

ROCHESTER ORAL HISTORICAL PROJECT (Rochester Jewish community 1925-1975)

Interviewee Benjamin Owerback

Interviewer Maurice Isserman

Date(s) of interview July 21 and 22, 1976

Setting (place of interview, people present, impressions)

I spoke with Mr. Owerback in his apartment at Seth Green Place. He was friendly and informative, and offered the kind of minute and colorful descriptions of his experiences that are guaranteed to delight the heart of an oral historian.

Background of interviewee

Mr. Owerback was born in Russia in 1897 and came to the United States in 1913. He moved to Rochester in 1915 and worked in a variety of jobs, from tailoring to peddling. Since 1922 he has been a leader in Labor Zionist activities in Rochester.

Interview abstract

Mr. Owerback describes his immigration to this country and his early experiences in learning the language and getting jobs. He offers a detailed description of the Poale Zion and the Farband in Rochester from their origins to the present. He also describes the Labor Zionist movement's relations with other socialist and Zionist groups in the city.

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

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Social history | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Jewish community |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Family | <input type="checkbox"/> community relations |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Demographic/residential | <input type="checkbox"/> Religious life |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Economic | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Jewish education |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Political/civic | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Anti-semitism |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Zionism/Israel | |

Interview log

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

BENJAMIN OWERBACK, interviewed by Maurice Isserman July 21, 1976,
Tape One

born 1897 in Russia-immigrated 1913
anti-semitism in Russia
immigration to Us--thought there would be gold in the streets
first lived in NYC--early job experiences
involved in strike in 1914
farm work
1915 moved to Rochester
landsmen in Rochester
neighborhoods
lost contact with relatives in Russia -- most were killed in Holocaust
difficulties in learning English
more New York stories
still reads Yiddish press
Jewish Removal Society--found jobs on farms for Jews
worked as a peddler in Rochester
marriage in 1922
lost home in depression
religious education of children, grandchildren
National Aid Society, Jewish War Veterans, United Welfare Fund

Tape Two, July 22, 1976

Joined Farband in 1922, Poale Zion a little later
Three branches of Farbund in Rochester
Reasons for joining
Poale Zion organized Farbudd to broaden appeal
150-200 members in Farbund at its height
Socialist sentiment in Farbund
Histradut campaigns
Farbudd smaller than Workmen's Circle
Pioneer Women
Zionism's limited support to Jewish workers in twenties
Farbudd founding convention in Rochester in 1910
Farbudd schools teach Jewish history
Young Poale Zion local
27 Buchanan Park was center of Rochester Labor Zionism
organized Hebrew Credit Union
mutual help during depression
support for strikers
Labor Zionists sponsored summer camp
relations with other Zionist organizations
Holocaust--feels FDR ignored plight of Jews.
Rochester aid to displaced Jews in Europe after WWII.
1948 meeting to celebrate founding of Israel
Decline of Labor Zionism in recent years
Membership records thrown out.
Present activities of Labor Zionism
Cemetery on Britten Rod sponsored by Farbudd
Three visits to Israel.

Interview I
Tape I
Side A

Q. Speaking with Benjamin Owerback at 200 Seth Green in Rochester on July 21, 1976.

Now Mr. Owerback, when were you born?

A. I was born 1897.

Q. So you're . . . how old are you now? You're . . .

A. Huh?

Q. How old are you now? You're . . .

A. Well, I'm 79.

Q. And where were you born?

A. I was born in Russia, Kostilov, it's Ukraine.

Q. In the Ukraine.

A. Yea, in Russia.

Q. Uh-huh. And when did you come to this country?

A. I came here in 1913.

Q. 1913. Do you remember much about your life in . . . in the Ukraine?

A. Do I remember much of my life? Well, I remember a little. But what would you want to know?

Q. Well, did you grow up in a city or was it a village?

A. It was a small town, yea it's a city. They . . . they call us a city but it's a small . . . small village, a small city.

Q. And were there many Jews?

A. And the . . . well . . . cities in Ukraine, the little ones especially, they were all Jewish people.

Q. I see.

A. Now like the surrounding . . . surround was all Gentiles, but the city itself

- A. (Continued) consists of Jewish people. There was a lot of synagogues, you know, and Jewish people. That's all there was. There wasn't very many, they won't. . . I was born about three hundred families was there. There were synagogues, quite a few of 'em. And all the people in my little town were religious people.
- Q. As a child growing up in Russia were you aware of very many restrictions on you as a Jew?
- A. Was I aware of what?
- Q. Of legal restrictions or. . . or anti-Semitism or. . .?
- A. Well, we knew that the Gentiles don't like. . . maybe I shouldn't say that, don't like too much Jewish people. But, no there wasn't any discrimination that I know in the little town, unless . . . that I know. . . That was too small of a town, bigger cities probably had more of this.
- Q. No violence or. . . ?
- A. Violence? No, there wasn't. The only thing was when the Japanese War in Russia, when they were fighting. . . does that all take it up, yea? Japanese War broke out. We were told that we were gonna have a pogrom in our little town. And I was a little boy and my mother put me up in the garret with my sister. Then the next day Kossacks came in the little town, you know what Kossacks are?
- Q. Yea.
- A. Everything quitened down, there was nothing, no. . . no pogrom in our little town.
- Q. And why did you decide to come to the United States?
- A. Oh, well my. . . my father died when I was a little boy and my mother was supposed to come here. Do you wanna. . . do you wanna know this story or not?
- Q. Yes, I do.
- A. My mother was supposed to come here when I was a little boy and my sister was

- A. (Continued) a little girl. I was maybe around 12 years old. My sister was about 10 or so. And she had already the everything made out to come here. Then my sister got sick and she left me by a uncle in Letiche. My sister was left in Draznow, that was two. . . two towns. But my aunt didn't have any children and at that time there was a like. . . I don't know, some kind of a sickness that it was diarrhea. I had diarrhea, but I. . . I didn't bother too much. But my sister had diarrhea and she was real sick, she pretty near died. So that stopped my mother from coming down here. Well, the living in the little town was really, really poor. It consist, even a man, was out to make a living, even a man. But a woman like my mother was, she had stockings, stockings machine. And she had about three of 'em, stocking machines. When my father died she brought in the machines to the little town and before they used to make. . . make stockings by hand, you know. She brought in the machines and there was girls working for her in total dark she could hardly make things neat.
- Q. Is that what your father did before he died?
- A. No, no my mother was the orininator. My father used to work for a hide company.
- Q. What company?
- A. Hide, hide, you know. . .
- Q. Oh, hide.
- A. Yea, he was with them and. . . and he took sick, I suppose he had pneumonia and he died. We were little, very little. My sister was very. . . I think I was around four years and she was about a year or so. And so mother brought in the machines and she used to make stockings. And the girls used to get around. . . well, they were gettin' from twenty-five to thirty-five, forty dollars a year working. Till the. . . she got out. . .
- Q. Did you hear much about America when you were still in the Ukraine?
- A. Did we know about it? We don't know about America. They think gold is laying

A. (Continued) right in the streets.

Q. Gold in the streets.

A. Yea, when I came here it was already, you know, lot of people from even from my little town were in this country already. They. . . they came here. And darned if they used to send a dollar, it become two down there. And they thought that everybody is gettin' rich in America. And that isn't that. And my mother thought that if I come I'll take her over. So the war broke out in 1914. And when I came here I was very poor too. It was hard to get a job. And I was in New York and I worked in a. . . you want to know that?

Q. Oh, yea.

A. When I came here I . . . I worked in a boiler shop. And that. . . that wasn't so bad, very nice people. But all my . . . mostly came from same city. They say they are working in a tailor shop and they make about ten, twelve dollars a week, that was a lot of money. So, I went there but as soon as I started working there the union. . . at that time the union just established itself.

Q. Is that the Amalgamated Clothing. . .

A. The Amalgamated Clothing just established at that time, 19. . . 1914, 19. . . yea 1914 it would be because at that time it was . . . And they came and took us out from. . . I had to pay in \$10 to learn the trade. After I learned the trade the union came and we had foot power. Course it's interesting, foot power, you know, they weren't electric.

Q. Oh, foot power, right.

A. Foot power. Then so the union came and said, took us all, and she told. . . the woman. . . the woman was the boss at that time. I worked in Brooklyn and I. . . I lived in New York, but there used to be a trolley, underneath, they went from. . . from Galesses Street into Brooklyn, through the bridge. You paid

A. (Continued) five cents, you got. . .you had three tickets, I don't know if you wanna know all this. . .

Q. No, I do.

A. Well they had three tickets. . .

Q. . . . kind of thing I want to hear.

A. You got three tickets, cost you five cents. So you went one way, next way and another way for five cents. And I used to go to work there, but after I work there two weeks for nothing and I had to pay \$110 dollars, the union came took us all and we were striking.

Q. Uh-huh.

A. And as much money as I had at that time, I didn't have anything, you know. There was good many days that I hardly had anything to eat. And so they give us bank books, you know, union. . . union books and they made it. . . made us for union members. And we were on strike several weeks and then she said she was gonna have it in May. She was gonna put up. . . she was gonna put up electric. And they came . . . we went there, there wasn't no electric and a little while later she did. . . and she never put it up anyways. We came back to work, there wasn't any work.

Q. No work.

A. No work, so we were all strike. So that's it.

Q. Why. . . why were you on strike? Strike for more wages or. . .?

A. No, we wanted to have electric.

Q. Oh.

A. And she said she was gonna put it on, but she never did. So, we give her time after, but when we came back to work there was no work. So we couldn't do nothing.

Q. What did you do then?

A. Huh?

Q. What did you do then?

A. Well, then I . . . I was looking for a job. All of a sudden I see in the paper, you know there used to be morgans you know. Morgans shuneral.

Q. Morgans shuneral.

A. Yea, oil well, I know it isn't any more now. So, I looked for a job and I see in the paper that tailor shop wants a man to make backs, and I could make backs. So I went over to there and I worked there one day, they gave me \$2, no more work. So I went to work on a farm. I. . . I went down to on the Eleventh. . . Eleventh Street, moving society, Eleventh Street. So, I went down and I worked on a farm quite a few years. Well, it's a big long story. It'll take us years and years if I told you the whole shooting match what I went through.

Q. Well. . .

A. But, anyway, so I worked on a farm and. . . for a little while then I had somebody up here. And I wrote. . . wrote to them.

Q. A friend who was up here?

A. If I. . . yea, if I could come here, and they. . . they told me that there was strike here at that time. You know somebody got killed, too? A girl, you know that too? And there wasn't any work. So I stayed. . . I stayed in New York and then all of a sudden the strike settled. So they told me that I could come and. . . and get to work here. I thing this would be of all my stories interesting because people wouldn't know. I came to Rochester and the man that I came to, the names wouldn't be. . . matter. So the man that I came to he said the girl that works in the shop, in the tailor shop is going to be married, so they need somebody to work in Kempers. So he took me up there and I worked there. I had to work two weeks. One week, I had to work two weeks before I

A. (Continued) got one week's pay. They used to keep one week back. So, when I came down there and I worked two weeks, he gave me \$3. He says here are six rubles, you know because the rubles was. . . in Russia was the rubles. I told him, I says look, I heard that story before. Twice for three rubles, for six rubles, I'm not gonna work. Oh he insulted me and he yelled at me. I says all right, that was it. So I quit him, I didn't want to go no more to work for him.

