



Citation for this collection:

MSS 179 Robert H. Richards, Jr., Delaware oral history collection, Special Collections, University of Delaware Library, Newark, Delaware

Contact:

Special Collections, University of Delaware Library
181 South College Avenue
Newark, DE 19717-5267
302.831.2229 / 302.831.1046 (fax)
<http://www.lib.udel.edu/ud/spec>
askspecref@winsor.lib.udel.edu

Terms governing use and reproduction:

Use of materials from this collection beyond the exceptions provided for in the Fair Use and Educational Use clauses of the U.S. Copyright Law may violate federal law.

Permission to publish or reproduce is required from the copyright holder. Please contact Special Collections, University of Delaware Library, for questions. askspecref@winsor.lib.udel.edu

A note about transcriptions:

Of the original 252 audio-recordings in this collection, 212 of these tapes were transcribed around the time of the original recordings (between 1966 and 1978). In 2012, Cabbage Tree Solutions was contracted to create transcriptions for the remaining tapes. Corrections to and clarifications for all transcriptions are welcome, especially for names and places. Please contact Special Collections, University of Delaware Library, for questions. askspecref@winsor.lib.udel.edu

Interview with Mrs. James H. Ginns (nee Sally Topkis), June 1970, by Myron L. Lazarus. This is the second of two interviews with Mrs. Ginns regarding the history of Jewry in Delaware and Jewish charitable, social and religious institutions.

Q This is a recording of the Oral History Project of the History Department of the University of Delaware. We're interviewing for the second time Mrs. James Ginns, and she is going to describe for us the history of the Jewry in the state of Delaware.

A Well, I'm starting with the arrival of our family in Wilmington.

Q Fine. Was your family the first . . .

A No.

Q No, O.K.

A We arrived here in 1882, after the [sounds like "Pogrom" in Odessa, which took place in 1881. This was Odessa, Russia. The reason for moving to Wilmington was there were about eight or ten Jewish families in Wilmington when we moved here. Among some of the people I remember are Mr. Nathan Lieberman and family, Mr. Emmanuel Richenberger and family, Mr. and Mrs. Bernard Wolfson and family, Mr. and Mrs. Aaron Harris and family, Mr. and Mrs. Myers (M-y-e-r-s) and family . . .

Q Were they from any particular area of Europe or from all over?

A No. Some . . . most of them were German.

Q I see, most of them were German.

A The Roy brothers and sister were also here. They had a large chinaware store, crockery store down on King Street between 3rd and 4th . . . where the Wilmington Dry Goods is now.

Q That's right. On Market?

A On King. King was a very good business street at that time. There was a very large women's wear shop and furnishings called Riley's down below 3rd Street on King. And Littoncot's was the first store which had an interest from King to Market Street between 3rd and 4th. There was no place of worship for the Jews then. However the Torah was kept in Mr. Harris's home. He lived on Market Street right below 2nd.

Q What kind of business was Mr. Harris in?

A He was in the pawnbroking business. People used to congregate there when they had [inaudible] or perhaps a holiday. The Moses Monitors Society (Mont. More Soc.) was the only Jewish organization existing. It was organized about 1870. It's still in existence. It's a beneficial organization. This organiza-

tion took care of the charity and welfare of the few Jewish people here, also any transient Jews that happened to be coming through Wilmington. They held a ball each year about Purim time which was the gala event of the year. A large number of non-Jews also attended. The money made from this event was used for charity purposes. It may interest you also to know that there was a Jewish cemetery near Front and Union Streets. However, the bodies from this cemetery were removed about the time of the First World War when the government needed the land to build houses for the war workers. It's now Union Street, Front and Union, where the development . . . when those houses were built, they weren't supposed to be left standing more than about 10 years, and they're still there. The bodies were removed to Lombardy Cemetery.

About the years of 1884 or 1885, more Jews had come to Wilmington and the need for a place of worship was felt. I remember services being held for the holidays on the second floor of 209 Market Street. There was no regular rabbi then. A Sunday School was started with a Mrs. Ida and Carrie Lieberman as teachers. I attended this Sunday School and so did my younger brothers. The Harris children, Wilson children and probably all of the others in Wilmington. I did this all from memory you know--there was no notes. Those Jews who wished to observe koshers had a difficult time because there was no kosher meat here and any kosher meat used was brought from Philadelphia. Rabbi [sounds like "Rezus"] was brought here about 1887. He acted as a rabbi and [sounds like "shohut"]. However, there was great difficulties since there was no Jewish meat merchant here. Finally arrangements were made with a Mr. Lee, a non-Jew who had a meat store in the 2nd Street markethouse. Mr. Lee did the best he could, but occasionally he would use the kosher knife for the tref meat and vice versa. I remember my mother saying she had to change her dishes seven different times until there was finally a Jewish butcher in town. About this time, the Jews of Wilmington began to ~~find the need for a house of worship~~, *and a group of men were working on it*. I do not remember where they met, perhaps at 209 Market Street. My brothers David and Lewis were very active in this movement and I am sure many others were also.

