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Interview with Mr. I. B. Finkelstein, Jewish community leader, June 3, 1970, by Myron L. Lazarus.

Q This is a recording of the Oral History Program of the University of Delaware. We're interviewing Mr. Isaac B. Finkelstein. Mr. Finkelstein, where were you born?
A New York City, March the 27th, 1884.
Q Uh huh. And your family, how long had they lived in New York?
A Well, my mother came here when she was probably five or six years old, as I understand and they were married in New York City, so therefore I'm a so-called native American.
Q Uh huh. Where were your parents from?
A My mother was from Posen, Germany, and my father was from Russia.
Q Um hmm. But they met in New York.
A Met in New York City, yeah.
Q Uh huh. About what age ... well, what age were they when they came over here?
A Well, my father was about 17, because he and a brother came here because the ... many ... I don't say ... maybe many is correct ... but many young men left Russia because they refused to serve in the czar's army. And at 17 you were expected to report in the proper place and then you were on reserve and this that and the other so that really when they get ... I understand, when they get out of the army, they were nearly 40 or 42 before they were actually free of military service. So he and a brother came over together. The brother went to Chicago and settled there and my father, for whatever reason it was, settled in New York and ... .
Q Did he have family in New York, did he ...
A No ... no.
Q Did he come over alone?
A He came over with his brother.
Q Uh huh, with his brother.
A Brother ... that was all ... no ...
Q But usually people know somebody here.
A Well, he probably knew somebody, but I don't think it was anybody ... was no relative.

Q There was no family.

A No family, no.

Q What age was he when he came over, did you ... 

A 17.

Q 17. What had he done in Russia?

A Well, what most young Jewish men do, I guess. They had to go to Talmudura [sp] and they had to take the Jewish studies up and they lived in very small communities, very small villages.

Q What part of Russia was this?

A I don't think I remember. I guess I've heard, but it slips my mind.

Q Sure. What ... did he have any particular occupation that he was training for, or ... 

A No, he inquired ... in some manner he inquired the making of men's clothes, which was at that time very often done by young men who were learning something about it. And when he came here, he finished his education ... or so-called education, in this country. But he couldn't--he had the ability to actually take your measurements, get the material ... 

Q Um hmm. Did he learn this in Russia or in New York?

A He learned it in New York.

Q I see.

A And he could take your measurement, make the patterns, and my recollection is I saw these papers hanging up so that ... with your name on there ... he could manufacture ... 

Q He was a custom tailor then.

A Yes, that's right. That's what they called them at that time, custom tailor. So they had ... they did that ... unfortunately--this is a reminiscence, I guess ... he found himself in New York, and at that time there were no unions, and the conditions were very bad. You either had what they called the season, I remember hearing it all the time ... when the season came along, you were busy, they worked 20 hours a day. When it was out of season, it was ... well, you didn't have any work. So I got from ... from here from my father and mother ... they always thought that every Jewish family had a very handsome pair of candlesticks, good ones, which they could use in a pawn shop all the time to tide 'em over in certain periods. And then when they started to work again in the fall,
they took 'em out. That was their security for the loan.

Q: Were these silver candlesticks?
A: Oh, no, brass.
Q: Brass.

A: Oh, no... Jewish people had brass candlesticks, you know. And we had them in the family passed around for I don't know how long. But after a while... meaning by that, some years later, they had... the pay was very, very small, because the competition was very keen and the method there was apparently that contractors would bid for a certain amount of work, and the competition was very keen. So they had a... finally a union was started in New York and I don't know how much of a family we had at that time, but as I learned they had a problem of trying to make a living at all, the competition was so keen. And so the union was formed and my father did not want to be a strikebreaker and... I mean to break a strike, he was in sympathy, but he had a little family, he had two or three children, and so he found an opportunity of going to Philadelphia. So he moved to Philadelphia.

Q2: [Unidentified interviewer] Do you remember what part of New York your father lived in?
A: Well, I can't say. I know I was born on a street called Cannon Street, so that I suppose he lived there too. But the interesting thing to me is this that... not wishing to hurt the desire for some kind of a more representative income, he went to Philadelphia. And after two or three years, the same thing happened in Philadelphia. He did not want to again obstruct the effort to get better working conditions, and he found an advertisement here in Wilmington in which a certain firm here, a men's clothing at that time, too, here; there was no such thing as buying a $100 suit, whatever the relationship would be today. You bought a ready-made suit, it was $10 or $15.00, and if you wanted something better than that, why you had it made to order. And my father was competent, he could do that, and so he came down there, and Mullens at 6th and Market Street had a... was the best known store here, men's shop, and so he came down and was employed in charge of the men's furnishing department... men's clothing department, for the better clothes... better suits. So he made... he did that for a number of years, quite a number of years. And that was the condition at that time. Now whether it was because of the changed conditions by which better manufacturers made better clothes for those who wanted them ready-made... I suppose it's what happened. But as you know today many of the stores here have good clothes that are not made to order, but you probably know the names of some of the manufacturers that advertise very extensively. So... but he was there for quite some time, he had full charge, and I was amazed he apparently would take... I'd seen him in his department, they had long tables on which he'd make the patterns, and then he took my measurements, the proper size and all that, and he cut the patterns himself. And I saw him in his place there, he laid on the cloth, and I looked in amazement, you know, where
it happened to fall. They had electric shears, you know . . . a tailor with a long pair of shears . . . we had 'em for I don't know how long. And you cut out the pattern on that. And apparently he knew, because they fitted.

Q

How old were you when your family came to Wilmington?

A

Nine years.

Q

Did you go to school in New York and Philadelphia?

A

Well, I suppose I did, because when I got here nine years, I suppose I did. But I had a difficulty to overcome. I went to school here at the primary school, 3rd and Walnut Street, and then I completed whatever studies I had to do there, and I went to 6th and French to the grammar school. And I got through the grammar school at 6th and French when I was about 13. So therefore I was a 13-year-old dropout for financial reasons. But as time went on, and I felt a very definite need, I found it was necessary—or desirable—to take advantage of the opportunities, and I recall one day particularly that I went out to the Wilmington High School . . . oh, I must have been I suppose 20 at least . . . at high school, asking who was the man in charge . . . who was in charge of the English Department, and I found it was a certain man, and I met him, and a most wonderful thing for me because both he and his wife were teachers. And I went to their home for a number of years. And he was . . . when I told him my problem, he was very sympathetic and he really wanted to . . . I never forgot him.

