

SIDNEY SCHOCHET

April 10, 1994

Interviewed by David Schulman

I: I'm in the home of Sid and Mary Schochet in Asheville and we're going to start talking today about how the Schochet family came to western North Carolina. Sid could you start us off on that and tell us how you came here?

SS: Well, of course I wasn't around in those days. That was a little bit before my time. But my grandfather whose name was A. Bloomberg, Aaron Bloomberg, came here a little bit after his brother, Lewis Bloomberg came here first. It was about 1889. And he came up from Savannah where their older brother had come a short time before from Lithuania. They are all from Lithuania. A little town, I think it was called Linkova was the name of the town. They came to the mountains here around 1890 I suppose it was. My grandfather, like most of them then, went into the retail business in a small way. He started out peddling I imagine is what most of them did until they found a place to set up and had enough money to buy some merchandise and go into business.

I: So he would have peddled just all around western North Carolina?

SS: Peddled around western North Carolina from what I understand.

I: And his name was Abe?

SS: A., Aaron Bloomberg. He had several children, one of which was my mother, Jenny. She was born in Lithuania, came over as a young child. Had a brother, S.I., Isaac Bloomberg known as S.I. And Joe Bloomberg and Dora and Helen and they all lived here. They married and had families. My family, my mother married my father, Barney Schochet, and he was in the retail business here. We've always been in that sort of business all down through the years. My father was from Newark, New Jersey and he was a travelling man I believe, travelling salesman as they called them. Today they call them sales representatives, sales reps. And she married him and he settled here but none of his other family ever came down here or settled. His family always stayed up in New Jersey. And I never really was acquainted with them. My older brother and sister, who are now deceased, knew them to some extent but I never had much occasion to.

I: Your brother and sister's names were...

SS: My sister was Lillian Levy and my brother was Eugene Schochet, everybody called him Gene. He was pretty well known around Asheville, everybody knew him.

I: And your sister, did she end up living in Asheville?

SS: She married David Levy whom she met during WWII. He was from Vineland, New Jersey. He was at Camp Croft in South Carolina and she met him, they had social occasions here and she met him during the war. Of course at that time I was in the service and I was not in Asheville. I was out in Ohio most of the time during the war. And she married Dave Levy but he's now deceased also.

I: People were telling me about the dances that they used to have at the center and they said several marriages came out of that.

SS: Of course it was that way all over the country. I met my wife, Mary, at a dance in Richmond. I was at Camp Lee. I was in officers school at Camp Lee, OCS at that time, 1943, and happened to go to a dance one evening at temple there, Reform Temple, and saw her and met her. She's from Richmond.

I: And her maiden name is what?

SS: Mary Petersell. Her family had been in Richmond quite a while.

I: So your mother had several brothers, you said, and they were all Asheville families too for a while or for a long time?

SS: They all lived here. Well, S.I., her brother S.I. had the Leeder's Dept. Store on Patton Ave. which at one time was very exclusive shop, very exclusive store. Her other brother, Joe, he married a non-Jewish woman and sort of, they didn't have a great deal to do with the family. She had another brother, Jack Bloomberg, who had a large, big department store at one time where the Plaza Theater was after his department store burned down in 1926, I remember, I was a little fellow at that time.

I: That wasn't that Palais Royal?

SS: The Palais Royal was owned by Morris Myers. That was on Biltmore Avenue just a little bit down the street just below where the Cafe on the Square is now.

I: Around where Thames is?

SS: Not quite that far down. Be Here Now, it's sort of a night club, that's where the Palais Royal was. Morris Myers owned that.

I: Your uncle's store, what was it called?

SS: It was called the Emporium. It was where the Plaza Theater later was and now is the Pack Place on that corner. In fact all of Biltmore Avenue, when I was coming up, was practically all Jewish stores on both sides of the street.

I: I was going to ask you if you could sort of give us a mental picture. Could you sort of think back and go down Biltmore Avenue and tell us some of the stores or many of the stores.

SS: I'll do the best I can. It's been quite a while ago. Starting down the left side there, what's now Pack Place was a small shop run by Mr. Banea, below him was another store run by Morris Chisek and below that, our family had a store there below him and then on down was Goldsteins, Izzy Goldsteins, it's Bernie Gordon's father-in-law had a store there. Below that was the old Racquet Store which was a big store, a tremendously busy store, similar to, well, nothing as big as K-Mart but somewhat on that order.

