

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

Interviewee Mrs. Florence Sturman

Interviewer Tina Isaacs

Date(s) of interview 6/23/76; 6/29/76

Setting (place of interview, people present, impressions)

The interviews took place in Mrs. Sturman's home, no one else was present. Mrs. Sturman has been in the Rochester community since 1938 and was very knowledgeable and informative. She was an eager and enthusiastic participant.

Background of interviewee

Mr. and Mrs. Sturman are both very active in the Jewish community in Rochester. Mr. Sturman was interviewed separately by Brian Mitchell. Their affiliation is with Temple Beth-El, in which Mrs. Sturman has been very active. They are co-chairmen of the Rehovat Sister City Program and Mrs. Sturman is currently the Vice-Pres. of the Federation, and on the Allocations Committee.

Interview abstract

This set of interviews is particularly insightful into the organized Jewish community in Rochester. Mrs. Sturman had some interesting things to say about the role of women in the Jewish community. All topics were covered, Rehovat was gone into in great depth as was the Campus Complex Project.

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

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Interview log

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

--see following page(s) --

Mrs. Florence Sturman: Interview Log

Tape I Side A

Background

Born in Syracuse, came to Rochester in 1938 when married
Parents of Eastern European descent--father active in
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*Changes

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**Woman's movement

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Tape I Side B

***Women

Jewish Comm Federation; no women on board until recently

Beth-El; no women on board until recently, no officers

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Mrs. Florence Sturman: Interview Log cont.

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Mrs. Florence Sturman: Interview Log Cont.

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Tape II Side B

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Interview 1
Tape 1
Side A

- Q. This is Tina Isaacs interviewing Mrs. Florence Sturman. It is Wednesday, June 23. This is Tape 1, Side A. Mrs. Sturman, could you please tell me something about your background? Where you were born and such?
- A. Yes. I was born in Syracuse, New York. And. . . do you want dates and so on of birth?
- Q. If you want to.
- A. Well. . .
- Q. I never press for dates.
- A. You don't press for dates, well I don't know. . . but, at any rate, I didn't come to Rochester until 1938 when I was married so that my knowledge of the Rochester Jewish community would date 1938 on.
- Q. Are your parents Americans?
- A. My parents came to the United States when they were in their teens. And both of them became quite Americanized. They were married in the States. And my father was very much involved with the Jewish community of Syracuse. In fact, he was one of the founders of Temple Addis Yashuron (Transcriber's note: improper spelling), which is a Conservative temple. And that was one of the early Conservative temples. He was one of the very earliest members of the Conservative movement. And he was one of the first Zionists in Syracuse, one of the earliest Zionists in Syracuse. So, we had a family involvement all the time with the active, you know, active Jewish community. And . . .
- Q. Where were your parents from?
- A. My Dad was from what was called Meishtod. That was on the border between

- A. (Continued) Poland. . . Lithuania, it was then Lithuania and Germany, as I was told. And there was quite a group of people from Meischtod settled in Syracuse. In fact, the synagogue was originally called the Meischtoder's Shul. Have you heard that before?
- Q. Well, yea, that. . . that's something that comes up a lot, you know, little communities that all settled together.
- A. That's right. And it was quite a. . . a group of men that settled there. My mother settled in Utica originally. And she was from an area of Poland called. . . it was called the Key. Now I don't know exactly where that was, but, as I say they were married young. My Dad came when he was about 16 years of age. He brought over his whole family, which was quite amazing. He came alone and his uncle had preceded him. And his uncle started him out in Syracuse. It was the usual thing, with a pack on his back. And my Dad in later years didn't have an accent or anything, nor did my mother. They were self-taught. My Dad became an optician, an optometrist. And he had offices in the country town, and he would commute to the town from the beginning of the week and return on Friday for the Shabbat. And his contacts with all the Gentile people throughout the week probably Americanized him tremendously. And then when he returned for the weekend he was constantly involved in temple activities and the family. So that he. . . his whole weekend was taken up with temple problems and so on. And he became. . . he was on the Board of Directors of the temple, and then he was Vice-President and Honorary Vice-President for a lifetime. At that time, the president of the temple was president for maybe twenty years or more. There was a sort of dynasty. So Dad didn't become the president, but he was as I say Honorary Vice-President a whole lifetime. And before he would. . . had died he was honored by the president and the community. He was quite involved. And my mother would

- A. (Continued) bake the . . . homebody. We had a large family, and in those days women spent their time in the home. A very warm lovely person, my recollection of her. They died just shortly after I was married.
- Q. Was. . . I take it then English was spoken in the home?
- A. Yes, yes. Oh, I'll tell you. English was spoken in the home all the time except my grandmother came to live with us and she died when I was about nine years of age. And she spoke Yiddish. But, you see, I. . . I can understand Yiddish because of my grandmother, although that knowledge was cut off at nine. But she . . . she. . . I don't believe she spoke English at all. But the. . . the natural communication in the home was in English, except once in a while when my parents wanted to say something they didn't want us to understand, then they would revert to Yiddish.
- Q. Now how. . . you said that you came from a large family. How many brothers and sisters did you have?
- A. Well, I was the youngest and I was the only girl. I had five older brothers.
- Q. OK. Did. . . did your brothers go to college?
- A. Actually, I was the only one that was graduated from college in the family. My brothers started in college and dropped out and so on. So, I was really the only one that graduated.
- Q. Where did you go to school?
- A. I went to Syracuse University.
- Q. OK. When you were a child, can you remember any anti-Semitism in Syracuse?
- A. I. . . it's a peculiar thing because my most vivid recollections date back to the time I was around five years of age. And I was very, very close to a girl who lived two doors away. She was Catholic Irish. And Helene and I were inseparable. In fact, I just recently saw her at a college class reunion after a lapse of maybe twenty years. But at any rate, I remember around the

A. (Continued) Christmas period she told me that she heard that I had killed Christ. And I went crying home to my parents and I kept saying, "I didn't kill Christ. I didn't kill Christ." And it was so vivid that it left a lasting impression. I remember very definitely that I was a little envious of the Christmas tree and the Christmas celebration. And I always used to take presents over to the Reynolds family at Christmas time. And, of course, in those days we didn't celebrate Chanukkah very much. We'd light the candles and they would give you. . . your parents would give you Chanukkah gelt and you would have a special meal or something. But I don't remember any real presents at that particular period of time. I think that the Reynolds used to give me something, you know, some candy or something like that. But, that was my most vivid impression. Now, if you go on to later years, I don't think I was as aware of it as I probably should have been. But when it came to seeking a position, I found that I had difficulties. I had a double degree from Syracuse in the School of Education and in the Liberal Arts School, majoring in Sociology and History. And I wanted to teach. And I was only offered one teaching position in the small town of Patterougas, New York, which had 1200 people in it, completely Christian town, and my parents would not let me accept. A few years later I was told that I was used as an example of the change of times because my credentials were outstanding in those years, and yet the doors were closed to Jewish girls in the teaching profession.

Q. Did you resent that?

A. I didn't. I don't think I really quite realized that it was because I was Jewish. I had a lot of self-confidence, and I just assumed that maybe there weren't openings. It was dur. . . it was in 1936 that I was graduated and those were Depression years, and I just figured there weren't the openings.

- A. (Continued) And I don't think I was as upset as others were upset for me. But I did get another position in a different field entirely, so I guess that took care of it.
- Q. OK. I want to talk about that in a few minutes. Were you or your brothers . . . and your brothers, given a Hebrew education?
- A. My brothers . . . of . . . of the five they . . . they did go to Hebrew school, but only two were Bar Mitzvahed, which is very interesting considering my father's involvement in the temple.
- Q. Right.
- A. I started in Hebrew school and I think I had two classes. And I was sitting in the front seat, and I remember this vividly, and the teacher yelled at someone in the back seat and I was so frightened that I never returned to Hebrew school. And in those days it wasn't considered too important for a . . . a . . . a Jewish girl to have a Hebrew education. So I just didn't go any further, but I always went to Sunday school. And I was confirmed, and I taught Sunday school when I was at college. And then when I was married I . . . I signed up for a Hebrew course at Temple Beth El and right at that time I had to leave town, my mother was ill, so I had to drop the course. But I had the books so I taught myself, so that I can read the prayer book and I can follow the service and I can sing and chant and so on. So that I feel comfortable in the temple, but I . . . this was more or less being self-taught, I really don't have a full knowledge of Hebrew. I have to read the transliteration I can't translate.
- Q. Did it seem natural to you at the time that boys were given preferential treatment to girls, and . . .?
- A. I don't think I worried about it because in my home I was, you know, I was the only girl and I think I was sort of treated very specially. And I always had

- A. (Continued) such a warm relationship with the family that I never felt singled out. . . discriminated against as far as any kind of education was concerned. I could have gone if I wanted to. I could have done anything I wanted to. And, as I say, I did go to Sunday school so I did get a basic knowledge of background of religion and the old stories and so on, as they used to teach those days. There was much more of an emphasis in Conservative Judaism on the Sunday school program. It was a . . . that was the major activity for young people as far as education was concerned. They didn't have the . . . the three-day-a-week Hebrew school generally for most children. I think the majority went on Sunday.
- Q. OK. I'd like to talk about your family for a while. How many children do you have?
- A. I have three sons.
- Q. Three sons. Oh, you don't have daughters.
- A. No, and they're all bachelors. Would you like some. . .?
- Q. No thanks. OK. Now, have your sons gone to college?
- A. Yes. My . . . well, my oldest son attended college at Ohio Wesley and took courses at Syracuse University and U. of R., but he never graduated. My other two sons have their degrees, both sons were graduated from Dartmouth College. And one has a Harvard Business School Masters Degree and the other has a Masters Degree from the University of Indiana.
- Q. I see. And how many of your sons live in Rochester?
- A. Just one.
- Q. And do you see him often?
- A. Yes, practically everyday when he brings his dog and when he picks his dog up. We're very . . . we're very close.
- Q. If you had a daughter would you have expected her to go to college?

A. Definitely.

Q. Do you think that you raised your sons the same way basically as you were raised yourself? As far as values go, as far as . . . well, do your sons have Hebrew educations?

A. My sons have a Hebrew education. They were all Bar Mitzvahed. But I must say that they didn't continue on beyond the Bar Mitzvah age. I think one of the boys did get the graduation certificate from the high school over at Beth El. They, interestingly enough, . . . two of the boys took religion courses in college, but they weren't interested. I think that considering our times I have given them much of the same sort of home life that I had. We kept a very warm family-centered home life. And I suppose that I still am the old-fashioned mother in many respects.

Q. Do you think your sons are as religious as you are?

A. No. Definitely not.

Q. Why do you think that is? I don't mean just necessarily you personally, but generally, why is the younger generation less. . .?

A. Religious?

Q. Yea.

A. I don't know. I think they're values are a little different. I think they don't believe in the formalized kind of religion that we believed in. It was very natural for me to go to temple with my Mother and Dad as a youngster on Saturday mornings. The Shabbat was very sacred, and it was the kind of a day where your parents were together. And your mother didn't do anything at home, and it was a . . . there was a nice feeling. You'd visit around with the relatives. Of course, sometimes that could be very tedious. But, if there were relatives in town you went visiting, and your parents took you along.

With our boys as they were growing up, I don't know whether we were as

A. (Continued) forceful in making them join us at temple, insisting on it. We've always said the, you know, the Kiddush on Friday night. We've always had a family dinner on Friday night and invited relatives, single relatives, uncles who were bachelors. And there's always been a very warm feeling for the boys that has carried over as far as the holidays and the Friday nights are concerned. But, I admit that when it came to . . . to the Shabbat, if it were summertime we would all go out in the country and spend the weekend in the country and so on. So we weren't as observant ourselves, although we've been members of Temple Beth El. And we certainly weren't as strict in our observance as my parents were. So, that's probably carried on. I mean it's had an effect on the boys. I think that the whole society has changed. The emphasis isn't on the formalized religion, and the children have been taught that all people are equal and you respect everyone for his or her religion and so on. And a lot of their friends have been non-Jewish. And we haven't pressured them in any way to avoid being with Jewish people, so . . . I mean non-Jewish people, so that consequently they have gone their own way and we don't force anything upon them. I think they're . . . I think their basic attitudes are very positive as far as Judaism and Israel and so on is concerned. My younger son spent a little time in Israel one summer, worked on a kibbutz and so on. And they've heard an awful lot from us about Israel and so on. But I think they are very positive, but I think . . . I eventually have a feeling that my youngest son will be very much involved in the Jewish community.

