Interview with HARRY SUSKIND
By M. Friedrich
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Tape 1
Side 1
Interview 1

A. . . . on the board of the Bayden Street Settlement . . .
Q. Oh!
A. . . . and they had a meeting of the personnel committee, and I'm on that. It was the kind of thing you couldn't rush.
Q. Yes sir. Well, I'll just start . . .
A. As a start off, I'll . . . as I understood the letter, it was from 1925.
Q. Yes sir. To the present.
A. To the present. You've just come from the meeting . . . Yeah, a fifty-year period. Why did they . . . ?
Q. Why 1925?
A. Yeah. Why . . .
Q. (Unintelligible) Rabbi Rosenberg's book that more or less is an adequate document of some problems that stops at 1925.
A. Well, actually, you know, the most interesting part of the history of the Jews in Rochester was before 1925.
Q. Yes sir. I've read the book. It is a fascinating story of the two different communities.
A. You see, 1925 . . . you know, the area taken up by the bulk of the Jewish population was rather limited in its scope. And they started disappearing from that area, a lot of it about 1925. Not too long after World War I.
Q. Oh, I thought it was much later that the Joseph Avenue . . . as a . . .
A. No, not the residential part of it.
Q. No? The business . . .
A. The business part came much later. In fact, about . . . it was disintegrated
A. (Continued) all together at that time of the riots. In 1964.

Q. A lot of people have said that there were elements of anti-semitism in the riots themselves. I don't know, is that correct or . . . ?

A. Yes, I think that the . . . that's where the promoters of the riots . . . a lot of them had something on, you know? The colored people who were the instruments of the rioting, I don't think that they were so positively anti-semitic. There were a lot of them realized that the Jewish people were very much concerned with the colored problem, and did a great deal toward . . . toward alleviating, I mean, trying to. During 19 . . . oh, what would be the date? (Unintelligible) the director of the Bayden Street Settlement when he first came after Mrs. Jardone resigned. It must have been . . . what date did the . . . of the World War II? Nineteen . . .

Q. The United States 1941 to '45.

A. Around there. In that period. Of course, anti-semitism was quite an active problem at that time because the Hitler regime, you know, the Germans who sided to a great extent with the Nazi Germany. But the colored probably were contaminated with that probably. But actually, I never . . . they simply accepted the Jews as part and partial of the thing that they were revolting against. But it wasn't the primary thing.

Q. It just happened that they were . . .

A. It just happened. Yeah. And, you know, the idea that all Jews were rich and they were opposed to rich people. That's my opinion. Barry Creaksaw (spelling unknown) came I think . . . well he served in World War II. So, he came after World . . . after the war was over.

Q. In 1946?

A. Probably around then. And at that time, Jewish people had left the ghetto area around Joseph Avenue, Ormand Street, (Unknown) Street. They left. A lot
A. (Continued) of the property had fallen into the hands of the banks by
virtue of the fact that the banks at that time didn't have a compulsion in
their contractor of the mortgages. That they were . . . had to be repaid.
All you did was paid your interest and the property then . . . when the Jews
left it, they just abandoned. Now, a lot of the real estate around that area
was absorbed by . . . the banks who had the mortgages. And why the seventh
and eighth ward in that area was used by the blacks, so that is where . . .
where . . . they settled there. When they started bringing in blacks to the
agricultural area around Rochester, and when wintertime came, they had no
place to go so they come back to the big city. So there was a demand for
rental property. Places where they could live. And by that time, the banks
had taken over a great deal of the property around Joseph Avenue, Ormand Street,
and they started renting to the blacks. That was the beginning of the black
population in that area. And while it is true that . . . you see, the busi-
nessmen stayed on long after that. I mean . . .
Q. There's still some businesses there right now.
A. Not many, but the . . . the bulk of the . . . particularly those that didn't
own any property there, or they were simply renters of stores, they got out
of there quickly. The others by the virtue of the fact that they had real
estate there and wanted to rescue it if they could, stayed on longer. Speaking
from personal experience. We stayed until 1970. That was six . . . six years
after the violence took place.
Q. You mean your . . . your business?
Q. I'm not familiar with what you do.
A. Well, I . . . we had a paint store on Joseph Avenue. Are you related to the
Friedrich's here in Rochester?
Q. No. No I'm not. I'm totally different family entirely.
A. I see. You are from Rochester?

Q. No, I'm from San Francisco.

A. Oh. (Unintelligible)

Q. That's why I ask a lot of silly questions like this.

A. Yeah. I knew the Friedrich's though, the ... quite a building outfit, if I remember Friedrich's. Abe Friedrich and Son. (Unintelligible) a lot of business with him. Of course, they've gone bankrupt not too long ago.

Q. But your business stayed there until just a few years ago?

A. Yeah. Well maybe ... maybe you knew Irving Creeksfeld, if you say you come from San Francisco. He was the Director of the Three Rivers Mission ... Three Mission ... The Three Mission Settlement Houses. Have you heard of them?

Q. I've heard of them, but I don't know anything ...

A. And he was the director. He left Rochester and went to San Francisco. The man ... Huh?

Q. I think I have heard of him, yeah.

A. Now he was a very active man and did a tremendous job of pushing the city forward in the matter of housing. I think he did it in San Francisco, too. Because I was out to San Francisco and he took me out, me and my wife and some other people that were there for lunch, fellows from different areas of ... like the Catholic Church, priests were there, and people that were in downtown in San Francisco in the financial district. Had a mixed group there. They were there for the luncheon that he had. Then they took us on a tour. We were ... where ... where he's identifying the area as potential next slum area in San Francisco. Whether he was right or not, I don't know. I imagine he was.

Q. Well, something similar has happened in San Francisco (unintelligible) the Joseph Avenue. Did you grow up on Joseph Avenue, maybe?
A. Well, I was born in New York, and I was born in New York in 1894. That's a long time. Came to Rochester in 1900. And lived, while we never lived entirely in the area, we were always on the periphery. We lived on Cleveland Street, and we lived on Joseph Avenue but quite a ways down near Clifford Avenue, and we lived on Brad Street. That was always around the periphery of the Joseph Avenue area. Most of the Jews lived in that area, and of course, they came here long before 1925. That's why I say 1925 is actually not the most interesting part.

Q. It may be an arbitrary point.

A. Yeah. And that's the fault I found of the book that ... was it by Rabbi Rosenberg?

Q. Yes.

A. Because he didn't have it in there. He didn't have the ... what I feel is the real substance of the Jewish population in Rochester. Because after 1925, that was after World War I, they started to emigrate away from there. Park Avenue area became important. Irondequoit ...

Q. In the early '30s.

A. Yeah. ... became important. Those were areas of settlement of Jewish people. But once they started to dispersing, all there was at that time was a matter of, I think, about 20,000 Jews that lived in Rochester. I guess that's about ... roughly about the time. And you start dispersing them to Brighton and to Irondequoit, you don't have a very thickly populated area. So, the Jewish people ... kind of being ... separated, they didn't know each other like they used to when they were in the Joseph Avenue area in the ghetto thing. It's very interesting. But, I came to Rochester in 1900, in March, and I remember Joseph Avenue from that period. That was really a very exciting time. Of course, I was only a little kid then when I first came.
A. (Continued) But as I got older and got to understand more, I realized that this was real . . . really beautiful. Because here were people that were coming over . . . every day there were new people coming over from Europe. After all, those that came from Russia, they had a hell of a time of it there. They came over here, and while their economic condition was just as bad in the beginning, at least they had prospects of improving their lives. And they did. I remember that . . . oh, along about nine . . . when I graduated from public school, it must've been 1907, I think . . . 1907, that would have made me . . .

Q. Sixteen or seventeen?

A. About that. No. 1907 . . . no, it was later, because I graduated from public school when I was thirteen years old, and that would . . . thirteen years, that would make it . . . Well, 1907's when I graduated public school, and 1911, high school. I was about a year at East High School, 1911. Oh, I never graduated. What education I got, I got after that. But, you know, kids were a lot more ambitious, and they knew if they didn't make good, they were in real trouble. When the Jews first started coming to Rochester long about the time that we came here, although my father was never a tailor, but a big tailoring industry was here.

Q. Yes sir.

A. And, if a man had any kind of an ability at all, he was . . . he was employed. And there were a lot of sub . . . there were either the big shops, you know, like Michael Sterns' were in business then, Hickey Freeman, and oh I can't remember them all. There were a lot of them. And then what they did, they sublet. They made the employ . . . the important things in their shops like cutting the cloth and getting the suit ready to be made, and then they would deliver it to the . . . to the tailor shops, small shops, sub-contractors, and they would finish whatever they're doing. If they were making coats or vests,
A. (Continued) or pants, they were all in different shops. In small shops. The fact of the matter, one of my boyfriends was, now long dead, his father had a tailor shop on Sullivan Street. It's off of Joseph Avenue. This side of Clifford Avenue ... one street. And, oh, there were some . . . some shops that were so well-known, you know. And Jews have a habit of maybe . . . they find something funny in every . . . in every job. There was one shop on Pryor Street who was . . . which was run by a man who, he was a successful Jew. He had money and a big shop, and it was quite a pumpkin. And, it was interesting. God, the kind of stories that would come out of that shop. The experiences made news all over town, you know?