I: Is that where like maybe the Bunn Antiques is now or not that far down?

SS: Not that far down. Where the parking garage is now. And the Racquet Store was owned by Lewis Bloomberg who was my grandfather's brother. Lewis Bloomberg is also the father of Harry Bloomberg who later opened up an automobile

business as a young man, in lieu of going to college. He wasn't interested in going to college, he wanted to work on automobiles and he was very successful as you know. Later ended up with Harry's Cadillac-Pontiac Co. which is still in existence.

I: So Harry Bloomberg's father was a brother to your grandfather.

SS: Harry and I were second cousins. On down a little bit was another store owned by a family called Gotlieb and below that was another one owned by Silverman. Then across the street was Finkelstein's was across the street. That's where Harry Finkelstein's father, Leo, started Finkelstein's Loan Office. Going up was the Asheville Army Store which believe it or not was not a Jewish store, but very nice people owned it but then they later moved over to Patton Avenue. And on up was a shoe store, also not a Jewish store, but a large shoe store, I forget the name of that place. And going up was a Greek man had a what they call a candy kitchen, it was like a confectionary, had alot of candies, soda fountain, all that sort of thing. And going up the street some Mr. Morris Myers had the Palais Royal Store which was a very nice establishment. And up above that was Uncle Sam's Loan Office owned Mr. Argentar, Senator Argentar. And then up on the corner Dave Adler had a GI outlet store on the corner there where a cafe is now. That's pretty much all I can remember.

I: This was anywhere from the 1900s to 1940s.

SS: Well, I don't go back to the 1900s, this was in the 20s and 30s and very early 40s. Hayday was back in the late 20s and early 30s. And when the Charles Store opened up on Patton Avenue, big store, general merchandise, it sort of hurt Biltmore Avenue businesses pretty much. My brother, at that time, had taken over the business. My father had passed away in 1930 and my brother moved over to Patton Avenue along about where the drive in of the BB&T bank building is now. And that's where we stayed until we moved in 1965 to our present location across the street.

I: How did the Jewish merchants, was it sort of a close knit, obviously they were in competition?

SS: They were in competition but they were very close friends. I would also say they were fierce competitors in a way, but they were also very close friends. They visited between each other and sometimes they'd send customers to someone else. If anybody had lost a relative, they needed a minion in the evening after business hours, 6 o'clock or thereabouts, no trouble getting a minion. They'd easily get 10 guys, just call up so and so and he might have a Jewish clerk and he'd tell his neighbor and in 10 minutes time you've got a minion.

I: Now it's hard to get a minion with 300 or 400 families sometimes.

SS: That's what I understand. But in those days it was more, they were competitors but they were also family I guess you might say in a way.

I: What was it like for you growing up in school, can you tell some of the other Jewish people of your age while you were growing up here?

SS: I'm sorry to say, most of them are gone now. There were the Schandler boys and their sister, Ruth, who still lives here, married to Morris Fox, very close friends of ours. The Schandler boys, we lived around the corner from them, they were on Oak St. and we lived on College Park Place. Ben Fox...

I: Is that related to Morris?

SS: No. William Book and Charles and another William Book, there were two William Books.

I: Cousins or...

SS: They were cousins, yeah. Their families had grocery stores. One of them was on Furman Avenue, Charles and William. And the other William, his father had a grocery store on Cherry St. He later became a dentist in the army and he's now retired. I think he lives in Florida.

I: So there was a grocery store like where the, is that Furman Avenue where there's Asheville Arms Apartments I believe?

SS: Yeah, that's Furman Avenue, but not that far up. It was nearer to College Street. About a block off College Street. There was Herbert _____, Norman Sultan whom you probably remember or knew the name anyhow, knew Herbert I guess.

I: These were mainly children of the business owners?

SS: Most everybody was in the business world. There were very few professional people here, Jewish professional men at this time. The first doctor that I can think of, I can remember Dr. Leon Feldman who was a very fine doctor, a very fine man and a prominent citizen in Asheville. We had Alvin Cartis was a lawyer, the first lawyer, Jewish lawyer that I can think of. He's very prominent in B'nai B'rith work, district five, B'nai B'rith. In those days, didn't have the opportunity to go into professions. Now the children, many of them go into professions.

I: How was it in school, I know I grew up in Silvan, felt pretty accepted. Were the Jewish kids pretty much accepted or not?

