

ROCHESTER ORAL HISTORY PROJECT (Rochester Jewish community 1905-1975)

Interviewee Arthur M. Lowenthal

Interviewer Tina Isaacs

Date(s) of interview 6/21/76

Setting (place of interview, people present, impressions)

The interview took place in Mr. Lowenthal's office in downtown Rochester. Although Mr. Lowenthal is 88 years old, he still goes into his office regularly. No one else was present during the interview. Mr. Lowenthal was willing to cooperate, but not the perfect interviewee as most of his answers were brusque and contained little information. I saw no need for a second interview; Mr. Lowenthal was not anxious to talk about his family or religion, and we adequately covered his community participation and activities.

Background of interviewee

Mr. Lowenthal is a native Rochesterian of German Jewish descent. He is 88 years old, and was, until the business was sold in 1961, the President of Max Lowenthal and Sons Knitting Mills, a business his father started in 1868. His community activities include (d): sitting on the Boards of Rochester General Hospital, Convalescent Hospital, Rochester Hospital Service, the Jewish Community Federation, the Jewish Community Council, David Hochstein Memorial Music School, Harley School, Civic Music Association, Planned Parenthood, Rochester Community Chest, and the United Jewish Welfare Fund.

Interview abstract

Mr. Lowenthal was closed-mouthed about most of the general questions, feeling that he did not really have anything interesting to offer. We spent most of the time talking about the business and about his activities in the community, especially during the New Deal.

Interview index (corresponding to tape numbers, sides of tape, and cassette recorder numbers)

* Social history	<u>—</u> Jewish community <u>—</u> NONE
* Family	<u>—</u> community relations
Demographic/residential	<u>—</u> Religious life <u>—</u> NONE
** Economic	<u>—</u> Jewish education <u>—</u> NONE
** Political/civic	<u>—</u> Anti-semitism
* Zionism/Israel	

Interview log

- corresponding to tape numbers, sides of tape, and cassette recorder nos.
- including references to others in the Rochester community

--see following page(s)--

Tape I side A

Background

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- German Jewish
- *Father's Early life
 - How M. Lowenthal came to Rochester
- *Knitting Mills -- 1868
 - At first a retail business
 - Neighborhood and growing up
 - No Jewish Education
 - B'rith Kodesh
 - German Jewish Community
- *Antipathy between the Reform and Orthodox Jews
- *President Jewish Community Council
 - Bringing the community together
- *Antipathy between the German Jews and the Eastern European Jews
- ***Max Lowenthal and Sones Knitting Mills
 - size of business
 - changes in the 20th century
 - employees-- type of person employed
- **Amalgamated Clothing Workers Union
 - Socialism
 - *the Depression
 - Jewish participation in the clothing industry
- Marriage
- Level of education: A. Lowenthal, Mrs. Lowenthal, son
- B'rith Kodesh
- Bernstein (275)
- Son
 - affiliation with Knitting Mill
 - lives in Rochester
- Changes in residence
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- ***New Deal activities
 - **Chairman of Work Relief Rochester and Monroe County Projects
 - *** Political pressure
 - Differences between the Democrats and the Republicans
 - *investigation of the Office by the Democrats
- WWII and the Holocaust
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- *U.N. : changes of opinion
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 - Cohen's

Tape I side B

Riots

- ***Community Activities
 - *Rochester General Hospital
 - Convalescent Hospital
 - **Rochester Hospital Service
 - functions
 - responsibility of Rochester industry

LOG: Arthur M. Lowenthal (Cont.)

Jewish Community Federation
Jewish Education
Jewish Community Council
*Hochstein Memorial Music School
Rochester as a cultural community
*Harley School
Civic Music Assn.
*Planned Parenthood
Rochester Community Chest
United Jewish Welfare Board
Israel
*Baden Street Settlement
taught a course in Modern European government
Woman's Movement
Co-educational colleges
JY, JCC
Future for Rochester
*Changes in the character of the community
Wealth and capital

Interview 1
Tape 1
Side A

- Q. This is Tina Isaacs interviewing Mr. Arthur M. Lowenthal. It's Monday, June the 21st, and we're in Mr. Lowenthal's office. Mr. Lowenthal, could you please tell me something about your background, where you were born and your family background?
- A. I was born in Rochester and lived here ever since. My father was born in Faulkenhein, German, brought to this country at the age of seven in 1850. He married in New York, Lady Louisa Oppersellars born in New York.
- Q. And, where did your father . . . where did your father and mother live when they came to Rochester?
- A. Well, that was a long, long time . . . are we still on?
- Q. Could you please tell me about your father's early experiences in the United States?
- A. His parents and his brothers and his sisters settled in New York. My father went to Cooper Union where he learned to be a compositor. Later, working at various (unintelligible) tasks, was approached by Mr. Harper, who was then one of the Harper's Brothers, who was on the Lincoln Second Presidential Campaign, and asked if he would go to Rochester. No. Cut that whole thing out. Cut that whole . . .
- Q. Mr. Lowenthal, why did your father settle in Rochester?
- A. Mr. Harper, of Harper's Brothers, was a member of the Lincoln Second Presidential Campaign, and had come to Rochester to elicit the support of the editor of the Rochester (unintelligible) German paper, who's editor was known to be a supporter of Mr. Lincoln, and an excellent orator. While interviewing this man, Mr. Muller, Mr. Muller stated that he would be glad to undertake this

A. (Continued) task, however, his . . . his small enterprise and he had no substitute, no followup, so that he could not extend himself. Mr. Harper stated that he understood. There was a man named (unintelligible) who came out of the room, a compositor, who wrote in literary German. Mr. Muller agreed that if were such a man were to come to Rochester, he could undertake the campaign. That man proved to be my father who did come here and for some weeks stayed here. Upon returning to New York, he realized life in a large city was not satisfying, as well as a small community. So, he came to Rochester.