Q. In the beginning, like in the '20s, the industries (unintelligible) change.

A. Yes. Yes.

Q. As well as the Jewish population itself, I . . .

A. Well, what happened was that just prior to World War I, they started unionizing in Rochester. And then the struggle came on. And when the wages got to a point where they were worse than they were in, you know, worse as far as the owners were concerned . . . another city, they go to another city. And that's why this town was well known for tailoring. I think this was . . . right up there among the leaders.

Q. It was a major . . .

A. And the Jews, more or less, started drifting away from tailoring. Their children started growing up. Boys were . . . girls that were . . . graduating from school. They were coming out of college lawyers, doctors. The old folks couldn't . . . couldn't have their children ashamed of them. So, the first thing they did was start moving to have a new . . . and out Monroe Avenue. It was a strange thing that there were a lot of Jewish builders that developed about that time. And they followed the trend. They started building around
A. (Continued) Park Avenue, Monroe Avenue. I would say that ninety percent of the property that was built up around Park Avenue between East Avenue and Monroe Avenue, I would say . . . there's no way of telling exactly, but it seems to me that all the property was being built by Jewish builders.

Q. I take it there wasn't any prohibitions or restrictions against Jews moving into those neighborhoods?

A. Oh, there was no public restrictions, but there was a lot of . . . well, there was a boycott on the Jews in many areas in Rochester. For instance, Browncroft was an anti . . . they wouldn't rent or sell. Most of the property was sold to Jews. It was a restricted area. The fact of the matter is there was a restricted area at the end of this street called Meadowbrook.

Q. Meadowbrook. Yes, I've heard of that. That was only in the 1950s when . . .

A. That's right. That's right.

Q. Have you been associated with the Bayden Street Settlement for almost . . .

A. Well, practically since World War . . . well, much before World War I, I was . . . I got in there just about in the late '25 . . . the '20s, or the very early '30s. And I've been in it ever since.

Q. You've seen all the changes . . .

A. Huh?

Q. You've seen all the changes . . .

A. Oh, I've seen them all. Yes. Yes. I've seen them all. Because I've been civic minded all my life, and . . . and at first, I was very . . . very concerned about what's happening to the black people in Rochester as they . . . as they emigrated here. And I venture to say that I probably had as much to do with what went on in that relationship between Jew and black. And blacks in relation to his economic life and his social life. So, in that I take a great deal of pride, because I've . . . I thought I recognized the situation
A. (Continued) much earlier than many other people. The fact of the matter is, if you'll notice that we're in the living room. I got a plaque from the University of Rochester for having ..., having contributed a lot toward developing public housing in Rochester. There had been an organization called Rochester Housing Association, Public Housing Association. I'm not sure if I've got the name right. Mrs. Sibley was a member of that ..., that group and a lot of other prominent people, mostly young people, and they had been trying to get Rochester interested in public housing. Rochester is one of the last to put any effort in that direction.

Q. The Hanover Houses are the first thing that come to my mind, and is that the same project?

A. That's what I got the plaque for. I (unintelligible) was at that time the director of the settlement, and I worked very closely with him to get this accomplished. And I'll tell you, if I ..., That would be a story in itself to ..., how that was accomplished. In the first place, the ..., the administrations in Rochester have always been republican, up to that time, it was a republican city. And it was during the time when ..., the administration was at that time ..., well, anyhow, the federal government was getting into it. I ..., I think it was during the time of Franklin Delanore Roosevelt's administration. And they had arranged ..., they had a set-up for granting loans, creating the possibility of public housing development, and we were in this thing right up to our necks. We finally got the counsel, the Rochester City Counsel to agree to build a project, which was very good, but I wished they hadn't. The reason for it is this: Being a republican administration, and shortly after the federal government had come on record for public housing and had provided monies for it, the state did the same thing ..., provided for public housing. But they had ..., they had strings attached
A. (Continued) to their program whereas the federal government was much more broader and less limited. In other words, you could . . . you could build the kind of housing that the area required under the federal program, but you couldn't do that with the state. The state had more rigid restrictions. At that time, the State of New York was democratic.

Q. Governor Harriman?
A. Huh?
Q. Is that with Governor Harriman? No. No.
A. Wait a minute, well, who was it?
Q. But the state was democratic, and Rochester was republican?
A. That's right. I don't remember . . . I think it was Nelson . . . Nelson Rockefeller. When did he first . . . when was his first administration?
Q. I don't know.
A. I think it was Nelson Rockefeller, because he too, passed down as a liberal. That's why some of these laws were passed. And the State of New York was, I think . . . I think it was republican. The state was republican and the city was republican, and the city felt that they would be disloyal to the republican party if they didn't take the loan from . . . from all of them. That was the worst thing that could have happened to public housing in Rochester.
Q. What were the problems?
A. There were no restrictions on the federal money, that is, very limited restrictions. But on the state money, there were rigid restrictions. If I remember correctly, the formula was that a certain . . . depending on the cost of the land acquisition . . . it's a crazy set-up . . . would determine the number of people that had to be accommodated on that site.
Q. So, on the basis of the cost of the land . . .
A. That's right. And this was a very thickly populated area down there in the
A. (Continued) Eighth ward. You know, the people were living in very confined quarters and property was bringing in, at that particular time, a substantial return to the owners. So naturally the land acquisition cost was high. I don't remember exactly what it was, but that's a matter of a record, but it was very high. The result is that we had to put up high-rises for a city that never had it. Never had tall buildings for residents. Here they're letting in a lot of black people who, at that time, had very little experience with elevators, and all that sort of thing. It was a mess. Seven-story building with a lot of little kids in it, is about as sane as . . . It was a crazy house. And that set back Rochester public housing for many years. And it was a disaster.

Q. There's a project right across from Bayden Street.

A. That is Chatam Gardens. There was . . . is a garden type . . . The fact of the matter is that all of the housing that's down there now, and they put a lot of . . . this is through the Model Cities Program, they're all two-story houses, the garden type, and are very well accepted, and are proving successful. But . . . Hanover Houses was a real disaster.

Q. There was an attempt to have them integrated, too, I believe.

A. Yes.

Q. There was a certain quota.

A. In the beginning there were . . . there were a few whites there. And, to a certain extent, the fault lies also with the whites that . . . that didn't want to be related in any way to the blacks. The fact of the matter is that this settlement was originally started by Jewish women. Now that goes back to the early part of the century.

Q. Yes. One of its major purposes was, like, to . . .

A. To make Americans out of foreign . . . foreign people. And most of the people
A. (Continued) that were coming in at that time, were Jews. And they took a lot of these Jewish girls and young boys, and men... young men, and taught them the language. Our educational system hadn't been developed as greatly as it is now. Talk about the early part of the century.

Q. Public schools were the exception almost.
A. Sure. I went to public school... we didn't... we didn't have a gymnasium. We didn't have, well, I stop to see what the kids' get now... what we had, my gosh! There's a tremendous difference. Anyhow, these people came over from Europe, they had to learn how to talk the language, and they had to know how to conduct themselves, getting ready for jobs. But those days are... a man... a man was a tailor or a... they used to have it broken down. Some were pocket-makers, some were pressers, some were lining... put linings in, it was all broken down into to... you know, small... small areas of... And, they talk about putting the thing into the slot, and do that all day long. That's what they doing, see? But they had to learn how to get along in this country.

Q. That was one of the purposes of Bayden Street...
A. Of the settlement. There were some public spirited women, mostly Jewish, although there were a few non-Jews. Mrs. Carson was... Mrs. Garson, Garson... was one of them. They were in the clothing business and there was Mrs. Wild, she's dead a long time. And there's... all the Wilds. All people... most of the people were in the clothing business. They started the settlement and supported it themselves. There were no public funds at that time. There was no Community Chest. There was nothing. It's only people who felt the need, wanted to do something about it, and they did it. Of course, now, the settlement has a... has a budget of well over $600,000.00 a year. And the blacks who are running it have got themselves so well-organized and
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A. (Continued) bureaucratic, it's not the same institution that . . . The purposes and everything else are different. Because here you're trying to make Americans into better Americans. There we were taking . . . taking Russian young people and making them Americans. There's a serious bit of difference there.

Q. Yes. Wasn't there a sort of a dispute about who would be the director, like, this is about maybe ten years ago that . . . ?
A. Who would be the director?

Q. Yes. Like, there should be a black director as opposed to a Jewish director regardless of their . . . ?
A. No, that never came up as an issue. Well, I'll tell you. Those Jews that were involved with settlement work, like myself, who came here before blacks took over, we felt that it shouldn't be based on color. We were hopeful that it would be integrated and there would be whites there, but the whites wouldn't come. And they finally . . . the blacks took over. Practically lock, stock, and barrel. The . . . the staff is black, and the . . . and the director is black. And the only reason I belong, still have stayed on the board and been instrumental in keeping others on that board, and using my influence to see that that board should not go completely black.

Q. Then it would still represent a community . . .
A. That's right. We still hope that we get the Puerto Ricans in, the Spanish speaking people, and that sort of thing.

Q. You mentioned earlier that as the Jewish Community drifted out rapidly from the Joseph Avenue, as a residential area, they became really dispersed.
A. Very few Jews live down in that area now. Maybe a few old timers. People that were too old to move really.