Perhaps the first large Jewish wedding in Wilmington took place on December 26, 1887 when my brother David and his bride Rae Teiger [sp] were married. The second wedding I remember was on March 8th, 1888, when Louis Finger and his bride were married at the Leshum [sp] home at Front and Madison Street. Perhaps the reason I remember the wedding well is because it was on the night of the great blizzard of March, 1888, and we all had to walk home to Front and Market Street.

Q This is the late Finger of the lawyer . . . attorney.

A His father.

Q I mean the late . . . I said the late . . .

A Yeah . . . ^{Aaron} Erin Finger's father.

Q Oh, Erin Finger's father, I see.

A His name was Louis Finger like this Louis Finger, he was named after his grandfather.

Q Right, I see.

A I was eight years old at the time and it made a great impression on me. It was about this time that the forming of a congregation became a serious question. However, it was not until 1902 when the Zion Lutheran Church at 6th and French Street was purchased. It took quite a while to raise the money to renovate the church into a synagogue. You must remember that we were all poor. Mr. Lieberman was perhaps the only person of wealth here. Whatever money was raised was through great sacrifice and work. However, the building was renovated and services were held there regularly. Hebrew classes were started for the boys, also a Sunday School for boys and girls was started by Mr. J. Harry Gordon who had come to settle in Wilmington from Savannah, Georgia. He not only started a Sunday School but arranged for picnics and excursions to Penns Grove, New Jersey for all the Jewish community. These affairs were looked forward to by all as the main event of the year. The Hebrew school grew to such an extent that more classrooms were needed. I remember my brother Louis Topkis addressing . . . he had [inaudible] congregation on Yom Kipper telling the people of the great need for expansion and asking for contributions to buy the house next door to the synagogue on 6th Street. \$16,000 was pledged that day. The building was purchased and torn down. The annex was built with more classrooms and an auditorium on the lower floor and a kitchen. The congregation grew to greater proportions, more of which I will speak later. As you all know, the Adas Kodesch congregation, [inaudible] Shel Emeth is now located on the Washington Street cutoff. The building is a great credit to the Jews of Wilmington.

In 1888, my family moved to New Castle but I do not remember any organization being formed from that time until after we returned, which was in 1896. It was about 1897 when there seemed to be a need for the women of the community to help those families that were poor and sick. My mother invited a few women to attend a meeting which was held at her home at 417 King Street. There were a number of women present. Mrs. Tiger, Mrs. Nathan Barski, Mrs. Hillerson, Mrs. Finkelstein, Mrs. Ray Topkis, Mrs. Esther Topkis and some other women. I do not wish to ignore these women, however. They all worked very hard but time does not allow me to go into greater detail. Those women wanted a name for the organization . . . for their organization, so a few of them went to Philadelphia at the suggestion of Rabbi Black to visit Rabbi Leventhau [sp]. After hearing the motive for their organization, he suggested that they call it the Ladies [sounds like "Bichor Cholm"] Society, which means taking care of the poor sick. The women then went to work and each one pledged a day or part of a day to go to a home where the mother was ill, bathe the baby, cook the meals, clean the home and take care of the family until the mother was able to assume her duties. May I quote from the late Mr. Barnard Glockman who described my mother

as "a woman frail of stature and body but a giantess of mind possessing a heart overflowing with sympathy and kindness." I know you will forgive me when I could not resist this tribute to my mother. The Bichor Cholim Society not only acted in the capacity mentioned before but they also acted as the Women's Auxiliary to the Adas Kodesch congregation. They presented the synagogue with a beautiful ark at a cost of \$1,000, which was in the old synagogue, and cooked many meals to raise money and acted in various capacities until about 1920 when some of the women organized themselves into the sisterhood of the congregation. It was about 1907 when the society gave the first \$50.00 towards the hospital called Farm, which is now the Bissell Sanitarium. I believe that Mr. Nathan Bosky gave the first money to build the first shack at the farm. The women also paid for the cornerstone when the Adas Kodesch Synagogue was rebuilt. In 1914 the society was chartered so that they could buy a building, which could be used for a home for the Jewish aged. They bought the Liberty Bonds during the First World War, worked for the Red Cross, held classes for the women to learn English and the American way of life. They took care of feeding and housing the transients. The first building that was purchased was at 211 West Street. This building was occupied until 1940, when the Jewish Federation purchased the property at 209-213 West Washington Street. We had outgrown the quarters on West Street and were able to take care of many more residents. May I say at this point that the women of the Bichor Cholim Society deserve all the credit that we can give them. They worked very hard. Whatever money they donated came from their meager means. They begged groceries and money for coal, meat and whatever they thought was needed. I want to mention at this time that we were unable to get men to serve on an advisory committee or to help materially in any great . . . to any great extent. Although the Jewish Federation did give this organization a small allowance each year. This organization carried on until 1960, when the Jewish Federation took over and built the wonderful Milton and Hattie Kutz Home for the Aged on River Road. Mrs. Kutz contributed \$500,000 toward this building. The Jewish community also contributed generously toward this building.