Q. Um . . . and how long was he here before he married? Do you know?

A. I do not know. No.

Q. Um . . . when . . . when did he start the (unknown) Lowenthal and Sons Knitting Mill? Was that his first job?

A. No, he did various (unintelligible) things, but in 1868, he established a knitting mill consisting of a few hand-knitting machines in the basement of a building on Mill Street. The store above my father was old.

Q. Um . . . when were you born, please?

A. I'm gonna answer that . . .

Q. Oh. Sure.

A. A growing family convinced him that selling in this fashion was not . . . did not provide a regular income. So much depended upon the cold of the winter. And with great preparation, he determined to try, and did succeed in selling wholesale. That was the really the (unintelligible) of the company.

Q. Okay. Um . . . when . . . you were born in Rochester, you said . . .

A. Yes.

Q. Um . . . when were you born?

A. April 13th, 1880.

Q. And you've lived in Rochester all your life?

A. Yes.

Q. Um . . . where did you live when you were growing up?

A. 29 South Union.

Q. South Union Street. I'm afraid I don't know where that is.

A. That is no longer. It's taken over by the development which is at the (unintelligible) corner of East Avenue.

Q. I see.

A. and Union.

Q. Um . . . What was that neighborhood like? Was it a Jewish neighborhood?

A. No.

Q. Um . . . Were you given a Jewish education?

A. No.

Q. You weren't? Um . . .

A. Although my father was for many years president of Temple B'rith Kodesh.

Q. I see. So, and are you still a member of B'rith Kodesh?

A. Yes.

Q. Could you um . . . do you think you . . . you have any insights into the German Jewish Community in Rochester um . . . when you were growing up?

What was it like?

A. I have very different memories of (unintelligible). That was the antipathy between so called Reformed and the Orthodox Jew.

Q. Did that result in any kind of friction between the two communities?

A. There had been. There was a very definite line of division, testified by, for instance, the fact that there was a Reformed (unknown) and an Orthodox one.

Q. What do you think . . . um . . . eventually brought the two communities together?

A. I was for many years (unintelligible) many years for (unintelligible) to hold an office . . . president of the Jewish Community Council. The reason I remained (unintelligible) essentially was, because of the friction; and my small efforts which I think had, it's difficult to tell, in overcoming . . . among the people who were interested to it and often Jews are interested in the various community undertakings, to find that there were . . . there was no reason why they shouldn't work together.

Q. What sorts of activities um . . . were involved in this, you know, bringing the communities together?

A. Well, I think probably the formation of one of the . . . I think the name was The Jewish Community Council, in those days.

Q. Do you think that there was the same sort of friction between the German Jewish Community or their descendants and the Eastern European Community, the immigrants?

A. You mean the ones that were there at that time?

Q. Yes.

A. There was a very definite display of haughtiness on the part of the young Jews, which I found then and . . . did today, did and do find (unintelligible).

Q. Do you remember any specific incidents?

A. No, but I know there was a difficulty in getting people to sit down together even to discuss their problems, but more specific I can't give you.

Q. Well, did you think it was a class problem or a religious . . .

A. I think it had nothing to do with religion.

Q. Um . . . did . . .

A. If it were, then I think a good example of religion should be abandoned.

Q. Well, what I meant was, do you think that the friction resulted from their class difference between . . .

A. I think that mainly it was an economic background and, a . . . I . . . definite display on the part of the German Jew was his own opinion of superiority.

Q. I see. Um . . . do you think any of that still exists?

A. I presume prejudice always will exist, but (unintelligible) in those days.

Q. Um . . .

A. More on a personal basis, I would say.

Q. Do you think that the same sorts of things alleviated that friction as that was alleviated the friction between the Reformed and the Orthodox communities? What I'm saying is, do you think that it was the growth of organizations in which both groups participated in that brought the groups together?

A. It was more the growth of people than any particular organizations.

Q. Great. Um . . . do you have . . . when do you think this happened? Approximately.

A. I can't set the time. I won't guess.

Q. Okay. Um . . . I'd like to talk about the knitting mills for awhile. Um . . . now, when did you start working there?

A. It was early 1910.

Q. I see. And, how big was the business in 1910 as compared to what it was in 1868?

A. I presume that 1868, although I don't have the facts, I think there were at the beginning three or four hand-knitting machines. That meant, three or four employees. Then there was hand sewing that might require as many in the store above. That would be about it. Towards the end, I presume, three hundred odd, I'm not sure.

Q. And, so . . . how did . . . how did the business change between 1910 and later on in the century, in this century?

A. In 1914, my father died, my two elder brothers had long been associated with him. Shortly thereafter, I was invited to become a partner. It was at that time . . . consisted of the manufacture of sweaters for children and mittens for children and adults. Within a too short a time thereafter, my two brothers died. Not many years after we changed fundamentally and became manufacturers of sweaters for men.

Q. Um . . . how many employees did . . . did you . . . um, hire. You said three hundred, was that consistent over the years?

A. Well, I don't know that. I think that probably was it's peak.

Q. I see. When . . . when was that peak?

A. Well, that's . . . that's . . . (unintelligible).

Q. Oh, I see. Um . . . were . . . did your employees at all, were they at all different over the years . . . um . . . were . . . were any of your employees Jewish?

A. Very few. Very few, I regret. I shouldn't say I regret, but I often wondered why. Because there was a . . . a very active industry to manufacture clothing for men. An operator who was a sewing machine expert in clothing, certainly was qualified for knitting, although there was different . . . you know, techniques. However, we were, seems to be that the whole industry and the clothing industry was unionized, we were not.

Q. Oh, I see. Um . . . were there ever any attempts to unionize?

A. There were very many.

Q. Um . . . did anything in particular stick out in your mind?

A. Yes, yes. I thought then, and I still think that the union, although they are of enormous value, and continue to be of value to the clothing industry, it would have furnished nothing to our employees. They . . . realized we were not overlooked by the union.

