

Interviewee Alfred London

Interviewer Tina Isaacs

Date(s) of interview 7/23/76

Setting (place of interview, people present, impressions)

The interview took place in Mr. London's room at the Jewish Home and Infirmary, no one else was present. Mr. London was very willing to answer questions, but he had very little to say. He is hard of hearing so we had a little difficulty communicating. Sometimes he did not understand my questions.

Background of interviewee

Mr. London was born in Russia and came to Rochester in 1905. He had no education except for Hebrew school and worked as a machine operator, then he bought a grocery business, which went bankrupt in 1936, and finally went back to working as a machine operator for Bonds for twenty years.

Interview abstract

The interview was a shouting session in which very little was accomplished. I tried to cover all bases, but Mr. London had very little to say and I felt that I wasn't asking the right questions to get him talking. He belonged to no community organizations, had no political opinions, and did not launch into reminiscences of his life as either a grocer or a garment worker, although that is what I was trying to accomplish.

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

<input checked="" 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> Economic	<input type="checkbox"/> Jewish education
<input type="checkbox"/> Political/civic	<input type="checkbox"/> Anti-semitism
<input type="checkbox"/> Zionism/Israel	

Interview log

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

--see following page(s) --

Mr. Alfred London: Interview Log

Tape I Side A

Background: Born in Russia, came to Rochester in 1905, Hebrew  
Educated, Father was a Rabbi who first went to Cleveland  
then to Rochester, eventually bringing the whole family over.  
Father had family in Cleveland.  
Father as Rabbi as Hannover St. Shul  
Garment worker  
Amalgamated Clothèngz Workers Union  
Story about early education  
Neighborhood--Baden St.  
\*Early married life  
Children  
\*Clothing worker 1905-1918, going into grocery business for himself  
Baker's strike story. Grocery 1920-1936. Machine Operator  
1936-1955.  
\*Depression  
\*Tailoring at Bond's: Oscar Smith (290)  
Baden St. Settlement: physicals  
German Jewish/ Eastern European Jewish friction  
Reform/Conservative/Orthodox friction  
Sister as a teacher  
Son's Hebrew education  
Conservative Judiasm. Beth-El. Grandchildren get Hebrew education  
Changes in religion  
Intermarriage  
Riots  
Holocaust  
Israel  
Changes in Rochester  
Grocery store: wife's help, women working  
\*Changes in garment industry

Tape I Side B

Anti-Semitism  
Less and less jews in clothing industry.

\* b. father built Iola Sanitarium Wickey-Freeman, Stromberg-Carlson, etc.

1. became very attached to his father-in-law

\*\* c. children --- son graduated as rabbi from Hebrew Union College, presently serving in Malden, Mass. (Tom)

1. Peter --- went to Colgate; presently a lawyer although he served the State Department as an undercover agent in Vietnam

a. returned disillusioned

2. daughter a volunteer at the RIT urban extension

3. youngest son just graduated from Albany Law School

4. Tom married --- produced three grandchildren

a. keeps in close communication with his children

5. believes that his children have a profound respect for tradition and a greater concern for knowledge

\*\* d. intermarriage all right for some people "if they're equipped to handle it"; could readily accept his children marrying non-Jews

\* IV Neighborhoods --- at first lived in a rooming house then shared an apartment; always lived in the Park Ave. section until he moved to Brighton in 1936

a. frequently went down to Joseph Ave.

b. moved to Brighton with the birth of his first son, good neighborhood, large back yard; superb school system

\*\* V. reflected that Fr. Coughlin had an audience based partly upon curiosity --- inconceivable that he was challenged so rarely

a. looking back, hard to believe that the Nazi holocaust etc. happened

b. Fr. Coughlin was a welcomed addition to people who wished to feed their own prejudices

1. wondered why the great religious leaders never took an opposing position to the rampant prejudice in the early days

END OF  
SIDE I

\*\* VI. belongs to B'rith Kodesh --- has belonged all his life and is from a reformed heritage

a. believes that there is an increased sense of Jewish identity throughout the world --- when a Jew does something bad, all Jews are disgraced

\*\* b. has been very active --- interested in the synagogue as a place for the continuation, understanding of the Jews

1. all aspects of Jewish education have a strong sense of the need for Jewish education

a. its important to understand where we've been if we're going to understand where we are going

