

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

Interviewee Winthrop Hudson

Interviewer Nancy J. Rosenbloom

Date(s) of interview June 10, 1976 (1 tape)

Setting (place of interview, people present, impressions)

I interviewed Professor Winthrop Hudson at the University of Rochester. Professor Hudson was somewhat reluctant to give his perceptions of the Jewish community on tape. He willingly spoke of the leadership of the Jewish community. He was more than happy to talk about changing ethnic patterns off tape.

Background of interviewee

Professor Hudson was a student at Colgate Rochester Divinity School in 1934. He has recollections of Rabbi Bernstein from that time. Professor Hudson has been in Rochester continuously since 1947 as Professor at Colgate Rochester Divinity School and since 1970 as Professor of History and Religious Studies at the University of Rochester.

Interview abstract The interview, which was short, commenced with recollections of Philip Bernstein as pacifist and Zionist. Dexter Perkins, Justin Roe Nixon and Bernstein were three prominent civic leaders during the 1930s and 40's. There followed some recollections of other leaders, interfaith activities and the perception of the Rochester Jewish Community first as unified in the Reformed tradition under the leadership of Bernstein and then as Conservative during the era of Stuart Rosenberg. Hudson maintained that antisemitism was not apparent.

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

<input type="checkbox"/> Social history - N/A	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Jewish community
<input type="checkbox"/> Family N/A	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> community relations
<input type="checkbox"/> Demographic/residential N/A	<input type="checkbox"/> Religious life N/A
<input type="checkbox"/> Economic N/A	<input type="checkbox"/> Jewish education N/A
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<input type="checkbox"/> Zionism/Israel N/A	

Interview log

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

--see following page(s) --

Interview Log: Winthrop Hudson

- A. Rabbi Bernstein
Institute of Religion hld at B'rith Kodesh for Protestant clergy.
Interfaith meetings and Interfaith Thanksgiving service.
- B. YMCA
Board of YMCA integrated. Community organization, not
Christian. General community leaders included Herman Goldberg,
Ira Berman, and Hy Freeman.
- C. Family Service. referred to as Protestant agency although
staff in part Jewish. Board of Governors was Jewish.
- D. Suggestion of looking as Board of Savings Banks in order
to test integration of Jewish Community with general
community.
- E. Mentions Loewenthal, Stern, and Sol Human.
- F. Antisemitism in Rochester and at the University of Rochester;
Hudson never was aware of any quota systems.
- G. Perception of fear of antisemitism.
- H. Riots; community response through religious affiliations,
mobilization of Protestant community to bring Sol Olinsky.
Task forces organized. Protestant community no longer
organized although the Genesee Ecumenical Council still
exists.
- I. Jews are especially active in cultural activities.

Interview I
Tape 1
Side A

- A. Should I close the door?
- Q. It'll pick up. Today is June 10th. This is Nancy Rosenbloom. I'm interviewing Professor Winthrop Hudson at the University of Rochester for the Rochester local history project. Perhaps just to make sure the tape's working right, do you want to. . . I don't know, tell who you are or what your affiliation with Rochester is?
- A. I'm Winthrop Hudson. I first came to Rochester as a student at the Colgate Rochester Divinity School in 1934. The most popular and admired speaker in temple at that time while I was in Divinity School was Philip Bernstein. He ordinarily would speak at chapel at least twice each year, marvelous speaker, marvelous rapport with the students. One of the most distinguishing features that I remember about Rabbi Bernstein at that time was the fact that he was an ardent pacifist. I don't remember when he began to change his position at that point but I suspect it was not until toward 1938 or as World War II approached.
- Q. In 1934, was that around the time the problems. . . was Bernstein. . . did he speak up against. . .?
- A. I'm sure that he did speak up against him, but I don't recall that. This was not particularly the setting in which he would have spoken on that issue. 1934, of course, was the year when Hitler took over in Germany. And I think it probably was this event that eventually effected his pacifist position. Rabbi Bernstein was greatly admired in the Rochester community, and I would regard him as one of the three most influential opinion leaders in the city. This continued throughout the 1940's. The other two were closely associated

