

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

Interviewee Anna Kreag

Interviewer Maurice Isserman

Date(s) of interview July 23, 1976

Setting (place of interview, people present, impressions)

I spoke with Mrs. Kreag in her room at the Jewish Home for the Aged. She was friendly and informative.

Background of interviewee

Mrs. Kress was born in Russia in 1897 and came to Rochester in 1913. She worked as a tailor, and was active as a Socialist, a Labor Zionist, a member of the Workmen's Circle and the Amalgamated Clothing Workers. She also belonged to Temple Beth David. She was married and raised two daughters.

Interview abstract

Mrs. Kreag discusses her immigration to this country, work experience and family experience. She also talks about Israel, splits within the Rochester Jewish community, and changes in religious observance over the years.

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

x Social history

x Jewish community

x Family

  community relations

  Demographic/residential

x Religious life

z Economic

x Jewish education

x Political/civic

x Anti-semitism

x Zionism/Israel

Interview log

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

Anna Kreng, interviewed by Maurice Isserman, July 23, 1976

Born in Russia 1897--father was a butcher.

Came to US in 1913--brother had come to Rochester earlier.

Difficulties in immigrating.

Went to work in tailor shop.

Myths about America.

Difficulties in learning English--went to night school at #9 school.

Lived with relatives on Morris St when first arrived.

Husband was salesman--married in 1920, 2 daughters, and grandchildren.

Bilingual home--read the Forward.

Problems with eyes.

Jewish education.

Sent children to Workmen's circle school at Joseph Ave and Solomon St.

Belonged to Temple Beth Zion.

Belonged to Amalgamated Clothing Workers.

1913 strike.

Active as a socialist.

Labour Zionism.

Depression experiences.

Supported FDR, Democrats.

Ridgen St. Settlement.

Visit to Israel in 1970.

No anti-semitism experienced in Rochester.

Changes in Rochester Jewish Community--greater Jewish education.

Class division in Jewish community softens over years.

Russian/German Jewish split.

Interview I  
Tape I  
Side A

- Q. This is Maurice Isserman speaking with Anna Kreag on July 23, 1976 in the Jewish Home. Mrs. Kreag, where were you born?
- A. In Russia.
- Q. In Russia. Where in Russia?
- A. In a town that's hard to. . . it's Rakokislatsvinislav. (Transcriber's note: closest transcription I can achieve; spelling is not correct.) It was a very, very big city, a port. When I was young, I was fourteen and a half then.
- Q. Was that maybe a Jewish city. . . or?
- A. No, no, no, no. That was a mixed city. Lot of Jewish people, but. . . but it wasn't exactly a Jewish city.
- Q. I see. And . . .
- A. No, you couldn't call it that.
- Q. When were you born?
- A. I was born in 19. . . 1897.
- Q. So you're. . . how old are you now?
- A. Well, I think. . . according to my figures I'm 77.
- Q. 77. And what did your parents do for a living?
- A. Well, so long ago. . . but my father was a Jewish butcher. Selling meats, kosher meats.
- Q. And why did you come to America? First of all, when did you come to America?
- A. When?
- Q. Uh-huh.
- A. As I say, I came here in 1913 the end. Close to 19. . . like I just. . . that time there was a. . . had to pay something like. . . but that doesn't matter,

A. (Continued) but it was 1913 in April.

Q. And why did you decide to come to this country?

A. To better myself. To get a better education, which I couldn't get in Russia. I went to Russian schools, lousy. We had to have a private teacher in order to get some of our Jewish education. And I had here an uncle and aunt, since. . . that passed away since a long, long time. But this uncle . . . see I came here the same time as my sister, we both went away. She's a year and a half younger than I am, she's here too. We both came at the same time. We both came to Rochester. And we had an aunt, my father's sister, and my father's brother. My brother is the one who sent us. . . years ago they had to send us tickets, ships documents. And he sent us. And we had. . . had to have twenty-five dollars to show at the Greenwich. You know what Greenwich is? When you pass the . . . like when you got to Canada you have customs.