\*\*\* VII. represented the Brighton Republicans --- believes that we need people in politics who are concerned with the civic good

a. tried to bring good leadership to Brighton

\* b. joined the Republican Party because he was attracted by the people who were Republicans --- most people who are involved in a political party do not do so for phil. reasons

c. still a committeeman -- not as active

- \* VIII. if any town survives, Rochester will ---"should say a prayer for Eastman Kodak"
  - a. have advanced the black community tremendously since the riots
  - \* b. Jewish-blacks relations good but often misunderstood
    - 1. becomes a question of black leadership
    - 2. should publicize the good aspects of the black community in greater detail
  - c. Roch's Jewish community suffers because the children of the community's leaders have not followed their parents into leadership positions
    - 1. community unique in many respects --- has a high sense of social and civic responsibility

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IX. Other Sources:

- a. Abe Chapman --- through him discuss Max Holtz, impartial mediator between clothing industry and labor
- b. Sam Dicker
- c. Max Adler ---
- d. Ben Goldstein, Mo Levenson, Ben Forman, Saul Linowitz, Harry Rosenthal
- e. Bernard Heuman, nephew of Saul Heuman --- active at time of JYMA; Pres. of Auto Club, Director of Lincoln-Alliance Bank; currently with Timely Clothes
- f. Dr. Stabens about Simon Stein who sent many boys to medical school

END OF  
SIDE II

Tape 1  
Side 1  
Interview 1

A. Russia.

Q. And how long did you live there?

A. In Russia? When I came here, I was sixteen years old.

Q. What did you do when you . . . what did you do when you were in Russia?

A. Nothing. I was drooling.

Q. Did you go to school?

A. There was no schools over there. I went in the yeshiva.

Q. Ah. So, you had a very good Hebrew education?

A. Yeah. Hebrew, yeah.

Q. Were your parents very religious?

A. Oh, my father was a rabbi. A (unknown). You know, if you know what it is.  
And I don't know if you knew it. I'll show you something. Just a second.

Q. Okay.

A. You see this book? That's Hebrew. I'll show you. In the city that I came from, it's called (Unknown). I don't know if you can . . . you see (Unknown)?  
And over there, was a man, he was the biggest rabbi you can say . . . the whole world. And he was a cousin of my father. So, he took care of me.  
See, I'll show you . . . that's him. And that's his son.

Q. So, did your family . . . did your parents come here with you?

A. No. My father came, the first one. He came to Cleveland. And then, he got a job here with the Rochester (unknown) so he came to Rochester. Then . . . took . . . then he worked here about a year, my older sister came. Then another nine months and the other sister came. Then another three months and I came. And then at last, my mother with the rest of the children came here.

Q. You came from a very big family!

A. I got four sisters and one brother.

Q. Wow. Can I close the door because it keeps . . . I'll do it. There we go.  
It keeps opening and closing.

A. Yeah.

Q. Did your father come to Rochester just because he had a job?

A. No, he didn't. In the beginning he came to Cleveland, because the family,  
brothers and a sister, lived in Cleveland.

Q. Oh, I see.

A. Then, he got a job Rochester. You know, to be a (unknown). So, he came to  
Rochester. He was a (unknown) and a (unknown).

Q. Where?

A. Huh?

Q. Where?

A. Right here.

Q. No, I mean which shul?

A. Huh?

Q. Which shul?

A. It was . . . (unknown) they called it, on (unknown) Street. I don't know if  
it was (unknown). It was a . . . a small shul before. Then, the small shul,  
they moved over on another street. They call it (unknown) they bought it, and  
on that place they build a big building. They call it (unknown). And, then  
it was just a small shul, the (unknown) shul. He used to (unknown) Rosh  
Hashana and Yom Kippur to (unknown). (Unknown) they call it. And I used to  
help him.

