

ROCHESTER ORAL HISTORY PROJECT (Rochester Jewish community 1924-1975)

Interviewee Mrs. Goldie Kaplan

Interviewer Tina Isaacs

Date(s) of interview 7/22/76

Setting (place of interview, people present, impressions)

The interview took in the Jewish Home and Infirmary, no one else was present. Mrs. Kaplan had been reticent to participate in the project and was coaxed into participating by Mrs. Gantman, a social worker at the Home. Mrs. Kaplan's memory was sound, but often times her memories were unpleasant and she began to weep. She was neither active in the Jewish community in Rochester nor had she ever held a job. She had done no volunteer work. The interview was very short, and at its conclusion Mrs. Goldman refused to sign the permission slip stating that we could use the tape, but as she could neither read or write English she didn't want to sign anything.

Background of interviewee

Mrs. Goldman and her husband emigrated from Russia to Cuba after WW I and settled in Rochester in 1921. (See above)

Interview abstract

disaster

(See above) Pretty much a ~~XXXXXXXX~~--Mrs. Goldman had few pleasant memories, and little to add to a project of this nature. She does, however, typify the Eastern European immigrant to some extent.

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

<input type="checkbox"/> Social history	<input type="checkbox"/> Jewish community
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Family	<input type="checkbox"/> community relations
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Demographic/residential	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Religious life
<input type="checkbox"/> Economic	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Jewish education
<input 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 casset recorder no.
- including references to others in the Rochester community

--see following page(s) --

Mrs. Goldie Kaplan: Interview Log

Tape I side A

Background

Eastern European
Family in Rochester
Cuba 1920-1921
Joseph Avenue Area
Synagogue

*Baden Street Settlement : learned English there
Changes in the neighborhood

Joseph Ave. and the riots

German Jewish/ Eastern European Jewish friction

*Depression

Democrats

WWII--Holocaust--U.N.--Israel

*Religion

grandchildren and education
value changes

Baden Street

Anti-Semitism

Childhood--passage to Cuba--immigration experiences

Participation in organizational activity

Changes in Rochester

Reform/Conservative/Orthodox friction

*JY

Bernstein

Cohen's Restaurant

Marcus

Solomon

Grandchildren

Interview 1
Tape 1
Side A

Q. OK. Mrs. Kaplan where were born please?

A. In Rochester. . . in (Note: says a Russian name, very lengthy.) That's Russia, Ukraine.

Q. And when did you come over to the United States?

A. That's years in my country, the United States, that wasn't the first time.

Q. What. . . what made you decide to leave Russia?

A. The war. It was terrible there, and I had brothers here so I came. I had family.

Q. Did you come by yourself?

A. I went here. . . originally I came with my mother and then I came to . . . I met a fellow. . . (Note: much background noise, drowns out Mrs. Kaplan's voice for a few seconds.) . . . that's Polish. And I got married.

Q. You got married in Europe?

A. In Belgium. My life story. And when I got married we lived in. . . we went to Cuba.

Q. To Cuba?

A. To Cuba because I couldn't live in Belgium, we couldn't make a living. So we went to Cuba. I was a year in Cuba. At the same time I was a baby, baby was I think. . .

Q. What was. . . what. . . what was Cuba like?

A. Cuba was very nice, at that time when I was there 1920, 1921. It was very nice. But after this became I wasn't there. I got out. After a year I came here. After a year they give me a visa, and my brother was here. I was staying a year there. And I. . . that was my baby year. She was forty-four

- A. (Continued) years and she was in a car accident and got killed. (Note: Mrs. Kaplan breaks down and cries, says a few words which are not clear.) So I got. . . that's when I started. . . my daughter died and I. . . I got pension, insurance. . . take me instead. . . that's all good when I got married.
- Q. When you came. . . what. . . you said you had brothers here in Rochester?
- A. Yea. Had one here, uncle I have here, since I came relatives and I can't tell you all the. . . Rochester. . . Rochester I went to Albion with my . . . to stay with my brothers. I was there and raised my child and my husband went into business and we had a nice life.
- Q. And where. . . where did you first settle down when you lived in Rochester? What street?
- A. Chadam Street, Ormond Street after they changed the street. It was Chadam Street, but they changed it to Ormond Street. You where that it is?
- Q. Down in the Joseph Avenue area?
- A. Yes. Yea, just near Baden Street. And it's . . . there was shuls. I don't know what to tell you where Baden Street. . . Joseph Avenue is a block to Baden Street.
- Q. Could I close the door because of the television outside? Is that OK? If we get very hot I'll open it again.
- A. Sure I don't care.
- Q. What was. . . What was Joseph Avenue like? Was it a Jewish neighborhood you moved into?
- A. Very Jewish, very nice and a lot of stores. It was very, very happy. It was a real shopping center.
- Q. So you felt like you were living in a Jewish community?
- A. Yes, that's right. And there were shuls, synagogues. You know about shuls?