Q. I see.

- A. They . . . what really means, in my mind, means that the standards set by the union in the clothing industry brought benefit to our people. We were small compared to the industry, and of course we had conditions that (unintelligible).
- Q. I see. So this is the Amalgamated Clothing Workers? Um . . . how many times did they come into your shop, would you say?
- A. I have no idea.
- Q. You don't know.
- A. But there . . . there were times (unintelligible).
- Q. Um . . . was . . . was there ever any politics involved?
- A. No.
- Q. No. Were . . . do you think you . . . um . . . the people who worked in your place had socialist leanings earlier on?
- A. No. No.
- Q. No. You don't.
- A. We had a very, very low turnover.
- Q. Oh. I see. So, you had employees that worked for . . . long.
- A. Very long.
- Q. I see.
- A. Very long.
- Q. Um . . . so, you . . . do you think there were any changes in the type of person you employed over the years that you can think of off hand?
- A. The only mark . . . that was . . . the technique of the knitting by the machines of being more sophisticated (unintelligible).
- Q. Um . . . now, there must have been many economic fluctuations over the years, can you remember what happened to the business during the depression?
- A. It suffered about the proportion, I should say, of every business (unintelligible) you were not in a luxury field nor were we in the very expensive

A. (Continued) bracket of the men's field so that, there continued to be relatively people (unintelligible).

Q. I see.

A. Not profitable, however.

Q. (Laughter) Um . . . can you recall any other sort of fiscal ups and downs that the business might have had over the years?

A. No.

Q. Okay, um . . . now, Rochester used to be an extremely big cloth-making center you know . . .

A. No. It's a very small cloth-making center.

Q. Well, um . . . were . . . was there a lot of clothing businesses?

A. Yes, but they didn't make their cloths, they purchased them and . . . My recollection is the only weaver in Rochester was the Allen Wool Mill.

Q. Oh, I see. Well, what I meant was that um . . . a lot of the manpower in Rochester at one time was involved in the clothing industry.

A. There was indeed at one time.

Q. Um . . . were many Jews employed in this industry?

A. I think very many, let's see, were owned almost entirely by Jews.

Q. Um . . .

A. There's a whole history (unintelligible) Jewish ghetto.

Q. When did . . . um . . . the clothing industry start dying out in Rochester?

A. Get that information out of people who are qualified.

Q. Okay. Um . . . okay, I'd like to talk a little bit now about um . . . your family. Um . . . when did . . . when were you married?

A. It was 1916.

Q. I see and, do you have children?

A. I have eight children.

Q. Oh! (Laughter)

A. One son.

Q. Um . . . now, did you go to college sir?

A. Yes.

Q. Did your wife?

A. No. She a . . . had gone to Columbia School (unintelligible) and studied abroad in France, I think for a year or two.

Q. Um . . . and did your son go to college?

A. Yes.

Q. Did you . . . um . . . give your son a Hebrew education?

A. No.

Q. You didn't. But were you affiliated at that time with B'rith Kodesh?

A. I've always been.

Q. Okay. Um . . . what sorts of changes can you recall that . . . that B'rith Kodesh has gone through in your affiliation with it?

A. My answer will be mainly hearsay. I'll repeat this so you'll know how valuable is my interest. Although Rabbi Wilkes and I enjoyed a personal friendship, and Rabbi Bernstein and I have been friends through their entire careers, I have never, have never heard either of them on the pulpit. So, you can gather I have not been much of a Temple goer.

Q. Um . . . now, Rabbi Bernstein is a very important figure in this community, and has been for a very long time and we've been asking people just for an opinion, you know, what sorts of contributions do you think that he made to the community?

A. Uncompromising integrity, power, and leadership.

Q. Um . . . okay, I'm gonna get back to your family for, again. Um . . . Did your son . . . does your son live in Rochester?

A. Yes.

Q. He does. Did he work . . . does he work, also, in the knitting mill?

A. He had been in the knitting mill but he left when we sold the mill.

(Unintelligible)

Q. I see. Um . . . is he married?

A. No.

Q. Okay. And he lives in Rochester?

A. Yes.

Q. Do you see him often?

A. Yes. I'm very pleased to say that he spends the summer with us in our Canadaigua Camp.

Q. Okay. Um . . . now, you mentioned that you lived on Union Street, um . . . I take it, you lived elsewhere in Rochester. Um . . . where . . . where did you live when you were first married?

A. From Union Street I . . . my . . . my parent's built a house on Buckingham Street and I lived there until I was married. The house was being built for us, to be rented, on Highland Avenue, had not been completed when my wife and I returned from our wedding trip and we lived shortly, a few months, on Landing Road and then Highland Avenue, and eventually we came here . . . stayed here. We bought an old house that we sold, seventy-five or more years old, lots of house, which we renovated, where we lived until twelve years ago. And, we sold the property by which a apartment was to have been eventually constructed from where we lived.

Q. I see. Now, in any of the areas in which you've lived, was there a sense of neighborhood, I mean was . . .

A. No.

Q. No. Okay. Um . . . let's see. Um . . . um . . . have you ever . . . you

Q. (Continued) personally or do you know of any um . . . anti-semitism in Rochester? Have you ever experienced that anti-semitism in your life?

A. Personally, no.

Q. Um . . . do you know of any incidents of such in the community?

A. I don't think so.

Q. Okay. Um . . . now, when . . . where you originally a Zionist?

A. No.

Q. Are you now?

A. I'm a member, but I (unintelligible).

Q. Okay. Um . . . when did you change . . .

A. I never changed.

Q. Well, you said that you weren't . . . you were not originally a Zionist, but now . . . towards Israel?

A. (Unintelligible)

Q. Um . . . what, well before . . . before I get into this, I would like to talk about um . . . we mentioned the Depression but we didn't talk about the New Deal at all. Um . . . what, um . . . was your participation in the Deal activities?

A. I was chairman of Work Relief for Rochester and Monroe County.

Q. And, what did you do in that office?

A. Of course, at the time, I think our role was to place 16,000 individuals. We spent somewhat over \$21,000,000. I took upon that, as you know, an (unintelligible) period of undertaking. There are many evidences of our work. There was no, so called, (unintelligible) breaking. There were many schools, fire-houses, roads, sewers, (unintelligible).

