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Interview with Mrs. James N. Ginns (nee Sallie T. Topkis), Jewish community leader, by Myron L. Lazarus (date of interview unknown).

Q This is a recording of the Oral History Project of the University of Delaware. We're interviewing Mrs. James N. Ginns and Myron Lazarus is the interviewer. All right, Mrs. Ginns, where were you born?

A I was born in Odessa, Russia in 1880 . . . May 9, 1880.

Q What were your parents in Russia?

A My father was a coppersmith . . . had a small factory and he used to make large utensils for the boats . . . you know, there was a big seaport in Odessa, Russia. And my mother had a stall in the marketplace like most women did in Russia and she sold the small things that my husband [sic] and his helpers used to make in a retail shop.

Q That sounds like your family was rather comfortable in Russia.

A They were very comfortable. My two oldest brothers, David and Louis, were not allowed to go to the public school and they went to private Jewish schools where they learned Hebrew and some history . . . they didn't learn too much.

Q But being Jews they couldn't go to the regular public schools.

A Yes. And I remember my mother always said that she had . . . they were escorted to school by a tutor or one of the workmen. And it might be interesting there to say that my nurse when I was a baby was an older woman who was . . . came to Odessa to try to find her son, who had been kidnapped by the Russians and put into the Russian army. At that time the Russian government was stealing Jewish boys to induct them into the army . . . to be raised as Russians . . . to be raised as Russians and . . .

Q Young boys . . . it wasn't men of military age.

A Young boys, six, seven years old. And they were raised as Russian Catholics and then inducted into the army.

Q Who would do this, the government, or . . .

A The government . . . the government did it. And this nurse of mine, I think that's interesting to note as a past . . .

Q Did she pass this on to your parents, or to you, do you remember?

A No, my parents told me [inaudible] . . .

Q2 [Unidentified female interviewer] Did she ever find her son?

A What?

Q2 Did she find her son?

A As far as I know, no, she did not. And then my parents left Russia in 1881 after the pogrom. There was a big pogrom between 1880 or 1881 in Odessa, Russia, and it was a very bad situation there. Everything was destroyed and my parents . . . my brother William, who was two years old, and I and all the workers in my father's factory lived in the sub-cellar for five days. The neighbors . . .

Q Do you remember this?

A No. The neighbors, who were non-Jews, were very kind. They took my two oldest brothers into their home, dressed them in their children's clothes and gave them Christian names so that in case the soldiers came, the Cossacks came, that they would pass them off as their children. So there's kindness no matter where you go. And they used to bring food to all of us at midnight when they wouldn't be caught, and they did it at the risk of their lives. And when it was safe enough to come out and when my parents could dispose of their belongings for as much as they could, which wasn't very much . . . I think they brought 2,000 rubles over here with them. And . . .

Q They had no trouble getting passports or anything like that.

A They had no passports. They had to steal their way across the river that separated Esarabia [sp] or now Turkey or Rumania, wherever it was, from Russia. They had to go there by night and my mother used to tell me that there was a small town called Brod, B-r-o-d, that sat on the border of Austria and Germany. And there were so many people wanting to immigrate to America at that time, they didn't have enough boats out of Hamburg, Germany, to take all the people so that a great many people were stalled in these small towns. And my mother and father opened a small restaurant. My mother was very ambitious, she was a hard worker, and she opened a small restaurant in Brod and fed the people, as many as she could until my brother Will and I came down with the measles, and then she closed up the restaurant. Finally they did come to the United States. There was a committee in Philadelphia . . .

Q By the way did you go from Europe . . . did you go to England, Liverpool?

A No. No, straight from Brod to Hamburg.

Q Oh, to Hamburg, and then Hamburg . . .

A Germany.

Q And Hamburg to the United States?

A Hamburg to the United States. And they . . . I think [sounds like "Castle Garden"] it was at that time in Philadelphia . . . maybe it was New York, I don't know. But anyhow, they came to Castle Garden. And this committee in Philadelphia, composed mostly of German Jews, tried to locate the people in the communities where they could best fit in. And my father being a coppersmith was sent to Chester where there was a Krapp shipyard, and there too they needed coppersmiths. And that's where we first located and

where my brother Charles was born, about three weeks after we came to this country. So . . . but the sad thing was . . . or maybe it was a fortunate thing, the men went on strike. They didn't want to work with either a foreigner . . . or maybe it was because he was a foreigner and maybe because he was a Jew, I don't know. Whatever it was . . .

Q Do you remember the name of the company?

A Krapp Shipyard. And they went on strike so my father was discharged. And he went back to the committee and asked the committee what he should do, and they sent him to Wilmington. There was a factory, and I remember it distinctly, on 2nd Street between King and French, that manufactured copper pipes, about six to eight inches around, they may have been used for sewer pipes. And they got a job for my father there at this pipe factory. The same thing happened there. The men went on strike and the men didn't want to work with him. Evidently my father was a very quick worker and he probably worked very fast and wanted to make good, and they didn't like it. And for one reason or other, they went on strike. And he went back to the committee and they said, "Well, there's no other copper factory around that we can send you to. We've got to make a peddler out of you." My father was not a businessman . . .