Q

Do you remember his name?

A

Yeah, Jones . . . I can't think of his first name . . . but named Jones, and he was coaxed away from Wilmington because he went to a Bank's Business School in Philadelphia.

Q

Um hum, banking school.

A

No, it was a Bank . . . the name was Bank.

Q

Oh, I see, the school's name was . . .

A

Bank, yeah. But it was a business school. And he was there for I don't know how many years. I know I kept in touch with him because I became very fond of both he and his wife because he acted . . . his relation to me was so that I naturally just . . . just naturally responded.

Q

But he's the one who encouraged you to go to school.

A

He didn't encourage me, I encouraged him to teach me.

Q

I see.

A

No, I felt a need . . .

Q

But you were going to Wilmington High School at this time.
A No.

Q No? You just were tutored by this gentleman.

A At home.

Q Uh huh. I see.

A Then . . .

Q By the way, where did you live in Wilmington at this time?

A Why we . . . coming into Wilmington, we lived about 2nd and Jefferson Street, and I know that later we lived on 1618 Franklin Street in Wilmington for about 30-odd years. But got [inaudible] with Arden and we liked it, and so we kept it as a summer place. But finally after some years . . .

Q Was that your family or just you?

A Just me. We got tired of going back and forth and we gradually built up . . . you know, we wanted to get rid of having two refrigerators and having two washing machines and two of this and two of that. And so we finally gave it up. And an avid something . . . we had a small place here, a summer place . . . in fact, that little photograph . . . my wife is a painter and I might say that she was a very fine painter in the sense that she was a very sensitive painter. For her it wasn't a question of just painting a boat or something like that, she had a feeling of . . . especially an interest in things that appealed to her. So that all our life . . . although she didn't start until our son started to go to college, and she was about 36 years old when she first started to paint . . . 'cause she's a very shy person and she . . . we have quite a good many of them hanging here. But we . . . she only sold one, that was really . . . and she didn't want to sell it . . . it was sold to the Society of Fine Arts in their permanent collection. And she didn't want to dispose of 'em. So we're holding onto 'em, if you'd . . .

Q We'd like to see them after . . .

A Well . . .

Q Is this the home that you first . . . at least part of the home when you first came out to Arden?

A No, we first went and rented summer places here. But this little photograph on here is what it was when we first bought it. So we added to this and added to that and added to the other. And then about 16 years ago, 16 years ago, we decided that we got tired of this moving back and forth and decided to make . . . so we added to the place here and gave up the place in town.

Q Um hm. Let's go back to your education. Now, after your tutoring with Mr. Jones, did you go anyplace else for your education?
Oh, yes. Again... in the meantime, I got married... I was married and...

Where was your wife from?

She was born in Russia, came here when she was, I understand, probably five or six or seven years old. But I felt again the... if I say [inaudible] I'm boasting, that's not the fact... because I saw so many of our people who were perfectly satisfied. You belonged to a temple, you belonged to the country club, you know, you belonged... then you're "in." Well, we didn't feel that that gave us anything. My wife happened to feel the same way. So I tried to find out... to further myself in some way, I made a lot of inquiries. And the University of Delaware had no extension course at all, none. And a little bit later I found out that... by looking into it, I found that the University of Pennsylvania had a C.C.T. course, which was a college course for teachers which did not need any entrance examination, but for teachers who wanted to complete something they needed in order to advance further. So I found I could enter that. And I went up for about four years, between four and five years...

To the University of Pennsylvania.

Yeah. And I had my own job to take care of, I was working, I was interested in wholesale hardware and our iron and steel business, called the Delaware Hardware Company, and I was there for about 40 years before I retired about 10 years ago. But this other appealed to me, and I had... the best time of my life was when I went to the university extension course. And I took all the courses, too. This is boasting a little bit, but I just wanted to see, could I do it? And I found one or two of the courses that I took were a little bit difficult for me, 'cause you see, I had no... what do they have in high school...

Is it math or...

Math, that's it. I had no math. And so when a professor put the signals, put the symptoms... well, they're not the symptoms, the...

Formulas?

The formulas on the...

Symbols.

Huh?

The symbols, the math symbols.

Yeah, math symbols, I just marked them down, you know. I had a brother-in-law who was a physician, Dr. Sidney Stat, and so I'd bring the symbols home and I got what I could get out of it, but I passed 'em, all of 'em. I was no... I did it only in order to test myself, to see could I do it. So
a little bit of all the other things that was desirable, I took all the
works, I took . . . in addition to handling my own job here I'd found
that by . . . two . . . I could only take two subjects that fitted so
I'd take one trip to Philadelphia . . . 'cause it wasn't at that time,
either, there wasn't such a thing as a 30-minute train. Philadelphia
was one hour. And if the evening class was dismissed at 10 minutes of
nine, I could make the 10:09 train to get here. If not, you had to
wait 'til ten something and get here at 11:30, which was the local.
Which was all right, I didn't mind it and I . . . my wife was entirely
sympathetic with me doing this because I had to leave her alone home oh,
lots and lots of times. But I did it anyway, and I say, I took all the
courses and not very long ago I had the . . . I don't say the pleasure,
but I had . . . I guess it was a pleasure . . . that I came across a
drawer with all the papers that I had written for the classes. And that's
been . . . well, wait a minute . . . been at least 30 years ago . . .
more than that, that I enrolled . . . and the marks were all right, too.

Q Did you get a degree from the University of Pennsylvania?