Q. Which particular schools, what projects were built then?

A. Stop it here. The enterprises which I . . . of which I entertained great satisfaction (unintelligible) during the depression. During this enterprise, 16,000

A. (Continued) people were employed at various times. Just under \$22,000,000 was spent. I was invited by the City Manager, whom, I had not known, to come to his office and asked if I would become Chairman. I said, based upon the agreement of my wife and my partners, though I was very much inclined to accept, my speech ended with that, because I felt it was a tremendously time-consuming enterprise. I remember well I said to Mr. Ackers, City Manager, on the scorching day in August, Mr. Ackers, if I do accept, I will be susceptible to know political information . . . know political pressure. And when asked what I meant by political pressure, I said, I don't know how to describe it but on a day like this, although I don't have scientific explanation, there was a breath of air stirring. We could feel the relief on our expiring brow, if I said there's a pretty mean wind blowing, we would all know that it would be a nice afternoon for sailing. And if I said that there's a hurricane, well, we'd know that that would be a hell of a wind. Now, that little relief on the moist brow on a day like today, of anyone because of his political position, seeking something, that I call political pressure. I'd have none of it. We agreed, my partners (unintelligible) my wife embraced the idea well, realizing that social engagements, although we were not very often requested in the daytime, were so by default. That my day would be 7:00 o'clock at my own office, 8:00 o'clock at the office of Work Relief which would be an abandoned school near (unknown) Street, dinner . . . whenever I got home. That remained some days the same.

Q. How long did you work at this?

A. Well, I'm not good at time (unintelligible)

Q. Um . . . did at any time local politicians approach you um . . . in your capacity as Chairman of this program . . . um . . .

A. Yes.

Q. Any specific incident that . . . that . . .

A. One incident of political pressure that I found was the only one, because I think, was properly handled. During the period prior to the incident, a large number of many roads were being built in a certain section of the County, that were being built and worked on (unintelligible). And, we had it just about completed and there was going to be another area. Now we come to my . . . having accepted the Chairmanship and going to the offices, I found that in bids for material, there was failure to get the price for materials delivered on the job. That is, whether say, roads were gravel and sand and concrete, or gravel with mortar and sand were required, and that according to price, but not delivery. And delivery sometimes added a very substantial proportion of the cost of the material to its actual . . . And, my first change was that all bids for everything . . . lumber, glass, anything, had to be delivered on the job. Shortly thereafter, I had protest . . . I had a request for a meeting of certain supervisors, that they were supervisors in that (unintelligible) that we were about to abandon. Through the scuttlebutt, the word came was that they were protesting with this new provision in bidding that their community would be at a disadvantage. The point was made. Five men came to my office. I had prepared for them. As a matter of fact, on his desk each man was given a pad, a pencil, and (unintelligible). And, first, I think he signs it (unintelligible). First, I said, I want to anticipate what soon would be obvious to you . . . mainly that I have a very bad memory for names. So, (unintelligible) your name (unintelligible) and what is your story and you will not think I'm impolite, I hope.

A. (Continued) When you're talking, I may not be looking at you, I'll be making notes. First part of their . . . all of their comment was, we do come from (unintelligible), we served you very well, we delivered a great deal of materials to you, we're prepared to continue, and now you practically cut us off. Of course, you're taking into account the cost of delivery. Given that, in various forms about what the five men said. And, when they had finished, I turned to man number one, my notes saying that this one said this and that, maybe you'll want to make trouble. But, I'll speak clearly. I don't want to (unintelligible) with any thing that you've said, you have a very different idea. My idea of running this enterprise isn't (unintelligible) with my employees. You've done nothing that seems to sense that. You don't have in mind that in the other parts of this county there are men with similiar (unintelligible) sand and gravel. I didn't forget that these poor fellows in far away places have no jobs, and words to that effect. Now, I hope you've made notes, and if you wish to review what I have done, do it. But, I hope you all carry the idea that I have no sympathy with your point of view, but I'm (unintelligible). Well, I think that's enough of that. That sort of did the trick. I didn't invite more of that kind of critique.

Q. Um . . . were there any differences between the local republicans and the local democrat over these, you know, work relief's and such?

A. No. At one time, there; (unintelligible) I had. When I came from college, in 1910, I enrolled, and never since have I enrolled in this party of that party. And, I've been strictly independent so that when it was arranged that during this democratic administration the democratic, that I as republican, was chairman. There did develope some criticism and a commity was formed to make an investigation. And, in preparation, I had offices

A. (Continued) set up in what was the Number Twelve, the old Number Twelve School on (unknown) Street. The offices were equipped with forty men, I forget how many. I had requisitions . . . printed. . . and, when the men came, I invited them to my offices, and said, we want to cooperate in every way we can, all records, of every kind, are available to you and here are requisitions which prevent a . . . signed (unintelligible) documents legally. There's only one restriction, the documents must be returned each night. They will be placed in your office the next morning but, that was (unknown). I took them to the heads of every department and explained the same thing to them, and of course, I explained to the department heads before. When they were through, I guess they were surprised at that, they wrote a report on, well it was my obituary was written, that I handled it well. (Laughter) Much to my surprise.

Q. (Laughter)

A. That's the only attempt made to (unintelligible)

Q. Did they think you were republican because you weren't a democrat?

A. I don't think they thought much . . . Uh . . . yes, that may well be it. I hadn't been making any activity (unintelligible)

Q. Do you think the democrats ran the city better than the republicans did?

A. I have no "think" on it.

Q. Okay. Uh . . . but during the New Deal, there was . . . the democrats were in control of the city government.

A. They were as far as things I had to do, I . . . found it commendable.

Q. Okay. Um . . . I'm gonna ask you a couple of questions now about um . . . certain political events that happened nationwide and your reactions to them. Um . . . this is, you know, again personal sort of reminiscences or impressions no . . . Um . . . During World War II now, when did you first become aware of what was happening to the Jews in Europe?

