

EI-785

JOHN MARKUM

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INTERVIEW DATE: AUGUST 15, 1996

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INTERVIEWER: PAUL SIGRIST

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LITHUANIA, 1930

13

SHIP: LEVIATHAN

PORT:

RESIDENCES:

SIGRIST: Good afternoon. This is Paul Sigrist for the National Park Service. Today is Thursday, August 15th, 1996. I'm in Belchertown, Massachusetts and I'm here with John Markum. Mr. Markum came from Lithuania in 1930 and he was thirteen years old at that time and he was held at Ellis Island for three or four days.

MARKUM: Yeah, for three days.

SIGRIST: For three days. I should also say for the sake of the tape that you may hear traffic in the background. Mr. Markum, can we begin by you giving me your birth date, please.

MARKUM: Yes, I was born March 23rd, 1917.

SIGRIST: 1917, and where were you born?

MARKUM: I was born in Russia. In Kharkow.

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SIGRIST: Can you spell Kharkow?

MARKUM: K-H-A-R-K-O-W. This is an English spelling. I don't know how you write it in Russian.

SIGRIST: Tell me what your family was doing in Russia at that time?

MARKUM: Well, during that, my father came from America, visit Lithuania, and he get married over there and the war broke out. So therefore, him and his wife, or my mother, rather, took off to Russia to run away from Germans. And, of course, he got a job there on the train and after the war they came back to Lithuanian, over my grandmother's place.

SIGRIST: Was your father born in the United States?

MARKUM: No, he was born in Lithuania.

SIGRIST: Or he had been in the United States. What was your father's name?

MARKUM: John.

SIGRIST: John, then—

MARKUM: Same thing.

SIGRIST: Is it John in Lithuanian or how would you say that?

MARKUM: Jonas, Jonas.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that?

MARKUM: J-O-N-A-S. See, J you don't pronounce in Lithuanian language. It's Y. Yo. Yo. J is yo.

SIGRIST: So Jonas would be your father's name.

MARKUM: Jonas, that's right.

SIGRIST: Tell me what you know about your father's family background.

MARKUM: Well, they used to be in a village by the name of [unclear] in Lithuania and little by little they separated. They went to America to get away from Lithuania, back and forth and my father's father died

and he was only fourteen years old. So my grandmother, that would be, she gave him a piece of rye bread and a piece of pork and he took off toward Germany to go to America.

SIGRIST: Do you know what year that was?

MARKUM: I don't know. I don't know what year it was, but he was only fourteen years old. So he got on the freight and there's a port in Germany. Anyway, he got one of them cargo ships and he got to America, fourteen years old, and he landed in Grand Central Station. That time there was no—I don't know if they had Ellis Island or not. I don't think so. And he just sat there and didn't know what was going to happen, but he sat there for two days and some guy come along and he couldn't speak English. She he motioned, do you want to come with him? So he went with him. So he brought him back to Petersham, Mass over here as a farmer and he started working hard, plowing and everything, a fourteen year old kid until he learned English and then, of course, he was working I guess too much for no pay at all, just board and room, that's all it was. So that was it.

And then on and on and he learned to speak English. Used to work for a two years, save a little money and then he went back to Lithuanian, visit the family. And he brought back his brother over here, and his sister and that was it.

SIGRIST: Then could we just pause for a moment. [tape off/on] We're now resuming. So your father brought his brother and his sister back over here.

MARKUM: Yeah.

SIGRIST: And where in America was he living?

MARKUM: He was living mostly in Derry, Mass. Petersham and Derry, Mass.

SIGRIST: Derry? Derry, Massachusetts.

MARKUM: Derry, Massachusetts, yeah.

SIGRIST: Now, you said he went back and got married.

MARKUM: Uh-hmm.

SIGRIST: Tell me a little bit about that.

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MARKUM: Well, it wasn't too much. I guess he went to visit back to Lithuania and he met up with my mother and they got married and that was it. Then war broke out. He had—I guess he had like eighteen thousand dollars, I think he said, saved in gold. He brought it back to [unclear] and just put it in the bank and when the war broke out, boom, everything went. That was the end of it. He was broke. So therefore, he lived with my mother's mother in her home, a little village by the name of Nepreshta. [PH]

SIGRIST: Spell that?

MARKUM: Nepreshta. I don't know how.

SIGRIST: Nickpreshta.

MARKUM: Nepreshta.

SIGRIST: Maybe we can look that one up. Did your parents ever tell you about the day you were born? Do you know anything about the circumstances the day you were born?

MARKUM: No.

SIGRIST: A family a story or something?

MARKUM: No, just that was during the war. The war was going on and they were in Russia at that time. That's all I know. I came back to Lithuania. They brought me back when I was only a year old. I remember that time because in Russia there was a ground floor and there was three steps and never told my mother until we lived in Athol, Mass. We had a picnic over there. My wife listened and I told my mother, I says, "I want to ask you." I says, "How old was I when I left Russia?" She says, "About a year old." I says, "Was there three steps to the door?" and she looked to my father, says, "I never told them." And my father said, "Well, what about it?" I says, "I remember." I says, "When you used to open the door, I used to crawl on three steps to meet you at the door." And they were amazed. That was it.

SIGRIST: Your earliest memory.

MARKUM: Yup, that's my earliest. That's it. [Laughs]

SIGRIST: That's great. Tell me a little bit about your father's personality? What was he like?

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MARKUM: He was a very quiet man. He wouldn't argue with anybody. He'd never get in a fight or anything like that.

SIGRIST: Can you describe what he looked like, in words?

MARKUM: Like I am.

SIGRIST: Well, what is that? How would you describe yourself?

MARKUM: Well, he's about a hundred and sixty pounds, five feet and eight, when he was young. A little—dark hair and when he died he had all his teeth in, too. He was only seventy-eight when he died.

SIGRIST: What was your mother's name?

MARKUM: Domicelle Tarakimas.

SIGRIST: Can you spell her last name?

MARKUM: T-A-R-A-K-I-M-A-S.

SIGRIST: Thank you. And what was her first name?

MARKUM: Domicelle.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that, please?

MARKUM: D-O-M-I-C-E-L-L-E.