Q. What changes do you recall in communal life or, like, the old JY was there . . .
A. To begin with, as I said, the children started making progress, economically, socially. The old parents still lived in the old areas, but a lot of them died off, and a lot of them felt that their children were ashamed of them living in the slums, and a lot of the children wanted to get them out of it. And it was becoming more and more an unsafe place to live. And they were frightened.

Q. Well, with the dispersion of the whole community, I mean, did the congregations take up in the slack?

A. That was a problem. You know, I don't know how many synagogues there were at the time that we're speaking of when they dispersed, there must have been around Joseph Avenue, Ormand Street, Hanover Street, there must have been twenty-five synagogues. Nearly that. They were endless, you know? There were, I think, in one spot on Hanover Street, I think ... not in one spot, in one small area, there were six synagogues. Well now, some of them have survived and have gotten out into different areas of ... Temple Beth El, which was never down in the slum area.

Q. That was on Park Avenue.

A. It was on Park Avenue, yeah. And that took over, because a lot of Jews had moved over to Park Avenue. That was the new shul, see? And then it burned down some years later, and they built out on Winton Road. And there's a shul that my father belonged to, it was called the Beth Amendrish (spelling?) and that was on Hanover Street. And that was a large, large synagogue. That was a ... not a Reform nor Conservative. That was a real Orthodox shul. The fact of the matter is it was the only synagogue in Rochester that looked like a synagogue. And it was large. Had a large congregation. And it was a really ... a nice place. And there were a lot of small ones all around us, you know. On Hanover Street three or four of them. On Joseph Avenue ...
A. (Continued) But they all finally passed by the board. A lot of them were taken over by Model Cities or paid out some money, and were able to start where they felt they were most needed.

Q. It seems like the whole . . . the whole structure of, like, Jewish education had to change if . . .

A. Yes. Of course, there are . . . when . . . back in the early 1900s, most of the Jews were either Orthodox, but some broke away from Orthodox. They had . . . and started a Temple B'rith Kodesh, which was at that time on Gibb Street. First it started on Front Street.

Q. Which is no longer there.

A. No. Because it was a street running along side the river, and was flooded every year. At . . . then they went to Gibb Street and that was the only synagogue, Reformed synagogue. Then afterwards the breakdown was a little bit more refined. They've got Conservative, who don't believe in some things but do believe in other things. Of course, there's still the Orthodox, which I think has taken a beating. There aren't that many people who are Orthodox and even those that are Orthodox, are no longer actually Orthodox. They've made concessions and such.

Q. It's been like a general statement that both Reformed and Conservative groups are drifting closer together. Do you think that's . . . ?

A. That is true. At the present time, that is true. But that's why I don't go to either one. (Laughter) I don't want to get mixed up.

Q. When your family came here, your father was associated with an Orthodox congregation?

A. My father actually was a liberal . . . he was very liberal. After some years, my mother convinced my father that he was doing the wrong thing, because he wanted . . . well, probably economic conditions were better. The . . . the
A. (Continued) Orthodox are really the real poorest Jews of all.
Q. And those were the (unintelligible) Eastern European experience that stayed in them . . . ?
A. Yeah. Polish and Lithuanian. My father was a Lithuanian.
Q. I remember speaking with your wife, she said that she came from Batavia.
A. Well, she was born . . . she was born in Philadelphia, and then when she was very young, they went to live in Batavia. And then they moved to Rochester.
Q. And you both have lived here, more or less permanently, since . . . since you were married?
A. My family?
Q. Yes.
A. Oh, my family lived in the . . . they never moved away from the periphery of the ghetto area. They lived on Grant Street, but both my father and mother died while they were still living there. That was 1937 and 1940. My father died first.
Q. And you moved here?
A. Well, I was married long before. They lived on Grant Street. I was married . . . I was married in nineteen hundred and seventeen. And they were still living on . . . they were living off of Joseph Avenue, Wilkins Street I think it was. Then they moved to Grant Street.
Q. I think I remember seeing that street.
A. But I never lived with them on Grant Street.
Q. Yes, I think your wife mentioned that you moved here about twenty years ago?
A. In this place?
Q. Yes.
A. I guess it's all of that. But we lived . . . we lived in other places since we lived on the periphery. Actually, the first house we lived in was during
A. (Continued) the flu epidemic. We lived on Norton Street. From Norton Street we went to Harris Street. From Harris Street we moved to the tenth ward. We lived on Range Park. Then we lived on Riverside Street. You know, it was a long period of time. On Riverside Street, we lived in two different houses on Riverside Street. And from Riverside Street we moved to an apartment house off of South Avenue, up there where the hospital is. I don't know if you know where it is.

Q. Near Hyland Hospital?

A. Yeah. And from there . . . No, I skipped one place. From Riverside Street we moved to East Avenue. I had . . . I had an apartment house there. And my wife didn't like it there, so we sold that, and then we moved to an apartment on South Avenue, and then from South Avenue we moved here. So we never really lived in the slum area at any time. And that's what I mean when I say they were all spreading out.

Q. Yes. Just like you moving . . .

A. That's right. And the straight and flat about it is that it didn't take too long a period of time. We're only talking about a period, and that's why I say the most interesting part of the Jewish history in Rochester, I think took place between 1900 and 1925.

Q. That's with the immigrants and the . . .

A. And interestingly enough, there was a . . . first . . . first the Jews came to Rochester. They were the bulk of the immigrants. No, well, first were the German -Jews. They started these clothing factories, mostly. Then came the influx of Jews from Russia, Poland, and they were . . . they were the Jews that became the employees of the rich German-Jews, you see. Once they started spreading out, the Italians took over. Because there are a lot of Italian tailors and there was a period of that. And then the Italians went through
A. (Continued) the same process. You look around, you got more Italian lawyers and ... They took over and the same thing happened. There are very few Italian tailors now. Then they became ... there were some Poles that got into tailoring, but not too many. And now I guess there are a lot of blacks that are into the tailoring industry. There may be some Italians yet, I think there are. But actually the real ... the real economic changes were made during the Italian ... You see, it was hard for a Jew to buck another Jew. The other Jew was the boss. But the Italians came in at the time of a different relationship. And they were perhaps a little more dynamic. They caused ... they allowed the Amalgamated Clothing Workers started with a Jewish backup, but I think the Italians really made it a real functional operation.

Q. Because they were in opposition to the management on ... they were entirely different on all levels.

A. Well, if I covered very much for you, I don't know.

Q. Yes. Yes you have, and I ...

A. Have I told you anything that you didn't already know?

Q. Well, it was particularly interesting about the changes in Bayden Street. You know, how it was originally ... let me just stop this or turn it over now.
Q. . . . to that period at all. I've forgotten the date of today.
A. Huh?
Q. I forgotten the date of today.
A. Today's date is the 4th, I think is . . . or 5th. Maybe the 5th.
Q. Yes.
A. I got the . . . this is the New York Times of August the 2nd. Now August the second was Monday. Today's Thursday.
Q. Thursday.
A. Fifth.
Q. Fifth. Right. Today is August 5th, I'm interviewing Harry Suskind in his home. Now you mentioned about that . . . that you really can't understand 1925 without . . .
A. Without going back.
Q. Yes.
A. And the interesting part, of course, I think was all . . . all was prior to 1925. I think 1925 was after World War '1, and that people had started to disperse from the ghetto area. They were starting to . . . in other words, there was maybe one or two generations gap. And when they first started coming to Rochester, until 1925, at least two generations. By that time, some of the children had . . . had better educations, they were already lawyers and doctors that were Jewish. And gradually, the older people were being . . . by virtue of the fact that the children were moving, the older people moved to from the area down around Joseph Avenue. So by that time, it was as a center point for Jewish . . . Jewish operations had pretty much passed. There were some busi-
A. (Continued) ness . . . Jewish business out places operating around . . . in the ghetto area, but they depended to a great extent on Jewish business that came from around Park Avenue, and down Irondequoit, and East Avenue, Monroe Avenue. And, in fact, by the late '20s, I think, some of the Joseph Avenue business had started to . . . go over to the Monroe Avenue section, Park Avenue section.

Q. Already by the late '20s.

A. Yeah. Yeah. Although Joseph Avenue was a business street up until . . . and did well, although at a lesser and lesser scale, until the rioting of 1964.

Q. And that's definitely a point that . . . that everything changed rapidly?

A. Oh, then . . . then there was no . . . it was done. Across the room kind, you know, it's over with.

Q. Yes. Yes sir. You mentioned that you were associated with the Workmens' Circle.

A. Not me. My father.

Q. Your father?

A. My father. I never belonged to Workmens' Circle. And, my father was a member. I think he was a member until he passed away in 1937.

Q. Given the clothing industry here and the fact that many Jewish tailors were involved in piece work and in the factories and the factory system . . .

A. Yeah. Yeah. And there were a lot of . . .

Q. . . . the union movements . . .

A. . . . sub . . . subcontractors . . . subcontractors were all over the seventh and eighth ward. There were lots of them, tailor shops in back of residential property. And then the large shops . . . the large manufacturers would well, one shop would be known for perhaps pants shop, vests shops, and finishing shops. They'd get the rough, you know, the coats that would . . . all cut. And all
A. (Continued) they had to do was sew them together actually. They were sort of a finishing operation. But they were scattered all over the area.