Q Like thousands of other Jews, huh?

A Yes. My father was not a businessman, so they took my brother Lou, my brother Dave and my father and they outfitted them with small baskets with all sorts of notions . . . shoestrings, collar buttons, lamp wicks-- they used to have the oil lamps at that time, and I remember them having a big bundle of lamp wicks around their shoulders, they used to cut a piece off, you know, to sell to the person. And my father used to peddle around the various outskirts of Wilmington . . .

Q Now, this was in Philadelphia.

A Wilmington.

Q I'm sorry, that's right.

A We moved to Wilmington, you see, because he could work in Wilmington. We lived on what was then known as Bright's Alley, and that's no more in existence. It used to be between King and Market on Front Street and it's now in the parking lot, [inaudible] in that little parking lot. And there was a little alley that was probably about . . .

Q Bright? Called Bright's Alley?

A Bright's Alley. And there was a . . . oh, probably about six or eight little houses there. And this house of ours had six rooms, three stories, two on each floor. And that's where my brother Harry was born, in that house. And I remember very distinctly when he was born, I was four years old. I remember his [sounds like "brisp"] and I remember the women there, by that time there were a few women there. And my mother cooked for 20 men. They didn't live in the house, because there was no room, but she

cooked for them. And my father and brothers in the meantime peddled.

Q2 How old were your brothers then, do you remember?

A What's that?

Q2 How old were your brothers who went out and peddled with your father?

A Well, I was four years old at that time when my brother Harry . . . well, I was about two years old . . . or about two years old when we moved to Wilmington, and I think my brother Lou was about ten years older than I and Dave was about four years older than Lou. So he was about 16, Lou must have been about 14. And they used to peddle . . . go downstate . . .

Q Downstate Delaware.

A Yes. And my father used to peddle around Wilmington, East Lake, Brown Town . . . he used to go to New Castle, go down to Delaware City, and he had a day where he went every . . . and once I can remember distinctly, one day my father went out with tinware. At that time they used to cook with tin pots. And I'll never forget seeing him . . . he had these tin pots and pans tied together and all over him. He looked like a spaceman, exactly like a spaceman. He was a short man and he used to walk from Front Street up to King . . . up to East Lake . . . or walk way out to Brown Town . . .

Q Or to New Castle?

A Yes . . . there was no streetcars in those days. And of course when he came back, he came back with some money and all his goods was gone because these people were very happy to get the things. It wasn't very long after that . . . I guess probably about . . . I would say about three or four years, they all pooled together and we opened a store on Front Street, a clothing store. And my brother Dave became engaged to his wife and he married at 19, and he married Rae Tigre [sp] from Newark, New Jersey. And that was all through a matchmaker. And my mother and father, according to Jewish customs and European customs, took all of their worldly goods and divided them with him, which parents don't do today. And they gave him half of what they had in clothing and left him with the store and they moved across the street. And I think it was . . . I think back that from what I remember, he probably was so busy making love to his wife, he didn't tend to his business, and so his business went to rack and ruin. And in the meantime the customers were not coming to the store across the street. Also in the meantime, my father had established a clientele over in New Castle, and we moved to New Castle. And at that time there was a very flourishing iron factory over in New Castle called Tasker's [sp], Morris Tasker Company. And by the way, that factory was sold to Russia, lock, stock and barrel. The whole factory was moved to Russia and I think that was the first iron factory or steel factory that was established in Russia. And . . .

Q Kasker?

A T-a-s-k-e-r. But that was a few years later. Then my parents moved onto

I think it was called . . . I don't know whether it was Front Street or Second Street of New Castle we opened a . . . moved into a small house and used the front room as a store. We were . . .

Q What kind of . . . now, your father was still selling the same kind of merchandise he was peddling?

A No. That was a general store, and that was not clothing, a general store. And oh, I don't know, it was a few years [inaudible] and then they did well, worked very hard, and my brothers in the meantime were peddling. And my brother Dave had moved to Newark, New Jersey. My brother Lou had gotten a job with a wholesaler on South Street in Philadelphia. And this is interesting to note, too, that my mother got him a job with this wholesaler by the name of White, Mr. White. He got \$10.00 a week salary, of which my mother paid back to this . . . the Mr. White \$5.00.

Q The man who got the job.

A Yeah . . . my brother never knew about it.

Q2 He was really making \$5.00 a week.

A Yes. So he really earned . . . got \$5.00, but he was receiving ten as far as he knew. So she was very anxious for him to become stabilized. And we moved into . . . on Delaware Avenue . . . or Delaware Street in New Castle. There was an old hotel called the Delaware House and they rented this house and we opened a store, it was quite large. At that time we had quite a large clothing department, and they sold very good clothing, suits as high as \$100.00 a suit. And of course there were other things. And my mother wouldn't buy any ready-made nightgowns or underwear or anything like that for women because she said decent women didn't wear ready-made things.