The Y.M.H.A. was organized in my mother's home at 417 King Street at about 1899. My brother, William Topkis, along with I. B. Finkelstein, Elias Wetstein, Harry Hersch, Charles Topkis, Joseph Stone, Leslie Stone and a few others were very anxious to do something for the youth of that day. When this group was organized, they secured a number of members and rented a room at 3rd and Market Street where they held regular meetings. Then they moved to 4th and Shipley Streets for a short time. Finally my brother Louis Topkis had purchased the old Oddfellows Building at 3rd and King Street. He allowed them to use the second and third floors of the building for their meetings and various activities. I do not know if he ever received any money for rent and heat or not. However, I do know that my brother William Topkis paid the director's salary for several years and was very happy to be able to do it.

I organized the Young Women's Hebrew Association group in 1913. Since the girls were not a part of the above organization, this gave the girls of the community an opportunity to meet together and have social affairs to which the boys naturally were invited.

The Jewish Community Center is an outgrowth of this organization. However, before the Community Center was organized, there was the Adas Kodesch Center. May I tell you how this began? At the Yom Kipper service held at the Adas Kodesch Synagogue in September, 1925, Louis Topkis as chairman of a group of people and who knew that the Adas Kodesch building was bursting at the seams for want of classrooms for their Hebrew school students, had asked permission to appeal to the worshippers at this time. He made a plea to the people telling them of their needs and the response was more than gratifying. Mr. and Mrs. Max Cohn gave \$10,000 to purchase the ground on French Street next door to the synagogue. Of course the people of the congregation was anxious to have a center next door so that they could use the classrooms and auditorium. \$125,000 was pledged that day. After that, the committee worked and secured promises from many people, both Jews and non-Jews. A very large bazaar was held at which there was no games of chance played. We received many letters of commendation from Protestant clergymen praising us for this. The cornerstone of this building was laid in June, 1925 or '26. Dedication of the building was in June, 1927. It was my brother William's dream that all of the Jewish children in the city could come together in one Hebrew school, but this was never accomplished. The Adas Kodesch congregation decided to again hold the Hebrew classes in their own building, but the Jewish Community Center continued on with their work. The building has been used by many of the organizations in the city for their meetings and now it has come to the time when the Jewish Community Center has outgrown its quarters and is about to build a new center where I hope it will be able to fulfill all of the hopes of the Jewish people of our city. I might add here that it is now already completed and it's out on the Garden of Eden Road . . .

Q Off the Concord Pike.

A . . . in Talleyville and is a very great credit to the Jews of Wilmington.

Mr. . . . The Hebrew Charity Association was organized about 1900 with Mr. Morris Levy as president, which office he held until his death, when my brother Louis Topkis became president. Mr. J. Harry Gordon was secretary for many years. I wish it was time to . . . I can't read this, I'm sorry.

Q That's all right. [Tape is stopped and picks up in mid-sentence below.]

A . . . 18 the General Jewish Committee was an outgrowth of the Hebrew Charity Organization. This organization was a forerunner of the Jewish Federation of Delaware. Mr. David Snellenberg was the chairman of the committee . . . of the General Jewish Committee to raise money for the Jews in Europe. This drive was the first one in the United States to appeal to Jews and non-Jews for funds. Mr. Pierre S. du Pont was honorary chairman. Mr. Julius Rosenwald, the national chairman, was present at the first banquet to start the drive in the Hotel DuPont. The goal was \$75,000. But when Mr. du Pont heard the great need for money, he volunteered to raise the goal to \$150,000, which was raised. This drive gave

the impetus for many cities to start the same kind of non-sectarian drive for money to help Jews in Europe. The General Jewish Committee evolved into the Jewish Federation of Delaware about 1925, when the . . . when Mr. Ben Codor came to Wilmington to be the executive director of the Jewish Welfare Society . . . now it is called the Family . . . Jewish Family Society. Dr. Joseph Boski, Sr. was the first president of the Federation. The Wilmington Chapter of Deborah works and raises money for the Deborah Hospital at Browns Mills, New York . . . New Jersey. This is a non-sectarian hospital for the treatment of T.B., heart and cancer. This group was organized in 1951. No one can pay who becomes a patient at this hospital, whether they have money or not, they cannot pay.

The Americans Medical Center is a group of women who work and raise funds for the Denver, Colorado hospital. This group was organized in 1951.

The Delaware Link, No. 43, Order of the Golden Chain, is an auxiliary of the Mason Lodge . . . Masonic Lodge.

The Forbond . . . better cut that out. The Pioneer Women also work and raise funds for Israel. This group was organized in 1932. The Mizrahe [sp] is also composed of a group of women who work and raise funds for Israel. This group was organized in 1951.

The Hebrew Charity Association eventually became the Jewish Welfare Society, then the Jewish Family Society. And then it became the Jewish Federation of Delaware.

The Hesche [sp] Shel Emeth congregation was split away from the Adas Kodesch congregation. It seems that there was a dissatisfaction among some of the members about the ritual. The Adas Kodesch congregation adhered to the ascanaisic [sp] liturgy and some of the members preferred to have the sobartic [sp] liturgy. They built their synagogue on Shipley Street near 3rd. Mr. Morris Chaiken was the first president. I do not know who the rabbi was, but I remember that Rabbi Furst was their rabbi for many years and was beloved by everyone. The Hesche Shel Emeth congregation combined with the Adas Kodesch congregation in 1959. They all now worship in the new synagogue which is on the Washington Street cutoff since 1962. The women's organization connected with Hesche Shel Emeth congregation was known as the Masika Adas and the [sounds like "Hanus and Sohumi"] Society. The women helped the congregation and at the same time assisted with the aged and transient Jews. They were organized in 1916. The Bichor Cholm Society and the Moshes Decame [sp] Society were combined together through the efforts of Louis Topkis about 1920.

