

Jewish Historical Society of Staten Island Oral History Project

1979-1996

Overview of the Collection

Collection Number: SIM-30

Title: Jewish Historical Society of Staten Island Oral History Project

Creator: Jewish Historical Society of Staten Island

Dates: 1979-1996

Extent: .35 Linear Feet

Abstract: Members of the Jewish Historical Society of Staten Island conducted interviews between 1979 and 1996 with Jewish Staten Island residents considered prominent in the community and/or knowledgeable about the community's history. Most interviews were recorded on audio cassette tapes and notes were made for most interviews. The audio quality is generally poor and no oral history release forms were signed. Although digital files of the interviews are available to researchers, because of the poor sound quality many of them are unusable. The notes interviewers created are often sketchy and rarely provide even basic details about the interviewee. Biographical material about the interviewees has been provided here when available from other sources.

Administrative Information

Preferred Citation

The Jewish Historical Society of Staten Island Oral History Project, Archives & Special Collections, Department of the Library, College of Staten Island, CUNY, Staten Island, New York.

Acquisition

This collection was donated to the College of Staten Island Archives and Special Collections by the Jewish Historical Society of Staten Island 30 October 2008.

Processing Information

The original audio cassette tapes were transferred to digital files by Library Media Services in 2009-2010. The inventory was prepared by James Kaser in August, 2016.

Restrictions:

Access

Access to this record group is unrestricted.

Copyright Notice

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Container Listing

[The following box/folder inventory is in the form of a table. If you are visually impaired and using a pdf reader you may need assistance and should contact the Archives at 718-982-4128.]

Box#	Folder#	Title
1	1	25 th Anniversary Celebration, recorded 12/15/1979
1	2	Aberlin, Jane (1914?-2012), interviewed 2/11/1981

Born Jane Stein, Aberlin was the great-granddaughter of Moses Greenwald, one of the first Jews to settle on Staten Island in 1848. Her grandfather, Abram Greenwald, was one of the founders of the Jewish Community Center of Staten Island.

Aberlin graduated from Curtis High School and earned a bachelor's degree from Barnard College in 1934. For a few years after college, she worked for national radio personality Ted Malone. She married Isador Aberlin (5/4/1908–7/1/1977), an accountant and attorney, in 1940. The couple had two children, Jean and Robert.

Aberlin was active in the Jewish Community Center of Staten Island for over sixty years, having served as vice president and president of the women's division. She was also one of the seven original members of Snug Harbor Cultural Center & Botanical Garden

Aberlin talks about the history of her family on Staten Island and the history of the Jewish Community Center of Staten Island (JCCSI).

1 3 Avins, Jules (8/31/1918–5/12/2003), interviewed 10/10/1995 (no audio file)

Avins father, Louis Avins (b. 9/18/1888) was brought to the United States by his parents Julius and Sarah (Ravdin) Avins from Dvinsk, Vitebsk Province Russia when he was four years old in 1892. Louis Avins married Fannie Krinitz and operated an automobile supply and hardware business at 303 Richmond Road in New Dorp Manor.

Avins graduated from Curtis High School in 1930 at the age of fifteen. He graduated from City College with a degree in chemical engineering and received a master's degree from Carnegie Institute of Technology. On May 5, 1941 he married Ruth Avins.

He talks about his childhood and his involvement as an adult at the JCCSI.

1 4 Baker, Samuel David (1909?-2002), interviewed 2/6/1983

Born in Russia and lived in Chicago when his parents first came to the United States. He arrived with his family on Staten Island in 1919. His father operated a shore repair shop on Victory Boulevard in Tompkinsville. Baker graduated from Columbia College of Pharmacy and operated a drugstore in Prince's Bay on Seguine Avenue.

1 5 Berger, Graenum (1908-1999), interviewed 11/4/1980

Born in Gloversville, NY, Berger graduated from the University of Missouri and the Jewish School of Social Work (NYC). His first job was as executive director of the JCCSI, a position he held from 1932-1938. He went on to found the American Association for Ethiopian Jewry and published *Black Jews in America*.

Berger mostly talks about JCCSI administrative matters during the Depression and rise of Adolph Hitler, as well as some individuals who played a leading role in the organization during his time there. His papers are located at the American Jewish Historical Society.