Q. Where was that?

A. Huh?

Q. Do you remember the name of that shop?

A. It was on Selinger Street, it was on Selinger Street. I don't remember. There was two. . . two partners at that time, I don't remember, I don't remember exactly the name, but there was two partners who were working up there. And I quit them, I went to look for a job. I went all over Rochester wherever there was a factory, I went there to look for a job, I didn't. Then I got a job at Rochester Lumber Box Company and he says he's gonna give me \$8, \$9 a week. But I had to work 10 hours a day. So Saturday we only work a half a day or we didn't work any, so he gave me eight and a half dollars, which was all right. So I work there. And then I start. . . well they told me everybody's peddling so you might as well too. So, I started peddling. It was never. . . and that's it.

Q. So you came to Rochester first in 1914?

A. I came in 1915. I worked. . . I worked around New York till about 1915. I came in around December 1915, yes.

Q. When you first came to Rochester, where did you live?

A. I live with the people that the. . . that they. . . I lived on Alphonus Street. Yea, I lived by the people that they told me to come. She was my. . . my

- A. (Continued) lonse. . . you know, she came from the same city. In fact she worked for my mother, she had the stockings put out by machine.
- Q. Were there many people in Rochester from that city in Russia?
- A. Were there many people? There was a few, yes. Well, not. . .not in the city, but nearby there was quite a lot. You know they call them Kippeller, and that isn't very far from Kostilov. But Kostilov, there was. . . there was a few, maybe around. . . oh, I would say around. . . round number, they. . . they came from Kostilov, must 'a been around twenty or twenty-five at that time from my little town. Course that's what I know of.
- Q. And was the neighborhood you lived in mostly Jewish? In Rochester?
- A. The neighborhood all. . . was always Jewish people, Alphonsus Street, Thelma Street, Ermin Street, all Jews. There wasn't anybody. . . well, maybe there was a. . . a German once in a while, but most of 'em were Jewish people, all Jewish people.
- Q. Did you always live in that neighborhood, or did you move to other neighborhoods?
- A. No, I lived in that neighborhood for a little while and then I went. . . I move. . . I moved down on Kelly Street. I lived on German Street. I lived on Joseph Avenue and down. . . and then I went. . . I went to work for Mirpole a couple years. And I went down to. . . I lived in Jamestown, oh about a year or so. Jamestown, New York. Then I came back in 1922 I was back and I bought a farm. I was all by myself and it wasn't good either.
- Q. Your mother and your sister never came up to Rochester?
- A. What?
- Q. Your mother and sister never came to Rochester?
- A. Never heard of them. You see the war broke out. The war broke out and 1914 and then I didn't hear from them until 1922. The. . . the mail was. . . was . . . back was, you know they were fighting down there. And even after the

A. (Continued) war was over, say in 19. . . well they. . . they finished the war quicker I think in 1916, 1917, 1916 pardon me. But they were fighting around you know those people. And the mail didn't come. I couldn't. . . I couldn't find them. And then my mother moved. She moved from Kostilov to Nycostantine, Nycostantine. From Nycostantine she lived in Odessa.

Q. Odessa.

A. And I couldn't find her. And. . . and she probably wrote to me and the letters got lost. So I couldn't do nothing. In '22 I got married and when I was ready to get married I began to hear from her. And down in the same time she was all by herself. And she. . . she could hardly make a living from that making stockings because the war broke out. And then the machines, they have needles that they, you know, I don't know whether you saw sometimes where they make sweaters?

Q. Right.

A. Yea?

Q. Yea, I think I know.

A. See, they had needle. Well they. . . they had the same thing like the women crochet. And those needles during the war you couldn't get 'em and the machines break 'em like nobody's business. You see, they have about. . . oh, let's say they have . . . well as many eyes as there is in a stocking, they have so many needles because when the cotton goes by, you know, it. . . it makes a stitch. And she couldn't get any needles and she got. . . she got married. And then after the. . . she married a well-to-do man, he had a flour mill. And she was pretty well off and she took my sister with her. And then. . . then the Bolsheviks came and they took everything away from them. And they, you know, she wasn't so young and he was probably older yet. He was sick. And then I . . . I think he died and my sister got married. She had a little boy. And

- A. (Continued) they went to Odessa. Down when Hitler came he took them out and they killed them.
- Q. When you came to this country you couldn't speak English.
- A. I couldn't speak, no.
- Q. So, was it a very difficult process for you to learn to speak English?
- A. Well, when I came I came to New York and you didn't have to speak English. But when I went on a farm, yea. . . no. I could understand pretty near. . . I went when I came here in New York City, you don't have to. . . you know, you could talk Yiddish and you got along very nice because the East Side was all Jewish people, there was nobody else. And where I was working there were Jewish . . . all Jewish people. There wasn't any. . . anybody. No. See when I came here, if you want to know, I don't know if. . .
- Q. Oh, yea.
- A. When I came here I came to somebody, some loansmen. You know what a loansman is?
- Q. Loansman, yes.
- A. Fellow that comes from the same city. And when I came here my mother says to me, you get this address. She. . . I'll tell you how I came here. I came here you see I was only fifteen years old, fifteen and a half. But I came here my mother made a passport like you have a passport here. She made the passport for her, for me and for my sister. So she sold that passport to a woman that wanted to come to this country with the agreement that she should take care of me, you know, like my mother. So she was my mother until we come here. When we came here she had two boys. So I told her I want to go to this and this man because mother says when you come to this land, they'll take care on you. So I came to that family and I saw they were looking at me. . . I don't like people to look at me, you know, like I came and sit down on their neck, you know.

A. (Continued) This country isn't like the old country. The old country, well, certainly there's friendly people here too. Anyways, so I stayed overnight. And then the next day I said I want to go to this and this people. And these people were known to my mother and they know to me because his daughter worked for my mother too. So but he lived quite a ways from. . . you see I told you that there was a . . . a . . . a trolley that went from Brooklyn into . . . into New York. As soon as you come out from the underneath you were in New York and the landscape. So he gave me an address for Mr. Cooper. Mr. Cooper lived on Clinton Avenue not very far from there.

Q. Yea.

A. So he says here, you. . . I don't know if you know Mr. Cooper or not, but you go to Mr. Cooper. Mr. Cooper'll take you down to that. . . that man. I came down there. I got out from the. . . from the underneath. I couldn't say nothing, I didn't know anything. So, but he gave me the address so I went down to policeman that stood there and I give him the address. He looked at my shoes he says oh greenhorn. But I don't know what he said, but he says come on. So he took me by my hand and he took me in the city, different street years ago. Took me up on Clinton Avenue to that woman and he says here's a loansman. And they, that woman never knew me. She knew my father, she knew my mother. But she. . . that's, oh. . . she were. . . they were different people. I says where is your husband? She says my husband is working he'll come back. At that time in New York City there were big-mouth clips. They used to go into the different tailor shops and pick up pieces from them, you know. And they used to have shops and they used to pick it over and sell it. So in a little while he came on. Oh, she gave me some tea and cookies. She says to me wait till my husband comes. Oh, she was so happy to see me. So her husband came up from the. . . and I told him I says I want to go to this and this guy. He says you have lots

- A. (Continued) of time. Don't worry about it. He says you come with me. So he. . . I went with him to pick up the clips, you know, in a pushcart.
- Q. Right.
- A. I came down there and while I was talking to him he says there's a greenhorn of mine just came in and he's lookin' for a job. He says all right, I'll give him a job. So he did. He game me a job, \$3 a. . . that's the reason I told the guy, I had six rubles, three dollars a week. And I used to. . . he was wanting to know. . . you see, they have samples. If you go and buy a suit they'll do out a lot of it. When I go and buy . . . you go and buy a suit, they give. . . they have a book of clip. . .
- Q. Of samples, yea.
- A. And you pick out the. . . this is what I done. I just put a piece of clip on it and the man, you know, used to make books and give 'em to sell 'em. So I worked there for, oh a week or two. Then I don't know if you want to know all this.
- Q. Oh, I do.
- A. Huh?
- Q. This is exactly what I want.
- A. Then I. . . I stayed there for a week. And then there was a man that worked in New York City, even in those days when you had a shop you had to have somebody inside, a lock didn't mean nothing. You had to have somebody to lock the door. It wasn't as bad as now. Now they break it in anyway. But in those days you locked it from inside, the watchman was inside the store. He got a, you know they got three or five dollars a week. . . a month, you know what he got. Dollar a week I think he got. But, he used to make his own tea, you know in the morning. And as much money as I had. . . I told you how much money I had. So I used to go next door and we used to buy a big bread, big loaf for three cents

A. (Continued) yesterday because it was not the fresh ones. The fresh ones was maybe five, ten cents. And we used to make tea and. . . in the shop. So I did. And I mentioned that I worked in embroidery shops. So the man comes around and I was dovening. You know what dovening is. I was praying, you know. Greenhorn, doven. . . I still doven today too. But I was prayin' and he comes around, he looks at me, says you know, what are you doin' in here? You know. The older guy happened to be busy or he says you stay here till the boss comes. And I have to go away some. So I was there. So after he didn't bother me. He. . . I. . . I went to the. . . with my dovening and when I got through, he says what are you men doin'? And so I told him. I says I'm working, I'm gettin' three dollars a week. He says, well, he says, I could use you and I'll give you five dollars a week. Why, sure. So, I went down and I had the loansman just came that week. So I went down and got him and I says look, lady come one with me. You know I had to tell the boss that I work for somebody else. I says come on with me and I'll get you a job. I did. I took him down I told the boss, I says look I'm gettin' five dollars a week from the man in the embroidery shop and now I brought you another guy, you do the same work. See you didn't have to know too much to put a clipping on. So, he was working there. So I worked there for a little while until I told you that the boys, you know, told me that I make a lot of money. My mother was in Europe, she wanted money you know, she was poor at that time. The first. . . the first few dollars I earned I sent it away to her. So I didn't have too much money no more. So that's the way it was. Now. . .

Q. So, I see that you still get the Yiddish Press.

A. Oh, yea.

Q. You've kept that up all these years.

A. What?

Q. You've kept up your reading of Yiddish Press.

A. Oh, yea. I . . . yea, I . . . well, I'll tell you I read a lot the Yiddish Press, but the only thing is today, you know I have this, I have Hebrew. Let me show you a Hebrew magazine. I have the . . . the Yiddish hakeple. I have. . . yea, but you see the trouble with me is today my eyes aren't so good. When I read a lot. . . oh, I used to . . . see all those books?

Q. Yea.

A. But, today I can't read so much.

Q. So, you learned English on the farm and then when you came to Rochester?

A. Yea, I . . . you know, I worked on several farms. I had good farms and I had bad farms.

Q. Did many Jews work in these farms? Or were you pretty much alone?

A. Oh, the . . . well, you see the . . . there's a . . . there was on Eleventh Street in New York City, there was a Yiddish Removal Society. They used to. . . well, they probably know more about it. I think it was. . . he was a rich . . . rich fellow and he wanted the people from this country to work on farms. In New York he helped them out, he helped a lot. There was a lot of Jewish farmers around New York.