Q. Right.

A. Well they had that like that. And of course my uncle is the one that got us here and sent. . . sent us the twenty-five dollars to show that we had a few dollars with us. And we came. And we didn't. . . we didn't land. . . my sister, we didn't land in New York City, New York. What do you call it? Oh, I forget what they called it, but where all the foreign people come in. And, so long I've forgotten. I'm too old to remember it. And we came. . . our. . . our ship. . . our boat that we came on. Oh, I'm sure it never went back again. It was one of the. . . those. . . like a cattle boat.

Q. Uh-huh.

A. And we came on that. It was a terrible trip. And we were on the boat for fourteen days to get to America and to Rochester. But ever since then we came to an aunt of mine, whom we lived with. And then we. . . then my sister and I, well. . . my uncle. . . my uncle was a cutter in a tailor shop.

Q. A cutter?

A. A cutter, yea. That's just so. And he brought us . . . there was nothing else we could do, we had to. . . you know, nothing . . . we didn't know nothing of English. We didn't know how to speak, we didn't know. So we couldn't go to any offices or anything like that. And we still also didn't have enough education for all that. So my uncle got us jobs in the tailor shop. Taught us how to sew and how to. . . So I was. . . I was working there for about eight years in the tailor shop. And well then. . . oh, then I met my husband.

Q. Let me. . . let me ask you a few things about right before you came to America. Had you heard much about America?

A. Oh, sure. All I hear about America is you walk on the streets and pick up gold.

Q. Gold, yea.

A. That's silly. But, that's what us in Europe when we were young heard. Oh, it's so long. You know how long I'm here now? Can't figure it out. I came here in 1914.

Q. Uh-huh.

A. So it was many years back.

Q. 62. Yea.

A. And many times I didn't. . . I didn't even think of those things to remember, which I can't now, it's so long ago now.

Q. When you first came you didn't speak English? Was it a hard process to learn English?

A. Oh, was it ever! But, right away we went to night school. It was the school on. . . on Joseph Avenue, it was an overnight school.

Q. Uh-huh.

A. And all the foreign people, there was many of us then.

Q. Uh-huh.

A. So we went to night school. We had warm teachers and they started us from the beginning. To say table and chair.

Q. Right.

A. And picture. And they had to point to us and they had to mark it down. So that we would then study it.

Q. Were there mainly younger people?

A. You. . . you think it's so easy to come from. . . you can. . . it's all you know is Jewish and Russian.

Q. Yea. Were there mostly younger people in the classes?

A. Oh. Sure young ones, all young ones. Years ago. . . years ago many of us came to America. But some. . . so many people that they did come, they come to New York, you know. They land there. But the way we were telling, my sister and I, we came to Baltimore. Just the same, it doesn't make any difference. Put us in a train and we came to Rochester.

Q. Right. When you came you lived with your aunt and uncle.

A. Right.

Q. Where. . . where was their home?

A. Their home was. . . was on the street is still there. It's off Joseph Avenue. The street is called Morris Street. Number 22 Morris Street. That's where we came and that's where we stayed with my aunt and uncle, with my aunt and uncle until we got something to do. So we still lived there for quite a while.

Q. And that, of course, was mainly a Jewish neighborhood?

A. Mostly, yea. Mostly, mostly, yea. Sure, mostly Jewish people, yes.

Q. What was the shop where your uncle worked as. . . as a cutter?

A. Oh, my G-d, I forgot.

Q. Was it one of the big factories?

A. Yea, yea. I can't think of the name. So long ago I've forgotten.

Q. Not Hickey-Freeman, or. . .?

A. No, not Hickey-Freeman. And not Timely Clothes.

Q. Michael-Stern?

A. And not Michael-Stern.

Q. Well. . .

A. Some kind. . . some other kind of. . . in fact it was. . . you know, it was what we call a small factory because it wasn't. . . not Michael-Stern, Hickey-Freeman, Timely Clothes, those are real big factories. That's where I went to work, it was for Hickey-Freeman.

