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audited

Buxton Project: 424-2104
 Narrator's Name: Emma Romano Starks
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 Interviewer's Name: Joseph Hraba

- A. Emma K., well you probably want my maiden name.
- Q. Yeah go ahead.
- A. Emma Romano Starks
- Q. How is Romano spelled?
- A. R-o-m-a-n-o.
- Q. When were you born Emma?
- A. August 8, 1909.
- Q. Where at?
- A. *Durkij* Iowa, that's 2 miles east of *Bussey* Buxton.
- Q. I need the names of your parents.
- A. My father's name his legal name was Ignaz, I-g-n-a-z, Romano but he always went by the name of Ed Romano and my mother's name was Marion Slahta Romano.
- Q. How did she spell her last name?
- A. S-l-a-h-t-a.
- Q. Were both of them from Slovakia?
- A. They were from Austria Hungary. It was many years back of course it would have been changed Slovakia and what have you.
- Q. When did your parents come to this country?
- A. Well perhaps 18 well of course my father came here first and he was here oh 4 or 5 years and then my mother came here but let's see 1898 was when my older sister was born so I would say 1895.
- Q. Settling first in Pennsylvania?
- A. Settled in Pennsylvania.
- Q. Okay earlier you were saying that your father knew John L. Lewis in Pennsylvania.
- A. Pennsylvania, now I don't know whether it was in Scranton, Pennsylvania or *Coal* Coldtown, Pennsylvania but Lewis, John Lewis taught my father how to work in, well he worked in the coal mine with him but then he taught him how to work in the entriss. That is a little step above the just the regular digging of the coal.

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- Q. You also mentioned that your father help organize the Slovaks along with _____ organizing going on with respect to the united mine workers, right?
- A. That's right he did.
- Q. Can you tell me a little bit about that Emma?
- A. No about the only thing I can do is the Slovaks just didn't understand the English language and so my father understand the language enough that he could interpret what John Lewis, he understood John Lewis about this and my father seemed to think that would be a help to the Slovak people that worked in the mines, to all the people of course but he worked with the Slovak people.
- Q. What accounted for your father knowing English language better than most of those immigrant
- A. Well my father studied different languages. I think my father spoke about 7 different languages.
- Q. So he had some ease with language huh?
- A. Yes, uh huh.
- Q. Exactly what did he do, can you give me any kind of detail Emma with respect to helping John L. Lewis organize, would he act as Lewis' interpreter in speeches or just what?
- A. That would it uh huh and explain to the people that it was to their good that they do form some sort of an organization because at that time it was almost like slave labor.
- Q. Okay what years would this have been he worked with John L.?
- A. It would be in the latter part of 1898 or 1900 right in through there, the first part of the 1900s.
- Q. What brought the family out here to Iowa?
- A. That's pretty hard to say but it seems to me that I had an uncle that lived in Illinois. It was my mother's brother that lived in Illinois, I can't think of the name of the town, a small town just close to the Iowa border and they lived in Illinois and after, well the folks wanted to get close to relatives you know so they moved to Illinois but they didn't stay in Illinois they moved to Iowa and after they moved to Iowa they had another, my mother's brother to come out from the old country.
- Q. What was his name?
- A. I think it was John Slatha, John or Mike, I think it was John, yes it was John.
- Q. And he located here too?
- A. He located at Evans and they lived in Evans all their life then after they located in Evans
- Q. Regard to your parents, they first came to Evans, is that right Emma, was it at Evans their first location?
- A. I believe that it was yes.
- Q. And then where?
- A. From Illinois to Evans then I'll see, I know White City was one of the towns, no Evans,

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 A. ^{Dirkey} White City and there was one other town in there but I can't think of right now, then Rex 4, Rex 5 and then Lavilla.

Q. Apparently your father never worked with Consolidated Coal Company?

A. Rexfield Coal Company was the company that he worked for.

Q. Now as I said earlier Emma we want to focus on the Slovak community here, it seems like Lavilla was one of its centers but there was also a center, you recall there was a Slovak Lutheran Church in Buxton?