Q. In New Jersey or. . . ?

A. In New Jersey there were more pig farms. Yea, there were farms. I worked in . . . the first job I got I got a yadlepus levoiney, that was a Jewish farm. Sitronovok his name was and I wish I stayed there. Then I changed I went down and I worked . . . I worked for. . . for New Jersey State Hospital milking cows. And that was a very good job, but I don't know, I wasn't satisfied. But I worked different farms. Sure there was Jewish. . . when I went, I went with another Jewish boy, an American boy. It was hard to get a job at that time, 1915. You couldn't. . . you couldn't get a job. And then there was a

A. (Continued) lot of banks that . . . was at that time I think it was, oh 1916 already. There was a lot of banks went bankruptcy in those days, you know, when the war broke out. And there was a lot of people lost their money and they. . . it was bad times. Anyways today it was bad times, but there's a lot of people makin' a lot of money. But in those days there weren't. So I. . . I went back and I. . . I worked on a farm. Then I came back to New York City and I couldn't get no job no how. I went all around. I used to take the morning. . . the Morning Journal, that is the morning paper, the Jewish paper. They used to print a lot of want-ads, like they do in the morning paper here. So, I used to go up all the way maybe 156th, 150th Street, 200th Street, I don't know how. . . how far I used to go. So, I used to spend a nickel down, when I went back I walked back. I didn't get no job. You see we came down there to. . . you had to come early in order to get a job, so I used to take the subway or the elevator and get there. But when I got there, there was maybe forty or fifty people. He advertize, he's gonna pay \$5 a week. So great big man comes out, boss I'll work for four dollars. You know, that was the way it was. And there was about forty, fifty people for one job.

Q. So then you came to Rochester and you had several different jobs. Did you get a job then that you held for a long time? Told me about the garment factory and the. . .?

A. Well, I worked. . .

Q. . . . box factory. . .

A. I worked . . . well, I worked in the box. . . the Lumber Box Company till spring. And then they told me what. . . what you gonna work for that, you go start peddling. So I start peddling. And in. . . in the summertime you made a poor living, just like a worker. But when wintertime came, you had to go and look for another job, you know you come back to the same people, he says no

- A. (Continued) we told you that we. . . he always liked me, he says we wrote you a postal card that the job was open, you didn't come, you can't work. I worked for Linksloe Furniture Company. They used to make chairs for. . . for schools. He was a very liberal man, the forman, he gave me a job until pretty near spring came. But when spring came I used to have a horse and I feed him anyways all winter, so when spring came the sun was shining, so I left the job. You know, that's the way people kept on one way and another, you tried to. . .to get by that's all.
- Q. And well just. . . I'm just interested in the different jobs you. . . you held up until. . . you can just keep talking about that until the present.
- A. I. . . I couldn't hear you.
- Q. Well, what other jobs did you hold then after that?
- A. Oh, one. . . lot of jobs. Jobs, after I got through with them and I. . . I went down there. I worked once even in the. . . where the electric they're makin'. . . makin' down below here, where they used to fix up the electric. But I worked there in the wintertime. I used to get. . . well then I thought I was a rich man, I used to get I think \$.35 an hour, that was a lot of money. And then if you worked overtime you used to get time-and-a-half. But, that job didn't last very long, it lasted several weeks then you had to quit. Them times were different in those days. And no matter what you was doing, you had a few weeks good ones and then all of a sudden they were. . . they were. . . they were no good. Now like we had times from '40, '41, '42, times kept on going up and up and up and up. But in those days there was two or three years good ones and then it was bad enough. That's the way it was. And then in '22 I. . . I was married and you had to keep on working.
- Q. What was the job that you worked at the longest?
- A. Huh?

Q. What job did you hold the longest? The longest time?

A. To work for somebody?

Q. Yea, that you worked for the longest.

A. I worked long as they kept me. I worked on a farm. I worked two or three years. I worked from 1915. . . from 1914, '15, pretty near '16, a couple years I worked there. And that's what I done. Then I worked for myself, kept on working for myself, I peddled food then I peddled junk. One day we used to peddle food, that's the way it was, and one day we used to peddle junk. See then when the wintertime came you couldn't peddle food because you wasn't established. Lately, the last time, fifteen, twenty years I used to peddle food all the time.

Q. Oh, that long, huh.

A. You see, but because I was equipped, I had the truck and I had some meat in there. Before there wasn't any, so in the wintertime we used to go out and peddle junk and you never made enough anyways.

Q. So, you became sort of a businessman in a sense.

A. Well, I worked for myself, yea. I worked at different kind. I had a store one time on Joseph Avenue. I peddled with accessories. I done a lot of. . . a lot of things but they didn't. . . I had a farm. I had a farm near Honeyoye Falls. I worked there a year and I lost a lot of money. See somebody told me that they were gonna go with me and then when I paid in then they wouldn't go. So I worked a whole year at that time and I lost money. So. . .

Q. How about the Depression during the thirties? What were you doing then?

A. Oh, doing pretty well. I was married, it was very bad years. Go out, I used to get. . . thirties was really bad. You see I had a house on Elmira Street.

Q. You owned a house?

A. Yea, I bought a house and I. . . I lost all the money put in there. And when

A. (Continued) the Depression came the little one was born at that time.
Want to show you. See it? See my little girl? She was born in '29.

Q. Oh. Uh-huh. Is that your first?

A. Huh?

Q. Is that your first child?

A. No, that's the . . . the youngest.

Q. Uh-huh.

A. That was the youngest. This one was the first, Daniel Owerback. Maybe you know him.

Q. No, I don't.

A. You don't? This is the first one. That's my daughter.

Q. Uh-huh.

A. And that's the little boy that . . . that my dau. . . my sister had in Europe.
She send me a picture and I put 'em together.

Q. Oh, so you had two children?

A. Oh, me? Three.

Q. Three.

A. I got this one, little girl, the girl I showed you. This . . . this is older girl.

Q. Oh, I see.

A. He . . . he's the first-born.

Q. I saw that.

A. This . . . this is the second.

Q. I saw that, too.

A. The older daughter. . . well, they were small when we took it. Now this, this was my mother. And this . . . this here boy is the same as this boy.

Q. I see.

- A. He got killed. I don't know. Don't hear anything more. But, I wished I did.
- Q. So you were married in . . . in 1922?
- A. Yea, I was married in '22 in December.
- Q. And was your wife also from the immigrants?
- A. Huh?
- Q. Was your wife also an immigrant?
- A. Yea, oh yea. Yea, she came about the same time that I did.
- Q. Was she about the same age as you?
- A. Huh?
- Q. She was about the same age as you were?
- A. Yea, just about, yes. She was about the same age.
- Q. How did. . . where did you meet her?
- A. I met her here in Rochester. She lived on Goodman Street and I lived on Kelly Street.
- Q. And did she work also? Or. . .
- A. She worked in a tailor shop.
- Q. Uh-huh.
- A. But after she was married, in those days they. . . the women didn't work. After she was married I wouldn't let her work, she didn't work. She worked in a tailor shop.
- Q. And when you brought your children up, did you give them a religion. . . a religious education?
- A. I tried. Yes. You know my son. . . well, Professor Karp he knows him well. Oh, yea, he knows him. He was active in . . . he's very active all over the. . . all over the city, they know him. I'm suprised you don't know him. Are you a Rochester boy?
- Q. No. No, I just came here to go to school.

A. Oh, to school.

Q. A couple years ago.

A. Oh, that's it. He goes to Beth El and Karp knows him pretty well. And you asked me if I . . . yea, I give. . . there used to be a . . . well, when we talk about the Farband and Poale Zion and we come to that, I will mention the school. I gave all my children a . . . a Jewish education. As much as I could, that was possible. It was. . . in fact they. . . the uncle taught Jewish. You see my . . . my daughter, the one that I showed you, the youngest, she's a teacher. She teaches. . . she was teaching down in Field Street. And when people came here in this country they brought a family. So they put 'em into school. Naturally they couldn't speak English so the little girl comes up to my daughter and she says, you know, give us our best teacher we might. . . we might bretharodt, my bretharodt my teacher she says. He wouldn't talk only English. And he don't understand English and read the zutzse, you know?

Q. Right.

A. I don't know if you understand Jewish. Do you?

Q. No.

A. Not much. You see, she says you are better person than my. . . my brother has. My brother's teacher, he wouldn't talk to him only in English.

Q. Oh, I. . .

A. And you talk in Yiddish.

Q. Right.

A. Now, you see, so she. . . she knew pretty good. . . well, I don't know how much, too much, but they do.

Q. But they also. . . they also spoke English from. . .?

A. Oh, yes. She could. . . oh, yes she talked. . . she talked Jewish.

Q. Do all your children live in Rochester now?

- A. No, one of them. . . she lives in Milwaukee, the one. . . the youngest she lives in Milwaukee in the outskirts. She has a good job now. She . . . she's teaching down there, too.
- Q. Do your. . . do your children have children of their own?
- A. Oh, yes, sure. Oh, sure. I have grandchildren.
- Q. Oh.
- A. But, sure, they have children. Sure, this is their children. This is my daughter's children. This is my granddaughter. She was married in May in Israel.
- Q. I see.
- A. See, this is my granddaughter. She was married Israel.
- Q. Uh-huh.
- A. This is a little boy. She's got an older one. That's a great-great. . .
- Q. . . . grandchild.
- A. Yea. This is her. . . hers. . . her little boy.
- Q. And do you. . . do you think that. . . are they getting a Jewish education from their parents, your grandchildren?
- A. Well, yes. The boy's got. . . got a very good education because my son, he went through high school in Hebrew.
- Q. Oh, I see.
- A. In. . . in Beth El. But the girls, they're gettin' a education. But this one just got Bar Mitzvahed. That's the youngest. . . youngest boy that she has. See? The one that lives in Milwaukee. Now, but oh yea, they got a good education. And my son kept 'em. . . he made 'em go night school after even they got through Bar Mitzvahed. You know, as a rule they go through the Bar Mitzvah they don't want to go no more. That's what. . . see I got one here told me he don't like to. He's a very smart boy, but he don't. . .

Q. Well, I'm. . . I'd like to ask you about organizations that you belong to, but I don't want to talk about Labor Zionism just yet.

A. No.

Q. So, just have you belonged to any other organizations in the Rochester Jewish Community?

A. Yea, I was. . . there was a. . . a national . . . national aid society.

Q. National aid. . . that's a. . .

A. Yea, I belong there.

Q. Benevolent society?

A. Huh?

Q. Was that a benevolent society?

A. Well, yea it is, you know. You know, they have. . . at that time I belonged there they. . . we didn't pay very much. It was only around I think \$7 or \$8 a year and you used to get . . . oh, about \$5 sick benefit.

Q. Who. . . who sponsored that?

A. Huh?

Q. Who sponsored this organization?

A. Who sponsored? Nobody, no. . .

Q. It was just a. . .

A. It belongs . . . it. . . people come from the old country.

Q. I see.

A. They needed somebody.

Q. So, right.

A. You know, company. And then they were all poor people and they formed this organization. They were peddlers and they used to give 'em \$5 sick benefit. When winter comes, they were sick. They got \$5. With \$5 they lived through, you know, more or less. And. . . and they. . . they had. . . they had

A. (Continued) organization if somebody was in distress, they borrowed some money. They give them. They had a . . . a free loan association. And . . . and that's the way it was. They . . . they . . . then I belonged to synagogue.

Q. What . . . what synagogue was that?

A. Huh?

Q. What synagogue did you belong to?

A. Well, I belonged to several. . . well, till now. Now I belong to Beth Joseph. But at that time there was a Kippeler, a little one, near the Big Shul, there was a little Kippeler shul. There was a big Kippeler and a small one. And I belonged to the . . . to the small one. And then I from there I went. . . I moved away from there, I lived on the . . .

END OF TAPE I, SIDE A

Interview with BENJAMIN OWERBACK
July 21, 1976
By Maurice Isserman

Interview I
Tape I
Side B

A. . . . down there and then they . . . we were down to a . . . a place near Atlantic City, Amato1, New York. Amato1, New Jersey. And there was a big ammunition plant. We stay down there, we guarded the ammunition plant. And . . . and then the war. . . the war ended and. . . in 19. . . well, 1918 it ended. . . in 1919. . . 1918.

