today, maybe in vocational school. First thing we made was white cream sauce, white sauce. And when we sewed, we made aprons. We really, you know, got a good foundation then. They don't do that today I don't think, unless you go to vocational school.

P: What were some of the other courses that you took?

A: Well I went (--) I took the commercial course, cause I knew I wasn't going to college. I wanted to be a nurse, but in those days you had to pay to go in. Pay, or you didn't get paid for three years, or whatever have you. And my father said, "Well we need the income, you'll have to get to work." He did get me the good job, a good prestigious job. And there were a lot of people out of work. So I didn't go in for nursing. So I struggled with the commercial course. And I belonged to the Gregg Shorthand Association. And I remember in high school I was secretary of that. And I worked in the office, of course the Electric Light, enjoyed every bit of it. But then when I got married in thirty-eight you had to leave, because the depression was still on and they wanted men with families to have positions for. (P: Right) That was that. But my brother was fortunate enough to get back into the telephone. Then when the war came he volunteered. He went into the Navy and all that stayed on his record. So that when he retired he had the long, I think he worked forty-seven years in all. And I was forty-two when I went back to the insurance company.

P: Well you, you said when you worked for the Telephone Company they had dress codes, that you couldn't (--)

A: Well when I worked in the Electric Light nobody could have (bobbed) hair, and they frowned on lipstick and, you know, they really wanted to keep the prestige of the place. And we had lovely, lovely people there. And then when the electric range came into existence the whole auditorium was turned into an electric kitchen. And once a week they invited the public, and the women, and they had demonstrations and all. And then they went on the radio. I remember it was WLLH. They broadcasted one of the sessions from there, and two of us had to take it down in shorthand. And what one missed the

other would get. We had quite a time with that. (P: Yah, yah) And the lady that I was with, Lena Sharkey, she since passed away, she was a terrific stenographer. And I was just sixteen when I went in. And I think I was seventeen or eighteen when this cooking started. So I really had to tow my mark. (P: Ah huh) That was fine. It was fun. It was a beautiful place to work, very nice. So I was lucky that way. I didn't land in the mill, or the shoe shops, or...

P: How about your friends? Did a lot of men work in the mill?

A: No. There was nobody. A lot of them worked, when the war came on, in Textron and shoe shops mostly a lot of them, and a lot in the Boott Mills. There wasn't (--) I had one cousin that worked for the Butler Cooperative Bank. And Gardner Pearson was General Pearson from the army. He was a very, very prestigious man. He got her a job in Washington. She was my cousin, but she passed the federal exam. I couldn't take it because I was too young when I got out of high school. You had to be eighteen to pass or try to pass the federal. (P: Oh right). I passed the state and I got accepted for a job in Shirley. It was a school for bad girls, or something. I forget what. My father wouldn't let me go. I didn't have transportation anyway. But she's the only girl that I knew that had really a decent job. They were all in the mill, or shoe shops, or whatever have you.

P: What about some of the friends you played with in your neighborhood? Were they, were they Lithuanians?

A: No. There again when I got up on the hill, we were the only Lithuanians up on the hill. Ah, that's Christian Hill. Centerville is in two parts. There's the west part that goes down towards the river and Lowell Tech, the University of Lowell. They were a lot of Lithuanians and Poles there. And all the Lithuanians seem to be down that end. And there again we were the only ones up on the hill.

P: Yah, I see.

A: So it was drudgery for my father and mother to get over here to church.

P: Hm, I bet.

A: You know, long hours. Get up early and walk over and walk back. And then a little later the buses, you know, would run. Get the bus. And my mother would leave the house at seven and probably not come back till two. And they had to fast in those days. It really, really was a hardship, but they loved it and they never complained.

P: I was going to ask you about transportation. Did people either take a trolley or a bus?

A: Well we had trolley cars of course. And I remember the ones that had no sides, you know, you just jump on. And then when the hurricane came in thirty-eight, it took every single tree off the hill going up. I had to go up Third Street. And when I got up, three quarters of the way, there was a park. And every tree in the park went down and all the

trees on the hill. And it really was heart breaking, because when you turned the street on Bridge Street and looked up, you couldn't see the top of the hill. It was so pretty. And we thought, well haven't we come a long way. We live in such a pretty area, you know, it was so different from Concord Street, and then all of a sudden the trees were gone. And then after that I remember the trolleys came. So it did change, you know?

P: Yah. Was there (--) There was a flood too in the late thirties.

A: Thirty-six there was a flood.

P: Do you remember that?

A: Yes! We had cousins that lived near the auditorium, on the river there. They lived on Davidson Street and Water Street, and they got flooded. So two of them came up and slept on our living room floor.