Q. When the union movement, the Amalgamated Clothing Workers' ... 
A. Yeah. Then there was ... they couldn't stand up to that situation. The fact of the matter, Yumen ... 

Q. Is this Sol Yumen?
A. Not Sol Yumen. Keller, Yumen and Thompson formed a company. They were all originally smaller factories doing a part of the work. I don't know ... I don't remember now what ... Keller, his name was Keller. One of the partners, it wasn't Sol Yumen, either Thompson or Keller. When the strike was on, a girl was shot ... let's see what street that was again ... Actually it was a little bit outside of the Jewish area. I knew her street was down near the Joseph ... near North Street. She was shot during a demonstration, you know. And, of course, then the smaller shops all folded. And the work was pretty well done in all the factories like Michael Stern's and Hicky Freeman, Atler Brothers; there were a number of well-known clothing manufacturers that operated in Rochester. But the small shop ... the subcontractors, that was ... that was when they started to decline and disappearing from the scene.

Q. With the union movement?
A. (Affirmative response) Because you see, they ... well, let's face it, undoubtedly when there was no union, these shops were more or less sweat shop operations, and paid low salaries, low wages, lower than the bigger shops dared even do. And then the bosses used to work, and there was no such thing as an eight to five operation. I knew one family by the name of Cohen that had a ... one of those sub-shops on Sullivan Street and I knew Mr. Cohen himself. And I know this personally because I used to hang around with one of his sons, Moe Cohen. And there was another one, Archie. And, there was no such thing ... they'd
A. (Continued) take off Saturday, but Sunday mornings you'd find them in the shop, you know, working until whatever hours they felt they wanted to work. The help didn't come in most of the time, but . . . but most of the time they did, because a lot of them, you see, were religious Jews. They didn't want to work on Saturday. The large shops couldn't conform to that. So this is also a factor in determining this subcontracting. But as time went on and the small shops folded, they assumed regular hours. The big shops always had it, had regular hours, but they were controlled more or less now by unions. The union won their strike.

Q. Were the Jewish workers involved heavily with the union?
A. Oh, yeah, sure. It was led by the Jewish people like . . . well, there was Sydney Hillman from New York. Came down here and he was . . . stayed a long time. And Abe Chapman who's still at the head of Amalgamated. There was one of those. And he had a lot of sub-lieutenants, you know, that were . . . I knew a lot . . . knew a lot of them. Though many of them are dead now and gone. Abe Chapman is still alive, though, I understand.

Q. Did the Jewish Community as a whole support one political party in the city more than another? Like in many cities . . . New York City they were the backbone of the democratic party.
A. I think pretty much it was the same here. But strangely enough, as they grew in economic stature and became Americanized . . . the children became better educated in English . . . A lot of these people that came over were well-educated people. Not . . . not in what we know it, education. And . . .

Q. It's just that Rochester hasn't had too many democratic . . .
A. Well, Rochester . . .

Q. Administrations except, like, in the depression.
A. Well, strangely enough, there was a Mr. Messinger.
Q. The name doesn't ring a bell.
A. It doesn't? He was the only socialist . . . only socialist . . . now what was he, a supervisor? Or an alderman? I'm not sure. But he was either a county or a city . . . a local elected official of the socialist party.

Q. Here in Rochester?
A. In Rochester, yeah. Yeah. Most of the Jews were either socialists, and as they gained in stature, became republican.

Q. I know . . . that's . . . the next generation.
A. Evolution. That's a fact. Yeah. Mr. Messinger was elected, he's either an alderman or a . . . what was it council . . . Those days it was supervisor, which was county, and alderman, the city, you know, ward. Ward set up. I'm inclined to think it was a ward. Then he must've been an alderman. I'm not sure. And then, of course, he became a successful businessman and ran a paper company out on State Street or Water Street. I know State Street was the last where they were. Before that, I don't remember. But anyhow, he was a socialist alderman. As he became richer, he no longer was active in politics.

Q. After that one term as alderman?
A. I think he was more than one term, I believe it was two terms. But . . . and strangely enough, the Russian Revolution turned the lot of these people off as far as socialism was concerned.

Q. This is in 1917?
A. From that point on. I knew, I had a friend who was a business acquaintance. His name was Abraham Schulman, and he belonged to the inteligencia (spelling?) that come over from Russia. He was personally, he personally knew some of the leading people in the Russia Revolution. I don't remember their names, but he . . . he's coming to see me sometime and he speels off these Russian notables who were in the Revolution. And then when the Revolution took place, I think
A. (Continued) most of them must have belonged to a menchurik (spelling?) party. Most of them were liquidated. And he was so angry. He said to take a man like . . . and then he'd mention a name. And kill him, for what? A beautiful personality. So they turned against the Russian Revolution. Fact of the matter, you can't find Jews that are in favor of the Russian Revolution for that reason. Because they had a knowledge of all these people that were liquidated and were hurt, and they threw up their hands in disgust.

Q. Even Trotsky (spelling?) himself.

A. That's right. That's right. And I think that Trotsky was one of the men that this Mr. Schulman knew. So they'd have no part of the Russian Revolution.

Q. Did they continue with their socialist . . .?

A. Yes. Just about . . . Yes. Some of them did, not all of them. This was a gradual process, and what . . . what liquidated the whole socialist party as far as Jews are concerned, was the advent of Hitler.

Q. And the position of the Soviet Union . . .

A. Yeah. Bear in mind that Germany was the most socialist country . . . socialist country in the world prior to World War I even.

Q. That was the largest . . . one of the largest parties and afterwards they were the government.

A. That's right. That's right. And then the Wymar (spelling?) republic, I think, was mainly made up of socialists. And this is what Hitler liquidated. So that was the finish of Jewish intensive liberalism, I think, in America. Although in New York it still is, but has taken a different turn. Like your . . . take woman like Bella Abzug, see?

Q. I was just reading about her.

A. She's a liberal. But she's . . . her background must have been the same kind of background that I'm talking about. And my own experience was not quite like
A. (Continued) that. My father was not a liberal. Stangely enough, my father was oh . . . was a working man. Didn't give it much thought. And when it came right down to it when I'd have arguments with him, he was not a liberal in the true sense of the word.

Q. What . . . politically?

A. Politically. I'm talking about politically. Oh, he was, otherwise, he was too liberal. I mean he was a very good man. I think.

Q. Were you, yourself, active in politics here in Rochester?

A. Never active in politics.

Q. But your father was associated with the working . . .

A. Only through the Workmen's Circle. And the Workmen's Circle, I think most of them were socialists.

Q. Before when you mentioned, like, when Emma Goldman . . .

A. Huh?

Q. Emma Goldman's experience here in Rochester.

A. Yeah, well she also is a product of the same . . . You know, a lot of them who for years couldn't talk in Europe, all of a sudden they come to America and the free speech was beautiful. And they really talked. They were, I don't know if they philosophically understood the principals of marxism or that sort of thing. Maybe not.

Q. But they used the same, some of the same terms.

A. They were . . . what they were rebelling against is economic conditions that were almost inhuman. My mother came to this country, it must have been about 1890, I don't know the exact date . . . or 1889. When she came to this country, she was a young girl, young woman. My mother told me that when she was in Russia, when she was a little girl so small that when they took her to the factory, they had to lift her up on the table. And in her town where she lived,
A. (Continued) there was a tobacco factory. And they took all of the labor that they could get, but they really got it for nothing. And she tells me, she was three years old. Now maybe she was a year older, I don't know. I mean that seems awfully young. But they had to lift her up and she... they set her on the table and she was cleaning tobacco. Well, coming away from that kind of a situation, you could understand the despair they had in the old country.

Q. Yes.

A. And they got here and there was freedom of speech, and they were still poor here. They didn't come to this country and find the streets lined with gold, you know? Had to work. And they still had sweat shops in New York at that time.

Q. Yes.

A. And... so, they were trying to better their conditions. And if they could talk, they talked. And they did things.

Q. When you came to Rochester was there really distinct division between the German-Jewish and the Russian-Jewish Community?