Q2 [Inaudible - drowned out by laughter] . . . name?

A Topkis.

Q2 Oh, um hmm. I don't know if it's on the tape.

Q Yeah. It is now.

A So . . .

Q You were in New Castle.

A Yes. Well, anyhow, we had this and we had . . . we sold on installments, and I was the bookkeeper at the age of 12, if you please. And prospered . . . we did very well until the Tasker factory was sold, and then business went down because a great many of the employees moved away from there, they didn't have any work, and the only thing that was left in New Castle was a cotton mill and a woolen mill and the gas works. So there was very little work for the . . . and there were no . . .

there were only two trains out of New Castle a day, and they were just beginning to get streetcars, horse cars at that time. And we had a rather hard time. 1892 and '3, there was a small panic, a depression, and that was during that time, too. So that my father had another store, he opened a store out in Dobbinsville and there were a great many Polish, Slavish people working out there.

Q2 Where is this?

A Out about a mile outside of New Castle is a little development out there called Dobbinsville, named after a man by the name of Dobbins. And I tell you who had the woolen mill . . . the New Castle Fiber Company used to be out there, they took that over. And my father used to go out there and in the meantime he used to . . . there was another development, this was that way and this was this way, and this was [sounds like "Shaw Town"]. And in Shaw Town was the woolen mill . . . or the cotton mill, either one, I don't know which. But they used to go with this cart, and my brother Will used to pull the cart, and it was like a fruit cart, you know, that they have, that you see them in New York and Philadelphia? Probably about that long and divided into compartments, on two big wheels. And on Mondays they used to go out to Shaw Town with this cart and sell out there.

Q2 What did they sell on the cart, now?

A Oh, notions, all kinds of things.

Q2 Not food.

A No . . . no. Dry goods. And then during the week my father had this little store out there in Dobbinsville and people who worked at the Tasker Mills would come there and buy. And most of them were foreigners out there. And then after the depression and after the Tasker factory moved away, things started to go down and down and down until we moved back here to Wilmington in 1896 and opened the store at 417 King Street, which is now part of the Wilmington Dry Goods Company.

Q If you please.

A Before your uncle bought the store, it was another man, I forget his name, bought it from my brothers. My mother was gone at that time and my father. And we lived there at 417 King Street and had the store there. And our store . . . Butlers had a stationery store on Market Street across the street from where they are now, and it connected with the 417 King Street excepting it was on the 2nd floor. And our store was the second store on Market Street that had an entrance from King Street to Market Street. Lippincott's was the other store between 2nd and 3rd . . . or 3rd and 4th on King and Market. And it was a very long stairway because King Street is down the hill and Market Street's up the hill. And I married in 1899 and moved to Coatesville, Pennsylvania, where we opened a store. Now where do you want me to go from here?

Q What kind of a store was this in Coatesville?

A Department store.

Q How many years were you there, in Coatesville?

A 13 years. And . . .

Q How many children did you have?

A I have two daughters.

Q Born in Coatesville?

A Born . . . well, my oldest daughter was born in Wilmington. I came back to Wilmington to have her. And our other daughter was born in Coatesville. And while we lived in Coatesville, I organized the first Jewish Sunday School, or [inaudible] Sunday School for Jewish Children, as they say.

Q In Coatesville.

A In Coatesville. And . . . which is now a conservative synagogue there and I don't know what they call it. But I think I should go back to the time in Wilmington . . .

Q If you like.

A When . . . it was around 1896, between 1896 and '98 that the Adas Kodesch congregation was formed. And my brothers Dave and Lou were part of the group that organized that synagogue. And I will go back further than that. In 1888 . . . in 1886 they used to be . . . and for holidays they used to bring a rabbi or a reader down from Philadelphia to conduct the services for the holidays. And those services were . . .

Q This is Adas Kodesch now?

A No . . . no . . .

Q The beginnings of Adas Kodesch.

A That was the beginning. That was held at the second floor over Morrow's Grocery Store and I think it was either 209 or 211 Market Street. And that was the . . . there they had the first Sunday School for Jewish Children. And the teachers were the daughters of Nathan Lieberman who lived here and they were Carrie and Ida Lieberman. And I'd like to go back further, that when we came here--I think it's important--you can reconstruct this if you want it--when we first came here in 1882, I should have mentioned that that there were about . . . probably about eight Jewish families in Wilmington. And Mr. Harris--I forget what his name was . . . had a pawnshop on Market Street near 2nd . . .

Q Is this the Harris of Harris and Groll?