SIGRIST: Thank you. Tell me what you know about your mother's family background?

MARKUM: Was a big, big family and her two brothers, they came to America here and they moved to Pennsylvania and they worked the coal mines. They both got killed in coal mines, so that's all we know. That's it.

SIGRIST: What was your mother's personality like?

MARKUM: Oh, she was a quiet woman, red-headed. That's where I got my red hair here. There's nothing left there now. And they just plain farmers, that was it.

SIGRIST: Did you live in the same house in Lithuania growing up?

MARKUM: Yes.

SIGRIST: Can you describe what the house looked like for me?

MARKUM: Well, it's a log house. Something like a log cabin. They used to shape the logs by hand and use a moss in between the logs for insulation like that. And, of course, we have straw roofs and cold nights there's a—used to have a stove built right in there with—it wasn't bricks or anything like that. It's from clay and that stove was like a wall where the heat used to come out to the chimney and that used to warm the whole house up with that. That part like a wall and of course the stove itself, too. They used that stove for baking and bake, and cooking, everything like that. There was a little tiny stove for small cooking and for baking and so on, there was a big oven like. That's what they used it.

SIGRIST: Where was that stove positioned inside the house?

MARKUM: This was by the door more or less. As you go in, by the door. The rest of it, bedrooms were in the back of the wall that I just told you, and rest of it, the dining room, if you want to call it a dining room, has a dirt floor and this is where we ate and so on and slept. Everybody slept the same room.

SIGRIST: Do you remember how they maintained the dirt floor?

MARKUM: Sweep it. Just sweep it and that's all.

SIGRIST: So it was very hard.

MARKUM: Yes, more or less they used to make it out of clay. They used to use clay and the soil I guess somehow and of course, it wasn't hard, but you could sweep it up and keep it clean.

SIGRIST: That was in the dining room? Was there a different kind of flooring in a different part of the house?

MARKUM: No, same thing. Same thing. The whole frame house set right on soil and that was it.

SIGRIST: Who built the house?

MARKUM: They used to have carpenters go round building.

SIGRIST: Did it have windows?

MARKUM: Yes, yes. No screens, of course. Never heard of it.

SIGRIST: How did you light the inside of the house?

MARKUM: Well, we didn't have no choice. Never saw anything better, so to me it was all right.

SIGRIST: No, how did you light? Light.

MARKUM: Oh, light?

SIGRIST: What kind of lighting did you have inside?

MARKUM: Light? We used to—we did have a kerosene lamp, but that was a little expensive to buy kerosene, so what we used to do is take a piece of pine wood and my father used to make into like—I don't tell you how word you call it. It wouldn't be a shingle, but in that same kind of family. I'd say about inch and a half wide, about sixteenth of an inch thick, and about three feet long, and they make it into those little—they had little pieces like that and we used to stick the piece of it in the wall, light it up. And that burnt down, you start another one in the evening and that was it.

SIGRIST: I've never heard that before.

MARKUM: Yes, they used to call it balanus.

SIGRIST: Baladus?

MARKUM: Balanus.

SIGRIST: Balanus,

MARKUM: B-A-L-A-N-A-S.

SIGRIST: Thank you. And I'm just curious, what time did people go to bed back then? How often would you have to light the inside of the house?

MARKUM: Well, sometime depends on the nights, what you have to do, but lot of times people get together to certain house, and the women would make the cloth by themselves because you didn't buy any cloth over there. You made it from your own, out of linen and wool.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what the process was? How they did that?

MARKUM: On what?

SIGRIST: How they made cloth?

MARKUM: Yes. Well, you want the beginning, to start the begin?

SIGRIST: Yeah, sure.

MARKUM: All right, we'll start with the sheep, with the wool.

SIGRIST: Did your family keep sheep?

MARKUM: Oh, sure, we kept, yeah. So you took the wool and they used to take it down little town and they processed the wool and then they bring it back and on the weaving machine, what do you call it. I don't know what you call that in English.

SIGRIST: Like a loom?

MARKUM: No, isn't a loom. Just to make the thread. Spinning.

SIGRIST: Like a spinning wheel.

MARKUM: Spinning wheel, yeah. Used to make into thread and after they make into thread, then they use a loom to make into cloth, and the linen was same way. You cut the flax. Flaxseed growing there, that's linen. And you cut it. It's more like a straw and they take it and dry it, and after you dry that, of course, it's got crumples up, so they have like a wooden thing in there you put it handful by handful and you crack it. Crack that into linen itself, just the raw material, that is. Well, after that you take that and you weave that into thread, that linen, little by little, and this is what the women used to do during the night, as much time they had. In daytime the women's job was to take care of the pigs, chickens, milk the cows and all, and the men, well, they done take care of other things like go and cut the wood and so on and everything like that.

SIGRIST: In the area where you lived, what did most people do for a living?

MARKUM: Just farming.

SIGRIST: They were mostly farmers.

MARKUM: Yeah, some of them were carpenters, of course, and that's how some made a living. Russians live up there, quite a few villages. They were carpenters, more or less, and done the yard work like

digging wells and so on and they help us to cut into lumber, by hand. But like that.

SIGRIST: Can you talk to me a little bit about taking care of animals? What kind of animals you had and how they were cared for.

MARKUM: Well, we had geese, ducks because we lived right on like a lake, on part of the lake, and of course that kept the waterfowl in there. So the geese, we used to raise so many for our own use. The rest of what you used, the Germans used to come in and buy the fat geese. Fat ones. That's all they looked for, fat, because generally used to use goose fat as a butter. They didn't use butter on their bread. Of course, the ducks the same way. And the cows, we had—I think the most we had was one cow at a time, but most of the times just milking during the summer. During the winter was all dry, so we didn't have no milk, nothing to eat. Potatoes, mushrooms that we picked. We lived on that most of times in the winter.

SIGRIST: What kind of vegetables did you grow during the summer?

MARKUM: Peas. Barley, wheat, rye, and there's another one. I forget just what you call that. It's—well, I don't know. It's big, big kernels on there. Was like a peas, but it isn't a peas. I don't know what they call that in English.

SIGRIST: Like some kind of a bean maybe?

MARKUM: A member of the bean family, yes. I presume that, yeah. Used to call pupas. Paupas.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that?