A. We came to Rochester quite early. Although there were a lot of Russian-Jews in Rochester. We came... my parents came here from New York in 1900. March. And, I didn't know any German-Jews. And strangely enough, we never lived really in the heart of the ghetto. The first home that I had, we lived on Putnam Street, then we moved from Putnam Street to Hudson Avenue. And from Hudson Avenue to Thomas Street, all of which was on the fringe of. And all my parents knew, I was only a youngster, I was only six years old, there were Russian-Jews. Families, not a very large family in Rochester. And we soon got acquainted with the people at the... went to the synagogue with. People they got to know... introduced one way or another. And all of them... the German-Jews were the ones that isolated themselves actually.
Q. They put up their own barriers . . .
A. Yeah, well, they were rich people. They made a lot of money, they had been here for a long time. And, the Russian-Jews had a rough time of it.
Q. They were the people who were working in the backyard sweat shops.
A. That's right. That's right. And it was the German-Jews that . . . that were the ones that hired them, you know?
Q. Yes.
A. And there could never could be any peace between the employer and employee, especially in times like that. The trick was to get them to work for as little as you could get them to work for. Keep the body and soul together.
Q. Like, I believe in that one study by Rabbi Rosenberg sort of just ends and says, well, two communities became one. He stresses . . . Philip Bernstein's activities as being the major factor.
A. Well, of course, since then there's been a break-away from the portion of the B'rith Kodesh congregation has broken away and have gone to that other temple off of Penfield Road there.
Q. I've seen it more than once, and I'm conscious of it, but I don't know anything about it.
A. Well, their . . . they were radical in the way that the . . . they wanted the Reformed temple to be Reformed as it was. In other words, the Reformed temple as it was . . . when I first joined it, the question of wearing a yarmulke as a hat, was frowned upon.
Q. Yes.
A. In other words, they tried to make their religion as modern as they possible could, and leave all of the old superstition and everything else out of it. And Philip Bernstein, because of his desire, as I interpreted it, his desire to have the Jewish population more solid, more solidified as a unit. He tried
A. (Continued) to do some compromising in the matter of ritual and that sort of thing. In other words, he brought the old Reformed movement closer into the Conservative movement. And in that way, Beth El talked to B'rith Kodesh members. You know? I remember one time when I was first . . . when I first joined B'rith Kodesh, and a religious Jew came into my place of business and he says to me he says, which temple do you belong, which synagogue do you belong to? I said B'rith Kodesh. He says, they're not Jews. (Unintelligible) He says, they're not Jews. And now, of course, the ultra-Conservative have moved up, because they realized that . . . in this day and age with automobiles and all of the other things that go on in modern life, they couldn't pay strict attention to old, rigid Orthodox rules. For instance, what is a woman gonna do if she's got a refrigerator? She's gonna have two of them, one for meat and one for milk? See? Dishwashers?

Q. That's right.

A. Now the Jewish population is spread all over the county. And they come to the temple. If they attempted to come by walking, they'd never get there. They'd spend their whole life walking. So, they had to have parking lots and the necessary equipment to handle it. So they compromised. There was a lot of compromising going on. Of course, from where I stand, it doesn't matter. I mean, these things are all things that had to be done by the old timers. It was a way out for them, so they adopted certain things that made it hard to accommodate modern life.

Q. Do you think that the religious community here in Rochester has moved more towards the Conservative position from Reformed or Orthodox, or are they still three separate groups?

A. Well, there was a time when the Reformed . . . this all goes back to the old picture that I tried to convey before; the Reformed were the rich Jews. Here
A. (Continued) no longer true. No longer is that true. As they... you can't make a statement like that. I suppose there are some rich Reformed Jews and there are some poor Conservative Jews, but in the main, I think it's the Conservative who are the wealthier more affluent Jews. Beth El has a very wealthy popu... congregation. Now B'rilth Kodesh has a congregation which is not so affluent. A lot of the people there are just working people. But they do have a lot of professionals in both congregations. But I think that Beth El has a richer congregation... this is only an observation. I never studied the matter. And of course, what's been eliminated... you know, there was a time there when down... down in the poorer section of town... We never really had a slum down there. It was just a poor neighborhood, but it was never "slummy". But we had so many churches, as I stated to you before, not churches but synagogues on... in that particular part of the city, that it really couldn't be supported but it was. I don't know how that happened. It must have been... on Hanover Street, let's see there was one, two, three, four, five, six... I think there were seven synagogues at one time on Hanover Street. If I counted right. Oh, there were so many things happened. I remember there was in Rochester the Young People Socialist League. And it was quite well supported by young Jewish people. I belonged to the Young People's Socialist League when I was a kid. This happened before World War I. But World War I pretty well destroyed the socialist movement, and destroyed the Young People's Socialist League. We used... we used to... we went along with the Germans when they built the... what do they call that building there on St. Paul Street? It's right near Bausch & Lomb Plaza on the other side of the street. Roe? Rose? What was the name of the German building there on St. Paul Street where we used to meet as youngsters?

Rose: You shouldn't have asked because now I don't... now I'll never think of it.
Interview with Harry Suskind

A. (Continued) Labor Liseum (spelling?) Labor Liseum.

Q. Oh, yes. Oh, yes. I've heard of it.

A. Yeah.

Rose: I thought you meant the gymnastic place on Clinton Avenue. The gymnastic . . .

Q. No. I said St. Paul Street.

Rose: Oh.

A. Labor Liseum. The young . . . there were many Jewish youngsters that belonged to the socialist . . . The Young People Socialist League. A bunch of fine kids. All intellectuals. That is . . . I don't mean education wise, I mean what they . . . they were thinkers. And, we had the Young People Socialist League there. And many of the bright, young kids belonged to that, who later became lawyers, and doctors, and what have you. But when World War I came along, picture this: Labor Liseum was a building that was put up primarily by the German workers in Rochester. You know, all these young Jewish kids used to meet there. They were very close friends with these Germans. Then we went to war against Germany. And there was a cleavage there. The Germans remained with their building, the Labor Liseum, they still have it. And, most of the membership, the young Jewish membership particularly dissolved . . . disappeared. That was the time of Eugene V. Debs.

Q. Yes.

A. Fact of the matter, my wife has a picture with Eugene V. Debs and his brother that she took right here in Rochester. And we belonged to the Labor Liseum. And that had a big influence on the City of Rochester.

Q. How so? I never even heard of that. I mean, I have heard, but nothing in detail.

A. Well, it's hard to remember because you go from day to day developments. But from actively participating politically. That is, this is political economic
A. (Continued) action. Oh yes, this brings up a new point that I have to tell you which I will after I develop this thing. They turned to other things. Most of them were good people. They part in many progressive things for the city. You know, they were active in . . . well, when the Community Chest came along you saw them all working there. All that sort of thing. What was the thought I had? Now that I've broken it up, I don't remember it any more.

Q. Something to do with the effect of people who were associated with the young socialists in Rochester?

A. Yeah. But . . .

Q. Rochester politics?

A. Yeah. Yeah. They were pretty involved in the politics . . . the political end of it. Oh, yes! There was a time when there was a strong socialist movement in Rochester.

Q. Yes. I've heard of that.

A. The time when . . . when Messinger became elected on the board of alderman. And you know, this was a reactionary city of . . . one of the greatest reactionary cities of the United States, I think, at one time. They used to have two nights a week . . . they'd have soap box orators at the corner of Front Street and Main. And periodically, somebody would get arrested trying to make a speech at the corner of Water and Main Street. In front, no . . . Water and Main. They felt with a lot of literature, you know . . . you know, this was dynamite. But actually the literature was almost innocuous. Tracks by known socialist writers of those days, who actually, there was nothing revolutionary about it at all. They were asking for things that would take . . . that we accept . . . old age pensions, and . . .

Q. Eight hour days.

A. . . . and the eight hour day, and . . . I wish I had some of those things
A. (Continued) that we used to pass out. Eight hour day, health insurance, all of the things that we practically got now, and politically are being discussed at all times. But those were the things that they were talking about on Water and Main Street. And those were the things that they were arrested for. Weekly.

Q. I know there was some resistance here in Rochester over accepting WPA funds and . . .

A. Well, brought that out when I said . . . Did I talk about the housing?

Q. Yes, we talked a little bit about it.

A. About the . . . Hanover Houses?

Q. Hanover Houses.

A. Yeah. That was one of the things that I talked about, that it was so rigidly republican that when it come to . . . when we finally broke down the barriers and they recognized the fact that we ought to have some public housing, they wouldn't take the money from the federal government because that was against their grain. They took it from Albany. Had they taken it from federal government, we would never have had Hanover Houses, the problem that it created for us. For the simple reason that there, you could've built your houses and built the homes in any way you saw fit. And the federal government would provide the funds. But with the state, it was another matter. The cost of land acquisition determined the number of people that had to be relocated on that . . . on that area. And this demanded a high-rise. Rochester was not ready for that. Now, if we had put on the garden type apartments there, we would have only then had garden type . . . maybe two hundred. Maybe one hundred and fifty in that land. We started off with three hundred and seventy-eight. This is what caused the high-rise. This was the biggest mistake. And without a question, I think, the greatest setback in public housing that Rochester had.
A. (Continued) Rochester started their public housing much too late.

Q. This was right during the depression.

A. We started on public housing when the costs had risen. And . . . this I know. This is a fact of life. We had a lot . . . because I was right there with all the rest of them, working together. And we recognized immediately that this was a terrible . . . a terrible mistake. But there was nothing we could do about it, because that was in the hands of the political machine. And we were so glad to get some kind of public housing that we didn't put up maybe as great a resistance that we could have because we were afraid that the whole thing would fall on its face.

Q. Yes. We know people in opposition to it just completely.

A. That's right.

Q. Do you think that . . .

A. Huh?

Q. . . . the kind of urban renewal or public housing like those public housing projects right next to Bayden Street has been successful? Those are smaller in the inside.

A. In spite of the fact that all of the surroundings were negative, yet when they put up garden types, they're doing very well. I think they're doing well. That is not more than two stories high. With children, anything else is . . . in a city like Rochester where the kids are not familiar with that, and they have no experience with elevators and living upstairs, you know, and that sort of thing. In New York, maybe, they're so accustomed to it, they accept it. But in the City of Rochester you can't . . . you couldn't do it. That was a complete revolution in living style.

Q. Yes, but . . . the urban renewal has so changed Joseph Avenue that it's difficult for me to visual what it was once. I don't know whether urban
Q. (Continued) renewal has been successful since there were blocks of vacant... vacant land right across from the settlement. There's not just one church there, and there's blocks of...

