

Interview with JUDGE HARRY GOLDMAN
June 16, 1976
By Mark Friedrich

Q. If you could just state your name and where you were born.

A. Yes, I am Harry D. Goldman. I was born in Rome, New York. I received my primary education there. Then, I received by BA from Syracuse University and my law school training at Harvard Law School. I worked in New York City for two years after completing law school and came to Rochester to try a law suit. I was invited by the firm against whom I tried the law suit to come to Rochester. I had a brother who is a very prominent attorney here in town. At that time he was just getting started in the law and I was very eager to get out of New York City. I think it was a case of taking the boy off the farm but never getting the farm out of the boy. It was during the days of the Depression, right after the stock market break, Black Thursday, and men were selling apples on the corners and many lawyers were paying to be employed so they could get their one year of apprenticeship in so they could take the Bar. In as much as I had two degrees it wasn't necessary to have that year of apprenticeship so I paid the handsome sum of \$25. Coming to Rochester, I came here in February, 1931 as an associate of the firm of McFarland & Harris which later became McFarland, Harris and Goldman. In the early 30's one of who was a Jew, was quite aware, nationally as well as locally, of the division between the various Jewish groups, depending upon the origin of either of your place of birth or that of your parents or grandparents. My parents came from Luthuania on the border of Germany but were classified pretty much as Russian Jews. In the scale of social prestige, in those days you had the Spanish Jews as the top group, the German Jews as the second group and I sprung from the common group that came from eastern-southern Europe. I think the status of the groups was achieved by the date when your ancestors first came here. The Germans, particularly in Rochester, were the first and were a very significant group. They were primarily in the clothing industry. The Adlers, the Sterns, and the Steinblochs. They were the Jewish leaders of the community. They were good citizens who gave more than a fair account of themselves as members of the community. Their religious adherence or service was minimal as compared with the more conservative or orthodox groups. They were for the most part reformed groups. They had the first Jewish synagogue which is the Greentree Synagogue which I think was then on Front Street which is no longer in existence. Later that group became B'rith Kodesh and had their temple on Gibbs Street across from the YMCA and now are out on Elmwood Avenue, a very lovely temple they have there. The conservative group had emerged and was becoming a perhaps more of the young people were being attracted, who had religious backgrounds as I did that is coming from an orthodox family, were joining the so-called conservative temples which were between the orthodox and the reform. Although more orthodox oriented than reform. The principle synagogue or temple was Beth El which was on Park Avenue, Meigs Street. I identified myself with that group and became a very regular temple attendant. Interested in it, I became a member of the Board of Directors, sometime an officer, vice president for many years and declined the invitation to be president because I felt that conservaty declined as it was, that somebody was more observant should have the job. I was not a Sabbath observor and I worked on Saturdays. I didn't keep a strictly Kosher home, so I felt that it wasn't right for me to be the president. I have remained with that temple although with very little interest in it so far as active participation. But at that time,