A No, I couldn't. I had no . . . I never went to high school. So I
wasn't qualified. I didn't care about . . . I mean, that didn't bother
me at all. What I was after was all those things with information and
books and things that were of a different field from me and that was
outside of me. And I wanted to be part of that. So we did. Now I have
one son who is a . . . he's the chap that called me a while ago. He's
the radiologist . . . he's the head of one of the departments of the
University of Delaware. His wife is a radiologist and she takes charge
of the Presbyterian Radiological Department, also in my son's responsi-
bility. He told me the other day that they had 101 employees in the
two departments that he was responsible for. And that's grown tremendously.
When he went in . . . that's the only job I think he ever had.

Q2 Now where is this?

A University of Pennsylvania.

Q2 Oh, I see.

A I think it's the only job he had because he's been there about . . . oh,
from the time he left medical school and he went into radiology and by
the time he passed that . . . he's been there now about 32 or 34 years.
And as I say, his wife's also a radiologist and we have one son who's
just . . . I thought he was going in for radiology because because his
parents were, but no, he's going into ophthalmology. And he's now at
Johns Hopkins. He had to go in the Army and they put him over to
Bethesda and he had to report there for two years so that throws him
back two years before he can begin . . . take him all this [inaudible]
time before he can be qualified to look at anybody's eyes, I guess.
Well, that's . . .

Q Let's go back to your business. Where and when did you start this
business? Did you work for the company or did you start a business?
No, no, I worked for them. I worked as a . . . well when I left school I worked as a boy of 13, 14 years old and worked at a toy store at 54 Market Street named Adams . . . these things, of course, are of no particular interest . . .

Oh, yes, fine.

But they're . . . I did, I worked there for quite a while. And then I found another position with a wholesale notion house, it was well known at that time.

What was the name of it?

Delaware Notion Company. And I was there for quite some years until there was an opportunity to go into the Delaware Hardware Company, which by that time I was strong enough to find somebody with and we were able to take over the Delaware Hardware Company which had been . . . this was in 1922, the company was 100 years old then. And I was there for about 38 years.

Now, you bought into the company, is that what happened?

Yeah, yeah.

Um hmm. What actually did you do in these other jobs? Like the toy store . . . were you a salesman or did you . . .

Well, like a boy would do around a shop, I did the usual thing of a boy of 13, 14, 15, 16. And at that time I was getting a munificent salary, which I guess was a normal thing, about three dollars and a half a week. Yeah. I mean, I wasn't . . . certainly wasn't overpaid, but that was the usual thing . . . if you wanted a kind of a job, you did that. And . . .

Do you remember the job?

Oh, yes . . . oh, yes, very well. Yes, it was . . . many incidents like that you remember . . . yes, I remember the job. And then I found one better job with the Delaware Hardware Company, which is the one which I say I have another man that I was associated with, and the two of us, a man named Harry Topkis, there was a Topkis family and this Harry Topkis was one of the sons and he and I managed to barely get our toes in there somehow or other. There was some death in that Delaware Hardware Company's family and it was . . . it was available. And so I gave up the Delaware . . . because we could foresee that with the other Delaware Notion Company there was no such thing as all these other department stores that carry all these other things. There used to be in that time . . . in Wilmington there'd probably be some parts of town on which they had four corners and four notion stores. But those things gradually . . .

Now this was a retail business? Or wholesale?

Oh, no. Wholesale.
Q: Wholesale. All right. Where was it located?

A: 27 Market Street.

Q: Um hmm. Does it still exist?

A: No. No. They ... I'm sorry to say they collapsed after ... two or three years after I got out. And that was not caused ... the man with whom I got associated with, the father of two sons who were ... as they became of age came in ... they just didn't ... they didn't have it. They had too much of the immediate present idea of having a good time and thought they were entitled to a lot of things. Well, you're just not entitled to it unless you earn it. So he passed away ... the father passed away and after being together I guess for about 30 more years together ... when he passed away and the two boys came in, I thought it best served me to get out. I don't want to go into any more details about that.

Q: Do you see any kind of a change or growth in this kind of a business over the years when you were ...?

A: Oh, yes ... oh, yes. Of course you had ... there were plenty of other new, competitive fields. In other words, there was this thing of having competition ... competition came out of Philadelphia or out of Baltimore, and they had trucks come in here which we didn't have before. And then there was other factors, too. For instance, contractors with whom we did business oftentimes found need for sending in in a hurry for things. Well, when they were paying $3.00 or three and a half an hour at that time, it paid them to buy them from the closest retail place they could put their hands on to get what they needed, 'cause they couldn't always foresee ... you could not foresee everything that you wanted. For instance, if you were building a house, you knew in a general way, but there were always changes and there were things that you had to do differently, and it was entirely better for them to go to ... if they were in that neighborhood places wherever the closest hard ... now we may have even sold that article wholesale--'cause ours was wholesale--to that retail store. But it paid the contractor to go to that retail store to pay the retail price to get what he wanted in a hurry because after all, when you pay a man and a truck and he drove down to 2nd and Shipley where we were located, it didn't pay him. But that could be foreseen ... I mean, that could be foreseen. And other sprung up with probably more modern ideas who felt that they ought to do things in new conditions. Just like now you have all the stores open on Sunday. I can remember when I was ... yes, I was president of the Delaware State Chamber of Commerce at the time, and Gaylords came in and wanted membership, and they wouldn't accept them because they were going to open up on Sunday and many of the stores, oh, they were the older members, they were opposed to it. But today, as you see, it's a different thing all together.

Q: Were you active in the Jewish community, in community affairs when you were younger?

A: Oh, yes. I helped organize ... probably ... I don't know how ... this might have been 70 years ago or very close to it, but I helped ...
or I was one of the persons who helped organize a Y.M.H.A. We didn't admit any girls at that time, only boys. And it was very ... this might be of at least some sentimental interest. We got together ... I don't know how old I could have been, maybe 16 or 17, something like that, and a small group of us, I don't know, maybe 10 or 12 boys, got together and wanted to start something in the way of a Y.M.H.A., or whatever name you'd call it. And we'd meet in a private house. I think you interviewed Mrs. Gins.

Q Yes.