Q. 1918.

A. In 1918, in November. And I stayed there till April. In April, in fact I just

A. (Continued) find the certificate which shows. . .

Q. And you belonged to some Veteran's organization?

A. Huh?

Q. You belonged to a Veteran's organization?

A. Yea, I belong to the Jewish Veterans here in Rochester.

Q. I see.

A. They do a lot of good work. And they. . . they spend a lot of money for charity, too. So, it's a very good organization now because they . . . you see they make money and they spend money.

Q. Were there a lot of Jews in Rochester who. . . who went into the Army?

A. Oh, sure. Everybody, everybody had to go. Oh, yea, sure. We have . . . our organization alone in Rochester, and there's a lot of 'em don't belong here, 500 members, so there's a lot of. . . oh, sure there was a lot of Jewish boys. And a lot of Jewish boys got killed in the. . . during the First World War, Second World War. A lot of 'em got killed, a lot of 'em got crippled. Oh, yea.

Q. Were there other organizations that you belonged to?

A. I devoted all my time in the Poale Zion, but we are not talking about it. And I devoted all of my time to the. . . well, there used to be a . . . a Credit Union.

Q. A Hebrew Credit Union?

A. No, not a Hebrew. Hebrew Credit Union I belonged that comes in with the Poale Zion. But there was a Credit Union, several people made a credit union by themselves. And they were poor people, even business people today they're millionaires, but in those days, in 1916, they were poor. They had to give \$25 or \$50, so they went to the Credit Union where they belonged and they used to get it and they used to pay so much a week till they paid it off. Then they had administration here too, but that was. . . I know a lot of people are. . .

A. (Continued) they're rich today, but in those days we belonged. We were glad to get \$25 or \$50 till we could keep business, you know, going. Those days \$50 was a lot of money.

Q. Right.

A. And I belonged down there. . . I don't know when it was that I belonged, but . . .

Q. Did you ever have anything to do with the Baden Street Settlement? Do you have any memories of that?

A. No.

Q. No. How about. . .

A. The only thing is we used to rent the . . . they used to. . . my. . . my son used to go to the Talmud Torah there on Baden Street, you know, at that time.

Q. How about the Rochester Welfare Federation or. . .?

A. I. . . I was very active down there for years and years. I used to go around to. . . to collect money for 'em. You know, when they. . . when they came out. I used to go out at one time, I don't know why they stopped, but one time they had . . . they had several people that they used to go around to get money from people that they wouldn't pay. You see, they have regular people that they collect money from people that are good, but that is not. . . But for a couple years, I belonged to them. I don't know why they. . . they dispersed it, but we used to collect quite a bit of money, you know, from people they they. . . they wouldn't pay, you know? They were liquid. . . liquidated in. . . in their payment. They didn't pay. So I used to be one of 'em. They had about 10 people that go. They used to. . . but after a while they didn't. But you see for the. . . the Jewish Welfare Fund I worked there oh 25, 30 years, 35 years. Oh yea. I worked there all the time. I used to go out. . . one time I was a captain. We. . . we. . .

Q. Well, let me shut off this machine for a second.

END OF TAPE I, SIDE B

Interview with BENJAMIN OWERBACK
July 22, 1976
By Maurice Isserman

Interview II
Tape I
Side A

Q. Owerback on July 22, 1976 at 200 Seth Green Drive in Rochester. Now when did you first become involved with the Labor Zionist movement?

A. I joined them in. . . in '22.

Q. 1922.

A. '22.

Q. And how did you become involved?

A. Well, I always liked Israel as far as that goes. And this was. . . our organization that was devoted for Israel. And then I. . . I thought to myself the men. . . the man came around and asked me to join the Farbund and I thought it would be a good idea. And then I took out a policy. And. . . and of course there were some sick benefits. You know, it was more like a. . . a relief organization, you know, in the same time. In the same. . . in the same time, they. . . they tried to put laws for Israel and they are devoted for Israel. And they were called the Socialist Zionism, this is what the Poale Zion was. Poale means workers, Zionism is for Israel. And. . . and I joined them at that time. When I joined them they. . . there wasn't. . . there was three branches . . . would you wanna. . . there was three branches from the Farbund.

Q. From Rochester?

A. Rochester, yea. There was the Amalgamated Branch, that's from the . . . the . . . from the tailors. There was a Branch 136 where I went in and then there was another branch by the name of Branch Throw. So that time, but when I got in in '22, the Amalgamated Branch joined together with 136. So . . . so my branch consisted of workers, peddlers and businessmen.

Q. Is the Farbund the same thing as the Jewish National Workers Alliance? Is that . . . ?

A. This is what it was. Today it has a different name. You see, they . . . the name was Jewish National Workers Alliance and some of the . . . the goyem thought that this was a . . . a Communist organization. So some people that they were taking out Citizen's papers, you know, at that time they came from the old country, so the judge wouldn't give 'em a Citizen's paper. He asked them what kind of lodge this is. So, the people at that time . . . you know, I happened to be the Secretary. And he says if you want to know more information, I'll get you Mr. Owerback. Yea, this is . . . so the judge . . . I suppose the judge found out, but that it isn't a Communist organization. It's more like a national organization than it is a Communist.

Q. So do you think that most of the people who joined the Farbund joined out of commitment to Socialist Zionism, or . . . or more out of a . . . searching for a benevolent society.?

A. People . . . the people at that time, they . . . they . . . they were struggling to make a living and . . . and at the same time they wanted to have organization to be more, you know, to come together to talk over their votings, to talk over their . . . their circumstances where they are. And . . . and the same time they were looking for . . . they wanted more or less Orthodox people, and they were more or less in love with Israel. But, they didn't have time to think about it.

- A. (Continued) They had to think about their families, but once-they got into the Farbund, the Farbund teach them and they put in love in their heart for Israel. And at the same time for the workers.
- Q. So, was. . . was. . .
- A. When we got in there they. . . they have . . . they have men at every. . . every meeting there was literature about Israel, about the. . . about America, about the politics. There wasn't a meeting that it wasn't a cultural meeting. And in the same time we had lectures that they used to come every once in a while and talk about Israel, about America, about Europe. And then in those days there was a lot to talk about Europe because it was just after the war and. . . and people were in distress and they needed help. And everytime they. . . they used to . . . no matter how poor we were we always used to make a collection. And we used to go heart and melt and help the people in Europe because we were just after the war, they were in very poor shape.
- Q. Did many people join the Farbund and go on to join the. . . the. . . I don't know how to pronounce it, Poale Zion?
- A. Well, the most of them, there were. . . the most of 'em that they were more or less, you know, inclined for Zion, they. . . they were. That was the reason they . . . they . . . they organized the Farbund, in order. . . the Poale Zion itself done a lot of good work, but there wasn't very many people. And they learned a lesson from the mother organizations that if they took in relief benefits, sick benefits, and others like cemetery, relief benefits. At that time we didn't have no cemetery, but we. . . we bought it after. So, it would keep the members together.
- Q. Right.
- A. And at the same time they would put in propoganda for Israel and for. . . they used to help out strikes, you know, at that time there were strikes. And they

- A. (Continued) used to help them out. They used to have party strikers, they used to go out for. . . for the nations, for. . . and so some of 'em once they joined the. . . the Farbund they. . . they were more or less inclined for Poale Zion work, even if they didn't belong. Well, the most of them did belong to the Poale Zion.
- Q. How many members did the Farbund have in Rochester?
- A. Well, at one time we had quite a few of 'em. At one time we must of had. . . I can't tell you exactly, but we must 'a had about . . . 136. . . a lot of 'em . . . I don't know, we had about. . . must 'a been about 150 or 200 members. I don't remember exactly, but it was quite. In those days that was quite a good organization.
- Q. That was around 1936, you said when. . . ?
- A. Huh?
- Q. What year was that? Around 1936 or so when you had that many?
- A. Oh, they kept on coming up all the time. Well, in 19. . . 1922 when I got in there wasn't so many, but there was quite a few of 'em, but each. . . each year it increased.
- Q. So, out of Poale Zion itself, how many members did it have?
- A. The Poale Zion. . . well, it was combined the most of 'em, they belonged to the Poale Zion belonged to the Farbund anyways. You see? Because they were the ones that they were. . . the initiatos, the ones of the push the Farbund in, Poale Zion work.
- Q. So there were. . .
- A. Oh, there were small. . . small number but every one of them that belonged there belonged to the Poale Zion belonged to the Farbund anyways. But not everybody . . . the Farbund members when you got. . . when you joined the Farbund they told you to. . . they told you that you got to do Zion work. And if you don't,

- A. (Continued) if a whole branch didn't do that work or was against it, they cancelled it. They. . . they. . . even. . . even in politics, you know, when you belong to the Farbund or Poale Zion you at that time was no different, you couldn't be a member of the Republican Party or the Democratic Party, you had to be a member of the Socialist Party.
- Q. So you maintained paternal relations with the. . . with the Socialists?
- A. Well, me, myself, no. I was Orthodox. I. . . well I had to. . . well, anyways who isn't, you know, to help out the. . . help out the workers or strikers or relief to Jewish people? That's the reason the Socialist Zionism, that is Labor Zionism. That is what they. . . the name is today.
- Q. Well, did. . . did most of the members of. . . of the Farbund say vote for the Socialist candidate in Presidential elections?
- A. Well, not necessarily nobody watched them. But, you. . . you couldn't. . . you couldn't go out and. . . and poll the Republicans, you know?
- Q. Right.
- A. On. . . on the street, you know, years ago they used to go out and have speeches on the street. And you couldn't do that. If they saw you they told you not to do it or by right they could of put you out from the Poale Zion or from Farbund. But the Poale Zion was more. . . was more or less inclined. You didn't have to belong to the Socialist Party, but they were more inclined for it. And then when the. . . then when the. . . in '24 they organized Histadrut. You know what Histadrut is? That's the one where they used to call geverschultin campaign, that's for to give the workers in Israel tools to work with, that's the geverschultin campaign. So, that's what they used to call 'em in Yiddish. So, when they organized that in '24, a lot of union members that belonged to the union they joined the Farbund. They always wanted to take in members of the. . . of the working class. And at that time. . . at that time on some of the leaders were inclined to belong. . . I no belong, but anyways they were inclined. Some

- A. (Continued) of them joined the Farbund or the Poale Zion and they worked for 'em. They helped workers from Israel. This is what the main work was is to help them to get tools.
- Q. Were many of the members of the Farbund also members of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers?
- A. Some of 'em, the ones that they were. . .oh, no the ones that they were working for the. . . for the tailor union they belonged to the. . . oh, yes, sure. Even if they belonged to the Farbund they still. . . they still were union members.
- Q. Do you think that the Farbund was as powerful or as numerous as the Workmen's Circle for example?
- A. The Workmen's Circle was. . . was originated before the Farbund. And the Farbund itself, they didn't have so many members. At one time they . . . the Circle. . . the Arbeiter Circle. . . Arbeiter Ring and the Workmen's Circle had a lot of members at one time. I don't know the group. . . sixty or seventy thousands. They had a lot of members. But now they. . . now they're going down. The older members die out and the young people they don't. . . none of them. In the big cities there is quite a few of 'em, but general as a rule the young people today they don't. . . either they are Zionists or they belong to the. . . they pay their dues and that's all they don't do anything. But when you belong to the Poale Zion you had to work. You had to go out and. . . and make people believe what you believed. And then that. . . that is what we used to do. Now when it came out the Jewish Congress we were for it, we worked for it, we used to go out and sell schkulim. You know what a schkle is? They used to have. . . if you pay so much a schkle is a half a dollar, a dollar. So when you pay that in you had a right to work for the Jewish Congress. And we used to work for that. And we used to work for certain other things. We used to work for the geverschultin campaign when that started. We used to go out every week all

- A. (Continued) over the city. And not only the Farbund, but the Poale Zion at that time after a while we. . . we organized the women's club by the name of the Pioneer.
- Q. Pioneer.
- A. Woman. And they. . . they. . . they were still in the same circle, like the . . . like the Farbund is. Then we organized a young. . . a young group, Habonim they used to call them. And they. . . they were for Israel. See they. . . they all belonged to the same organization but different. . . different branches or different. . .
- Q. I spoke to a woman yesterday who was a member of the Pioneers, Bessie Zelter?
- A. Yea?
- Q. Bessie Zelter? Do you. . . do you know her? She was a member of the Pioneer Women in. . . in Rochester.
- A. What was her name again?
- Q. Zelter. Bessie Zelter.
- A. Zelter? I suppose so, there was quite a few of 'em. You see once they. . . at the beginning they belonged to the Farbund, they used to be a branch of the Farbund. And then they organized that they wanted to be by themselves. They organized the Pioneer Women which it was a good thing. You know, they couldn't take in people that just belonged to the Farbund, but Pioneer Women organization of women that, you know, it made 'em more. . . more or less to join. And at one time they were a big organization. They still. . . the older people die out and the young people don't take it so serious. But at one time they had a lot of members. They still have quite a few of 'em, they have about three branches even today. But the older branch is . . . is gone pretty near 'cause of older people.