SS: Pretty much, we didn't have any anti-semitic problems to amount to anything. Nothing comes to my mind. I never had anybody insult me or anything of that nature that I can really remember. Of course I was always kind of a big kid, so that might have had something to do with it. I had an awful lot of non-Jewish friends, still do. One of my close friends goes by my business just about everyday. He's a lawyer downtown, a very fine gentleman named Shelby Horton who I went to school with for many, many years and we stop and talk and chat. And many of the people that I went to school with I still see. The ones that are still around. Of course we didn't have the social life, alot of Jewish people now belong to various clubs, various organizations. Back in those days they didn't belong to those for one reason or another.

I: What was your life like? I mean, did you work in your parents' store or what did you do after school? What was that like?

SS: My brother was in the store ever since I can remember. He was 10 years older than I am. After school I'd play ball, I loved to play baseball.

I: School teams or just neighborhood?

SS: I played on the grammar school team, never played on the high school team. I wasn't really good enough for that. But we'd play in the neighborhood, we played on the David Millard High School grounds which was on Oak St., right across the street from where we live.

I: You were saying you lived in College Park Place. Where would that be now, it doesn't exist now?

SS: It goes up alongside, well the Schandler family had their business and home next to the First Baptist Church. They lived upstairs. And there were two houses next to their house and then there was College Park Place which went up alongside from Oak St. up to College Street going up toward the tunnel. And right beyond that, on the side beyond that was David Millard Junior High School. It set up on a little knoll, now it's all leveled down and it's occupied by one office building.

I: It used to set up on a hill didn't it?

SS: Set up on a knoll, a small hill.

I: And that's where all the kids went to school?

SS: Yeah, we went to junior high, then we'd go over to Lee Edwards High School. I'd hang around the store, help out at the store on Saturdays. I didn't go up there during the week to a great extent. On Saturdays I'd help out some when I became I guess maybe 16 or 17 something like that.

I: What about your other uncles, do they live in the same area or did they live other places, other Bloombergs?

SS: S.I. Bloomberg lived out on Macon Avenue which is the Rural Park section and had a real lovely home. Jack Bloomberg lived over on Kennelworth and my aunt, my mother's sister Dora, she married an optometrist and they lived in Durham until he died and then they moved back to Asheville back in the early 30s. And she opened up a hat shop on Haywood St. She had a milinery shop.

I: Just hats?

SS: Just milinery. Right next to, well, it's in the block there where the Wachovia bank is now on Haywood St. Next to her was Edwin _____ shoe store.

I: Wasn't there a Schwartzberg there?

SS: Roy Schwartzberg was across the street next to Bright's Jewelers. Bright's Jewelers and right next to him, well Bright wasn't there at that time, where Bright is was a Jewish family called Fater. Fater had a, sold lunches, they had a big magazine display and all kind of sundries and things like that. They had a big business.

I: What about, would you say it sounds like maybe 75% of downtown was Jewish, was that fair to say?

SS: A good portion of it was. I wouldn't go as far as to say 75%, but a good portion was Jewish businesses.

I: Some people have talked to me about Jewish boarding homes in Asheville. Do you remember those or were there many?

SS: The only one I can remember is Mrs. Rosenfeld over on Austin Ave. She had a boarding house.

I: Where is Austin?

SS: Austin runs between Spears Avenue and Coleman Avenue. It's a short street parallel with Merriman Avenue.

I: And did they serve kosher food and stuff like that or it was just more of a boarding house?

SS: Just a boarding house. Really the only kosher style or kosher boarding house I can think of was over in Hendersonville, Horowitz's. Horowitz Inn I think they called it. That's the only one that I can think of.

I: Can you tell us some about the rabbis that were in town? Good and bad, I understand some of them were a little bit controversial.

SS: Well, naturally, most rabbis are. The first rabbi I can remember was a gentleman by the name of Rabbi Fox, Elias Fox. He was rabbi at the synagogue where I was raised in the synagogue. Now I belong to the Reform Temple but most all of us came up in the orthodox synagogue.

I: Where was that now?