Q. Uh-huh. When you first went to work in. . . in the factory, what did they train you to do?

A. Well, they. . . they trained me to. . . to, you know, work by hand.

Q. Uh-huh. You were making dresses?

A. And it was. . . no, no, no. They was all men's clothes. All men's clothes. No, no ladies' clothes. And they taught me how. . . they taught me how to bast edges on a jacket. And they taught me how. . . how to sew, I didn't know then. But then I learned it in a small shop, like where my uncle worked.

Q. Yea.

A. When I want to do better, I went to Hickey-Freeman.

Q. Did you use a sewing machine, or. . .?

A. No, by hand.

Q. It was all hand.

A. By hand, yes.

Q. When did you go to Hickey-Freeman?

A. That's another good question.

Q. Well. . .

A. I couldn't tell you exactly.

Q. Were you there for a long time at Hickey-Freeman?

A. Oh, yea. I was there a long time. I was there even when I got married I was there and I went back to work because. . . we got married but we didn't even have a. . . we had just a bedroom, we didn't even have a. . . a house yet. So I went to work. And my husband he was, until he died, he was a salesman.

Q. Who did he work for?

A. At. . . at first he worked. . . no, at first he worked for. . . for fellow who was came from same city with my husband. And this fellow used to manufacture quilts. And that's where my Jack went over when he was here because. . . Then he used to go away selling, you know.

Q. When did you get married?

A. Oh, I got married. . . isn't that a shame? When you get old it's terrible.

Q. Do you remember how old you were?

A. Oh, yes, I think I was. . . I was only 21.

Q. 21. So it was about. . .

A. You can figure out. I'm 77 now.

Q. 1919 or 1918.

A. Oh, wait a minute, 1920.

Q. 1920.

A. Right. Just came to me. 1920 I got married, yea.

Q. And your husband was. . . was also an immigrant?

A. Oh, yea, yea. Came from different part of Russia, but immigrant, yea.

Q. Did he come over at about the same time you had?

A. He came, I think, a little later than I did. But almost around the same time. We met here. I didn't know him, he didn't know me because we came from

A. (Continued) different part of Russia.

Q. And did you have. . .?

A. But. . . huh?

Q. Did you have children?

A. Oh, yes. G-d bless them. I have two just wonderful daughters. My oldest daughter lives in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and she is married to a very doctor, professor, Dr. Sarwick. And they live in Pittsburgh. And she has two children, a son and a daughter. My daughter here that really takes care of me and always does. My son-in-law was a pediatrician, was. But he's no more over three years. My daughter lives here, very, very good to me by the way. So, my son-in-law passed away three years ago. And she has four children. I have four grandchildren here. She has. . . my daughter has two sons and two daughters. My oldest grandson is Larry, and they lived now. . . they lived. . . they lived. . . they moved in now in Providence, Rhode Island. They live far away. But now they live in Providence, Rhode Island. My Larry, his wife and little Jacob. They live there. And my youngest grandson lives in. . . oh, where is the Hall of Fame?

Q. Oh, I don't know.

A. Anyhow, he lives out of town, too. That's my two granddaughters, my oldest granddaughter, who is also not married yet, she goes to college in. . . my head don't carry me no more. Anyhow also is away. But she when in a college, she goes to college there, she isn't graduated yet.

Q. Tell me, when you got married and had your own home, did you speak mainly Yiddish or English at home? Or both?

A. Both.

Q. Both. And. . .

A. I tried to speak English because those years we wanted to learn a little bit.

Q. Did your children learn Yiddish also?

A. Yea. I sent them to Yiddish school. Yea, they both. . . my both daughters went to Yiddish school.

Q. And did you receive Yiddish periodicals in your home? Magazines, newspapers?

A. Oh, sure. Oh, yea.

Q. Do you remember some?

A. If I was able to see it I would have it now.

Q. Uh-huh.

A. I don't know if you know, you know I have a problem with my eyes, that's why I'm here.

Q. Uh-huh.

A. In case you didn't know it. Something happened to my eyes, and I can see but I can't see you clear.

Q. When. . .

A. So I can't. . . I can't have no more reading or writing or anything. I was deprived of that.

Q. When you did get Yiddish magazines, which ones did you receive? Did you read the Forward, for example?

A. Well, the Forward was always there.

Q. Any others that. . .?

A. And only I don't remember all the literature we used to get. But we used to have a lot of Jewish literature, see we were able to. . . My husband spent seven years in a hospital.