Q. Oh, yes.

A. Synagogues and it was very nice.

Q. Are you Orthodox?

A. Yes.

Q. What shul did you belong to?

A. I belonged to the . . . just a . . . the Israel . . . B'nai Israel. It was a little shul next to the . . . Perschneppa Hagudu they called it.

Q. Was it. . . it was people from where you lived?

A. Yea.

Q. In Russia?

A. No, a lot of people from Russia here, not true, it's still not true.

Q. Did you go to shul often?

A. I go to shul like. . . in fact I joined the Terlitesek Fellows, you know about the women. . . Terlitesek Fellows? And they made it like. . .

Q. Oh, ladies auxiliary?

A. Auxiliary.

Q. Yea.

A. So, I. . . I didn't make it up and I . . . and they. . . and I was chairman of several things there. We gave a lot of money to that shul. Along with other members I used to write in postcards, I was in all things. Fifty years they made a party, they gave me a fan. I was chairman and some people bought it and they gave it to my . . . but they . . . rheumatism they call it. And my husband put it down 'cause then they was happy. So that was a start.

Q. Were most of those activities fund raising activities?

A. Yea, of the synagogue. We gave the synagogue a cemetery.

Q. When you were. . . when you were younger was English spoken in the home? When you first came here? Or did you speak Yiddish?

- A. No, I spoke the Yiddish. I couldn't speak English because I went to Baden Street school. There was a school on Baden Street, day school. I used to go there to learn to write English a little because I just came I got . . . learned my letters later. I didn't know that the . . . I just couldn't take it, so I then went to school. My mother took care of my child.
- Q. That's good. What was the school like? Were there a lot of people?
- A. Jew, native. . . of course I knew a little Russian so I could. . . I could take a little . . .
- Q. Were there a lot of people of all ages there?
- A. Yes, all ages, not. . . not young girls. Middle ages, young ages. Because at that time I was what. . . thirty-five years old, thirty years old.
- Q. How long were you in school?
- A. I was going up until I . . . I knew a little and I knew I couldn't be no secretary so I thought I could. . . I was satisfied to leave.
- Q. Did you get any Yiddish newspapers in your home like the Forward or . . .?
- A. Yea, I used to read the Forward. They got. . . got. . . I could read, somebody got one, they would read. I used to read it.
- Q. Did you live in that area the whole time you were in Rochester?
- A. I lived I don't know how many years. . . and I came after I moved . . . you know where Richmond Street is? That's near the high school, you wouldn't know. I should tell you. So I lived there a few years and my daughter got married. And I gave her a big house. . . and we bought another. . . we lived on Monroe Avenue.
- Q. Did you. . . was. . . where you lived on Monroe. . .?
- A. Twenty years.
- Q. Twenty years on Monroe Avenue? Was that a Jewish neighborhood too?
- A. Yea, it was a lot of Jewish, but it was still respectable, you know? It was

A. (Continued) a high rent. . . now it's different. My son went nuts.

Q. When did you start noticing that the Joseph Avenue area was changing?

A. I think it was the black ones. I used to go to the library. At night I was afraid to go alone, it was changed down there. It was the black ones who come.

Q. When. . . were you living in Brockport in 1964?

A. 19. . . in 19. . . I don't. . . '63 to . . . no '53 to '63 I was I think in Brockport.

Q. Were you here during the riots then? Or were you in Florida?

A. No, I was in Florida.

Q. Did you hear about the riots in Rochester in Florida?

A. Yes.

Q. What did you think about them?

A. What could I think? I think that some of them . . .

Q. Did you think that Rochester would ever have riots?

A. I never thought it would because Rochester was a very respectable city, lot of business, Kodak.

Q. Did you think that maybe there was outside agitation? That people came in from outside to stir up trouble?

A. I didn't know what to think. I don't know what to think, and I listen to radio and I didn't have much on my mind.

Q. When you first came here do you think that there were any. . . that there was any, oh, friction problems maybe, little problems, between the German Jewish people here and the Eastern European Jewish. . . Jewish people?

