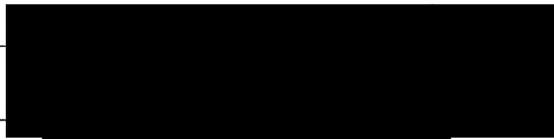


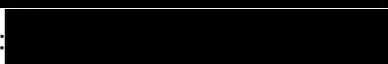
Interviewer: Norma V. Asadorian

INTERVIEW AND TAPE SUMMARY

Name: Mary (Mariam) Kambarian Asadorian

Date and Place of Birth: August 16, 1924, Granite City, Illinois

Address: 

Telephone Number: 

Interview Date, Time, and Place:

October 27, 2001  


Interview Summary (attach additional sheets, as needed):

Mary Kambarian was born and raised in Lincoln Place. She was very informative, providing much information about the people and cultures in Lincoln Place during the late thirties, forties and fifties. Her interview provided much information on many topics, including foods, local businesses, the role of the Community Center and the role of the Armenian Orthodox Church in the Armenian community. Some of the history related family geneological history and told about where her ancestors came from. Customs related to the Armenian extended family were interestingly presented. A great deal of the interview explained relations with the soldiers at the Army Depot and experiences at the tavern where she worked. The Americanization of the immigrants and their love of the United States was an important theme that consistently was apparent throughout the interview.

Note any special circumstances involving the interview:

Interviewee needed to stop several times for a break, so the tape was stopped and restarted. Phone interruption also necessitated stopping and starting tape.

Lincoln Place Oral History Project  
Dept. of Historical Studies, Southern Illinois University Edwardsville

Biographical Information and Family History

Current Information

Full Name: Asadorian Mary Kambarian  
Last First Middle

Maiden Name: Kambarian

Current Address: [REDACTED]

Telephone Number: (home) [REDACTED] (work) n/a

Best time/way to reach: at home any time

Family History

Years/dates lived in Lincoln Place: 1924 - 1947

Address(es) in Lincoln Place: [REDACTED]

Date and Place of Birth: Aug. 16, 1924 in Granite City

Current Marital Status: (actually, at home in Lincoln Pl.)  
single [ ] married  divorced [ ] widowed [ ]

Spouse's name and place of birth: Edward S. Asadorian  
born in Granite City, Ill.

Mother's name and place of birth (if known): Hermine Kambarian  
born in Istanbul, Turkey

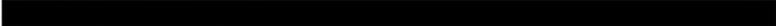
Father's name and place of birth (if known): Abraham Kambarian  
born in Keghi, Armenia

Children's names: Edward Gregory Asadorian,  
Arthur Andrew Asadorian, Melanie  
Asadorian Keeney.

BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY  
OF  
MARY KAMBARIAN ASADORIAN

Based on an Oral History Interview  
Conducted by  
Norma Vee Throne Evans Asadorian

Interview Conducted on October 27, 2001  
at  
Home of Mary Kambarian Asadorian



Submitted as Part of the Lincoln Place Oral History Project

The Lincoln Place Oral History Project is a focused endeavor to interview individuals who lived in the Lincoln Place ethnic neighborhood of Granite City, Illinois. This little enclave circumscribed only a few blocks of the city, but the large number of immigrants that settled here enriched the area with the diversity of their cultures and the vitality of their enterprise. Among the ethnic cultures to be found in the Lincoln Place neighborhood was a large community of Armenians from villages and cities in the Caucasus Mountains region.

In ancient times, the kingdom of Greater Armenia extended its dominion well into the heart of the Anatolian Plateau in the west, to the Caspian Sea in the east, to the northern fringes of the Mesopotamian kingdoms to the south, and to the legendary land of Colchis in the north. During the Middle Ages, the Armenian Kingdom fell under the domination of the Ottoman Empire where the fortunes of the Armenians rose and fell upon the whimsy of the Islamic sultans. During the late 1800s and in 1915 during World War I a series of successive genocidal actions against the Christian Armenians by the Islamic Ottomans resulted in the savage extermination of millions of innocent Armenians and the migration of millions more to countries in the Middle East, Europe, and the Western Hemisphere.

Coincident with the violence by the Turks against the Armenians, Mary Kambarian Asadorian's paternal grandfather, Zadoor, immigrated to West Virginia in 1903, and then in

1905 moved to Granite City, Illinois, presumably because of the industrial work available for unskilled immigrant labor. According to her account, he was smuggled out of Turkey by the Armenian underground because he had killed a Turk.

In February, 1921, shortly after Mary's parents, Abraham and Hermina, had welcomed their first son, Jerair (Anglicized to Jerry Kambarian), Mary's paternal grandmother, Shoghig, immigrated to the United States. Mary's parents and their young son followed the elder Kambarians to Granite City, Illinois not long thereafter. There they settled into the ethnic neighborhood which became known as Lincoln Place.