Q. Your. . . did you give your children a Jewish education?

A. Mmm-hmm.

Q. And have they given their children a Jewish education?

A. Not. . . not exactly.

Q. Do you think there's been a decline in religious observance?

A. Absolutely. I certainly do. Nowadays my age . . . who didn't send their children to a. . . whether it was a Talmud Torah or whatever they, you know, were religious. Once you went to the Talmud Torah, kids went to learn Jewish. And now only Jewish, but Hebrew too. Where I sent my kids, they didn't bother too much with Hebrew because specifically we wanted them to know how to talk. . . how to speak Yiddish like I did.

Q. Where was that that you sent them?

A. Where they went?

Q. Yea.

A. Well, I'm not sure. I used to send them to the Workmen's Circle School because we belonged there all the time.

Q. Where was that located?

A. Located on corner Joseph Avenue and Solomon Street, there's a building. I'll bet it's still there. If I know what they have there. It was on Joseph and Solomon Street, a building upstairs. And there it was different Jewish things that was going on. And. . . and we called it the school, you know. That's where my both girls went. And my both girls know how to read and write Jewish by the way.

Q. Did you belong to a synagogue?

A. Yes, I belonged and my husband belonged. I'm still an honorary member but I can't go. Did you hear, maybe, of Temple Beth David?

Q. Uh-huh?

A. You did? Well, that was . . . that's my temple.

Q. And that's. . . you always belonged to that one?

A. Oh, yea. My husband and I. My husband did a lot for that temple, you know. At the beginning it was small until we all built it up and now it's a

A. (Continued) beautiful temple even now.

Q. So. . . so you belonged to the Workmen's Circle? You and your husband?

A. Yea, we belonged to the Workmen's Circle and we belonged to Temple Beth David.

Q. Uh-huh. And, what kind of activities did you participate in that Workmen's Circle sponsored?

A. Well, mostly lectures and talks we listened to not the. . .oh yea we used to do things, you know, make by hand things to sell and what not. But when I was able to we always used to have. . . used to get together and they used to send out letters. And we used to make the envelopes and little things like that, you know. And anything, any special thing we had people that could do that. But, I. . . we just did what we could that's all. It was nice activity. It was nice. As I say, I wish I could do that now.

Q. Right. When you worked in the different factories, were you a member of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers?

A. Oh, yes. Oh, yea. I belonged to the union, yea.

Q. Were you a very active member?

A. Oh, yea. My. . . my. . . the president that we had that he will be there until he's already an old man, by the name of Abraham Chapman.

Q. Yea, I'm gonna speak to him in a few days.

A. Huh?

Q. I'm gonna be interviewing him also.

A. Yea? I don't know how he is.

Q. I think he's still very active.

A. Yea? Does he look pretty good?

Q. I haven't seen him but I heard he's still very active.

A. Good. Well, he was our president. Of the union, the Amalgamated.

Q. Were you ever an officer or a shop steward or anything like that?

A. No, I wasn't an officer, no. Helped out things that came on, but I didn't take any offices, no.

Q. Did you ever participate in any strikes, or. . .?

A. Well that's when I came here. I came here in the strike and since then, thank G-d we didn't . . . the Amalgamated didn't have it. When I came the Amalgamated had the biggest strike and the first strike was in 1913. And after that when that strike was settled I came here just when the strike was over. Just when the strike was over. So anyways, got out and look for a job and the only job we knew is. . . when I say Ruth I told you I came with my sister, younger sister. And all. . . any job that she could find at all was doing the tailoring, it was the biggest thing in Rochester years ago. Hyman. . . it's so long I forgot. When you don't think about those things you forget.

