

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

Interviewee(s) Jack and Bess Cohen

Interviewer Tina Isaacs

Date(s) of interview 6/14/76

Setting (place of interview, people present, impressions)

The interview took place in the Cohen's apartment in Brighton. Both were eager to help and very friendly.

Background of interviewee

Jack and Bess Cohen ran Cohen's Restaurant for almost forty years. The restaurant was a local gathering place for the Jewish (and non-Jewish) community. Both are native Rochesterians of Eastern European descent, and both grew up in the Joseph Ave. area (where the restaurant was also located.) Mrs. Cohen was formerly a President of Hadassah, and has done much volunteer work in the community. Mr. Cohen now owns and operates a liquor store.

Interview abstract

The most rewarding part of the interview was the Cohen's reminiscences about the restaurant. They miss it very much, although they don't miss the backbreaking work which sometimes went into it. We spent at least one-half of the interview talking about the restaurant, and covered a whole range of topics (none thoroughly) in the course of the rest of the interview. The Cohen's married life was mainly centered around the restaurant.

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

Social history

Family

Demographic/residential

Economic

Political/civic

Zionism/Israel

Jewish community

community relations

Religious life

Jewish education

Anti-semitism

*although all topics were covered, none were dwelled upon.

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) --

Tape I side A

Mr. Cohen's background

Joseph Ave. area

Restaurant originally opened in 1926, new building in 1931
closed 1965

JYMA

Eastern European parents

Mrs. Cohen's background

Joseph Ave. area

U of R

Work experience

Married in 1931, lived on Harvard Street

*Quota system at the U of R

Value of education and work experience

Hebrew education

Beth-El

Decision making: women's participation

***Restaurant

parents' participation

change in restaurant over the years

*10% discount for U of R students

Size of the 1926 store/ 1931 store

**Employees

Vaudeville theatre-- the Palace

Electioneering-- Nelson Rockefeller's visit

Hours worked a week

*Clientele

*Murder outside restaurant-- a union official

***Riots

Restaurant was wrecked

Reaction

Black help and Black customers

Outside agitators

Thousands of dollars worth of damage

Opened up after riots for one year

Riots were not anti-Semitic

***Restaurant

Changes in clientele

Customers mostly Jewish

Changes in Joseph Ave. area

*Depression and economic fluctuations

 * Joseph Ave. torn up for a long time

*Political discussions in the restaurant

 Socialism

Catering hall upstairs

*Changes in the neighborhood

never prevented people from coming

fragmentation of culture?

 JYMA, Hochstein School, synagogues

Harvard St. neighborhood

Beth-El

Gentile friends

*Liquor Store: South Ave.

 comparison with restaurant

***Restaurant

Sundays 12noon to 10pm
Families
Cooking of food
*Purchasing of food
Fox worked for the Cohen's
Easier to find help earlier on
Personal efforts in restaurant
*Sabbath business
Baden St. Settlement
JY--Hyde Park
Used to run kitchen until 1945

Tape I side B

*Mrs. Cohen's family Background

Parents are Eastern Europeans
#9 school: whole family were students there
First tea and coffee store in Rochester owned by parents
Grandfather first Jewish baker in Rochester

*Political affiliation

Mr. Cohen's father was a Socialist and belonged to the
Workman's Circle
Mr. Cohen also belongs to the Workman's Circle
Union activity in restaurant

Jewish Community in Rochester

Israel bonds
Jewish identity
No changes in the Jewish Community
Young Rochesterians very religious

Mrs. Cohen was President of Hadassah 15 years ago

Fundraising

Contributions for Jewish organizations

Sisterhood at Beth-El

Fundraising

*Volunteer organizations

Gray Lady work in Genessee Hospital during WWII
Importance of volunteer work outside of the Jewish community

Jewish community closed?

Holocaust

*U.N. and Israel

Visit to Israel
live there?
Contributions
Jewish survival without Israel

Change of opinion about the U.N.

Bernstein Chair

**Rabbi Bernstein

Friction between Reform/Conservative/Orthodox Jews?

*Friction between Eastern European and German Jews

Class difference
Hitler brings the Jewish community together
Arthur Lowenthal
always a close knit community

LOG: Jack and Bess Cohen (cont.)

****Intermarriage**

More now than ever, not so important now
Causes : college; upbringing is not different
Prevention
Less Kosher homes
American life less religious?

***Anti-semitism in Rochester**

Country Club incident

Differences between the Democrats and the Republicans in Rochester
Future for the Rochester Jewish Community

***Changes in affluences and position of the Jews**

Xerox more sympathetic than Kodak

Jewish values

Temples keep the community together

Education

Cultural accomplishments

Jewish contribution to American society

Self-sacrifice of parents

Last few seconds are missing.

Interview 1
Tape 1
Side A

Q. This is Tina Isaacs interviewing Jack and Bess Cohen. It's Monday, June the 14th, and I'm in the Cohen's apartment. Mr. Cohen, could you please tell me something about your background, where you were born and such?

Mr. Well, I was born in Rochester not too far from our restaurant on Stephanie Place right next to the No. 9 School. And went to Washington Junior High School, then went to East High School, and after graduating school went into the restaurant.

Q. When did. . . what year did you start the restaurant?

Mr. Well, the particular restaurant that. . . the original restaurant was started in. . . let's see, 19. . . it may have been 1926. And, we moved into the large restaurant in 1931. We remained there until we closed it in 1965.

Q. And, so you grew up in the Joseph Avenue area then?

Mr. Lived all my life in that area.

Q. What was it like growing up there?

Mr. Well, it was the traditional Jewish community. We had Jewish kids to play with, we had the JYMA, and the playground around the corner of our house. It was a nice childhood.

Q. Did you have any kind of a Hebrew education?

Mr. I did go to the Talmud Torah, we called it, and until I was Bar Mitzvah. After that I can't say that I did much more.

Q. Were your parents native Rochesterians?

Mr. No, no both of my parents were born in Russia and moved to England and then came to Rochester.

Q. And. . .

Mr. So I. . . I was born here, but I have a sister who was born in. . .

Q. I see. What year did your parents come over?

Mr. Let's see. I was born in 1907, had a brother that was a year or so earlier, would you say 1905? Maybe 1904 maybe. I'd say. . .so I lived in the Jewish area around Joseph Avenue all my life.

Q. Mrs. Cohen, where were you born?

Ms. Right here in Rochester.

Q. Also. . .

Ms. Also in the area that my husband was born, Joseph Avenue, lived there until . . . until I was ten years old then we moved to another area called Hyde Park. I went to grammar school there. I went to No. 9 School, then to No. 10 School. Went to high school, went to University of Rochester. . .it was then called the Mechanics Institute which is the Rochester. . .

Mr. . . . Institute of Technology.

Ms. . . . Rochester Institute of Technology now.

Mr. R.I.T.

Ms. And then I worked in Sears-Roebuck, I did personnel work, did all the hiring and firing for a long time. And then I was married, and we lived on Harvard Street. We had some children and . . . I've been in Hadassah, and I should tell you I do hospital work, I do volunteer work in the. . . in the hospitals. Help my husband in the business. And what else do I do, dear?

Mr. Well, you keep busy.

Q. When you were at the U. of R. were you aware that there was a quota system there then?

Ms. Yes, I was.

Q. Well, how did you feel about that?

Ms. Well, if I did learn a history of my name, I don't know whether you'd want

Ms. (Continued) to record it. But, anyway, I went to school and I was interviewed at the time by a woman called Lou Monroe, who is long since gone. And when I came there for the interview she asked me my name and I said it was Bess Rose Goldenson, was my maiden name. And she said to me, your name is Elizabeth, and I said no it is Bess. Goldenson, she says, and your parents are both Jew? And I said yes. She said, and your name isn't Elizabeth? And I said no my name is Bess. And she said, and your father is a Jew and your mother's Jewish? And I said yes. So, anyway I hated the school for that reason. I always felt awkward. And at the time we were there there were very few Jews. But, of course, since it's changed considerably. I think the enrollment there now is as large for the Jewish enrollment as it is the Gentile.

Q. Something like that.

Ms. Right. I wouldn't doubt it.

Q. When did all this change? Do. . . do you know?

Ms. Well, it took. . . I was out of school for a while. I'd been out of the school for a long time.

Q. Have you kept up with any, you know, affiliated U. of R. sort of things?

Ms. No, I really haven't. I'm very friendly with a lot of the girls from my. . . that were in my class. At the time we were there we had. . . we formed the first Jewish sorority. And we had a few girls that we're still friendly with that were part of the class. We see each other, our husbands and wives.