MARKUM: Yeah, P-A-U-P-A-S.

SIGRIST: That's great. Use as many Lithuanian terms as you want to, as long as you spell them for us. That's great. Can you tell me some of the—who did the cooking in the family?

MARKUM: Oh, my mother, of course.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me some of the dishes that she made?

MARKUM: Phew. Well, there was plain dish. If you had was they made out of grain. Of course, you had the bread in there. Then the soup most of the times. That was it. Every made into soup.

SIGRIST: How would she make a soup at that time and what did she put into it?

MARKUM: Well, you had mushrooms. You had carrots. You had cabbage. All like that, and meat was very scarce. So we lived on a lake of course and I used to go out when I was a little kid there and catch fish and we used to eat a lot of fish. That was a delicacy, if we get the fish. In the summer was no problem for fish, but in the winter was kind of rough. So we used to cut the ice, through the ice probably about, oh, some places around fourteen inches deep, ice, it got so cold. And you cut it there and you jig for fish. Once in a while you catch fish, most of the times you didn't.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what kind of fish they had?

MARKUM: I had pickerel, perch and there was another fish. In English I see they do have a name for this fish. In Lithuania they call linais. That's L-I-N-A-I-S. No. L-I-N-A-I. Linai. Linais, in other words one would be linai. Those were nice fish. I believe they were vegetarians, the fish were, fish on the bottom. That's the only way they used to catch them with the traps. We used to make our own traps and catch that in the summer.

SIGRIST: And then how would your mother prepare that fish? What would she do to it?

MARKUM: Into soup. Everything went into soup. That was it.

SIGRIST: So soup really was the staple food.

MARKUM: Oh, yes, definitely.

SIGRIST: What would be prepared for like a special occasion, a holiday celebration?

MARKUM: Oh, that was—that was work for three, four days to prepare all that stuff. Everything they had stored like for Christmas, they had that and for Easter. That's the two big holidays. That was it, and like for Christmas, of course, we had all different kinds. I even forget just what you call them, some of the dishes in there. Like used to call galumpke [PH] over here. You heard of them?

SIGRIST: Galumpke [PH], yes.

MARKUM: Of course, that's another thing they make out of carrots, filled it in there. Of course, if you saved your eggs, you had definitely eggs and you had little piece of meat like a ham. You had anything like that, so you had a piece of ham for everybody and chicken. Chickens were pretty scarce at that time, so we didn't have too much chicken in our lives.

SIGRIST: What eggs did you eat? Were you eating the geese eggs?

MARKUM: Or goose. Any kind of egg we ate. Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: Was the farm situated—you say it was on a lake. Was it right on the border?

MARKUM: This was a village. I think there was about nine houses and that was it, and everybody had a lot of land here and there. They were scattered. They were not in one place, land. You had your neighbors, would say hundred and fifty feet long, maybe. Two hundred feet long by twenty-five feet wide and one straight piece in there. Then next to you have another neighbors like that. They were scattered all over.

SIGRIST: Were there fences between them?

MARKUM: No, just about six, seven inch bare soil between. That was your line. That was it. That's it. That's all there is for that.

SIGRIST: What did people do for entertainment back then? What would people do for fun when they weren't working in the fields?

MARKUM: Not too much of anything. Used to get together there and that's it and like in the summer, in May that was a big thing they'd arrange an altar and they'd pray in the evening. Now, if the evening, they sit down and gossip. That was it, and winter same way. Some women, you know, they spinning the yarn and all like that there and the women get together, they gossip and the men would be going to bed to sleep and they gossiped. That was it. [Laughs] While they working.

SIGRIST: What about when you were a child, what kinds of games did you play or what did you do for fun when you weren't doing your responsibilities on the farm?

MARKUM: Working. Working.

SIGRIST: What were your specific chores on the farm?

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MARKUM: My chores, take care of the cows, geese. See they wouldn't get lost and all like that and there. Then if I had some wood to chop, I'd chop the wood. When my folks went to market, they left me responsibility of taking and chopping the wood. They gave me the chores to do, I have to do the chores until they come back from the village—from the town.

SIGRIST: How long would they be gone if they went to market?

MARKUM: Well, they went early in the morning and they come back until night time almost, because you went by horse.

SIGRIST: Did you ever go to the market?

MARKUM: Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: Can you describe for me what that entailed?

MARKUM: This is more like you probably see nowadays like in Mexico. Open in the tent. Somebody would pick up a tent and farmers bring in sheep and geese and pigs and so on, and the Jews usually come around and they buy all that stuff in there. And somebody will want—gypsies used to come around and trade horses. That was a big deal, too, you know. One time my father and I were going. I don't know, we had geese to sell, I guess a couple geese. So we went to the town. We saw this—my father stopped the horses to rest and then we see over the hill, a young gypsy had a horse that was just about half dead and he was whipping the heck out of it to get him, you know, all excited and everything there. Then he stopped for us and got some whiskey. Poured whiskey down his throat and boy, that poor horse run galloping back to town. So I guess he made a good trade off the horse.

SIGRIST: Do you have other stories about seeing the gypsies or about gypsies interacting with your family at all?

MARKUM: Yes. Yes, they used to—they used to steal. That's what they made a living off most of times, and trade. When they—I remember one time there was one sandy place and the hay was very [unclear]. Didn't have too much rain in there. Not too much rain, so my father and mother, they were cutting the hay and they were drying it out and they put it in little piles. So they're way up by the woods in there and they left few piles in there, and there came gypsies down there. A man and a woman were there and they jump out of the wagon, took three or four piles of hay and off they

went. That was the end of our hay, part of it. So what are you going to do? That's the way it was.

But what the gypsies used to do, used to camp in the summer right by our forest up there. Not too far from the forest in there, and they would not steal where they camped. They'd steal some of the other villages they go out. But we got along good with the gypsies, some of them pretty good. About once a week they'd have a music. This was in summer, during the summer, and then of course, most of the village, the younger men and girls would go out and they'd dance over there. Some of that music that they played on the violin, I'd never forget it. I wish those days we had recording because I believe now it's lost. They played with memory and some of those women, they sat there and could see the tears coming out of the eyes. When they pull that violin, it just goes right through your body, it seems to me. That was their music. It's just unbelievable. I still can remember, and I was—well, I was probably about seven years old that time. Eight years old.