- A. (Continued) with him in this role. It would be Dexter Perkin, who was a professor of history at the university, and Justin Roe Nixon who was pastor of the Brick Presbyterian Church and later professor at the Divinity School. But many people who were out of the city would often wait until they had heard what Rabbi Bernstein, Dexter Perkins, Justin Nixon had to say on the subject before they made up their own mind. They were very, very influential in this respect. They were forever in demand as speakers to community groups. They were involved in all sorts of civic problems, and they were very highly regarded. That's why there was only one. . . oh, I might say that Rabbi Bernstein ultimately got involved in Washington and work in Germany, religious advisor following the war, and then with the cause of Israel. So he was out of the city much after 1950 and did not play quite the same role. Dexter Perkins went to Cornell for a period and did not. . . Justin Roe Nixon got older. The only person who stepped into this role was Sol Linowitz, and he became a very influential opinion maker in the city. Many people think of him as Chairman of the Board of the Xerox Corporation, but that came a little late. He first made his reputation on television running a program for several years called "The Court of Public Opinion." And he was involved as the others had been in every good cause in the city, President of the City Club, President of the Rochester Association of the United Nations, many other organizations. Ultimately he became involved in the American Association of the United Nations, went to Washington to the State Department, gradually removed himself from the city. And I don't know of anyone who's occupied the same sort of role these men have occupied since that time.
- Q. Do you recall any specific issues, city issues, that they addressed in the thirties and forties?
- A. There were all. . . well at least Philip Bernstein and Justin Roe Nixon were

- A. (Continued) involved in labor questions and frequently served as labor arbitrators. And I remember they were involved in issues with regard to the Board of Education. But more often they were involved equally with national political issues and national issues. They sort of set the pace and the tone in the community. Rochester had a rather liberal Republican outlook which was due to these men as well as others. They were very important, both local, national, and international discussions.
- Q. OK. Do you recall . . . well, after you graduated from Divinity School you became a resident of Rochester?
- A. No, I went to Chicago and I got my doctorate at the University of Chicago. And I came back in 1942 to teach here. Went back to Chicago to teach in 1944 and returned in 1947, and I've lived here since that time.
- Q. Both at the U. of R. and in Rochester?
- A. No, no I've been continuously at the Divinity School and while I would do things intermittently at the university I was not on the faculty here until 1970.
- Q. Well, I guess one of the question that I was going to ask is I guess a little bit away from Bernstein and public officials, but it has to do with the changing complexion of the Rochester Jews. And whether maybe as a reaction of a resident of Rochester also to different groups of Jews that came in whether. . . whether this. . . I'm back into immigrant questions. . .
- A. Well, I'm after the immigrant period.
- Q. Well, what about. . .
- A. Immigration had stopped.
- Q. Well, what about people coming after the Holocaust? Or did. . . did the people in Rochester . . .?
- A. I don't think the people were really aware of an influx of people after the

- A. (Continued) Holocaust except the individuals who arrived, and these generally were people of some distinction.
- Q. More in present terms of Soviet Jews, is that a question that you think touches on the whole Rochester community?
- A. I . . . I wouldn't think that the Rochester community was particularly aware of. . . they're aware of the plight of the Soviet Jews, but I mean it's not a deeply felt issue as it is. . .
- Q. As around Russian Jews coming to Rochester?
- A. I . . . I don't think that the general community is particularly aware of it.
- Q. Who were some of the other influential Jewish people in Rochester, Jewish people and their function?
- A. Well, I would think probably politically one of the most influential persons would be Abe Chadam and his predecessors in the Amalgamated Clothing Workers Union. Although his influence is in the general labor, but he would be certainly on the scene, a person of influence in the Rochester community. And . . .
- Q. Did you have any contact with him personally?
- A. I met him once, but I would see him at Party meetings, for example, that type of thing. He was a person of major importance within the Democratic Party. But I just happen to remember one other thing that first. . . Rabbi Bernstein stipulated each year and provided, initiated an Institute of Religion which was held at Temple B'rith Kodesh, it used to be opposite the YMCA at that time, for all the Protestant clergy. It was very well attended. It went on for quite a long number of years. He brought in a speaker for the morning, a speaker for the afternoon. The women provided a marvelous luncheon. These speakers usually, if I recall correctly, were from Hebrew Union. And then somewhat later, early fifties I believe, Stuart Rosenberg who was Rabbi of