The B'nai Brith was organized by the late Moses While in 1898 with Charles Hopman as the first president. This national society, as you may know, was organized in 1870. Their main object is to fight anti-Semitism. They have done a wonderful piece of work fighting for the rights of the Jews all over the world. The Women's Auxiliary was formed in 1939 with Mrs. Robert Heller as president.

The Workman's Circle was organized in 1906. It is a fraternal organization and has about 75 members. This organization was the first to bring Yiddish lecturers to Wilmington and to help foster the Yiddish language.

The Masika Adas congregation was formed in 1933 with Mr. Morris Perry as president. This group withdrew from the Hesche Shel Emeth congregation and are located at 602 Washington Street. They adhere to the orthodox form of worship.

Rabbi [sounds like "Abasilver"], Louis Lipski, Maurice Samuels, Rabbi Stephen Wise and others came to Wilmington to organize the Zionist organization. The Hadassah, which is the women's group of the Zionists, was organized in Wilmington about 1928 and they have worked and are working to this day for Israel. They foster the Youth [sounds like "Eliah"], the hospital and many other projects.

The first sign of dissatisfaction with the services of the Adas Kodesch congregation came about 1896 or '7. A group was formed and they met for services on the second floor of 8th and Orange Street. I think there was a rabbi connected with this group, although I do not remember his name. I know there was a literary society for young people. I was a member of this group. We met regularly to discuss books and have a social hour. This group seemed to fall by the wayside until another group got together and organized a Temple of Truth congregation. It seemed to be the desire of this group to have a more moderate and modern form of worship. The first place of meeting was at 504 Market Street about 1905. The first building to home the Temple of Truth congregation was situated at 911 Washington Street about 1905 or '06. Regular services were held there with Sunday School classes held in the basement, where we had an auditorium and a small kitchen. The first class was confirmed in 1910. This was a conservative congregation where some of the men wore hats and others did not. We used the conservative prayer book. The congregation grew until they had about 175 members. A large house was purchased across the street where we had more classrooms, a larger auditorium and a larger kitchen. Many money-making affairs were held there, also lectures and happy social affairs. In 1922 a large group of temple members withdrew from the temple to form the Temple Beth Shalom, situated at 18th and Washington Street. We were left with 40 members, many of whom were single men. The burden of carrying on was left to this small group, and if it had not been for the generosity of a few men, we would not have been able to continue. It was shortly thereafter that we joined the Union of American Hebrew Congregation and became a reformed Jewish congregation. And we became known as Temple Beth Emeth. It wasn't very long before our membership and we were beginning to think and plan for a larger temple where we could house all of our activities, school rooms for Sunday School and Hebrew classes, social activities, lectures and so forth, where we are now located at 300 Lea Boulevard. The ladies of our congregation were known in the beginning as the Ladies Aid Society. They helped the temple and sewed for the needy and so forth. This group changed its name to the Sisterhood of Temple Beth Emeth about 1923 and are doing bigger and better things since then. You may be interested to know how

we became affiliated with District No. 8, Federated Sisterhood and eventually to become a part of Midatlantic States Conference of Reform Jews. It was probably about 1926 when I was president of the Sisterhood that we wanted to be part of the national and district organization. I wrote to the chairman of Pennsylvania Federation; she replied that they were not anxious to take on another state. So I wrote to the New Jersey chairman and she answered the same way. Finally I wrote to Mrs. Abraham Simon, the national president, and organizer of the National Federation of Temple Sisterhood. She then invited us to become a part of District No. 8, comprising Virginia, Maryland, District of Columbia. I went to Richmond, Virginia to attend their conference and we became a member of District No. 8. I think it is [inaudible] that our Congregation of Brotherhood were invited to join their organization where I am sure that we are very happy to be.

The Beth Shalom congregation was organized in 1922. This group withdrew from the Temple Beth Emeth because we had no Hebrew school, dissatisfaction with the form of worship . . . although we were a conservative congregation . . . and because some of the men wore hats and some did not. There may have been other reasons, but I am not aware of it. The Beth Shalom congregation purchased and renovated the building at 18th and Washington Streets, where they were housed until 1953 when they moved to the new location at 18th and Baynard Boulevard. This congregation adheres to the conservative form of worship. The Sisterhood was organized in 1923 and has been the right arm of the congregation.

The Wilmington section of Council of Jewish Women was organized by me in 1918. This group of women worked very hard in the community. It was the time of the First World War; they bought Liberty Bonds, helped in the Red Cross, worked both in making bandages and collecting money during the annual campaign for funds, and canteen work . . . helped in the Americanization work, teaching the women English and American way of life . . . maintained a kindergarten for Jewish children at 3rd and King Streets for two years, acted as a liaison between the schools and the Jewish home to prevent juvenile delinquency. We were able to keep Jewish children out of the correctional schools and I think we still do not have any of our children at Woods Haven School or Ferrell School. We helped . . . we held current events classes and book reviews which helped our women to keep abreast of the times. After 12 years of hard work, the interest seemed to wane and the council was dormant. The council was reorganized in 1950 and the women are doing a very fine piece of work in many areas, also helping to support the hospital in Jerusalem. They are doing a fine piece of work at Woods Haven School and in many of the anti-poverty programs in the city.