A Well, her mother, Mrs. Rosa Topkis, was the head of the Topkis clan, whom I say ... the husband was a copper ... tin ... a coppersmith in New Castle. But she's a very ... I very often think of her with the warmest regard because she was a very clever woman. When we said, "Oh, where we gonna meet?" We had to meet at somebody's house. So she said, "Well, why don't you meet at my place?" She was running the Wilmington Dry Goods Company long before your father had any interest at all or J. M. had any interest at all. And we met at ... between 4th and 5th on King Street at her home on Sunday, because all of us were working, and she was clever enough to ... well, she had several boys who had fitted into this Y.M.H.A., at least four or maybe five. So when we'd have our big business, you know, we had ... we met on a Sunday, she would ... was smart enough to have some refreshments. And these were the things that Jewish boys, any loved. Teiglach--you know what teiglach are?

Q2 Yes.

A She'd have dishes of those, you know, and then we'd say, "Well, where we gonna meet next week?" or next month, "Well, why don't you meet here?" So we did. And that went on for some time, until we grew a little bit larger and stronger and we rented ... I remember we rented a place at 3rd and Market Street--it had a clothing store downstairs and a large room upstairs, oh, many times larger than this. And that was our headquarters for the Y.M.H.A. And after that, Louis Topkis, who was one of the sons of ... he bought the Oddfellows building at 3rd and King Street, and being very much interested in this, he says, "Well, you can use this building until something ... until I need it or something like that, without charge." So that to us was a hall with a balcony, oh, my goodness, it seemed beyond all dreams. And we did that for quite a while. And then finally it got around to the point of organizing even better and so that was the building at 515 French Street, in which your uncle was very much interested at that time. And what they did was--with the best of intentions--but I remember that Louis Topkis and William Topkis and a man by the name of Max Cohn were very much interested in this--Max Cohn had no children of his own--then men put up $10,000 apiece towards building this building. I notice that they have eliminated my name from ... when I say something about the Y.M.H.A., my name isn't in there with the past presidents. I never called attention to it, it didn't make any difference to me. But they ... yes ... so we tried to argue them against doing this, I mean our group that was interested at all. We wanted a Y.M.H.A., but we were against it because they wanted to make a
community center and our argument was how can you have a community center if you're going to have it against one of the shuls? See? But it didn't help very much. We tried to point out to them that you're not going to have a community center . . . "Oh, the community will support it." Well, how's the community going to support it when I know . . . I think I know human beings by this time fairly well, you don't do things unless you have a special interest in it. And the [inaudible] was at 3rd and Shipley Street, rather competitive with Adas Kodesch. And I remember going down to the factory . . . Louis Topkis had a factory, Topkis Factory at that time with Max Neil and Charles K. Brewer and we tried our best to convince them that they must do some other . . . you just can't put it against . . . alongside of any one of the temples, the shuls. But they meant so well that they insisted on doing it because they figured out that they had these . . . they had the building part and they had a couple of buildings that belonged to the shul, but they felt sure that they could convince the community, which they didn't. And I became the first president of the Y.M.H.A. here in this wonderful city because nobody else would take it. But we had to get started. We were building . . . they built and you just couldn't get started at all. So I did it with the understanding that we were going to work this thing out. We didn't work it out. Because the same . . . the same [sounds like "Hesch Shel Emeth"] . . . Shel Emeth Shul, orthodox shul at 3rd and Shipley Street, you think they would allow their children to go the few blocks up to 6th and French? Oh, no, you don't do that, you know, that's unfortunately a fact. And they built a building alongside of that for their own reception . . . for their own recreation room, and I remember they had . . . it cost about $25,000 to build this big building, which at that time was a pretty good price, what it would cost, and there was nothing else there. They wouldn't allow their children . . . they built this building up. Well, anyway, the matter came up until we finally came to the point that they've gotta do . . . the shul has gotta do something. They either have an Adas Kodesch center for themselves or build this. And this was built . . . this was built at 5th and French Street, they'd been fooling around all this time, it was built for $105,000, which at that time was a lot of money, in a sense.

Q2 Do you know the date? Can you date this? Beginning of the "Y"?

A I don't know. It'd be purely a guess, I don't remember.

Q Were you involved with the work . . . the background work for the temple that's off of Concord Pike . . . or not the temple, I mean the community center?

A Well, I'm on some sort of advisory committee with all that sort of thing, but I have dropped out of some things, and yet, inspite of retirement and all that, I'm still very active in quite a number of things.

Q What other organizations have you been involved with besides the community center?

A Let's see, I had a piece of paper here . . . well, if I ramble along
here . . . this is just a . . . I did this the other day again for . . . the other week for this photo archives. I was past president of the Delaware State Chamber of Commerce for three terms.

Q In ham. What year was this?
A 1932 through '34 [inaudible] . . . I was president of the . . . these are all being president . . . the Delaware Safety Council, 1931 and '32; Wilmington Citizen's Housing Association . . . that was . . . one of the things I have that seemed to me important that . . . and I've learnt this . . . that an idea . . . if you have an idea, think it's right, think it's a good idea . . . let's assume that you're . . . we're in general agreement, how long would it take to get public acceptance . . . and I said 20 years. And well I was sitting at some table with some men, they said, "Oh, no, that's not so." Well, I said, "I think I'm wrong, 25 years," before you get a public acceptance of an idea, that's assuming I'm not arguing, there wasn't any argument at all, there's quite a difference . . . because you couldn't get more than 10 or 12 people together to meet at somebody's private home to talk about low-cost housing. And so I was in there right from the beginning. That's been a good many years ago. And I served on the Wilmington Housing Authority for 13 years, seven years as chairman of that. And we also had the question, I look back . . . of course, you'll probably as you get older, you'll probably come across the same thing . . . I come back to this other factor. That it seems . . . well, it seems that you have to know that there's a period of time before people will begin accepting and sometimes they don't accept it even then. We have people today who are opposed to public housing, very much opposed to it. But at that time, we had an awful time. Then there was even a period when it came along the question--and I have it somewhere in this pile--where the board, they were six members, six members on the Housing Authority, and we were split three to three about renting for Negroes. No, sir, [inaudible] couldn't get a majority at all to go ahead on the question of renting low-cost houses to Negroes. Well, the term of a Housing Authority member was six years. So we had to wait until the term was up and we got somebody else on so we had a majority, but that didn't mean we had a unanimous vote at all. We only had four to two instead of three to three, to get a . . . have Negroes on it.