A. (Unintelligible)

Q. Um . . . what were your reactions to the Holocaust?

A. The reaction of any decent person, I think.

Q. Could you elaborate on that?

A. No, I could not elaborate.

Q. Um . . . did you support the State of Israel when it was first . . .

A. Yes.

Q. Yes. What was your opinion of the U.N. when it was first born? Did you have hopes for it?

A. Indeed I did.

Q. Um . . . were you at all active in anything having to do with the United Nations?

A. Yes. And, I don't remember what it was. (Unintelligible) but I forget. (Unintelligible) I don't know. It's pretty stupid but I don't.

Q. Um . . . has your opinion of the United Nations changed over the years?

A. Yes.

Q. What do you think of it now?

A. Futile.

Q. Um . . . is this due to . . . why? Why do you have less of an opinion?

A. Because of the nature of man.

Q. I'm afraid I don't understand.

A. Man isn't . . . a very noble creature, a very selfish individual.

Q. So, you think that the United . . . the U.N. has . . .

A. It remains a great disappointment.

Q. I see.

A. Operated under high, high hopes.

Q. Do . . . did your . . . um . . . reaction to it change . . . um . . . over Israel in any way? You know, the more reason to think . . . ?

A. I don't know, but I presume . . . oh, recently?

Q. Yea.

A. Oh, yes. Yes. Because I'm . . . I'm (unintelligible) ordinary development of (unintelligible).

Q. So, you think that even before the recent . . . um . . .

A. The recent episode?

Q. Yea.

A. I was preparing for it.

Q. Okay. And, you already had your . . . your opinion had already started lowering, you know, pre . . .

A. Yes, it was a very sustained recline, I think.

Q. Um . . . okay. Now, one other event I'd like to speak about, this is not a nationwide event but a community event, um . . . and that is the '64 riots, but before I get into that, I'd like to ask you what your impressions were of the Joseph Avenue area . . . um . . . over the years. Were you aware of the Jewish Culture that was taking . . . that was happening in the Joseph Avenue area?

A. Oh, I think I probably was, but I wasn't . . . I'm no expert on that; I'm sure of that.

Q. Did you go down there at all?

A. You mean in the course of my ordinary living?

Q. Yea.

A. Sure. I particularly liked going during the winter months to Cohen's Restaurant for their lentil soup.

Q. I see. Um . . .

A. I found it a . . . interesting experience, too, I dare say, because I think I was fortunate . . . interest in the Jewish life in that area was then (unintelligible).

Q. Did you think it was a culture in and of itself.

A. I didn't think, I'm sure I didn't think, it was that.

Q. Um . . . when did you become aware of the that the Joseph Avenue area was changing?

A. When it was changing.

Q. (Laughter) Um . . . did you feel badly about it?

A. Why, of course.

Q. Um . . . what do you think is the greatest loss of, you know, the scattering?

A. I think that's futile. I don't know what the greatest loss is.

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A, INTERVIEW 1

Interview 1
Tape 1
Side B

- Q. This is Tina Isaacs interviewing Arthur M. Lowenthal, this is Tape one, Side B. Mr. Lowenthal, what . . . um . . . were your impressions of the 1964 riot, how did you react?
- A. You asked that before, I think, and I don't recall specifically, except . . . consternation and abhorrence.
- Q. Um . . . Did you think that . . . did you expect it to happen?
- A. I know I didn't. I didn't think of it. I remember it would . . . would not (unintelligible).
- Q. Um . . . were you shocked when it did happen?
- A. I assume so, not having anticipated it.
- Q. Do you think . . . now, the riots took place in the Joseph Avenue area . . . um . . . primarily, do you think that . . . um . . . there were any anti-semitic overtones to the riots, or were they just anti-white?
- A. I don't know.
- Q. You don't know. Um . . . have you ever thought about what might have caused them?
- A. Yes, but I don't remember. It's too difficult to collect my thoughts on.
- Q. Okay. Um . . . I would like to um . . . talk about your activities in the community. You participated in many, many community activities. Um . . .
- A. I lived many, many years.
- Q. (Laughter) Um . . . I think what I will do is go through these activities um . . . and possibly you could enlighten me about what you did and what sorts of experiences you had um . . . in these activities. Now, you were on the Board of Directors of the Rochester General Hospital. Um . . . when . . . when were you?

- A. I was and still am. I'm on the, what do you call, Advisory Committee now, but I think I was associated for forty years.
- Q. What sorts of activities um . . . do you participate in? What does the Board do?
- A. The Board directs the general policy of the institution. In the early days, when General had a nursing training program issuing certificates of graduate of nursing, I was for a good many years, Chairman of the Nurses' Committee.
- Q. Um . . . do you think that the hospital . . . how has the hospital changed over the past forty years of your association with it?
- A. Well, I suppose in that it no longer has the school of that type of student nursing. And, it's a . . . changed its quarters. It was important to do that . . . it has modern facilities that it is a progressive institution. It is as are the other voluntary hospitals associated in the university medical school. But it is now, a very significant . . . very significant in the training of medical students today. That's very important in the hospital, to its management and to its purpose.
- Q. Um . . . You're interested in . . . in most of the hospital activity around town, are you not?
- A. No. I'm not really interested in any of them. But I'm . . . my interest is centered in General and its Convalescent Hospital for Children, which I've been very long associated with, and I was one of the founding directors of Rochester Hospital Services Corporation, which I was, I think, second President. So, those three tied together, and I think they have been my greatest single interest in them.
- Q. How did you become interested in . . . in these things?
- A. I was the youngest son of a very big family, and I had a long cherished idea of being a doctor. As I grew older, I felt it was an imposition on my parents

A. (Continued) and I felt that people of their years who spent . . . knitting of eleven children, three of whom died; they earned the right to know the kinds of men and women who they had produced and that is a long span of support that was necessary to send them to college, medical school, and internship, and I just felt that it was an imposition that I had no right to impose. And I, at one of my brothers' request, left Yale and went into the business which was a total surprise, change in my . . . what I had in my mind, and of course, I was (cannot hear due to extremely loud background noise).