P: So you were high enough that you weren't affected by it?

A: Oh it was beautiful, but my father couldn't get home. My father had to stay at the block, at Central Block, because the bridge was over, the water was over the bridge, and it was weakened and nobody could go over. So he couldn't come home for two days. I remember that was in thirty-six and the hurricane was thirty-eight. But we more or less, wherever we lived, we seemed to be away from our own nationality, except when we'd meet them at church and we'd have outings and things like that. Of course my father's work, a lot of them worked in mills together and they kept in contact. It was mostly mills you see.

P: Yes, yah.

A: It was a Mill City.

P: Was there any conflict between the, say the Irish in the neighborhood, and the Lithuanian, and the Italian and the other groups?

A: Well as I said before we did have our hard times.

P: Did people tend to stick to their own kind?

A: Yes, and they looked down on us. We, you know, we were foreigners and little did they know that the Irish were also foreigners. They weren't born here.

P: Right.

A: They had to cross the sea, cross the ocean in ships.

P: Do you think it was different then than it is today? That maybe (--)

A: Oh I think today is (--)

P: People are more accepted today?

A: Oh of course, of course. Look what we have today. But I'll tell you one thing, being of foreign extraction, we were more tolerant of anybody. You know, the Poles, the French and the Hispanics, everything, I, and black people, I adore some of them. I mean I, I feel for them. And ah, some of them are much better than I am, and much better than those that think they're better. It's too bad really. But this is ah, Lowell and Boston is an Irish City, very Catholic, very Irish. So no matter how good you are, you still had to compete. You still had to compete.

P: And you were still kind of looked on as the outsiders really, because you weren't (--)

A: Yes, yes, yes, and we had that to contend with too, besides not being able to get you know, good jobs, prestigious jobs. The language element, you couldn't speak, and you couldn't do this. Very few had a car, very, very few. It was a struggle, it really was. Ah, we could see it was a struggle, the children, but the parents struggled before they got over here. So to them it was (--)

P: And then they were trying to learn the language and everything [unclear].

A: Oh my goodness yes! My goodness yes, terrible!

P: When you were describing your house on Concord Street um, did they have an ice box to keep these things cold?

A: Oh we had an ice box yes. And they had a pan underneath, and we had to empty that pan all the time.

P: Is that where the ice would drip down?

A: Yes, it would drip down and we had to empty that water all the time. And another thing that's kind of cute, we didn't have a bathroom so to speak. We had a tin tub. And I remember coming home from the Moody School and all we'd have our day in the tub. My mother would just shut the door when she and I were alone, and my brother and she, and she'd fill that tin tub with warm water and everything and we'd have our bath there. And I remember laying a towel down and we'd step on it and she'd wipe us. And that was our bath. Now as far as the toilet went, it was way down in the basement, in the cellar. That was a dirt floor you know, clay, very dampish. That was one reason we had to move away. My mother had terrific headaches. It was very damp there. And my brother and I, of course we were young, we were afraid to go downstairs.

P: Oh sure!

A: So if we, if one had to go, we both had to go together. And my mother would light a candle. I remember we had a little tin candle holder. And we would light the candle and we'd go down the stairs together. And we would stand by the door with our back turned, and we would wait for one to get through with their toilet. And then I'd take the candle and my brother would do it, and then we'd go upstairs together. And that was a ritual. Nobody went down there alone, of course unless my mother or father came with me, but (--)

P: What about at night? Did you keep a potty by the bed or anything?

A: Ah, yes, we had a hall. We had a little hall that was (--). We were on the second floor, and we owned the house too. We had a little hall and I remember we had cupboards there, and my father (--). It was like a storage place. They had sheets and towels, and winter clothes and things like that. And we had a little potty thing there. It was kind of high. I remember that.

P: How would you (--)

A: And nothing to sit on, it was just there. It was just there.

P: How would your mother do the wash?

A: By hand. And oh, my mother's washboard, my mother's washboard is hanging in the kitchen of my daughter in Wilmington, Delaware. And she has sent to Washington for the patent. She has all the patents that's in it. It's cobalt blue glass, and it's tin and wood. And they sent her the whole patent, when it was patented, who did it and everything, and she has it framed, hanging underneath that board. Now that was one, but my mother also had a tin one. And my brother use to do a lot of hunting and he had very heavy under clothes, you know, the thermal underwear and the heavy union suits. And over on Christian Hill we had our cellar door opened, because he lived on one side and we lived on the other. When he married he was on the other side and that door was always opened. We had [set?] tubs. So he used to borrow my mother's, the tin one.

Interview ends

JW