SIGRIST: Did the gypsies invite the villagers to come listen to this?

MARKUM: Oh, yes. Oh, yes, yeah, they all knew in there and everybody got prepared. They go out there and they dance and sing and so on, yeah.

SIGRIST: Can you describe for me what the gypsies looked like? How did they differ from how you looked then?

MARKUM: They, like now you got the style is the American there, the gypsies. You knew gypsies by wearing the earrings, the men wearing earrings. They used to have long hair like they do over here now. They used to have a costume something like the Russians used to wear years ago, loose pants hanging in the—like a shirt hanging over like that. And they used to wear beads and so on, and some would wear moustaches. Like that.

SIGRIST: And how did they travel from place to place?

MARKUM: Horse. Horse and buggy, and that was it, yeah. One time one of the young—my mother's sister, she was living the same home, I guess. One of the gypsies, young gypsy came over and his wife was telling fortunes going round the village, and he stopped over our house. He was courting my aunt in there, and after he left courting, my father come back and said, "Where's the rope?" and the rope was gone. While he was courting my aunt there, they would steal the rope. So that was the end of the rope.

SIGRIST: Oh, so they were sneaky people.

MARKUM: Oh, that's how they made a living out of. That was it. So you probably know, during the war, World War II over here they had a Boston—well, they came to this country. Most of the gypsies started trading with the cars. Car dealers were gypsies and I think some of them still left.

SIGRIST: Were the gypsies from Lithuania or were they of other nationalities?

MARKUM: They different nationalities. I don't know. They're Hungarians or what, I don't know. I don't know what nationality. I was too young to—my father never explained to me just what where they came from.

SIGRIST: Was there a church in town?

MARKUM: There wasn't in town. We had to travel seven kilometers to church.

SIGRIST: And what religion were you?

MARKUM: Catholics.

SIGRIST: Catholics.

MARKUM: They were Catholics.

SIGRIST: So there was a Catholic church outside of town. How far is seven kilometers, roughly?

MARKUM: Well, what's—how many miles to kilometer? I mean, how many kilometers to a mile? I think it's—oh, that was the recorder.

SIGRIST: Oh, do you want to flip your tape?

MARKUM: No, that's all right.

SIGRIST: Oh, okay.

MARKUM: And well, you can find out how many kilometers in a mile.

SIGRIST: But it's a distance?

MARKUM: Yes, a kilometer is shorter than a mile.

SIGRIST: And how often did you go to church?

MARKUM: Oh, every Sunday.

SIGRIST: And was Sunday the only time that you went?

MARKUM: Yes. Well, unless it's a certain kind of a saint days or something like that. Well, special things and then you went.

SIGRIST: Can you describe for me what a saint's day is?

MARKUM: Ah, there was—well, there was a lot of them, as far as that goes. My father, he was too busy to go to church so my mother went most of times and took me in there. I went to—well, you asked what saint, I don't really remember it now. Just Christmas and Easter, that's about it. That's all I remember.

SIGRIST: Those were the important ones.

MARKUM: That's the most, yeah.

SIGRIST: What sticks out in your mind about the church building itself?

MARKUM: Church building is a—it's like a church over here, more or less. Same way. They do a lot of stones and so. Didn't use too much wood, and inside there was no seats whatsoever. So you kneeled on the floor and that was it, and there was altar there like over here.

SIGRIST: Do you have a story about going to church that you told? Something that happened maybe one time when you went to church with your mother?

MARKUM: Well, the only one time that I remember is when my father got—because he was considered American.

SIGRIST: Because he had been in this country.

MARKUM: Yeah, and he didn't believe in Lithuanian law and anything like that and everything. He was against it and every time, most of the times a priest used to come in once a year and visit everybody in the village, different villages. So he got in argument with a priest and I don't know what they got in argument about, anyway, but the priest told my father, he says, "You do what I tell you, but don't do what I do." So my father got mad and said, he told him—he used kind of rough language on him. Told him get out of the house. That was it, and that wasn't very—oh, my mother was mad at my father, everything like that. But he always taught me, he says—in

school, when I went to school there, they teach you how to hate Polish people because they were against Polish because they took, you know, this and that. They tortured us like that. So I'd come home and tell my father and my father'd take me outside and he says, "Listen, John." He says, "Don't listen to this." He says, "When back to America," says, "not going to be like that." He says, "Gunna be"—he says, "What you do there, what you think," he says, "Nobody gunna ask you what you think or gunna teach you how to." He says, "How you gunna make a good life for yourself? You gunna make a life, that's it." He said, "Nobody cares over there." He says, "You got freedom." He says, "Don't say I tell you this because we gunna get all arrested." So he said, "Just keep it to yourself," and I try to keep the secret to myself until we get in this country. That was it. [Laughs]

SIGRIST: Which must have been hard, in a way because if all your friends—

MARKUM: Yes, that's right.

SIGRIST: Hate the Polish and want to talk about that.

MARKUM: That's right, but we used to come out of school, you couldn't talk in Polish or Russian. But there were Russians kids and Polish went the same school. It was a one-room school. So after we leave the school, within hearing school way, we talk Russian and we talk Polish. So therefore, I learn to talk Polish and I learn to talk Russia. That was it.

END OF SIDE A
BEGN SIDE B

SIGRIST: How did you practice your religion at home?

MARKUM: Right here?

SIGRIST: No, in Lithuania. What would you do at home to practice your religion?

MARKUM: You said your—when you sat down to table, you bless yourself and everybody would say a little prayer.

SIGRIST: Do you remember that prayer in Lithuanian?

MARKUM: Part of it, yeah, but aren't going to tell on the recorder.

SIGRIST: I was hoping I could get you—

MARKUM: [Speaks very rapidly in Lithuanian, saying prayer]

SIGRIST: Thank you. And was that the grace that you said before dinner?

MARKUM: Yes. Yes, yeah.

SIGRIST: Were there any other ways that you practiced religion at home?