Q. OK. Now you said you moved to Rochester in 1938.

A. Right.

Q. Now, why did you move?

A. We were married. I married a Rochesterian.

Q. Oh, your husband's a native Rochesterian?

A. He's a native Rochesterian.

Q. Where did he grow up?

A. In. . . you mean in what area?

Q. Yes.

A. I think they. . . he basically grew up on . . . well, now I'm not sure of the original street, but I know that . . . I think on Alexander Street right in the back of the Sibley. . . old Sibley house.

Q. I see. So he didn't live in the Joseph Avenue area?

A. I think they did originally live in the . . . the Joseph Avenue area, but I don't know what street it was.

Q. Where did you move in when you moved here in 1938?

A. We moved into our present home.

Q. Oh, you've been. . . you've been living here since. . . oh!

A. Since 1938. (Laughter) We've added on an addition, but we've been in the one place since that time. In fact, when we moved in Brighton we were surrounded by empty lots. We were. . .

Q. What was this place like in 1938?

A. We were just. . . we were one of the early houses on the street, and we've remained here. We built on an addition to house the growing family and we've remained right here.

Q. What sort of people lived in Brighton in the late thirties?

A. Well, there. . . I think there was a mixture. There certainly weren't as many Jews as there are now. Our neighbors. . . I'm trying to think. . . Our neighbors were mostly Gentiles, but there was no feeling whatsoever of any anti-Semitism or anything like that. It was a very comfortable feeling. We had no feeling of not being welcomed into the neighborhood or anything like

A. (Continued) that.

Q. When did the community start changing?

A. It was a gradual change. It's hard to pinpoint it, but it was very gradual. In fact, the amazing thing is that I remember the time, perhaps twenty years ago, when we received a phone call asking us whether we would object to having a Chinese family move into the neighborhood. And my husband was just amazed at the question. He told the individual who had called, don't call any further, have him build his home, have him move in and I'm sure he'll be more than welcome. And he's still here. He's a very prominent cardiologist in the . . . in the country. I think he was President of the Heart Association. And now the interesting thing is we have a black family living right next door to us. We have two black families down the street, and there is no problem whatsoever.

Q. So the neighborhood has basically always been mixed?

A. But not as mixed as now. It was pretty "waspy", if I can use that expression, when we first moved here. But, I think that the temples coming out this way, that has made a difference. And a whole trend has been towards the Brighton area.

Q. What attracted you to the area in the first place?

A. Well, we had an opportunity to buy the house, and my husband knew the house. And his father bought it for us as a wedding gift, and we didn't look at any other houses. He said, do you like it? And I said I love it and that's it.

Q. OK. Now was your husband's family . . . were they always members of Beth El?

A. No, his Dad was President of Leopold Street Shul.

Q. Yea.

A. And his uncle was one of the founders of Temple Beth El, his uncle Sam Sturman, who was a bachelor and very close to my husband. In fact, my husband was like

- A. (Continued) a son to him. So, it was interesting during that particular period, many of the young people whose families were Orthodox belonged to a college group over at Temple B'rith Kodesh. In fact, my husband was President of the B'rith Kodesh. . . B'rith Kodesh College Group. I'm quite sure he was President. So, when we first were married, our first service we went to Temple B'rith Kodesh. We had been married around holiday time and we had left for a honeymoon of six weeks. And when we came back it was after the holidays. So we didn't have to affiliate. So the first year we attended a lot of functions at B'rith Kodesh where his sister belonged. And at the end of the year when we felt we should make a determination, he decided that his uncle was President of Temple Beth El, and his background was more Conservative, so we joined Beth El.
- Q. Now, did you ever visit the Joseph Avenue area?
- A. Actually, I must admit that most of the time that I went down to that area it was for marketing. If you wanted Jewish food, you went to the Joseph Avenue area. But I don't remember even being in the old Leopold Street Shul. I might have been in there once in the early years, but I don't remember that. So I didn't really spend any time in that area.
- Q. What were your perceptions of it?
- A. I didn't think of it as a ghetto or anything like that. I just thought of it as an area where Jewish people of low incomes lived. I don't think that was always true. I think there were Jewish people of moderate incomes and better incomes that lived there at one time because of the proximity to the synagogues. And if they had any religious feeling, they wanted to walk and so they had to be near the synagogues. At that time they didn't have the. . . in the early years you didn't have any temples out here. So I don't think I really had strong impressions about it anyway other than that.

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

A. No, but my husband was. But, he's gonna be interviewed separately.

Q. Right. Well, then I will ask you for your personal impressions of the Baden Street Settlement, even though you weren't connected with it. What did you think of it?

A. It was considered a good neighborhood center and it did a lot of good work in those. . . in the early years. Had a lot of outreach programs, a lot of young people gathered there and it did a very fine job. It changed a lot, particularly, I think, after the riots in '64. I think that was the changing point. Or maybe it started changing after the war years.

Q. When did you first become aware that the Joseph Avenue area itself was changing?

A. I don't think I gave it too much thought.

Q. What were your reactions to the riots in the early sixties?

A. I couldn't believe it. I had been involved for a number of years at that point with the Women's Human Relations Council. That was an organization that was set up to combat prejudice. And it was a group of women, representatives of all the women's groups in the city. And I eventually became President of the group. But at that time we had succeeded in getting the Commission on Human Relations into the City of Rochester. That was State-funded. And there were housing committees. And we all felt that the situation in Rochester was improving for the blacks. Of course, in the early fifties there were only, I think, about eight thousand blacks. And then it mushroomed so rapidly that I think by '60 it was maybe 40,000. I don't know what the statistics are today. But, in that Women's Council there were blacks sitting on our Board. And we just felt that there was an effort to eliminate prejudice and so on. And we never felt the turmoil. And I think the whole

- A. (Continued) community was basically shocked. I think it was part of the overall national movement at the time. I don't think it was just local. But we were shocked that Rochester had such a violent uprising. I don't think I can. . . I don't know how I can term it any stronger, but it was a complete hurt to those of us who felt that we were all interested in promoting good will and opening doors and so on. And perhaps, though, it was the kind of shock we needed in order to progress more rapidly.
- Q. Well, Rochester was one of the first communities to have riots in those years.
- A. Yes.
- Q. Has any. . . do you have any idea, a personal opinion, of why the riots took place here? And why so early on?
- A. I really don't know what actually started the whole thing. There was all kinds of talk at the time. But I really can't say that I have any personal knowledge of why it would happen here rather than elsewhere. I think part of it was the fact that we had a group come from the South. The population increased so rapidly. There were two areas that were, you know, quite dominately black. In the Third Ward, and as you know, the Joseph Avenue Ward. And I think it was just that there weren't the jobs, and the housing wasn't good. And. . . and it was happening across the country. And although Rochester was one of the early ones, blacks were beginning to assert their rights. And I think it happened at a kind of a . . . a dance, a street dance. And the question was whether it was incited from outside or whether it was a minor incident that just was the, you know, spark that ignited the whole thing. And then one thing led to another and they they complained of police brutality, and before you knew, that was a major . . .
- Q. Do you think it was outside agitation?

- A. I think. . . I don't really think it was outside agitation. I think it started spontaneously. And I think that when the police came in, perhaps, some of the. . . I don't think. . . I don't think there was police brutality. But I do think that some of the blacks overreacted and interpreted it as police brutality.
- Q. OK. Do you think that there were anti-Semitic overtones to the riots?
- A. I don't think so. Although, a lot of it started right in the Joseph Avenue area and they did smash those stores. And most of them were owned by Jews. And I know there was a strong feeling among certain Jewish merchants that they had been extra kind to the blacks in their neighborhood and given them all kinds of credit and so on, and they felt that they were being singled out unfairly for this kind of damage. I really don't think that it was that sort of thing. I. . . I personally feel that it was spontaneous reaction, and I think that the whole time was a time of foment and so on. I think that the people were ripe for that sort of thing. Instant reaction.
- Q. Have you ever been connected with FIGHT?
- A. Not directly, but I'm very aware of the FIGHT organization and its inception and so on. And I was active in the Jewish community at the time FIGHT was organized. And I was very upset about Sol Alinsky and bringing him into the community when the Christian community brought him in as an organizer of the black community. I was really upset because I. . . I thought that he was a very abrasive individual. And I thought that he would do more harm than good in polarizing the community. But, I might have been wrong. Leadership did develop. I. . . I just felt at the beginning that the FIGHT organization was progressive and trying hard to get its rights fast. A whole new kind of leadership, like Minister Florence at the time. And at that time, the feeling was that you should have assimilation. That the blacks should be welcomed

A. (Continued) into the white community, that they should be given jobs in the white community as they progressed and so on instead of isolating them in a black community. And FIGHT basically believed in "black power," in building their own image, their self-image. But maybe that's what they had to do first in order to grow. I always felt that we had belonged to the National Association for the Advancement of the Negro People . . . the Colored People they used to call it. The National Association for Advancement of Colored People. And, then later we belonged to the Urban League. So we were always involved, and we just. . . our contact with the blacks was more or less comfortable contact, trying to promote better education, advanced housing and better jobs and so on. And then the FIGHT organization came in and they were trying. . . well, basically wanted to demand their share of the community goods and they wanted to do it fast. Maybe they were right. They felt they had waited a long time. So, as I say, I have mixed emotions. I . . . first I was very opposed to Sol Alinsky. And I remember him speaking out at a meeting, general meeting, at Temple B'rith Kodesh where he was so arrogant and abrasive and rude to people who were asking legitimate questions that that just confirmed my feelings.

Q. Why do you think he was like that?

A. You didn't think he was like that?

Q. No, no, no. Why do you think he was like that?

A. Well, he was a professional organizer and perhaps he felt that this was the way to get people to act for themselves in their own behalf. Maybe he felt this was step one in having them build self-image, self-power, and they could rely on themselves rather than the white man. And his philosophy might have been entirely different from ours. And he was highly regarded in some Sociology circles, so. . . And, of course, the Christian community funded him. A hundred

- A. (Continued) thousand dollars at that time. I don't know whether the hundred thousand was for three years or not, but it was a big sum of money at that time. And I must say women like Mrs. Harper Sibley were willing to go out on a limb for this organization. Of course, I think there was a lot of turmoil in the white Christian community about this whole thing. And I think that it caused a lot of controversy. But it was a reaction to the riots because the feeling was that if nothing was done we might have had more riots.
- Q. Do you think that relations have improved with the black community since '64?
- A. I do.
- Q. OK. One more Joseph Avenue memory. Did you . . . or with your family, whatever, ever go down to Cohen's Delicatessen?
- A. Yes, not frequently. But, we used . . . we did on occasion.
- Q. What . . . what are your impressions of that place?
- A. It was . . . it was a place that you were bound to see people that you knew. You'd go in and you'd order a corned beef sandwich or some such thing and it was strictly kosher. And it was fun. Although, I don't think that we felt impelled to run down there like some people felt that it was the place to go. But, I don't think we felt that way particularly. But it was fine.
- Q. OK. I'm gonna do 180-degree turn and start asking you questions about religion. OK. Now we've already . . .
- A. Excuse me, would you like anything to drink? I'll put on coffee.
- Q. OK. Now you said that you are affiliated with Beth El. What are your impressions of the Conservative movement in general?
- A. Well, I've been affiliated with Conservative movements since my birth. As I said to you before my father was one of the early members of the Conservative movement and always active in . . . in the temple and very close to the rabbi and involved in getting the rabbi to come. I think the Conservative movement