Q. Um . . . Now, what um . . . motivated these three specific interests of the General Hospital, the Convalescent Hospital, and the Hospital Service?

A. We'll take the Hospital Service. There certainly was an elegant need of some institutions of some organizations to help people finance medical care. Certainly more evident every year since. And, I was asked how the (unintelligible) I don't know who, if there was an organizing single person, but anyway, I was one of the group that organized it and as I say, I was even second President of the group.

Q. Um . . . Now, what does the Rochester Hospital Service Corporations do?

A. Provide insurance to pay for hospital bills.

Q. I see. Um . . . how many people take out this insurance from you?

A. Oh, I haven't the figures here, but it runs into the hundreds of thousands in this . . . in this community covered by the Rochester Hospital Service Corporation.

Q. I see. Now, can a person in this community get this . . .

A. No. This is group insurance mainly through industry.

Q. I see. Is it part of an employee plan though? Hospital plan?

- A. It constitutes a big hospital plan of the corporations that . . . that embrace it.
- Q. I see. Um . . . have you any interesting experiences that happened in any phase of your hospital work.
- A. Yes, but there I think, they'd bore you to distraction.
- Q. (Laughter) Um . . .
- A. Yes. Many in a . . . but . . .
- Q. Well, okay, what I'm just trying to get at is there anything you could think of that um . . . has any relevance say to the community or to the growth of the community, you know, over the years that . . .
- A. I think the most important thing is that the Board of Directors (unintelligible) deal by the need to (unintelligible) by industry (unintelligible) were the work to the great changes in the dispensing of medical service. That it hasn't been tied to our yesterday.
- Q. Do you think that there was any (unintelligible) for this founding from um . . . say a lower level, that is, if a union would . . . if a union was demanding certain hospital plans and . . .
- A. I don't know. There may have been many things that stimulated or hindered me.
- Q. I guess what I'm asking is: is there anything about Rochester industry that um . . . prompted it to be so beneficent, you know, and so socially minded?
- A. I don't know. I don't know that its so beneficent. I think that Rochester industry . . . is controlled by, in the main, people with a broad perception of responsibility. That we're fortunate to be, let's say, in ownership for (unintelligible) of industry and realization of the need of the people who made their prosperity, the workers.

- Q. Do you think Rochester's typical in this sort of . . .
- A. I think we're typical in that a . . . certain people in the . . . leadership.
- Q. Did Kodak and Xerox participate?
- A. Oh, yes!
- Q. How . . . have they um . . . participated for a long time?
- A. (Unintelligible) Xerox participated and . . . predecessor Haloid (unintelligible) as I recall.
- Q. I see. Um . . . okay. Well, moving out of the hospital's sphere, I see that you've also been on the Board of Directors of the Jewish Community Federation. When did you start participating in the Federation?
- A. When it did.
- Q. Okay. What capacities have you served it in?
- A. Different capacities. Director and all the odds and ends.
- Q. Um . . . what kinds of activities did you um . . . participate in as part of Federation projects?
- A. (Unintelligible)
- Q. Um . . . what does the Board of Directors do . . . do, you know, for the Jewish Community Federation? Is it, again, decision making?
- A. Well, there are rules and regulations set up which permit an organization to qualify its members, I presume, that remain to function today, (unintelligible) if you raise and dispense money and to exercise (unintelligible).
- Q. Um . . . okay. Has this . . . has the Federation changed during your service . . . um, with it?
- A. Yes, it has.
- Q. In what way?
- A. I think, most obvious is a . . . breath of participation in Jewish education.
- Q. Um . . . now, the Federation . . . um . . . doesn't just see to fund-raising, I mean, that's only one part of it, is that true?

A. Yes. That's true.

Q. Yea. Um . . . have you participated at all . . . um . . . in the educational aspect . . .

A. No.

Q. . . . of the Federation's activities? Um . . . okay. Now you're former president . . . have I left something out about the Jewish Community Federation before I go on to another activity, that you can think of?

A. I don't think so. I can't remember any more.

Q. Okay. Um . . .

A. It is the binding of units from which the community gathers.

Q. Um . . . you are former President and Director of The Jewish Community Council, um . . . could you tell me something about that?

A. Well, I guess I was the Director when the problems . . . (unintelligible) I was too long in studying, I think, I had the good sense (unintelligible) myself while on the . . . trying to overcome the anticipated number of Jewish schools. I estimate twenty years or something like that, I was, I think . . . many. I refused so long, of course, they remained . . . there was a very cordial working relationship between all the members of the community. People weren't thought of as Orthodox, Conservative, or Reformed.

Q. Um . . . what did the Jewish Community . . . what does the Jewish Community Council do?

A. (Unintelligible)

Q. Um . . . what were your personal experiences with the Community Council, then?

A. (Unintelligible)

Q. Can you remember any particular . . . ?

A. No.

Q. No. I keep asking the same questions. (Laughter) Um . . . okay. I see many community, sort of cultural, things here. The Hoffstein. . . David Hoffstein

Q. (Continued) Memorial Music School. Um . . . you were the founding director.

A. I was. I had gone to highschool with David. Mr. James Watson and Mr. Hiram Sibling had been his beneficiaries and they had long been interested in him. They had invited opportunity for studying with working people and going to Europe and studying. They had provided a Stratavarios for him when he returned to this country (unintelligible). Shortly thereafter, he had gone to war. I should require that . . . he was culture (unintelligible) for the benefit soldiers and was going to one (unintelligible) to another in New York just before he (unintelligible) the taxi in which he was riding struck a Third Avenue L-boat. Destroyed his Stratavarios. He was unscathed. Sh. . . very shortly thereafter, he went to Europe and was engaged in battle and was killed. The insurance on his Stratavarios which was carried by the lady, and after his death, that money was turned over to the group, which formed the David Hoffstein Memorial Music School of which I was director and treasurer. That money we purchased . . . David, with a home of his parents and their family, and the school established. I negotiated the contract with Dr. Reeves, President of the University of Rochester, for a certain amount of gratuitous teaching. We charged what an individual could pay from nothing to maybe, five dollars. Any money that we took in was turned over, or returned over, to the University which in turn granted additional teaching, additional to the contract that I had negotiated.