Q. Right.

A. But I think I told you mostly all the things that I did. What I. . . what I participated in. I always belonged to the union and I always belonged to the Workmen's Circle. I didn't belong to the ritzy societies like the Hadassah and all these. Those are big shots over there. You were only greenhorns. So I didn't belong to that.

Q. Were you ever. . .?

A. But we belonged to our class, the working class.

Q. Were you ever politically active?

A. Yea, anything. . . anything that was going. . . that it was going on.

Q. Were you active as a. . . as a Socialist or a supporter of the Socialist Party?

A. No. As a Socialist. . . Yea. Those years when I first came here. As I say when we were taught. . . when we were. . . Yea, I guess I did. I belong. . .

A. (Continued) I didn't belong to the. . . I belonged to Amalgamated and whatever Socialist Party there was, I belonged. But a long time I was . . .

Q. Yea. Now I spoke with a number of people. . . Bertha Tischler? Do. . . do you know her?

A. Who?

Q. Bertha Tischler.

A. Bertha Tischler.

Q. She was in the Socialist Party then. Edward Schnepf, do you know him?

A. Yea, I remember some of the people, yea. Yea.

Q. And a few other people who were also. . .

A. Years ago there wasn't too many, but there was a lot. All these people, especially like Abraham Chapman, our president, there was . . . all of us were workers. And so most people. . . as long as we were connected with the Amalgamated it was most of the Jew. . . the tailors' union.

Q. Right.

A. After that we saw a lot of other people that, I guess, joined them, called themselves Amalgamated. But when originally Amalgamated means the tailors' union. Yea. I think I told you all I remember.

Q. Well, if you don't mind I'll ask you a few more questions.

A. I don't mind, no I don't mind, no, no.

Q. Were. . . any of the people in the Amalgamated also members of the Workmen's Circle or the Socialist Party?

A. Oh, yea. Yea.

Q. How about the Farbund?

A. What?

Q. The Farbund?

A. The what?

Q. The Farbund? The. . . the Labor Zionist. . .

A. Oh, oh. Well, those years we didn't have much money for Zionists. We didn't. . . now I am a member for a long time, I mean I have been for a long. . . I belong to the Labor Zionist. . . the. . . when they were organized and had it. . . I've been a member of that even up to date, up to the date.

Q. But, there wasn't much Zionist sentiment in those days?

A. No, no. Not very much, no.

Q. Do you remember people ever collecting money for settlers in Palestine?

A. Yes, many of 'em, many of them, many of them, yes. Of course I always had to help. . . I always had a. . . now I don't have it. . . a pushkin. It's a box where you throw money. And. . . and every week or every time lighting candles, I used to put money in that, it all go to Israel, to Palestine. We used to go to Palestine, but not now, now it's to Israel.

Q. Right.

A. I was there five years ago.

Q. Where? When the. . .

A. What else can I tell you?

Q. When the Depression came were you working then?

A. When the Depression came. . . yes, but there was no work. My husband was. . . I'm telling you he was a salesman, and he used to go out. . . we had a little car I remember and he used to go to countries, you know, like to peddle merchandise. Like you say, there was Depression, there was no. . . no place to make money.

Q. Right.

A. And it was pretty bad. I'll never forget that time, it was hard.

Q. How did you get by?

A. How did I get by? I had my two little. . . at that time my two little children were small, and we used. . . used to go. . . maybe you do now, too. I live here so I don't know from nothing. Tell you we always have a milkman, delivers milk to your door, and rest his soul wherever he is, I had a milkman by the name of Mr. Bittker, Bittker. And Mr. Bittker would give me two quarts of milk everyday. Sometimes I had one else, I says just give me one. And I had no money to pay him. And I finally felt very, very guilty. And he was so nice. And so one day I finally. . . things like that you remember. And I remember I said, Mr. Bittker, please, don't leave me any money. . . any money. . . any milk, I said, I can't see no way how I'll pay you. And there was people. And he says, Mrs. Kreag, I thought I'll listen to you, but I don't want to hear no more. That's the truth. He says, you have two children, they need milk, and I'm going to leave milk. And when you'll be able to, whether you pay it up, but he says don't tell me no stories, he says, I'm not gonna stop delivering it. I don't know if you'll find people like that nowdays. And so he always delivered milk.