Q2 Do you remember when you first started renting to Negroes?
A Well, let me see, it'd be . . . I haven't got an exact date.

Q2 You rented no units at all to Negroes or the housing was separate?
A No, no, the Housing Authority built houses.

Q2 But . . . and it was all for whites.
A All for white.

Q2 Oh, I see. Then there was no public housing for Negroes when there was public housing for whites.
A No, no . . . as I say, there was a Public Housing Authority, founded . . .
organized, and I remember distinctly at the time we went down to Dover to finally get the governor to sign the bill that organized a Housing Authority. And it was... anyway, let me run over this thing quickly. Let's see... we had a... the Wilmington Citizen's Housing, that was before the Housing Authority. We fooled around with that thing for ten years. Then I was interested in the Social Workers Club, 1934 to 1938; and Delaware State Conference of Social Work, six years I was chairman of each of that time; we had a Consumers' League of Delaware and I was chairman of that for ten years, 1931 to 1940. The Jewish Welfare Society, that I didn't mention at all before, I was president of that for two years; the Jewish Federation of Delaware, I was on that committee six years as president. I must have been on that for at least fifteen years. Wilmington Kiwanis Club, I was the first one... I don't want to put that in now in this... but I was the first Jew in the Wilmington Kiwanis Club. I hate to say these things, because it's disgraceful... but that's a fact. And today--I became president some years later. We had a Taxpayers Research League here, I was president of that three years.

Q2 What was that for?

A The question of taxes, taxes research to research the tax they were paying in order to find out are we... are we doing what we can with the money we get. We need it today, but it's passed out of existence.

Q2 Was that federal taxes or state taxes?

A State and federal. And that's when we brought in some of the big boys, I have a good bit of material here which men like Lammot du Pont and I had a... I'm not dropping names just to sound big, but we met very often at his office on this matter of taxpayers... oh, yes, they were interested in taxes. Now here's something that I'm particularly proud of, I guess, the Delaware Festival of the Arts. We started that, oh, I guess 30 years or more ago. And I was head of that for 20 years because what I like to do is help to organize something and then see if you couldn't get public acceptance and elect somebody as chairman of the people, because otherwise they wouldn't exist. You know, the thing would wither and die. I was chairman of that for 20 years, I've got a lot of material on that. And we started in by inviting artists to exhibit and if you are not acquainted at all, at the present time we have a Delaware Festival of the Arts is this one, and then we have a Brandywine Arts Festival that started out also and I acted as chairman of that for two years until we could get someone to take it over and they're doing very well. In fact, we had two problems there. One of them was would artists around Delaware and nearby, would they exhibit outdoors, and the second place, would anybody come to look at 'em, see. And the first year, there was an awful crowd. It shows merely that that was actually ready and ripe long before we started. So we had... I remember, [inaudible, sounds like Othad Eckham], who was a pretty... pretty much of a critic, he came over to my table, he said, "My God, you must have 10,000 people here." Well, I said we didn't have any entrance count, but it looked like there were. And there have been every year since. In fact, I got a notice the other day that we're having a meeting next week on our
next Brandywine Arts Festival. And that'll take place in September, and I would suggest that if you're . . . see the advertisement, you'll go out there to see it.

Q: We have gone to it.
A: Have you been there? Well, I was president of the Arden Club up here for . . .

Q: What is the Arden Club?
A: Hmm?
Q: What is it, the Arden Club?
A: What is it?
Q: What is it, um hmm.
A: Well, it's made up by . . . right almost from the beginning . . . it's right above here, it was a building called Guild Hall, but that's the center part for our activities here. And they have various guilds, Housewives Guild and a Scholars Guild and now they've got a Tennis Guild and they have oh, six or eight or nine more guilds. 15 members of the club can make up a guild, which is done for its own interest, things they may have an interest in. Now, of course we had a Jewish Community Relations Council, I was chairman of that for three years, and a Recreational and Promotion Service. That's another one of my favorites; I helped organize that and I'm very happy to say it's still [inaudible] very well. And it started about 24, 25 years ago. The purpose is to . . . with the change in time . . . I wrote some articles at one time called "Leisure--What For?" and I got a lot of criticism on account of that because I was . . . some of my friends, particularly in the business world, they thought I was trying to promote a five-day week. And I was careful not to say that, but I was careful that a manufacturer had better see what they could do about recreational businesses. There was business available there for those who . . . and of course you have it here now, with boating and tennis and playgrounds and all. So Recreation and . . . and I'm still on that board. About . . . at one time . . . ten years . . . I was to organize a legislative forum. We did that by having a luncheon meeting, we usually got together about 150 people for lunch, and the idea was not an action group, 'cause they had to be very careful, I think, at that time that you talked about an action group, they'd charge you with things you'd never dream of. This was to try to get the pro and con of legislation that we got bills on and we had the people come and take both sides of it and some of our big boys would come up there, too. We had quite some influence. Of course that was the point, not to pin 'em down to anything at all, they were perfectly free and easy to come. And I could drop a lot of names who finally came--not at first, you see.

Q: Well, how about dropping a few names?
A: Um... I would get myself into trouble because I don't want to make it appear that I'm doing this in order to brag about names that came in... no. Then we... back in 1936 and '37 we started also a Men's Social Service Club, again for the purpose of social problems.

Q2: What kind of social problems?