A. (Continued) has changed considerably in a few respects. I think the rabbinate has changed. The rabbi used to be completely a spiritual leader. You would think of the rabbi as a person apart from the rest of the congregation. And I think now the rabbi has become a community person, an average man who . . . who, away from the pulpit, can wear a t-shirt and sneaks and do his own thing. I don't think that there's quite the same image of the rabbi. I think that the Conservative movement has changed in regard to speaking of Hebrew. I think it's much more advanced in its teaching of Hebrew. You remember I mentioned my experience in the Hebrew teaching. I think it conducts school in a very modern, progressive way. I think their adult education courses are something that we didn't have when I was a child. You'd have an occasional lecture from a prominent person who would be coming from out of town. But now you have all kinds of programs in the temple. And it has become somewhat of a community center. I don't think it has gone to the point that some of the Reform temples have gone to in regard to . . . heavens, they . . . I don't know whether they're still doing it, they had bridge clubs and art classes and so on. But, I think it has changed in that regard. It is more open. But, as far as women are concerned, I have been on the Ritual Committee at Beth El for perhaps twenty years. In fact, someone recently said to me that, don't you think it's time you got off, and I said you're probably right but I'm hoping to see a change in the role of women and hoping that I can stay on until I see that change. But, over and over through the years it's been almost as though we've been enacting the same meetings. The same subjects have come up and there is very little change. There has been more English reading in the Conservative movement than there used to be. In fact, now they use a supplementary booklet of prayers and poems that are modern and so on that's very effective. And I think it's very good. And they have more

- A. (Continued) responsive reading and there's much more English. But as far as the role of women is concerned, except for the girls having an equal education at the Hebrew school level and the girls being Bat Mitzvahed, the role of the adult woman is pretty much the same as it always has been. In some Conservative temples, as you know, it's changing more rapidly than in Rochester, but you're interested in Rochester. And in Rochester we don't have aliyote. Once a girl is Bat Mitzvahed, she might be called on some future date to read the same Haf Torah, but she is not called to the Torah for an aliyote regardless of whether her education is the same as the boy's. And recently at a Bar Mitzvah they. . . there were two young . . . it was a double Bat Mitzvah rather. And one family a boy had previously been Bar Mitzvahed and one family a girl had previously been Bat Mitzvahed. The boy was called to the aliyah in celebration of his sister's Bat Mitzvah, the girl was not. So there is that differentiation. And I hope to live to see that changed.
- Q. Does your interest in the Women's Movement transcend the temple? I mean are you interested in the Women's Movement in general?
- A. I believe in a. . . very strongly in certain parts of it.
- Q. Which parts?
- A. The equal job opportunity, equal salary, equal political power and so on. But, I don't believe in the part of the burning of the bras and . . .
- Q. But don't you think that's just anti-Women's Movement propaganda? That's not what the Women's Movement's all about.
- A. I know it isn't. I know it. I think it was sort of a radical group within the Women's Movement. And every new movement has some radical group. But, I personally have always felt that as a woman I could go as far as I wanted, except that. . . For instance, on Boards where the power is exercised, women were not welcomed to Boards. I was one of, I believe, sixteen of the

- A. (Continued) first women on the Board of the United Community Chest. And . . . and that was only a few years ago, I think it was 1969. Up until that point the United Community Chest, now called the United Way, . . . no it's still called the United Community Chest of Rochester, never had a woman on its Board.

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A

Interview with FLORENCE STURMAN
June 23, 1976
By Tina Isaacs

Interview 1
Tape 1
Side B

- Q. This is Tape 1, Side B, Tina Isaacs interviewing Mrs. Florence Sturman. We were talking about women's participation in certain community organizations and how that's changing.
- A. Yes. Well, now for instance, just the Jewish Community Federation, up until recently they didn't have . . . well, the last few years, they've begun to put women on the Board. And now I'm one of the Vice-Presidents of the Jewish Community Federation. I think that as far as I recall I'm the first woman who's been Vice-President. And I don't intend to go on as President, but that's beside the point. I know that in early years I resented the fact that a woman at Temple Beth El was active in the Sisterhood. And no matter how active she was she was not on the Board of Directors. Well, in recent years there are a lot of women on the Board of Directors, but we have yet to

A. (Continued) have an officer of the temple who is a woman. Now the Jewish Community Center has a Vice-President now who is a woman. In years gone by my sister was President of the Jewish Family Service as a woman. Now I don't remember a woman being President of that since then. But, I think that women should be involved in every level. And I . . . I do think the Women's Movement has brought that to the front. I mean you see women in industry and on Boards of Directors, and I think they should be because that's where the decision-making process takes place.

Q. To your knowledge do more or less women participate in the Reform temples?

A. Oh, I think they have a lot of women participating. Now, I don't know. . . I do think they have women officers of the temple. Their women are beginning to participate in the . . . the pulpit, too. I was recently at a Bat Mitzvah there, and both grandmothers participated in the service and read the prayers. And the mother participated in the service. So, I think they are ahead of the Conservative movement in that regard.

Q. OK. To your knowledge, have there ever been . . . has there ever been any friction between the Reform and the Conservative and the Orthodox communities in Rochester?

A. I believe in the early years there was. That was really before my time. And I think that since my coming to Rochester in '38 there has been a really much better relationship, particularly after the war. I think the war and the Holocaust changed the thrust of the whole Jewish community towards fund-raising for Israel. And all the lines of demarcation changed. But, the intermarriage. . . and I say intermarriage because in the early years when a boy from the Orthodox community married a girl from the Reform community, it was considered intermarriage by both sides. Today, I think that there is so much overlapping in individual families. . . For instance, our immediate family

- A. (Continued) an effort made to preserve the inner city.
- Q. What kinds of things do you think need to be done, I mean, for the city?
- A. I. . . I would hope that they could improve the housing patterns and the education patterns and I do feel that our new buildings are not as attractive as they should be. I think that we have really missed the boat on some of our new structures, that they have not enhanced the inner city or the main part of downtown, with the exception of a few buildings like Lincoln Tower and the Security Trust, Midland Bank Building, a few of those buildings are attractive, but generally speaking the construction downtown is very unattractive. But I think that the whole process of decay will have to be reversed.
- Q. Do you think that the city government is unsympathetic to inner city problems? Well, even downtown problems, say . . . and I'm thinking now of the move of the Post Office.
- A. Well, I don't think. . . I don't think you can fault the city government. I think it's a tremendous . . . a tremendous problem to govern any city today, maybe the whole structure of city government should change. As far as the Post Office is concerned, I think they will keep a branch downtown. I. . . I think that was blown out of proportion.
- Q. Well, can. . . does anything else leap to mind?
- A. No, I think we've probably covered most of it. And I'm sure others will have input where I failed to mention something.
- Q. Well, thank you very much.
- A. You're welcome.
- Q. It really was lovely.

- A. (Continued) way back in the early years of our marriage, at one point part of the family was active in Leopold Street, which is the Orthodox, part of the family was very active in the Reform temple, and part of the family was very active in the Conservative temple. This was within one immediate family. So that you. . . that's bound to build, you know, good will and erase the boundaries among the three.
- Q. OK. Can you think of anything other than the war that brought the community together? Anything prior to that possibly?
- A. I don't know. You see, I had only been here a few years before the war. In fact, the year after we were married was the time that Britain entered the war. So that my knowledge of the early years was that. . . I wouldn't have the knowledge actually.
- Q. OK. Do you think there was any friction, this time, between the descendants of the German/Jewish community and those Europeans and their descendants?
- A. Today?
- Q. No, well. . . anytime during your experience in Rochester.
- A. No. During my experience I don't think it has really existed. I think that . . . in fact, I think the background of many members of B'rith Kodesh today are from East European ancestry. And I think the German background might be in the minority. And, of course, you have your Spanish group in an entirely different temple.
- Q. OK. What. . . I do want to talk about World War II and the Holocaust, but before I get to that, what are your impressions. . . were your impressions of Rabbi Bernstein, his role? He's a very important person in the community. What were your impressions of his role?
- A. Rabbi Bernstein was always a close personal friend of the family. In fact, my sister-in-law travelled to Europe with him and went to Israel with him

- A. (Continued) and to Morocco and . . . and so on. And the families have been very close. And I've always been very much aware of his role in the general community. I don't think that there has been anyone that can be compared to him in Rochester. I think we have had some outstanding rabbis who have participated in the Jewish. . . in the non-Jewish community, but his name would always come up whenever they wanted a rabbi to represent the Jewish community, Rabbi Bernstein's name would always come up. I think nationally and internationally Rabbi Bernstein is considered as one of America's top rabbis. I. . . I think that he's made a tremendous impact on many people in the community. I think he's been good for the Jews because I think a lot of non-Jews have accepted him as the token Jew, in the old days, you know, so that. . . that they would have a very positive image of other Jews because of what he did. So that I think he's been very strong for. . . for the Jewish people.
- Q. Do you think that he was instrumental in turning the congregation of B'rith Kodesh towards Zionism?
- A. I think that . . . I think that he was, yes. Definitely.
- Q. OK. Now when did you first know what was going on in Europe in the thirties and the forties?
- A. Well, I knew back in I would say 1937, my first year out of college. I was working in Gloversville, New York in a Jewish Community Center. I was in charge of women's and girls' activities, and they had a fund raising drive at that time. This community was. . . that community was the center of the glove industry and there were a few very wealthy Jews. And there was a speaker at that time that spoke a bit about what was going on. Not in depth or anything, but there were problems and so forth. And I remember one of the men in the community who was a multi-millionaire gave \$200. And that was

A. (Continued) thought of as a tremendous gift. And it was. . . as I say that was the first time I had any realization. Then when I came to Rochester as a young bride, I don't know how much after that it was, I was at a large meeting, a luncheon meeting, on behalf of I think it was the Welfare Fund. And there was a speaker there that spoke about the people's bodies being used for soap and lampshades and so on. And I remember that was so shocking and so upsetting that I came out of that luncheon nauseous and with a tremendous headache. And the interesting thing to me was that it didn't inspire people to . . . to give, it sort of shocked them into inaction. They just couldn't do much that. . . at that particular meeting, they were as I say shocked into inaction. It wasn't a success as a fund raiser. But I remember that I was emotionally upset, because I don't think we really at that point had an understanding of what was happening. Although we certainly should have had because on our honeymoon when we were in Europe, we were there at the time of the Munich crisis. And we were in France when Galadier came back and there were the parades and they thought that finally there would be peace and they were appeasing Hitler and so on. But, there were those at that time who felt that war was imminent. On the return ship, the return trip, we came back on the Stattendahn, that was the original Stattendahn, and 1100 refugees were added to the passenger list so that we all had to give up quarters and combine with others. And it was a very rough crossing and we were surrounded by people who were leaving because they were very much concerned. This was September of . . . this was October of '38. And I remember we spent Yom Kippur on board ship and it was the saddest service that I can ever remember because these were people who were being uprooted and leaving their homeland and so on. And I remember when we saw the. . . when we came into the Statue. . . to the New York Harbor and they sighted the Statue of Liberty,

A. (Continued) the emotional reaction of the people was very touching, very unbelievable. So, I was aware. . . I was aware of the whole refugee movement and so on. But, I didn't think that I was as aware as I should have been of what was really going on.

Q. Did you personally know any of the refugees who ended up in Rochester?

A. Yes, we did. We knew a number of them. In fact, at the time when I first came here my sister-in-law, as I told you, was President of the Council of Jewish Women and I became actively involved in the Council of Jewish Women. And they had little restaurants that they opened on Monroe Avenue, which was called the Open Door. And it was run by the refugees. They would make products like jams and jellies and they would bake things for sale. And they had a little tea room there and they would serve light lunches and so on. And that was a project to help the refugees, and there were quite a number. I have no idea of the numbers, but I'm sure that you can get those statistics. But, they were a group apart. The German refugees that first came felt that they were very special kind of people. But we didn't. . . but we did know quite a number of them.

Q. What were. . . what was your reaction when you found out on toward the end of the war, after the war, what had really happened in Europe?

A. Disbelief. It. . . it just seemed inconceivable that something like that could happen in the twentieth century. It. . . you can comprehend one death. Or if you read about an accident in a. . . and a few people are wiped out, you can comprehend that and you can be very sad. But when it comes to six million Jews, you just can't comprehend that. It becomes unbelievable. And I think that it was. . . it had a numbing effect, you just couldn't believe that it could happen.