Q. Do you think. . . now you've worked all your life.

Ms. That's right.

Q. And do you think that having college education might have made you want to work more? You know, the. . . the. . . do you think the more education a woman has the more she desires to work?

Ms. Well, I think that. . . I. . . I don't. . . I think the more education that she has. . . personally I don't think you can do any better than getting schooling. In fact, I wish that I wasn't as old as I am, I'd like to go back and take courses, 'cause I don't think now I'd have any kind of memory. But, I think going on to school is wonderful, I really do. I feel that in spite of the fact that I was married, went to work with my husband, helped him, that whatever I learned certainly didn't do me any harm. I find that going on to my work at the hospital, I do testing of newborn babies, hearing testing. And then I also work at the elementary schools doing work in the library. So I feel that my education certainly wasn't. . . hasn't gone to waste.

Mr. Well, that's always been one of my regrets that I didn't go on to college, but certain circumstances. . . my parents went into the restaurant business and they needed somebody to help 'em, so after high school I sort of did it. I really feel badly that I didn't.

Q. Did. . . did you have a Hebrew education, Mrs. Cohen?

Ms. No, I didn't. That I didn't, no.

Mr. She comes from a very religious family and her father was a. . . had a beautiful voice and used to act as a cantor in the shul, also a member of the family is Rabbi. . .

Ms. Rabbi Goldenson, who is the rabbi at Temple Emmanuel in New York.

Mr. He's a cousin of the. . .

Ms. But, I always regret that I didn't have a Hebrew education. But, it seems that I have. . . I had a brother. . . I have a brother and a sister and they went through Hebrew school. I went to Sunday school. But when it came my time there wasn't. . . I was just out of that class, there just wasn't time for me perhaps to be taken to Hebrew school. I always regreted the fact

Ms. (Continued) that I didn't.

Mr. Well, Bess goes to temple every Saturday, and she. . . she really would love to partake of the ceremony in Hebrew, but she doesn't and she misses it.

Q. What temple do you two belong to?

Ms. Beth El.

Mr. Beth El.

Q. Did you share most of the decision-making in your home?

Mr. Oh, sure. I. . .

Ms. You mean as youngsters?

Q. Well, no I mean. . .

Mr. When we were married?

Q. When you were married.

Mr. Oh, yes.

Ms. We really did. We don't. . . neither of us do anything without consulting the other.

Q. The reason I'm asking this question is that I'm very interested in women's equality and that sort of thing, so. . .

Mr. Well, she handles all the money. She's a better manager than I am.

Ms. I may do more talking, too, which doesn't mean that I'm more. . . I have more. . .

Mr. No, I don't think Bess is into that. . .

Ms. I mean I. . . I certainly don't see harm in a woman's exerting herself and trying to. . . to better herself and to voice her opinion. But, I do feel that I enjoy the house and I enjoy being a housewife, and we regret the fact that we have no children. But, of course, that was an act of G-d, we had nothing to do with that. But, we've been together. . . the fact that. . . well, the fact that we did have a loss has brought us closer together. I don't know whether that was. . . neither of us do anything

Ms. (Continued) without consulting each other. We do things together. It's been that way all our lives. For the 45 years, as I told you before, that we've been married.

Q. That's great.

Mr. No separate vacations.

Q. What. . . what year were you married?

Ms. 1907.

Mr. No, married.

Q. Married.

Mr. 1931.

Ms. 1931.

Mr. 1931.

Q. So you had the restaurant business then for five years before. . . ?

Mr. Well, they were not. . . they were sort of eating places, neighborhood places, but the large restaurant that we devoted all our efforts to that happened in 1934.

Q. Did your parents also participate in this. . . in the restaurant?

Mr. Yea, they were there originally, then my father passed away about a year or so after we opened the restaurant. My mother and myself, we continued on. She's been gone how many years?

Ms. Think back. . . it's so hard to remember. It's a good twenty years ago.

Mr. I'd say it was about twenty years.

Ms. Right.

Q. So how big was the business when you first. . . could you just describe, you know, the business? How it was when you first opened it up and how it changed through the years?

Mr. Well, it. . . it started as a . . . an active restaurant, and I think it

Mr. (Continued) progressed in importance as the years went by. Now, we've been closed for 11 years, and there isn't a day that somebody doesn't mention the restaurant and wonder when we're going to go back into it, and where can they get a good sandwich and a bowl of soup? And it just amazes me that people still remember the place.

Q. Everybody I've spoken to so far has said. . . that's the . . . right.

Ms. The clientele we had really, it was. . . it was. . . it was really something.

Mr. It was in the inner city but people from all areas of. . . of the city used to come down. And we'd have a special deal with the kids from the U. of R., we'd give 'em 10% discount if they came to the restaurant.

Ms. We always felt. . . excuse me for interrupting, we loved. . . always loved children. And it would seem that the least we could do for the kids at the U. of R., for example, was to give them something, you know, give them a discount, which we did. And this is part of my. . .

Mr. And then on Sunday when the eating facilities were closed they used to call up and order sandwiches. We would have hundreds of sandwiches. I don't know how we ever accomplished that. And distribute. . . and distribute 'em to all the dormitories and the girls up on the hill. And, my G-d, it was a job just taking care of that. We were always busy besides that. We always went out of our way to see that they were taken care of.

Q. So every Sunday you had a delivery truck going down to. . . ?

Mr. Oh, yes.

Ms. Yea, right out to campus. You know, we're out of the store so many years, as my husband said. And when we went out of business, this is after the riots, the letters that came in from all over the country, all over the world and said, students that had moved away and moved out of the country, had written letters saying how sorry they were to hear that we were closed,

Ms. (Continued) as a result there wasn't a place. . . that we weren't there, that there wouldn't be a place again when they came back with their families, and you know. And many families would bring their children down when they finished with college, this is really interesting. We had the parents that would come in, they'd say to us our son or our daughter is just entering school, will you see to it when they come down that they get a good meal? And, if they haven't the money, will you put it down in the books and let us know, and we'll pay for it eventually. You know, it's as though we had an added member to our family to take care of, and it was always a pleasure. Really a joy.

Q. How. . . how big was the restaurant you opened in 1926?

Mr. Well, that was in a little corner store that didn't have much seating capacity. This other one I think could accommodate over 100 people, then we had a delicatessen counter where people bought things to take out. And we also had a soda fountain counter that people sat at. So, we could accommodate over. . . about 125 people.

Q. And. . . how many people. . . do you have any idea about how many people you fed a week?

Mr. Oh dear, I couldn't even. . .

Ms. We had to count, I mean how could we get through. . .?

Mr. We employed about twenty-five people.

Q. 25, wow!

Ms. We used to have that on the weekend and more.

Q. The people you had working for you, were they friends, were they, you know, . . .?

Mr. No, they were just. . . they weren't. . . they were just employees, but they. . . many of 'em stayed with us years. We had people, waitresses, working for 15,

Mr. (Continued) 20 years. We had a chef here from New York until he retired at 65 years of age. He was with us at least 25, 30 years.

Ms. When we got them they stayed. They really did. It was always like a family, you know. We . . . we took good care of 'em, we treated them well. And in return they did the same for us. We had. . . we still. . . many of our girls still come by . . . my husband. . . (Transcriber's note: next brief interchange between Mr. and Mrs. Cohen is uttered too softly to pick up.) And they still continue to come or call. And when a birthday comes around, or an anniversary, we'll get cards from some of them. So, . . .

Q. Were most of the people you employed Jewish?

Mr. No, most were non-Jewish.

Ms. Well, most of them were Gentile.

Mr. Yea, we had to train 'em all, that was the hard part, because it was. . . there were no other Jewish restaurants. Whoever you got you had to teach 'em the names of the food, and what everything was all about, and it really was a trying experience to get 'em to do it the way you wanted to. And it would be the same as if I went into a Chinese restaurant, I wouldn't know too much about that either. So, it was a little difficult, but once they got used to it, they stayed on.

Ms. It was the days that they had vaudeville at the place they used to call the Palace Theatre?

Mr. Yea, Palace Theatre.

Ms. We had to send food up to. . . sandwiches up to. . . for the entertainers, you know, they'd call for orders. There were many people like. . . can you remember a few?

Mr. I can't remember all the names. But, many celebrities. . .

Ms. Remember the one with the ten-gallon hat, who was that?

Mr. There was an old western star called Tom Jones.

Ms. He came down Joseph Avenue, and we had the kids flock down there to see him, really fun days, years.

Mr. Every election time all the politicians would congregate, and shake hands with everybody and eat things that they'd never tasted in their life before.