A. Well, it's hard to really determine what caused it. I think inner city has got as much housing as it needs, in my opinion. And, well, I think that maybe we got a lot to learn. I know when I was younger, and I was very active in that sort of thing, in that business, we thought that once you give a person a good home... clean with all modern... that would be the solution to many of our ills. But apparently it isn't. It doesn't do it. Maybe I'm wrong. Maybe there's some factor in there that I don't see. But certainly since we've had this public housing, those people that went to Hanover Houses didn't change their lifestyles enough so that it was any better. But certainly high rises in Rochester was all wrong. I think that every city has to determine for itself what kind of housing people want and are accustomed to to bring out the best living pattern. And Rochester never had many apartment houses especially high rise.

Q. There aren't many that I can think of. And those that are, are very recent in Rochester. Pinnacle... a couple of UCD developments. There's one on South Avenue, and there's one on Clinton. But there aren't very many.

A. Well, before public housing went into effect, there were very, very few high rise apartments even in... of the privately owned apartments. You could almost count them on the fingers of your hand that went over four or five floors high, stories high. There weren't any in Rochester. They had some elevated apartments but that compared to other cities, they weren't high rise.

Q. Was Joseph Avenue composed predominantly, like, two story houses that had been divided...

A. Well, Joseph Avenue originally was a residential street. Houses set back
A. (Continued) maybe about twenty feet from the sidewalk line. And then when these small businessmen came along, what they did was put up little stores in front of their homes, lived in back, and operated their business out of these small places in front. That's how they could do it. They were twenty-four hour a day businessmen. And they got a living that way. Some group. But some remained just as they were. They started off that way and ended that way.

Q. I guess some of them had grown from, you know, back yard scrap dealers to hugh concerns. I'm just thinking about the Creeger Company.

A. Yeah. That's a . . .

Q. I mean, they started as a back yard business.

A. Yeah. There were a lot of them that . . . there's . . . that did beautifully. Then they . . . a lot of them failed. After they got big. As small businessmen they did beautifully, as soon as they got bigger, I don't think they could cope. Either they were in the kind of business that was on the way out, or they themselves were not big enough to handle the big business. For instance, there used to be . . . there used to be a woolen house in Rochester run by Cohen's. They were at the corner of . . . right near the railroad tracks on the corner of Joseph Avenue and the street running parallel there to it. And, had a big place there. They were known internationally. I think they had offices in England. In London. But, for some reason or another . . . They were in clippings and that sort of thing from the big tailor shops, and this was an ideal for it because this was a big clothing center. So, Cohen's were a big outfit. But the old man died, and the sons took over. And little by little they slip, slip, slip, until it died away and there's no longer any business there. And there was the . . . (Unintelligible) Star on the corner of Kelly and Joseph. They used to have ladies wear, all kinds of
A. (Continued) clothing for children, men, women. I can't think of the name now. I remember she was a... she was a daughter of one of the Manascievitz (spelling?) that make matzos in Brooklyn. I guess I'm getting very old. Can't think of that store owner. Roe...
Rose: ... on Kelly. Nusbaum!
A. Nusbaum's.
Q. Nusbaum's.
A. The Nusbaum's Store. And that ... they ... he was peddler. He used to go around and sell stuff from the ... he carried or he would sell ... they were smart enough. They used to get orders. What they'd do, they'd make arrangements with different stores in Rochester from which they would get a discount. They then would go around and sell it to all the ... sell the merchandise to, well, they wouldn't sell the merchandise. What they would do was, they had customers. They'd go to the customers and say, well, go into Sibleys and charge it to me. They would get a discount from the store, see? And then, they would collect the money on a weekly basis from the customers.
And that went on. And there was quite a few people who were in that kind of a deal. And, you know, these people were poor. They needed things. This was the first credit merchandise. There were a lot of Jewish people that went into it. But, Nusbaum's used to do their own. He used to sell that way. And then, finally they opened up a store. And then they opened up a larger store. And finally they were a big store. They were a factor in Rochester to be reckoned with because they had a lot of trade besides Jewish trade, Polish, Italian.
Of course, when the street became so bad, they finally fell on their face, too.
Q. Is that the way, like, a store like Neisner's became?
A. No. Neisner's didn't begin that way.
Q. They began as a full-scale store?
A. Yeah. They became ... I think he opened up a few stores, and then finally, they became bigger and bigger. They were very enterprising. No. But, there
A. (Continued) was a family by the name of Samuels. This is an interesting thing. Samuels used to have a little store that they rented from a man by the name of Clonik. This was a store that was below the sidewalk level. You went down the stairs and there was a store. And they used to sell all kinds of things there: dishes, crockery, I imagine some hardware items, and that sort of thing, shelf-paper, toilet paper. You know, all that sort of thing. Who was that run by? That was run by Howard Samuels grandmother. And the boys were going up there. I knew . . . I knew Samuels boys. I knew Howard Samuels' father, Harry Samuels. Lovely people. And, I think Howard was one of the first ones to graduate with a good education. Although the rest of them may have been educated, I don't know. But Howard went and opened up that plastics place down there in Macedon.

Q. Yes. Yes.

A. It was taken over by Mobile. He became a millionaire in it. I remember when he started. At first, all they were making was clotheslines. Plastic clotheslines. That's how he started. And they had the store there. This was a development that took place, of course, the Samuels then moved from that place to North Street. And ran a store there, a large store there. And Howard Samuels' uncle and father ran that place for the mother. So that's how that developed there. Oh, I don't know.

Q. It seems interesting that looking at Rochester today doesn't seem like the Jewish Community is that heavily involved in mercantile or banking. It seems to be more in the professions: lawyers . . .

A. Well . . .

Q. Or is it? Is my impression correct?

A. The banking . . . banking they never were very . . . had a very, you know, number in leadership in banking in Rochester. No. The nearest we came to it
A. (Continued) we had, he used to be a congressman . . . Honey? Rose! What was the congressman's name? You know, the one that was married to the Lipsky girl.

Rose: I could sit closer. Alright. What is it?

A. The congressman's name that used to be . . . he used to be with the bank in . . . on State Street. He married Lipsky.

Rose: Jacobstein.


Q. Yes.

A. Yeah. Well, Jacobstein was a Jewish boy that was born and raised in Rochester. He married this . . . Huh?

Rose: I couldn't help but overhear what you said about the Samuels.

A. Yeah.

Rose: Did you tell Mr. Friedrich what happened when you write a good thesis?

A. What's that?

Rose: What was the source of Samuels' fortune afterwards? What they went into?

A. Yeah. Yeah. I think I made that clear . . . plastics.

Rose: Plastics.

A. Yeah.

Rose: That was the subject of his thesis.

A. Yeah, that's right. He . . . his thesis at college. He is a chemist I guess. But anyhow, this congressman . . . you just told me and I forgot. Jacobstein. Meyer Jacobstein. He was a Rochester boy, graduated, I think, at the University of Rochester. I think he taught there for a while. But, he came back to Rochester and started a bank. That's how I got on the subject. He started a bank, and it was on State Street. They took over the bank, and I think, it was in the Elwanger & Barry Building (spelling?) that formerly had been a bank.
A. Continued) Right in that bank. Now they made it with another one, and he opened up a bank there. And I don't know how that finally was dissolved. But it was, and it was probably taken over by another bank. The accounts were if I remember. Then Meyer Jacobstein ran a Hearst paper in Rochester. Did you know that?

Q. No. I didn't know.

A. Yeah. It was a Hearst paper. It was published on St. Paul Street at the corner of Andrews where the cook iron store used to be. Not too far away from it. What was the name of the newspaper that Meyer Jacobstein published?

Rose: I can't remember.

Q. But it was a Hearst paper?

A. It was a Hearst, yeah.

Rose: It was a Hearst paper.

A. I remember. I think it was Rochester Evening News. Rochester Evening News. He was the editor of it. Now Meyer was a fairly liberal man. And ... go ahead.

Q. I just want to make certain that we don't cover that up.

A. Huh?

Q. I want to make certain that we don't cover up.

A. Oh! And he was quite a leader in Rochester. He became a leader through his activity with the Amalgamated Clothing Worker's. See?

Q. Except for that one venture, there haven't been many Jews that have gone into banking.

A. No. Although, there were some rich Jews, German-Jews that were not leaders in the bank, but were close to the top of the banking industry in Rochester. I can't give you much ... I think, Mr. Humen who was closely allied with the Rochester Telephone Company. He was a wealthy Jew, but not closely allied to
A. (Continued) the mainstream of the Jewish people. Meyer Jacobstein was a
liberal who was elected to congress on the democratic ticket. There's a case
where you had real Jewish influence in developing a political figure. My
opinion. But he was close to the labor movement. That's what put him across.
Q. They very active support from the Jewish...
A. Yes. Well, I don't know what else I can tell you. I should have kept a
diary.
Q. Yes, I know it's impossible to talk about fifty years in just a...
I wonder if we could have just some of your guesses: How... how... do
you think the Jewish Community is changing in Rochester any differently from
the community as a whole? Age-wise or...
Rose: Harry?
A. Yes, honey?
Rose: I'm going to the store.
A. Okay.
Q. ... socially or residentially?
A. I think we used to be a more closely knit grouping in the community. I
think the lines were a little more defined. Today, you have the Jewish
Community living in various parts of the city. County almost. The fact is,
there aren't too many Jews left in the inner city. Because the... the por-
tion of the inner city that Jews occupied has pretty much been taken over by
black. That's where the urban renewal and urban development took place. And
there are very, very few Jews in inner city. You'll find them mainly in
Brighton, Henrietta, Irondequoit.
Q. I suppose that's one of the reasons why the Jewish Community Center being
built... where it was built? Because there were more...
A. No question about it. No question about it. They had many problems there with
A. (Continued) the old building on Andrews Street there. First they had no parking there. A serious fault. And then again, of course, the area changed so that they couldn't get attendance there. So they figured they might just as well take the bull by the horns and really get away from it. They did.