Q. Did it make you feel more. . . more Jewish?

- A. I felt that Jews were responsible for their own and there was no point in trying to think in terms of assimilation ever again, that you were always considered a Jew no matter what. And that a Jew, once born a Jew, you were a Jew for life. And if you participated in the general community in any activities, you were considered a Jew. You weren't participating in any other fashion. And so I. . . I suppose that it strengthened my feelings.
- Q. Has that feeling stayed with you?
- A. I always feel very conscious of my Jewishness. And yet I have been involved with non-Jews in many avenues. And I'm always aware of being a Jew and I'm always comfortable about being a Jew. And I know everyone always accepts me as I am. But, I do feel . . . I don't feel 'cliquey' about feeling the necessity. . . necessity of being with Jews all the time. I feel very comfortable when I'm in mixed groups.
- Q. Do you feel the same way about assimilation?
- A. I don't. . . I don't believe in assimilation. I don't believe anymore in a melting pot idea. I believe very definitely that . . . that all the differences . . . the different people make for a . . . a positive situation in the United States. And I think we all ought to retain much that is good in our own beliefs, in our own culture.
- Q. So you would say that this is not just true for Jews but also for blacks and for the Irish?
- A. Exactly. I don't think you can . . . I don't believe in ghettoizing the differences at all. I don't believe in ghettoizing people. I believe in mixing people and all, but I think that when you make a contribution to the general community you bring with you all the attitudes and the positive aspects of your own religion and your own culture.
- Q. Well, if one integrates neighborhoods and schools, how does. . . how do people

Q. (Continued) retain their . . . if I may quote Jimmy Carter, "ethnic purity?"

A. You might not retain it completely. It changes. It changes. It has to change. I think that . . . I think the integration of the communities is very healthy. I think it's very good. I think within the family structure though it's very nice to be able to retain your Judaism. And I think that's the way it's going to be passed on from generation to generation. There is so much intermarriage today that it's gonna be hard to do it.

Q. What do you . . . what do you . . . your opinions on intermarriage?

A. Well, let's put it this way, I'd be happier if my sons married a Jewish girl. I would not reject them if they married out of the faith. I would not sit shiva as some parents used to do when a child married out of the faith. There are members of our family, general family, not immediate family, who have married out of the faith. And the spouses are more Jewish than the Jewish members of the family. That often happens too. So I think you gain some and lose some. But, I . . . I don't know. I . . . I've always taught brotherhood and equality, so I suppose the next step is possibly accepting those who choose to intermarry. And I would just hope that in our own family that the boys would remain Jewish.

Q. OK.

A. No guarantees.

Q. Getting beyond the specifics of your sons, what generally do you think intermarriage causes? I mean, what are its good effects, what are its bad effects?

A. Well, it dilutes a religion. There's no question about it. I think that generally speaking when there's intermarriage what happens is that, to avoid friction, there's no effort really to direct a child in any one religion so that the child . . . Children of that marriage, the children, become . . . not

- A. (Continued) irreligious necessarily, but I don't think there's any religious habit to their lives. The life is a matter of culture and so on. And I think it sort of weakens the structure of Judaism.
- Q. Why do you think it's important that we bring up our children in the . . . to have some sort of religion?
- A. Well, I think the values that we get through religion are fine ones.
- Q. Could you elaborate on that a little? What . . . what values do you . . . ?
- A. Well, I suppose every religion would claim the same values, but you know to honor your parents, to . . . the Ten Commandments basically. To do good, to live a full life, to think in terms of your doing something for the next person and so on. But that doesn't necessarily have to be Judaism. It's just that I personally was raised as a Jewess and so, therefore, I think that's a good way to impart positive values.
- Q. Do you think there are specific Jewish values that one finds only in Judaism?
- A. Well, the belief in one G-d, of course, you know. And that is primary to our religion, we don't believe in other deities. And I . . . I think that it's a good, basic, flexible religion. They're so tolerant of deviations within the group. You can be a good Jew in so many different ways. And, frankly, I think it's a very easy religion. And I think that if . . . maybe too easy. If I weren't born a Jew, I think . . . and had a choice, I'd choose to be a Jew. They've had all the problems of the world and so on, but I think basically the values are very positive. There's not all the ritual and the . . . oh, so much of the automatic responses. Like when I hear . . . I probably shouldn't mention . . . the Hail Mary and so on and the television and the repeti . . . not on television, the radio they repeat the Lord's Prayer and so on over and over and over again in rote. But we do it in rote, some of our prayers in rote, too. But, we don't have the pomp or the circumstance.

- A. (Continued) And we. . . . ten people can get together into a private home and have a. . . a service and it still can be religious. Or you can have a beautiful Seder at your table and that can be religious service. Or your Shabbat, lighting of the candles. It's an emotional experience, too. And I find that especially during times of problems in your home, in your family, religion seems to be something to hold onto. You have faith in the powers that be.
- Q. OK. You mentioned just off-hand the fact that Jews carry the problems of the world. Well, I'd like to talk about Israel and its establishment. Now, what did you think of the U.N.? Did you work for its establishment?
- A. Yes. In fact, I still belong to the Rochester Association of the United Nations. And my husband was one of the Vice-Presidents a couple of years ago. He has since dropped off the Board. Was he a Vice-President or just on the Board? Just on the Board. But, at any rate, I still feel basically that the idea is a sound one. But the last few years the action has been irresponsible.
- Q. Have your. . . then your opinions of the U.N. have changed?
- A. Yes, my opinions of the U.N. have changed. I still think there's a lot of value in the U.N. There's a World Health Organization, through the UNICEF with a children's organization, and so on. I have feelings that it has been taken over by the Third World and they're feeling their power now, and perhaps the structure will have to change somewhat. But I do feel the idea is a good one. To try to bring people together to talk about their problems rather than fight it out. Unfortunately they're still fighting it out.
- Q. Then did your opinion of the U.N. change due to actions over Israel or was it before that?
- A. I think there were other actions, too.
- Q. Does anything sort of leap to mind?

- A. Well, yes. I think that if they were really a peacekeeping organization that we should never have been in Vietnam. That if there were. . . if they were structured so that they could send a peacekeeping group to Vietnam and . . . and prevent a war, that would be what they should be. And I don't think they have been effective anywhere in the world really in that regard. Perhaps others will differ with me, but I still think it's a valid instrument.
- Q. OK. Now were you . . . were you interested in Israel when it was first established in '48?
- A. Yes.
- Q. What were your feelings then?
- A. I was just thrilled. Very, very much excited, very thrilled. In fact, I heard about it when I was attending a Bar Mitzvah in Schenectady and it was very emotional, very. . .
- Q. Do you think that the survival of Israel is necessary for the survival of the Jews?
- A. I think so. I really do.
- Q. Could you elaborate on that at all?
- A. Well, I think that we've reached the point in our history where the . . . the Israel and the United States both are important for Judaism. I don't think Israel could survive without Jews in the diaspora. And I think that diaspora probably could not survive without Israel 'cause it's almost like a fatherland. I think we have looked for this day for many centuries, and I feel that now that Israel is a state, its survival is absolutely paramount to our existence as Jews. If Israel would not survive, we might survive as individuals and there might be remnants of Judaism, but I don't think we would have the strength as Jews that we have.
- Q. OK. Did you listen. . . were you at the 1975 visit of Golda Meir here in

Q. (Continued) Rochester?

A. Yes.

Q. What did you think of her dedication of the Bernstein Chair?

A. Well, I had met Golda Meir personally a few years before that. We were in Israel in 1972. We had a visit with Golda in her private office with Mayor Stephen May. My husband and I were part of a delegation for the Rochester-Rehovot Sister City Conference. And we spent about 45 minutes with her. And she was just. . . she's an amazing woman. She is absolutely an amazing woman. In fact, someone last night said that he. . . a Gentile told me last night that he felt that she would go out as the outstanding woman of our century. She came through with a very lovely grandmotherly type, easy to talk to, very easy to visit with. And yet, although you weren't able to take notes, you felt as if almost everything you said was quoteable and you wished you could write it all down. In fact later we got together and wrote our impressions and tried to remember verbatim much of what she said. Very smart, very shrewd. She isn't religious I don't believe. She doesn't have the very strong feeling about Judaism as a religion. I think basically she's a sound Socialist. I think she's a cultural Jew rather than a religious Jew. But, I believe she lives her Judaism. I think that she made quite an impression at that convocation at the Eastman on all those who were gathered. I didn't think she was as profound that night as she has been in other times. But she's wonderful.

Q. Now, I think I'm gonna leave off discussing the Rehovot. . . some other time.

A. All right.

Q. But you did mention Stephen May. Now, there has. . . what I would like to know is do you think there. . . in the political community in Rochester, do you think they are sympathetic to the Jewish community?

- A. Yes, very definitely. I think Stephen May as Mayor was much more involved in the Jewish community than the present Mayor. Very often you would see Stephen at social gatherings and other gatherings of the Jewish community. He was a regular attendant at some of these gatherings. He was head of our Interfaith Committee of the Federation, and I believe, still is. I think he was definitely interested in the Jewish community. Of course, being a bachelor he had more time to socialize. But, I'd say . . . and we have had some very prominent Jews in our city government. Like Joe Silverstein, who was Vice-Mayor and so on. I don't think we have as many Jews involved in government here at the local level as there might be elsewhere. I don't think the Jewish people take as active a role in politics. We have a number of judges of course and all. But I don't think the Jews are as involved.
- Q. Why. . . why do you think that's. . .? Do you have any idea? It's interesting.
- A. I. . . I really don't know. We've been involved at the local level. My husband ran for office twice in the Democratic Party. But, basically they just don't know why it is. I don't think that they were told not to be involved or I don't think they were kept out of the . . . the organizations in any way. Perhaps just that the Jewish people in the last few years have spent so much of their energies raising funds on behalf of the State of Israel and involvement in the Jewish community organizations that many of them haven't involved themselves in the political game. Now, it takes a lot of time.
- Q. Do you think that in your experience in Rochester has there ever been any local political leaders who were less than sympathetic to the Jewish community? Do you remember any kind of anti-Semitic incidents?
- A. Not really. I can't. Not off-hand, no.
- Q. Do you think that there's a difference between Democrats and the Republicans in the way they handle, first of all, just the city government in general,

- Q. (Continued) and second of all the Jewish community? I mean I know that you're Democrats.
- A. Well, yes. Well, the Democrats are supposed to be a little bit more liberal towards minority groups. The Republicans are supposed to be more establishment and all. But to be perfectly honest with you, I think it's six of one, half dozen of the other. And I think that once the Democrats get control they don't accomplish any more than the Republicans. The Republicans do equally as poorly. Neither group has been doing the jobs that I feel they can do. Of course, we've had some marvelous Jews in the State government. Herbert Layman and Jacob Javits and people of that caliber who have been great. And on the local level most of those who I think of in very positive values have been those who have become judges. Don't like to mention Bill Posner's name, but he led the Democratic Party locally and ran into all kinds of trouble. Of course, we have Richard Rosenbaum who is the Republican State Chairman who is Jewish. We also have. . . you know, it just dawned on me that someplace in this history someone ought to interview Sol Linowitz.
- Q. Mrs. Sturman, have you or do you know of any sort of anti-Semitic experience that's happened in Rochester over the past. . . well, since you've been here or even before?
- A. Off-hand, I can't recall. You know, we have ways of blotting out from our memories unpleasant things. And I might have done just that, but perhaps I'll give it some more thought, after we. . .
- Q. OK. Now were you in any way connected with the JY?
- A. Not really.
- Q. Are you a member now of the JCC?
- A. Yes, we have been members for years of both, of the JY too. We were members all along. Oh, I shouldn't say that I wasn't connected, I completely forgot.