Q. This is about 1931?

A. 1931,32,33, the emerging leader and has since become not only the leader not only in my opinion in Rochester but nationally, and somewhat internationally is Rabbi Phillip Bernstein. His background was very much like mine and that is coming from a very orthodox family. His idol was Steven Weiss and so he received his training under Steven Weiss, who then had a school in New York City as part of the Hebrew, it's the teaching institution for reformed rabbis; it's in Cincinnati. Well, one place where it's obvious that there was a cleavage between Jews of German birth and those of Russia was at the Irondequoit Country Club which was founded by German Jews. I think the only non-German Jew in it was my father-in-law, Max Cohen. Then along came by brother Manny and Jacob Arch who just passed away, fine lawyer and good human being, and several of us then went into the membership of the Club to play golf and that was in a rather unimportantly breaking down of the barriers between the groups, perhaps I should say among the groups, there were three groups. But the Jewish Community Council was formed about that time and its first president was Rabbi Bernstein. He did more to weld the groups together and to merge them and to try to make them understand that these things which separated us was superficial, not of any real validity. He became the first president and I was very active in it. The man who has been one of our outstanding citizens and who was a remarkable person, now 88 years old, is Arthur M. Lowenthal. Arthur was a product of a German-Jewish family. His father founded the Lowenthal knitting mills, then a very distinguished industry and now no longer in existence although it at one point had celebrated its 100th anniversary. His father was one of the founders of the Rochester Mechanics Institute which later became RIT and you will find one of the streets on the campus known as Lowenthal Road or Street, I'm not sure. But Arthur, who had no religious rearing in terms of a Jewish background, but always a very passionate Jew ethnically, and a man concerned with the welfare of others joined with the Jewish Community Council and was a tower of strength in eradicating as we did the differences among Jews based upon where your ancestors were born. Arthur became the second president of the Jewish Community Council and I succeeded him as president. By the time I had become president there was no question about differences based upon ancestry and the people who became important were the people who were participating, were doing the work in the community. Fund-raising was terribly important because the Jews have always prided themselves from the beginning of this great country of ours of taking care of their own. Perhaps the greatest disgrace of Jew could feel would be to go on public welfare. Jews raised funds in the early days for aid to institutions in Palestine, hospitals, seminaries, orphanages, and the like. Also, took care of local needs such as the partially supplemental took care of local needs such as the Home for the Aged, the what was the JYW&WA, now the Community Center and the Jewish Social Service Bureau of Families. As, did I say that fund-raising became important because we didn't go to the outside community for assistance. We raised the money within the Jewish community and that meant that every Jew pretty much as it is today, who believes, and I think we all do, of the importance of the Community Chest. Who feels an obligation to take care of his Community Chest and to take care of the Jewish Welfare Fund. We, I suspect that if you were to make it an examination of the income of average Jews like myself, you would find that our charitable gifts far exceed those of non-Jews who are similarly situated as far as income is concerned. I kept a separate checkbook which is called a special checkbook and in it only are the contributions I make large and small, and I see on the first page here, St. John Fischer College, Wayne University, Visiting Nurse Service, Alfred University, Jewish Community Council, the National Conference of Christians and Jews, United Jewish Welfare Fund.

Q. Are you a member of the Board of Trustees of St. John Fis.

A. Yes. I say that during my period of incumbancy as the president of the Community Council, the differences had been leveled out and a man had been elected to the community

depended upon his interest in his work and that's why I think the present Jewish Community Federation is doing the greatest job that's been done in my nearly 50 years here in Rochester. They are a young, vigorous group, and their importance depends upon on their contribution both in terms of their activities and also their contribution in terms of money. But when the state of Israel merged, the Welfare Fund devoted a very substantial portion of the money it raised, it raised huge sums, and the early presidents of that Welfare Fund, among them was Arthur Lowenthal. I either succeeded him as president or he succeeded me, I'm not sure as president of the Welfare Fund. I know we raised \$4 million at that point. 1948-49. Then, we decided to make a study of our institutions, how they were performing, what groups they were serving, and we came to the conclusion that the emphasis should be taken off fund-raising although it is terribly important and we merged the Welfare Fund into the what is now the Jewish Community Federation. So you would see the pie now with the social agencies and the state agencies and national agencies and Israel with much emphasis on Family Service, particularly one of the important tasks now is the resettlement of Russian Jews who were permitted to leave the Soviet Union, Jewish education, and so on. Now one of the great glories of Rochester is that we are one of the few communities where the three major phases join in fund-raising for a community in what used to be the Community Chest and what is now the United Community Fund, or whatever. Buffalo doesn't have it, Syracuse doesn't have it, New York doesn't have it, nowhere do you find the three phases all sharing and their institutions are for the most part principally supported by the Community Chest, which as you know raised \$15 million. We pride ourselves in this community, the job that's been done. That, too, has come of age in the broadening of its base so that all elements are representatives, it's more democratic than in the days when I was an officer, as chairman of its budget committee, and so on. But that doesn't completely take care of any of the agencies that are tied to any one particular religion. There must be supplemental, so all of us belonged to the Jewish Community Center although I never used it. We are members of the Jewish Home for the Aged even though, fortunately now, the state under the old age benefits pretty much support all homes for the aged. But we saw a shift in leadership from the German so-called Jewish families to the Russian or Eastern or Southern Jewish families. The names that were the great names in the community have gone. The contributions made by a man like Isaac Adler, who is a distinguished lawyer, Vice Mayor and acting Mayor of Rochester and a member of the Board of Education, in those days when those jobs are filled by your top men, and served for the most part with little or no compensation. The Simon Adler was a district court judge but now along come the Jacob Archs, Harry Rosenthal, who is now dead, these are men that were judges, Harry Goldman, who became the first Supreme Court judge in this area, a Jew could be elected Supreme Court judge; we now have have Judge Baum and Judge Patlo on the Supreme Court Judge Arch was on the Supreme Court. We have judges on the Family Court, the County Court. I think we've emerged as well as we have because we all felt that we had an obligation to the community. You know, from the practice of the law for 25 years and from being on this bench 21 years, I've had some great experiences, some satisfying ones, and I've made a living. But for my work in the community, I've truly made a life. I was selected as citizen of the year a while back, and so on. This morning's newspaper carries a story with a picture, my secretary cut it out, that on Friday I'm to get the Ruth Stenson Award for contributions to the community and the law. I speak of that, perhaps I'm not modest, but I speak of it because I don't think I am the exception. I think this whole business of community service is inbred in Jews. They learned that, particularly the orthodox and conservatives, that you learned it from parents. Where in our house there were a group of poor boxes on the wall leading to the pantry, the doorway, and they started across the bottom and the whole door jammed down the other side, and every Friday before the candles were lit for Sabbath Service, my mother who was a very little woman, held us all up and gave us two pennies, we didn't have a lot of money, and we dropped pennies in the