SS: That was on Liberty Street which is now the site of Best Western Motel. And around the corner from there on Spruce Street was the Reform Temple. Spruce Street which is right across from the Radisson. Or almost where the Radisson is now. Spruce Street is where the Thomas Wolfe home is. And where the Radisson sits, part of that was, the temple sat there. It was very convenient and during the holidays we'd visit back and forth and one thing and another. But to get back to Rabbi Fox, he was short, portly, had a short, white, neatly trimmed beard. In those days we didn't have a _____ or Hebrew school actually. He'd come to the various boys, girls didn't take in those days much in the way of Hebrew, the boys' homes. At least he came to my home a couple of afternoons a week. And we'd spend an hour or two and he'd teach you how to read the Jewish alphabet and later on the words and the shima and things like that. He was very prominent in the Masonic order. In fact, I guess they still have a picture of him in the Masonic temple down on Broadway. I've been in there a number of times. He might have been the Master, I don't know about Grand Master, but he was very high in the Masonic order, very highly regarded.

I: And this would have been in the 20s?

SS: 20s. He also was the _____, kill the chickens. I remember my mother had chickens in the back yard and he'd come and kill a couple of them which I wasn't too fond of, watching them flop around like they did.

I: Was he married, did he have a family?

SS: Not to my knowledge. I don't remember him ever having a family.

I: He stayed here a short while?

SS: He was here many years. I don't know if he was still rabbi or not, he was an old man, he was run over on Merriman Avenue, an automobile ran over him one time and killed him. He may have lingered awhile. That's a long time ago. After him, I remember we had, they organized a Hebrew school, a _____ in the afternoons in the synagogue, the basement of the synagogue and we had a very nice rabbi, tall, nice looking young fellow named Kaplowitz. We liked him because he'd get out and play ball with us. We couldn't imagine a rabbi, but he was one of the kind of guys, he liked to play ball and he'd get out and play with the guys. He stayed here a few years. And then after him came a gentleman that made a pretty big impression on me. His name was Hyman Goodkowitz. By that time we were pretty much barmitzvah age and he taught us, you might say, in a more modern way. He had his lessons planned out and he'd do it according to history and he'd give us little lectures and he'd teach us how to read the different parts of the service and all this sort of thing. We liked him very much. And an interesting sideline, I don't know if you're aware of this or not. You've heard of the four chaplains that went down on the Dorchester during WWII. There was a Catholic, two Protestants and a Jew. They gave their life preservers to sailors and the last that was seen of them, the four of them had their arms around one another as they were out in the water and they drowned. It was on the Dorchester which was a troop ship. And it was sunk back, I don't know, 1943 or 44, I'm not sure. But they were on their way to Europe and these must have had thousands of troops on the ship there, I don't know how many were lost. But the four chaplains gave their life preservers to sailors and they went down with their arms around one another. What I was going to say is that the Jewish chaplain was the son of this Rabbi Goodkowitz who was our rabbi here. His name was Alexander Good. He shortened his name to Good. He was a graduate of Hebrew Union College. He was reform rabbi. I met him one time when he was in Cincinnati at the Hebrew Union College. He came home one summer while he was still a student, very nice, handsome, good looking young fellow. I remember meeting him and being in his company for a while.

I: And did that happen while his father was still here?

SS: No, I think he had gone. He'd retired or gone up north or moved away or did something. At that time I don't know who the rabbi was. I was in service at that time myself and I sort of lost track.

I: That's a fascinating story.

SS: It is. It's something you might even want to delve into a little further.

I: And the name of the ship was...

SS: The Dorchester. It's well catalogued. I don't know where you'd get information on that, maybe Hebrew Union College might have something on it or I'm not sure offhand. B'nai B'rith might have something. He's the last rabbi that I remember growing up as a youngster. After that I went on to college, went to Carolina, Chapel Hill, became very friendly with the chaplain there, Rabbi Samuel . He was also in the service. He was in the Marine Corp, he was a Marine Corp chaplain. Came back and he went on to set up a Jewish studies group there at Vanderbilt University. Then from there he went to Yale, did the same thing. After a while, Sam as I called him, we were very close friends, went back to Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati and became the Provost out there. He stayed there until he passed away back in the late 70s I think. He was an authority on Jewish/Christian

historical relations back in Biblical times. He's written a number of books. In fact his first book I've got up there that he sent to me and he autographed it. And ask anybody in the reform _____ or Hebrew Union College about Sam _____, they all know the name.

I: So you were in the service for 2-3 years?

SS: I was in the service from Sept. 1942 until March of 1946, 3 1/2 almost 4 years.

I: And then did you come back to Asheville?

SS: I came back to Asheville. Meanwhile, I'd gotten married. We came back and I went into the retail business next door to where the family had their business. And I've been here ever since.