Q. Yesterday I showed you a quote in the Irving Howe book. . .

A. Yes.

Q. . . . where he argues that Zionism had very little appeal to Jewish workers in this country until after the Second World War.

A. Well, they did. . . they didn't appeal. . . See the Arbeiter Ring, the. . . the Workmen's Circle were against . . . they. . . when the. . . when the young people, the cultural people from Europe that they belonged to different organizations in Europe they used to belong Poale Zion, Zionists, Young Poale Zion. They used to have Bundt, I don't know if you heard of that. That's from them. When they came here they wanted to join the. . . the. . . the Arbeit. . . not the Arbeiter Ring, the Workmen's . . . Workmen's Circle. . . not Workmen's Circle, it's the. . . yea Workmen's Circle is the. . . is the. . . is the real name. They wanted to join it. But they told them they can't join and come in in the Workmen's Circle and have propaganda for Israel because we don't want it. At that time they were very against. So some of 'em were that they should go in there anyways. They told 'em you could go in as an individual, but you can't come in as a organization and then speak about Zionism. Zionism we don't want.

Q. Why were they. . . why did they not like Zionism?

A. Now, now they more or less for it. Well, more or less they. . . the big. . . the ones they are on the top, even the union people, you know, the ones they are on the top. The Amalgamated Cap Maker and all of them, they're for Israel and they. . . they're doin' a lot of work. Since the. . . since the Histadrut the geverschultin. . . the Histadrut organized in '24 from that time on the IMN begin to believe in Israel. Some of. . . of course, some of 'em are going down to Israel. Some of 'em write in Israel. Abe Cohen, you know the one that was the editor of the Politz. . .

Q. Yea.

- A. He was very against it, but after he came to Israel and he worked for the good. I don't know, he loved Israel but he wrote very, very fine. . .
- Q. Why do you think they were initially opposed to the Labor Zionist movement?
- A. The Bundt taught in Europe that the Jewish people have a right to be wherever they are. And Zionism is only a dream, it'll never come true. And Zionism spoils the Jewish people for working for their rights. You see? They said if you live in Poland, work for the right that you have the right to live there like a Pole. If you work in Russia, just work for that purpose. Then the Zionists came around and told them that there was a place that the Jewish people could live for themselves, have their own country, and they didn't believe in it. They thought that this was only a dream and they. . . they'll spoil their dream of the propaganda to work for the Jewish people to get the right just like the people that they live in the country. And this is the way. They brought the same. . . the same assets up here. After the. . . they come in and after the Kashenerer Pogrom, you know, they had in 1905. The people begin to come in here and they brought in a big immigration and they brought in a lot of Bundtists and they. . . they were against Zionism. The Bundtists today are still against but they are really minority. There isn't very many people left of them. But the big ones . . . the big man, their head of the organization, the Workmen's Circle, Arbeiter Ring, and so on and from the unions, they are for Israel.
- Q. When was the Poale Zion first organized in Rochester?
- A. Well, they. . . they were organ. . . they weren't organized in Rochester was organized in. . . in. . . in Europe in 19. . . 1903.
- Q. When did they first set up a branch in Rochester?
- A. Well, they. . . well the people that they were in it still they came from Europe, you know, the few that they was. They were Poale Zion anyways. They were Poale Zion in Europe, so when they organized in New York they become

A. (Continued) members of the Poale Zion in . . . in . . . in Rochester.

They were Poale Zion. But the Farbund came out in Rochester. In fact, they had the first conference to organize the Farbund, they had it in Rochester in 1908 . . . 19. . . 19. . . yea, 1908. . . 1910. And then it took 'em about two and a half years till they got their charter.

Q. Can you tell me some of the names of the . . . of the people who first organized the Farbund and the Poale Zion in Rochester?

A. Well, there was quite a few of 'em. There were . . . there was quite a few of 'em. The ones that they were active while I was here, there was Weinstein, there was a Atlas, there was Dubnokov, and there was quite a few of 'em.

Q. Were these mainly men. . . men who had been active in. . . in Zionist movement in Europe and then came to Rochester?

A. Well, all those people who left in Europe and then they come up here they were active here. Lipsky was active. I was active here in the Farbund, but Lipsky and Weinstein, oh they. . . they were even before the Farbund organized. They were. . . they were Poale Zion from Europe. They came here, which I. . . I only came in '13, they came before that. And the first. . . the first conference was in Rochester. They. . . they had . . . they were in Philadelphia and they. . . they had said that they was going to form a Farbund in order to get more members. So when they had the first conference, we had it in Rochester. And then it was . . . they . . . it was that the. . . the Farbund will be organized and it was organized in Rochester, 1910. But they couldn't come out in the open until they had a charter. So it took 'em about two and a half years. 1913 they had the charter from the Farbund. So from that time on. . . then the war broke out and they. . . they couldn't. . . that was very bad anyways for 'em for quite a few years. And then there was a lot of people came from. . . Ben Gurion was here. Schatag was here. Golda Meir was here. Everybody came up here, especially

A. (Continued) when they organized for the Histadrut geverschultin campaign. They all used to come every year. And we in Rochester, we started up after the holidays and we covered the whole city wherever Jewish people were. That was before the . . . the Welfare Fund came out. And we put out propoganda for the . . . for Histadrut. Well, I don't know. Maybe it isn't right to say that, but this is what they done. They used to call 'em geverschultin campaign. But you know, tools. But it wasn't only tools that they sent. They had to have projectors. They had to have the guns, they have to have other stuff to protect themselves because everytime they used to have a pogrom in Israel, you know, the Arab people used to make that. And they had to protect themselves. So we used to call 'em geverschultin campaign, which it was. You know, they. . . that was called geverschultin campaign to help 'em to get tools to work, you know. They used to cut stones by hand and once they send 'em down a machine to cut the . . . the stones it was a lot easier. Yea, so they . . . it was quite a few of 'em in Rochester that I can't think of right name of 'em but there was quite a few of 'em. And they belonged to the . . . then there was Anapolsky. He was a teacher. He . . . he was a very good teacher and we had . . . the Farbund wasn't only to . . . to put in a love for Israel to older people, but they organized schools for children.

Q. In Rochester?

A. All over the country. Well, in Rochester we organized. We had sure quite a few, quite a few of 'em. But, you see, we had. . . we was so poor that we couldn't afford it. We. . . we had one at the beginning. There was a teacher at the beginning. We used to have Saturday and Sunday teaching. One fellow by the name of Levine, he teach them Sundays. Weinstein used to teach 'em Saturday and Sunday. We had the young people come in there and they. . . they used to teach 'em Hebrew. . . not Hebrew, Jewish. Jewish history and Jewish doing,

A. (Continued) what they are doing. This is more lies that they put into their heart. And they . . . they lived with it for a long time. We had boys that belonged to Habonim, they went to Israel. Some of 'em are still there. You see? And they used to go out for the Flag Day, national fun, all the boys, little ones and . . . they . . . they had groups. And then when the war broke out naturally the young fellows grew up. I don't know if I should tell you that but maybe it would. . . they . . . when they grew up they went to college. And in everyone in college they used to tell what England is doing to the Jewish people. You know? They . . . they marked on the streetcars. You know, at that time was streetcars, street bosses. They put leaflets on. And then there was a few boys that . . . mine . . . one . . . one of mine was one of 'em anyways, they used to write different articles in the paper to tell about what England is doing to the Jewish people. But each time they . . . they put on somebody else's name it wouldn't be, you know. . . some of 'em . . . there was three, four of 'em that they used to write into the paper. And they were doin' a lot of good for it, but the boys today are still some of 'em . . . well, some of 'em got away, but some of 'em are still active. And then they have a Young Poale Zion, English speaking Poale Zion. They meet about once in a while, they have couples. They meet in a house. But in those days, in the beginning they used to have a lot of . . . they . . . we used to have a local. We . . . our local was . . . I don't know whether you want to know that or not. Our local was 27 Buchan Park.

Q. Did you have an office or. . . ?

A. We had a whole house, yea that was our local. We had all . . . all activities.

Q. Did the other locals have separate offices?

A. Huh?

Q. Did the other locals in Rochester have separate offices? Separate houses?

A. Oh, no, no. All the . . . all the activities for all our groups, Poale Zion, . . .

Q. I see.

A. . . . Farbund, Habonim. . . Habonim is the young. . . the young people, Young Poale Zion. There were all kinds.

Q. They all met at this one house?

A. All. . . we all had headquarters right there.

Q. What was that address again?

A. Huh?

Q. What was that address again? That address where you met?

A. 27 Buchan Park. That was the. . .

Q. And that was. . .

A. But now they took it out, you know, they. . . they destroyed it. But we were there for quite a few years. Then it burned up at one time, we built it. And we had. . . but that was the headquarters anyways. At the end we even organized a credit union. You asked about credit unions. Credit unions, Hebrew Credit Union is under our chapter.

Q. That's the one up on. . . on Monroe now?

A. On Monroe Avenue, yea. That was originated. . . See they. . . the one that they had before went bad. . . I don't know what it went anyways. They. . . they divided up, there wasn't no money. Then they wanted to organize another credit union. They came up here and they couldn't. . . they couldn't get a credit union unless they had a chapter from some organization. And we gave it to 'em. That's the. . .

Q. When. . . when was this?

A. Huh?

Q. When was this?

A. I think it was. . . I don't remember exactly when it was but it was. . . it's a long time ago. They. . . I don't remember the date, but it's a long time ago.

A. (Continued) Maybe in the forties, maybe in the thirties, I don't know.

Q. OK.

A. I . . . I couldn't. . . I don't remember the date, but I know that we gave 'em . . . well, it's still. . . they're still working under our charter. See that's the reason it's called the Hebrew Credit Union because we used to have a shuler there. And you know what a shuler is? That's a school.

Q. I see.

A. And the school was called Hebrew. . . Hebrew School. So they call it Hebrew Credit Union. That's the charter.

Q. So, you had fund raising drives for Israel, you had schools, you had educational vehicles.

A. We . . . we worked to help. . . every. . . every item that was gonna help the Jewish people either here either in Israel, was more for Israel but it was just as well for the people here. People were in distress, we helped them out.