- A. (Continued) I led a group there in the years gone by. I had a girls group that I led. I haven't thought of that in so long. But, in the early years I used to have a group that I . . . a club.
- Q. What did you do?
- A. We used to have discussions of all kinds. And I'm trying to remember what we did it was so long ago. But, it was a nice group of girls and we used to get together and discuss values and so on and do things together. And I'm trying to remember exactly what we did.
- Q. It sounds something like the Young Leadership thing that they have now.
- A. Yes, it was a social group. And, in fact, I . . . I've seen some of the girls that were associated in that group bowling in recent years. And this is the first time I've thought about it. I . . . I really can't remember too much about it. It must have been a very great group. (Laughter) But I know I gave it some time. I used to go religiously to the meetings. I was more of their advisor, you know, they were teenagers and they conducted their own meeting. And they needed someone to act as an advisor and that was the sort of thing that I did. They did their own thing as we call it today.
- Q. What do you think is . . . is the importance of a building or an organization like the JCC? What has it done for the community?
- A. Well, actually, I think it's a valid organization for a community, a Jewish community, because all people are not affiliated with a temple. There are a lot of singles that come into the community from out of the city who might gravitate there and who have in the past. In the years gone by they used to have a dormitory and a lot of our prominent people had dormitory rooms there. Sol Linowitz had his first room at the JY in the old building. And there were a lot of fine people that had their rooms there. So, in addition to the physical aspects of the program, I do think that it was a meeting place

- A. (Continued) in the old days for activities. And a lot of people gathered there. Everyone wasn't religiously oriented so it did serve the needs of many people. It had a Sunday school down at the old JY that was funded by the Council of Jewish Women. Now they do have a community Sunday school at . . . under the Bureau of Jewish Education, but at that point they didn't have that kind of structure. So I do think it has a valid reason for existence. There are a lot of social programs that have really no place in a temple, I think. And I think that's where the JCC, the programs. . .
- Q. Do you think that there is a Jewish culture to Rochester?
- A. A Jewish culture? You're thinking in terms of the Yiddish books that are being written and the . . . I suppose that . . . I suppose you would put it in a class of a Jewish culture in some of the art programs and art work. And I think so.
- Q. Do you think that the Jewish community has been particularly culturally oriented? And now I'm thinking more along the lines of the symphony and the Memorial Art Gallery.
- A. Definitely.
- Q. OK.
- A. Very definitely. It's very interesting. We're patrons of both the art gallery and the Civic Music Association and I'm on the Women's Council of the Bausch Museum, it's now called the Museum and Planetarium. And it's very interesting to me to see that way out of proportion to the numbers in the community, there is a strong involvement in both the music association and the art gallery. The . . . for the coming President of the Women's Council of the art gallery is Jewish. The present Chairman of the Board of the . . . it's now called the Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra, is Jewish. And if you look over lists of patrons and so on you'll find quite a number of Jewish. I should say they've

- A. (Continued) been very much involved. As far as the museum is concerned, I still feel like the token Jew. In the Women's Council there are very, very few Jewish women, very few Jewish women. You have to be invited to join, and it's almost like joining a sorority. It. . . it really gets to be that sort of thing. They question you about all your activities and so on before you're invited. And then they send out ballots and you have to be voted on by the whole membership. And it is utterly ridiculous. And there are very few Jewish women on the Women's Council. And I have a feeling that there aren't too many Jewish members of the museum. I work on a regular basis at the gift shop of the museum. I just had that feeling that there are things that I should do in the non-Jewish community, too. And I think it makes me a better rounded person. By doing a little elsewhere you get a balanced perspective when you step back and do something outside your own. . .
- Q. That's something else that I wanted to talk about at much greater length next time. But, why. . . why do you think that there's a. . . other than the museum, a disproportionate representation of Jews on these sort of cultural . . . in these cultural activities?
- A. Well, the Jews have always been involved in music. Some of our most prominent artists are Jews. I think it's almost natural. I don't know. . . I don't know why. Jewish people have always been in the forefront of the fine things like our. . . I don't know what brings it out. I don't know why it has to have a reason, it just seems to be, you know, part of the whole being. I think that, well, if you really go back to the home. For instance, even in the ghetto homes, even in the . . . the kibbutzim or even the most simple flat in Israel, you find that there are all kinds of books. When Jews practically had nothing to eat they always had something to read. The Jews are really people who are cultured. Maybe that's one of the things I should have

A. (Continued) emphasized before when you asked me about special qualities of the Jewish religion. I think it's almost part of us. And I think that. . . I think that the Jews have given strong leadership in this field too.

Q. One last question, do you think that Rochester itself is a really culturally oriented community?

A. Oh, yes, it is definitely. I do think it is. I think it is a very fine community. And I think it's definitely a cultural community. There are many, many things to take advantage of here, but unfortunately you find a very small group of people that are attending all of these functions. It seems to be the same people that go to all these things. But, I don't think that our drama is outstanding. We don't have a strong theatre here. And unfortunately they've tried and we haven't supported the theatre. But other than that I think that we have definitely a cultural community. Incidentally, I should mention that Ruth Rosenberg has been the guiding light for the opera program in Rochester since its inception. Someone might want to talk to her.

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE B (Interview 1)

Interview II
Tape I
Side A

A. But I don't think I did. . .

Q. This is Tina Isaacs interviewing Ms. Florence Sturman. It is Tuesday, June the 29th. This is Tape 2, Side A. OK. Mrs. Sturman, could you please tell me about your activities in sort of the larger community? You know, the whole Rochester community? And specifically, changes in the educational activities?

A. Well, in . . . of course, when my children were growing up my interest was in following through on their activities, such as Boy Scouts, Cub Scouts, and especially the schools. And at one time I was President of the Brighton PTA. And I became interested in schools, served on a number of their committees, and still maintain an interest in the schools. I was given a life membership in PTA, which was a nice honor. But, it's very interesting to note that during this whole period, I would say in the sixties, the Jewish community was very involved with the schools. The Superintendent of Schools was Herman Goldberg. And in the PTAs there were not only active and committed people, but in the number of the PTAs the presidents were Jewish. There were a couple of presidents of the Genesee Valley District of PTAs, which is the overall body. One was Sylvia Kaplan, Stanley Marcus. And then beyond that, on the school boards we had the President of the School in West Irondequoit, James Litwith. And the President of the School Board in Brighton, Bert Tannenbaum. And I'm sure that there are many others. And, of course, there were many principles who were school. . . who were Jewish. And I'm sure some of them are going to be interviewed on tape so I won't go into that. But, they were involved in the whole field of education. And that was one of my interests in the early

A. (Continued) years. And then another interest was the whole field of human relations. And this preceded the riots. In the I would say the fifties, late fifties, there was an organization formed of women. It was called the Women's Human Relations Council. And, this was a body that started actually from a small discussion group at one of the churches. And, in fact, I think one of our Jewish women was the . . . in charge of that discussion group at that time, Mrs. Lamont Kaplan. And at that time there was a feeling of a great deal of prejudice. And they thought that perhaps it should go beyond this one discussion meeting and formed some sort of a council. So they did. And they had representatives from the Jewish community and the Christian community and the Black community. And eventually all the women's organizations signed up and sent representatives and some of the other organizations sent representatives. So, it was a fairly large body of representatives. And they would meet several times a year basically to zero in on the whole problem of prejudice in housing, in job discrimination, and even in just prejudice that people were not aware of that they might transmit to their children. So, we would have forums and plays where you . . . and discussion groups afterwards, almost like a group therapy kind of session. And zero in on some of the problems relating to home activities that would transmit prejudice from one generation to the other. And that . . . and so for a while there I was President of that agency and then they felt that it was very important to have an overall, funded body by the State. And they worked hard to get the Human Relations Commission started in Rochester, and that's still in existence. And the women's group went out of existence.

Q. Now, the women's group, did it do anything besides . . .

A. Have meetings. . .

Q. I hate to use the word consciousness-raising, but I mean did it go beyond

Q. (Continued) the meeting stage?

A. Yes, it worked on. . . oh, for instance, open housing covenants. They published a booklet of open housing covenants. In fact, I just came across that. And, as I say, they worked to get this Human Relations Commission started. And, for instance, if a black person were trying to move into a neighborhood and had. . . was having trouble, they might write to the neighbors, they might contact the neighbors, they would do something in that vein. But, of course, now all that is in law. You can't discriminate against a person in housing because of their race or religion. But in those days it was a little different, and it isn't so many years ago.

Q. Did you ever contact realtors or . . .

A. Yes, we did. . .

Q. . . . local politicians?

A. Yes, we contacted realtors, local politicians at times of political, you know, elections. At that time they formed also a Religion and Race Council that encompassed the bodies of the churches and so on. They put in full-page ads in the paper to warn people not to be taken in by scare tactics and to vote according to the people's. . . the individual's beliefs and all and not be afraid of their. . . well, of course, of their biases and so on.

Q. Do you think that the Human Relations Commission was. . . and the women's group, were successful? Now, and I mean that in two ways. I realize you were probably successful within your own group. It must have been very gratifying. Did the community itself that you were trying to work with, were they sympathetic? Did they listen?

A. It's hard to know what impact you have. We felt that we did go out of existence, so we felt that we had outgrown our usefulness. But I think at one time we were a voice that might have been listened to by some people.

- A. (Continued) And it's hard. As I say, you can't really tell the impact you made, but just talking and working in behalf of good causes is bound to have some basic impact. Just like dropping a pebble in the water, not much, but at any rate a little.
- Q. OK. Well, I want to take a few steps backward, just talk about the education thing again. Why do you think there's . . . why do you think Jews overwhelmingly participate in educational activities?
- A. I think that Jews are the people of the book and they've always been interested in education on all levels. And I think someone quoted the figure the other day that 50% of Jews now have some kind of a graduate degree, which is fantastic. I can't believe that statistic, but . . . so don't use it without checking it, but I . . . I couldn't believe it. But at any rate, I do think that Jews have always been interested in education. And then you were talking about the larger community. Jews have always been involved in the Community Chest. But, and I'm on the Board of that now. I think I did mention to you before that they just put women on the Board in, I think, it was in '69. But I must say that at this particular moment in time there are far fewer Jews on the Board of the Community Chest than there are women or blacks. Which is a very interesting. . . The Advisory Board of the Community Chest consists of quite a number of Jews, prominent Jews in the community who you will probably be interviewing who now are over 70, so they were put on the Advisory Board. But that group are, I think they have more Jews in that group than proportionate in the community. But on the overall Board of Community Chest today there are very few Jews. And the interesting thing, and I don't want to be quoted, but at any rate the interesting thing is that those. . . many of the Jews on the Board now are Jews in name only.
- Q. Do you think that. . . well, is this because Jews have become less:

- Q. (Continued) interested in the Community Chest or that the Community Chest is trying to solicit people. . .?
- A. Well, it isn't a matter of solicitation. Jews are all solicited. I'm talking about the leadership.
- Q. No, I mean the leadership. I'm sorry.
- A. But incidentally, the President of the Community Chest at present is Jewish, which is very interesting. But, the composition of the Board and of the Corporation is mostly non-Jewish. And, as I say, Jews are not represented in any numbers.
- Q. Well, I guess what I meant was. . . I put it very badly, was I mean how exactly is the Board chosen in that. . .?
- A. By a nominating committee.
- Q. Now, is this nominating committee nominating less Jews do you think? Or is it Jews are less interested in being part of the Board?
- A. I don't think that the latter is true. I think Jews are very interested in becoming members of the Board, but I think it's a period of compensation where they're trying to get more blacks on and there are just certain number of openings. And perhaps they don't think of us anymore as Jews, but as white versus blacks and trying to get the blacks on. But I just happen to think that that's an interesting. . .
- Q. Very interesting.
- A. You ask about other activities in the general community. I think I did tell you I was involved in the museum.
- Q. Yea.
- A. And. . . and I just had a call this morning. I'm working there in the gift shop on a monthly basis. But that, too, I think is not. . . well, I'm sure the attendance is as much Jewish as non-Jewish, but I don't think that

- A. (Continued) in the overall Board or association there are too many Jews, and probably in the membership there aren't too many Jews. And I don't know why that is because that's an educational institution. And the interesting thing is in the Memorial Art Gallery and the Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra I would say that the Jews are very obvious in their participation.
- Q. Do you think it's important for Jewish people to participate in non-Jewish activities?
- A. I don't consider these non-Jewish activities. I think I consider these community activities that benefit the whole community. And I think that Jewish people normally are interested in social activities so that it's interesting to see that they are active. I don't think they think about being Jewish or non-Jewish when they participate. It's just their. . . pardon me, their interest.
- Q. Well, do you think that. . . that a Jew should go out of his or her way to participate in activities in the larger community?
- A. Yes, I do. I feel that we should be represented. I don't think that it's fair to have everyone else carry the ball. For instance, in the Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra I think that our community is richer for having a good music program, a good music school and so on. And I think it's. . . it's fine that the Jews do participate. I think it enriches the whole community. I think they should.
- Q. What kinds of things do you think that the Jewish people of Rochester have given to these? It's kind of a hazy question, but what kinds of benefits has the community got out of Jewish, specifically Jewish, participation?
- A. Well, it's interesting, for instance in the realm of leadership. Now the head of the Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra now is Nick Robfogel, Jewish. So they've given leadership and they've given money. Jews are very generous.