Ms. Remember the year that Roosevelt came? Not Roosevelt, but Rockefeller?

Mr. Rockefeller.

Ms. Rockefeller came. He wrote us a letter before and said he'd like to come down with his entourage for lunch and he wanted the place. . . what was it, dear?

Mr. Yea, he was there. Senator Keating was there at the time, and . . .

Q. When was this?

Mr. It goes back. . . I think in his first term of office when he was trying to be elected the first time.

Ms. And then he wrote a beautiful letter thanking us and thanking for the service, and whatever. . . lot. . . lot of interesting moments. Along with the heart-breaking, the hard and long hours, they were a lot of fun, too.

Q. Now how many hours a week did you put in down there?

Mr. Well, at one time we were open seven days a week. It was when the war came on that it was a little harder to get help. We used to close on Mondays then, and be open six days. So it made it a little easier. But, on an average day it was anywhere from ten to twelve hours, it was long hours and hard work.

Q. Did you have sort of a typical customer, you know? What kind of people came to this. . . came to Cohen's?

Mr. Well, from all walks of life. We used to have the junk peddlers would come. . .

Ms. For breakfast.

Mr. And the. . .

Ms. And we'd discuss all these worldly. . .

Mr. And the lawyers would come down, doctors would come down, and just business people.

Q. How about. . .

Mr. Salesmen that used to travel on the road always made a place to head for.

Ms. And that group there that used to come from Eastman Kodak?

Mr. We had some factory businesses around, they would come down. During Passover when. . . it's suprising how observing most of the . . . the Jewish professional people were because when Passover came around we'd see them during that week, and as soon as the Passover was over they would patronize their old places near their offices. We used to get a little disturbed about it but. . .

I think that whole deal with being Jews, wouldn't allow 'em to go and eat bread.

Q. Well, do you have any memories. . . well, you must have millions of interesting experiences that happened and interesting customers that came in. Is there anything that, you know, immediately springs to mind?

Mr. Well, there was once a restaurant convention, this was during the year of murder, incorporated. And the executives from the union used to come down to the restaurant every night and have their dinner. And, this is on a Friday night. And as they walked out the door, somebody took a shot and killed one of the officials. And it was a murder, incorporated incident because later many of the officials in that union jumped out of windows in New York, sky scrapers, it made all the front pages all over New York and all over the country because it was rather an important group of union leaders there. And we had the riots take place. We were disturbed during the riots. They wrecked the place.

Q. Could you. . . could you describe, you know, what. . . what your experiences

Q. (Continued) were during the riots?

Mr. Well, if anybody was taking a bet that it would happen in Rochester, they would lose. You know, you would think they would lose the bet because it was a most unusual place for a riot to take place. They always had good relations with the colored people. And we used to have people. . .

Ms. We had colored help.

Mr. Yea, we had colored help, and we used to have black people come in, and many of 'em wouldn't sit down, but they would take food to go out or else sit at the counter and have something. And there was never any problems. When that happened it was just amazing, especially we were amazed, never had any problems, no hold-ups, no burglaries, no nothing, then. . . And we still think that it was a . . . something engineered, it wasn't very spontaneous. I think it was . . . I think it was planned, and outsiders who engineered the whole thing.

Q. Who?

Mr. I don't know who it could be. But, you know, they were getting a little . . .

Ms. Restless.

Mr. . . . restless at the time, and just wanted to do something.

Q. Why?

Mr. I think people from Buffalo came to town.

Q. Yea. Why do you think it happened? I just, you know, your impressions?

Mr. I really don't know. I couldn't give an opinion. . .

Ms. Do you remember that. . .

Mr. . . . 'cause we used to treat 'em on a level basis. We never made 'em feel uncomfortable.

Ms. We had help that. . . that were with us so many years that they got to a

Ms. (Continued) point where they couldn't work, and they weren't able to take care of themselves, my husband would see to it that they had food for the help that we. . . these are colored people. And we'd send money to them, so it certainly wasn't the people that worked for us that just instigated this.

Mr. Well, it was a city-wide thing.

Ms. It was, yes. But, I mean to think that it never would start in our place, but it . . . do you remember, dear?

Mr. That's right.

Ms. Friday night. . .

Mr. Some of my help were lucky to get home that night. We weren't there. We were gone, I believe, before the . . . but, why it happened, I. . . I. . . I couldn't say.

Ms. It just crept up on us. . . we had been so busy in our place. We would stock the food, it was specially cooked and brought in, you know, and it's pathetic what happened. There were thousands of dollars worth of food gone, it was strewn all over the floors. And lamps. . . all the glass broken over everything.

Mr. The street never recuperated from that. . . From that point on it got worse and worse.

Q. Is that what made you move out?

Mr. Well, we. . . we opened up again after the riots for a short. . . for about a year or so. We curtailed our hours and . . . and we weren't open nights. But it was a difficult way to run a restaurant. After one Passover holiday we just kept the door closed.

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

Mr. Well, I don't think it had. . . it was anti-Semitic, I think it was a question of white and black. Because it happened on a . . . like Clinton Avenue didn't

Mr. (Continued) have Jewish stores, they were Italian and . . . and other . . .

Ms. Puerto Rican. . .

Mr. . . . Puerto Rican. So, I don't think it was a question of Jew and black, I think it was a white and black. . .

Q. Were there changes in your clientele from 1930 to 1965? I mean, anything noticeable?

Mr. Well, it was another generation, but it was the same. . . mostly. . . we had mostly Jewish people, but there were a great many non-Jewish people who enjoyed the food at our place. We had many, many friends. And now that I'm in the liquor store, I've been there for about 11 years, every so often I see somebody that will remember the restaurant. They all see me and remind me of how they enjoyed the food so much, and they're not all Jewish people. But, primarily it was Jewish, and it was another. . . 'course the children of the parents, and we've seen about three generations grow up in that restaurant. But the area became very depleted and they were afraid to come down and we thought it was the time to get out.

Q. What was business like during the Depression?

Mr. Well, the Depression was in . . . we were . . . the Depression was in the thirties.

Ms. '31, '32. . .

Mr. I think we had opened up. . . you know, during that time. . . I think. . . it's forty-five years, it's hard to recall. We remained there and kept busy and I think we survived.

Ms. Sandwiches then were 25¢.

Mr. Yea.

Ms. They were. . . you know, food was so much cheaper, but as the years went on the sandwiches became \$1.00, .75, \$1.25. And I understand that today if you

Ms. (Continued) went to buy any of that it isn't much more. I don't know.

Mr. Two and a half dollars.

Ms. That's right. But. . .

Mr. You mean personally whether it affected us?

Q. Yea.

Mr. We owned the restaurant, we always had food to eat. But, I. . . I. . . there wasn't much money, but at least we were. . . we survived.

Ms. We ate.

Q. Was there ups and downs in the business, you know, due to the economy or any of this sort of thing like that?

Ms. No.

Q. Was. . . was it a steadily growing thing?

Mr. It kept going along. There was a time when the. . . you remember the year they. . . they had the whole Joseph Avenue ripped up with sewer things?

Ms. Yes.

Mr. And, my G-d, that was a terrible period. I don't remember exactly when it was, but they had that street torn up for an awfully long time. It almost gave you a reason to get out of there. It might have been the right time to make the move then, but we didn't. 'Cause the whole Jewish population was moving away into Brighton and Irondequoit. I think Brighton would have been the place.

Ms. We were asked. . . everytime a project would open they'd come down to my husband and ask him if he wouldn't like to open up. They made him so many different offers and so many inviting offers, but somehow or other Joseph Avenue seemed to be our place. And we just never thought of moving that was all. I might have been better had we. . .

Mr. We got a little tired of working as hard as we did, you know.

Q. Was there any kind of, you know, sort of politicking going on in the restaurant, you know, along with customers, you know, getting. . . you said that. . . that a lot of politicians whenever campaigning would come in. Was it. . . ?

Mr. It was interesting that the old-time Jewish peddler or junk dealer or huckster whenever they would sit around a table in the mornings for breakfast, they wouldn't talk about baseball or the young man does, but they would always talk about thing to do with politics and things national and really more meaty subjects than the average person would think that those ordinary guys would be talking about. And that's something I do remember, yes. Many of them were Socialists and freethinkers. I mean they weren't always in harmony with . . . with powers that were in power then. But, they had. . . they had their opinions.

Q. Your place was like a community rest stop really?

Mr. Yea, we. . . we had a little hall upstairs. There were many Bar Mitzvahs up there and small weddings and fraternal groups would meet there, and it was a kind of a meeting place.