Q. How did you do that? With loans or. . . ?

A. Well, I don't know they. . . I don't know if you wanna. . . well, I'll give it to you. Our branch, well the other branch too, but our branch if anybody was in distress we helped 'em out. Now, it consist of peddlers, it consist of poor people, it consist of all kinds. But we were all poor, didn't have no money. And the time was there that it was the Depression and we didn't have nothing. So, if a peddler peddled and the horse fell down, we went to the administration. We borrowed some money for him, we bought him a horse. Man got sick and he had to be sent to Denver, we gathered up some money, we send him away. We had a case of a member's daughter was 16 years old, she died. Didn't have no. . . no grave, didn't have no money to bury her. So we. . . we and another fellow, don't know whether it was Lipsky I think, we went down to the Kippeler. . . at that time they were Chadam Street and we got a grave for her and we buried the girl.

- A. (Continued) This is what we used to do. We done not only for Zion, but we done for this country. . . for this people. See, people in our branch was more or less friendly. And somebody comes up, I didn't say kodosh I have your sight, instantly formed a minion. And you know it. . . it was a friendly group.
- Q. Right.
- A. And you said that. . . that sometimes you helped support strikes? That the Farbund helped support strikes, strikers?
- A. Well, yes.
- Q. Can you think of any specific instances of that?
- A. Huh?
- Q. Can you think of any specific times you did that?
- A. Well, when the. . . anytime. . . well, the Farbund as a whole helped all over the strikers, you know. But in Rochester if. . . if they needed help and they asked for it, we. . . we thought we would give 'em, you know. At that time there was. . . I don't know, after you know they. . . they didn't need so much in Rochester help because the union was strong. But in New York City there was quite a few strikes after and they. . . the Farbund and Poale Zion helped. Oh, yes they were. . . they were for it. They were for the workers to help.
- Q. Were most of the people in the Farbund very religious people? Or. . .
- A. All different. Some of 'em did and some of 'em weren't religious at all, they wanted to belong to the Poale Zion or Farbund. But, the most of 'em were religious people, yea, religious people. Used to go to shul, like myself went to shul. I raised my children to go. Whenever I had time and I didn't work, I went to synagogue and when there was a holiday or Saturday if I didn't work, if I worked I didn't go. So, the. . . but the children, the school was not a religious shul. . . school, it was more a national school. But the children that they got out from our school, they were in love with Israel because the

A. (Continued) propaganda that we gave 'em. There was Anapolsky, he was. . . he was one of our teachers and he put really in love to the children for Israel. But he. . . and then they. . . they were working for it too. We had a camp in Hamlin, Hamlin Beach. We had a camp for children.

Q. Summer camp?

A. Summer camp. And. . . and there they learned. . . the. . . the teacher Anapolsky was with 'em, and he teach them Jewish history. And then they were taught like they are in Israel to do the work like kalushim, to do the work themselves. And then I mentioned Atlas, his wife, she was the cook up there. Course nobody got paid because we didn't have no money. So we rented the farm from a man by the name of Shapiro and. . . in Hamlin. . . Kendall, Kendall, New York. That was in Hamlin Beach. And the children from here went there, I think we had paid about \$8 a week or so. We paid very little because there was very little money at that time.

Q. Did your children go?

A. Huh?

Q. Did your children go to this camp? Did your own children go to this camp?

A. I couldn't get you.

Q. Did your own children. . . ?

A. Oh, yea all the three of 'em. . . well, one of 'em the youngest that I showed you, well this. . . no here's the other one, this the boy and the girl were there. And then the younger girl she wanted to go there but she was too young at that time. So the mother. . . the mother went down there and they got. . . she got a room and she stayed with them. They wouldn't take her because she was too young. That was in '39, before '39. Then when the war broke out they couldn't get no gas and they couldn't do nothing, so they. . . the camp dispersed. But they had it for a couple years they have a camp up there. And they. . . they

- A. (Continued) were. . . they had a good time. I think we had to pay about \$8 a week for . . . originally at that time.
- Q. Did many of the children. . . or did many people from Rochester actually move to Israel?
- A. Some of the. . . some of the boys went to Israel. Some of 'em came back, but some of 'em went there. Yea, sure, they did. They. . . they went from Habonim. They. . . and then some of 'em . . . some of 'em died even down there. Used to . . . some of 'em. . . quite a few of 'em, not too many, but a few of 'em went to Israel and they lived there. And then we have some of 'em right now that they. . . they were right in the Habonim and they liked Israel, they went. Sure they. . . lot of 'em. Some of 'em got married there, that is they married here and then they went to Israel. They went to Okshirra, Okshirra. That is a . . . a place where they prepare 'em to be a hutz. Yea, they. . . oh, yea a few of 'em went. And a few of 'em are still there, not many, but a few of 'em are there. But, you see they. . . they long for Israel some of 'em, you can't get away. They. . . they were devoted for Israel and 'course some of 'em you know, they get older, they forget all that. Some of 'em are still. . . still devoted to . . . they. . . they work for Israel. They work for anything that comes up to good for Israel.
- Q. Were there in those. . . in 1920's and 1930's were there other Zionist organizations in Rochester?
- A. Oh, yes, sure. Sure there were other organizations. The Mizrahi was there. The Poale Mizrahi was there. Yea there was other organizations, sure there was.
- Q. How strong were they? Were they as strong as you were or. . . or not so strong?
- A. Well, then they had the Hadassah, you know, that was a big organization. The Mizrahi Women. Well, it's according what they done. They were more rich people in some of them than we were. But, we done for ourselves. We learned to do things for ourselves. Now when it come out to get money for the

A. (Continued) geverschultin campaign, as I talked to you, we started out at the beginning of the fall and we ended up pretty near Easter, Pesach. We used to cover the whole city. But for that the Arbeiter Ring helped us, you know, with the. . . they had a couple people that they came to our meetings. You know, when it came to that Histadrut, that's workers, they were ashamed not to do it. But a few of 'em that they were more inclined for Israel they used to come to our meetings. But our main thing was. . . came out from Buchan Park, we used to go. Then not only that, we. . . we done work for a lot of things. Now, there's a. . . there's a organization by the name of insurance, Hasna they call it. We bought chairs for that. Then we had naschuin, that is the sailors, we bought chairs for that. Then they came out with a project I'm still sorry that I didn't do it, to buy a piece of land in Israel. You pay in \$5,000. Does it work?

Q. Oh, yea. I just keep checking to make sure the tape. . .

A. So, you pay in \$5,000 and you go and get a. . . a plot and they're gonna plant trees for Israel, they're gonna build a house for you, you could pay it up for \$5,000. Once you get it paid, you could come and live there. You see, but in Rochester there was very few people done that. But, I don't know, maybe there was one or two. But, around. . . around the States probably quite a few of 'em did, and which that was a good thing that Israel had some money. And when the bonds came out, '31, '32, for the. . . no, in '51. They don't want that, that's all right after the. . .

Q. Oh, no. . .

A. Yes, they do, too.

Q. Sure.

A. Well, we used to go along and sell bonds. We were the first ones. Well, to go around. The first place we made everybody that could afford a bond, at that

- A. (Continued) time it was \$50. But when you come around to people, we used to walk around and sell bonds, some of 'em, oh, they were mad -- \$50. But some of 'em, the ones that they were more inclined for Israel, they bought, we used to sell 'em. We used to walk around Sundays over the city, like we did for the geverschultin campaign and make people, explain them what the bond is, some of 'em wouldn't do it -- \$50, that was a lot of money. But some of 'em bought. And everything that came out from Israel, we. . . we helped 'em in anyway we could. And then the. . . after the war, we had some of our members. . . not our members, but the Farbund and the Poale Zion had members going into Europe and they. . . they took out as many children as they could from churches even. And they helped so many people that they were in distress to get to Israel or they helped them on the place. They were. . .you know, they were very, very bad off after the war.
- Q. When do you think you first became aware of what was going on in Europe in terms of the Jews? Do you remember what year? When did you first become aware of what the Nazis were doing to the Jews?
- A. Oh, we were. . . we were aware right away.
- Q. Right away. Right from the thirties, '33, '34?
- A. Oh. . . oh, you mean. . . oh, yea sure. The papers was writing about. . . well, then . . . then when Hitler came into power, yea '32, '33, sure we were aware of what Hitler is. But nobody believed. You know, we had a man by the name of Haim Greenberg, he was well-known Zionist, he was well-learned man. And he came up and we used to have lectures as I mentioned before. And he came and he. . .he was talking and we asked him what is gonna be? He says God forgid Hitler ever done what he want and this might come. I don't know if you want to mention here what's gonna become of the Jews. You know, the big people know that Hitler ever gets into the . . . to the power, he'll destroy the Jewish people. You know

- A. (Continued) right away, Hitler he was very educated, big man. And he says God. . . we asked him, God knows what. . . God help us he says. We hope he never get in there, but he did. And he destroyed the Jewish . . . sure we knew.
- Q. Do you think that as someone active in Labor Zionism you were aware of what was going to happen earlier than the rest of the Jewish community?
- A. Well, I don't know. But, we knew everything about it. We knew because they. . . we knew what Hitler was doin', reading the Jewish Press or even the New York Times, they would tell you what Hitler was gonna do. So we knew. In Europe they didn't know, but we knew that he was gonna be very bad. And there was nothing that we could do. The only thing is if you could help people, but at that time the Depression was here, you couldn't. . . you couldn't move. You couldn't do much. You see, that Depression really depressed everybody.
- Q. Why do you think that Jews in America were. . . were actually more aware of what the danger was than Jews in Europe?
- A. Jews in Europe they didn't believe that, they didn't believe. Well, we were. . . we didn't believe what is gonna be. But they didn't believe, even after they. . . they used the gas 'em up, they didn't know. Used to. . . I just saw in the paper used to be a writing on the wall, work makes your life easy on the one that they were gassed up.
- Q. Yea.
- A. They didn't know. They. . . they told 'em that they are going in there to take a bath, they never came out. They put gas in there. And then they. . . before they done that, they used to write to the people in Europe, you know, wherever they was that they treat us nice, and we were working and all of that. So they didn't believe, even some of the other people didn't believe. Nobody believed what he's gonna do. We didn't believe that, but after we knew that it was there.