- A. (Continued) Temple Beth El which was then on Park Avenue, attempted to pursue a similar sort of program. And equally well attended, great fellowship, good spirit. And he brought in speakers from Jewish Theological Seminary generally with a wonderful meal, speaker in the morning, speaker in the afternoon. I thought that was rather interesting. This sort of esprit du corps present as a result of these efforts which people equated and were aware of the Jewish traditions.
- Q. You said for Protestant. . . I was just. . .
- A. Yes, well you have to remember that before Vatican II Roman Catholic clergy were not permitted to participate in interfaith discussions and meetings. So that they were self-excluded from such programs of this type. The National Conference of Christians and Jews whenever they would put on a program, a Jewish rabbi, a Protestant minister, and some Catholic layman. Clergy were not permitted to participate. That would explain their absence.
- Q. Were these discussions usually on religious topics or did they involve civic. . .?
- A. These discussions always focused upon the Jewish community, the Jewish heritage, Jewish tradition. Basically religious.
- Q. Later in the sixties did that evolve also to support for civil rights?
- A. These ceased by the sixties. They were no longer held.
- Q. What about that. . . I know on Thanksgiving there's a Thanksgiving service, interdenominational, is that the same type of . . .?
- A. Yes, that was interfaith, that is Protestant and Jewish initially as I have been told, but at some point some Protestant minister inadvertently, I assume, used a Trinitarian formula in a benediction, which I don't believe offended the Jews unduly. But, David Reese Williams, Unitarian, was upset and thought that it was offensive to Jews as well as to himself. And so he proceeded to

- A. (Continued) organize a separate Thanksgiving service at the Universalist Unitarians as well as Temple B'rith Kodesh.
- Q. At first you mentioned the Reform Jewish line then the Conservative line. And I just wondered whether to you or as to a Protestant observer does the whole Jewish community seem consolidated in terms of their positions or. . . ?
- A. Well, I would guess that people thought of the Jewish community in terms of . . . the thirties in terms of Philip Bernstein, the Reformed temple. He was a pre-eminent spokesman, he was a community figure. I don't think they even thought much beyond the Reformed community. Stuart Rosenberg, however, was a great civic person. He attempted to carve for the Conservative temple and the Conservative community the same position as the Reformed had, and he was rather successful at that. But after his stay. . . he wrote a history of the Rochester Jewish community, and after his relatively brief tenure here I think most people began to think in terms of the two temples. I'm not greatly aware of the Jewish community beyond the two temples. I think that has generally continued to be true.
- Q. Are there other prominent Rochester Jews that you recall? That come to mind?
- A. Well I. . . I would guess that it's hard for me in that period to really identify them in terms of their standing within the Jewish community as far as . . . It would occur to me that one of the best ways to establish this would be to look at the role that was played in certain community organizations by Jewish leaders. And I would think that the YMCA might be one way to look at this. I recall serving on the Board of Managers of the Monroe Branch of the YMCA and Herman Goldberg was a member of the Board of Managers. And Ira Berman was Assistant Principle at the time of Monroe High School was on the Board of Managers. And I'm trying to think of the name of a third person who later became a counsellor for the East District. He was a lawyer. And I

- A. (Continued) keep thinking that his name was Izzy Friedman. . .
- Q. Hy Friedman?
- A. Hy Friedman. Hy Friedman. That's the one. And I suspect the same thing would be true for the Board of Managers. . . the Board of Directors it would be of the YMCA in general. Who were the Jewish people who were operating on the Board of Directors of the YMCA?
- Q. It's interesting YMCA and not JY. Although they were probably in both.
- A. They probably were on both, but you have to remember that the YMCA became a community organization rather than a Christian. But I think this is an indication of the movement of people in and out of communities. And same thing would be true of Family Service. Whenever I would go to an annual meeting of Family Service the representatives would be guests from the Catholic Family Service and the Jewish Family Service there, they would refer to this as a Protestant agency. But quite a proportion of the staff of the Family Service, Protestant agency, was Jewish. And a number of members of the Board of Directors, Governors, were also Jewish. So, again, to me indicates acceptance of the Jewish community in the larger community and the movement in this direction.
- Q. You mentioned Family Service. I was talking to one local Jew who was telling me about the end of the Jewish Children's Home and its replacement by social work, Community Chest, this type of thing. Do you have any recollection?
- A. The old Protestant home was the Hillside Home and it has recently incorporated some child placement services with another group, find a home. And. . . but it, too, became generally community wide in its constituency rather than just Protestant. But I don't know about the Jewish Children's Home.
- Q. In that. . .
- A. I suspect that the Jewish Home may have ceased because there's been a feeling