A. I remember hearing so. I don't think we. . . we didn't know the difference from one to the other. Was nice, peaceful. It was nice and peaceful till Reuben came in. . . came into present.

Q. Really? What. . .

A. The Depression.

Q. What. . . you said your husband was in business. What kind of business did he have?

A. Junk business. He used to peddle junk, but after he went bankrupt he had factory. That wasn't too good and ten years he was there. At that time we had property and after problems, one after the other, it was. . . everything went to the dogs and that was the problem. My husband got sick and that's . . . it was a lot of trouble.

Q. Did your life change during the Depression?

A. Was change. I rented out my room, and I rented out. . . I put out the living room and sleep with my husband. My mother was sleeping on the cot. I make ends tie, you know, to make how they. . .

Q. Mmm-hmm.

A. Have to when they learn it in Russia. So when we was better off a few years but at that time. . .

Q. Was Rochester . . . do you think things were bad in Rochester in general during the Depression? Was it hard. . .?

A. The Depression was really bad. I have the slight amount, you know, sugar. I have to buy the. . . by that time. . . I used to in lines at night to buy something, ration, half of the need. People shouldn't say. . . went to the larders, sometime I didn't have my . . . so I set up. . . and I don't like the summer after. . . it got better.

Q. Then things changed? Do you think that things were better under the Democrats then?

A. I think so. I think so.

Q. Even. . .

A. But, I'm a Democrat. I'm a Democrat, I vote Democrat. But I think so.

- A. (Continued) There are other things that I mention, to tell the truth, the Democrats government. . .
- Q. Why? What. . . what. . .
- A. I don't know. I'm not educated enough to know what the reason is and what the politics is. I can't tell you.
- Q. When did you first become aware of what was happening in Europe in the 1930's? You know, with the Jews?
- A. I had a sister there and children with the kids and the kids' kids. She was older sister. So I send a letter to her, a girl got married, I send a present. It didn't come. And at that time I start to question. So I knew about this. In the papers you got some, but it's fair to say everybody knew it.
- Q. After the war was over did you think that the United Nations was a good thing when it was first being built?
- A. I tell you I don't know much about the politics. I don't know what to tell you about.
- Q. OK. How about Israel? When Israel was becoming a state how did you feel?
- A. I'm a Jewish woman and I was proud of it.
- Q. And were you very happy when. . . when Israel became a state?
- A. Sure, that they. . . that they gave 'em the right to be a state. I was happy and helped.
- Q. Do you think that the survival of Israel is necessary for the survival of the Jewish people?
- A. It is what I think.
- Q. Could you. . . what did your father do?
- A. I was 11 year old when my father died in Europe.
- Q. Oh. So your mother supported your whole family?
- A. Never. . . never in my life in Europe till I got into America. And I came with

- A. (Continued) my mother, my mother with her kids. And after I had a kid.
- Q. Did you have. . .
- A. I had operation, I couldn't have any more.
- Q. Were you brought up in a very religious home?
- A. Very religious.
- Q. And did you yourself keep a very religious home?
- A. I keep a religious. . . just. . . I kept religious till I got sick. I came to hospitals. There I did what I could, but I. . . but very religious. I still light candles and do whatever the Jewish religion. . .
- Q. So you think it's very important?
- A. I think I'm a Jew. Why shouldn't I keep the Jewish religion?
- Q. Do you think that the younger generation, people say my age, in general are as religious as older people?
- A. Not all of them. I'm gonna tell you. I got three grandchildren and they are all. . . one believes in religion, the rest of them don't. He don't keep very much religious religion, but he keeps the religion. But he goes to synagogue, likes to keep kosher. You know the kids the Jewish things. They're older now. And the two of them nothing.
- Q. Why do you think people are less religious?
- A. I don't know. They attempt to be Gentiles in a Jewish. . . the Gentile got less responsibilities. They don't have to be religious. They do whatever they please.
- Q. What do you think of intermarriage, Jewish people marrying Gentiles?
- A. It's their privilege. My youngest son got married. . . the youngest grandson got married to a Gentile girl. Since he went to school and he fell in love with the girl and I think she was a year older or a few years. And he got married, and they live very happy. They got. . .