Interview II
Tape I
Side B

- A. He done a lot for the country, but. . . but Jewish people nobody. . . none of the Gentiles knew anything. They don't. . . they don't even . . . even today they are jealous because the Jewish people hit back. They are. . . they will always thinking that you have to be able to hit a Jewish man, but to hit back. That is the reason they have. . .
- Q. Well, after the war ended, immediately after the war ended, how did Jews in Rochester respond to the situation?
- A. Well they helped all they could.
- Q. How did they. . . how did they do that? Run campaing?
- A. Well, they had people's relief. They had people come in from here to Europe. And they had. . . they send what they make, you know, every. . . every town, every little town, after they were destroyed they were some people left. And all the lonschlitters you called 'em, they gathered up some money, they made donations and they send it down to the . . . whoever it was the head man in that little town and everybody helped. Then after the . . . after the war they all wrote articles about, you know, about their cities and how they got destroyed. They knew, sure, they knew. But they. . . they. . . everybody send money, there was no question of that. And they were trying to locate their relatives if there was any left. So, that is what Jewish people in America done a lot. But the only thing is the European people don't think that the Jewish people done. . . done enough. Not to let Hitler destroy the Jewish people, that. . . that is what they are thinking of. But the Jewish people here in America. . . you know, they done as much as they could. But they done all they can to help them, money was no object. We had people's relief. We had the Jewish Congress. We had

- A. (Continued) the . . . a lot of people helped. And each organization helped their own city, which you know. . . take like New York City, we had a lot of organizations and every. . . every one of 'em sent some money down there. Especially if they knew who it was.
- Q. Did any of the . . . did any of the survivors come to Rochester after the war?
- A. Well, the ones that they could get out, yes. The ones that they couldn't get out they. . . they went all over. . . they went to China, they went to South America, and they come up here. Some of 'em.
- Q. Some did come here.
- A. Some of 'em. You know, they couldn't get in here so they. . . they went all over the. . . the world in order to get in. They went. . . some of 'em went to South America, even some of the people that I know. And they . . . some of 'em went to Cuba and they stayed there for about a year or so. And then they got into this country. Yea, they. . . they try. Some of 'em did, but you see there wasn't too many survivors.
- Q. Yea.
- A. Hitler saw that there shouldn't be so many Jewish people. I know my family I don't hear nothing from them. I know they. . . I know they got killed. Every one of 'em. And I had a big family. I didn't. . . I didn't have many. . . I don't have many in this country. I had one uncle, he came up here in 1914, 1914, before the war started, in the same time when I came. And he told me, he says, I'm going back, he says. You know he was pretty well off in Europe and up here he had to go work. He says, up there I'm a big man. He lived in a little town of Drazna. So he says, I'm going back. He probably got killed. There's where. . . my mother left my sister with his wife, that is my aunt, but she didn't have any children and she couldn't take care of her.
- Q. Now when after the war when there was a very active campaign for Israel and they

- Q. (Continued) were fighting the British, was there a lot of support in Rochester for the establishment of the State of Israel?
- A. Was. . . oh, yea they. . . oh, sure they. . . well, there was a lot of. . . everybody I think was pretty near for it.
- Q. Do you think that the destruction of European Jewry during the war converted many people to Zionism? People in the United States who hadn't previously been Zionists?
- A. That I wouldn't know. I. . . I wouldn't know. I. . . well, the ones that they converted after the war, the ones that they were in Europe they probably went. Some of 'em came up here and. . . well, some of 'em are refugees, they do a lot of work, too, for Israel. They . . . now they adopt a child like the Pioneer Women, you know? They. . . they adopt children, the ones that they got killed over in the war. So it cost about \$300 for a child, so the Pioneer Women do. And some of the refugees that they have here, the ones that they came after the war, they help. And then there. . . now there's quite a few of 'em, but they're active in Bonds, they buy bonds, they sell bonds. And some of 'em are active in relief work, you know? And they're doin' all right. And they're active. They. . . they put up a monument for the. . . they're talkin' about puttin' up a monument for the ghetto, the ones that they got killed in the uprising in the ghetto. And they keep up the memorial once a year, you know, not only they but the whole city does. Now it got into the JY and everybody. They have. . . they have quite a big meeting for the memorial. . . I don't know if you ever went. I'd go there if I'm in Rochester. And they have quite a big meeting there and it got big. They're talkin' about puttin' in a monument for that in Rochester, but I don't know if they ever will.
- Q. You must have felt a great deal of satisfaction on the day when Israel became a nation.

A. Oh, well that was in seventeen.

Q. That was. . . I didn't hear you.

A. Huh?

Q. I didn't hear what you said.

A. 1917.

Q. No, but in 1948.

A. Oh, oh. There was a big cele. . . oh, yea. . . well that was the Balfour Declaration in 1917.

Q. Yea.

A. Oh, sure people were dancing and they had a big meeting down in the business . . . business. . . on St. Paul Street, I forgot the name of it. I can't think of the name.

Q. The Labor Lyceum?

A. No, no, no, no. They. . . where the. . . all the. . . the commerce people.

Q. Kodak?

A. No, no. On St. Paul Street.

Q. Oh.

A. Down . . .

Q. Well . . .

A. Chamber of Commerce. Right down there. . . you know, right near Main Street. Oh, we had a big meeting, it was packed, with speakers. Oh sure, we had. . . we have celebrations every year. In fact, a few years ago they used to have big celebrations. I don't know, last year they didn't. It rained every year, everytime we had a celebration it rained. So they had all kinds of decorations and we used to walk from Monroe Avenue into B'rith Kodesh, you know. We used to walk, everybody did. Well, not everybody, I walked anyways, quite a few of 'em did. And but for last year they didn't have it and because every year that

- A. (Continued) they used to have it, used to rain. So they quit. So now they have it inside in B'rith Kodesh. But, they have a celebration on that day.
- Q. Do you . . . do you think that Labor Zionism made a . . . a strong contribution to the establishment of Israel?
- A. Contribution?
- Q. Yes. Do you think that you played an important role in . . . in . . . ?
- A. Well, we used to . . . well the first ones that we were active used to go out and they still go out, I don't know how much now but we used to go out there and take active part. We used to have teams; we used to have ten, twelve men that used to work for . . . for the . . . for the Welfare Fund and used to go out and collect and some of them that they were more or less interested in Israel, they gave big contributions. Now that . . . Goldbergs, that . . . that is a big man today. He come out from there, from the Habonim. He was down there and then he belonged to the Poale Zion, yea, sure. We . . . we had . . . we had quite a few of 'em. Yea, he belonged to the Poale Zion. Loyersak. We have . . . you heard Loyersak, now they went bankruptcy. You know, Loyersak that they have all kinds of automobile parts?
- Q. Yea, I think . . .
- A. Huh? Didn't you? Well, the son you know disturbed the money. He used to helong and he used to give a good contribution. He . . . in . . . even today geverschultin campaign, he's a very nice man. But, he you know, they lost the business. The son went in and he disturbed it. But he used to . . . when we used to have the first geverschultin campaign we used to have a meeting, Histadrut, we used to have it in the Arbeiter Ring Lyceum, you know, in Rochester. And he used to cover as much money as we will make.
- Q. He would match the . . .
- A. Huh?

Q. He would match what. . . what you. . .

A. As much as we got. We got a lot. We gathered up. . . we gathered up \$150. So he covered it, he went and gave the other \$150. Or if we made \$175 he would. But he was. . . he was a . . . well, Poale Zion anyways. He was. . .

Q. I didn't mean to interrupt you. Did the organization of. . . of Israel, the establishment of Israel bring new members in the late forties and early fifties?

A. I. . . I don't get you.

Q. Did. . . did many people join who hadn't been members before after Israel was established? Did they join Poale Zion or the Farbund?

A. Oh, well they. . . no they were ones that they were Poale Zion, were Poale Zion. Naturally you. . . you gathered up some people from the city that they never. . . never would believe in that. . .

Q. Right.

A. . . . but, the Poale Zion itself, they probably belonged to the Farbund more or less. The Poale Zion itself were always a small group. They . . . I don't know, they. . . at that time people had to. . . I mean they just got out from the Depression, you know. And the most of 'em, you know, were trying to establish themselves and they didn't. But ours, you know, you belong to the Poale Zion, you came to a meeting, you had to do some work.

Q. I see.

A. And if you didn't do no work and you didn't come to a meeting, you. . . we are a member like the Zionist organization, we didn't have any. Once they belong to us they. . . we made 'em work. They, you know, they kept on working even if they were poor themselves and . . . and they. . . they kept on, the most of 'em did anyways. When we had a meeting for the geverschultin campaign they all came, 100 people, some money. Their wives and the celebration, they come there. And then if we had a Bar Mitzvah or anything like this, we made a party

A. (Continued) right in Buchan Park, you know. It was more or less sociable, like a sociable club. They. . . all out. And then we had women down there that they made parties. They didn't charge nothing. They just helped us out and they done it.

Q. Why do you think that membership has been declining over the last couple decades?

A. Well, the memberships of the Farbund doesn't decline, but the people die out.

Q. I see.

A. And then if you don't get a good secretary and chairman that they are working for the organization, the organization itself is destroyed.

Q. Then you're. . . you. . . you, yourself are still a member?

A. That. . . that . . . that is. . .no, that is what has happened in Rochester today for the last ten years or so.

Q. Oh. When did you become an officer of the Farbund?

A. Farbund? Oh, I was. . . I. . . as soon as I got in there. At that time we had people in. . . in . . . they belonged there, they were just coming in from the outside, they didn't. . . well, unless the ones that they were, you know, Poale Zion from before like I mentioned like Weinstein, other. . . other people, Atlas and others. You know, they were devoted for the. . . for the cause. But the other, they didn't. I. . . I went through the whole thing. I went. . . I was the secretary and I was the hospitaler and I was the vice-president. I was president for very long, long time.

Q. When were you president?

A. Huh?

Q. What years were you president?

A. Oh, I was. . . don't even remember. I was president maybe 10, 15 years. Yea, and then it was my own fault that I quit. They begged me to become. I didn't

A. (Continued) like the guy that was there and I didn't. . . and I didn't . . . I took it. . . I let it go, but I was president for a long, long time. Vice-president. We used to go to. . . we used to have conferences from Upstate. And Binghamton, Syracuse, Buffalo, we used to get together once in a . . . once a year. And naturally we got acquainted with one another and we learned from one to the other. They were. . . people that they were really devoted to the . . . Then another. . . every organization have people that they are devoted for the cause. But now the younger people they belong, but that's about it.

Q. Are there. . . are there still records from those years?

A. Huh?

Q. Do you still have the records from those years, or do they exist somewhere? You know, the membership records? Min. . . minutes from meetings, things like that?

A. Minutes? No. See I moved out from. . . I did have the records when I had my own house, but when I moved out I. . . I don't have no place here. I even had to give away some of the books. You see, I got a lot of books. But lot of 'em I. . . I give away. I couldn't. . . I couldn't carry 'em up here, there wouldn't be no place.

Q. So what happened to the records?

A. Huh? They were thrown out.

Q. Oh.

A. No, nobody. . . see then the Buchan Park itself burned up a couple of times.

Q. Oh, so that destroyed. . .

A. And the records was. . . but, I. . . I used to have the records when I was. . . when I was secretary, but no more.

Q. You don't think that any of them still exist anywhere?

A. Huh?

Q. You don't think that any of them still exist anywhere? I mean if somebody wanted to write the story of the Farbund, there wouldn't be any records to write it from?

A. I doubt it. If they have. . . if anybody has any records, I doubt it. Not that I know of. That have the records, you know, from years ago.

Q. Yea.

A. I don't think so. I don't know. I haven't got any. I don't know if anybody else has. I used to have 'em but they were layin' around for years and years and years. I just threw out a lot of papers the other day. I had a lot of 'em up in there in boxes, all of that. You see they. . . and we have today. . . I threw them out, you see. I'm still active in the Jewish National Forum. You see? I sell these and you can't be without work. So, I'm active in that yet. And then we are active in other. . . other things. See, I have trees. If anybody wants to buy a tree, we sell 'em.

Q. You mentioned a newspaper yesterday, I think it's called the Comfor?

A. Camfor, yea.

Q. That's the. . . the paper published by the. . .

A. That's the. . . that's the published by the. . . by the Poale Zion and Farbund.

Q. And that's. . .

A. But the most of 'em is from the Poale Zion. Poale Zion and Farbund is the same thing.

Q. Right.

A. They all do the same work. So it doesn't make much difference. The only thing is the Poale Zion itself today if you belong to the Poale Zion you belong to the Labor Zionist. It's combined anyways. They have a Jewish paper and then they have an English for the Amer. . . for the English speaking boys. So the Camfor is for the Jewish people, you know, that they read. . .

Q. Right.

A. And then the Farbund itself gave. . . used to give out a paper, but now they print it in maybe once a year or so they give it out. They used to be every month. They used to give out the paper from the Farbund.