MARKUM: Well, they—well, we talk about, you know, different that you suppose to listen to your father and mother and never do your father and mother and other relatives and that, have respect for everybody. No matter even if enemies, too. So very religious people over there.

SIGRIST: And obviously your mother was the more religious person in the household. More religious than your father.

MARKUM: Well, yes, more or less. Yeah, yeah. He didn't take no nonsense from nobody or didn't listen or anything like that. When he was fourteen years old, he came to this country. Of course, more or less he learned to mind his own business, do what you want to do and when he back and got stranded in Lithuanian, that was pretty hard for him.

SIGRIST: Can you—you mentioned Easter and Christmas before. Can you describe how you celebrated Easter in Lithuania?

MARKUM: Easter. Well, we used to have cook the eggs, save the eggs for God knows for how long. We cooked the eggs for Easter and go around breaking eggs, who's got the strongest egg. And if you break his egg, well, you take his egg home, that's all. If he broke your egg, you were out of luck or you lost your egg. But that's the way just to go all through the village who got the strongest egg. That was a big deal every Easter, and some of them, they even load up the egg with sugar inside. Somehow they used to make a little hole and they melt the sugar on the sharp side of egg, and that's the one you break the eggs with and of course, that egg you couldn't break it regular, the shell. So the guy got caught, he got awful beating. [Laughs]

SIGRIST: Now, would you go to church for Easter?

MARKUM: Oh, yes, everybody. Even if you didn't feel good, Easter you had to go to church. Yeah. Yeah, then after church of course you had your dinner and celebrate. Usually, at first when I was little I

remember we used to celebrate two, three days and then little by little it dwindled down to two days and before we went back in 1930, it only took one day and that was it. So people were just getting away from this side religion.

SIGRIST: Right, it was becoming less important to them.

MARKUM: Yes, yes. Yeah.

SIGRIST: How did Easter differ from celebrating Christmas?

MARKUM: Well, it is a different kind of food that you made, that's all. That was it.

SIGRIST: Were there any special things you did inside the house at Christmas time?

MARKUM: Oh, yes, at Christmas time you fix a table. You put your straw on the table and then you cover up with a cloth, that straw. Then you put your—you had to put twelve different kind of dishes on the table. This is the twelve apostles. Then you pass your food to each, like to everybody taste the same. You know, each pass the bread from each of them, break the piece of bread and so on. From each and there and then you got the holy wafers, too, for Christmas. You had that there.

SIGRIST: Did the church supply the wafers?

MARKUM: Well, we had to buy it. We have to buy that, yeah. Yeah, the priest used to make—the organist used to make the wafers. Used to have an organist, too, that the whole community used to buy him, to eat.

SIGRIST: You started talking about school. You said it was a one-room school house.

MARKUM: Uh-hmm.

SIGRIST: What else sticks out in your mind about being a boy and going to school in Lithuania?

MARKUM: Well, it wasn't—they used to teach how to read and write. All we had was—you stayed in two grades about two years. One grade about two years because they figured that the first grader, the grammar school is equivalent to, almost to a high school over here

in this country. So all we had was three grades. That's all, and you're all done with the school. Then you go to college over there.

SIGRIST: How old were you when you started school?

MARKUM: Must have been round seven years old. Six and a half, seven years old.

SIGRIST: Now, could your parents read and write?

MARKUM: My mother little bit she could read, but she couldn't write, and my father he could read some, but not too much. When we came to this country, he learned to read in English himself.

SIGRIST: He already spoke a little English, right, when he—when you remember him, he must have already spoke some English because he had been in the United States.

MARKUM: Oh, he spoke good English, you know, before. I guess first time when he came to visit he crossed Atlantic seven times. Eight times. He worked for a year and half, and goes to vacation again. Come back and he work again. That was it, how come. So the last time we came over here, that was his ninth time and I know he looked at the Statue Liberty, he said, "Thank God," he says, "I hope I don't have to go back to hell again."

SIGRIST: And you did say that the people in the village thought of him as being American.

MARKUM: Oh, yes. Oh, yes, different. Oh, yes. Yeah.

SIGRIST: That's interesting.

MARKUM: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Well, tell me a little bit about what you knew about America when you were growing up?

MARKUM: I didn't know nothing about it. Absolutely nothing. When my father told me, he didn't—you know, he didn't have much time to sit down, explain, because he had to make a living, tired all the time and like that. So all he was hoping to come to America and would you be interested to know just how we came to America?

SIGRIST: Yes, that's exactly—that's what we were leading into right now, is just why he wanted to go at that time.

MARKUM: Okay. So 1927 we have a letter, he got a letter that my uncle died, Adam. So of course my father was all broken up. So my father's sister, Mary, she lived in Chicago and she wrote a letter to us, said that Uncle Adam left the farm half and half for her and John, my mother and the money he had in the bank, half and half. So she says, so she wrote a letter, "If you like, I can send you the money from the bank and I'll take the farm over, whenever it is, and I'll take half the money." So of course, my father wrote back, he says, "I want to go back to America, if I can. Get me a permit to get to America." He says, "I've been trying to get to America all those years. I can't. They won't let me go," because they had a quota, so much.

SIGRIST: Quota, right.

MARKUM: So she wrote back and she sent the papers for us to go to America. So we waited, oh, must have been—we had to get all kind of permits from different authorities up there, back and forth. Oh, God knows what, during the winter and then finally got everything straightened out. Finally, went to Kaunas, I don't know, three, four times up there to get the agent.

SIGRIST: Was that the nearest big city?

MARKUM: Yes, we had to take a train to Kaunas.

SIGRIST: How do you spell that?

MARKUM: Kaunas?

SIGRIST: Yes.

MARKUM: K-A-U-N-A-S, Kaunus. Had to take a train and see the consulate, the American consulate in there. So my father that time he spoke English with the consulate and everything. So he could arrange everything and went on the Leviathan. USS Leviathan at the time.

SIGRIST: Did your mother want to come to the United States?

MARKUM: Oh, yes, everybody wants to come to the United States.

SIGRIST: Well, sometimes they don't. That's why I asked.

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MARKUM: Oh, yes. Most of the people I knew over there. In Lithuania, anybody you mentioned going to America, that's your going to heaven. That was it.

SIGRIST: But your mother had never been, correct?