Q. Do you think there was a lot of this mutual help in the Jewish community during the Depression? A lot of people helping out each other?

A. I. . . I. . . I really don't. . . I really doubt it, how could they help if they didn't have anything for themselves? Oh, I suppose they did. I didn't. . . I didn't get any. . . I didn't get. . . we didn't get any help. Whatever my husband made, he made, I didn't help others.

Q. Did you vote for Roosevelt in the thirties?

A. Did I vote for Roosevelt? Oh, G-d, there was no Roosevelt left anymore. I voted for Roosevelt. I was very much so. . . that. . . you're talkin' about the Democratic Party?

Q. Yea.

A. Well, I'm. . . I'm heart and soul a Democratic woman. And I don't vote no. . . nothing else. Sorry the Republicans. . . the Republicans don't get our vote. And especially our President now doesn't get my vote. Well, I'm a Democrat, you know. We just had. . . we just had. . . well, it was nominations, I don't know whether it was . . . they were not here, the Republican Party has to have their convention yet. But we had ours, the Democrats. And . . . isn't that awful? Jimmy. . . I can't think of his last name.

Q. Carter.

A. Thank you. Yea, and naturally he came in with a big bang and I listen to his talks, I think he's a very nice liberal man. And I think that he will make a good President, we hope so.

Q. Were most people in the Amalgamated during the Depression Democrats? Did they mostly vote Democratic?

A. Democratic. Either Socialist or Democratic. Mostly Democratic. Very few people that you would find in working class that belong to the Republican Party. But, that's how it was. And now, too, you know? They're all Democrats.

Q. Did you. . . well you told me you participated in the Workmen's Circle and the Amalgamated, did you belong to any other organizations, civic or. . . ? Or philanthropic, or. . . ?

A. I didn't, no.

Q. Did you ever have any. . . any contact with the Baden Street Settlement?

A. Not that I did anything there, but . . . that's silly to say. The only time I participate in the Baden Street Settlement, we used to have every Saturday dances for our little kids, teach 'em dancing. Oh, it's so long ago. And I used to bring my kids there, but nothing else. Nothing else.

Q. Do you remember some of the other activities they had there?

A. At Baden Street?

Q. Yea.

A. I really don't remember any more. They had. . . everything was used to be there. They had all the activities there. But I can't remember now, it's so long ago. And when you don't get. . . when you don't talk about it you forget.

Q. Right.

A. So there's something else there to remember, but I don't. . . like the Baden Street Settlement, that was years and years ago that we had. . . They used to have I think they used to have a doctor, dental. . . It was people that came in without pay, doctors coming in and everything. People took. . . we took our children when we couldn't afford to. . . to Baden Street Settlement. That's. . . as I say, that's a long time ago, I don't remember it. I don't remember a lot of people.

Q. So you went to Israel five years ago?

A. Yea, 1970. Five or six years ago.

Q. Six now, yea.

A. Six now, yea.

Q. Was that your first visit there?

A. Oh, yea. I guess the first and the last. Oh, and I enjoyed it. I stayed. . . I went. . . Of course I went on a tour. There was a group of other people, but the funny thing that I was. . . I was the only one that came. . . that was going from Rochester. These other people when I came to New York ready to go on the. . . on the plane, there was so many people and I meet so many friends 'cause they. . . from New York, Philadelphia, New Jersey, from everywhere, from Rochester nobody but. . . but I did. And what made me do it, I'll tell

A. (Continued) . . . you. It was my husband died in '69, and I had gone through a very bad time, very bad. I didn't think I would live through it. But after all, we were young yet, you know? And so I decided I heard that a lot of people are going to Israel, so I think that will be right. I think I have the money at that point, and so I made arrangements, somebody did for me. I left here in . . . in 19. . . well it was in 1970.