Q. Did many people in Rochester subscribe to the Yiddish Camfor?

A. Camfor? A few. Yea they had. . . they used to have a man that used to come around from New York and he used to collect the dues and everything else. But, he. . . he got old and they haven't got anybody now. Yea, they. . . you have to subscribe for it or . . . and you send money for it. But, you see, as long as he used to come. . . I mentioned that . . . that Mayer Sher he used to give a couple hundred dollars for the campaign. You know, those people all over this country that they some of 'em give quite a bit of money, you know. . . you know, to print a paper today it costs a lot of money. See, this is the paper.

Q. I see.

A. . . . that goes out you see and it costs money to print it. Then they have twice a year. . . they have twice a year they have donations like for Pesach and Rosh Hashanah. We have. . . we give . . . a number. . .

Q. Did the Rochester local have a lot of contact with the national organizations? Did you go to conventions or conferences? Or. . .

A. Well, I don't know about how much contact they had. Not the total organizations. They . . .

Q. With the national organization of the. . . Poale Zion?

A. Well, the Arbeiter Ring. . . the Arbeiter Ring and the Farbund today, as I mentioned, they have cultural. . . cultural entertainment. Now for the last couple years the Arbeiter Ring and the Farbund send out a shul of Jewish music and Jewish entertainment. They send them out together, it's a partnership. We used to do it ourselves, we were the first ones to send people out all over the

- A. (Continued) province, you know, all over America. Now the Arbeiter Ring and the Farbund they send one out together.
- Q. You mentioned that you used to go to conventions of Upstate New York Farbund. . .
- A. Yes. . . we used to have. . . we used to have seminars. . . seminars. But now . . .
- Q. Did they ever have that kind of thing for the whole organization. . . the whole organization nationally? Say in New York or. . .?
- A. Oh, yea sure they have. . . well they. . . they have conventions and they have conferences. The conferences only the secretary or so, the ones that they are around New York, they go. When there was a convention they used to pay for the delegates.
- Q. Did you used to go to those?
- A. Oh, yes. I went. . . I went quite a few yrs. I went to Atlantic City. I went to Canada, I went to Montreal. And I went to New York. We had. . . we had conventions, yes sure. They. . . they used to pay for it. But once. . . once in two years they had a convention and. . . once in four years, now I do forget. I think it once in four years. And then they had a conference once in two years, only the secretary goes. The secretary from the Frabund would go or from the Poale Zion, they would go. But they have to pay their own fare and their own . . . when you go to a convention the organization pays for you. So if you have enough members, you have over 100 members, 145, you could send two delegates and they pay for it. So, that. . . yea, I went a good many times.
- Q. So when you went out to collect money for. . . for tools or whatever, this is part of a national campaign is the Rochester. . .?
- A. You mean for the Jewish Welfare Fund?
- Q. Well, for the. . .the. . . fund drives sponsored by the Farbund itself. . .
- A. Oh, yes. . .

Q. . . . part of a national campaign.

A. Yea.

Q. People in other cities were doing the same thing?

A. Well, you see that was. . . that was . . . when we went out, we went local. Just Rochester itself. Every city had their own campaign at different times. We went out. . . Now like we went out for bonds, we used to go every Sunday. We had the local from Buchan Park, we used to go out and they used to give us streets or we used to make our own streets. And we went down and we find out now we asked if anybody lives here, you see we didn't have a directory like they have now. We used to go up to the house and ask 'em is there a Jewish family livin' next door? 'Course then they don't know, and if it was a Jewish family they told us. We went in there. We didn't ask for anything, we told 'em we. . . we represent Labor Zionists or the Farbund or whoever we do. And we go out for to sell bonds or . . . well, when the Welfare Fund was out that was easy. That was nothing. They give us a few dollars, that was very easy to. . . to collect because we used to have about ten, twelve people and if we have even 100 cards so there wasn't that much. But when we worked for ourselves, we. . . we worked because we. . . we. . . see like if we. . . if I took Thomas Street, I used to go Thomas Street to Milton Street and there was a quite a few Jewish people there. There were all Jewish people. And you come on to some people, they. . . they tell you they don't want to go to Israel. I says, all right you don't want to go but I want to go, why don't you help me? Used to laugh, you know. Says why don't you help me, he says I don't want to go to Israel, I says . . . You know how much they used to give you? Ten cents, a quarter, fifteen cents. That. . . that was the. . . the amount that you got. And from people that I knew maybe you got a half a dollar, but used to go out a whole day, we used to collect \$10, \$12 you know. But every. . . every couple that they went out collect so

- A. (Continued) much and they gathered up. As I told you, during the whole winter we gathered up \$150.
- Q. Right.
- A. So, but they had it, was \$300 but they. . . every city brought so much so they bought quite a few tools.
- Q. Let me just stop for a second. You bought your own cemetery, the organization did?
- A. Oh, yea that was in the. . . yea, I was one of 'em and we bought it. We bought it from the Kippeler, they had a lot of 'em.
- Q. Where is that?
- A. Huh?
- Q. Where. . . where is this?
- A. Kippeler. . . where it is? It's on Britten Road. Yea, we bought. . . we bought cemetery. And then. . . then a while went by and they had a shed up there and the cemetery is a very hard thing to buy, you know, it's very. . . quite expensive. So they had a. . . a shed up there where the man kept the tools. And so I went down to the Kippeler again and I . . . I bought a piece of land. I bought about 37 graves and that was added on to the others, we had about 130 and then the 37 was added on. So the shed was there. Now, it's nice up there now. Now it's very nice, nice and clean. So they took over the shed and we have the cemetery anyways up there.
- Q. Is the. . .
- A. Huh?
- Q. Is the cemetery just for members of the Farbund?
- A. We have. . . it's members. . . we can sell 'em, but we sell 'em if anybody, you know, member has got somebody, relations, that he has to. . . so, we. . . we give. . . we sell 'em. And then we . . . if you want a grave, somebody dies

A. (Continued) or you die, your wife wants to lay near you. She has to buy both. She has to buy the piece of land because. . . well, I don't know, maybe I shouldn't say that. We. . . a person is entitled to a grave when he's dead, but when he's alive he don't need no grave. So if he wants a certain grave he has to. . . at that time when we bought a cemetery we made up our mind that we only charge 'em \$35. Oh so he could go up and pick up any grave that he wants and pay \$35 and he'll have it because he's entitled to a grave. And his wife is entitled to a grave if she dies before. Today they change their. . . their rules. But at that time we made \$35, is all they. . . they pay for a special grave. Today you pay \$100 if. . . if you're a member of the Farbund and you want a grave next to your wife or your wife wants a grave next to you, you have to pay \$100. So we have that.

Q. Who administers the cemetery?

A. Huh?

Q. Who. . . who administers it? Who runs it?

A. Who runs that?

Q. Yea.

A. The secretary.

Q. Oh. The secretary of the Farbund.

A. The Farbund. . . the Farbund he. . . he runs it. And years ago there used to be a committee but now there isn't.

Q. Does the Farbund still have an office or is it just run out of the secretary's home?

A. Oh, no he hasn't. . . he's. . . he's the secretary. He. . . that's the reason I. . . I quit because I. . . I wanted to have a. . . a local or somewheres to have meetings and it comes so that they never had it. So. . .

Q. So the Farbund doesn't have meetings now or. . .?

A. He has meetings but in different houses.

Q. I see.

A. And I always used to think that the Farbund that had 100, 125 members even at that time, should have a . . . a meeting hall. And if you want to go to a meeting you should know that this and this date there's a meeting. But he didn't do it, so it got into different hand, I . . . I couldn't do. . . So, that's the . . . that's the . . . and there was one more thing on my mind that I didn't mention and I . . .

Q. Have you . . . you've been to Israel yourself?

A. I went three times.

Q. When . . . when did you go?

A. Well, I went in . . . oh, in twenty . . . in '63, '63, '69 . . . there's one let's see. '62, '67, I think, and sixty . . . I just . . . I went through the papers and I find passport. Seventy . . . I find out in a minute. . . . three, '69, '74.

Q. Oh, so you've been three times.

A. Because I have . . . I have . . . I notice from the paper that they have time for '79 to . . . in '79 to . . . to go on same passport. So, I was there a few times.

Q. Why don't you describe those . . . those plaques to me on the tape? The gold plaques, gold book certificates.

A. Yea, that's . . .

Q. You both got . . . you and your wife both got one.

A. Well, this I . . . I give . . . I found out that's . . . See, I got time till sixty . . .

Q. '79.

A. '79. See, I was there in . . . they issued in '64.

Q. Well.

- A. Yea, it's for five years, you know, five years from now. Before it was three years, now it was five years. This is a Golden Certificate because I put up some people even now. And you have to pay \$100 for that.
- Q. And it's issued by the Farbund? Or. . .?
- A. No, that was . . . that goes. . . the money goes to the. . . for the National Fund.
- Q. For the Jewish National Fund?
- A. Jewish National Fund. You have. . .but the Farbund put me up, they paid \$100.
- Q. I see
- A. I put up my money when I was there in seventy. . . '74. I. . . I went down to the Keren Kayemas in. . . in Israel, is in Jerusalem, and I order and I give 'em \$100 so he. . . he put our name in.
- Q. What are the pictures on the. . .
- A. Huh?
- Q. What are the pictures on the certificate represent?
- A. Oh, the workers? The workers of Israel. They . . .see there's a farmer, there's another one. And there is probably a scientist.
- Q. I see.
- A. See, the most of it is the. . . they work the land, the National Fund works for . . . works out. . . takes. . . they buy land, even today. I saw in the paper where they buy land now from the Arabs, you know. And they don't want anybody to know but it leaked out from somewhere that they buy land and they pay for it and it's their land, but this is the. . . 'cause then you see farmers. That is what Israel was originated for, was halusid, just farmers. But today they have. . . the people got bigger, they increased the population. And the land is so much, so now they put up factories, industry in the same time. That. . . that is what this is.

Q. Why did you yourself never move to Israel? Why did. . . why did you never move to Israel? Why did. . .

A. Why didn't I? Well, I. . . that's the reason then my wife died and I thought maybe I would move down there. But, it. . . it's. . . it's awful hard for one person. . .

Q. I see.

A. . . . to live in a. . . anywheres, it's no good. Even here, you know, for one person. If my wife were to be alive maybe I would go. The living up there, it's awful hard. You come from America to there, see, it's. . . when you live in Europe and you come there it's better now, but not quite. But, when you come from America, such a rich country, you know, that you have food and you got everything. . . goin' to the grocery store. If you want to spend the money and if you have the few dollars in your pocket you get it. Up there, even if you have the money, you have. . . you have. . . and it costs a lot of money.

Q. I see.

A. A gallon of gas, you know, I. . . I think a gallon of gas, I know, it costs two dollars or more than that maybe. You know, it. . . living is very high. And, so I looked around out there but I couldn't. . . I thought maybe I'll live in Florida and I couldn't do that either. But, you see, in Florida you got your family here and if anything happens to you, you just call 'em and they're there. But in Israel, is. . . is a different country. You know, you got to change the whole system. If you have your wife with you, all right. You live there, it's all right wherever you live, but if you're all by yourself. . . I don't know. And I still think maybe I'll go someday if I live long enough, I'll go into institution there when I couldn't able to attend myself. I'm still thinking about it, I don't know. But, I have in my will to be buried there and then I think, well, what's the use? That costs a lot of money, too. To be buried.

A. (Continued) So I asked the undertaker, he belongs with me. I asked him and he says, oh costs over \$5,000 to send. . . go on down there. 'Cause you have to send 'em to New York and from New York they. . . they send 'em out so you have to pay him, you have to pay New York, you have to pay in Israel. Well. . .

END OF TAPE I, SIDE B