Q. Um . . . now, the school has grown since, um . . . what . . . what has been your affiliation with the school over the years?

A. I remained very active. I was one of the committee of two that was the David Hoffstein Residents and became (unintelligible), to select the host of students and selected the site and the building was built and I remained an active member on the Board for many years, certainly for a half a dozen, maybe more. (Unintelligible).

Q. Do you think that Rochester is um . . . um . . . a cultural community, I mean, do you think that most of the people who are in Rochester are interested in music and art?

A. No.

Q. Okay. Um . . . do you think that Rochester needs more cultural services?

A. My opinion (unintelligible)

Q. Um . . . okay. Now, let's see, you've also been affiliated with the Harley School.

A. Yes, I was, as director of that school for a good many years.

Q. Um . . . what did you do in that capacity?

A. Sit up on the board with the procedural (unintelligible) and I had a little to do with the handling of the dome, what we could do about teachers. I had a number of intellectual teachers, nor did I feel qualified to pass upon the quality of education. I was used, I think, (unintelligible) how it should be accomplished (unintelligible).

Q. Um . . . Do you think it's a good school?

A. Very!

Q. (Laughter) Um . . .

A. I have great admiration for the lady who founded it. I knew her very well. I think it's an important educational institution.

Q. Why . . . what was the impetus for its original founding?

A. That again, is a . . . what is it for the smallest kids for . . .

Q. Kindergarten.

A. No.

Q. Uh . . . nursery school.

A. Yea, but it has another name. But alright, that's the way it began, as a nursery school. It's grown up very nicely.

Q. Well, do you think there was a dissatisfaction with the public schools? . . . school system? . . . was that part of um . . .?

A. I don't think you have to be satisfied with something when you can see something better.

Q. Okay. Um . . . do you think that the . . . what do you think of the quality of education in the public schools, though, in the city?

A. I . . . have no answer.

Q. Um . . . getting down the line, um . . . you're also the former director of the Civic Music Association, when?

A. When I was asked to become, early days, a member of that board, I admired them for their selection of me as probably the least competent. Perhaps the feeling was mutual. And, I was told that if I promised not to have anything to do with music that I . . . I want it, I could finance it.

Q. (Laughter) I see. Um . . . do you have any idea why they chose you?

A. Because I was available and tended (unintelligible) money.

Q. (Laughter)

A. (unintelligible) try and serve the public.

Q. Um . . . okay. I also see down here that you um . . . have participated in the Planned Parenthood of Rochester. Um . . . what did you do in . . . in that organization?

A. Birth Control is an organization of women. Its object is never spoken of (unintelligible) it would chore women, women who know birth control has nothing to do with men. The Board of Directors is women. Three men were asked to come on the Board of Directors. I was one of the three. I was asked to become Chairman. I said, I'd be glad to become Chairman but I thought it was a very heavy transition from "no men". And, Dr. (Unknown) is a very, very competent director of the Strong Memorial Hospital was one

A. (Continued) of the three. And, I suppose today that I thought it would be a much . . . would be much less of a shock to the community for the doctor to become chairman (unintelligible) to invite me to become chairman.

(Unintelligible)

Q. Um . . . When did you first start participating in your . . . in Planned Parenthood?

A. I don't know. It was a long time ago.

Q. Um . . . How . . . how is that changed over the years? Now . . .

A. The most obvious change is that there are probably more men on the board than women.

Q. Okay. Um . . . now, the activities of Planned Parenthood itself, I mean, do you think that they have also changed over the years?

A. I think they've increased the scope in their activities. Uh . . . I have had nothing, no connection, for many years, but within the past four times, I've been a . . . finally have had accepted membership in the newly created Board of Former Advisory Board (unintelligible)

Q. Um . . . what were your impressions of the Planned Parenthood program?

A. Great.

Q. You think it's great. Do you still think it's great?

A. I think it's a . . . I think poverty is one of the great curses of mankind, and (unintelligible) and a . . . the enormous family has been a (unknown) poor, at least given good medical . . . medical . . . the opportunity of good medical, sound medical advice.

Q. Um . . . so you have no moral qualms about any of their activities (unknown)?

A. I'm not a moral qualmer much (unintelligible) I certainly don't know any of theirs that a . . . I don't think would cause me to (unintelligible)

Q. Um . . .

A. I think that old key is better than okay. (Laughter)

Q. (Laughter) Um . . . okay, now. You were . . . you also um . . . participated in the Rochester Community Chest, okay? What . . .

A. Who hasn't?

Q. (Laughter) That's true. Um . . . what did you do? . . . as a member of the Community . . .?

A. I started in as a solicitor. In many years, I became a (unintelligible) well, one of the two or three that did something or other with the (unintelligible) I forget what you call it. I went through the gamut. (Unintelligible)

Q. How, in your experience, how has the Rochester Community Chest evolved um . . .

A. Through a remarkable leadership and organization.

Q. I see. So, you think that it . . . it's progressive . . . it's been a progressive a . . .

A. I do indeed. I think it's very mindful of organizational expense. A good example is public education.

Q. Okay, uh, one more thing . . . one more activity (unintelligible) which sort of sums this phase up a little bit. Um, now, you've been very active of the United Jewish Welfare Fund.

A. Yes I have.

Q. Um . . . what sorts of activities did you participate in and what are your impressions, just generally, of . . . of it . . . the fund?

A. Of the fund? I think it is one of the most thoroughly competently organized . . . it does one of the outstanding work in solicitation.

Q. Do you think that it's more active than most other cities?

A. I don't know. I can't judge. It does a much better job in collecting money than some of the organizations that I know well.

Q. Rochester organizations or other . . . ?

A. Rochester and elsewhere that I've had opportunities to know about.

Q. And, um . . . you . . . how long have you participated on the United Jewish Welfare Fund?

A. I guess since it started.

Q. Um . . . now, you've been on many, many community um . . . boards and activities, do you think that Rochester is a . . . is a more organized community than most cities?