Q. And I take it. . .

A. I was there. . . in fact I came there in the fall. I came there like, you know, the Jewish holidays, Rosh Hashanah, and that's when I came there. I was there Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur and for three weeks. And I came back. And I never forget it, and I've never forgot it. And I never realized. I thought that when I would come to Israel. . . of course I went over. . . we went to Jerusalem, we went everywheres, beautiful. But when I was there and I. . . and in Tel Aviv, you know you. . . you don't think, you don't think it's. . . you don't think it's America in full speed. People dressed so beautiful and thank G-d you didn't have to be afraid walking the streets. And the youth, and they walk along the streets and seeing . . . oh, it was so beautiful. I says, well I hope to G-d it stays that way.

Q. So you've always felt very positively towards Israel?

A. Oh, yes. Oh, I. . .

Q. Since 1948 when it. . .

A. Oh, well, yea, oh, yea. Always, always. And I used to buy bonds. We still sell bonds, but I . . . I haven't got the money now so, all my money goes in the Home now. But I used to buy bonds for Israel always, always. And I'm still happy that we have Israel. I just hope and pray that it remains the Jewish land.

Q. Do you think it's important for Jewish survival that Israel. . .?

A. Yea, I do, honey, I do. Yes, I do.

Q. When you came to Rochester. . . I mean I suppose in Russia you experienced anti-Semitism as a little girl?

A. Anti-Semitism?

Q. Were you ever aware of anti-Semitic restrictions?

A. No, I haven't. Oh, you feel it, you know, there is. There is, but. . . When I. . . when you're a young person where we lived in a small town in Russia, as much as I can remember, got along very nice.

Q. So that wasn't one of the reasons why you left Russia?

A. No, no, no, no, no. The reason was for a future. 'Cause we were poor. We didn't have. . . my. . . my father, as I say, was a Jewish butcher. And he was a sick man. And I. . . we couldn't go to school as much as we wanted.

Q. Right.

A. And many things. And America was goin' so high all the time. This is just a joke that they say, oh in America you pick up gold in the streets.

Q. Right.

A. You don't pick up gold, but it's still a golden. . . a golden country. I still think that there's no other country like America, and I hope to G-d that it stays that way.

Q. Tell me, did you ever experience any anti-Semitism in Rochester? Were you ever aware of friction between the Jewish community and the larger community?

A. I did not. I did not, no. Always I never had any problems or anything like that. So I'm glad to say that no I haven't had any. I. . . I didn't. . . before I got in here I had my own. . . my home what they call on Birdwell Road. And I had, my house was in the middle. On this side I had German people. And on this side I had Americans, Italian people. And they were. . . I'll tell

A. (Continued) you the honest truth, they were crying when I was leaving. Why, why , why, I says? You don't have to ask me why, I can't. . . I can't keep up my home any more. I says it's hard for me, and then especially when I got the problem with my eyes. So I sold the home, but I moved into an apartment. And I found that that was very hard.

Q. Do you. . .

A. So, you live through so many things.

Q. Do you feel that the Jewish community in Rochester has changed very much over the years?

A. I can't. . . I don't think so. I don't think so, the Jewish community's the Jewish community. You know, all sticking. . .sticking with their faith and whatever. It's bet. . . now years ago there wasn't so many people that would go to shul. Like you say, Socialists and this, but nowdays. . . nowdays it's changed in that way. That the Jewish education got much more necessary and much more children go to. . . to a what you call school, the Jewish schools, the temple, temple, temple. Like Temple Beth El. You have so many children, different classes, that more. . . more. . . more children . . . the chances is that more people and more children are having a Jewish education than years ago. It's positive. I remember. . . even now, as I say my children went to Jewish school, mostly most everybody.

Q. Yea.

A. Especially. . . especially years ago we had a teacher in the Workmen's Circle school. And he was . . . he was amazing. But he, himself, came from Providence, Rhode Island. And he lived here. . . he was here for ten years.