- A. (Continued) And if you look at the patrons list of the Art Gallery or the Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra or the Associates of the University of Rochester, you will find many Jewish names sprinkled among them. I think. . . I think Jewish people are basically generous, and they have good leadership. They're bright, they're capable. And I think that when they participate in these organizations they do just because they feel it's the right thing to do and they're interested. I don't think they really analyze their motivations.
- Q. Do you think that Rochester is more culturally oriented due to Jews, you know, because of Jewish participation in these. . . ?
- A. I don't. . . I don't think you can make a. . . I would doubt we could make a statement like that because I don't think it's something you can really analyze.
- Q. Do you see any negative aspects to participating in the larger community?
- A. No.
- Q. Do you think it takes away from Jewish activities?
- A. No, I don't because those people who are active in the larger community usually are active in the Jewish community too. It's very interesting to see the duplication of leadership.
- Q. Are there people who are just active in the Jewish community and not the larger?
- A. Definitely. There are some people that only participate in the Jewish community, some only in the temples, or some only in the Federation, or some only in Hadassah, which is fine. But, I think that once in a while it is very good for a balanced perspective of life in a community to step into a different group and look at the larger picture.
- Q. Do you think that relations are harmonious between the Gentile community and the Jewish community in Rochester?

A. I would say yes.

Q. Have they always been so?

A. You see, I came here in '38. And I don't know whether they've always been this harmonious. I can only speak from my personal experience. But, I think that since I've been here that there's been a good feeling in the general community. In fact, I would go so far to say that in the early years before I came here there was as much difference between the various wings of Judaism, like the Orthodox and the Reform, as between the non-Jewish and the Jewish community.

Q. OK. Do you think . . . do Gentiles participate in Jewish activities at all that you can think of?

A. Yes, yes they do when they're called on. And we have an Interfaith Committee of the Federation. And these people have been most helpful during the various crises in Israel. And recently there was an Israel Bond dinner which honored one of the men in the community, non-Jewish, Angelo Costanza. And the majority of those who attended were Gentiles. So that there is participation. And obviously, they bought bonds in order to go there.

Q. Do you think there's more Gentile activity now than there was before? I mean, you know, an Israel type of related activities?

A. I do, probably. I imagine there's still a bit of feeling of guilt from the Holocaust. And I think that when Gentiles are asked by Jews to participate and do something specific they might be reluctant to say no.

Q. To your knowledge, do the corporations; Xerox, Kodak, Bausch & Lomb, such; participate in any kind of Jewish activities? Do they give funds?

A. I believe that there were voluntary contributions in the past from some of the corporations, but I don't know about it. I really have no knowledge.

- Q. OK. Do you think there's any chance of the Jewish community of Rochester becoming closed? I mean, do you, you know. . .
- A. Ghettoized?
- Q. Not. . . not necessarily ghettoized, but more . . . very much aware of its own community and not looking beyond it too much?
- A. No, I think that . . . I think with all the intermarriage that's going on the next generation is going to have more difficulty holding onto its Jewish feelings. I think we'll always be part of the general community. Right now I think that the emphasis on our ties to the Jewish community probably needs re-enforcing for the future.
- Q. Do you think that Brighton has any aspects of a Jewish ghetto?
- A. I have never sensed that, but. . . and I've lived here since '38. But I understand that approximately 40% of the students at Brighton school are now Jewish. Maybe that's not quite accurate, but it's. . . it's a large percentage. So I don't know what is going on in the schools, but I don't sense the feeling of ghettoizing. I think it's mostly a middle-class society. It's a cultural society, not based on religion. Although we have the two temples out here, but I don't feel that ghettoization.
- Q. Do you think the schools, the public schools now, in Brighton are better than the public schools in the city?
- A. I would say yes.
- Q. Now is this equally true of all the suburbs?
- A. I can't say all the suburbs, but I think some of them such as Pittsford and Irondequoit are better probably than the city schools.
- Q. What would you think if there was bussing?
- A. Well, the great majority of students are bussed anyway. The children in Brighton are bussed over to the Twelve Corners.

Q. Right.

A. In fact, I was the one that proposed the bussing of some of the children into Brighton schools on a token basis. Oh, a number of years ago, and I guess they're still doing it. I . . . I don't think you can completely change cultural patterns, I think you have to do it in housing first. But, generally speaking I don't think that bussing, unless it starts in going into the, you know, three-quarters of an hour, an hour and disrupts whole communities, is . . . is any problem as far as the children are concerned. They certainly communicate when they're on the bus. They . . . they really learn things on the bus by being together and so on, and so it isn't . . . and so it's such a shock to them.

Q. How about if they started sending children from Brighton into the 19th Ward?

A. I think they did try that. They had some special programs in the city and people did it on a voluntary basis. Actually I don't think it would be fair for me to answer that. I think someone who had a child, you know, ready to go to the school should answer that. But, on the other hand I do feel that it would be better if the whole thing were on a voluntary basis.

Q. OK. Now could . . . could you please tell me have you noticed any changes in the organizational . . . Jewish organizational activity? Changes in popularity or composition over . . . over the years you've been here?

A. Very definitely. When I first came to Rochester in 1938 my sister-in-law was President of the Council of Jewish Women. And at that time it was "the" group to join. Cover . . . It crossed all temple boundaries. It was considered quite a prestigious group, and it was very popular. They had large attendance at all kinds of meetings. And they had organizations within the Council such as brides groups where they taught the newly married to cook and so on. It was really . . . it really went beyond what one would expect a Council to do.

- A. (Continued) And then later on they were involved with refugee resettlement. And the Council did a tremendous job in that area. And then I think I did mention they organized the Open Door group, tea room, on Monroe Avenue. But then as the years went on this popularity seemed to change. For a while there, Council wasn't as popular. In fact, I think they were having difficulty keeping going. And then the Sisterhoods became very popular. And you'd go to a Sisterhood meeting and there were a tremendous number of women. You'd find three hundred women at a Sisterhood meeting. And I think that was the period in which the temples were built and . . . and so on. And there was a lot of enthusiasm. And then I think with the emergence of the State of Israel Hadassah, which has been in existence many, many years, became "the" most active organization. What the situation is today, I can't exactly tell. I think the Federation has taken its place. I don't think the Women's Association of the Federation takes the place of these other women's organizations, but I do think that people are so involved with so many things today that I don't know whether the attendance at meetings per se is that great. But I did notice that Hadassah raised a tremendous amount of dollars and went over its quota, so they must be doing a good job. I'm sure Council is too.
- Q. OK. I'm gonna go all the way back to the beginning with the Council of Jewish Women. Could you please tell me a little more about the Refugee Resettlement Program and also the Open Door restaurant?
- A. Well, actually I wasn't as involved in that as some other people. But, it. . . I do hope that you'll be careful to reach someone who knows more about the details of that operation. The Jewish Family Service was involved, Stella Shvrin at that time was one of their social workers. She was involved, and she's no longer living. But I know that that was one of their big projects. They used to have the women, the refugee women, who . . . many of whom had

A. (Continued) never done anything, they would prepare jellies and jams and so on in their homes. Then they would bring them to the Open Door and sell them. And then they would prepare light lunches and make a little money that way. And the money went towards keeping the little store in operation. And the rest of the money, I believe, went back to the refugees but I don't think it was that much. Actually, I think it was a . . . a method of integrating them into the community, getting them to forget their past and so on rather than to give them any basic security because some of them did have money. But, of course, it was an entirely different kind of life for them.

Q. OK. It's very interesting to me that the Council of Jewish Women lost its popularity to Sisterhoods because of course the Council of Jewish Women would be from all temples, whereas the Sisterhood would be affiliated with one specific temple. Why do you think that happened?

A. I don't know whether . . . maybe I shouldn't have said that. All right, I didn't mean it entirely lost its popularity to the temples, but the same women belong to everything. For instance, the same Boards of Directors exist as a completely overlapping situation. I have served on the Board of the Council, on the Board of Hadassah, and on the Board of the Sisterhood at different times. But, I do think that after the doors were closed to the refugees some of the programs weren't quite as attractive in the Council. And also I don't think there was that need to assimilate various groups within the community. . . or integrate various groups within the community. B'rith Kodesh and Beth El became very close in their working relationship and they would have inter or intrasisterhood functions and so on. And they assumed a lot of the social aspects that the Council had before. So, perhaps it was a matter of programming or perhaps it was a matter of the . . . those who were originally interested dying out.

- Q. OK. Now, could you please tell me what your impressions are of the volunteer system in Rochester?
- A. I think it's excellent. That was one of the things I faulted in the Women's Movement when they said that volunteers shouldn't exist as such but should get paid for their work. I don't think you could possibly pay people for the amount of time they spend in volunteer service.
- Q. Are most of the volunteers women?
- A. In the women's groups, but we have plenty of men volunteers in the Chest and in the Rochester Philharmonic organization and other organizations and do a fantastic job, too. And certainly in the Federation.
- Q. Do you think that there's an increase of professionals working in these organizations?
- A. Yes, definitely.
- Q. How about professionals attached to the organizations? That is. . .
- A. Certainly when it comes to the Federation or Bonds for Israel or the Jewish Community Center you have a lot of professionals. When it comes to the women's groups like Hadassah, Council, you don't have. Oh, in. . . to go back in Hadassah, Council, and Jewish women, there are professionals at the national level, but not at the local level. So the women do a tremendous amount of work, all the secretarial work and all the bookkeeping and everything else. It's really a labor of love.
- Q. Do you think that professional participation is a good thing? Do you think that there should be professional organization to these. . .?
- A. Well, I. . . it's very necessary in certain part of. . . part for organization on the national level and especially in fund raising so that the millions of dollars changing hands and all. . . But I do think that that we've reached the point where we're getting to be too much like business.

- Q. OK. Now could you please tell me what when you were part of the Sisterhood of Beth El what sorts of activities the Sisterhood did and how you were personally involved?
- A. I'm trying to remember. . . You know, my memory is light in certain regards. I don't remember whether I was Program Chairman or Membership Chairman back in the old days or which organization it was. But, at any rate, that was the sort of thing that I was interested in. But, to Sisterhood the main activity was to . . . well, to help in any way possible the temple family, such as the kiddush that they had every Saturday and other receptions and also scholarship programs for the young people and their education program. And of course, programming itself and just to keep the organization going. But, I sat on the Board and, as I say, I think I did . . . I was involved. You know, they used to have these functions, the dances and the Thanksgiving Dance and all kinds of big functions. And you participated. You took your turn waiting on tables and you took your turn doing anything that was necessary. They had the Torah Scholarship Fund and so on and you participated in all those things.
- Q. Do you think the Sisterhood changed. . . has changed at all?
- A. Oh, I think it's a viable organization. I think they're still doing a good job and the younger women are taking over. They're doing a fine job.
- Q. OK. Now, you are currently Vice-President of the Federation?
- A. That's right.
- Q. Could you just tell me about Federation activities in Rochester and your. . .
- A. And my involvement?
- Q. Yea.
- A. Well, I'm on the Executive Board and I was Co-Chairman of Allocations, very involved in the allocations process. And now I am Chairman of a Campus Complex Committee, which was organized about six months ago to look into the

A. (Continued) possibility of having other agencies besides the Jewish Community Center at the site of what is now the Center. This is still a study process that's going on. In fact tonight we have a meeting, final meeting of Phase I. The basic idea of the Campus Complex, which has been tried in a number of communities throughout the country, is that rather than isolate people that are age. . . in the old home, which we have over on St. Paul Street, you bring them into an area where they can be part of life, so they can look out the windows and they can see the children and the nursery school playing at the Center. Or, if they're ambulatory they can go over and participate, lectures, at the Center. They're not isolated, and they would be part of what is going on if they were able to participate health-wise. So what they're talking about, and I don't know if and when it will be a possibility to really go ahead on this because financially the implications are gigantic, but they are basically talking about is having a home for the aged, apartments for the aged, on an area adjacent to the Jewish Community Center. The possibility of having a Hillel School adjacent to the Community Center. The possibility of having the high school, continuing high school, at that same site. And also having services from the Jewish Family Service come out to the same area as a satellite program. So this is the thing that we're investigating. And the last six months we've been doing a study of various aspects of this whole idea. And what will come of it I don't know.

Q. Is there enough land out there to do that?

A. They have an option on twenty acres of land in addition to what the Jewish Community Center has. The Jewish Community Center has five acres which has not been used. We have an option on twenty acres of land. That's twenty-five acres, and there's still other land that might be purchased.