A No, no, not that Harris. There is a pawnshop there now. But it used to be owned by Mr. Harris, and the Torah was kept in his house, and

~~Yarsai~~
Yarsai

anybody had [sounds like "Yarsai"] or probably got together with the Rosh Hashonoh and had services at his house. I have that in that record that I had that you remember. And from there as more Jewish people came into Wilmington, they wanted another place, so they had this waiting room at . . . on the 2nd floor of the Morrow Grocery Store. And that was where the first Sunday School was established. And then the Adas Kodesch came after that. And I guess they used to meet up there until they became large to think of a congregation. They bought this church, the Lutheran church at 6th and French, and then it became the Adas Kodesch congregation since.

Q That building itself was a former Lutheran church?

A It was a Lutheran church, yes. And of course they reestablished it and that went on for quite a few years. I remember very distinctly, there was a house on 6th Street next to the synagogue, a small house, and I was at these services, it was on Yom Kipper, and my brother Lou, who was president, I guess, at the time, got up and addressed the congregation and told them that he would like very much for the congregation to buy this house next door for \$16,000 and asked for contributions. Well they got it right away. Within an hour they had the \$16,000. Of course, they didn't know my brother had already bought it and he . . . you know, but it was paid for by the congregation. And the same thing . . . the Jewish Community Center, which was then known as the Young Men's Hebrew Association, was established in my mother's home when we lived at 417 King Street and I remember that when I was waiting for my daughter Reba to be born, the young men used to have the meetings about getting together and forming a Young Men's Hebrew Association. And they did. And the first place where they had their meetings was in the old Oddfellows Hall at 3rd and King Street over the shoe store . . . Ben Wolfman's shoe store . . . not Wolfman . . . what's his name? I don't remember his name. But there's a shoe store, his son is there I think. And they used to meet in another place . . . the first time they met was in 3rd and Market, I think. And then they met at another place. And then they finally came . . . when my brother Lou bought the building at 3rd and King, he let the Y.M.H.A. come in there and they gave them rent-free for years, I don't know how long, to have their meeting there. And it was a wonderful place for the boys and girls of Wilmington at that time to come together. And when I moved back to Wilmington, it was in 1912, I organized the Young Women's Hebrew Association. There were no girls there at that time. And then they took in the girls. And we had meetings and dances and things of that sort. And I think one thing led to another and they had just one organization. My mother organized the Ladies Bichor Cholm Society in . . . not long after we'd moved to Wilmington . . . it was probably in 1897 or '8.

Q Could you repeat that name again?

A Ladies Bichor Cholm Society, B-i-c-h-o-r C-h-o-l-m.

Q Uh huh. What was the purpose of this?

A The purpose of that, they made . . . they wanted . . . they went to Rabbi

Leventhol in Philadelphia to ask him what name they should give to this organization, and since they were catering to the poor sick, the Rabbi said they should call it the Bichor Cholm Society because that means taking care of the poor sick.

Q And that's what they did.

A Yes, that's what they did. And they mainly took care of the women who were in confinement. At that time the women didn't go to hospitals, there was no such thing as going to a hospital, they had their babies at home. And many of them couldn't afford to have midwives or nurses. And so the women--Mrs. Bosky, Mrs. Hillers and her sister, my mother, my sisters-in-law, Mrs. Frank and some of the other women took their turns to go down there and cook a pot of soup, a pot of . . . well, if they needed, provide food for the family, bathe the baby, fix up the bed, clean the house, and they did a real job of taking care of these women. And that lasted for a good many years until it got so that the people were able to provide for themselves, and then it became the habit for the women to go to the hospital to have their babies, so that there didn't need to be that much for the women to do. However, there developed a need for a home for the aged. So the women decided to buy a house at 211 West Street. And they used to . . . they had one woman that needed a home. So they established the Ladies Bichor Cholm Society Home for this one and it grew.

Q How long did that organization last?

A What's that?

Q How long did that last?

A Well, that lasted up until the time the Milton Kutz Home was established. They moved from there . . . I had the dates, but they moved from there to 209-211 Washington Street where they bought . . . in fact my husband bought the old children's nursery, the town nursery, day nursery and he turned it over to the Ladies Bichor Cholm Society and they paid for it, he didn't pay for it, but I mean he bought it originally and sold it to them. And we moved over there, which gave us larger quarters, we could take care of more people. And so we stayed there until they moved out to the Kutz Home. And during that interval, while the home was in existence there on West . . . on Washington Street, no, on West Street, I had organized the Council of Jewish Women. And . . .

Q2 What year was this, now? Can you remember?