I: Was that the bootery?

SS: Yeah, the bootery.

I: And the Star Store...

SS: The Star Store was a family business. Northwestern Bank bought that property, we moved across the street and we combined and called it the Star Bootery. My brother passed away about 6 or 7 years after we moved over there and we just continued to run the business on to the present time.

I: Did he marry and have a family here too?

SS: He never married. He was a bachelor.

I: You said your father passed away in the 30s I think.

SS: I think it was 1930, yeah. My mother passed away in 1974.

I: Did she live in Asheville most of that time afterwards?

SS: Yeah, she always lived in Asheville. My brother died in, it's an interesting thing, it's not too important, he died October 16, 1971 and my sister Lillian died October 16, 1986, fifteen years apart.

I: What about the temple rabbis. Of course, Unger is mentioned...

SS: I was going to come to that. After we moved back, I'd come under the influence of Rabbi Sam _____ who was a reform rabbi. And the reform was a little bit to my liking more, it was not quite as, well, it was not as traditional which is alright, but I felt a little more comfortable with the reform service. In fact Sam and I talked many times about me going into the rabbinate. I even took the test in 1940 to get into Hebrew Union College because I wanted to get into work. I was president of _____ at the university for two years. I liked it. I'd liked to have done that and I took the exam but I wasn't good enough in Hebrew. I knew the other, the history I learned and all that but the Hebrew, I was weak in it. That year they only took in 4 or 5 men and in fact now, I understand, in fact I know, I would have gotten in now because what they do at the present time, if you don't know any Hebrew or very little Hebrew, it's mandatory for the first year that

you're at Hebrew Union College, you go to Israel. You spend your first year in Israel. They have a school in Israel. And you learn Hebrew. You spend the year there and you learn it. That became a program, I think, probably back 15-18 years ago. So today it wouldn't matter too much. If you have the other things they're looking for, they would let that pass. But I was coming to, Rabbi Unger came here right after WWII from Charleston, SC. He too had been a chaplain. In fact he'd been an infantry man in WWI. And he was a chaplain in WWII. He was a very close friend of Joseph Dave of Dave Steel Co. They were roommates at the University of Cincinnati. When Unger was at Hebrew Union College, he also attended University of Cincinnati at the same time and somehow or other they became very close friends. And Joe Dave was instrumental in bringing him here in 1946 or early 47. Rabbi Unger proceeded to instill the idea of a new temple to be in a different location. And at that time they had a lot of very active prominent men, they're all deceased now I guess, pretty much all of them, they bought property over on Broad St. and Liberty and raised money.

I: Wasn't that the home of a famous Asheville person? Somebody told me one time and I've not been able to track it back down. It wasn't Pack.

SS: Leo might know. Leo probably would know. I've forgotten who exactly. But it was a big, beautiful, rambling, very old home. And the temple was built and finished in 1949. If I remember correctly. And Rabbi Unger was very prominent in Asheville. He belonged to many, many organizations. He was a fantastic speaker, excellent rabbi. Well liked among most people and made a very tremendous impression. He was a nice looking man and he had a very good personality.

I: Seems like from some of the other interviews I've had, people either really, really loved him or strongly disliked him. Was that because he was very strong in what he did?

SS: He was very modern. He did not have much regard for Jewish traditional things. He was raised as an orthodox, he came from orthodoxy. In fact he told me or told many times people, when he was in WWI he was a machinegunner. And he was an infantryman. And his mother would send him food from New York. He was from New York City. When he first went in he practically starved to death cause he would only eat kosher. Then finally his mother or somebody told him it's better to eat and live than not to eat. But he was very traditional at that time. He was very prominent in Asheville among all the groups. He had a radio program. He wrote for the newspaper, very active in the community concert series organization, music.

I: So the Christian community got along well with him?

SS: They thought the world of him. But as I said, he was very modern in his outlook. In fact, maybe I shouldn't, but it's nothing derogatory, but I remember on two occasions where during the high holidays we'd have some visitors come in to temple and they might put on a yarmulka. And first thing you know the ushers come over and ask the person to remove the yarmulka. Which I never thought much of it. Today in temple half the people wear yarmulkas, because we've got yarmulkas setting out in the vestibule if they want to wear them, fine. If not, what's the difference as far as that goes. Of course in the synagogue everybody wears them which is fine. But that's the way he was.