Ms. A home away from home for many people.

Q. Did you cater?

Ms. Yes.

Mr. Not outside, just in the little hall upstairs. You know, we would take large orders for things, but never cater a wedding or a Bar Mitzvah or a shower.

Q. When the neighborhood was changing, say starting in about 1950, what. . . what did you feel? I mean, how did you feel about the Jewish people moving out and sort of being dispersed among the community, you know, the larger community? And then the blacks moving in?

Mr. Well, we couldn't blame the Jewish people who became more affluent, and they

Mr. (Continued) wanted better housing and better . . .

Ms. Husbands for their children.

Mr. . . . for their children.

Ms. Schools, you know.

Mr. Schools I suppose. That was a natural consequence. So, . . .

Ms. That didn't keep them from coming down Joseph Avenue, they still came.

Mr. Oh, yes.

Ms. Culturally. . .

Mr. But, the neighborhood did change. There was a great influx of blacks from the south, they were coming in. And, I suppose they just wanted to be away from it, so they didn't do anything.

Q. Do you feel that the culture that. . . that sort of Joseph Avenue culture was fragmented by this moving out? You know that. . . you know, you mentioned this play that was going on last night, now this was all about the Joseph Avenue area.

Ms. Culture, right.

Q. Which no longer exists, it seems to me. Did you. . . did you feel sorrow for this as this was happening? You know that. . . that something was sort of passing?

Mr. Well, I . . . the culture wasn't being diminished because they had the JYMA on North Street. They had . . . the temples became larger, and the synagogues moved away. And they offered an opportunity for . . . to continue their contact. So, I don't think they could have remained in that area and. . . and drawn, they would have had to disappear if they stayed there.

Q. When you lived on Harvard Street, what was that neighborhood like?

Ms. It was considered one of the finest neighborhoods at the time. Of course, that too went downhill, but it took a long time before that happened. And in. . .

Ms. (Continued) and today it's come right back again. 'Cause it's beautiful, really it's. . . it's been a whole revival of the houses and the gardens.

Mr. Well, there's a lot of young folks that like the older homes. And they've tried to pass, you know, city ordinances to keep the neighborhoods from becoming multiple dwellings with many families. And, that Harvard, Park Avenue, that whole district is really reviving itself and becoming a nice neighborhood.

Q. And you belonged to Beth El when it was over on Park Avenue?

Mr. Park Ave, yea.

Ms. Yes. That was a. . . that was a beautiful shul then, the temple.

Mr. That was an old church that was taken over.

Ms. Yes.

Mr. It was. . . everything . . . it really is a church.

Ms. Yes. That's where we were married. In the old Beth El.

Mr. Yea.

Q. Was the area in which you lived on Harvard Street, was that a Jewish neighborhood?

Mr. It wasn't. . .

Ms. It wasn't all Jewish.

Mr. No, it wasn't. . .

Ms. There were many Gentile people living. . . it was considered one of the nicest neighborhoods at the time, it really was.

Q. Did you. . . did you have friends who were non-Jewish?

Ms. In the neighborhood you mean?

Q. Yea.

Ms. It seems to me that we knew that. . .

Mr. Yea, the Crenshaws. . .

Ms. Yes, we always. . . we always said good morning and afternoon to them, that was it. We never had too much time to be too neighborly, you know. We were always working, but we had a lot of Gentile neighbors. And in fact I did when we moved there, and we only moved from there because I lost a sister. We all lived together in one home, we lived upstairs, my husband and I, and she and her husband lived downstairs. And when her husband died she stayed on, and then she passed away very suddenly. And after that there was no reason for us to stay.

Q. When did you move out?

Ms. We're here six years.

Q. Do you own your liquor store?

Mr. I do.

Q. Where is that?

Mr. It's on a street called South Avenue in the 1400 block. And it's a small neighborhood store.

Q. What. . . how does that compare. . . this is gonna come out a little funny, but how. . . how do you compare your liquor business, say, to the restaurant business?

Mr. Well, there are quite a few differences. In the first place you don't manufacture anything, and you're not concerned about the taste of anything, and how fresh or wholesome it is. And the whiskey stays in bottles on the shelf, you just take it off and put it in a bag, and it's much more simple than operating. . . I miss the restaurant occasionally, you know. I feel that now that we're out of it, I always think how great it would be to be in it again, and do some of the things you didn't do when you were there. So that it's a little notion in my head. I wouldn't want to do anything like that

Mr. (Continued) again. But it's an unrelated business, and it's a lot easier than . . . I wanted something that wouldn't require a lot of help. These days refrigerators or preparation of anything. . . it's a lot easier.

Q. Was Sunday your biggest day at the restaurant?

Mr. Sunday was the biggest usually.

Q. And did people come by every Sunday, you know, the same sort of people? Or the same exact people?

Mr. It's surprising how many would. . .

Ms. Same generally.

Mr. Yea, yea. . .

Q. And would they come for lunch or for dinner?

Mr. It started about noontime and would go till about six or seven.

Ms. Oh, later than that.

Mr. Oh, yes it would, too. Yea, yea. It would be eight, nine o'clock, yea.

Ms. We'd be busy till nine, ten o'clock at night.

Q. So it was mostly a family. . . I mean mostly people came with their families. . .

Ms. Right.

Q. . . . and. . .

Mr. Yea, it was a great place to bring children in so they could take 'em to other restaurants. And if the baby didn't cry too much then they knew they could take 'em downtown.

Ms. But, it. . . it was a lot of pleasant memories. There are people that I see today that . . . a grandmother'll bring her little grandchild up to me or say, do you see this lady, your Mom. . . I took your Mommy there when she was a little girl. You know, it. . . it brings back a lot of pleasant memories. You know, people remember and you remember how good the knishes tasted, and how good the vegetable soup was, and things, you know, that we made. And,

Ms. (Continued) you don't get it many places today.

Q. Did you do the cooking?

Ms. No, no I had nothing to do with that. We had a chef.

Q. And all the cooking was done in the restaurant?

Ms. Oh, yes, yes.

Q. And where. . . oh, yes. . .

Ms. And my husband's mother had cooked and taught a lot of the help to cook her way. And as I say they. . . they learned well and they cooked well. And they helped in the kitchen very nicely. Some of them made the salads, some of them worked with the chef, so they were really good.

Q. Where did you get your meat from?

Mr. Well, we used to buy our fresh meat from a local butcher, the same place that a housewife would buy. There aren't any other. . . there weren't any other restaurants, and there were no wholesalers to buy, and so we had to get it. . .

Ms. We had to kosher it. . .

Mr. The same Yiddish market where a housewife bought it. Our corned beef. . . yea, the fish we used to get from the Cantor fish market. The corned beef and delicatessen used to come out of New York. That was the best place. Some from Chicago and some from New York.

Q. And are there any Jewish restaurants here now?

Mr. Well, a fellow named Fox that has a place here. He originally came to town he worked for us. . .

Ms. We brought him to Rochester from New York.

Mr. Many, many years ago.

Q. When was that?

Mr. Oh, that's so long. . .

Ms. Many years he worked for us. We brought him here from New York. He worked for us for a few years, right dear?

Mr. He worked for a while and then he went into business for himself.

Ms. For himself, but he got his basic training at our place.

Mr. I don't know of any other. . . Rochester's never been too wealthy in Jewish style or anything else or kosher restaurants.

Ms. Well, there aren't that many. . . no help in getting on. There are a lot of Jewish cooks that are caterers, out of their homes, they do that. . . but to get a cook in a restaurant.

Mr. When immigration was going on and the immigrants, you know, were Polish and Ukranian, Russian people. They were familiar with that type of cooking, and you could get more kitchen help at that time. Nobody's doing that.

Q. Did you have problems as the years progressed getting kitchen help?

Mr. Well, we had to resort to black people for some of the menial, you know, the lesser operations. And we had people working for us a long, long time. We always had a good supply of help.

Q. And what did you do during a typical day? I mean, were you. . . were you kind of taskmaster or. . .?

Mr. Well, no. I used to devote a lot of effort into the deli counter making the sandwiches. We had another operation in the kitchen making the cooked food, and that entailed a chef and . . . but, most of my effort was outside on the deli making the sandwiches.

Q. Now, Mrs. Cohen when you were working in the restaurant what were you chiefly doing?

Mr. She was the chief cook and bottle washer. I mean, she did everything.

Ms. Well, I. . . I started off as a cashier. I was the hostess, then I'd work behind the counter and make sandwiches. So, I. . . I worked myself up and

Ms. (Continued) down. No, I really enjoyed what I did. I used to seat people, and act as the hostess, if it was necessary to help behind the counter, you know, you learned very quickly. I was . . . if it's your own you're more interested in learning, you know. But, we . . . we worked hard. We really did.