A 1918 I organized the Council of Jewish Women. And because there was a missionary home on West Street, between 3rd and 4th, who established a kindergarten and most of the children that were there were Jewish children, so we established a kindergarten for the Jewish children and we used to meet up in the Y.M.H.A. rooms at 3rd and King. And we had that kindergarten for two years until there was some dissension about it. There were a few people that felt that we shouldn't have it and that it was more for personal reasons than it was for anything else. And I was always

very sorry that we disorganized that kindergarten. We also had two Italian children in there whose parents were anxious to have their children off the street and they'd take them in there. So that there was a . . . we went on from there, did a great deal of . . . this is the Council of Jewish Women . . . used to have at that time what they called a School Friend Committee, and that School Friend Committee worked in close conjunction with the Americanization Committee. And there was 30 . . . I was president of the Council of Jewish Women and there were 30 schools at the time within the limits of Wilmington. And I had a woman who was a liaison officer between each school and me . . . or the Council, I would say. So that when there was any question of a problem with a Jewish child, she got word from the principal and she would in turn bring it to me. And also we printed a calendar of all the Jewish holidays in which we asked the teachers not to have a test on these holidays so that Jewish children wouldn't have to miss them by staying away from school. And we ran that for many years. And I think it did a great deal to keep the Jewish children out of the Juvenile Court and the Family Court. I don't think there was a Juvenile Court in those days. But anyhow, it was the Family Court, and . . .

Q You say this was the work of the Council.

A Council of Jewish Women.

Q Is that still their purpose?

A No, they don't . . . they've stopped doing that for some reason or other. the national council does not have it as part of their work, and I think it's too bad, because we did a great deal oh . . .

Q Well, now they have family service and . . .

A Yes, they have the family service, but I don't think it's the same because, well, personally I think paid social workers are very important, but the personal touch without a professional touch is also very important. And when we got word from a principal about any child, we would immediately go to visit the family and find out the cause. And I'll give you one instance. We had a little boy, report about a little boy over . . . they lived over 3rd Street Bridge. They were poor . . . and this little boy didn't want to go to Hebrew school at Adas Kodesch because all his companions were Russian boys or Polish boys and they didn't go to Hebrew school and why should he go. So he played truant and we got word that he was playing truant . . . that's where we came in. So I went to find out--Mr. Ginns went with me--and we found out that the boy's companions didn't go to Hebrew school so he didn't want to go to Hebrew school. So we visited there a few times, we got acquainted with the boy and my husband hit upon a very good idea. At that time he was running the theaters, the motion picture theaters. And he took the little boy aside and he said to him, "If I would give you a pass to come to the moving pictures free every Saturday afternoon, would you go to Hebrew school?" And he said, "Oh, yes." So he gave him a pass, he came to the movies and he went to Hebrew school, and that was the end of his truancy. I mean a little thing like that. I had another instance--these are things that come to

my mind--a fairly well-to-do family here in town . . . boy was nearsighted. And he . . . the teachers couldn't do anything with him. They moved him from the end of the room to the middle to the front and he still couldn't see the blackboard. So I got word about this boy, and I knew the father very well and it was rather embarrassing to approach a person that you know well on a subject of this kind. However, it was my duty and I had to do it and I called him and I told him that they were having trouble with the boy because he couldn't see the blackboard. And he said, "No, he's not nearsighted, he's dumb." So I said to him, "Well," I said, "the teachers say he's not dumb, that he's nearsighted. Now, if you want to take the boy to an optometrist and have his eyes examined, all right. And if you don't, I'm going to take him myself, and the Council will pay for the glasses if he needs them." Well, that embarrassed him and he took the boy to the optometrist. The boy needed glasses very badly. After he got the glasses there was no more problem.

Q He wasn't dumb anymore.

A No, he wasn't dumb anymore. I have to tell you another interesting case. There were two boys. One boy was a Jewish boy and one boy was partly Jewish. They were getting into trouble. The Jewish boy's father was a bootlegger. It was during the days of the Prohibition. And he . . . am I going into too much?

Q No, it's fine, I'm just making sure . . .

A And the boy got into bad company and he was pre-delinquent. And we got word about him and I went to visit the family . . . I knew the family. Back in those days we knew almost all the Jewish families. And I went to visit the family and talk to them and find out what was the trouble with the boy and so forth. I got in touch with the Village School at Dobbs Ferry, New York, Children's Village. So they gave me a scholarship for this boy and . . . but demanded that he stay there for two years and they would be \$500.00 a year . . . \$1,000.00 for the two years. And he . . . we collected the \$1,000.00 from contributions and sent the boy to the Village School. He went there, stayed the two years, and several years after that, I was in Hearn's Restaurant with Mr. Ginns and this young man came up to me, he was in uniform. And he introduced himself and he recognized me and told me who he was and wanted me to meet his wife, so I did. And we talked for a while and all and he said he was making the Army his career. So I said well, that's fine, everything's going well and he thanked me and so forth. That's been a good many years ago, at least 40, maybe more. This winter, I was meeting my daughter--granddaughter--at the station and we got into a taxi and as we got into the taxi and drove off for about a block, this man turned to me and said, "Are you Mrs. Ginns?" And I said, "Yes, who are you?" And he told me his name and I recognized it immediately. And he said, "I want to thank you for saving my life." And that was this boy. And he told me that that was the turning point of his life. He had a wife and several children and he was getting along all right. And that was a great thrill for me. And this other boy, I've never heard from. He stayed two years up in the George School up in New York. We also paid \$1,000.00 for him. And then afterwards, when he got out of there, he seemed to be interested in farming, horticulture or farming agriculture.