I: Unger was very vehement.

SS: He stayed here I guess 10-12 years. He became ill and retired. I'm talking about the temple. He was followed by, I'm trying to remember who came

after him.

I: Wasn't it Blooming?

SS: No, it was Rabbi Bloom. He was here a couple of years, very nice young man. Later he went somewhere up in New Jersey and last I heard he had a big job in some big temple up there. After him came Rabbi Funston, young man and he was very good. Most people liked him, especially young people. He stayed here a number of years and then he...

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SS: ...congregation was unhappy with him. He got a job in Johnstown, Pennsylvania, that's where he moved to and he was replaced by the present rabbi, Rabbi Raptor. He came in from Billings, Montana. In the synagogue after Rabbi Goodkowitz, I don't remember exactly who they had there.

I: I've heard the name Jacobs, do you remember Rabbi Jacobs?

SS: Oh yes. I'm glad you mentioned him. Rabbi Jacobs was there through the war years, a little after. I liked him very much. The young people around town liked him very much.

I: I talked with Estelle Marter a couple of weeks ago and she said she still talks to him. He's in St. Louis I think.

SS: He went out there as _____ director at Washington University.

I: So he must have been fairly young when he was here during the war I guess.

SS: Yeah, fairly young. I'm sure he's retired now. His name was Robert P. Jacobs, a very nice man. And he was followed by, oh I can see the man but I can't remember his name.

I: Cline?

SS: I guess it was Cline, Alexander.

I: My brother and I were barmitzvahed by Rabbi Cline.

SS: Rabbi Cline was with the temple sometime, one of those years. I don't remember the names too much over there.

I: There was some story that Mr. Petterson in Hendersonville told me, I guess this was maybe before your time, about a rabbi at the temple, he thought it was Silverman that died on the pulpit. Is that an accurate story or he said he wasn't sure if it was Silverman, but somebody was on the pulpit preaching...maybe he got it wrong, I don't know.

SS: Not to my knowledge. But to get back to the temple now, I left out one very important rabbi. This is before WWII, Rabbi Moses P. Jacobson. He was at the temple for many years. I guess he was the predecessor, pretty close to being the predecessor of Rabbi Unger. And he was there for many years. He was ultra reform. He was a very nice man and I don't want to say anything bad about him, but he was ultra, ultra reform. He was almost like a preacher, minister.

I: And where did he come from, do you know?

SS: I have no idea. I was young but I remember Rabbi Jacobson. He was pretty highly regarded.

I: At one time people evidently people belonged to both, alot of people belonged to both, but then there was evidently some sort of separation.

SS: One time they had a combined Sunday School. I don't know exactly what years but the Sunday School was combined.

I: Do you think that Unger, when did it sort of...

SS: I think it was back in the 30s that Sunday School was combined for a while. I'd say in the 30s. But the two congregations were never combined except when they first started back in 1889 or 90, 91 or 2, something like that. They originally had one congregation and then one group broke off and formed the synagogue and the other group stayed and went into the reform movement.

I: When do you think that was?

SS: Let's see, temple just observed their 100th centennial anniversary and that was 1991 or 2, 1992 I think it was. I'd say this was about 1889 or 90 or thereabouts when they split up. But some of the people, my grandfather, he was one of the founders of the original congregation and he went with the conservative or orthodox, you'd call it at that time. His brother Lewis, I think he belonged to both. And down through the years a number of people have maintained memberships, dual memberships you might say. I think Leo did. Leo's president of the temple and I've seen him many times at the synagogue. Today I think Dennis Winter has dual memberships, if I'm not mistaken, at least he did have at one time.

I: But do you think it was closer back then than now or do you think that came from the more divisions of orthodox and reformed? Just from listening, it seems like maybe it was a little more closer knit but maybe I'm wrong.

SS: Pre-WWII, the two congregations were not very close. The young people were fairly close. They would attend functions together and maybe belong to the AZA which was forerunner of BBYO. And AZA was a big thing with our kids, when we were coming up. But the older people were not really too close I think. And today I don't think they're as close as they were maybe 10 or 15 years ago. Cause I think we've got two very dynamic rabbis in both places, each one knows what he wants to do and he has his own program. Plus the fact that we've got a raft of new people coming here from up in the east, middle west, Florida, you name it. And they're either conservative, maybe to some extent orthodox or they're reform. And alot of those people are just not interested in co-mingling too much. I find that's true among our new people.