- Q. Do you think that when a Jewish person marries a non-Jew that that person is sort of lost to Judaism?
- A. I don't know. I don't know why you have to believe that. But now I think after all my grandson. . . so I say to him. . .
- Q. What. . . what do your grandchildren do?
- A. Teachers.
- Q. They're all . . . all three of them?
- A. No, one is . . . the granddaughter she is . . . I had another . . .
- Q. So they all went to college?
- A. All of them.
- Q. Do you think education is very important?
- A. Very important. Especially these days.
- Q. Do you think it's as important for women to be educated as for men?
- A. I don't know. That's their privilege what they want.
- Q. Do you think that women should have careers? Should have jobs?
- A. Why not?
- Q. Some people think that they should stay at home that's why.
- A. No, that's. . . in this day and age go on. They didn't have to say. . . husband, bake and cook, they could live an easier life.
- Q. Do you think that. . . that the younger generation has different values than the older generation does?
- A. Yes, they do.
- Q. What do you think are the differences?
- A. The differences? The image. . . the generations they can know better. . . they just are staying on and seeing the Russians and if you didn't have no washing machine you wash 'em by hand. And it was work then. Another time my daughter they worked a little and they got their. . . their money to spend

A. (Continued) and to be free.

Q. Were you ever connected with the Baden Street Settlement?

A. Yes, there I go to school. Yes.

Q. Did you ever do anything else with them?

A. Just make. . . what was it? It was a center they used to borrow money to . . . to poor people. They used to pay it back but . . . and they used to wipe out the debt. I don't know a lot of things was going on.

Q. Did you think it was good?

A. Sure.

Q. What kinds of things did it give the neighborhood do you think? The Baden Street Settlement?

A. I don't know. That was good. They used to kids. . . kids used to come together. That was a teaching that was exercise. I don't know what it was. In other words I couldn't tell you. Till the other came up and that was built.

Q. Do you think that the riots were anti-Semitic or just anti-white?

A. I couldn't tell you that.

Q. Did you ever either as a young girl or in Rochester ever personally experience any anti-Semitism?

A. I wasn't a young girl.

Q. No I mean in Russia or here.

A. Russia it was good too. They do a lot in the south, you know. And that was the main time, got to be bad, all kinds of treated us. All kind of names they yell, it was terrible.

Q. What was it like coming over? You know, with the ship and . . .

A. I think. . .

Q. . . . everything?

- A. I came by ship. Came to Cuba on very big ship. Took three weeks and so there came the ship from Russia. (Note: Mrs. Kaplan mumbles the next few lines.)
- Q. Was it very crowded the ship?
- A. Yes.
- Q. Were a lot of people coming over from Russia?
- A. Sure.
- Q. When you were in Rochester did you ever. . . did you yourself or your husband or anybody you know ever have any experiences with anti-Semitism?
- A. We didn't. . . no, we kept pact. . . people. . . we belonged to. . . my husband was a star. . . a Mason. He was a Shriner. He was active and I was in the ladies auxiliaries. After he was start B'nai B'rith and lot of Jewish . . . he didn't know from. . . he was respectable like.
- Q. Do you. . . now you said. . . you seem to have belonged to many organizations. Were they mostly Jewish organizations that you belonged to?
- A. Was Gentile a couple too. And we first start here a couple nights were . . . they were trying to make money and it was very nice. Gentile like . . .
- Q. Do you think it's important for Jewish people to . . .
- A. Be separated? No. No.
- Q. So you don't approve of separate neighborhoods or. . .
- A. No. I live in Brockport I live with neighbors, they was like relatives. It was very good. I never believe in that. Human, that's all. If they're good, they good. If there isn't then they're bad, what could you do? You can't do it with your own children.
- Q. Do you think it's good for Jewish people to participate in non-Jewish activities?
- A. I can't tell you that because I never had experience.
- Q. I see. Did. . . did you do a lot of volunteer work?

A. If you put the . . . yes some. The Eastern Star I used to be in the social club. And I had another few than the Eastern Star.

Q. Can you think of any interesting experiences you had with any of your activities?

A. I don't think I remember it. I had something good, something good.

Q. What kind. . . what kinds of changes do you think have been taking place in Rochester over the past. . .?

A. The buildings and everything. They built up lots. I should go now to Main Street to some places. I wouldn't know where not to go. They changed a lot.