poor box. We didn't know where they were going or anything else. We knew that it was for the poor. I think it's that type of indoctrination that we got as children that made us feel that you owe something to the community. But I could go on at great length and yet it would be much more helpful if you would ask questions.

- Q. When you came here in 1931, I believe that almost at the same time there was an entire community-wide organization or a drive to complete the JY?
- A. Yes. That was one of the happiest chapters in my recollection of Rochester. I remember working on that drive and because I was young and not well known I was given a poor section off Joseph Avenue where if I could get \$5 I was doing pretty well. But I quickly became interested in the JY. I led a boys group and then later was on its debating team which won the Eastern States Championship. I became a member of the Board of Directors, was a vice president for many years, and again declined the presidency because of my commitment to so many other things that I was at one time a director or an officer of 43 different community organizations and the one thing I would caution young people is to not spread yourself so thin. You'll find that you don't do too good a job for any one but you always have your pet ones you can give much more attention to. I was very active with the Boy Scouts. I was a perennial vice president for many years. Again, I've been vice president for more things with the understanding that I wouldn't have to move up but as a result I, but in 1931 we had raised about \$1 million to construct that building. That was going to be a building that was going to be put up without a mortgage. When we got it finished, we had no money to equip it. So Ray Ball, who was then the president of what was then the Lincoln Alliance Bank, now Lincoln First; Saul Uman, who was the principle partner in a clothing manufacturer that was called Keller, Uman, and Thompson that later became Timely Clothes; and for the life of me the Catholic member escapes me but he was a very prominent Catholic, it might well have been Louie Longie but I can't be sure of that. At the suggestion of the non-Jewish community, said let's run a campaign together to raise \$250,000 to outfit the building. I think it was a very cleansing thing for everybody involved. It washed away a great deal of suspicion in tolerance of, because you know it's awfully easy to dislike somebody that you don't know and particularly a group that you had no contact with. But once you make the contact you begin to see that they really are no different in the divine scheme of things, no group, religious or otherwise, is given any monopoly on vice or virtue. It's cut nicely upon all groups. There are scoundrels and there are angels in every group and the one thing that we must constantly remind ourselves is to hold each man responsible for his actions and not his group responsible for his actions. The, I suspect that there are not more than 20,000 members of the mafia in this country. Among the millions and millions of hard working, honest Italians. And I know them. Yet, one who doesn't know an Italian very well finds a vowel on the end of the man's name and assumes he's in the mafia. Get to know somebody and you'll find it awful hard to dislike him unless he should be disliked. But that campaign did much to bring us all together. Working for one group, because there was a great need for that Center then, down where it was on Thumberland Street, . . .
- Q. And the Joseph Avenue neighborhood was dynamic.
- A. When the Joseph Avenue neighborhood was truly the center of Jewish population and they moved out of there to the Monroe Street section and ultimately into Brighton and Irondequoit.
- Q. All segments of the community of Rochester made use of the facilities at the JY?