MARKUM: No.

SIGRIST: She had never been to America.

MARKUM: Never been there, no. Never to America, no. My father was the one, yeah.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about packing to take your belongings with you? What did you take with you from Lithuania?

MARKUM: Well, we didn't take too much. I know my mother, she weaved different kind of cloths to take to my father's sister in Chicago, as a present. She weaved some of that cloth, and everything else, we didn't take too much of anything.

SIGRIST: Do you remember taking something that was yours?

MARKUM: I took the books, school books and I still got one left. Somebody stole it here couple years ago from me. That was all about Lithuania, what was years ago, how it started and everything like that. It was pictures, everything in there. Somebody stole it out of this house. Who's got it, I don't have no idea. So that was it, but I still got one Lithuanian book left. That's about it, and I got some Lithuanian stamps left.

SIGRIST: That you brought with you in 1930?

MARKUM: Yes, yes. Yeah, yeah.

SIGRIST: I didn't ask you this before. Did you have brothers and sisters?

MARKUM: No.

SIGRIST: No. So it was just mom, dad and you.

MARKUM: I had one brother, he died I think he was eight months old, when I was in Lithuania and that was it.

SIGRIST: Do you know what he died of?

MARKUM: We don't know. Those years you didn't know what it was, anything like that.

SIGRIST: Right. What do you remember about leaving the village? When your family left, was there any kind of gathering?

MARKUM: No, no.

SIGRIST: Did you say goodbye to anyone that you remember in Italy [sic]?

MARKUM: Just a few relatives up there and that was it, and my mother's sister's husband hitched the horse and packed us up in the horse and took us to the village for the train, to take the train to Kaunas. And then that was it. Left us over there and from there we went to Kaunas and that was it. Then we traveled to Cherbourg, France.

SIGRIST: How did you get from Kaunas to Cherbourg?

MARKUM: Uh, on the train. Went through Berlin.

SIGRIST: Does anything stick out in your mind about that train ride? Because that's a long train ride across Europe.

MARKUM: Well, when we left Lithuania, this was just in the evening. We left Kaunas and we crossed the German line just before because my father used to cross across the line illegally years ago and so he knew where the line went and he called me in the train by the window and he said, "John, I want you to come over here." He says, "I'll show you. It's going to be German line," and he says, "the sun going down." And he says, "I hope this is the last time I see this Lithuanian side as long as I live." He said, "I don't want to go back." He says, "You remember as long as you live," he says, "you're leaving this country," and he says, "This Germany." He said, "Germany is much better than Lithuania," and he says, "We're leaving for America." And so this sun goes down. So I look back this way through the window and I turn this way and piece of coal flew in my eye and that piece of coal never came out of it until I came to the United States over here. Then we went to doctor, doctor took it out. It was all infected and everything.

SIGRIST: Do you remember how long it took to go from Kaunas to Cherbourg by train?

MARKUM: I don't remember, no. No, I don't. We stopped in Berlin and this was the first time we ever saw a Negro.

SIGRIST: What did you think when you saw him?

MARKUM: My mother, she turned around and she was coming out of the building in there and my eyes popped. Must have been unbelievable was to see a Black man. [Laughs] We saw pictures, but you know, reality is a different story all together.

SIGRIST: How long did you stay in Cherbourg before you got on the ship?

MARKUM: We stayed there for about two weeks waiting until they got all across together on the ship.

SIGRIST: And did you have to undergo any kind of examinations in Cherbourg before getting on the ship/

MARKUM: Yes. Yes, they had examined—they had like a place where the woman goes first and then men go in there, they examine. That was it. We went on the ship.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what they were looking for or exactly what the examination entailed?

MARKUM: Well, they see if you're ruptured, for one thing. Or if you had a TB and listen to your lungs and so on, and then like that or any kind of defective. Defective leg or arm, anything like that.

SIGRIST: And where did you stay during those two weeks?

MARKUM: They had a big hotel up there. We stayed like a big room and cots. We slept on a cot, everybody together. Must have been about, oh, a hundred and fifty people in one place in there.

SIGRIST: Were you separated from your mother at that time?

MARKUM: Oh, yes, the women slept together and the men slept another place.

SIGRIST: When did you get to see her?

MARKUM: Well, when you get up in the morning, you go to breakfast. Then we have a breakfast. We had three meals a day. That was it, in France.

SIGRIST: Did your mother ever relate to you in later years maybe her experience in this processing facility in Cherbourg? You know,

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anything that happened to her maybe, since you guys were separated at that time?

MARKUM: No. No. No, that was just a—just an ordinary thing like same thing as to Ellis Island. You were separated at night time. The women went to sleep one place and the men went another place.

SIGRIST: Do you remember in Cherbourg if you had your luggage with you or was that—

MARKUM: No, that was put away on the side. That was it, yeah. What you had, you wore same clothes and everything like that, and that was it.

SIGRIST: Well, tell me what a thirteen year old boy thinks when he sees the Leviathan, which is a big ship.

MARKUM: Well, went the evening and I looked at it, and there was lights all lit up in there and it looked like a big building. That's how it was at night. Took us in a small boat and they loaded us up and we walked in there. That was it. That was just the beginning.

SIGRIST: Do you remember how they got you from the small boat onto the Leviathan?

MARKUM: Yeah, we walked up on the—like a bridge, walked on a bridge.

SIGRIST: Do you remember how you felt about having to do that?

MARKUM: Well, that was quite excitement. It's hard to explain. You're scared and you were looking around, you know. You didn't know what to think, really.

SIGRIST: Do you remember any of the other people who were going to be getting on the ship with you, what nationalities they were or if you—

MARKUM: They were Czechoslovakians a lot of them that time, and we could understand what they saying some things, but their language is mixed with different nationalities. Russian, Polish, Lithuanian some in there and God knows what else. So we could catch what they were talking about, but we couldn't understand what they were talking about. That was it. That's it.

SIGRIST: Tell me where you slept in the Leviathan.