The [inaudible] Jewish Women's Organization was started by me--I seem to be . . . in 1929, the purpose of this organization to represent the Jewish women of Delaware whenever needed. For 12 years we worked hand and glove with the Jewish Federation supplying up to 200 women to collect funds during the campaigns. They worked for the Red Cross during the Second World War, entertained the soldiers through the U.S.O. by

supplying supper once a month and chaperoning dances. The Bureau held the first survey of the Jewish community in 1930 for the purpose of finding out where the different groups of Jewish people lived. We wanted to find out if we could help in bringing the Jewish children to the Sunday Schools. We found that at that time there were about 2,000 Jews in Wilmington area. We have a committee that has helped at the Delaware State Hospital and provided workers to distribute surplus foods to the poor. Welcoming Jewish families to the community, supplying them with literature, letting them know of the various congregations and organizations. In 1944 at the request of the National Jewish Welfare Board, we again conducted a survey of the Jewish people. About 75 women took part and we found that there were about 1200 Jewish families here, or about 4100 people. A later survey was again held under the auspices of the Jewish Community Center and the Jewish Federation in which we helped. At present I believe the census stands at about 8,000 Jewish persons.

The Forbonda [sp] Jewish Women's Group was organized in 1929. This group helped in assisting in the work in Israel. The Pioneer Women also work and raise funds for Israel. This group was organized in 1932. The Mizrahe [sp] Group was organized in 1951. They also work and raise funds for Israel.

The Jewish War Veterans Auxiliary was organized in 1924. They help at the Veterans Hospital and do many other things.

The Wilmington Chapter of Deborah works and raises funds for the Deborah Hospital . . . I've said that before . . . at Browns Mill, New Jersey. This is a non-sectarian hospital for the treatment of T.B., heart disease, cancer and similar diseases. I believe that they treat the people there free of charge. They were organized in 1951. I think that's a little repetition of . . .

The Wilmington Branch of the Brandeis University Auxiliary was formed about 1951. Their main object is to provide funds to buy books for the library and to help wherever they can.

The Women's Division of the Jewish Federation is composed of the women who contribute personally to the Federation campaign for funds. They also conduct and manage the Economy Shop, which will probably bring in a goodly sum each year.

In the early years the Jewish people lived in the lower part of the city. As time went on and they prospered, they moved further up in the city. Then they scattered to various parts of the city because of business reasons or a desire to find the better places to live. There was a time when the majority of the Jewish people lived below the Brandywine Creek and now the majority live north of the creek, as our surveys have shown. And they need for the synagogues and community centers to be closer to the majority.

I hope that I have made you realize how very difficult it was for the many men and women who helped to organize our early congregations and

societies. They were poor, many were uneducated, but their hearts were in the right place and at the right time. It has seemed to me that organizations were formed in spirit . . . in spurts. Years sometimes passed between progress and standing still. We are again going through a spurt of expansion. Since Beth Emeth moved to larger quarters, the other congregations have expanded and moved out of the center city, and now the Jewish Community Center is in the midst of raising funds and will be in their new quarters before we know it. I would like to pay tribute to those people in our community who have either grown up here or have moved here to make their homes. They are assuming the responsibilities of leaders and are helping to carry on in improving on the efforts of the past leaders. May God bless them.

Q Very nice. [Tape is stopped, then re-started.]

A If I can answer them.

Q I notice you mentioned one trend you saw, the movement of Jews from below the Brandywine to the northern Brandywine Hundred. I wonder if you could see any other trends that have . . .

A Well, they're moving out into the suburbs, naturally.

Q Yes . . . but any other in terms of perhaps cohesiveness as a community or . . .

A Well, I think that the . . . I think the community is certainly closer together today . . .

Q Now?

A Than they were in the 1920's. I . . . I don't know whether I want to put this on tape or not.

Q Come on, why not? It's all right.

A I didn't want to . . . for a long time before this was written, I had been asked to write this history, and I refused to do it because I didn't want to go into the history of the breaking away from the [inaudible]. There was a great deal of hard feeling.

Q Breaking away from what?

A From congregations.

Q Oh, I see.

A There wasn't too much hard feeling when the Hesche Shel Emeth broke away from the Adas Kodesch. There wasn't very much hard feeling when the [sounds like "Putz"] broke away from Adas Kodesch. But there was a great deal of hard feeling when the Beth Shalom broke away from the Beth Emeth. It caused a rift in the city amongst the Jewish people and it was very bad. I'm very happy to say that the relationship is very good now and I

think the rabbis all . . . they have a Jewish Rabbis Association and they cooperate very well.

Q Well, they're not so different anymore in terms of theology . . . they're not that different anymore.