Q. Excuse me. You were open on Friday evening and Saturday during the day?

Mr. Yes.

Q. Did you have less business because it was Sabbath or did that not . . . not affect it at all?

Mr. Well, Saturday was a pretty active day, wasn't it? Yes.

Ms. People had to eat regardless of the day. But, because they were strictly kosher and very firm they wouldn't pay on Friday, they'd pay like after sundown on Saturday.

Q. Was that a normal occurrence?

Ms. Some people. . .

Mr. Not too often, but there were. . .

Ms. There were some.

Q. And did that happen more in the earlier years or was there no difference?

Ms. I . . . I . . . I think so, wouldn't you say so, dear?

Mr. I'd say that happened. . .

Ms. Yes, I think so, yes. Earlier. . . earlier years. I think as the years went on I think people got to the point where paying on Saturday wasn't the ordeal it was, you know, years ago. But, I'd say yes in the earlier years.

Q. OK. I'm just gonna go back to Joseph Avenue neighborhood. Were you at all connected with the Baden Street Settlement? At any time?

Mr. No, not personally involved, no.

Q. What were your impressions of it though? Did you know what was going on? Did

Q. (Continued) you think it was. . . ?

Mr. How far back do you mean? When it was. . .

Q. Well, your whole experience in Rochester. I mean the Baden Street Settlement has certainly changed over the years.

Mr. Yes. Well, I'm not too active. I really don't recall too much about that. It was organized by a group of society women from the other part of town, and well at one time it was all for the white people. And they used to have I think a nurse there and they had things for young girls to do. And then they had an athletic program, I think, for the . . . at one time it was just a small place on Baden Street. More of a health center, then it developed into more of a community program and athletic context.

Q. How about the JY? Were you members of the JY?

Mr. When we were kids I do remember going to the one on Hyde Park, the original one.

Q. What was it like?

Mr. Well, it was a . . . a big house that I remember we had to run upstairs, you know, and different games and things to play and do.

Ms. But there's a new JY. My husband used to run the kitchen there.

Mr. Yea, we used to. . . when the new JY opened up, we ran the restaurant on North Street, you know, in the. . . in the new JY building.

Ms. We ran that in conjunction with the restaurant.

Mr. We had the restaurant, too. We ran that until about the war started, then in '45, then we gave it up.

END OF SIDE A, TAPE 1 (Interview 1)

Interview 1
Tape 1
Side B

Q. This is Tape 1, Side B, and I'm interviewing Jack and Bess Cohen. I'd like to get back into the early experiences in the Joseph Avenue area. Mrs. Cohen, I neglected to ask you about your family before. Could you please tell me what kind of experiences your family had? How long they've been in Rochester and such?

Ms. Well, my mother and dad were both born in Russia. And my mother went to No. 9 School here as a little girl. We all went to No. 9 School, my brother. I have a brother, a dentist, and I have a sister who just passed away. And I went to No. 9 School, and as I said the interesting part was that my mother was a student there, this goes back many years ago.

Q. When did your family emigrate?

Ms. About the same time yours did, wouldn't you say?

Mr. Yea, I'd say.

Ms. My mother came as a little girl, mother and father. But then my . . . my parents had the first tea and coffee store in the city. And they were the first people to give premiums, which was a rarity in those days. And, I can remember being told that we were the first people on the street who had electricity in our windows. They were lit up showing our merchandise. It was quite a thing. And what else can I tell you?

Q. Where was the store?

Ms. It was on Joseph Avenue right opposite. . .

Mr. Buchan Park.

Ms. . . . Buchan Park. And. . .

Mr. So you said your grandfather was the first. . .

Ms. My grandfather was the first Jewish baker in the city, and. . .

Mr. That's where her mother got all her great. . .

Ms. Good recipes. He was an excellent baker.

Q. How. . . when was the bakery opened, you know, approximately what year?

Ms. Oh, it was so long, far back, I don't know. My mother was just a child then. They would tell about the day . . . that they would deliver in a . . . in a horse and buggy or in a pushcart or something, this goes back so many years ago, I really don't know. I wouldn't even venture a guess.

Q. OK. I'm going to ask you a few questions about your political activities, if you don't want to answer, fine. Are you. . . are either of you members of any civic organizations in town? Or any political party or any sort of political. . .?

Ms. No.

Mr. We're not, no we. . .

Q. OK.

Mr. I do remember though my father had Eugene Victor Debbs picture in our living room, so he must have been pretty active in the. . .

Ms. That's many years, huh?

Q. So you come from a Socialist family?

Mr. Yea. Really. I think that feeling is. . . has been with me, and the Democrats were about the closest thing to the Socialists, so we've been going along. But, not always all down the line. We would pick out the people that we. . .

Q. Well. . .

Mr. . . . wanted to vote for.

Q. . . the Socialist Party was very active here in the late teens. Was your father a member of the party?

Mr. I can only remember the . . . when I was just a little thing, you know, I

Mr. (Continued) can remember that picture up there. But, he never became active that I know of.

Q. Were you also brought up in a liberal home?

Ms. Yes, we. . . we. . . I don't ever remember that their views being. . .

Mr. Well, he joined the Workmen's Circle, although that was a paternal group, he was one of the original members in. . . in Rochester, Branch No. 27, I remember the number because I'm still a member also. I carried on and pay dues. After he passed away I said I would be a member also.

Q. I see. That's great.

Mr. Yea.

Q. Did. . . there was no union activity or anything connected with your restaurant?

Mr. No, we didn't have any need. . .

Q. At the time service workers were getting unionized.

Ms. We were never affiliated with a union. We were never asked to join.

Mr. And the help never organized themselves either.

Ms. And we had all the people from the union eat in our place.

Mr. Yea, all the Amalgamated members. . .

Ms. Yes.

Mr. . . . and the executives came in the restaurant.

Ms. We weren't too far away from their headquarters on Clinton Avenue.

Q. Were there any kind of labor squabbles in the restaurant, you know, people arguing that you can remember?

Mr. No, you mean. . .

Q. You know, just customers quarreling amongst themselves or. . .

Ms. Because of politics you mean?

Q. Yea. Or. . . or labor. You know, union sorts of things?

Mr. I think. . . I don't think I remember anything like that.

Q. OK. I'd like to sort of switch subjects a little bit now and talk about the Jewish community in Rochester. Do you feel any special allegiance to the Jewish community? You said you belong to Beth El. . .

Mr. Well, I'd say we were close to things Jewish. . .

Ms. I'd say we were very Jewish conscious, Jewish minded.

Mr. . . . very interested in Israel. . .

Ms. UJA.

Mr. UJA.

Ms. I've worked on the committee that sells bonds to Israel. Never a year goes by that we don't buy, or that we don't contribute generously.

Mr. I think I feel very Jewish. . .

Ms. I'd say we were very Jewish minded, absolutely.

Q. Do you think the Jewish community in Rochester has changed over the years? That you can. . . you know, your impressions?

Mr. No, I. . . I think Rochester's a fine Jewish community, temples, synagogues are Jewishly active.

Ms. I think most of our friends are very aware.

Mr. Yea, we maintain a kosher home.

Ms. Yes.

Mr. And Bess doesn't eat anything non-kosher outside. I'm the goyim, but she still observes. . .

Ms. No, I. . . but I. . . we have a great many friends who are very Jewish minded.

Mr. Oh, yes.

Ms. Feels the same feelings that I have, and we both. . . I'd say that our. . . we have a circle of friends that feel that way we do. They're very aware of things in Israel. In fact, we have friends that go back and forth as though

Ms. (Continued) they were going to downtown, they go that often to Israel.
They have family there.

Q. How about. . . how about their sons and daughters? I mean do you think that
they're as religiously minded also?

Ms. Some of them are. Very. . . and there are. . .

Mr. Well, look at our Temple Beth El, there are a lot of young people that are so
active in the. . .

Ms. Have you ever had an occasion to go to temple on a Saturday?

Q. No, I haven't.

Ms. Well, it's suprising the number of people that come, young people and their
families, husbands and wives and their children. It's really a. . . a joy
to see it on a Saturday. It. . . it. . . it's remarkable.

Mr. And the boards of Temple Beth El are all young. . .

Ms. Active. . .

Mr. . . . active people.

Ms. . . . people.

Q. Do you think Rochester is typical in that sense? Or atypical?

Ms. Not having lived anyplace else I wouldn't know, but I think that they're
very conscious of the issues.