MARKUM: Well, it was one room. It was one room. I don't remember too much because my mother and I were seasick so bad. And we had a—the only thing I think saved us was we had a bottle of cognac supposed to give it to my aunt in Chicago, Mary, and we were so sick, and they called, I don't know who it was, the attendant there, and said, "Nothing we can do about it." And we just throw up and throw up and couldn't eat nothing, anything like that. Took us six—six days to cross the Atlantic in there. My father wasn't sick because he was used to it, I guess, but then we opened—the first day they opened up the bottle of cognac, they gave me a sip of that and it kind of straightened your stomach a little bit. My mother took that. That's about what we lived on for six days.

SIGRIST: You say you were in one room, is that the three of you were in this room?

MARKUM: Yeah. Yeah.

SIGRIST: What was in the room?

MARKUM: Oh, there was nothing in there. Actually, it's—I don't remember if there was a toilet there or not. [unclear] went out there or not, but there was one bed and that was it. That's all you slept, one bed. All three of us.

SIGRIST: Was there a porthole or something that you could see out with, that you remember?

MARKUM: Yes, porthole was there, that's all.

SIGRIST: Did you have any—after you felt a little better having the cognac, did you get a chance to walk around on the ship?

MARKUM: No. No, you were sick. You were sick twenty-four hours a day and that was it. Just you couldn't eat, you couldn't anything, and the minute you get up, you start throwing up and there's nothing to throw up, but you just throw it anyway. So you heaved and you heaved and you heaved.

SIGRIST: Pretty miserable.

MARKUM: Yeah, when they came out there on the Ellis Island, we were let in there, my mother was sick. I was sick and everything in there.

SIGRIST: You said the ship took six days. What do you remember about the ship coming into New York Harbor?

MARKUM: We saw—my father was watching, I guess, the Statue of Liberty. They called me right out, my mother, and I know we would come out on the deck then he showed us the Statue of Liberty. Told us all about it there, that the America's all about and everything. "Remember," he says, "you're going to remember this, Johnny, as long as you live. This is the first time you saw the Statue of Liberty."

SIGRIST: His very first time?

MARKUM: No, no.

SIGRIST: Oh, you're very first time.

MARKUM: Mine, yeah.

SIGRIST: Did you have any impressions of the buildings in New York or anything—

MARKUM: Oh, yes, I never seen anything like it. Then, of course, when we left—you probably don't want to hear about Ellis Island.

SIGRIST: Well, yes, let's get you to Ellis Island.

MARKUM: Okay, we're on Ellis Island right now.

SIGRIST: Well, how did you get from the ship to Ellis, do you remember?

MARKUM: They had a little like a ferry.

SIGRIST: So the shipped docked then and—

MARKUM: They took us right in there and we [unclear] in there, a big building. Called your names and you marched in this room down there and they give you the way to go, what place in there. That was it. There was just the settees. Person after person all filled right up full room in there. So we stayed there, I think it was three days and at the end of it, they call the doctors. Well, one by one, they examined me and examined my father, my mother. Then they called us the table. It was a Lithuanian consulate over there and they asked my father a lot of questions because he lived in Derry before. That's quite a while ago, way before the war. So he asked him. So one of the immigration bureau, I imagine, person, asked him, he says, "What do you remember about Derry?" So he says, "Well, there was a Simmonson's store." So he says, "No, there's

no more Simmonson's store." Said, "That's gone already." So they laugh about it. I know at the end of it, he asked if he still loves Lithuanian. He says, "No, I hate it," and the Lithuanian consulate jumped right up and he really hit with a fist, he says, "You," he says, "coming from Lithuanian," he says, "you're talking about your country like that!" And my father turns around and he says, "That's not my country." He says, "America is my country." He says, "I love America. I hate Lithuania." Then the consulate turn around and he says, "I got a good mind to deport you back," and the guy says, "No," he says, "I think we're going to let this family go." He says, "They make a good farmers," and that was it. So that was the end of that.

SIGRIST: That's a great story.

MARKUM: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Do you have any recollections of eating at Ellis Island?

MARKUM: We didn't have much of anything. Oh, God.

SIGRIST: Do you remember where they fed you?

MARKUM: Where?

SIGRIST: Where on—

MARKUM: Yeah, there was a big dining room and you just—they really didn't have much to eat at all. Now, mostly if you wanted to buy something, you had money, you could buy it. I know my father bought apple for me. That time was five cents for an apple and that was a Greening, too. I don't know if you remember apple by the name Greening. It's old-fashioned apple. They had that, but the food was very, very poor. It's just ridiculous, but it kept us alive. That was it. That was the main thing.

SIGRIST: And you mentioned that again your mother was separated from you like she had been in Cherbourg when you were staying there.

MARKUM: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Yeah.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about the dormitory at Ellis Island and having to sleep there?

MARKUM: We didn't sleep. We sat on benches for three days. That was it. Because we didn't know there were—in other words, they were

processing people almost twenty-four hours a day, get them out of there. We were waiting our turn. Just waiting, waiting.

SIGRIST: I see. So you just stayed right down on the benches then.

MARKUM: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh.

MARKUM: And you ate and come out and that was it. That's it, you waited your turn.

SIGRIST: You mentioned earlier seeing the Black person in Berlin for the first time. Was there anything at Ellis Island that you saw for the first time?

MARKUM: No. No, nothing that impressed me. No. No, we were just trying to get out. To get out of there, that was their main thing. I know my mother broke out few times crying and didn't know if they were going to deport us back again, send us back or what. Because you wait and the other people are going out and going, leaving, leaving and we are sitting there and nothing's happening. So it's awful depressing. It was for me, too, because I didn't know, you know. My father says, "Well, I don't know what's going to happen, they going to turn us back or what." We weren't sure.

SIGRIST: Had he been through Ellis Island before, your father?

MARKUM: Oh, no. My father?

SIGRIST: Yeah, when he had come in those earlier—

MARKUM: No, he always just smuggled himself in. That was it. I guess, I don't know, I guess he saw the Statue of Liberty. How, where, I don't know but he always come in in some kind of tug boat or something, you know.

SIGRIST: Just did it somehow.

MARKUM: Yeah, always found some way in and that was it.

SIGRIST: Well, we have about seven minutes left. Why don't you tell me where you went and what happened when you got there. When you were released from Ellis Island, where did you go?

MARKUM: Well, we took a train. We stayed on the—they released us from Ellis Island. We took—we went to what is that big railroad station in New York City?