1 6 Cohen, Joel (b.1929?), interviewed 8/7/1979 and 7/29/1996

Cohen grew up on Oxford Place in St. George and talks mostly about his childhood and youth. He graduated from Wagner College in 1950.

1 7 Diamond, Richard (1932-2004), interviewed 3/19/1996

Diamond grew up on Staten Island, graduated from Staten Island Academy and Cornell University. His uncle was S. I. Newhouse and Diamond's career was as associate publisher and publisher of the *Staten Island Advance*. He talks about his

family, which arrived on Staten Island in the late-nineteenth century and characterizes the Jewish community on Staten Island.

- 1 8 Fleshner, Jacob G. (1/15/1897–11/1981) and Fleshner, Amy (Robinson), interviewed 12/30/1980

Fleshner immigrated from Rymalower a region of Austria. Rymalower was in a area of Galicia that was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire until 1918. Galicia is a region lying along the north side of the Carpathian Mountains, consisting of the provinces of Krakow, L'viv, Tarnopol, and Stanisiawow, which between the years 1772 and 1918 formed a crown land of the Austrian Empire. After World War II western Galicia became a part of Poland and eastern Galicia became a part of the Ukraine that was controlled by the Soviet Union.

Fleshner was a founder of the Rymalower Young Men's Benevolent Association, a mutual aid society that pooled resources to help members with a loan fund to meet emergency financial needs and a burial society with plots in the Baron Hirsch Cemetery on Staten Island.

Fleshner was in real estate and is interviewed with his wife and they mostly talk about the JCCSI and temples of which they were members, discussing various rabbis.

- 1 9 Friedland, Jacob (Jack) (1911-2011), interviewed 7/1996, no audio file

Friedland was born on Staten Island and attended Curtis High School. A graduate of Brooklyn College, he studied law at St. John's University and was admitted to the bar in 1934. He was an executive director of the Jewish Community Center in the 1930s. Starting in the 1940s he began constructing houses on Staten Island with Albert Meniker as his architect/partner. Over the course of his career as a real estate developed he constructed more than one-thousand houses.

- 1 10 Garber, Harold S., interviewed 10/22/1996

Graber is the son of one of the founders of a firm called Men's and Boy's Clothing that operated for many years after its founding in 1924 at 163 Richmond Avenue. He mostly talks about his family's immigration from Poland in 1914, their start as peddlers of clothing from a horse-drawn wagon on Staten Island and their operation of the clothing store.

- 1 11 Geisinger, Max (3/26/1908–7/28/1997), interviewed 3/1986

- 1 12 Gross, Avery, interviewed 11/10/1996 and 11/18/1996

Gross mostly talks about his grandfather, Samuel Gross, and father, Reuben Gross, and their successful effort, in 1954, to found the Foundation School in Park Hill.

- 1 13 Hollander, Sid, interviewed 7/31/1979
Hollander mostly talks about the early days of B'nai Israel on the South Shore
- 1 14 Holocaust Observance and Dedication of Young Israel of Staten Island, 4/2/1981
- 1 15 Installation of Officers
- 1 16 Jewish Historical Society Breakfast, 7/13/1986
- 1 17 Jewish Historical Society Inaugural Meeting, 11/1979
- 1 18 Jewish Historical Society Planning Meeting facilitated by Dr. Malcolm Stern, 3/1981
Stern provides advice on the formation of a Jewish Historical Society.
- 1 19 Kaspin, Philip Bea 7/16/1981
Kaspin mostly talks about the history of T'Ferith Israel and B'nai Jeshurin on Staten Island
- 1 20 Kiviat, Abel (1892-1992), interviewed 7/3/1984
Kiviat, a 1912 Olympic medalist, grew up on Staten Island.
- 1 21 Klein, Monroe and Klein, Marcia (Siegler) 3/24/1996
The Kleins mostly talk about growing up in the Staten Island JCC.
- 1 22 Kramer, Rabbi Marcus, interviewed 1/5/1981
Kramer led Temple Israel from 1956-1971, returning later as rabbi emeritus, and mostly talks about the congregation's history, although he also makes observations about begin Jewish on Staten Island.
- 1 23 Levine, Phillip J. (b. 1920), interviewed 4/7/1981
Levine graduated from City College and Columbia Law School. He mostly talks about the JCC, although he briefly characterizes prominent members of the Jewish community.
- 1 24 Levy, Nathan (1907?-1982?), interviewed 8/16/1979
Levy operated businesses on Jersey Street and talks about this commercial district and the history of the Jewish community on Staten Island, including Anshe Ased Chesen, the JCC, and the Foundation School
- 1 25 Litinsky, Rosalie (Mord) (1910-1993), 10/15/1980 (3 discs)
This lengthy interview was conducted at Litinsky's house and Dr. J. Adler, Sam and Mrs. Baker, and Oscar Weissglass were present as interviewers and conversation participants. Prior to her marriage, Rosalie Mord worked as a social worker at Staten