Mr. The UJA campaign always goes over the top.

Ms. Way over the top.

Mr. They seem to be active in any cause that is Jewish.

Ms. Hadassah is very active here.

Q. You said you belonged to Hadassah.

Ms. Yes, I was President of Hadassah for many years.

Q. What were. . . what were your experiences in Hadassah? And how. . . what. . .
what did you people do and . . . ?

Ms. Oh, our goal is working for Israel, of course. We made thousands and thousands of dollars for them, and quotas that were really unheard of that were made.

Q. How did you go about doing that?

Ms. Well, many fundraising functions. We used to sell tickets for a car that we'd . . . you couldn't call it a raffle, but we used to sell tickets for the drawing on a car. We made many, many thousands of dollars on that. We had luncheons. They had book reviews. People that would give musicals. There were. . . there was a lot going on for Hadassah, still is.

Q. When were. . .

Ms. During the time that I was president we had a membership of 2500, then, it has gone much more now. This goes back years ago when I was president. And I think it's one of the most active organizations in the city, although I understand ORT has been taken over by young element, but I'm not active in that or I'm not too knowledgeable in what they do.

Mr. Well, there's an Orthodox group, the Pioneer Women.

Ms. Right, right.

Mr. They're a very active group.

Q. Do you belong to any other community organizations other than Hadassah?

Ms. Well, do I, dear?

Mr. You know, as members. . .

Ms. Shul, temple, sisterhood. . .

Mr. You know, the old folks home. . .

Ms. Oh, yes. That's right.

Mr. The. . . I'd have to look at my checkbook to see all the. . .

Ms. You know, when you. . . when you want to think you just can't think of all the things.

Mr. There's so many auxiliaries that Bess belongs to, but they're mostly Jewish

Mr. (Continued) things. What about. . .

Q. Not active. . . so you actively participate then in just the Hadassah?

Ms. That's right. And sisterhood at Temple Beth El.

Q. What does the sisterhood do?

Ms. Well, there again, I can't tell you anymore now because I've given up so much of that. But, sisterhood raises money for the Torah Fund. They raise money for the Library Fund, prayer books, things like that. They do a lot of things. They make money for things going back into the shul, to the temple. But, I'm not active in that anymore. I've sort of given up a lot of my outside activities.

Mr. They have a gift shop.

Ms. Yes, they have a very fine gift shop there. They sell. . .

Mr. Library.

Ms. It goes into the Library Fund.

Q. So it's mostly a money-raising organization then?

Ms. Yes, I would say so. And sending kids to camp for the summer. And giving scholarships. And they have the theological seminaries fund and all, and it's really getting to be the shul proper or towards the shul or things in the shul. But, I'm not active in that. . . my husband said we're dues-paying members.

Q. Were you ever part of any volunteer organizations?

Ms. Yes. The Gray Lady work. I did Gray Lady work for many years during the war. That was in conjunction with the hospital.

Q. What. . . what sort of activity was that?

Ms. I. . . I worked in any department that I was needed in in the Genesee Hospital. This also goes back many years. I worked in the library. I pushed a cart around and serviced the different patients. I worked in administration.

Ms. (Continued) I worked at the information desk.

Q. Was this . . .

Ms. I worked in the emergency, wherever I was needed.

Q. Was this a Jewish sponsored activity?

Ms. No.

Q. No.

Ms. No.

Q. So that . . .

Ms. This is Red Cross.

Q. This is . . . do you feel it's important for Jewish men and women who are volunteering to offer volunteer outside of the Jewish community?

Ms. Yes, I do. I really do.

Q. What sorts of things do you think that Jews can, you know, give outside their community as far as . . . I mean, . . .

Ms. They can do exactly what I did, and it can be recognized. . . I think after a while it. . . I. . . it was recognized as my working out of the Gentile sisterhood. So I was really working out of the temple when I was doing all this sort of . . .

Mr. You did. . .

Ms. I did braille work, I worked with the blind. Pardon me, what, dear?

Mr. There are some of our friends deliver blood and go on the blood mobile. They act as members of schish organization, they transport people who are. . . can't. . . don't have the facilities to drive their car or to shop or to go to see a doctor or things like that. There are others who devote effort in Sigl Center for handicapped children. There's also people who go to the state hospital that train with the mentally disturbed people. And there's so many areas where Jewish persons could devote efforts besides primarily

Mr. (Continued) Jewish functions.

Q. So you don't think the community is a closed community then? You know, that . . . you know, helping with. . .

Mr. No, I don't. . .

Ms. I. . . I don't think so. . .

Mr. I say I think they go alongside of the Jewish. . .

Ms. I work at the hospital with another Jewish woman, I. . . we go in and we put in a Monday morning every week practically. And the school system that I work in I. . . I think I'm the only Jewish woman that comes in and does the volunteer work. It so happens that the . . . there are not too many people that do that.

Mr. There are a lot of Jewish women that to them . . .

Ms. Devote. . .

Mr. . . . do things outside of the Jewish circles.

Q. And you think that's important?

Ms. I think so. I think anything you do is important, you know, that you do something worthwhile.

But, I. . . I'd say that a great many of our friends do things outside the Jewish. . . the Jewish organizations. I'd say so.

Q. I'm gonna ask you about some political occurrences over the past, you know, your. . . your reactions to them. And I'm gonna start with the Holocaust. And first in the 1930's did you know any of the German Jewish people that came over to Rochester from . . .?

Mr. Not personally. We did have some come in the restaurant that had the tattoos on their hand.

Q. When did you personally become aware of what was going on in Europe?

Mr. Oh, I'd say when it became general knowledge. We would have. . . we wouldn't

Mr. (Continued) have had any previous experience, you know.

Ms. We had no family come over at that time that we had any, you know, close contact with if that's what you mean. No, I wouldn't say that we had, no.

Q. What were your reactions to the Holocaust when you did find out what had happened?

Ms. Horrid, just horrid. The things that took place. . . we lived in an. . . in an era. . . a time when things like that happened in this day and age, it's impossible. Then you saw it and read and heard about the people coming in, are free. Would you say that that was your feeling?

Mr. That's true. And it's hard to comprehend six million people there. You wonder how they could do it. I mean, how they. . . how they could kill that many people. But it was a sad time for us personally.

Q. Did. . . did you serve in the army or anything during the war?

Mr. No, I didn't.

Q. But you said that you. . . you were participating in volunteer work during the war?

Ms. Oh, yes, Red Cross representative, yes. That this is the course I took, it was called Gray Lady work, where we did work in the hospital.

Q. How did you feel about the U.N. right after the war, and also the founding of the State of Israel? Were you interested in Israel right from the beginning?

Ms. Oh, definitely.

Mr. Yes, we were.

Ms. Absolutely. My work at Hadassah brought me very close to it.

Q. Have you ever been to Israel?

Ms. Yes, we were there ten years ago.

Mr. It's time to go back. We were there, what, fifteen years ago?

Ms. That's right.

Q. What were your impressions?

Mr. It was exciting and wonderful.

Ms. We were thrilled to be there really.

Q. Do you feel that you might want to go there to settle down ever?

Mr. I don't think we would.

Ms. No, I don't think I'd want to live there, no.

Mr. The language would be a barrier. We're too old to make that kind of. . .

Q. But, you have contributed to, you know, the state. . .?

Mr. We're active contributors to the UJA, and we have a number of bonds, and we'd like to. . . you know, we've always done something.

Q. Do you think that there can be Jewish survival without the State of Israel? I mean, do you see that the State of Israel is necessary for the survival of . . . of the Jewish population in the world?

Mr. Well, it's a place they call home. And, I suppose if there's no other place to go they can go to Israel.

Ms. I don't think that. . . that the. . . that there. . . do you think that we'd lose the race of being, you know,. . .?

Q. That's what I'm asking. I mean. . .

Ms. I. . . I. . . I think we always. . . that there would always be Jews and we'd always have a feeling that we are Jews. Of course, it would be a sad state of affairs if the State of Israel was destroyed and we didn't have it anymore. But, I still don't feel that the Jews will fall apart. Do you feel that way, that we would?

Mr. No, if you look back at the records, they survived five, six thousand years. . .

Ms. Yes, right. But it would be sad if anything did happen to the State of Israel.