- A. Oh, yes. Except that, the use in large measure depended upon what alternatives people had. Children from poorer homes couldn't go to private camps. They went to Camp Pioneer at the JY, a fine camp, and so on. Children whose parents had swimming pools in the backyard I guess, didn't come out to swim very much in the pool. But I was never concerned about people who had swimming pools in their backyards. My concern is about the people who need the swimming pools someplace where they can go and take advantage of it. The one group or segment of that has become more active in terms of community participation is the temples. Temples now furnish, in addition to religious services, many other services for children. Quite apart from their schools, this sometimes are complete with a place like the Jewish Community Center, but I think we're doing a reasonably good job with our young today which is the important group to be concerned about. We find that Jewish youngsters, like all other youngsters, have their problems. They're not much different.
- Q. There's been just general comments made about the problems that might have occurred in Joseph Avenue. They changed the transition from a predominantly Jewish neighborhood to a predominantly black neighborhood. In areas of friction . . .
- A. Yes, there are areas of friction. There were charges that the merchants were overcharging, gouging the blacks. There may well have been such incidences of it but the Jew on Joseph Avenue suffered two things: the blacks who came in were no help to the Kosher meat market, who had to get more money for his meat because it was Kosher when he could go to Skippy's or some other place and get meat. The large number of blacks and the unfortunate occurrences on Joseph Avenue of violence made some people reluctant to go down there and trade as they had in the past. The Jewish bakery no longer had the number of customers coming down. So, as a result, all Jews, store or not, moved away if they could afford to move away. I was appointed by the Governor Dewey to be the first Housing Commissioner of Hanover Houses which was the only state housing we had in the community. We once had a republican leader, and in those days republicans controlled everything. It was open season on democrats year round. You still have a remnant of that as you still have a larger republican enrollment than you do democratic although they never can succeed at the elections. But there used to be the feeling that no matter how you voted, you better be enrolled republican. The then republican leader, who was a strong leader, wouldn't use any WTA money or federal funds, he wasn't going to take any of that cripple in the White House money, you know, that sort of thing . . .
- Q. Ideologically . . .
- A. Yes. So this was the one thing we had, built in the wrong place, completely wrong. It completely segregated the blacks more and more in that area. I did a foolish thing. I said we were going to have 50% white and 50% black. I don't believe in quotas in any respect but I thought this time we were going to try to sell those houses. We got reasonably good blacks and awful poor whites. Now, of course, it's going, but at that time you could see the transition from the Jewish group, you had the Baiton Street settlement, which was a terribly important social agency. It was kind of three-headed. It was a family service, a nursery and health service, and it was an educational service. It started down there because of Jews who were in that area who had come from the old country and had to be Americanized. Now, of course, it is all black. It's unfortunate that Joseph Avenue and that whole area is black because it's not good to segregate anybody. We've pretty much done it with the Hanover Houses and with the opposition to blacks who tried to move into the suburbs. I had some personal experiences with that. Man's not inhumanity, it's indecency to other men, a very sad reflection on all of us.
- Q. You just mentioned experiences. Black-white, I guess until the 1950's there were sections of Rochester that Jews couldn't move into.