A Well, they are and they're not. Of course I think . . . and I don't think that's due . . . I think it's due to the trend of the times, I think it is due to the holocaust in Germany, because of the six million Jews that were killed in Germany, I think the Jewish people began to realize those who never took very much part in Jewish affairs and while they considered themselves Jews, they weren't very active as Jews. And I think we have a good many today.

Q But you're saying they're more active now than they were.

A Yes . . . well, I think . . . yes, I think that since the Nazis killed so many of the Jews in Germany and since Israel was organized as a state, I think a great many Jews in the United States have come to feel closer to Judaism. In talking to a great many Jews, not only here in Wilmington but in various cities, I'm afraid we have a lot of people who call themselves Jews and to my mind they are Jews in name only.

Q Why?

A Well, they don't belong to a synagogue. They don't belong to a congregation. They don't contribute. They don't contribute to the Jewish Federation, they don't contribute to the Israel cause. They give here and there, spasmodically. They may give to some local things but not to [inaudible]. They don't want to be considered Zionists. If they give to Israel they think they might be considered Zionists, but you can contribute to Israel without being a Zionist. You don't have to believe in a political Israel. I . . . my two brothers, Will and Lou, were very active workers in the Zionist movement. In fact, my brother helped to organize it . . . they brought Chaim Weizmann and Abi Silver [sp] and Louis Lipski [sp] and so many people that I remember . . . Maurice Samuels . . . that I remember came to Wilmington. And they organized the . . . it was because the Hadassah organized in Wilmington that the council fell down because people were more sympathetic to the Hadassah than they were with council.

Q But there is more unity . . . you stay there are still those Jews who are not quite part of what you consider being Jewish, but are there fewer of them now, though?

A Well, I . . .

Q You mentioned Israel and the holocaust in Germany . . .

A Well, I think . . . for instance, I don't know, they haven't taken a census, a survey of the Jewish community, since that last survey we took under the Jewish . . . which is about ten years ago, maybe more. At that time, it was considered that--after the study was made--that

about 60% of the Jewish people in Wilmington belonged to a congregation. 40% don't. Now, that's a large percentage for a small community like Wilmington. And . . .

Q Of course, this was when, 10 years ago?

A Yes.

Q Um hmm. Because probably most Jews are outside of Wilmington.

A Well, they're in the suburbs which are considered Wilmington.

Q Oh, I see. So this survey considered Wilmington and suburbs.

A Yes. And to my mind it's very bad. May I express my personal opinion?

Q Certainly, absolutely.

A Personally, I feel a great obligation to the community as a whole, both non-sectarian and sectarian. I feel that we owe a debt to the community in which we live and we've got to pay that debt in community service. I just received my 50-year pin with the Red Cross last week. As a . . . my feeling, as an indication, I've been reelected to the board, I've been on the board that many years. There are very few Jewish people that belong . . . that do work for the Red Cross except they did in the war time, but not now. The Council of Jewish Women is doing a very good piece of work with the Head Start Program, with some of the anti-poverty programs, with the employment program . . . with the Woods Haven School they're doing an excellent piece of work. And I feel that we owe that debt, we can't pay that debt just by taxes. We have to pay it by service. But we also owe a debt to our own religion, and I feel that the only way we can pay our debt to our own religion is to be a part of the Jewish community, to be a part of the congregational work, to contribute to it, to contribute to the Jewish Federation, to all the Jewish causes and to work wherever we can, give of ourselves to the Jewish causes. And I find a great many people are dormant. They don't either work for the community nor do they work for the Jewish community. And it's a shame because they can do a very good piece of work.

Q You mentioned that now the Jews tend to be . . . are more cohesive as a group. You just mentioned that . . .

A Well, as congregations they are cooperating.

Q Uh huh. Other people I've interviewed, older people who lived on 2nd Street where the Jewish community started, they complain about the fact that there is no more cohesive community among the Jews.

A Well, they don't have, because, you see, notwithstanding the fact that the Adas Kodesch congregation is an orthodox congregation, they moved far out of the city near the suburbs, and it's very difficult for these older people, even though they live on the north side of the Brandywine, it's difficult for them to get to the Adas Kodesch congregation to the services.

Maybe some of them don't wish to ride on the Sabbath. Maybe some of them don't wish to ride on a holiday, and they're not supposed to ride on the holiday. And yet they have to if they want to go to services. So that when we had the Bichor Cholim Society downtown, there was a cohesiveness, there was a friendly feeling, there was a closeness.

Q It's also because of the small size of the group, and this older culture doesn't exist anymore.

A No, it doesn't, because the older people are dying off, they don't all live as long as I have, and they don't all attend meetings like I do and . . .

Q And the younger people have different ways . . .

A And the younger people have different ways and there's a great deal of intermarriage and . . . one thing that I'm very sorry about is that the rabbis have gotten together and they will not marry people of different faiths unless they've converted.

Q To Judaism.

A Yes. And they feel that very strongly. My personal opinion is that they should marry them because if they would marry them, there is a greater chance that they might raise their children in the Jewish faith, and if they don't marry them, they drift away and they're nothing. So that . . .

Q Do you notice more conversions to Judaism today than in the past?

A Oh, yes, there's more conversions. There's also more marriages out of the faith and not belonging anywhere.

Q More now?

