

Interviewer: John W. Tedrick

INTERVIEW AND TAPE SUMMARY

Name: Michael Malcolm Torosian

Date and Place of Birth: October 22, 1934 Lincoln Place (Granite City)

Address: [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Telephone Number: [REDACTED]

Interview Date, Time, and Place:

November 15, 2001 5:00 p.m. [REDACTED]

Interview Summary (attach additional sheets, as needed):

Mr. Torosian is a first generation American. His father emigrated from Armenia in 1913. His mother was a refugee; she emigrated sometime after the genocide of the Armenians in 1915. Mr. Torosian was born in Lincoln Place and describes growing up there as the most wonderful childhood anyone could have. He lived there for the first twenty-nine years of his life, excluding the time he was in the service. Mr. Torosian indicated that the community center played a major part in his life as a child. He states that from the age of eight or nine, he was there almost every night. He stated that the Community Center was the envy of the surrounding area. The combination of caring people, citizenship classes, sewing classes and a beautiful basketball gymnasium made the center a wonderful place. Additionally, the fact that it was paid for by Mr. Howard and constructed with local labor, provided employment for many families in Lincoln Place during the depression. Mr. Torosian described the mix of different ethnic groups as educational. Lincoln Place provided the structure for education about many different cultures. Everyone learned from each other. The sense of community was very evident in Lincoln Place. Mr. Torosian and I also discussed the Armenian Genocide and issues surrounding its lack of acknowledgement and publicity. He graciously states that genocide was the responsibility of the regime in charge at the time, and not all Turks.

Note any special circumstances involving the interview:

Biographical Profile

Mr. Michael Malcolm Torosian

Life is often described as a journey. Classically imbedded within this point of view is the concept that the destination isn't nearly as important or significant as the experiences one has during the trip. For most individuals their journey actually begins prior to their participation in it. Remembrances of family heritage, life stories, and traditions play an important role in the development of who we are. The journey we will now experience involves the life of Michael Malcolm Torosian.

Our journey begins with Mr. Torosian's grandfather. Grandfather Torosian emigrated from Enoch Armenia, a small village near what is now Ezerum Turkey, to the United States in the late 1800s. At that time in history, there was considerable conflict between the "Young Turks" and ethnic Armenians. Mr. Torosian related that his grandfather must have gotten into trouble or something and as a result came to the United States and settled in East St. Louis, Illinois. In 1913, at the request of grandfather Torosian, his son (Michael's father) and a cousin also immigrated to the United States. Later on in life, Mr. Torosian asked his father how he got to the port to leave Turkey. His father simply stated, "You walked." This feat is an impressive journey within itself if one considers not only the distance in excess of 200 kilometers from Enoch to Trebizond, but also the social unrest of the times.

Mr. Torosian's mother was less fortunate in her journey to the United States. She became a refugee during the genocide of the Armenians. One day the door to their home was opened and they were simply told to leave. During their removal she saw her brother stabbed to

death by a guy that was Kurdish. Mr. Torosian's mother related to him that things of that nature were common. They, those in charge of the relocation, just had a field day; they took their money and whatever. After spending four years in Aleppo Syria, she was able to return to Istanbul. A short time later she immigrated to the United States. Character and graciousness can be seen in Mr. Torosian through his comments that it wasn't all Turks, just the regime in power at the time. While Mr. Torosian reports that his fathers immigration processing was very rapid, his mother's was a complicated ordeal. Her ship was initially quarantined at New York and sent back to Pyreus Greece. After two weeks there, in quarantine, they returned to the United States and processed through Providence, Road Island. Mr. Torosian's parents were married in the 1920s and settled in Lincoln Place Granite City, Illinois.

Michael Malcolm Torosian was born October 22, 1934 at 1725 Poplar Street in Lincoln Place. He relates that growing up in Lincoln Place was the most wonderful childhood anyone could want. He states they were first generation immigrants and were very proud and very thankful to have the opportunity to have a better life for themselves and their children. When he was eight or nine years of age, the community center began to play an important part in his life. He was there nearly everyday. The community center was a place where skills in language, crafts and sports could be gained and refined. He states that it was staffed by very caring people. He stated that their idols were the 1940 Illinois State Champion Basketball team. Most of the members were from Lincoln Place. Throughout junior high and high school years, Mr. Torosian remembers the positive impact of growing up in a diverse neighborhood. A neighborhood where a variety of different cultures, values, and ideas could be experienced formed a basis for a solid education.

During his thirty-four year career at Union Electric he states that his exposure to a variety of cultures served him well. Mr. Torosian is extremely proud of his Armenian heritage and is a devout Christian. The fact that Armenia was first to adopt Christianity as a national religion, about three hundred A.D. expands his journey through life with 1700 years of tradition. Mr. Torosian's journey continues through his involvement with Church, travel to Armenia, association with Armenian heritage associations, and the continuation of traditions and history passed down from generation to generation.