Island Hospital. She married Dr. Henry Litinsky in 1938, and in 1947 they moved to 65 Rose Avenue in New Dorp, where Dr. Litinsky also maintained his medical office.

1 26 Margolis, Joe, interviewed 7/12/1996

1 27 Melniker, Albert (2/22/1910–1/8/2002), interviewed 12/12/1995

Melniker was Staten Island's most prominent architect. He attended the Hebrew Technical Institute and graduated from the University of Michigan (1935). He talks about B'nai Jeshurin and makes generalizations about Jewish life on Staten Island.

1 28 Men's Club of Agudath Achim Anshe Chesed Breakfast Meeting 12/2/1979

Speaker Israel Somach with remarks by Rabbi M. Zachariash

1 29 Miller, Louis R. (1901?–1994), interviewed 9/17/1979

Miller mostly talks about his work with the JCC, B'nai Jeshurin, B'nai B'rith, and the Jewish Foundation School

1 30 Peck, Louis (1907-2006?), interviewed 7/22/1981

Peck talks about the Men's Club of Temple Emanuel and B'nai B'rith.

1 31 Robinson, Mrs. Manny (Amy), interviewed 12/28/1980

Mostly talks about her work with the Sisterhood of B'nai Jeshurin.

1 32 Rubin, Cantor, interviewed 11/27/1979

Rubin, who came to Staten Island in the early 1920s to operate a butcher shop mostly talks about T'ferith Israel and the administrative history of the JCC.

1 33 Somach, Israel (1905-1990), interviewed 11/27/1979

Somach talks about T'ferith Israel and Jewish life on Staten Island.

1 34 Susskind, Edith Rivkind Susskind (1923–1/24/2014), interviewed 12/11/1995

Susskind talks about her family history on Staten Island and characterizes the changing importance of the JCC.

1 35 Teitelbaum, Donald D. (–6/25/2004), interviewed 8/7/1979

Recording is barely audible; only brief notes available.

1 36 Uslan, Ruth (1913–11/20/2002), interviewed 1997

Uslan was the daughter of a plumber with a shop in the center of a Jewish neighborhood in Stapleton. Uslan details the various businesses and residents during

her childhood. From her perspective many people were “culturally” Jewish, including those who were members of the JCC, for the social life there.

1 37 Weissglass, Allan, interviewed 12/31/1996

Weissglass grew up on Staten Island. He talks about family genealogy and the family business, as well as his social life as a child and young adult.

1 38 Welkowitz, Lillian (4/25/1896–2/26/2003), interviewed 12/31/1996

Welkowitz came to Staten Island in 1921 after she married a dentist who opened a practice here. She discusses the social dynamic of the Jewish community and she and her husband’s sometime diffident relationship with JCC.

1 39 Werb, Lewis and Florence Werb (1927?–9/23/2011), interviewed 3/5/1996

A Staten Island native, Werb was an attorney and real estate developer. He served on the JCC’s board of directors and was also a chairman and president. The Werbs mostly talk about their families and marriage.

1 40 Werner, Dr. Max (1907– 2001), interviewed 10/23/1995

Werner came to Staten Island with his family as a ten-year-old boy in 1917. His father was a kosher butcher. Werner opened his medical practice in 1933. He married in 1939 and served in the US Air Force during World War II. From his perspective there were many Jewish doctors on Staten Island in the 1930s and through the 1940s and 1950s which made earning a living challenging because of the competition. He gives an overview of the medical profession on Staten Island over a fifty year period.

1 41 Rabbi Morris Zachariash (1926?–7/8/2014), interviewed 10/30/1996

Zachariash mostly talks about neighborhood change on North Shore and the relocation of the temple and yeshiva. He was on Staten Island from 1954 to 2005. He was rabbi of Congregation Agudath Achim Anshe Chesed and established the Jewish Foundation School.