Q. OK. Do you think that from this past six months of study, do you think that

- Q. (Continued) the community would be sympathetic to that sort of setup?
Or is it too early to tell?
- A. I . . . from the feeling that has come out of this I think that the . . . that the community would be ready for something like this. And, the . . . the cities that have tried it through. . . in different parts of the country have found that it has worked. But I think it would require an educational process. I don't think you could just say we're doing it and that's that because the funding implications are great.
- Q. Enormous, yea.
- A. And I think therefore you have to sort of sell the idea to the community.
- Q. Wouldn't that isolate the Jewish community a little bit more?
- A. Well, that is one thing that is raised as a . . . something not in favor of it. But, I don't think so. I . . . I don't feel that this is further ghettoization. I don't think it just works that way. Now this. . . the Jewish Community Center was put out in an area that is certainly not just a Jewish area. And they do have members of their organization now who are not Jewish. It has to be that way because they're partially funded by the Community Chest so they can't close the doors. And basically I think you would have to do the same to the Jewish Home.
- Q. I was just gonna ask you that.
- A. I think that according to the law if a person wanted to go to a Jewish home rather than a . . . a non-Jewish home, if you had room, you would probably have to consider admitting them.
- Q. But do you think that would happen realistically?
- A. Oh, I think generally speaking a Gentile person would not normally go to a home that is primarily Jewish.
- Q. Is the Gentile membership in the JCC now considerable at all?

- A. I don't have the statistics on that, but I know there is some membership of Gentiles.
- Q. OK. That's really very interesting.
- A. It's an interesting concept. And I. . . I can see some great advantages to the whole idea. Instead of duplicating many of the services you would utilize the Jewish Community Center to the fullest, such as the library. The library could be enhanced and made available to the Hillel School and the home for the aged. And yet if the Jewish Home were built there they would have their own lounges and so on, so they just wouldn't come over and sit at the JCC all the time. But, and of course the Hillel School could use the swimming pool and the physical facilities without building a new complex of their own, physical facilities. So, there could be a saving to the overall community.
- Q. OK. I have a question about the Allocations Committee. Now, had there ever been problems as to who should get how much? You know, I mean, what sorts of major difficulties do you run into in allocations?
- A. Well, the allocations process at the Federation level is a very complex but interesting process and I'm sure someone will go into it in depth so I don't want to do that. But, your. . . your problem is that you have. . . you raise so many dollars and in the Emergency Fund so many of those dollars go to Israel automatically. And then you are left with a certain amount of dollars to allocate in the community of Rochester. And every year people ask for an increase. The Bureau of Jewish Education, the Hillel Foundation of the University of Rochester, the Jewish Family Service for its Refugee Program and now they're bringing in Russians and need more money, and all these other agencies that come to the Federation for funding locally have asked for increases. So, you have to make judgments on . . . on the basis of the money you have.

Q. Has there been a shift in allocations?

A. Well, I think there is more being spent on cultural activities than there was a few years ago. But I think basically your major amount of money still has to go to Israel because that's a matter of life and the smaller amounts are kept in the community. And also you have to support some of the national agencies and some of your funds go for some of the national agencies like the Anti-Defamation League and the American Jewish Congress, the American Jewish Committee, so on.

Q. Also a very large chunk goes to the UJA does it not?

A. Yes, well that's the overseas, that's the part for Israel. Oh, well the UJA some of it goes to other parts of the world, but the major part goes to Israel.

Q. Has there been a continuity in specific donations to the Emergency Fund?

A. I don't have all those figures. I think that someone else would have more, you know, knowledge on that.

Q. OK. I would like to talk then, unless you have something. . . have I left something out about the Federation that you can think of?

A. No, they've organized the Women's Association, but I'm sure someone else will discuss the Women's Association. That was organized a couple of years ago. And that, primarily I think, is to keep in touch with the women who work on the drive and also to coordinate some of the women's organizations, like an umbrella organization to help them avoid duplication in dates and so on and so forth. No, I think I'm sure that someone else has gone into depth on the Federation.

Q. OK. Well, then I would like to talk about Rehovot for a while.

A. All right.

Q. When did. . . when did the idea start? Whose idea was it to have a sister city?

A. Well, Rochester now has six sister cities. It started with Reine, France.

- A. (Continued) Then they have Wurtzburg, Germany and Calcanosetta, Italy and I think that Rehovot was the fourth. And then they had Krakov, Poland and now Bomakomali in Africa. The . . . the idea I believe started from Stephen May who was Mayor at that time to . . . to have a Jewish, an Israeli city as a sister city. And I believe he approached the Federation, and the Federation after much thought came up with the idea that Rehovot would be a fine sister city because they have the Weissman Institute there, which is a university, graduate university of nationwide repute, international repute. And so it was agreed upon, of course, it took a bit of doing. You know, correspondence back and forth. And then our names were suggested, my husband and I are co-chairmen, and so we were asked by the Mayor May at that time if we would assume the chairmanship. At the time we didn't realize it was gonna be as complicated as it has turned out to be. But, we've been co-chairmen since 1972.
- Q. What does a sister city do? I mean, not just necessarily in Israel but all six of these sister cities?
- A. Well, let me just put it in the proper frame of reference. There are over 700 sister cities in the world involving about 73 different countries. And there are approximately 550 cities in the United States involved in this relationship. It goes back to Dwight Eisenhower in 1956 who suggested this and felt that a people-to-people kind of program would build understanding whereas sometimes governments and statesmen aren't able to do it. So the whole sister city program throughout the country has involved all kinds of exchanges. For instance, in the time of tragedy like in Guatemala, the earthquake, they immediately started sending all kinds of supplies and . . . down to the sister city in Guatemala from the sister cities in the United States. Basically our Rehovot program is still very young, very new. We

- A. (Continued) took a group of 29 people from Rochester to Rehovot for a charter signing trip.

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A (Interview II)

Interview with FLORENCE STURMAN
June 29, 1976
By Tina Isaacs

Interview II
Tape 1
Side B

- Q. This is Tina Isaacs interviewing Florence Sturman. This is Tape 2, Side B. Right. We were talking about the sister cities program. And I would just like to know in general what kinds of activities go on in sister cities? Is it fund raising? Is it. . .
- A. Well, as I say, in each community there might be different kinds of programs that are going on. Now, as far as the Rehovot/Rochester program, we are not fund raising. In fact, the few times when we have needed funds we have gone to the Federation and they have been kind enough to give us some funds. In the short period since our existence we have had three exchange students here. We have had one student that was here for a . . . I believe about three years at the Rochester Institute of Technology. And he has returned to Israel and has gained expertise in photography, has set up a studio there. And I understand a picture of his is at Ben Gurion Airport blown up on the wall. Then we have a student here at the University of Rochester who's getting his doctorate in optics. And he will be working for the government. And the program here is

A. (Continued) something that he could not get in Israel, so it will definitely be a benefit to the Israeli government. And we also have our first high schools exchange student under the ATAD program, which is the Association for Teenage Diplomats. He has been spending this last year at Pittsford-Mendon High School, and he's made a tremendous impact. That is a practically wholly non-Jewish high school. The Jews are in the minority. And Koby Moritz has really given them a most positive impression of the type of person that comes out of Israel. He's just been wonderful, and he spent the year in the home of Mr. and Mrs. Sanford Liebschutz. So, although all these programs take money we basically have not been fund raising to provide the monies. In the high school situation we help provide transportation and Liebschutz took care of the rest. In the situation with Shak Eli at the University of Rochester, the University gave a scholarship. And we took care of the subsidy for the first two years. And the government of Israel is taking care of the subsidy for the third year. And in the situation at R.I.T., we did help fund part of that, but the young man, Koby Yakir, worked part-time and earned some of his own money. So we do not look upon ourselves as fund raising. Basically we try to do anything we can to enhance the image of Israel in Rochester. Last summer Mayor Reichman came here and there were twenty young people plus three chaperones that were here, plus a couple Israelis who are . . . are in New York City at the Embassy there, for the international conference which took place in Rochester, Sister Cities International Conference. And the young people were here for two weeks living in homes and performing. They had a program that they had worked out, partially dance, partially singing and so on. And they performed a number of times, in Midtown Plaza, Temple B'rith Kodesh, at the Americana Hotel, the . . . on the Genesee River banks and so on. So, when people come from Israel we give

- A. (Continued) them as much exposure as possible. They mix with the Gentile community and it's strictly a getting-to-know-you proposition.
- Q. Have you sent students over to Israel?
- A. The last few summers there have been young people who have gone to Israel as part of this youth program. And tomorrow 35 young people will be leaving Rochester with their. . . with three chaperones and will spend six weeks in Israel. During this period they will go to Rehovot for at least a day. But they're basically a group that's going under the auspices of the Bureau of Jewish Education rather than under the Rehovot Committee. And last summer the same thing happened. Very often when we have groups going from Rochester, a ministers group or some such group, we make the arrangements with the Mayor's office in Rehovot for special kind of treatment or for a reception or some kind of activity.
- Q. I see. Now, do you have any Rochesterians doing graduate work or undergraduate work in Israel?
- A. There. . . there were a few stu. . . oh, there are a number that are doing work in Israel, but there were a couple of students at the Rehovot . . . the Weissman Institute the last few years. And there is a professor there at the Weissman Institute. But, basically they went on their own. This was not part of our exchange. They went on their own and we were happy they were there.
- Q. What kind of information dissemination activity do you pursue?
- A. Actually when . . . we don't do too much of that except for instance when there is international fair of some kind and they have booths at Midtown Plaza, we have information on Rehovot that we distribute. But, we don't really make a concerted effort in that regard. Whenever anyone calls us we can give them the information.

Q. Is . . . are you in any way connected with the Speakers' Bureau?

A. No, I'm not. I don't. . .

Q. Do you know if any of the talks involve Rehovot at all?

A. Oh, I am sure that they probably do refer to Rehovot in some of their talks on Israel. I think it's fairly well known that Rehovot is now one of Rochester's sister cities. We have an inter. . . we have a Sister Cities International Board of Directors that meets monthly in the Mayor's office. And my husband and I are both on that Board. And basically this program is part of the Rochester program. The Federation comes into the picture because they help us fund. Not only do they help us with funds, but last year when we had this whole group of about 25 they helped us in every possible way. With housing and mailings and so on and so forth. We couldn't have done it without them.

Q. Now, do . . . are the other five sister cities programs run in the same way as this one?

A. No, every . . . every program is run differently. The Reine, France program which was the first one, and they're run on an entirely different basis. They have a tremendous program. In fact, they have an international fair in Reine, France and all kinds of equipment was sent over for the international fair from Rochester. Kodak had a big display and I think Xerox had a big display and so on. This weekend they're having quite a contingent come, I think about 60 people coming from Reine, France as part of the Bi-centennial and they'll be in Rochester for the weekend. Now, for instance, Galtinsetta has a Galtinsetta Society here in town. There's quite a group of Italians whose ancestry comes from Galtinsetta and they . . . they've organized a regular society and they have a big dance once a year in which they raise funds for their program. But they haven't been successful in getting any

A. (Continued) exchange students here. Now Wurtzburg, Germany has a tremendous program going with exchange students. I think they have had about 100 exchange students going back and forth between the two cities in the past, I think they've been in existence eight or ten years. But, they have done a tremendous job with exchange students. Now, we're having a little difficulty on the exchange program because it's difficult to get students to come here. There's a . . . it's very complicated when they leave Rochester at the end of high school years and go back because they can't automatically get into college. They miss the matriculation exams and there's an awful lot of red tape and they have to go directly into the Army and it's very complicated. Right at this point we're working on this one boy who's had all kinds of obstacles put in the way of his future career just by . . . because he has been in Rochester for the year. And also if a student were to go to Israel as an exchange student for a year, say the senior year in high school, he or she would have to have a knowledge of Hebrew. So that would eliminate a whole segment of the community. Eventually we hope that we will be able to send a student there though.

Q. Say. . . I mean if you were going to send a high school student it would have to be somebody from the Hillel Day School?

A. It would probably have to be someone who had a real knowledge of Hebrew.

Q. Yea. Very interesting.

A. But it is . . . I think it's a worthwhile program. I think that nationwide we do a tremendous amount of work on interexchanges and visits and so on. People travel back and forth. And it's bound to promote some good feeling.