And I got him a placed in the National Farm School up in Doylestown, Pennsylvania. But after that I lost sight of him, and I have never heard from him since. But there were many cases like that, and I turned over all the records to the Jewish Federation . . . Jewish Welfare Society, so whether they still have them or not . . . those are outstanding ones that I think show what can be done with a personal touch.

Q And this was all part of the Jewish Council of Women.

A The Council of Jewish Women, yes.

Q How long has it been since you haven't been very active with this . . . since you've . . .

A Well, I'm still active.

Q Oh, in the Jewish Council?

A Yes.

Q Oh, I see.

A Yes. Well, then in 1926 I organized the Bureau of Jewish Women's Organizations which was then called the Federation of Jewish Women's Organizations. And that was for the purpose of bringing the Jewish women together so that . . . and to avoid duplication of work. Also to avoid duplication of fund collecting, money raising. And that was in 1926. And we all . . . we've been in existence up until now and I'm just going out of the presidency. I took over the presidency again because there wasn't anybody that would take it over. And . . .

Q When were you last president?

A What's that?

Q When were you last president?

A Now. We're just mingling . . .

Q Right now?

A Right now. We're just combining with the Women's Division of the Federation. And . . . which we should have been in the beginning, because . . . it was because of lack of foresight of the man who was director at the time and my own lack of foresight. See, I knew that I wanted a Federation of Jewish Women's Organizations. Had we been invited at that time to become a part of the Jewish Federation . . . that was about the time when the Jewish Federation was organized . . . Mr. Coder was here . . . we would then have been the Women's Division of the Federation. But they neither gave us an invitation nor did I think about it, although for 12 years I was president of the Delaware Bureau and I acted as the chairman for the women's committees to raise funds for the . . . at that time. So we really were doing that work. But about three

years ago we were approached to become a part of the Women's Division, but the approach was bad and the . . . I don't know, the feeling was not good. It wasn't done in the right manner. It didn't sit well with the women. And after I had the presidency again this last year, I realized that our real function should be as part of the Jewish Federation. So we got together before I went away early in June and worked out a plan where we . . . combining. So we've had our meetings and some of the officers have been integrated into the Women's Division and some of the offices are just simply dying out. And the committees are dying out that weren't functioning properly or maybe weren't needed. And the first big meeting is going to be on October the 20th when they get together and then the Delaware Bureau will be a thing of the past and it will become the Women's Division of the . . .

Q Tell me about you and your husband's life a little bit. You left me off at Coatesville.

A Well . . .

Q You said you were 13 years in Coatesville.

A Yes, we lived there for 13 years.

Q And you had a general store there?

A We had a general store, general department store there. And . . . well, there wasn't anything very interesting, very active . . . my husband was part of the community and he was part of the firemen's group and . . .

Q He was a volunteer fireman?

A Oh, yes, he was a volunteer fireman and it was through his efforts that they . . . they used to pull the engine by rope, you know. The men, when the fire . . .

Q Run? You mean the men would pull it?

A Yes, the men would run and pull the engine out and do all the work.

Q No horses or . . .

A No. My husband, being a businessman, saw that that was no good, and so he proposed to the fire company that they should get horses. "Well, how are we going to maintain the horses?" So they bought a sprinkling wagon, and they attached the horses to the sprinkler and charged the merchants on Delaware Street, the main business . . . Main Street, they called it, so much a week for sprinkling the street so it would keep the dust down. And that maintained the horses and the fire company. And those horses were used to pull the fire engine. So that was his big contribution to the city of Coatesville.

Q And then after Coatesville, you came back to Wilmington.

A Yes.

Q Uh huh. Did you open up another store in Wilmington?

A No, my husband went into the moving picture business there. That's the reason we came back because my brothers Charlie and Will, who owned 417 King Street at that time, had gotten interested in the moving picture business. And they couldn't spend the time of . . . brother Will wasn't well, and they couldn't devote the time to the moving pictures. And they bought the old St. Paul's Methodist Church, which was at 7th and Market, where the candy store is now. You know [inaudible] candy store, it used to be, now it's Shellenberg's, I think, I think it's Shellenberg's Candy Store on Market Street.

Q Do you mean where Reynolds was?

A Well, it used to be Reynolds, now it's Shellenberg, I think. It's right across the street from Braunstein's. And where Feinberg's is now, I think. Isn't Feinberg . . .

Q Now you're talking about Market Street or King Street, now?

A Now, I'm talking about Market Street.

Q O.K., well Feinberg . . . isn't Feinberg on King Street?

A But they moved it to Market Street . . . the furniture store.

Q Oh, yes, I'm sorry, yes.

A Well, it's that building that they had the moving picture . . . that's where the church used to be. And they opened a moving picture called the Majestic, and that was there. And believe it or not many people wouldn't go to the motion picture theater because it had been a church and they turned it into a motion picture. But anyhow, they did very well.