SIGRIST: Grand Central Station.

MARKUM: Grand Central Station. We stayed there wait for train to Derry, Mass, and we finally stayed there I think it was overnight until next day, and we took the train, and we started on the train in there and of course from New York City it used to stop every little village like that, little town in there. What really surprised us, all the car junkyards in there. You go by there and all those cars are junk in a junkyard in the junk piles up there. That time, too. Back in that time. And then we finally got to—of course, no train come into Derry, so we stopped in South Derry and this is about seven to ten miles from South Derry to Derry. So there was an Italian family right near the railroad down there and what we had luggage and so on, we couldn't carry it. So we asked the people they could hold it for us. So we walked back to Derry and my father used to work for Dr. Brown over there before he—so he let us stay there and rest up. Clean up and everything before we went to the farm.

SIGRIST: Do you remember, apart from cleaning up, what else did you do on that first night in America? What—did Dr. Brown feed you?

MARKUM: We rested. Let us, you know, go in there and wash up and clean up and gave us clean clothes, some clothes, you know, he had over there, and clean sheets and bed and everything like that. It was only one room in there, that's all, but we were glad to get that until we got—the farm was about from Dr. Brown's two hours about almost two miles. So then we stayed for about three or four days and Dr. Brown told my father, he said, "John," he said, "you can hook up the wagon and take the horse." Told him to take a horse and go on the farm and see how things are. So that was it, and he had a man up there supposed to be taking care of the farm and so on. So that was the end of that.

SIGRIST: When you finally got to the farm, did you have an opportunity to go to school or did you go right to work?

MARKUM: No, we had to go to school.

SIGRIST: Tell me about the experience of going to school here in America.

MARKUM: I hate to even think of it. I couldn't speak one word in English. They put me in the first grade, when I was thirteen years old. You

got little kids, what, six years old first grade there. Had to go there, so they kept me there for about six months until I learned a little bit and then they put me in second grade. By spring I was in second grade. The second year I went to third and fourth grade and so on and then I start reading. They got me reading a lot and then we had a manual class, too. So we used to go up to the high school and learned to working on the woodwork and so on there.

SIGRIST: When you first were put into the first grade, do you remember how you went about learning English? I mean, how did it begin to make sense to you?

MARKUM: They used to have some Lithuanian kids from Hardwick. They spoke Lithuanian and they used have to get an interpreter for me.

SIGRIST: Is it Hardwick—

MARKUM: Hardwick, Mass. Not too far form here, yeah.

SIGRIST: Hardwick, Mass. Okay.

MARKUM: Peter his name was, Nasatorich, [PH] and they used to come over here and they wanted to know—to explain to me, they would tell me about. So that was hard. It was very, very hard.

SIGRIST: Do you remember the first few words that you learned?

MARKUM: Well, hello and goodbye and good morning. That was it and that's about it.

SIGRIST: Would you say that was the hardest part of adapting to the United States?

MARKUM: Yes, the first. Yes, yes, yes.

SIGRIST: What about your mother, did she try to learn English?

MARKUM: Well, she learned from my father and me. When I learned to speak it a little bit and then we talked English to her and she caught on pretty good. Took a whole lot longer for her, but she cooked on the farm and took care of it, like that and everything, but it was a little different than where she lived in Lithuania.

SIGRIST: Now, were other people living on this farm, too?

MARKUM: No.

SIGRIST: This was your own farm?

MARKUM: Yeah, yeah. This was Uncle Adam, when he died he left it.

SIGRIST: Oh, that's right, this was your uncle's farm.

MARKUM: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Were there animals on the farm, also?

MARKUM: No. No, they got rid of it I guess. When he died, they sold everything and they got rid of it and that was it. That's it. They hired one man to take care of the place, you know, so it wouldn't get burnt or anything like that. So he lived there, and when we moved in, why, he moved it and that was it. We let him go. That was a nineteen room house.

SIGRIST: Wow, that's a lot bigger than you had in Lithuania.

MARKUM: Well, I guess. [Laughs] Eighteen more rooms.

SIGRIST: Tell me about the first job that you got in the United States that you got paid for.

MARKUM: Carrying a drum on Memorial Day, fifty cents. [Laughs] In the parade. Of course, then I used to go to school. On the way home, walking home from school, the people used to stop me to cut their lawn. I used to trim the hedge, cut the lawn, rake it up, clean it up and made fifty cents. That I used to look forward for that.

SIGRIST: And what did you do with your fifty cents?

MARKUM: Ah, saved it. I saved it so I could buy—oh, God, I think it was a shirt or something like that and a pair of pants and so on because that was all home made pants that I wore to school, too. And all home made cloth.

SIGRIST: So your mother was still doing that here?

MARKUM: Then, I tell you what I'll do. I will donate one piece of cloth that's handmade.

SIGRIST: Great.

MARKUM: For the museum.

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SIGRIST: Great.

MARKUM: If you like to keep it there.

SIGRIST: Sure, very interested in that.

MARKUM: Of course there's some—I think the mice got in it a little bit. They tore it up, but it's all made of wool, pure wool.

SIGRIST: Great. Well, after we're done, I'll go take a look at that.

MARKUM: Yeah, so I'll donate that.

SIGRIST: Let me ask you one final question before we end here. How do you think about yourself? Do you think of yourself as an American? As a Lithuanian? How do you think of yourself in terms of nationality?

MARKUM: Both, as both. Both. I was a Lithuanian, yes, I've been a Lithuanian, but they—what kind of culture they have in Lithuania, they had those years, I don't know whether they had today. But what they had years ago, I don't believe in it. Never will. I don't go along with that how they live, and this is—this is why they have a lot of trouble because—I can't understand it because I just—I came to this country too young. I look back, I can't understand the culture at all. It's the way they live. They way they live over in America just can't beat it. That's all. So I got—that's about it. That's how I can explain it.

SIGRIST: Mr. Markum, thank you very much for letting me come and ask you all these questions.

MARKUM: You're welcome.

SIGRIST: This is Paul Sigrist signing off with John Markum on Thursday, August 15th, 1996 here in Belchertown, Massachusetts.

END OF INTERVIEW

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