A Yes. I couldn't give you figures, but my feeling is that there are more, that they bring their children up without religion, or some of them have joined the Unitarian Church or some of them even have let their children go into the various Christian faiths, so that they don't have any feeling of adhesiveness to the Jewish faith. And I had one man tell me not very long ago that . . . he said he didn't believe in God. I said, "Are you a Jew?" He said, "Yes, I'm a Jew." I said, "I don't see how you can be a Jew and not believe in God." The first fundamental of Jewish . . . Judaism is the belief in one God. I said "I don't see how anybody can be a Jew and be an atheist," my personal feeling. And yet I've had rabbis tell me that they can see where a person can be an atheist and be a Jew, and I can't see it.

Q Well, they might consider being a Jew part of the history and part of belonging to a people.

A Well, if they want to consider the Jews as a nation, they might consider them as a national Jew but not a religious Jew. But I don't feel that I'm

part of a Jewish nation. I'm not part of Israel. I think the people that live . . .

Q But you're part of the history . . . the history of the Jews.

A Yes . . . I think the people that live . . . I'm just expressing my own views . . . the people that live in Israel are Israelis and they are a nation. But I'm an American of Jewish faith, and that's the way I feel. And I feel that I don't see how a person can be a communist and be a Jew. The first principle of communism is not to have any religious faith at all, am I right?

Q Certainly.

A Well, how can you be a Jew and not have any religious faith? How can you be a Jew and be an atheist?

Q Well, sometimes you're a Jew because someone considers you a Jew.

A Well, they'll always consider you . . .

Q Identifies you as a Jew.

A They'll always identify you, but look at even Goldwater, whose father was a Jew, his grandfather was a Jew. And they threw it up to him when he was running for president, he was raised as an Episcopalian, he didn't know anything at all about Judaism. His mother was an Episcopalian.

Q Um hmm. Well, he's probably still accepted as a . . . where he lives, as an Episcopalian.

A Yes, he is. He's accepted all over the world as an Episcopalian, but when he was running for president, it was . . . I won't say thrown up to him, but it was said of him, "He's of Jewish faith," but he wasn't of Jewish faith, he had a Jewish father, and he had a Jewish grandfather, and in their store they have a big mural up there in the store-- I've been in his store many times.

Q Have you?

A Yes. There's a big covered wagon with a picture of his father, photograph of his father standing there, he was a peddler in Arizona, and his grandfather was a peddler out there. So that it doesn't make any difference whether you like it or you don't like it, whether you want to remain a Jew or you don't want to remain a Jew, people will say, well, "He's a Jew," whether you're a Jew or you're not a Jew, they'll call you a Jew because we're still second-class citizens.

Q Do you think so?

A Yes.

Q Why do you say that?

A Can you buy a house out at Westover Hills, even with all the civil rights program? Can you buy a house out at Alapocas? Can you buy a house out in Westmoreland? Can you belong to the Wilmington Country Club? Can you go wherever you want to go?

Q What do you mean, go wherever I want to go?

A I mean in any affair, to buy tickets to any affair that goes on?

Q You mean there's still social institutions that [inaudible] . . .

A Socially you're not accepted.

Q Um hmm.

A You're tolerated. We may not like it, but if you want to face the truth, face it and realize.

Q But don't you think that's kind of dying out a little bit?

A No.

Q And people are brought together less by ethnic groups and religion but by professions and things like that.

A No . . . no. I don't. There may be a case here and there where people have become friends, maybe some of these people that work in the DuPont Experimental Station become friendly with some of the non-Jewish people and on occasion they're invited to a dinner party . . . occasionally. Personally, with all the activities I have, with all that I did, I was 34 years on the Woods Haven school board; I've been 50 years on the Red Cross . . . I never invited any of those people to my house for a dinner and I was never invited.

Q Hmm. Um hmm.

A Because I realized that I wasn't gonna push myself, and I wasn't invited. I'm telling you this very frankly. So why should I push myself into a place where I'm not wanted? I wouldn't want to live in Westover Hills if they gave me a place for nothing. But I resent the fact that I can't buy a house there. I resent the fact that I can't buy a place in Alapocas. I don't want to live there, I don't want to live where I'm not wanted. But I resent it. You can talk all you want about your civil rights laws and everything. You can do all you . . . or you can put all the laws on the statute books that you want to. But if they're not maintained and if they're not kept up, well, they're no good.

Q Do you see any other current trends among Jews that are a change from the past, from what you . . . well, your observation of history. You mentioned several things.

A In what way?

Q Well, I don't know . . . different attitudes about Judaism . . .

A I think there are some of the young people who are coming closer to Judaism, and I think there are some that would rather not be known as Jews. They think they can hide away. We've got some intermarriages right here in Wilmington, a good many of them . . . they're neither fish nor fowl.

Q Why do you think there are younger people who are closer to Judaism now?

A Well, I think Israel has made an appeal to them.

Q Do you think it's because maybe some younger Jews, modern Jews, are more secure, that they don't feel they have to be like the rest of the population, they can take into consideration their own history and their own background and . . .

A No, I think the reason that the reason they feel more secure is because they've been accepted by some of the people.

Q And thus they could be Jews.