Q Now, what did they do in terms of the movie business? You mean they opened up movie theaters.

A Yes, yes.

Q I see.

A Yes. And . . .

Q Now, what was the name of the theater again?

A Majestic. Majestic Theater. Then they opened up the . . . then they bought the Clayton House at 5th and Market, it was a hotel, where the Craig Theater was? 5th and Market? And they bought that and tore it down and built the Queen Theater there. Then they had the Arcadia Theater . . .

Q Now, this was your husband and . . .

A My two brothers.

Q And two brothers.

A Yes. And Mr. Ginns managed all of those theaters. And also for a while we ran . . .

Q That's the Arcadia and the old Queen Theater?

A Yes, Arcadia and the Queen and for a short time they had the Lowe Theater, and . . .

Q Lowe's Theater?

A Yes. And for . . .

Q Between 8th and 9th?

A Yes. And also Dockstader's Theater, it was where Lowe's Theater is now, there used to be a vaudeville house called Dockstader's and my husband . . .

Q They ran that?

A Yes, they ran that. And for four years my husband ran the Playhouse; it was very difficult to get somebody, and he did very well. Mr. Raskob, William Raskob, came to Jim and asked him if he would do it and he did and he ran it for four years and that was the first time they ever made money there. They've lost money on the Playhouse . . .

Q When was this? When Mr. Ginns had the Playhouse.

A Well, it was in the Second World War, I think.

Q What's that?

A During the Second World War.

Q I see.

A And I don't know the dates. And then . . .

Q The Mayfair . . . was the Mayfair what is . . . what in recent times has been the Savoy?

A This Mayflower?

Q The Mayfair you were talking about.

A No.

Q Because there was a Savoy theater between 5th and 6th.

A Yes, but it's now called the . . . it's still there.

Q Well, it opens and closes.

- A But it's closed now temporarily. What day . . . it was owned by a Greek man, I forget his name.
- Q But that wasn't the Mayfair.
- A Nicholas . . . his first name was Nicholas. And no, they didn't own that.
- Q Now these theaters remained with your brothers . . .
- A No, they're all gone out of existence. The . . .
- Q The Queen and the Arcadia . . .
- A They've all been sold, the whole . . .
- Q The Lowe's is still . . .
- A The Lowe's is still running and the Warner's is still running.
- Q Yes. But did your husband have something to do with the Warner?
- A They didn't belong to them. And the Wilmington Music Company has disbanded . . . I mean it's been liquidated and so that that is no more in existence.
- Q How about the old Grand, did he have anything to do with the old Grand theater?
- A No. No.
- Q Grand Opera House?
- A Yes. Where Warners built the theater on Delaware Avenue, before they built the theater on Delaware Avenue, they ran the Grand Opera House. I think they still run it . . . Warners.
- Q Yeah. Uh huh.
- Q2 I was wondering about your education.
- A What?
- Q2 You went to school here?
- A I went to school in Wilmington between . . . the Number 6 School between 3rd and 4th on Walnut Street, primary school, and then we moved to New Castle and I went to school over there. And I went up until the senior grade in high school, and I never graduated.
- Q In New Castle? Uh huh.
- A I'll have to tell you a story about that. I was painting over in New Castle one time, I was painting this academy over there where I used to

go to school, and a woman came up to me, told me she was a school teacher and she was getting books from the library. I was sitting on the pavement there, painting. And she was going to the library in back of me. So as we got acquainted, she'd watch me every week when she came, and I said to her one day, "You know, I went to school there when I was a little girl." And she said, "Oh, did you?" said that was nice. And I said over where the Arsenal is now, across the green, is where I went to High School. And she said, "Where did you go to college?" I said, "I didn't go to college." "You didn't go to college?" "No, I didn't go to college." Well, she was so horrified and I thought, "Well, I'll shock her some more." And I said to her, "I didn't graduate from high school either." "You didn't graduate from high school?" I said no. She said, "How come that you speak such good English?" That's my pet story. I always call it "the snobbishness of the intelligencia." So I read an article in the New York Times the other day about a man by the name of Saul Weinberg, I don't know whether you read it or not, it was quite a big article. He was also very, very successful, much more successful monetarily than I am, but he also was not a college graduate. I gave it to my great-grandson to read, who is a college graduate, and I said to him, "I'd like you to read this article and find out . . . and see for yourself what can be done without a college education." Because after all, I have great feeling . . . almost all my children are college graduates . . .

Q You said you had three daughters or . . .

A Two daughters and five grandchildren and 15 great-grandchildren. So these are my great-grandchildren I'm talking about. And I was . . . I've always had a feeling that we put into college what we get out of it . . . we get out of college what we put into it . . . a great deal . . . to a great extent. A lot of people go to college and get a great deal, a lot of people go to college and get nothing. And I don't know whether you're a college graduate or not but that's a case with many people.