I: I see that myself. There seems to be a real strong delineation.

SS: And they're satisfied to live in their part of the religious world, whereas years ago it used to be if there was a fair going on or a lecture or something or other, you'd see more of a mixture I think than you see now.

I: Let's talk a little bit about what you remember about this William Dudley Pelley deal and anything that you might recall on that.

SS: Well, as I told you before, I heard some about it. He had his headquarters out on Charlotte Street, you know where that is on the corner of Charlotte and I think its Sunset Drive. Originally it was the women's clubhouse, different women's groups would meet there and somehow or another he got ahold of it, I don't know how. This was back in the 30s. And he was called the Silver Shirts, patterned after the Brown Shirts of Hitler's.

I: From what I've read he wanted to be America's Hitler.

SS: He wanted to be America's Hitler, that's right. I've seen him go down Patton Avenue. He was a little guy and he was dressed in, like a uniform, khaki pants, brown shirts, what you call jack boots, you know, tall, sort of like a riding boot. We call them now brigade boots, engineer boots, but they're a little bit dressier. He had a Sam Brown belt. He was always accompanied by 3 or 4 young, athletic looking guys. He just walked down the sidewalk, going maybe to the bank or a meeting or who knows where he's going. He always had 2 or 3 guys, you know young, athletic looking guys. Then, of course, this same Alvin Cartis that I mentioned to you, the lawyer, he was active in B'nai B'rith and B'nai B'rith knew what he was up to and they wanted to get him somehow or another. And they finally got him on, they found out he was selling worthless stock, Gallahad Press was what it was called, his paper, worthless stock in the organization to these old widows out in Indiana and Ohio and Missouri and whatnot. It wasn't worth the paper it was written on but he was getting in thousands of dollars. North Carolina had a law called the blue sky law. I guess it was because, I think they said the paper was kiting up to the blue skies. Alvin Cartis got these two non-Jewish lawyers, both very fine gentlemen. And they were R.R. Williams and Thomas Harkins. Harkins was a Republican and Williams was a Democrat, very strong party people but they were friends and tough lawyers in Asheville. Top men, they were mentioned, you know. I grew up with their sons, Herschel Harkins and Bob Williams.

I: Wasn't Herschel a legislator?

SS: Yeah he was a lawyer and legislator. He lives down in Wrightsville Beach now. Bob Williams was a lawyer. Bob was my leader in Boy Scouts.

I: Is the young Bob still in Asheville?

SS: No. Young Bob, unfortunately, a number of years ago he went fishing out in the state of Washington, Columbia River, for salmon, fell in the river and they never found him. Hell of a guy. He was my patrol leader but he was my friend. He was a hell of a guy. But these two men, the fathers, they took Pelley to court, had a long dragged out trial. I guess they had reporters there from everywhere, didn't have TV in those days of course. And they convicted him and they sent him to jail out in Indiana, Gobelsville, Indiana, I think was where the jail was. And he served his time and I think he died a few years ago out there in Indiana, good riddance. He would have liked to become America's Hitler.

I: Was Julius Levitch, was he involved with that?

SS: Julius, he may have been, I don't know. He may have been, I'm not sure.

I: But you think, from what you understand, the B'nai B'rith sort of asked the Asheville community to help them or how did it sort of...

SS: Well, Cartis, he worked it out. He was a lawyer. He worked it out. He

was an officer in the fifth district of B'nai B'rith and a local lawyer and he knew how to go about it. He got it on the docket. He got the charges made.

I: Leo would carry the flag for the Lions Club in Asheville. He marched in a Christmas parade or some kind of parade. Pelley put a picture of him saying, we don't want this Jew carrying the American flag.

SS: I read about that in another parade. A fellow named Bill Rosenfeld who was a close friend of Leo's. It might have been Leo but I always had heard that Bill Rosenfeld was the guy. Bill Rosenfeld was a very good friend, contemporary of Leo's and I always heard he carried the flag in some kind of parade and Pelley criticized him, some Jew carrying the American flag or something like that.

I: Was his mother the one that had a boarding house.

SS: Bill had a luggage and jewelry shop on Patton Avenue. Later, he went into the service. He came back from service and got in the insurance business in Greenville, SC with Lincoln National and he made a terrific success down there. But I think I heard that he just died a few months ago. But he was tall, good looking, a good looking fellow.