- A. (Continued) that a home of that sort was not proper for children, they ought to be placed in families. In the general pattern it becomes difficult when families are divorced, someone's living where they can't be placed quite as readily in foster homes.
- Q. I guess there might have been some concern of a lack of a really strong Jewish upbringing. I'm not certain about the reason, wanted to be assured of the Orthodox religious. . .
- A. Yes.
- Q. Let's see.
- A. Another way that might test the emergence of general community leaders as opposed to Jewish community leaders would be to look at the boards of the savings banks. These were little clubs. The savings banks are self-perpetuating institutions. They're not commercial institutions, they were organized as philanthropic institutions. And I think that existing board members always brought in friends to serve on the board. And they, in turn, brought in their friends. Self-perpetuating boards.
- Q. Do you suspect that they were mixed?
- A. I suspect that you might find increasing number of Jewish members on the boards. I'm not certain. I was just thinking that would be the type. . .
- Q. Historical. . .
- A. . . . of group that might represent. . .
- Q. Are there other prominent Jews that you have recollections of?
- A. There are, I suspect, people such as the Lowenthals, Sterns, and there's one person I was trying to name who was very conspicuous, Sol Heuman. Do you recall anyone by that name? That might not be precise.
- Q. Maybe I could jump back and tackle a sensitive topic. There's one thing that we're asking the Jews so I'll turn it around. We're interested sort of

- Q. (Continued) in anti-Semitism. Now from your perspective do you think there's been anti-Semitism in Rochester? The U. of R. had a well-known quota system at the U. of R. Do you have any reaction at all to that topic?
- A. I haven't ever been aware of any anti-Semitism. In my ignorance I'm not aware of the well-known quota system . . .
- Q. Oh.
- A. . . . so that I am sure there probably was one at the medical school because you generally assume that all medical schools had a quota system.
- Q. It might be a myth. But, you know, you always hear up to the 1950's that only a certain number of Jews could get into the University of Rochester. It's something you grow up with in your head, and whether it's true or not. . .
- A. Yes. I don't know. And it's entirely possible that there were quota systems I'm sure. It's. . . another question would be the Country Club of Rochester which is the Rochester elite in the non-Jewish community. But, it might be interesting to see if there were any Jewish members of the Country Club of Rochester. I suspect there may have been one or two. Do you know?
- Q. Well, probably not until recent years.
- A. But, I would guess that it's possible that they automatically joined the Irondequoit Country Club.
- Q. Why?
- A. Well I think there probably was a concern that the families would be exposed to other Jewish families so intermarriage wouldn't take place, that sort of thing. At least I've been aware of this sort of feeling. Some Jewish families are concerned that boys and girls, say, grow up and make a good Jewish marriage. And this is true, I think, of Protestants as well, Catholics.
- Q. Do you think that's something that's remained constant over the years? Or

Q. (Continued) do you think there's an increase in intermarriage?

A. Well, I. . . I would guess that in my own family, in the university, and in general elsewhere intermarriages are occurring everywhere. And I read of many fears expressed within the Jewish community by some Jewish with this. . . who have something to do with survival of Jews. But I also read other studies that indicate that the Jewish community makes a net gain through intermarriage and if one is interested in survival that intermarriage is one way of ensuring Jewish survival. So there's mixed opinions I suppose.

Q. What about the Protestants?

A. The Protestants I would guess are no longer really anxious at this point at least in the northeast, I don't know about the south. But certainly in the northeast, Pacific coast.

Q. To go back, all right? To go back thirty years, to go back to the time of Hitler, do you think that it was Bernstein who made the general community aware of what was going on in Germany? Or do you think. . . do you think the local community was aware of. . . of this political anti-Semitism anyhow? Do you think it was the Jewish voice that really. . .?