A. Yeah, uh huh. I don't believe there was a Catholic Church in Buxton though.

Q. No. If there was we haven't unearthed any evidence that existed.

A. I don't think that there was.

Q. Said the Slovak Catholics they were affiliated with any church they affiliated with St. ^{Peter}

A. Yes.

Q. Now I suppose the center of the Slovak community that your parents were part of was St. Peters Church.

A. Oh yes.

Q. What can you tell me about the old days with St. Peters, was mass said in Slovak **in** the old days?

A. No it was always in, well mostly Latin, but we most generally had a Irish priest, however the Slovaks would have a priest come out I think it was either once or twice a year from Minneapolis, you know they had to hear confession so the Slovak people that couldn't speak the English language could go to confession to their own priest.

Q. When would, twice a year you say.

A. I would say once or twice a year.

Q. When would this be, any special time of the year?

A. Well it seems to me that one of the times was around Easter time.

Q. Did that have any special significance Emma, coming around Easter?

A. Well I suppose that well one of the rules of the church, that was at that time was you should go to confession at least once a year and so that was it right there.

Q. The apparent reason, I need to ask you this, is that the real reason that ^{the taking of} confession in their native tongue was much more comfortable to the people?

A. It was much more comfortable and then, see my folks went along in the Greek Catholic Church of the, I would say the eastern rights.

Q. Yeah the Orthodox Catholic okay.

A. Yes and their services are a little bit different than the

Q. You said they went along with it, they were members of the Orthodox Church at one time?

- A. The Greek Catholic it isn't, I can't tell you too much about the religion but it was a Greek Catholic of the Eastern right, it's connected with the Roman Catholic a branch of the Roman Catholic.
- Q. When were they part of that church, was that
- A. Well they were always that but after they moved to this country, to this area why all we had was the Roman Catholic Church and that's the church we went to.
- Q. Okay so they switched okay. Now you say the priest were mostly Irish priests.
- A. Irish, uh huh.
- Q. Was there ever any friction between the Irish priest and the Slovak immigrants
- A. I don't believe so, not any more than anything else. We did have a few German priest also.
- Q. German priest. What was the ethnic myths of St. Peter's Church in those days, Slovaks of course?
- A. There were Slovaks and Italians and Irish.
- Q. And Irish?
- A. Uh huh. Like Kathern Carr over here, their family was quite active in the church, they always have been. Ellie Safranco, she comes from the Slovak part.
- Q. Slovaks, Italians and some Irish, these would have been the mainstay ethnic groups in St. Peters?
- A. Yeah, I would say more Irish than Italians.
- Q. More Irish than Italian?
- A. Yes.
- Q. Okay good. How did those 3 groups get along with one another, did they get along pretty well or?
- A. Well I guess so, we didn't have too much trouble when we were going to church. We went to church once a week which was on Sunday and then we'd come back in the afternoon and go to catechism on Sunday and actually at that time we lived in the coal towns and we didn't mix with the people here in town. I mean there was no reason why we should you know.
- Q. Okay, talking about mixing with people, who were the friends of your parents, were they primarily or exclusively Slovak people?
- A. Slovak, Polish, Croatian they had a few Polish friends a few Croatian friends.
- Q. Were there many polish here in Monroe County?
- A. No I don't believe so. I know that there was one or 2 Polish families in Rex 4, in fact my godmother was a Polish woman.

Q. What were the name of those families?

A. Rogonly. } *Ragoelny*

Q. Rogonly?

A. Uh huh, I don't know how it would be spelled, R-o-g-o-n-l-y I think it was, but I can't think of anyone else, I know there were several but not very many.

Q. So your parents had primarily Slovak friends?

A. That's right.

Q. Did you experience directly or did you hear through your parents about the gatherings that the Slovaks would have?

A. Well both I would say. Of course the Slovaks used to gather at our house quite a bit.

Q. When?

A. Well when we lived in Rex 4 why it was practically every night somebody would be over there and they would just discuss things that happened in the old country and how wonderful it was in the olden days. Of course now it would sound like they was, what do I want to say, you know against the

Q. Unpatriotic or something?

A. Yeah on that order because they bragged about their own country so much but then later on they sort of cut that out because they decided you know it wasn't the right thing they were making their living here in this country, in fact my dad put a stop to that when they would come to our house because he said you're in this country now, speak for the United States and they would just sit around and visit drink now and then you know and then after we moved here to Laviilla the same thing happened. There were 3 or 4 families that would come over just about every night and sat around, either in the kitchen in the winter-time or out on the front porch in the summertime visiting.