Q. Have. . . have your opinions of the State of Israel changed, you know, since

- Q. (Continued) 1948 when the mandate came through establishing the State of Israel to now when there are all sorts of anti-Zionist propositions on the floor?
- Mr. Well, it. . . it's not a . . . a happy thought when you think of the U.N. at this point because they don't seem to have too many. . . Israel doesn't seem to have too many friends in the U.N. now. Whether that'll change soon I don't know.
- Ms. I think it's sad, I really do. I think it's sad that there aren't more in our corner that are. . . that feel . . .
- Mr. Some of the African nations are coming. . .
- Ms. Are they coming back into the field?
- Mr. I think so.
- Ms. But, all that they did for them in Israel, it's just sad to think that they forgot all that. You know, they were given a lot of help. . .
- Mr. Before the Arabs had the oil.
- Q. Yea.
- Mr. They promised them money and oil so they. . . they've bought them back.
- Q. Do you think the U.N. is an effective keese peeking. . . peace-keeping force in the middle east?
- Mr. Well, it. . . it's the best thing we have now, so I would hate to see it go. I. . . I'd . . .
- Q. So you still support the United Nations?
- Mr. I'd say so. Yes.
- Q. Did you hear Golda Meir when she came here in 1975 to dedicate the Bernstein Chair?
- Mr. Oh, yes.
- Ms. Yes, we were there. It was a thrilling evening. It was just a thrill to be

Ms. (Continued) there. Were you in the city at the time?

Q. Yes.

Ms. Then no doubt you were there. Did you feel the way. . . the same way?

Q. So. . . what did you think. . . what do you think about Rabbi Bernstein?

Mr. He's just one great person. He was really something. When we both. . . I add this as an. . .

Ms. Aside. . .

Mr. . . . aside When we closed the restaurant he sent us the most beautiful letter telling us how sorry he was. He was a great jokester. He could. . . He could make a joke. . .

Ms. Out of a cheese blintz.

Mr. Yea. And whenever he started a speech and it pertained to food, he would always bring in Cohen's Restaurant as a subject. But, we. . we thought he. . . we didn't belong to his temple, but we thought he was a great person. And he's. . . he's always been so pleasant.

Q. Do you think there's ever been in your whole, you know, experience in Rochester . . . was there ever friction between the Reform Jews and the Conservative Jews and the Orthodox Jews? That you can remember?

Mr. Between the Reform and the Conservative I don't think there was . . . there were any problems, but whether outwardly with the. . . I think the Conservative and the . . . and the Reform sort of went their way and the Orthodox went their own way. I don't think they . . . they did things together. But, now I. . . I imagine there is a rabbinical group that embraces all the different . . . the Sephardic and the Ashkenazi, Reform, Conservative. . . they must have a going group now.

Ms. I think there's B'rith Kodesh as the Reform. . . Is. . . is becoming more Conservative in their thinking than they ever have been. I think it's been

- Ms. (Continued) a complaint of some of the members that they're going over-board too far.
- Q. Now both. . . both sets of parents are Russian immigrants. Was there friction between the Russian immigrants who were coming in and the German Jewish descendants who were already established?
- Mr. Well, my parents would never come in contact with the German Jews, you know, the Deutchisherjedudim. But, they went their way and the others went their own way. I don't think there. . . there was any . . . I mean they were too good. . . higher plane than the Russian Jews, didn't have anything to do with them when they first came over.
- Q. Do you think that there's anything left of that today?
- Mr. I don't think so. You know, the. . . the Orthodox. . . the. . . all the things that the Orthodox Jews belong to the country clubs and so I don't think there's that feeling now.
- Q. Can. . . can you think of any specific incidents that brought the two communities together?
- Mr. Well, I'd say the. . . Hitler brought 'em together. Yea, sure.
- Q. Do you think it all came about say during . . . right after World War II?
- Mr. Yea, when Hitler got in power and even though you were a tenth generation Jew, if you had some Jewish blood in you, he made you feel you were Jewish. They. . . they. . . they started to realize that they were Jews. I remember one man in particular, Arthur Lowenthal, who was very staid, old German Jew. And he became very active in Jewish concerns. And I'm mentioning his name because he used to come down to the restaurant every Friday when we'd have lentil soup, and he would not only eat one bowl, but he would eat two bowls of that lentil soup. And he enjoyed himself immensely when he came down to the restaurant. But, he was a good example of what happened after Hitler.

Ms. Became a very ardent worker for everything Jewish. The UJA and bonds for Israel.

Q. Do you think that Israel brought the Jewish community together, too?

Mr. I'd say so, yea. Yea.

Q. So this was a time when it was more important being Jewish than what kind of Jewish you were?

Ms. I'd say yes.

Mr. Yea.

Ms. Yes, I'd say so.

Q. Do you think there was anything before then that was bringing . . . that was . . . had started to bring the community together? That you can recall?

Mr. Well, my own feeling is is that it was always a close-knit community. Jews lived in one area at one time and everybody knew one another. And, I don't think they were drifting apart. I don't know of any particular incidents that would . . . caused any. . .

Q. We were talking before about the Jewish community and how you think that it's a very closely-knit community. Are . . . I wanted to know what your opinions are on . . . say something that could be a potential fragmentation, such as intermarriage. Have you any opinions on . . . on, you know, marriage between Jews and Gentiles?

Mr. Well, in my own experience I have a brother who married a non-Jewish girl many, many years ago. And at that time it was just something horrible. I mean, you just felt that your world ended. But I think now people take it in stride and if I can be almost vulgar and say that they hope it isn't a scharta that they bring home, a goya isn't so bad now. So I don't think many of the girls that the Jewish boy married convert, I mean, try to maintain a kosher home and Jewish atmosphere. However, a Jewish girl marrying a

Mr. (Continued) non-Jewish man I don't know whether it's the same thing would hold true. But, I suppose there's more intermarriage now, and there is cause for alarm. I would say that there is, yea.

Q. What do you think is causing this?

Mr. Well, a lot of the young people go to college, different kind. . . types. . . you know, different girls, a lot of it takes place there. And it's freer. I mean, the kids want to do what they want to do themselves. They. . . they're not listening to what their parents tell 'em or what their parents did.

Q. Mrs. Cohen, how do you feel about this?

Ms. Well, I think I agree with my husband. I don't like it.

Mr. Yes, Bess is. . .

Ms. It bothers me terribly. It really does. It disturbs me when there's intermarriage. But today it's becoming a very common thing. As my husband says everybody's so free. Kids go off to school. They . . . they live a whole new life of their own. And today they don't get married until they try it out, and then some of them marry and then others don't. But, I. . . I. . . I find it very disturbing. It really bothers me, it really does whenever we hear of intermarriage.

Mr. Are there statistics that say things like that are happening to a greater. . . ?

Q. Well, yea, I'd say. . . Do you have any idea what could have caused this sort of thing?

Ms. I think more people are. . . more young people are going off to school.

Mr. I don't. . .

Ms. I really think more kids are going off to school. I know when I went to school my parents objected to my going away, going out of town. And I hated to come here because of my experience, as I told you, with the dean. But my parents said they have a good school here, what do you have to go away for?

Mr. But we know of so many instances where children were brought up in a very . . . not strict, but a wholesome Jewish atmosphere, and they went to temple and their parents are active in the temple, and the kids would go away to school and come back with a schixie. And I can't understand why that would happen. He . . . he had . . . he had all the . . .

Ms. Background.

Mr. . . . background and the feeling and the training to be nice Jewish. . .

Q. So you don't think family values have changed at all? You think it's more of a . . .

Ms. Well, their values haven't changed . . .

Q. In their upbringing?

Ms. . . . they feel the way they do, but what can they do when the child comes back. . . he did that with. . . around. . . you lose the child. But I'm sure that they all feel, still feel the same way they did before, but I feel they have to change, I suppose, with the times. I don't know what else to say.

Mr. Well. . .

Q. Do you think there's anything that can be done to prevent it?

Ms. I . . . I don't know. I really don't know how. . . how you can. How can you control your child when he's not home? He's not with you? And how can you control them even when they are at home? They. . . they've got minds of their own, and they come. . . they go away to school or they go to school. In. . . in your own hometown, you. . . you have contact as such, you meet different people, you're drawn together with people. You fall in love with someone out of your faith. I don't. . . I don't know how. . . how you can control it. Do you know of any way that it can be done?