Q. So the main thrust of the programming is interpersonal relationships. I mean that is. . .

A. Exactly.

Q. Having people. . .

A. Get to know each other on a . . . on a person-to-person basis. With all, . . . without all the red tape of government and protocol and politics.

Q. OK. You said that the newest sister city was in Africa?

A. That's right.

Q. How is that working out?

A. It just started. They were here last summer, a delegation was here for the Sister Cities International Conference. But, . . . and they're still working on a . . . they're still working on trying to get a delegation from Rochester to go to Bomakomali for charter signing.

Q. Where. . . pardon my lack of geography, but where in Africa is this?

A. I'm trying to remember. Don't ask.

Q. OK. (Laughter) I was just curious, you know, if it's in . . . in the south it would be . . .

A. In trouble.

Q. Right.

A. I. . . I have a feeling that it's on the west coast. . .

Q. Well that would make sense. What was the International Conference like? Why was it held in Rochester first of all?

A. Well, Frank Lamb is the National Vice-President. He offered our city as the site, and so they came to Rochester for a conference that lasted four or five days. It was a tremendous undertaking. And it worked out well. People came from all over the world for the conference. And they had parades and they had all kinds of activities, discussions, seminars, banquets, picnics, everything.

Q. Did the people stay in hotels or did they stay at people's houses?

A. Both. Both. Mostly at private homes, but there were some housed at the Hotel Americana.

Q. Do you think that the enthusiasm for the sister cities program is growing?

A. Yes, it keeps growing year after year. The VISTA program, which started a few years ago which you I'm sure know about, seems to be dying out. And I don't know why that is. I guess part of it is funding and impetus from the national government. But, this program which is done by volunteers on a one-to-one basis seems to be growing every year.

Q. Is there any connection at all. . . you mentioned VISTA, is there any connection at all with the Peace Corps?

A. No.

Q. None. 'Cause VISTA is just within America is it not?..

A. No. VISTA. . . VISTA. . . well, the young people are sent from the United States, but they're sent all over the world to do. . . to work. You see, they are trained and then they go to various countries for a period of two years.

Q. I thought that was the Peace Corps. Well, anyway. . .

A. Maybe. . . maybe I'm wrong. I might be wrong. Maybe it is that.

Q. The international. . .

A. Yes, the Peace Corps might be the international one and VISTA might be the local one. Although I know that . . .

Q. It doesn't matter.

A. I'm not sure. OK.

Q. But, you think that that's sort of dying out?

A. I don't think it's as popular as it was with. . . I think that the young people aren't quite as motivated to go . . . to give two years of themselves to a program of this kind. I think that the sixties were a time of turmoil so there was a feeling that you . . . wanting to do something positive for the underprivileged. And I think that there were tremendous changes in the seventies which. . .

Q. Actually, that leads right into my next category. You said that young people responded in the early sixties to a time of turmoil.

A. Right.

Q. Now, how about Israel which is having its times of turmoil? Has there been, do you think, ups and downs in sentiment in the community for active participation in Israeli-type organ. . . you know, activities? During say. . . this is from its inception, or even before, since you've been here till now. Have . . . were more people participating. . . say during the war in '47, '48 than recent. . . more recently, you know, '67, '72?

A. I . . . I think that the American people have responded to Israel certainly since it became a state. Many people were involved before it became a state. But I think that once Israel became a state practically all Jewish people in the community started backing Israel. During times of crisis when there is a war there is a complete outpouring, financially and an effort to build goodwill in the community towards Israel. So, but I think all in all it's a continuous feeling of the need for support from the diaspora to the people of Israel.

Q. How many times have you yourself been to Israel?

A. We've been there four times. And we were scheduled to go a fifth when my husband took sick, but we'll probably make another trip.

Q. Have you gone as a private person, or a . . . in an official capacity?

A. We . . . both ways. My husband's on the Board . . . Deputy Board of Governors of Hebrew University, so we've gone to some of the Board meetings at the Hebrew University. We went at one time for the dedication of the Samuel Sturman Psychology Building at the Hebrew University. Perhaps I ought to say something about. . .

Q. Would you please?

A. . . . because I don't know whether anyone has mentioned that. Samuel Sturman

A. (Continued) was my husband's uncle. And he was the first President, I believe, of the joint Jewish Community Council. Now I don't know what it was called then, but he was the first one to hold that office. He had been President of Temple Beth El. And he was a bachelor, and he was very idealistic when it came to the State of Israel. He felt that out of Israel would come peace and Israel would be a beacon of light for the world and so on. And he felt that he ought to do something in behalf of Israel. And so the proposition was given to him to do something for Hebrew University, that by doing something for Hebrew University he would make more of an impact on Israel than if he were to give the money to lesser yeshivote or so on which he had an interest in and all. So, they did consult him and they suggested that there was a need for a Psychology Department at the Hebrew University. And he really didn't know what this involved at all, but he said if that's what you need, go ahead and build it. So he gave them the money for the first building which was a modest building. It was air-conditioned so they could keep the animals in the building for experimental purposes, but most of the building was underground. So it. . . but we went over for the dedication of that building. And then he left his entire estate to Hebrew University. They did build on a wing. They used some of the money for the Harry Truman Institute of Research, which was originally supposed to be the Harry Truman Peace Center there. So that he made an impact in both areas. And he spent his lifetime in Rochester, so I think that his name should be considered.

Q. That's fascinating. What other activities do you know of that he participated in?

A. Well, I think in his early years he was in. . . he was involved in, as I say, the temple. He was President of the temple, and I think he was one of the charter members of Temple Beth El. And the Community Council or whatever it

A. (Continued) was called at that time. Oh, and also the Children's Home. He was involved in the Children's Home and I believe the Home for the Aged.

Q. What did he do? I mean. . .professionally.

A. He was in the. . . he owned a furniture store.

Q. What was the name of the furniture store?

A. Sturman Home Furnishing Company.

Q. Does anything. . . do any memories spring to mind about him that you can think of off-hand before we. . .?

A. Yes, he was a very modest, dignified, quiet man, self-educated. He had a nice sense of humor. And it was amazing that he was as involved in the community as he was. But I think this gave meaning to his life because his life was all work. There were no children. Community gave him a social life, too.

Q. And when did he die please?

A. I think he died around . . . I think it was in 1966 or thereabouts. He was actively involved with Alfred Hart, Harry Harris and some of the old-timers, Arthur Lowenthal and people of that quality in. . . in working behalf of the community.

Q. OK. Would you ever live in Israel do you think?

A. No.

Q. Why?

A. Well perhaps I'm too comfortable. I'll be honest with you. I. . . I feel that we in the diaspora have a real service to perform in interpreting Israel to the United States and fund raising on behalf of Israel. I don't think that Israel could survive without that help. And I don't buy Ben Gurion's feeling that all Jews if they're true Zionists should move to Israel. I feel that you can be a . . . an ardent Zionist and live in the United States.

Q. Can you be a good Jew and not be an ardent Zionist?

A. Well, that. . .

Q. A difficult question.

A. A difficult question and you. . . you're. . . you'll have to define what is a "good Jew."

Q. Well, just, you know. . .

A. I think that in. . . in today's world you would certainly have to have a feeling and compassion and understanding and sympathy with the State of Israel in order to be a good Jew. I would almost feel that that was necessary. You could be a good person. . . you could be a Jew by birth and be a good person, you might devote yourself to very worthwhile causes, and if you had no feeling for the State of Israel I still don't think that could be a really a good Jew.

Q. OK. Have your sons ever been to Israel?

A. One of my sons has been to Israel, spent a summer there. The other two have talked about it but they haven't scheduled it yet. And they will, they will definitely go.

Q. OK. What sorts of direction. . . what sort of direction do you think that the Rochester . . . well, the Rochester Jewish community and the City of Rochester are going? I mean, what changes do you think have taken place in the Jewish community since 1938 since you've been here?

A. Well, I think one thing. . . there. . . I don't think there are the divisions within the community that there were when I came. If you were a Reform Jew in those days you were almost an elitest group within the Jewish community. I think today there is no lines of demarcation. I think that basically the . . . the temples, Beth El and B'rith Kodesh, are much more similar than they were in those days. The . . . the whole rituals that B'rith Kodesh now are more nearly those of Beth El. And, of course, the memberships are almost interchangeable. Families are interchangeable. So I think there is a blending

- A. (Continued) within the community of all different segments. I think the Federation has become much more prominent. There is a coordination that there wasn't in the early years when I was here. There has been a proliferation of all kinds of volunteer activities. It's a tremendously highly organized community, much more so than when I first came. But, I think it is a very fine community. I think we have national standing. I think that it's a community that you can be proud to be part of.
- Q. So you think things are getting better?
- A. I think they have been good for some time now and I think they'll continue that way.
- Q. OK.
- A. I'm not discouraged about any aspect of the Jewish community.
- Q. Not even in the younger generation?
- A. No, I'm very optimistic about the younger generation.
- Q. OK. Now, can you think of anything that . . . that I have glossed over or that you'd like to discuss longer? Either your impressions about Israel or the Jewish community or really just about anything?
- A. Well, I would hope that someplace in this study that some information would have been secured about people like Tillie Rose, who made a tremendous impact in the community in the early years. She was one of the founders of Hadassah and was practically a one-woman social agency.
- Q. Could you tell me what . . . ?
- A. But, now she might have been included in the history that Rabbi Stuart Rosenberg wrote about, but if she were not I would hope that someone would make an effort to get some information about Tillie Rose.
- Q. Did you know her?
- A. Yes. But she has family here and family still living out of town and a daughter,

- A. (Continued) Sadie Rose Wilerstein, who is now in her eighties but who is married to a rabbi who has written books. And she would be the person to give information about her mother, if that information was not secured elsewhere. And then there's a woman like Raye Aiole who made a tremendous impact in the . . . in the early years when I was here. She was President of Temple Sisterhood for twenty some years. And she does have a place in any written history of this period.
- Q. Do you think that most of the local leaders are sympathetic to the Jewish community? Local Gentile leaders?
- A. Yes, yes I do. I think there's a very strong feeling. I . . . my husband and I mix very often in the larger community and feel very comfortable about it. And I think there is a very warm feeling, and I know they certainly realize that we represent the Jewish community. So that I . . . I feel very comfortable about relations with the non-Jews.
- Q. But you think it's very important for the Jews to have a sense of community?
- A. Definitely. I definitely do. I feel that you cannot live in a community and be a good citizen in a community if you only work in behalf of Jewish institutions. I think you can be a good Jew and work in behalf of all kinds of institutions. I don't think you can neglect your own, no question about that. I don't think you can neglect your own, but I think that there's room for work in behalf of both.
- Q. Has the tenor of life in Rochester changed at all? Obviously I mean things have gotten much bigger and the corporations have become much more powerful, but I mean is . . . is the ambience different?
- A. I don't see the changes. I think it's still basically a small community. You . . . it . . . it's still isn't a . . . a . . . well, it still isn't a community that you get lost in. I think that the history of Rochester during my period

- A. (Continued) of existence here has been very positive except for the period of the sixties with the riots and all. I don't think that we can be proud of that particular period and I think there is as much left to be done in the black community. And I don't think the Jew's in a position to do it alone, but as participants in the larger community I think they can help. But, Rochester has remained basically the same community that I came to in '38.
- Q. Do you think it's a conservative community?
- A. Yes, I think it's conservative but I like that. I . . . I like the conservatism about it. I don't object to that. I do think that there are certain places where there haven't been changes at all. For instance, in the country clubs you still are not welcome to join the Country Club of Rochester or the Genesee Valley Club. I think the Genesee Valley Club might have a token or two Jews and the same with the University Club. The University City Club. But, so that is something that has not changed, which is surprising. It is surprising that the clubs would not be open.
- Q. Is that anti-Semitism do you think?
- A. I suppose it might be a form of it. Not overt, but certainly there must be a subconscious element of anti-Semitism. Or maybe it's just a feeling that they want to be exclusive. I don't know whether their doors are open to others who do not meet their qualifications financially or culturally or, you know, or members of old families. There are such qualifications. I just don't know.
- Q. Do you think that Rochester is becoming too suburban?
- A. Yes, oh, yes. I think the change in that regard is very. . . is definite. We'll have to do something to prevent our . . . the main part of our city from just deteriorating further. I think that it's become more black all the time and the whites have gone out to the suburbs. And I think that there has to be