Q. What about formal occasions for example weddings or _____?

A. Oh land, weddings that was a 3 day celebration. I don't care how poor the miner was why he didn't go to work on a Monday after after a Saturday and Sunday celebration of a wedding, same way with the christening. They, would it be christening or bap, well christening especially they would have an all day celebration and people would bring food and they sat around there to eat, have big meals eat and then dance and sing. There was always a dance.

Q. Could you sort of walk me through one of these 2, 3 days Slovak weddings? How would it begin and how would it end?

A. Well especially the wedding naturally they'd go to the church and get married and then they would come home and the women in the community would get together and cook this big meal and everybody was invited and they would be serving food for about half a day, they would move the furniture out of the living room and they'd have their dances in the living room.

Q. What instruments would be played?

A. Well it was a violin, base vio and accordion.

Q. Those 3 huh?

- A. And once in a while there was one of the neighbors that played a flute and they had enough music you know.
- Q. What kind of music would they play?
- A. Slovak music.
- Q. Slovak music?
- A. Uh huh.
- Q. Would there be folk dancing then?
- A. Oh yes, very much so. That was mostly folk dancing.
- Q. Would they ever play American music?
- A. That I don't remember.
- Q. You don't remember any of that?
- A. But I know we used to do an awful lot of polka dancing.
- Q. What about the food, was there anything unusual about the food they would serve?
- A. No. I know there was one dish that they always served and that is, well it's called stuffed cabbage and in the Slovak language it's called haluka and it's rice and meat rolled up into a cabbage leaf and then cooked or boiled or what have you. I make it all the time I always bake mine.
- Q. They boiled it in those days?
- A. Yes they would, more or less you know not a hard boil it would be steamed or I don't know just how they would do it but it was most generally cooked on top of the stove rather than baked.
- Q. Now the day they got married they would return to the home of the bride or the groom?
- A. The bride.
- Q. And they would eat and dance?
- A. Eat and dance after they get through eating, well when they sat down to the table there was always one person that would, if it was a woman as a rule she would put 50¢ on the plate and she would pass the plate around and each person would put in 50¢. If it was a man why he would put in \$1.00 and pass the plate around at the table and then after the food, after eating why they would go in to dance and first the husband would dance with his wife and they always tied a big apron on the bride, around the bride and she would carry that wrapped some way around her hand around her waist and around her hand, and each especially the men all wanted to dance with the bride you know and each man that would dance with the bride he would put a dollar in the bride's apron and that was the way, that was the gift that they would get from the community.
- Q. So there was a mistress and a master of ceremonies?
- A. Oh yes.
- Q. What was that role called in Slovak?

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- A. Oh goodness I wouldn't know.
- Q. Okay but that was typical to have that?
- A. Oh yes.
- Q. Was it usually a good friend of the family or just who would do this?
- A. Well I think that it would be a good friend of the family, I know my mother used to be one of the main leaders on that. She would always start tha, my father would start the bride dancing and of course then the others would follow and my mother would also.
- Q. Well would the family ask them to do this?
- A. No.
- Q. They would just take it upon themselves to do it?
- A. That's right, uh huh.
- Q. Okay, what other. they must have had picnics?
- A. Well not so much. It was just a gathering in the homes or you know in the yard you know as I mentioned before. But there ^{was} so much of a picnic. We would have maybe once a year go to a picnic, like a school or a church picnic but that was about all.
- Q. Okay, what about the celebration of some of the holidays, Christmas and Easter was that done in old rural fashion?
- A. Yes.
- Q. Can we take Christman first, can you describe how you and your family celebrated Christmas?
- A. Well Christmas, course those were very lean days but my mother would start bakng about 2 or 3 days before Christmas and we always had different kinds of bread you know and there was 2 other things that we always had for Christmas and Easter and that poppy seed rolls and nut rolls and I don't know what type of meat we had but we would all receive a gift, which would be a small thing and the folks would always see that we had, I remember the folks would send to Sears Robuck and they'd get these wooden pails oh I would say about a pint, not a pint but a peck wooden bucket of hard candy and we would have that in the house and if anyone would come which the kids would always come over and mother would dole that out to all of us.
- Q. Was there anything special you did for example on Christmas Eve or Christmas day, was there a traditional meal on Christmas Eve?
- A. We ate very sparingly before Christmas and Christmas day there would be a big meal.
- Q. Where was that at, in the middle of the day?
- A. At the middle of the day, at noon time there would be a big meal.
- Q. Did you go to mass on Christmas Eve?
- A. Yes, whenever it was possible we always went and that was midnight mass at that time.
- Q. Did you return to church on Christmas day?