Q Oh, yes.

Q2 I think that's very true.

Q And also whether or not you're educated, it depends on what you've been doing lately.

A Well, lately I've been doing painting and still working on this organization and of course I'm naturally interested in the community. I've been on the Red Cross Board . . . this is my 50th year.

Q On the Delaware . . .

A Delaware Red Cross. And I was on the Woods Haven school board for 34 years.

Q My.

Q2 Was your husband also involved in . . .

A No. He was never involved in any organization work. He was never an

organization man. But he never interfered with what I did. I must tell you, I was a suffragette and you must [inaudible - laughter] . . .

Q Is that right?

A And I was a militant suffragette. I belonged to the National Women's Party and this is a very cute story. We used to go down to Washington a great deal and visit the senators and the congressmen . . .

Q Were you a member of the League of Women Voters, by the way?

A No. That was too pacifist for me.

Q Too what?

A Too pacifist for me.

Q Oh, I see.

A And the National Women's Suffrage Association was a pacifist sort of organization. And then the National Women's Party was organized by Alice Paul and it was the militant group.

Q National Women's Party.

A Um hmm. And Florence Bayard Hillis, who was the daughter of the Thomas Bayard who was ambassador to England, you know, the Bayard family . . . long-time resident of Delaware . . . was the chairman for Delaware and I was the treasurer for eight years. And we used to go down to Washington a great deal to picket and to visit the congressmen, visit the senators, do a lot of lobbying. We visited President Roosevelt many . . . Wilson, President Wilson . . . many times and . . . in a group, you know, not individually. Well, one time I was not there with Mrs. Hillis and she was arrested along with a lot of other pickets.

Q You picked the right time not to go.

A And it was all over the papers, front page, in great big headlines and all, and my husband was up in arms. And really he had never objected to any of the things that I did as far as organization work was concerned, where I wanted to go or anything. He never objected a bit. If I went to conventions or here or there or anywhere, he wouldn't ever object, but I was out somewhere and I came in and he was all afire about this, "This is the end. This is the end. You've got to promise me you will not picket the White House." "All right, I'll promise I won't picket the White House." Well, a couple of weeks later we were called to come down to Washington. We went down to Washington and all of a sudden there comes a call, "We want people to picket the Capitol." So I said, well, I didn't promise not to picket the Capitol. So I went down with Mrs. Hillis and the rest of them and we picketed the Capitol. But we weren't arrested. And I came home and I told Jim, and he said, "Well, you're just impossible, I'm not going to do anything more with you." And he was disgusted with me.

Q Now what year was that, do you remember?

A Oh, goodness. We got suffrage in 1920, so it must have been around 1918 or '19, maybe about '18, '19, along in there.

Q Uh huh. Were you ever active politically? Besides that?

A No. Well, after we got the vote, no. I'll tell you what I did. There was one of the women that was in our group, her name was Sturvet [sp] and I remember distinctly. And I didn't know it, but she wanted to run for City Council after we got the vote. She asked me to sign her application to get her name on the ballot. Not thinking anything, or doing anything, I signed her application. It happened that she was a Socialist. Well, Coleman du Pont was living then and he was a great force in the Republican Party. My brother Lou was a big force in the Republican Party in Delaware . . . he never run for office, but he was very close to Coleman du Pont. And he . . . so he sent word with Jeanette Eckman that he would like me to be chairman of the city committee for Republican Women. But I turned it down, for which I was very sorry afterwards, because I was very tired. We had really worked very hard and I thought, well, I'd done my job, I didn't want to take on anything more. I was really very tired because I'll tell you why I didn't take it also. Mrs. Tallman, who was then Mrs. Ashbrook, was the biggest anti-suffragette that we ever had in Wilmington and she got the job as chairman of the . . . we don't . . . Emily Bissell, I was very friendly with, who established the tuberculosis stamps, you know, the Christmas Seal, and she was an anti-suffragette, there were many of the society women who were anti-suffragettes. And they all got political jobs, but I didn't get one. I didn't want it. I was really very tired. And I didn't want anymore responsibility. I had the Council of Jewish Women, I was chairman of the Americanization Committee for Delaware, which was a big job at that time, and . . . [End of Side 1 of tape.]

Q2 It sounds like you've had many careers.

A Well, I would say organizing probably is my career. I think I've been more interested in . . . I didn't start out to be that way, but I am interested in organization, I am interested in these things. I was very interested and still am interested in the Council of Jewish Women because it's the one organization of Jewish Women who do community work. They do Jewish work, but they also do non-Jewish work. They do non-sectarian work. And I think that practically all my life I have been . . . I've had a feeling within me that we owe a debt to the community in which we live. And the only way we can pay that debt is to do something for the community. And through that I have tried to do whatever I could.

Q And with that I want to thank you very much, Mrs. Ginns.

A You are very welcome. I hope I've given you what you want.

[END OF INTERVIEW]