Q. Do you think that the lifestyles have changed at all?

A. I don't know. I don't know. I'm old and I don't go out and I don't know. I'm not twenty years old or fifty. I'm an old lady. And I can't tell you much because the last fifteen, twenty years I don't go out a lot. I don't see nobody. And I'm like you say put. That's all.

Q. When you first got here in Rochester do you think that there were any problems between the Reform Jews, the Conservative Jews and the Orthodox Jews?

A. I was in such a closet I knew I got to be a Jew and I just knew the Jewish people. And that's all. After I came to the Gentile people they were so nice, so long they was good. They was human that's all.

Q. So you think that all the different congregations got along together very well here?

A. I don't know. I got along all right. I don't know what some people done.

Q. I was just. . . I. . . when I was asking that question I didn't mean so much you personally as things that you might have heard or something like that. You know, just. . .

A. You couldn't hear much by me because I didn't. . . (Note: Mrs. Kaplan mumbles the next few words.)

Q. Did you ever belong to the JY?

A. My daughter used to belong. She belong years ago, but I didn't. I worked there, I don't know. The home of the get rich and had a legacy and a pension. I used to go there and set up what I could. Made latkes, potato latkes a lot, potato pancakes.

Q. Oh, I know what they are.

A. A lot. . . another Jewish ladies and all us at JY came to eat.

Q. Did a lot of people go to the JY?

A. Yes, at that time was always something then.

Q. Was it something that really brought the community together you think?

A. Yes.

Q. Were you ever. . . did you ever know Rabbi Bernstein?

A. I knew him but I wasn't so much a friend. I see him with the kids, but we didn't . . . I used to go and he used to be there a lot of times. So I knew that he was active, knew his name, but I didn't exactly in touch with him.

Q. How about Rabbi Bernstein, what did you think of him?

A. I tell you.

Q. Did you know about his activities during World War II?

A. No.

Q. No? Did you ever go into Cohen's Restaurant?

A. Oh, Cohen's Restaurant. We were there, that was. . .

Q. What was it like?

A. They had good Jewish meals, and it was real kosher and we didn't. . . everybody went to Cohen's Restaurant. Got a meal at Cohen's Restaurant?

Q. Hmm?

A. You're Jewish and you. . .?

Q. Oh, yes . . . Yes, I am.

A. You are Jewish?

Q. Yes.

A. What is your name?

Q. Tina Isaacs.

A. Isaacs. Which Isaacs?

Q. I'm from New Jersey.

A. From New Jersey? There was here a Chaim Isaacs.

Q. Was Cohen's Restaurant just a place for everybody to meet all the time?

A. Everybody to eat there. If you want to go out you had kosher meal, you went to Cohen's. And Cohen's was the best. Everybody liked it.

Q. Can you remember any stories about?

A. What could I remember?

Q. Oh, just if anything interesting had happened there?

A. No. Not in restaurant, not inside a restaurant, just there. There my daughter's wedding. . . this was in the war time, they didn't want a wedding. So they got married, Solomon was here. He married us. So I took all my money to Loftus, he had a home in the back. And I had . . .strudel, if you know what that is? And they set a table and whatever they ordered they got. It was nice.

Q. Was Rabbi Solomon your rabbi?

A. Yes, he married off my daughter.

Q. What did. . . what did you think of Rabbi Solomon? I interviewed Rabbi Solomon by the way.

A. He was a nice fellow.

Q. Was he. . . he was a good rabbi?

A. He was a good rabbi. He got. . . his wife died years ago. And I talk to him often. He speaks Yiddish and I speak Yiddish. He's a nice man.

Q. What. . . what kinds of things do you do here?

- A. Nothing. I go to the crafts and I make little ducks, little things, little . . . for the grandchildren, my grandchildren.
- Q. Do you see your grandchildren pretty often?
- A. Yes, they come here. They was here yesterday, was my granddaughter with two great-grandchildren.
- Q. How many grandchildren do you have? Great-grandchildren do you have?
- A. Right now four.
- Q. Do your grandchildren live in Rochester?
- A. Yea, they do.
- Q. All three of them?
- A. All three of them.
- Q. Do you think. . . do you think you have a very close family?
- A. I love this family. They very . . . (Note: Mrs. Kaplan mumbles a few words.)
- Q. Well, unless you can think of something interesting that's happened, I'd like to thank you very much for talking to me.
- A. You got enough there to make six pages?

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A (Interview I)