A. On Christmas day.

Q. What time when would you go?

A. Well I would say it was around 10:00 in the morning because in those days we only had one service. There was times when we had to be at church at 7:00 in the morning and I can't remember just when that was now whether that was on special holidays or not.

Q. What about Easter anything special on Easter?

A. Yes, I know mother would often make these special breads and then there was always a ham baked for Easter. They'd always butcher and smoke their own ham you know and then have that, they didn't bake the ham they boiled it. Then mother would make Easter eggs and she made them like they did in the old country. She'd boil the eggs then she had a little stick that she would dip in wax and make figures on the egg and then she would dye the egg and then to get that wax off the egg well then she would heat the egg just enough to rub that off the Easter egg and they're bringing that back a little but I've noticed that quite a bit you know on holidays were the people make the Easter eggs the same way.

Q. Those are pretty eggs.

A. Uh huh, yeah.

Q. Yeah, I've seen them too.

A. Then now that was always a 3 day holiday.

Q. What 3 days?

A. For Easter.

Q. Starting Good Friday?

A. That would be Easter Sunday, then Monday and Tuesday. Now I remember my dad would never go to work on Monday after Easter, he would never work on Good Friday but on Monday the people would congregate at different homes and there was oh well the old thing the boys would call on the girls and that they would dump their head in a wash basin you know that was to bring good luck for the coming year.

Q. Would the girls do the same to the boys.

A. Yes, on Tuesday.

Q. On Tuesday they returned it?

A. Yeah they returned that, and I remember my mother would always put money in the wash basin when we would get up in the morning why this was, she'd put probably a dime or a quarter or a nickel in our wash basin and then we'd wash our face in that wash basin and the money was given to us. That was just a little thing that the Slovaks used to do. I can't go into detail why it was done.

Q. Emma was there any other time of the year, any other holiday that had somewhat of a Slovak flavor to it or was Christmas and Easter about it? What did you do for New Years, did the Slovaks get together?

A. Well they probably would but New Years was just another day I would say.

Q. That was not an important holiday?

A. No.

Q. Now let me just kind of change gears here here a bit Emma, let's talk about some of the organizations that the Slovaks had. Were your parents affiliated with any of the Slovak organizations?

A. Yes. Both my mother and father were affiliated with the Slovak organization and that was

Q. Was it the yednota?

A. yednota that's what it was. In fact I still have my mother's pen.

Q. Both were. Were either of your parents officer?

A. No.

Q. Just members?

A. Just members. Ellie Safranco's mother seemed to do most of the work on that.

Q. yes I've heard that. Okay, did they attend meetings regularly?

A. There weren't very many meetings. My mother used to attend once in a while.

Q. Did the Slovaks have a hall or a meeting place?

A. Not that I know of.

Q. So where were these meetings held?

A. Well it would most generally be out in the country in someone's home, a member's home you know and probably one of the officer's home and the meeting would be held there and I think that was only once or twice a year.

Q. Now the yednota furnished some insurance coverage didn't it?

A. That was it uh huh.

Q. Burial insurance?

A. Burial uh huh.

Q. Did it offer anything else in the way of services that you can remember Emma?

A. Not that I can remember.

Q. Did the Slovaks here in Monroe County ever combine to form a credit association or a mutual aid society where they would loan money to one another for say home mortgages or whatever?