Q. Yes.

A. I think they're doing very well there where they are. Out there . . . what route is it again? Not Westfall, it's beyond Westfall.

Q. It's not Edgewood, something like that.

A. Yeah. Edge . . .

Q. Edgewood.

A. Edgewood? Or Edgewater?

Q. Edgewater.

A. Edgewater.

Q. Edgewater Drive.

A. Yeah. It's a beautiful place they've got there, and it's quite an institution.

Q. But yet, the Jewish Home for the Aging is still . . .

A. Still down on St. Paul Street.

Q. . . . in the inner city.

A. Yeah. They . . . well, what their clientele, I imagine being the inner city is as good as being any where else. The fact is, it's better. Now, people living . . . they all have relatives and friends that go and come to visit them. And, if they went way out in the boon docks, that wouldn't happen. So, they're about equal difference from the people that live in Brighton, the people that live in Irondequoit, or Henrietta. They've all got to come to the inner city. If they want to see their friends. They're not big enough to have institutions like that in every part where the Jews happen to be a little bit more thickly populated. That's one of the beefs that many people have,
A. (Continued) many Jewish people had about the JY being way out there in ... in ... such a distance away from the city. It's alright ... it's alright for people Brighton, but what's the matter with the people in Irondequoit? So, they said some day we'll have one there. Well, that's a little ambitious.

Q. Yes. I understand that there's still a lot of money to be paid off on the one in Brighton.

A. I think so. I think so.

Q. Do you yourself use the Community Center?

A. No. I'm 82 years old! It's an effort for me to go from here to the corner let alone way out there. (Laughter) And of course, my driving. I have to limit myself on the driving, too. My eyes are not as good as they should be, so I only drive certain times of the day when the traffic is light. And I don't drive at night. Most of the activities that they have is at night. So. It means that somebody else would have to take me, or else I'd have to get a cab or something like that. So. I'd like to belong. I used to belong to the old JY. I used to go to the gym and the health room. I was a member there for many years. I still am a member, but a very ... not much of an active one. Drink up. I'm sure you must be as thirsty as I am.

Q. (Unintelligible) I think the last time, we talked a bit about your own Jewish education and that of your family, but how do you think Jewish education has changed here in Rochester?

A. I think it's improved. I think it's improved to a great extent. There was a period there when it was awfully bad. When I first came to Rochester there were a number of what we called Talma Torahs. A Talma Torah is a place of learning for children. And there were quite a few of them. Every ... every synagogue had a ... something of a Talma Torah connected with it. But, the education was not ... was not as well done as it's done today. I think that
A. (Continued) the Jewish educational system that they have is really fine. B'rith Kodesh turns out some nice, well-educated kids in Jewish and in Hebrew. And so does Beth El. The rest of them do not have Talmud Torahs anymore. If they do have them, they're having a rough time with them.

Q. Financially.

A. Yeah. The Hillel School was quite a nice idea. But I've never been close enough to the Hillel School to know exactly what... how they did operate. Now the Hillel School operates... they used to have a building on East Avenue.

Q. I think a Catholic School bought that building or something afterwards.

A. No. I think it... isn't that where the apartment is built?

Q. Maybe so.

A. Yeah. I know I used to live on East Avenue, and Lowenthal lived next door to me. And he sold his land, as long as the land of the Hillel School went to that apartment house. But I don't think they were able to support it financially. A lot of these Conservative Jews who did a great deal for that sort of thing, have either moved away or passed on. And we don't have that kind of concentrated effort. It's mostly by the Orthodox Jews. It's changed a lot! Now B'rith Kodesh, I think, has the finest Hebrew School in the community. And, it's far from... it's Reformed of course, but they do give the kids a broad Jewish education. The education that I got when I got one... when we first came to Rochester in 1900, was pretty bad. It was Orthodox. Rigid. And kids that were coming from families where all of the sudden they got freedom of speech, they wouldn't go. (Laughter) And they had a rough time of it. There used to be a school at the corner of Joseph Avenue and Stephanie Place. It had a big yard... that afterwards became the Nusbaum's property where they had their business. And... I remember I went to that...
A. (Continued) school. And the rabbis were all Europeans using the rigid form of educating kids. If they couldn't get it through ears, they'd get it through their backsides. And, it didn't work. Those schools all fell by the wayside. The kids wouldn't stand for that kind of nonsense. And besides, this was extra-curricular. For the first time, these kids had to go to public schools and they went to Hebrew School.

Q. Where in Europe, particularly like Poland and Russia, the Hebrew School might have been the only . . .

A. Well, the Hebrew School was the only school they went to.

Q. Yes.

A. Oh, I suppose in the bigger cities, there's some difference. But most of the people that came to Rochester or came to America, came from the little shtetils, you know, where education was not . . . A man might be able to read in Hebrew, read the whole Torah . . . and he couldn't add up two and two make four, you know? That wasn't in their field.

Q. But the education now has become more organized . . .

A. Well, today of course, the kids are in the sciences, and in the all of the other curriculum that the educational system has. They get all that. In addition to that that they get in public education, they get this from the Hebrew Schools which is over and above the rest of it. It has some meaning to Jews. I don't know if it has any meaning otherwise.

Q. Do you think that the Jewish Community as a whole will continue to support Jewish education, financially? I mean, that there are constantly problems there.

A. I don't know. We're living here in our (unintelligible) which is a comparatively young experience, and if American life system will be able to maintain itself, I think that Jews will going on freeing themselves from the old
A. (Continued) European things that they experienced. And I believe that they'll become freer and freer in their ability to adapt to a general system. Most of these divisions are placed by a matter of force from the top. They had to do it that way. They used to divide and conquer. And of course, when that kind of a theory doesn't exist, I imagine the Jews to a great extent, dissimulate. Maybe not . . . that doesn't mean that they're going drop Jewish religion. But it means that it will change. It will change. All these religions are experiencing the same thing. The Catholic religion is experiencing that, too.

Q. Yes. The priests marrying and . . .

A. Yeah, you see all sorts of things happening which fifty years ago, you would've thought impossible. When I was a little kid, when I used to pass a church, a Catholic Church, I used to hold my breath. That's right. Until I got passed it. (Laughter) You were afraid you might be contaminated, you know? But that sort of thing keeps on changing. It's gradually . . . you don't even really notice it. You accept these things. I remember a time when we living next door to my father's house on Grand Street. It was the family Goldman. He was supposed to have been one of the most formidable men in the Orthodox Jewish life in Rochester. The truth of the matter is that the whole family migrated to Israel. But they had a big family of boys . . . Rueben Goldman who's an attorney still . . . I saw him a few weeks ago at the Beth El. He now lives down in Florida. Rueben Goldman. Most of the rest of the boys . . . big family of boys, have passed away. I guess there's a rabbi, a Goldman boy in Israel. And I remember the time when those boys, you know, the holiest day of all is called Yom Kippur, and they would . . . the father would stay in shul all day long praying. And you don't eat on that day. The boys knew that the father and mother hadn't eaten all day, so they'd drive the car down
A. (Continued) and stay there around the corner of Bayden Street so it wasn't in
sight of the synagogue. And as soon as the services were over, they'd get
them out into that car and bang . . . go home. So they could eat, you know?
Oh, that thing isn't done anymore. But things are changing. Things are
changing. Even Orthodox Temples have a place for parking. The old story
goes around that the . . . I heard. It was applied to a certain individual
that I won't mention, but he had a boy coming to their house every day, and he
thought he was a Christian boy. Every Saturday to light the fire. In those
days you had furnaces, and you know, you'd have to light the fires because you
couldn't light it on Saturday. One day the kid said to this Jewish man, he
says, next Saturday I can't come. Why? I got my Bar Mitvah. This kind of
illustrates what I'm trying to say.

Q. You mentioned the one family that immigrated to Israel. I was just wondering
what . . . about the Zionist organizations here in Rochester, like the Labor
Zionists.