Q. Do you remember his name?

A. Yea. It's Jewish. He used to call Jewish . . Beryl Segal. Mr. Segal. Mr. Segal. And his wife used to teach Hebrew, not the Jewish, but Hebrew. You

A. (Continued) know, Jewish is the plain. . . Jewish language is the. . . but Hebrew is a harder language to learn. When you go to Israel, that's when you want to know how to speak Hebrew because that's what they do over there. You walk on the streets that's all you hear.

Q. Mr. Segal was the teacher at. . .

A. Oh, yea, Mr. Segal.

Q. Did they have other teachers there or was he the only one?

A. Oh, no. When he was there he was the only one. But then when he left, we had . . . we had another teacher. . . oh, I forgot the name. Just only one always. What. . . what. . . what he had, he had different. . . different classes at different times, same one. My children went from . . . from 4:30 when they came from school. They came from school and they had a glass of milk and a cookie and off they went. And that was 4:30 till six. And every w hole day, changed different hours.

Q. There were many children who. . . who went to these classes?

A. Oh, yes. A lot of 'em, yea.

Q. Were there other activities for children sponsored by the Workmen's Circle? Say summer camps or. . .?

A. Oh, why sure. Oh, yes.

Q. Did you send your children to summer camp?

A. My. . . there's no summer camps in Rochester. The Workmen's Circle has a camp in New York. You have to go to New York. It's a huge, now it's even bigger and better. But my children I sent 'cause it was so much closer and so much more convenient. My husband, rest his soul, used to take 'em up in the cart. I used to take 'em to Toronto, Ontario, Canada. They still have a nice camp there.

Q. Jewish camp, or. . .?

A. Oh, yes. They have Jewish teachers. And they used to teach children, you know, Jewish reading and writing and dancing and everything in the Jewish . . . all the. . . I just asked my sister and brother-in-law was renting there. We have a lot of friends there, but he said they sold the camp now. It's nothing now, it's nothing like it was. I says, oh, I'm glad I don't. . . I'm glad I don't have to worry about. It was. . . this was. . . that was a beautiful place.

Q. Did many children from Rochester go up there?

A. Yea, lot of them. Oh, yes from Rochester, from Detroit, from every Workmen's Circle, wherever is. . . in every city that had a Workmen's Circle and they had children.

Q. This was also Workmen's Circle?

A. That's a Workmen's Circle too. Everything had to do with the Workmen's Circle. Beautiful camp.

Q. Were there other activities that the Circle sponsored?

A. No, no, no, no. A lot of activities was lectures and meetings and. . .

Q. Where were the lectures held?

A. In. . . in the hall where we used to meet.

Q. Do you remember which hall that was, the Labor. . .?

A. Yes, yea on Joseph. . . on Joseph and Solomon. That was our place, the Workmen's Circle place. They sold it after a while. We used to. . . they used to have all kinds of meetings. There was a lot of rooms there. And people have different kinds of meetings, but we always used to meet up there. It was nice. And there were a lot of activities, what I can remember, what I don't remember. Too long ago, honey, for me to remember. But good things I remember and I know that it was just wonderful. I. . . we never. . . none of our group belonged to any kind of . . . the. . . the what you call. . .

A. (Continued) these. . . these societies that other women belonged to, the Hadassah.

Q. Uh-huh.

A. This is for the rich people. We weren't rich people, we were workers.

Q. There was a real division then?

A. Yea. We felt that we had our place and they had their place. But now there's a lot of them that belong, you know, nowadays to the Hadassah and to the others.

Q. Several people I've spoken with told me about a sort of split between the Russian/Jewish and the German/Jewish community here back then. Did. . . were you ever aware of that?

A. German?

Q. German/Jewish and Russian/Jewish. Were you aware. . . ?

A. I never knew any German/Jewish.

Q. Never knew any.

A. I never. . . I never knew German Jews. It was just our own Russian Jews.

Q. I see.

A. Plenty of them. But I don't remember knowing no Germans. We never associated with German Jews. For one reason because they were. . . they always. . . they always used to tell me that they think that they're better than anybody else. That's what I was told then. But I had nothing against any of them, but I didn't. . . I didn't never belong together with German Jews. That's about it.

END OF TAPE I, SIDE A