A: What kind? Same as you have today. You haven't solved any of them yet. Not many of them. We haven't solved any of them yet. We still have them. But that's gone out... that's gone out of business again. Some of these went out of business because the persons who started it passed on and there haven't been somebody else... and it's been taken over by some... then I was serving as the Mayor's Emergency Employment Relief Commission and then I've served a couple of times... years... as the Delaware Committee... chairman of the Delaware Committee on National Week. During the Second World War I served on... as chairman for the state of Delaware of the Price Panal. It was my job--my committee's job and mine that we meet and we had certain authority so people who slipped away from the prices that they filed with us... and we found out, I'll drop a name now, we found out that the Hotel DuPont had the best value liquor that was around. That's a fact... [inaudible] you learn something. I found out that they... for the same price, you had to file with our commission, the price list of restaurants and hotels and liquor places and so on. Then I got interested in the Community Council on Youth. And I got involved in this t.v. educational channel 12. And I'm still serving on quite a number of--either a director or a member... the Delaware Historical Society, the Delaware Branch of the United Nations Association, United World Federalists, The Girls Club--I'm very fond of that. That was an effort to... the women started that and they have actually built a very... have you ever been in the Girls Club?

Q2: No.

A: No? They've done a wonderful job. I've got a very high regard for these women. I was in on the beginning of it because what they wanted to do was one of the women's clubs wanted to get something like that started. One of the women, a Mrs... a Dr. Dennison, she was a schoolteacher, she saw me and I told her maybe we could do something and I happened to belong to the Kiwanis Club at that time and I thought that that'd be a good thing for them to do, so I was doing them a favor, too, because they are today contributing $6500 a year to the one on the east side, which is for Negroes. So you have... they call that the Kiwanis Club. Well, Delaware State Commission on Aging, I've been on that for about 10 years. Delaware Branch of the American Cancer Society... Correctional Council of Delaware has been one of my pets. This thing--and I have to admit that the reason I know I've been on it 50 years is because I got a citation here on account of Mrs. E. Paul du Pont and I were cited because we'd been on it so long. I don't know whether that's good or not. But it was a big problem how... what to do with the rehabilitation of those getting in trouble. Right in the very beginning we could see that just putting them in jail didn't help. The National Conference of
Christians and Jews. One time we had a Lincoln Club of Delaware. I think it still exists under that Mental Health Association . . . B'nai Brith Lodge. I was interested in Block Flight, got that one organized, it was taken over by the state . . . Committee of 39, I'm a charter member of that. Delaware Tuberculosis and Health Society, I've been on that about 38 years, I imagine. National Consumers League, Planned Parenthood . . . and one of the things that I failed utterly was an attempt to get a bridge across the Delaware--way, way back. We could see the need of having a crossing and this shows part of the work, how it works out, so we finally had a committee of three from Delaware, I was amongst them, and three from New Jersey trying to get together to build a bridge. In spite of the fact, there were those who went down to the shore. We'd go down here to the wharf and sometimes wait an hour and a half or two hours for a boat. But the opposition was too strong. Being a crossing between two states, you had a . . . you had to get a consent of Congress, and we only had one representative in Delaware . . . from Delaware in Congress and Pennsylvania had 36. And Pennsylvania owned the Wilson Line and this new Delaware/New Jersey boat line was owned by Philadelphia interests and they blocked every effort. So . . .

Q Then was this . . . the early push for the bridge? What was the date on that?

A [inaudible].

Q2 The bridge was built--opened in 1951.

A Well, this was long . . . longer than that. This was like . . . it was I remember something that took 22 years later about the bridge, because we finally got a firm bid of $48,000,000 to build a bridge. And when it was built, 22 years later, when Frank D. Pont got into it for some reason, he pushed it through, it's $80,000,000.

Q Um hmm. I wonder how much the second bridge was.

A Well, it's much more than that.

Q Yeah. Was there an organization involved with this early attempt to get the bridge?

A Yes.

Q What was the name of it?

A The Wholesale Section of the Chamber of Commerce.

Q I see. Um hmm.

A Um course, Planned Parenthood, I belonged to that [inaudible]. Well, the
other things that I have a special interest on, I guess, is the Delaware Art Association... Delaware Art Center. I've been on that I guess for 30 years I guess as a board member. And I still take a...

Q Was your wife involved in that?

A Yes. Well, I may say that she wasn't involved that officially, but I have a very strong... I must admit, I want to admit, that my interest was aroused through her, and things that she did. So that was why I was... I suppose my interest was aroused in that and I did a number of things with these art festivals and things on account of my interest in it, but then my interest, I'm sure, was aroused by her. Then among some citations, I got the Chamber of Commerce Marble Cup Award in 1955, Community Service Welfare Council in 1958, 1960 an honorary degree, Master of Arts, University [inaudible]... I didn't go to high school. Then there were some citations by the governors about one thing or another. Oh, I got a citation when the State of Delaware Highway Department built the bridge; I wasn't invited to the opening--neither were the others, either. That's human nature. Nothing unusual about that, except later, whatever that means, I got a citation about that. I mentioned the Chamber of Commerce Marble Cup Award... the B'nai B'rith, they gave me a citation twice, about 13 years apart. Office of Price Administration, I think I mentioned that, Second World War... I did. Well, that [inaudible]... I found this 25th anniversary of the Public Jewish Community Center and it reminded me of the names of quite a number of Jews that are on this. This is almost falling apart.

Q Since you've done so much in community work, do you think the problems--as you said, the problems of today aren't so much different from the problems of years ago.

A No, not much... oh, there's some advantages...

Q Do you see any big changes in community work over the years?

A Oh, yes, there is some. I think the United Fund Council, I think they're an intelligent attempt. I was involved--and I didn't mention it--I was involved in that for another reason. At one time I was interested in some other things that failed. I wanted to get a city manager for the city of Wilmington on the theory that--it's a job and there's nothing new about it at all... I remember Cincinnati was the first city that developed a city manager who had nothing at all to do with the political aspect at all. They had a mayor who did the decoration, you know, attending affairs...

Q Ceremonial.

A It was ceremonial, but this man who was selected as an engineer and he was given full charge but I couldn't get anything at all like it over here.

Q Newark managed to do this. Newark.