A. Oh. There were very definite sections, the so-called Kodak section, of Brighton, down from the 12 corners, down Elmwood Avenue and that whole section Avalon, many of those streets Jews couldn't move in. The, you had Country Clubs that Jews couldn't get into, the Country Club of Rochester, only now do they have letting in Jews, I guess. The Oak Hill in those days Country Club, Genesee Valley and I was one of the founders of the Rochester Association for the United Nations. We had a very dedicated group, used to meet at the Rochester-Colgate Divinity School and there was a man who later was with Kodak and later went to Tebity, Mass. to be head of their gelatin plant there. A fine fellow. He was president of their foreign policy association. Just a great guy. Well, a client of mine, he was moving to Tebity, and a client of mine wanted to buy his house. A rather modest house on Rossevelt Avenue in Brighton. The agent said to, this was a fine young couple, she was the daughter of Alfred Hart, who started the Hart Food Stores and Star Market. They put in an offer and the word came back that, sorry, they wouldn't sell because they had a gentleman's agreement on the street that they wouldn't sell to a Jew. The term gentelman is interesting. And, so, we had a policy committee to the United Nations that used to print a statement on all questions that came up and they had one on Russia. I was urging us to be more understanding of Russians. This chap was taking a more conservative point of view and I said, now look, you've got to understand their culture's different, their whole background is different. I said, of course we don't understand them, but we'll not be wondered we don't understand Russians when Rochestarians don't understand Rochestarians because there is a Rochestarian in this room who won't sell his house to a Jew. Then the denials, you know. But, that's gone pretty much. I don't know any place where a Jew cannot live in Rochester. As I say, in the clubs there is still some restrictions but that doesn't bother me too much. I'm not too concerned if blacks can't get into Oak Hill or the Country Club of Rochester, I'm much more concerned if they can't jobs or a decent education or decent housing. We can all live without being members of the most social club. We can't live if we aren't given a fair break. What we now think is in its bicentennial year a country in which all people are created equal. Oh, I could go on telling you at great length. I can only say that from my early days until now, that I've been rather proud of the way the Jewish community has emerged. You look around and see who the motivating people are, the groups, the President, the United Community Chest, Bert August is a Jew. Mel Eisner is the greatest spirit we've had in the scouting movement in Rochester. Arthur Lowenthal and Home for Children, you can go right down the list and you will find it difficult to not find many Jewish names in groups that are working for the betterment of the community. So, I think we're doing pretty well. I do think that relations generally between non-Jew and Jew are much better than they've ever been.

SIDE B

I think I've omitted so much because I can't cover it, but it seems to me that I've, one area in which you saw the disappearance of distinction between German and Russian Jews was in Temple B'rith Kodesh with Phil Bernstein. You had only German names. My brother Manny became its president, was its longest president for 12 years or so and I guess he's still the honorary president.

Q. Is your brother still active?

A. No. He is 78 now and he is semi-retired. The one thing that I felt was terribly important in community work is the people who have been very active and are getting older, would move out and let the younger people take over. I am 73 and I am constantly turning down partnerships and what not because it is completely wrong. You've got to have some leadership with a little longer tenure. The one way in which a person becomes a good community worker is to give him a job. You give the

average fellow something to do, he'll take the pride in the doing of it and do a good job. So I think, and as we see it in the Jewish Community Federation now, I think the men who are most active in it, an old man is 50. I think they're all younger than that. I think that's great. So, while it's a great temptation to go on, I know some people my age who just feel neglected that they haven't, that they've been made honorary. I said yesterday, I'm an honorary trustee at three colleges, that means that you may attend the meetings and may speak if you have to, but you can't vote. I think that's fine. But I said yesterday to somebody that I remember one organization that I won't name where I was honorary because I had become super angry. It was a very important vote and I cast a vote and by one vote my decision won and then it occurred to me about a week later that I had no right to vote! But I think that's good. I think it's a young man's world and it belongs to the young. I think it's good when an older man can graciously move aside. Trying all the time as you can along, as you always try to do, to bring new blood in, so that there were people who could carry on and this I think is being recognized more and more. I just received a letter yesterday saying that (read the letter). I like to think that I'm as flexible in my outlook today as I have ever been. In fact, sometimes I think I'm more flexible because I find myself complaining more about the ills of the world but as people get older their veins and arteries get hard and while they still may be able to do the job sometimes they're too much width to the pants than the hidden empire of old loyalties. It's been nice talking to you. I think Rabbi Rosenberg, who wrote The History of the Jews, up to 1925, did a reasonably good job and someday maybe a man like Rabbi Karp, who is quite a scholar, might carry it on. While I think this oral history is good, maybe someone can listen to these and put something together. Unfortunately, every time you try to do something, and you run into a dollar sign, it is the greatest barrier in the world. Stands in the way of good things, too frequently.

