

Oral Histories of Tompkins County

Archival Finding Aid

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1984-1985 - Hungarian Immigrant Project

The Hungarian Immigrant Project was created from research for an exhibit on Hungarian immigrants living in Tompkins County in the 20th century. The resulting exhibit curated by the DeWitt Historical Society (now The History Center in Tompkins County) was on display in the late 1980s. Part of this collection includes materials from interviews with first and second generation Hungarian immigrants living in Tompkins County. The documents included are not transcripts of the interviews but narratives written by Eniko Farkas and Betty Whipple, the interviewers. These interviews were not recorded, so the project notes are the only files on record of these interviews.

Interviews with:

Gabor Demeter

At the time of the interview, Gabor Demeter was the oldest living Hungarian immigrant in Ithaca. He was born in Turje, Hungary, in 1889 and fled military service at age 18. He came to the United States to join his brother, who worked for the Portland Point Cement Company in Lansing, NY. While staying in a Hungarian boarding house in Portland Point, Gabor Demeter married Anna Nemeth, who was from Vashosszúfalu, Hungary. Around 1918, Gabor Demeter began working as a stonemason in Ithaca while his wife worked at the Clinton House Hotel. He was the first president of the Hungarian Culture Club.

- *Recorded 10/1984*
- *Recorded as part of the Hungarian Immigrant Project in 1984.*

Mary Hancy

Mary Hancy's parents, Stephen Hancy and Agnes Gvalog, were both from Sümegcsehi, Hungary. They married in 1912 and relocated to Portland Point in the Town of Lansing, where they lived for 40 years before moving to Ithaca. While in Portland Point, Stephen Hancy worked for the Portland Point Cement Company, packing 100-pound cement bags in the factory. Agnes Hancy supplemented the family income by taking in boarders. Mary Hancy recalls that although her parents never returned to Hungary, her mother wrote letters back, and her father would still talk about Franz Joseph I, Emperor of Austria, King of Hungary, Croatia, and Bohemia.

- *Recorded 3/8/1985*
- *Recorded as part of the Hungarian Immigrant Project in 1985.*

Esther Korik

Esther Korik's father, Geza Varga, was born in Veszprem, Hungary, in 1891. Her mother, Anna Oszko, was born in Vashosszúfalu, Hungary, in 1887. Her parents came separately and planned to stay only a year in the United States, but they ended up marrying and settling in Portland Point near Lansing. Esther Korik recalls her family's connections to other Hungarian immigrants in the area and the activities they shared. She also lists the skills her mother taught her daughter and the foods she cooked.

- *Recorded 1/19/1985*
- *Recorded as part of the Hungarian Immigrant Project in 1985.*

Elizabeth "Betty" Whipple

Betty Whipple is a second generation Hungarian immigrant who was born in Lansing, NY, in 1928. Her father, Joseph Stephen Kordas, was born in 1888 in Hosszúfalu, Vas megye (Vashosszúfalu), Hungary, and came to the United States in search of work in 1907. He worked first in Patterson, NJ, and Throop, PA, before coming to Ithaca in 1910 to visit a girl from his village. Joseph Kardos worked as a mason's helper and later cement worker and farmer. Betty Whipple recalls participating in activities with the Hungarian Culture Club, such as dances and bacon-frying parties.

- *Recorded 1/5/1985*
- *Recorded as part of the Hungarian Immigrant Project in 1985.*

CITATION FOR THE COLLECTION

"Hungarian-American Immigration" Oral History Project, four oral histories recorded between 1984 and 1985 by Eniko Farkas of the Dewitt Historical Society, The History Center in Tompkins County. Oral Histories of Tompkins County Audio Archives, Ithaca, NY, 2021.

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