A Oh, yes, I know... I know... Norma Handloff and I are old, old
friends, very old friends. And let's see what else... oh, there's ever so many more things that... just don't come to mind. I remember the t.v. thing--Norma Hanley was on the same committee with me and we... we couldn't do anything more about it because we found that as a result of our careful study, it would take a programming of nearly a million dollars a year and to build a station would cost a half a million dollars a year, and that kind of money wasn't in sight at all.

Q You're talking about educational t.v. in Wilmington, for Delaware.
A Yes, for Delaware, we're talking, for Delaware.

Q You're not talking about Channel 12.
A Oh, no. Channel 12 was something that came along afterwards...

Q Well, that's the end of E.T.V. in Wilmington... in Delaware, isn't it?
A Yes... yes.

Q The recent legislature isn't appropriating money.
A Yeah. Well, it's normal. There are many things--I skipped over some things here that I never [inaudible]...

Q Is there anything about today that bothers you or do you see things as sort of a continuing history, I mean, people I've interviewed talk about problems today as if these are something new and...

A I don't know of anything new... I mean there may be some slight difference in degree, but I don't think there's anything new about them.

Q Are you optimistic about affairs?
A I don't know. I think it's entirely one of how we can get people to awake from their apathy, just their apathy. Now I don't quarrel at all with anybody who when I get to talking and they have a difference of opinion. I don't quarrel with that if I can understand why they do it. And I see that very often it's one having to do with either self-interest or they think it's self-interest because you can't make any real change without hurting somebody. Anybody that says that they can do it, it just can't be done, I don't think. I'm speaking in a generalization, of course. But there is a big change in the opportunity for doing these things, and I don't for a moment imply by that that we shouldn't keep on pushing to get these things done. Hopefully we're going to get more people to see the point, but if you take the National Consumers League, that was a question of women working in the shops, what we did with that, and my, it was awful. Well, we haven't made... I could go down that list and tell you many things that have been made, but have been so slow, you see. And I would say half the things I mentioned are about the same as they were. There's very little difference you see. But you have an awful lot of things that need to be done, but you take most people... seen to be satisfied. I oftentimes wonder what do they do even with the
ordinary daily press to . . . you'd think that . . . well, sometimes it makes me think that what people do, they look at the headlines on top, mayto turn to sports on the inside, and that's all. I mean, as far as reading editorials or discussing with friends, it isn't for the majority of them. And therefore we select those people for our state legislature or for national office who represent a majority of these people, you see? Because that's how they get elected. And when they get elected, they immediately think in terms of representing the people who elected them. And then it sounds like we're in a circle, because they wouldn't get elected . . . of course this is a generalization, I understand of course that there are exceptions . . . they don't accept . . . they'll not . . . yes, they'll represent a certain element which is a majority because if it weren't a majority, they wouldn't get elected, and [inaudible] they get elected, they feel they've got a responsibility towards these people. And if they want to get reelected, they're gonna continue with the same thing. And oftentimes you will see a big [inaudible] legislature—I said legislature, it's a city council, don't make any difference, the principle's the same, and what do they do? They want to know what their constituents want them to do. And you say why should they care . . . want to do what their constituents . . . because that's how they get elected and that's how they're gonna be reelected, if they're gonna get reelected. So . . . this is not finding fault with any particular people that are elected because they represent the people with the ideas that elected them.

Q Do you see any solution for all of this? For this problem of apathy and . . . I guess this is just something you have to live with.

A Something that you have to live with, hopefully that you're gonna make some . . . of course, there are some changes. But it takes an awful long time. You remember I said before, if anybody has . . . well, has plans, some idea, and assuming it's a good idea, well, there you are.

Q Otherwise, you have to get the support and . . .

A You have to get the support, and you can rest assured . . . that gives me hopes, though, that if it is gonna take 20 or 25 years, well, it'll have to take 20 or 25 years. It's not gonna be done and you're not gonna be something up and have it go through the . . . you take this matter of Family Court. I remember, very well remember, we had nothing. Then we had a Juvenile Court. But there was no attempt . . . and there is not enough interest now to say, "Well, look, you're going to put in John Smith. He committed a crime." All right, he'd been found guilty and he's sentenced to jail. Well, very few people realize that that man or woman is gonna get out. Two years ago, five years from now, ten years, fifteen years, they're gonna get out. Is he gonna be a worse person when he gets out? Or can you do anything while you got him in? And it's been found that you can do something with these people. It's not a new concept, nothing that I'm throwing out as something new, but I know I'm serving on this thing, the Correctional Council, I mentioned it on that thing for about 50 years and we're still fighting like everything to bring about [end of Side 1 of tape] . . .

. . . last evening and I hear a good bit of what's being said inside and I had that opinion long, long, long ago. But you don't find any terrible
furore about this sort of thing. People are perfectly willing ... and you take most people, yes, even take a little thing like the death sentence. Look at all these years it took to come to the point or to find out that the states that do not have a death penalty haven't any more death crimes than the ones that do have death penalties. I mean, you'd say that ... well, how is it possible, it's ridiculous, but it's a fact.

Q: Otherwise it's not a deterrent to ... 
A: No ... no ... no. And there are some people—for instance, you take our prison system now. Only yesterday, you might say, they began to think of ... that they wound up taking the drunks [inaudible] ... well, you know, only yesterday they came to that conclusion.

Q: Do what, did you say now?
A: Detoxification for drunks.
Q: I see. Instead of just punishment in a prison, you mean.
A: Well, they're punishing ... it's no crime, it's a disease. And what they've done over and over again, I've been down to Municipal Court, not today, only, but years ago when I got interested in it, and you find a judge sits on the bench and by bringing in one after another, it takes him two minutes or so, five minutes or so, the guy ... yes, he's a drunk, he was ... policeman said he was drunk and he's guilty ... all right, ten days or ten dollars and costs. And he goes in there and gets dried out and they let him out. The same thing over again. At the cost of us ... that's almost 20% of the people we have in our population. Nobody thinks that we can reduce our whole cost of law abidance, the whole cost by twenty-seven and a half dollars a day for keeping, see. The seven and a half isn't spent in order to try to cure him. We spend seven and a half dollars a day to feed him and to keep him and then they let him out.