A. Well, I. . . I would guess that most everyone was appalled by what Hitler was doing at the outset. But I'm not sure that even in the Jewish community they were fully aware of what was going on. But as the years. . . by 1938, '39 I think it was becoming fairly clear. And I would guess that Dexter Perkins and Justin Roe Nixon as well as Philip Bernstein would be speaking out on this and making the community aware of it. David Reese Williams was also influential in a way, always speaking on various issues, being in many places. But he was always regarded as a bit eccentric and off-beat so he didn't carry quite the weight of the other three who were regarded as very solid persons.

- Q. Right. I guess I'm trying to get a sense of what might be thought of as anti-Semitism, incidents of anti-Jewishness or whatever. And from there the other topic that comes to mind are the riots in 1964 and that whole area down around Joseph Avenue. I wonder whether you had an opinion on whether . . . whether or not . . . well what your recollection of what was going on in terms of the '64 riots. The fact that so many of the shops were owned by Jewish businessmen.
- A. I . . . I would think that within the general community people with whom I was acquainted in the Protestant churches it never occurred to them that most of the shops were owned by Jewish people. I think the attention was focused on the blacks, the riots. Everyone was surprised, shocked that this would occur. This was humiliating, for Rochester was rather smug and thought Rochester was a very nice place to live, things like this should not have happened here.
- Q. Did . . . were there different community organization that responded directly to the problem in terms of . . . I mean religious affiliation?
- A. Yes, the Protestant community responded quite quickly and mobilized their resources and the ultimate outcome of their activities was to bring in Sol Alinsky to organize FIGHT as an instrument for expression of the feelings of the power of the black community. This was a rather paternalistic effort in a sense. It was set up by white Protestants through the Council of Churches, financed by the churches, and carried out in this way. It enlisted the support of the black clergy. It was rather interesting that three years later I think the blacks organized to throw out Alinsky and get off Alinsky's plantation, as they wanted to do their own thing and not be managed this way.
- Q. That was the emergence of FIGHT?

- A. This was the origin of FIGHT. It was organized by the Council of Churches, Protestant churches.
- Q. Today do you think FIGHT and the Council of Churches continue to enjoy any kind of a good relationship?
- A. Well the Council of Churches has rather disintegrated. It's now called the Genesee Ecumenical Ministries and it does not have a central organization. It simply has task forces for different purposes, so it does not have the unified organization it had. At the time the FIGHT broke with Alinsky the leaders of the Council of Churches were considerably abashed because this was a repudiation of the leadership they had provided.
- Q. On this Genesee Ecumenical Council, this is interdenominational?
- A. This includes Catholics.
- Q. And also Jews? Or not?
- A. It probably does in some of these task forces. I wouldn't be surprised. But, that is true. . . very. . . it does not have really a central organization of any strength. There's a Commission on the Judicial Process, Commission on. . .
- Q. Does there continue to be a commission on. . . on the black community? One trying to live with FIGHT or not really?
- A. I don't think so. I'm not really familiar with this, Nancy, because I haven't been really involved in the last ten years. There's a very complex structure, but the old friends of FIGHT which found its initial. . . also from the Council of Churches, and found much of its leadership in the Third Presbyterian Church for example, it's now called Metro-Act. That's still in existence, still active.
- Q. Are there any other observations of the Rochester Jewish community that you might care to make?
- A. Well I. . . I've been pretty impressed with the vitality of the Jewish

A. (Continued) community and Jewish life in Rochester. And one thing that has struck me, it may not be true, but the Jewish community provides much of the support for the cultural life of Rochester. If you go to a play it seems to be a large percentage of the audience is Jewish. I go to various musical events, very large percentage of the audience is Jewish. I don't know how I know they're Jewish. This is another question. I'm laughing, 'cause I run into Jewish friends and this may be a highly inaccurate observation. But. . .

Q. The performers also or. . .?

A. Well, I'm not sure about performers but it just seems to me that. . . maybe this is true of lectures as well and other intellectual enterprises. It just seems to me that a lot of the support for the cultural, intellectual life of Rochester is to be found within the Jewish community. Now I may be completely wrong at this point, but that's just my impression.

Q. I think that's an interesting observation.

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A