- Q. You mentioned you were with a group to support the United Nations. Do you think the perception of the United Nations in the Rochester Jewish community has changed?
- A. I can only judge it for myself. I was not only one of the founders, I was Governor of the State of New York, they called it Governor, I was on the American Association for the United Nations Board. We had then, and I still think we have, the largest branch association in America. We had 6,600 members at one point, and we still have a large number. I have trouble talking myself into making my contribution which is more than the average membership dues each year. Not only because of Israel and the Zionist situation, but because, why I thought it was the last best hope on earth. I still think that the world will not be completely safe until there is universal sovereignty, not just my country right or wrong. We have, whether or not this is the structure that can do it, I don't know, because without changing it, because with the emerging countries, the Third World, so forth, when a nation of 88,000 has the same vote in the General Assembly as the great powers, that's all right on the basis of one man, one vote, in election but not to determine great world questions which impact the whole world and unfortunately, in many of those countries that are merging, they have not yet had enough democratic experience to be able to make a judgement of what others ought to do. A country where the sultan is weighed each year and diamonds and gold are put on the other side of the scale to determine, show your love for authority. That would be a country to determine whether or not there ought to be day care centers in places in the world kids can go . . . I still made my payment. I think most Jews are more concerned about it on the basis of their proposition that Zionism is racism because that's an absurd thing. That's a little like the protocols of Zion the old forgery and fraud. You can find ways to criticize Israel without that sort of nonsense. The interesting thing is that probably no country compared to size, certainly, as Israel

has done as much in scientific assistance to merging countries in Africa and then you find that they throw them out of UNESCO. You know, this all makes you wonder, is this the vehicle? There must be something else. Well, I was young then, but I was a last ditch fighter for the League of Nations. I suffered great frustration and disappointment when it went down the drain. Now we find that the one thing that is disturbing is that nationalism, which should be disappearing, is becoming more and more the chauvinism of countries and that's too bad. What we need is not division, but unity. Then, you find things like India where HAITUS CORPUS is suspended. You wonder, here is a country that had a pretty good shot towards democracy so you ask yourself, are we better off in the world than we were 50 years ago? I can't be certain of that answer. Incidentally, it was my hope originally, that in terms of Jewish religious observance, that the reform and conservative would one day merge. That may still happen because find the reform moving to the right, conservatism isn't fast enough moving to the left to find the common ground. I think one day, not in my lifetime, but soon after my departure you'll see a merger of those two groups. We find nowhere near the sense of competition among the groups that there was in .

- Q. You were here around 1931 and the developments in Germany. How aware was the Jewish community here in Rochester?
- A. The Jewish community . . . You know, they say it's an ill wind that blows no one good. God knows that it didn't have to be that way, to have to murder 6½ million people for Jews to suddenly realize that to yourself you might not be a Jew but to others you were still Jews. You know, I read some time ago that during the Hitler days as Jews in Germany died of blood infection. If you had a great grandmother that was Jewish, a blood infection! Perhaps the best example of that was a man named Charles Markus, one of the finest men you could ever meet. Bachelor, he lived alone, he was chief purchasing agent for Kodak, he was Jewish, he was never a part of the Jewish community until Hitler. Then, when Hitler started, he joined the JY and proceeded to do whatever he could there and he made available a large contribution. When he died, his principle beneficiary was the JYMA. Well, Charles Markus became a Jew because of Hitler, because he all of a sudden realized that somehow you're identified even if you don't believe it yourself. It had a great impact here. We all were involved in the business of signing affidavits of responsibility for refugees who were coming here so they couldn't come in unless somebody took public charge. The community mobilized itself beautifully to do everything it could for refugees. It left a great impact on Jews here as it did all over the world.
- Q. The refugees were integrated into the community right away.
- A. No, they were integrated immediately and as a matter of fact, many of them brought many substantial skills with them and they have merged leaders in their own businesses. Just as now Jews are trying to integrate this handful of Russians that we have, finding jobs and houses for them. The community is once again, it seems to me, living up to the great Jewish principle that we are our brothers' keeper. I think that ought to end this.