The Kambarian family grew once they were settled into life in the Lincoln Place community. Mary's brother, Virgil, was born on July 22, 1923. A sister who died in infancy was born between the two brothers, although Mary knew virtually nothing about her other than that she had died. Following Virgil's birth, the Kambarians rejoiced at the birth of a baby girl on December 12, 1925, whom they named Shakeh, which was Anglicized to Charlotte. The last child, Mary, was born on August 16, 1924.

Mary describes her life in Lincoln Place as the best time in her life. She says that she loved the diversity of the cultures there and the friendliness of the little community. Although her family was not wealthy, they did not suffer for want, even during the Great Depression of the 1930s. Most of the memories that Mary related in her

interview centered on the warmth and friendship of the people with whom she interacted, such as the soldiers who frequented her father's tavern in Lincoln Place and the lifelong friends with whom she enjoyed her childhood. The multicultural milieu of Lincoln Place created in her a character that was outgoing and accepting of diversity in those around her and an appreciation for the rich environment that emerged from the many cultures of the immigrants that settled there. This diversity remained distinct as each spoke his or her ancestral tongue in the home, but blended together on the street and in the school as Americans, speaking English and practicing American ways. Lincoln Place truly was an example of the American melting pot. In Mary's words, "I loved my childhood because we were all one."

The earliest memories of Lincoln Place expressed by Mary included the schooling she received at the Lincoln Place Community Center, or the "Clubhouse," as it is affectionately called by Lincoln Place residents. The one dominant character in shaping the young children of the immigrants was Miss Sophia Prather, a spinster who was hired to teach the children the ways of America. There Mary recalls being taught to sew and to act like a young lady. She played softball at the "Clubhouse" and seems to have had an active and happy childhood.

During the Depression, Mary's family was able to survive thanks to the help of friends. Apparently, this was typical

of the Armenian extended family, as well as the Armenian community, in general. The feeling of family extended beyond mother, father, and children, and included a large number of blood relatives many times removed, in addition to friends who were treated as one of the family. The sense of duty to help other Armenian-Americans was an obligation ingrained in Mary by her family and taught by example. The love and friendship within the cocoon of the Armenian-American community in Lincoln Place provided the nurturing and harmonious environment in which Mary was raised. Her childhood memories as expressed in the interview were demonstrative of those feelings.

Despite the horror of World War II abroad, Mary recounted her life as a young woman during the 1940s as a happy one filled with family and friends, especially those associated with Abie's Tavern, her father's business establishment in Lincoln Place. Financed with small amounts of money collected by her mother from friends and family, Abie's Tavern was the focus of Mary's life during World War II. There she worked as a barmaid and waitress, passing away the years of the middle forties. Many of her fondest memories center on friends and events that occurred there. With the opening of the Army Depot in Lincoln Place during the war, countless soldiers passed through the doors of Abie's Tavern where they were treated as brothers and sons by the family-oriented owners. In the forties, Mary's days were

filled with work in the tavern, while nights were spent with friends dancing in the popular nightclubs in the local area. Hers was a relatively carefree and insulated existence in the bosom of the Lincoln Place neighborhood.

At the conclusion of World War II when so many young men were returning to their hometowns and marrying, Mary, too, was courted by the man who would become her husband, Edward Asadorian. It was at this point that she moved out of Lincoln Place to the part of Granite City that those who lived in Lincoln Place called "uptown." It was really downtown Granite City, but to those who lived in Lincoln Place, it was over the tracks and uptown. Mary's life shifted to Grand Avenue where she lived in a large Victorian style home with her husband's extended family. In 1948 she gave birth to her first child, a son, Edward Gregory Asadorian, who was born on December 8, 1948. In subsequent years, she gave birth to another son, Arthur, named after a close friend, and a daughter, Melanie Rose. On Grand Avenue Mary's life paralleled the typical 1950s housewife: getting the children and husband off to school and work, visiting with friends over coffee, watching soap operas, doing housework, and going to church. Her life continued to be focused on her extended family and the Armenian community.

Today Mary still lives in Granite City, but only infrequently goes to the Lincoln Place neighborhood where so many of her fond memories are rooted. She now resides in a

comfortable middle class suburb near the Granite City High School and shopping centers. She remains firmly ensconced in the small Armenian-American community in Granite City. Like her, many of the former Lincoln Place Armenians have moved to more affluent areas of town. Yet their ties and life-long friendships abide. Mary's social activities are primarily linked to her local Armenian Orthodox church, which she attends every Sunday. Occasionally, she takes a night out with friends and goes to bingo at the Armenian Hall or plays pinochle with friends she has known for seventy years. But for Mary the joys of her life still center around her extended family, which today consists of three children, their spouses and their children. The love of family and closeness of friends that were the happiest memories of her childhood are the enduring qualities that have shaped her life.