A. I never was very close to that and know very little about it. I know they
exist, and I was never a Zionist, and I am not a Zionist now. I have too much
of a socialist background to accept Zionism. In other words, socialism was
supposed to have the theory of internationalism, and certainly Zionism doesn't
stand for internationalism. So I never was a Zionist, and I don't even know
how to express it. But when . . . when what happened in Germany came on, no
Jew could be anything but for a something that they could rely on so that
things like Hitler . . . so that things like what Hitler brought about, can't
happen again. So that even if we didn't believe in Zionism as such, we had
to go along with the Zionist idea of a homeland for Jews by conditions that were
forced on us outside of our own ability to determine it. I know a man that
was a Jew, and he read in the newspapers what was going on in Germany. How could

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A. (Continued) he be opposed to those who believe in a homeland for Jews? He couldn't accept it as a human being at all. And I think it's been good for the world that if the Jews have that homeland. It has shown what small people could do. Here were people who were not even permitted to own land in Russia. Were definitely not farmers. Couldn't be by virtue of the laws that existed in these countries from which they came. And they go and take a piece of land like Israel, undeveloped, and make a garden of it. This they did. There's no denying facts. So they have set an example for the world that it actually can be done by a small nation. By a small people. They love freedom. It's in their land. They believe in equality. They have labor unions there. They have the most democratic nation, I think, in the world. Believe in things that we haven't accepted yet, but eventually we will. They've shown courage. They've shown so much, and when you think about the State of Israel, what a little piece of land it is!

Q. It's very tiny.

A. It's nothing! It's a little piece of land, a sliver. And the whole world is debating as to whether they should let them have it or not. I remember Phil Bernstien wrote a book, you probably read it, on what the Jewish people believe. And... what is a Jew? Certainly Jews were Jews long before they even had a nation. Jews believed in praying for next year in Jerusalem. It's part of their prayers. Every prayer ends with that. And yet, here we have Jerusalem... I think we have Jerusalem, no American-Jew particularly wants to go to Israel. It's not only a Jewish. I guess; it's a people. That's what Phil Bernstien came up with. You know he designated to that way. The Jews that are far removed from their religion, far away from other Jews, when you get right down to it, they're Jews.

Q. A culture of people and not just a...
A. We met two people... we met two people... I was in Black Island last week, and we met two people there, older people, who... she was a... they were both German, both came from... he was, you could tell he was a well-educated man and from the upper classes there. Probably a good, real (Unknown). And she was one-fourth Jewish. And I don't know, that probably means that one of her grandparents was Jewish. One-fourth. Her father was a medical doctor, and she... well, they were trying to get her to be a pianist, and she was a good one, became a doctor. He wanted to marry her and he couldn't, because she was one-fourth Jewish. And he was put into a concentration camp.

Q. He was?

A. Yeah. Because he insisted on marrying her. Well, he got out of that. And they both came to America. She had a practice on... in New York City on, I think it was Madison Avenue. She's a general practitioner. Of course, now she doesn't do anything. They live on Black Island, they have for a long time, and that's a nice (unknown) place. They live together. She does painting, and he does all kinds of fancy glass work, and different artistic things. They're not wealthy, I don't think. Enough just to get by. They're two old people now. So, she's one fourth... she's a Jew. She had to get the hell out of Germany. So, for their own protection, I think the western world particularly, if they're civilized at all, should fight for little Israel. Because if it happens to one, it can happen to another. Look what's going on there in... in Lebanon where the Lebanese, the Arabs are... and the Christians are fighting and killing each other off. Which is the same kind of a thing. These divisions are silly. Yet, this is what's happening in this world all the time. So, for an example of courage and ability to fight for what you think is right, Israel stands out like a little shining
A. (Continued) light. She's a little light at the end of the tunnel. Well, I wish I could tell you some more about Rochester Jewry.

Q. You've given me...
A. Huh?

Q. You've given us a lot of information.
A. Have I?
Q. Oh, yes.
A. Things that they hadn't known about, things they'd forgotten?
Q. Yes, and things that were not emphasized or out of proportion, or overemphasized.
A. Well, you know, Joseph Avenue is like a saga. When I first came to Rochester, I was a little kid. My mother or my aunt who lives in Rochester at that time, wouldn't let me cross Joseph Avenue without holding on to my hand for fear I'd get stuck in the mud on the other side of the crosswalk. True. And I've lived to go through that from how many times Joseph Avenue was repaved. It had streetcar tracks on there, and it had the trollies, and it had buses. Finally, I guess there's just one bus runs down. Now, all that property has been wiped out with urban renewal, and I've lived through that epic.

Q. So you've been associated with the Bayden Street...
A. I seen it go from nothing to something down to nothing again.

Q. It almost seems like it's gone that way.
A. Yeah, that's the way it is.

Q. Blocks and blocks of open space.
A. I lived through on Joseph Avenue... I remember when we had to go to the old railroad station, New York Central, was on the west side of Clinton Avenue. Now it's on the east side. And it used to be a small railroad station. Then I remember what... oh, what when on in Rochester when they built that great big New York Central Station. And I saw it go down to what it is today. It's
A. (Continued) worse today then what it was . . .

Q. Yes. Yes, I know that railroad station was famous.

A. Oh, yes. Well, it's happened in many other cities that had beautiful stations that went to nothing. Cincinnati had one. What other cities did I see it. St. Louis had a beautiful station. And they're all in the same shape. But Rochester's station went down with the railroads. Yeah. When we came to Rochester, it was the New York Central and Hudson River Railroad. Then there was the West Shore. The one that went down on the west shore of the Hudson River to go to New York. Yeah. Well, if there's any questions you're gonna ask . . . ask. I'll try to answer them.

Q. Just about . . . scratching my head because we talked a great deal last time. Although some of it was lost, most of it is there.

A. Is it?

Q. Yes. And . . .

A. Probably get some duplication here. You'll have to cut that out yourselves.

Q. But you mentioned last time how the role of Bayden Street has changed. It used to be to make Americans out of immigrants and now it seems to be . . .

A. Trying to change the life pattern of Americans. Because after all, black people are Americans.

Q. I see there's almost been a complete shift from the support that was once Bayden Street (unintelligible).

A. But you know, I've lived through a tremendous growth in that. I don't want to put myself down as an expert, but when Irving Creeksfeld was the director of the Bayden Street Settlement, he was a very energetic person and he had very innovative ideas. And I remember when the black people started settling heavily in the seventh and eighth ward. Prior to that, there had hardly been any black people there. But, after World War I, they started coming up. And
A. (Continued) the area became... started to get black. And, oh, they were really poor. They were bad, and they were not in good shape at all. And Irving Creedsfeld said to me one day, he says, you know, we ought to start a neighborhood community council so these people can partake in these things that are going on and express themselves, and be part of the community. I thought that was a good idea. And so went ahead and started organizing it. And I remember the first meeting we had. We called a meeting. We made it noon over in the Number Nine School, no, there was going to be a meeting. And we proclaimed it all over. We printed leaflets, I think, and put them in store windows and all that sort of thing. And I remember it was an evening in March, and it was cold, rainy, wet, miserable night. And we had this first meeting at the Bayden Street Settlement. And I think there were about four or five black women that came to this meeting after all this effort. But you know, it would break your heart to see how poor they were. How badly dressed they were in this inclement weather. Completely inarticulate. I'm sure they had thoughts, but they made no effort to express them. So we were talking at them. From this had developed, though, a beautiful organization. They partook in the model cities, they were very active in... they called the Northeast Council. Changed the name. And you see there people who... I've gone to their meetings, so I know... well-dressed, very articulate, very understanding of their own problems. And... there has been a change. It's completely different. But I remember... when I'm talking about these days with Irving Creeksfeld... oh, that must be thirty-five years ago. So it's different. I see a lot of these fellows go up to the Chamber of Commerce. I'll see this one's in politics, and this one's a lawyer, and this one... So, you see, it's the same darn thing going right all over again. Exact... even those these people came from the south, from Carolina, or
A. (Continued) where have you, their problems are probably the same as the problems that the Jews had. Except they took on different aspects. But they had . . . it was a question of retraining, adjustments.

Q. Wasn't FIGHT with (Unintelligible)?
A. I don't know what FIGHT did. I think what FIGHT did was opened up some opportunities. But I don't think that FIGHT made some of these people that came up north from the south, develop into lawyers, and doctors, and dentists, and political . . . politically wise people getting jobs. A lot of them are working now in large industrial plants. I don't think what FIGHT did has opened up . . . it did some spade work. Opened up the ground work. But, you have to develop a will in the people themselves to do for themselves. And I think that gradually had its affect, and there is a great number of black people who are successful. They're doing very well, have moved out of the area. They're no longer living in that secluded area there of Joseph Avenue. Not by any means. Of course, there's still a lot of property . . . a great ways to go, but that's not a strictly a local problem. That's nationwide. That's nationwide. I wonder . . . I often thought about it. I remember when the Italians first came to America. And the first thing they did, they were given the pick and shovel. Because every trench that was dug, every sewer that was laid, was laid with sweat. Hard, hard labor. And if it had been the black people that had come up at that time and we didn't have improved machinery and everything else, it would be they that would be doing those things.

Q. The Irish . . . like the Irish, too, that came fifty years before that.
A. Oh, sure. They built the railroads.

Q. Yes.
A. They built the railroads. And then, of course, from other countries like Poland, Lithuanian, they worked in the mines. Because that's what they did in
A. (Continued) the old country. Silesia. Now you take around the coal area, around Pennsylvania, mostly Slavs. It seems that these people brought with them...in the old country they never had a chance to get out of the mines. They stayed in the mines, but here, with freedom, they could get out of the mines, eventually. Not easy. But a lot of them had done it.

Q. It's almost the same as is true with the Jewish immigrants that had been tailors and small businessmen.

A. That's right. You know in New York City? Mostly they were in the tailoring business...