A. No I don't know that they ever had anything like that, I can't ever remember of it but I do know that they used to help each other.

Q. How so?

A. Well I know my folks helped one family that bought a farm out oh maybe 2 or 3 miles east of Lavilla here and they just came in and said they needed \$3,000 to buy this farm and wanted to know if my parents would help them and mother and A happened to be in the

- A. kitchen the day, that's where they always did their entertaining in the kitchen you know and I happen to be there and mother and dad exchanged looks and they says why not, the people need the money and we've got it we'll loan it to them and so they went to the bank the next day and drew out \$3,000 and gave it to these people and they were paying that off you know and \$3,000 would be a million dollars today.
- Q. That's a considerable sum of money isn't it?
- A. Yeah, because they bought this farm they paid I think it was \$6.00 an acre for it.
- Q. Were your parents pretty well off financially you know in context of the times?
- A. I would say yes. It isn't that they had that much money but my mother was a very good manager and she raised gardens, cows and chickens and everything and we always had enough to eat and my dad worked in the coal mine and she made it a point to save a certain amount of money out of each pay check. Then also when
- Q. So the money that they had was acquired mainly through savings?
- A. Through savings, that's right.
- Q. Rather than investing?
- A. Oh yes, there was no such thing as investing. In fact they didn't use banks for a good many years. The money was right in our house.
- Q. Where at in the house?
- A. Well that I wouldn't know, but in the house uh huh. I do know one time that I was almost skinned alive, I decided I'd go in my mother's bedroom and clean up the bedroom and we had a big tin barrel that mother kept flour in and she always kept a newspaper under that so the dampness wouldn't get next to the flour you know in the barrel so I thought I'd replace that with a clean newspaper and thank God it was in the summertime when we didn't have fire in the stove because I picked up that newspaper and threw the newspaper in the stove and when my mother came home and I was so proud of myself and oh she just raised cane, she says what did you do with that paper I says I threw it in the stove and she pulled that newspaper out of the stove and there was 5 \$100 bills she had hidden in that paper.
- Q. 5 \$100 bills.
- A. Yes.
- Q. That's a good story.
- A. Isn't it though I thought I was going to be murdered but then later on mother just said your intentions were good but she says never do that again unless you tell me you're going to do it. So evidently the money was somewhere in the bedroom that they had.
- Q. Your father was a miner all of his life?
- A. Yes.
- Q. Did your parents own any land?
- A. No.
- Q. No?

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A. No.

Q. They had a house here in Lavilla toward the end of their life huh?

A. Yes, they bought that house oh I was about 17 years old at the time.

Q. Now the focus for us has been on the Slovak community here in the area of Buxton, mainly here in Lavilla but you were tied to the Slovak community with people the Slovaks who lived out and around Buxton weren't you?

A. I would say that we were uh huh.

Q. You mentioned earlier that you were in Buxton yourself only a couple of times.

A. That's right.

Q. Is there anything for the record Emma that you remember about Buxton that you like to tell me?

A. The only thing I remember about Buxton was this one particular night I went to a dance with this idea that I had mentioned to you.

Q. When was this Emma?

A. Oh once again I would say when I was about 16 years old.

Q. About 16 years old?

A. Yes uh huh.

Q. So it'd been in the 1920's?

A. Yes.

Q. And where was the dance?

A. Right in Buxton it was, I don't know whether it was a dance hall or just what it was, but okay we had the band start playing and everybody was having their drink and all of a sudden we heard some shooting and I idea aunt was with us and she says come on let's get out of here and we were quite frightened. We went to his aunt's house and stayed there all night long, she wouldn't let us go out of the house after that. The next day there were somebody had been shot. We had found out that somebody had been shot there in the hall.

Q. There was a shot right inside the hall?

A. Inside the hall, there used to be quite a bit of that in Buxton.

Q. Among the people you knew Buxton had a rough reputation?

A. Well that's what I understand yes.

Q. Anything else that you remember about Buxton?

A. No, that's the only thing that I can ever remember. I had to stay pretty close to home, I wasn't given too much freedom.

Q. That's not unusual?

A. No, we had to be in the house around 8:30 or 9:00 every night.