Q. No. Mr. Cohen, I interrupted you. You were about to say something.

Mr. I don't recall. Well, the homes that the children are brought up in now

- Mr. (Continued) are different than when we were brought up. There's ham, there's bacon, and there's shrimp and lobster and things like that. And, Jewishness doesn't seem to . . . well, at least food-wise, it doesn't seem to mean too much. We would never think of anything like that.
- Ms. Not in the home. You may have eaten it out, but not at home. So, I don't know, maybe all that has some very effective. . . they're freer, not thinking. But, there's more intermarriage today, a lot of it.
- Q. Well, do you think that. . . that American life on the whole has become less religious, more secular?
- Ms. What do you think, Jack? I don't know. See, our little circle of friends we still. . . I think most of them still have the same feeling, don't you think so?
- Mr. Oh, sure. Their children are married well also, you know.
- Ms. Yea.
- Mr. They kept the faith and there aren't too many of 'em that have married outside.
- Ms. See, not in our circle of friends. But. . . There are very few of them that have married outside of the. . . of the faith. And. . .
- Mr. As far as attendance at our temple, it's packed houses every Saturday and holidays and they have services in the morning, they have services in the evening, and it's a very active temple. So, what's happening in other places I don't know. And I don't think it's only among the Jews. Look at all the priests that are. . . and the nuns, and they have to have certain gimmicks to get 'em into the churches. So, they really . . . it's a universal feeling of the whole religious atmosphere.
- Q. OK. Now you. . . you said you. . . we've already discussed the fact that you felt some anti-Semitism at the U. of R. when you went. Have either of you ever experienced any anti-Semitism personally in Rochester? That you can

Q. (Continued) recall?

Mr. I don't know. We can't be judges because our whole life has been around Jewish, with the restaurant and all that. I mean, so I do recall we used to go up to Skaneateles to take a trip when we closed the restaurant. . . when the restaurant closed on Monday, we would leave Sunday night, drive up to a little place near a lake, near Syracuse. And we'd spend Monday just relaxing. . .

Ms. We'd relax on Mondays.

Mr. . . . along the lake. And, I remember asking the lady at the desk if . . . 'cause we were starting to play golf at that time whether there was any golf courses that we could play at. And she did say well there is a golf course but I don't think your kind can play there. Just as blunt as . . . well, it wasn't too long ago, yea. But, . . .

Ms. And we. . . we'd been going to this place for a long time.

Mr. So that was the first I think rough feeling I had of being a Jew. . .

Ms. We never came back again, that was it. But, you know, it was really a . . . then we thought of the book Gentleman's Agreement. At the time we read the book we didn't think that it was possible that that would happen, but it. . . when it happened to us it was a real surprise. But I don't. . .

Mr. But, in the city I can't recall. I really don't. . .

Q. Do you know of any incidents that anybody else might have encountered in the city?

Ms. You. . . your clientele at the store now, your customers, are all Gentile.

Mr. No, I really. . .

Ms. We really. . .

Mr. Unless there were country clubs that Jewish people might be. . . like the Country Club of Rochester or Oak Hill Country Club that Jewish people couldn't join at one time. Personally I can't say it happened to me. But, I'm. . .

Mr. (Continued) I'm sure that it's happened to other people. But, I really don't know of place here in the city. It would usually happen at a resort area or a . . .

Q. Were there any changes in the city itself, do you think, between when the Democrats were in power or when the Republicans were in power?

Mr. As far as one being more helpful to the Jew than the other?

Q. Yea, yea.

Mr. My own personal feeling is that I think the Democratic Party is . . . is . . .

Ms. More of a friend?

Mr. I'd say more of a friend to the Jews than the Republicans are. 'Cause you associate the Republicans with the wealthier county people who don't come in contact with too many Jewish people. That's my. . .

Q. What . . . what sort of future do you see for the Rochester Jewish community? I mean, how do you think things are going?

Ms. I think we have a very active community.

Mr. I think it's a healthy one.

Ms. And I think a very healthy community. You know, and as far as Rochester is concerned I don't think it has anything to fear. I really don't. I think we have a fine community with a lot of active, interested workers.

Mr. And they're young people and they've got many years to grow.

Ms. They're. . . they're offsprings of parents that are very active, and they've taken on the same thing. I. . . I think we have a . . . a very healthy city when it comes to Jewish activities and a way of life and all.

Q. You're very happy here?

Ms. Yes.

Mr. Sure. We've lived here all our lives.

Ms. Yes. We have no reason to. . . to want to move. As I say, our circle of

Ms. (Continued) friends in particular are judged by the people that we're friendly with. They're very active most of 'em in the community. They're very Israel minded. They're . . .

Mr. . . . active in the temple.

Ms. . . . active in the temple, active in the UJA, active in . . . in buying bonds. Really, I think our circle of friends in particular.

Q. Do you think that there are more . . . do you feel the nature of the Jewish community as far as affluence and the type of jobs filled has been changing in Rochester over the years?

Mr. Well, with the emergence of Xerox Corporation, they brought in a lot of . . .

Ms. Young Jewish people.

Mr. . . . of help in the city. And as far as Kodak, I don't think they . . . they go out of their way to hire too many Jewish people. But, a lot of 'em are professional men, lawyers, doctors, dentists, insurance people, real estate people, a good many of the Jewish do well.

Q. Mrs. Cohen, what do you think is special about the Jews? What is it that has kept them together for so long? What kind of values do they have?

Ms. Well, don't you think that the . . . that the temples have kept them together? I mean the fact that I . . . I think that the fact that they . . . they're interested in going to temple. They're interested in going . . . in . . . in . . . in Jewish activity and way of life. They're interested in . . . in . . . in knowing what's going on in Israel, for example. And they feel there's a closeness that there are ties with Israel. And our . . . our feeling for one another. I think the Jewish people are very close anyway.

Mr. I think Jewish family wants to educate their children, that's a paramount thought in even the poorest family. They want to send their children to

Mr. (Continued) school to see that they get an education. And there's a . . . a friendly . . . the . . . the closeness in the family, the mother and father are close to their children. And, I think that's something that keeps us together.

Q. Do you think that . . . that there's been an important stress on education then?

Ms. Oh, definitely. Definitely.

Mr. Education and also cultural things like music and to love things of beauty. I think that's a big part of being Jewish.

Q. But these are things that . . . that the Jews have to offer to say the American civilization, community? Would you say that's their contribution to American society? These values?

Mr. Yes, I think it's . . . it's people appreciating the things that we do, it would help them also.

Ms. I know in our parents time they were the ones that forego things for themselves so that their children could have an education. You know, it wasn't easy for our parents, all of our parents, to send us to college, to high school and through college. They were willing to sacrifice things for themselves so that we could go on. Of course, today I think it's a little different. It's a little easier getting into schools. There are scholarships. There are things . . . there are loans to be had, but I . . . I . . . I think that . . .

Mr. I remember when I was a youngster my mother wanted me to learn to play the violin, and we were as poor as anything. And she would scrape together the \$2 each week and pay the teacher to teach me. Well, I didn't have much aptitude for a violin. I was embarrassed to even carry it in the street. But, it was an indication that the mother wanted her child to grow up with good things.

Ms. It's true. I'm sure it is still. I . . . I think that we . . . we've given a lot to the . . . to the community. I . . . I don't think we're a closed clan that we just stick to each other and feel that because we're Jews we can't mix. We mix well. And, we have a lot of Gentile friends. I think we have a lot to be proud of in the way we act, in the way we conduct ourselves. The fact that we want to learn and are willing to give of ourselves. I . . . I . . . I don't know what we . . . what more we . . . we could ask for. I really mean it. I think we don't have to take a back seat for anybody. I really don't feel that we have to. I think that we have a lot to offer.

Q. Well. . .

Ms. That's my feeling. Do you feel the same way?

Mr. I'm sure do. I'm proud to be a Jew. I really am.

Ms. Definitely.

Mr. I . . . I never, you know, am embarrassed to say that I am Jewish.

Ms. Our customers all know we're Jewish, and my husband's business is mostly Gentile. And they. . . I think they respect us more for the fact that we observe the holidays and we're not there at certain times and our help carry on for us. And I know that in my type of work working in the school system, I'm the only Jewish girl or woman with them, and I . . . it doesn't bother me when I say tomorrow I have to be off because it's Yom Kippur or Rosh Hashanah or something. I'm very proud of what I am, and don't try to cover up the fact that I'm Jewish. And again I bring up the fact that most of my friends are. . . have the same feeling. So that we contribute a lot. We're part of the music association, we're part of. . . of the cultural things of the city. We belong to the museums.

Mr. Memorial Art Gallery.

Ms. Art Gallery and all. We partake of what's going on.

Q. Do you visit the gallery often?

Ms. Yea, we. . .

Mr. We did there. . . you know. . .

Ms. We do. We go. . .

Mr. We're members but really we should be in there more often than we are.

Ms. We. . . there was a time that they took some of our art to display because we had a few things that they were gonna have a display at the gallery. I. . .
I mean. . . I feel that we live a good community life here. And we partake of what. . .

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE B (Interview 1)