A. I've had no opportunity to judge most cities. I think more than some that I know of or less.

Q. Do you think the city's well run?

A. The city itself? I've just come from the meeting of the Former Bureau of Municipal Research now, what's the new name . . . summing my limited opportunity, I think it's run well.

Q. Have you enjoyed all your activities in the . . . ?

A. No.

Q. . . . community? No.

A. No.

Q. Have . . . um . . .

A. I've spent an enormous amount of time collecting money, and I didn't enjoy that a bit.

Q. (Laughter) Um . . . what . . . what was the impediment . . . for you to belong to just so many things?

A. I guess the weakness of other people in asking me.

Q. (Laughter) Or, your weakness for not saying no.

A. Oh, certainly! Yes.

Q. (Laughter) Do you think that you're a community-minded person?

A. Yes.

Q. And that's been part of, you know, the reason why you've accepted all . . .

A. Yes. I'm very much interested in people (unintelligible).

Q. Well, before um . . . I move on to some other topic, can you think of anything that you'd like to add about um . . . your community activities over the years in the Community?

A. That's enough.

Q. (Laughter) Okay. Um . . . I would like to talk about Israel for awhile.

Um . . . have you ever been to Israel?

A. Yes.

Q. What were your impressions . . . what did you think of it?

A. (Unintelligible) effort and determination that people can exist, to (unintelligible) themselves (unintelligible).

Q. Um . . . have you been a supporter of Israel all along?

A. Yes.

Q. Have you contributed to it financially?

A. Yes.

Q. Um . . . do you think that there can be Jewish survival without the State of Israel?

A. (Unintelligible)

Q. Do you think that Israel is crucial to the Jewish identity?

A. I have no (unintelligible)

Q. Okay. Um . . . what would your reaction be if . . . if Israel were in clear um . . . um . . . danger of military annihilation? Do you think?

A. (unintelligible) . . . enormously sad reaction.

Q. Um . . . did you hear Golda Meir when she was here?

A. When was it?

Q. In 1975, yea. When she came to dedicate the Bernstein Chair. That was . . . last year.

A. (unintelligible)

Q. What do you . . . what do you think of her?

A. What do I think of Mount Whitney?

Q. (Laughter) Um . . . okay. Have . . . have you ever participated in the Bayden Street Settlement?

A. Yes. (Laughter)

Q. What did you do?

A. I, in the days after I came home from college, I conducted a course in modern and European government.

Q. Really?

A. And, there was one requirement for entrance. That is, the guy had to go down and take a shower-bath afterwards. We had a long, narrow room and a hose, and I'd go down there, "hey, what's the matter with your ears? You have ankles, haven't you?" and squirted the hose on them. (Laughter)
That's one of the amusing things that I recall.

Q. (Laughter) Um . . . how . . . were a lot of courses taught at Bayden Street?

A. No. I guess there were quite a few good ones. I don't know if I taught any. Class was very much interested in, you know, government, college, and I recently found my notes and I'm ashamed of them. (Laughter)

Q. (Laughter) What . . . what kinds of people took the course?

A. Stupid. (Laughter)

Q. (Laughter)

A. I don't know. They were just kids, you know, kids.

Q. Um . . .

A. Male (Laughter)

Q. Well, that has changed. (Laughter) What do you think of the women's movement?

A. Everything that has to do with equal opportunity, but I don't like co-education and I don't like promiscuous sleeping together.

Q. Well, do you think that co-education leads to that sort of thing?

A. Yes, I do.

Q. Um . . . why? Think . . . just about the fact that

A. The urge of sex is present for the boy and girl in rooms next to each other.
(Unintelligible)

Q. I see. So, you think . . .

A. I think it's a bad thing.

Q. You would be in favor of . . . of um . . . all males colleges or all female
• • •

A. I don't know if I'd be in favor of all male colleges but I was sorry when
Yale went co-educational.

Q. Okay. Um . . . okay. How long were you um . . . affiliated with Bayden
Street?

A. I don't recall. In the course of my long years, not many.

Q. (Laughter) Um . . . how 'bout, have you ever um . . . participated in the JY?

A. No.

Q. Um . . .

A. Oh, JY.

Q. Yea.

A. No.

Q. Are you a member of the Jewish Community Center?

A. Yes.

Q. Do you go down there, at all?

A. I haven't been there, I'm sorry to say.

Q. Um . . . okay. I guess I have one more question, which is: what kind of future do you see for . . . um . . . Rochester, I mean, have you . . . what kind of direction do you think the city is headed and the Jewish Community is headed?

A. Because of, I think, our main industries are directed by alert, sensitive, forward-moving people, because the nature our main industries, I see a (unknown) future.

Q. Do you think the . . . um . . . do you think the character of the community has changed, you know, the . . . the . . . ?

A. The intimacy of fifty years ago is gone. It's too large to (unintelligible) in our activities. (Unintelligible) the small community atmosphere. I think the city has, every city is going to confront with the fight of forces of uncontrolled educational opportunity and the question of wealth. I don't know (unintelligible) important. I think that the wrong feelings against big business and industry (unintelligible) an accumulation of money that makes possible expansion in industry, new lines of endeavors in building the city's what not will give opportunity to more and more people. Good (unintelligible) is the fork in what ails the (unintelligible) determination of folk god or two instilled in (unintelligible) already they estimated the number of people who will find employment and little houses that'll be required, the number of people to build the houses, and the number of people (unintelligible). The abuses of wealth are . . . there are a little (unintelligible) but the advantages of accumulation of wealth are the money that's responsible for this growth (unintelligible). Go speak to someone who knows something about it.

Q. Okay, have you anything to add that I . . . might have . . . ?

A. Yes. I think you've been very tolerant to listen to all this dribble.

Q. (Laughter) Oh, it hasn't been dribble. Um . . . if you have nothing to add, I guess that . . . I just would like to thank you very much.

A. I appreciate your willingness to come.

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE B, INTERVIEW 1