Q. Really?

A. Sure. And then when the big shul was . . . it was too much for him, so he was

A. (Continued) performed the first half of the . . .

Q. Rabbi Solomon was there, too, at that shul, too.

A. Huh?

Q. Rabbi Solomon? Was he at that shul, too?

A. No. At that time, I don't think so. No.

Q. When you came here, how did you learn to speak English?

A. Huh?

Q. Where did you learn to speak English?

A. Right here.

Q. Did you go to school?

A. No. I couldn't. I didn't have a chance to go to school. Because I start to go to school, and then, I went in . . . I was supposed be a rabbi, too. But, that time, they couldn't make no livings. So, my mother said, no, she didn't like it. So, I went to work in tailoring. But that time was small shops. And, today, if they want a worker, they can take in anyone from street, and they give him one thing to do, and within two weeks, he's alright. But that time was different. Start in the beginning and way up. So, I did small, small work, see? It was a lot of small shops that people took out . . . took out from the big factories. And where they didn't work on Saturdays, because the big factories were working on Saturday. And then a boy went out it at the did bigger work, and I want it. I want it. So the boss said to me, I can't get a . . . a boy on . . . your small work. If you want to attempt both jobs, I'll give it to you. And I want it. So, everybody was working from 7:00 o'clock in the morning until 6:00 o'clock, and I used to work from 5:00 in the morning 'till 9:00 . . . 'till 9:00 at night.

A. Wow.

Q. I had the key from the shop, because I want it. So, I didn't have no chance to go, but whatever I know to read the paper and everything, is just by myself

A. (Continued) that I learned.

Q. Did you belong to the union?

A. Huh?

Q. To the Amalgamated Clothing . . .

A. Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

Q. Were you here during the strike? In 1913?

A. Oh, yeah, sure. I came in 1905.

Q. Right. Do you remember the strike?

A. Sure I remember?

Q. What was it like?

A. What was it like? They called up, it was . . . they came and that time it wasn't Amalgamated. They called it Government Workers. And they called up everybody to go out strike, they wanted more money. And so, I took . . . I don't remember exactly how . . . how long, I think it was three months. I don't remember exactly until we were. Then in a short time again, so they changed all the people came in to be the bosses. And from Government Workers, the became Amalgamated.

Q. Do you think it was a good thing?

A. And I was a striker. A good striker. You know, I wrote a striker hymn? When I went to Fader (spelling), you know . . . you know why? I'll tell you. I was . . . before my brother was born, so I was only one. They call it (unknown). So, but my father I was (unknown). And it was there, I used to go to the teachers if they became mad, they hit the children. So my father told everyone of them when I came, they shouldn't touch me. If I do something wrong, they should tell him. But they shouldn't belt him. So one time, he was a redhead, the redbear I can remember, and I was that time old I think about eight years something like that, seven and a half years. And, he used



A. (Continued) to fight around with his wife and then eat lunch with his wife. And, I don't know, he had a fight with his wife, and I came in there was met, so he grabbed me. The foot went by my shoulder, and he gave me a push and I fell down by the table and I hit over there. I became mad. I took all books that I had . . . boom. And those the children, they were ten or twelve children, they saw I was gone . . . they went after me. We all went out in a fight. Then the rabbi show up there. So well, that time they had (unknown) like a (unknown). So after all, he's got to make a living the rabbi. And here we walked out, so they had a plan to him. So the rabbi . . . the rabbi decided, he said like that, you've got to get . . . all the children should go back and he's got to give a hand, they call it (unknown) to the rabbi that as long as he'll be to the end, he shouldn't have to touch anyone. If you touch it, you can go out and the father don't have to pay him. And I was independent, I didn't go. I wanted he should come to me and shake my hand, and ask me. And that's what . . . that's what I . . .

Q. (Laughter) Where . . . where did you live? What street did you live when you first came to Rochester?

A. Bayden Street.

Q. Oh, right on Bayden Street. What was that neighborhood like?

A. Huh?

Q. What was the neighborhood like? Was it a Jewish neighborhood?

A. All Jewish. All Jewish. It was Bayden Street and Kelly Street and Vienna Street and (Unknown) Street, all but Jewish people.