Q: He goes back and does the same thing.
A: He does the same thing. And if we don't do something ... and I'm very much interested in this 308 West Street house which is again a house with the idea of what to do with some who ... I don't know if you're familiar at all with the 308 West ...

Q: Is this the halfway house?
A: Yes. And well, it's so obvious that if something can be done, you ought to do it. There's been a great deal of trouble trying to get this halfway house, now they've got quite a number of them around the country. Delaware I think was the first one. But we find ourselves exactly with the same thing. We do know, I've been down there many times, we do know they've got a very simple system. And before a man's term is up, a social worker
sees him and decides upon whom they can take over to the halfway house, he has to pay $15.00 a week for board, he hasn't got the $15.00, so he has to work to earn it. They help then to get a job, they tell the employer . . . the social worker tries his best to see such employers who might be willing to accept him with the understanding that he's . . . what he's done and where he's been and he just got out . . . well, they don't try to hide it at all, but they try to make the employer sold on the idea that he's possible . . . make a very good employee for 'em. Well, have we got that accepted yet? No, We're beginning with this . . . I'm talking about this 25-year . . . we're beginning with these things, you see. And the same thing with these boys and girls that they have trouble with, because something has . . . you can't take a boy . . . you can't take a boy or girl that's 14, 15, 16 years old and begin to teach them order, respect for other people . . . you can't do that. You had to begin when they were two years old. I've got a little great-granddaughter now, two years old . . . that'd be her little picture over there . . . two years old--well, she wasn't then, she was only 11 months old then--two years old and they had her down here the other week, my grandson had 'em down here . . . had her down here . . . well, a little two-year-old learns already. Not because . . . I mean not because [inaudible] because before she became two I saw other babies of two years old, and then I said, well, I guess my grandchild is a bit of the same--she's smart, clever. They're quick, they know when . . . they know where to put the words. They learn the words and know where to put 'em too. And if you don't begin when they're two, three or five . . . . In my family we had three boys and two girls. We never, never . . . never did we ever come home . . . or be home for dinner . . . we called 'em supper, they weren't fancy . . . without everybody being there. There's no such thing as "so-and-so isn't here," well, "What do you mean he isn't here?" Suppers were at 6:00, he was there. That's all there was to it. There was no question so therefore I grew up into that. But it isn't so . . . take these things down to that, it isn't so smart. But we know these are the things . . . but when I see some of the things on television and I see how some of these kids are living and they're hungry . . . I had a sister-in-law who's passed on, but she was a principal of a school nearby, and she told us kids were coming in school and they fell asleep at the desk. They were hungry, they had no place to sleep . . . they didn't have a place where they could study their lessons, so what do you expect from them? I mean . . . you're bound . . . I mean what I'm trying to say, you're bound to get that kind of result from that sort of a condition. Well . . . so therefore you have to change the condition. But how many people are aware of this? So therefore when you talk about 25 years, I think I may have to review that . . .

Q: Patience isn't the character of the age, though, is it?
A: No . . . no. I'll admit there are some changes, but they're very slow. And when the Correction Council has been in existence for 50 years and today they've got the same problems as they had . . . a little difference in minor degree . . . and when they started . . . the Family Court bill didn't pass this year mostly because they wanted to take the . . . those sixteens and seventeens, those under 18 years old, and put 'em in the Superior Court, which if found guilty puts them in there with the adult
prisoners, and we've been doing that all the time. What they had was this law didn't pass, ... the Family Court was fighting it, ... they didn't want to do that, ... but if they don't do it, well, we'll have the same thing more or less. Maybe it'll come around.

Q: What other changes do you think you'd like to see? You talked about prison reform and ... 

A: Well, these things we're talking about, which would be ... 

Q: That'd be plenty.

A: That'd be too ample, yes, indeed. But every change that's made affects several other things. And as I see that with the best of intentions, again assuming that it's a good law and assuming that they have finally written it up so that it passes and we get it passed, how many people immediately look it over and say, "Now, look, there's this thing here, we can get around that." And they've hurt something to their interest. Look what you hear now with Social Security. Well, nobody intended a law for some of those doctors to make the kind of salaries they're making. It wasn't intended for that. But what they do, they say, "Well, now, wait, here's this law." How many nursing homes have been built now? Hundreds of them in the country, thousands of nursing homes, why? Because of the interests of a nursing home ... they can make more money by taking people in. And they make some little adjustment there and so they ... but it was never intended for that. So therefore how careful you have to be even if there's a good law, assuming it's good, that you have to be careful that it's not being used for purposes which it wasn't intended for. You take a little matter here, one thing I think that's terribly important amongst many others that are terribly important, you take drunken driving. And you say, "Well, what's that got to do with it?" Well, we're killing, in this little state here, [inaudible] ... the other day, 87 people in this little state were killed so far this year. You talk about right now. Nobody questions the desirability of not having that kind of a war, killing some of our boys, but we never think of our doing it right here in Delaware. And why? Mostly because a person who has been found guilty of driving while drunk, or under the influence, if he hasn't been found guilty yet, and so he goes to trial and what's he do? If you don't send a man to jury trial, I don't know [inaudible] is something you ought to do, if you ever get arrested for driving drunk, demand a jury trial. And a jury will very often, mostly will not convict, 'cause the juryman sits there and says, "Well, gee, it might have been me." Yeah "it might have been me" and so he doesn't do it. So you have your ... right here in this country, right here, little bit of a Delaware, how big is it? 87 people killed so far this year, 32 more than a year ago at the same time. In last night's paper I see a Delaware Safety Council which I have a special interest in that, and I find that there are going to be between 550 and 650 people that get killed over this 4th of July period.

Q2: In the United States.

A: In the United States, yes. I'm not talking about all the ones that get injured. That's terrible.

Q: Well, I don't want to take up anymore of your time, Mr. Finkelstein.
A That's all right.

Q And I want to thank you very much.

A Well, I don't know if I've given you anything at all . . . I'm glad you came . . .

[END OF INTERVIEW]