A I had a young man tell me . . . and this has been ten years ago . . . now, there may have been a very big trend . . . you might be interested in this . . . this was a young man who was born and raised in Wilmington, you would know him if I'd tell you who he was. He went to Friends School, graduated from Friends School, he was one of the group. The minute he graduated from Friends School, they dropped him like a hot potato, everyone except one couple. And I happened to be at his home for dinner one night and he came home with me, brought me home, then he seemed to want to talk, and I invited him to come up. We sat here and talked. That's exactly ten years ago because he talked and talked and talked and talked. His greatest ambition in life was to marry an Episcopalian girl. And I said why. He said because he wanted to show them that he was just as good as they were. And I said that's the poorest reason in the world to get married. And then we talked and I said, "But you can change," I said, "You can start going with Jewish girls, you can start going with Jewish people," and he said well, he hadn't any friends. And I said, "Well, you can make friends. You go to Sunday School." He went to Sunday School . . . he was confirmed in our Sunday School, he was bar mitzvah. He could have made friends with the Jewish boys and girls but he was very happy with this group in Friends School that accepted him. But they dropped him. Then he was bitter. By the way, he's in Europe and he's doing writing over there or something, but he never married yet. And he even visited Israel.

Q Maybe he's still looking for that Episcopalian girl.

A Maybe so. I had the same thing happen to my own granddaughter. As long as she went to Number 6 School and lived up on the Boulevard, she had a little group, about six or seven boys and girls, or eight or I don't know, a few, they wouldn't go to Warner School unless they waited for her on the corner so she could go with them. That I know to be a fact. These girls used to come down and visit us in Atlantic City or Wildwood,

wherever we had a place for the summer, stay a couple of weeks at a time, a lot of them. The minute they graduated from Warner School and went up to P. S. DuPont, they dropped her like a hot potato. She was the most miserable youngster in the world. And I didn't know what it was. The boys joined a fraternity up there, the girls joined a sorority, which they did not take Jewish girls, there was no Jewish sorority at the time, and it came to be about . . . she went through high school very, very bitterly and wanted to stop every year, wanted to drop out of school, and I didn't know the real reason. Afterwards I found out. In her senior year she absolutely refused to go back to school. I went to the principal . . . or the superintendent of schools in Wilmington, who is now dead, and I told him the story and asked him what to do. I was trying to get her to go through high school so she could go to college. You know what he said to me? He said, "If you Jewish people would only convert into Christianity, you would have no trouble getting into college." A superintendent of schools!

Q Unbelievable.

A And I said to him, I said, "You are a Presbyterian, aren't you?" And he said yes. And I said, "Well, I don't want to be a Presbyterian; I'm very proud to be a Jew." And I walked out of the office. And you know what I did? Mr. Wilmot Jones was principal of Friends School and we had worked together in the Americanization work, see. I was chairman of the Americanization work for about 12 years here in Delaware and we worked very closely on that. And I went to him and I laid my cards on the table and I asked what I should do. He said, "Well, you bring her up here and let me talk to her." I brought her up there, the only thing she required was German, which she hadn't had in high school at all. So he got somebody to tutor her in high school--now, she's a very bright girl even if she's my granddaughter--and in two weeks cramming in German, she passed a year's study of German, believe it or not. And she got in and he took her in, and the German teacher wouldn't believe that she hadn't had German anymore than just the two weeks. And he took her into the senior class of Friends School, which was an unheard of thing. And she graduated from Friends School, and he helped me get her into college. She was a very unhappy, miserable child because these people were tickled to death to have her as a friend until the social life began. I've had those things . . . I've had that happen to me, but when they happen to the young people . . . now, these young people don't know these things and don't realize them. But I've lived through them and I've gone through them. I had a period of time when I lived in New Castle, I was about 13, 14 years of age, for about three or four years . . . we left there when I was 16, we came back to Wilmington . . . it must have started when I was about 12 . . . there was one girl there wouldn't allow a girl in the school to play with me. Can you imagine? She'd say to them right in my presence, "If you play with her, you can't play with me. She's a Jew." Now take a child of 12 or 13 years of age, and we were the only Jewish family there, to live through that . . . I'm very glad I'm not bitter. I'm very glad, I'm very happy that I've got sense enough not to be bitter, because I never could have done the work in the community that I did if I had allowed myself to be bitter.

- Q Do you think this is . . . this social discrimination is so true today, considering that a great number of people in this area, Wilmington area, are really not native Delawareans. They're kind of insecure in their social position, too. They come from other states and other cities, other parts of the country . . .
- A Yes, I find there are some people that come here, especially those people that join the temple I get to meet more, you know . . .
- Q I'm talking about Christians, and their discrimination against Jews. I wonder if there's so much today because in Delaware you hardly find native Delawareans where the social position is pretty solid . . .
- A Yes it is, it . . . oh, I've had a lot of praises and I've had a lot of people tell me how wonderful I am and all this, that and the other, but believe me, it goes in one ear and out the other as far as I'm concerned. I'll do all I can for the community, I'll work. I feel, as I told you before, I feel I owe a debt to the community and I'm gonna pay it in the best way I can. But when it comes to social life, my life is mostly Jewish people.
- Q I see. Well, I want to thank you very much, Mrs. Ginns.

[END OF INTERVIEW]