Q. Was it nice?

A. It was that time was the migration a lot. Oh, it was the nicest neighborhood. At that time.

Q. Were . . . was most everybody from Russia or Eastern Europe?

A. The majority of Russia.

Q. And how did you meet your wife?

A. My wife? Well, we lived when my mother came, we lived on . . . they took . . . the rented the house on Bayden Street. And she came, and from the city that she came, when she came here, she came to Bayden Street and they took house from us. She was staying . . . both . . . living by a woman that she came from Hill City. And from Hill City, we got in our city where . . . came from, we got a yeshiva. A big yeshiva that he was the boss. In the yeshiva. And it was learning one boy from that city, and he was staying right here by us. And when we came to the United States then he was a (unknown) he took over . . . the people over the border. So, we all came to him. And she was staying there, and so she came into our house. You know, she was good friend with my sisters. And my father took a look on her and liked her. My father fell in love with her. So he took me in, you know, but . . . she came three years later than I am. She was going about three years with a (unknown). But I never looked . . . I didn't care because I was afraid to get married. I didn't make much. I was afraid to get married altogether. I didn't have in my mind to get married. The matchmaker came and said, this girl . . . this girl. But, I don't know. I was afraid to get married. But my father liked her. And my mother, too, liked her. So, the first thing he did, he went to find out for what . . . what kind of a family she comes out. And he found out that she comes out from the nicest family you can ever find. So he came to me and said, that's the girl for you. And he took me in and my sister took me in. So well, I figured out . . . okay. So, we start to go out. So, I start to talk to her. I never talked to her. And that's the way it got . . . it came.

Q. When were you married?

A. Huh?

Q. What year were you married?

A. 1913.

Q. Where did you live when you first got married?

A. When I got married? Well, I'll tell you. That time was a style when a couple was married, they go stop from work two weeks before she was married. And when she was . . . when they was married . . . Today, the man is working and the wife is working. That time was a shame to work. So they took more rooms, and they took in borders. Because the migration was . . . a lot of it, that time. And I didn't like it. No. So she said to me, we'll take five rooms and I'll take in . . . she had a brother-in-law, she had this, that . . . I'll take in. I said, no. I'll tell you what you'll do. I'll take three rooms and I don't want to have nobody. So it was on Maria Street. I don't know if you know where it is. You don't know. So a man had three rooms, you know, he made it from his. Three rooms. So it was \$2.75 a week. The heat we get it and . . . everything. Complete. So I got the three rooms for \$2,75 and I didn't want to know nothing. And then the boss where she was working . . . she was a button hole maker, he wanted she should take in . . . he'll bring her in the house, she should make button holes. I said no, I don't want it. I am the boss. I bring in. You be the (unknown) you bring out. But I don't want you to do anything. You stay home. You got to prepare lunch, supper when I came home, everything should be ready. And that's the way it was.

Q. Did you have any children?

A. Huh?

Q. Children? Do have any children?

A. Yeah. I got three.

Q. So . . .

A. I got one daughter who lives in Texas. And she's got two children, two boys. The older one is a doctor, and the other one . . . the younger one is a businessman. And I got here, one son and one daughter.

Q. And, did your children go to college?

A. Huh?

Q. Did you send your children to college?

A. College? No. Who can afford it. But my son, he went to college but he made through himself. That time, it was in depression time. And he went to college, so that time, the president give jobs . . . ask him. So he got a job in college. He made \$220.00 a year and . . . a little bit we helped him. My sister and . . . my sister . . . and he went to college, my son. But, my daughters didn't go to college. But I got my sisters . . . one, the youngest one, she's a . . . her husband is here. He's a sick man. He's . . . She's the only one, she went to college. But my brother and one sister, although they didn't go to college, but they know just as good . . . better yet, than the college because of their . . . My brother was vice-president in a bank, and he was working all the time in a bank. And that's all.

Q. Do you think education is important?

A. Huh?

Q. Do you think college is important?

A. Sure it's important. Sure it's important to . . . but not everybody can afford to. But, he made himself, you know. He worked over there . . . \$200.00 . . . and he had little jobs on Sunday. He used to peddle the papers and did . . . Maybe, of course, I give him a little spending money, you know, that's all I could . . . I could afford.

Q. How long were you a tailor?

A. Huh?

Q. How long were you a tailor? How long did you . . . ?

A. Well, I'll tell you. I came here in 1905, at the end . . . September, 1905. And I was working in tailoring 'till 1918 . . . 19. And I had a good friend of mine a (unknown) and he was in business. And, you know, in tailoring, here I was working and here wasn't any work . . . so he came, and I had already I was married. And I had already two children. So he came to me and said, what's the matter with you? You got a wife and two children. You got to depend on the tailoring? Why don't you try business? So I said to him, well, I wasn't a businessman. My father wasn't a businessman. And I . . . He said, never mind.