I: Was he related to Charlie, there was a Charlie Rosenfeld?

SS: Charlie was his brother. He was in Hendersonville and then he later lived down at Clemons.

I: When I've tried to research on Pelley, it looked like the Asheville thing was in like '34 or '35 but did he leave. I think that they imprisoned him later, like they fined him and he said he was going to get out of Asheville and then the House of American Activities Committee or whatever tried him and got him for sedition and sent him to jail.

SS: Well, that might have been the case.

I: But his newspapers in the late 30s still said Asheville. I was trying to figure out whether he left and left somebody here.

SS: He might have left a nucleus here.

I: There was somebody named Sommerville that was an editor.

SS: Sommerville, yeah, that was his assistant.

I: Robert Sommerville or something like that.

SS: They could have given him a suspended, probation or something or other and then maybe the Senate got him on sedition and sent him to prison.

I: But after that Asheville thing, it sort of quietened down.

SS: Oh yeah. But I assure you that Alvin Cartis fixed his clock.

I: It sounded like that once Asheville sort of brought up the subject then Congress became more serious about doing something. So it sounded like the

Asheville thing was sort of the catalyst to get him. Did he have a family, Pelley?

SS: I don't remember.

I: It was pretty scary for the Asheville community, right, or did they just treat him like a nut?

SS: I think they just treated him like a nut. I don't think nobody went into a panic over him. Now today they'd have it all over television. The media today can work things up to such a pitch. You know, and even guys that don't deserve all the publicity amount to anything, get it. Like this _____, you know, he's gotten all this tremendous publicity and back in those days might not know too much about him. You read his speech or his assistant's and his speech.

I: Vicious. Assistant's even worse than his.

SS: I've got a copy of it. I got some publication in the mail the other day with the whole speech about Jews and South Africa and killing people, all the white people in South Africa, oh, it was terrible.

I: But the Pelley thing, do you remember how he, he just showed up in Asheville right? I mean nobody really knows, nobody brought him here right?

SS: I think it was like this fellow over in Black Mountain, what's his name, Kirk Lion, moved in from Texas, just arrived.

I: And then Cartis decided after a while that something ought to be done.

SS: I suppose so, yeah.

I: Just trying to think, we'll kind of wrap it up here.

SS: I'll be glad to tell you everything I can think of.

I: I appreciate it. You're one of the natives. They always have the best information. Is there any other funny or serious thing that sort of stands out as a common story in the community?

SS: Leo can tell you more about those than I can cause he's a comedian sure enough.

I: He told me one time, I don't know which rabbi it was, I'll have to refer back on the tapes, but the rabbi also didn't make enough money as being a rabbi and he had a grocery store. And somehow, I don't know if it was during prohibition or what, but it was hard to get beer and somehow the Elk's Club got the rabbi to go to Baltimore and bring beer back.

SS: One rabbi, I forget his name, _____, he had a store down on Whitkin Street which would be across, up the street a little bit from the Radisson, across the street, almost where Thomas Wolfe was born. Not the boarding house, but you know Thomas Wolfe's mother, he was born...

I: He was not born in that house.

SS: No. He was born across the street.

I: Where the YMCA is?

SS: Yeah, well, a little bit down, right before you get to Central Avenue there.

I: Did you know him?

SS: Thomas Wolfe. I saw him one time. Actually my family lived three doors from him on Spruce Street for a little while. My brother knew him cause they were somewhat the same age. My brother Gene knew him.

I: I know his family was supposedly anti-semitic, and some people have said he was, but was it really his family?

SS: He was anti-semitic. Lord, read his book.

I: But wasn't his mistress Jewish?

SS: I was going to say, if this woman in New York, I forget her name, Bernstein, hadn't supported him, he'd have starved to death. He would literally, cause he was sitting in there writing and writing and writing, you know, and I don't have to tell you writing is not the most lucrative thing in the world until you maybe hit it right. His mother was a Westall, from the Westall Lumber Co. They were very nice people but some how or another, I understand, she was a real tightwad.

I: His father was an alcoholic?

SS: Yeah. He had this _____ shop up there where the Jacksonville is now. And the only time I remember seeing Thomas Wolfe must have been about '37. I imagine shortly before he died, I saw him on Patton Avenue in front of the store across the street from where we are now. In front of the store talking to some people and he was just like his pictures, tall and sort of heavysset, his hair was sort of disheveled looking, he looked like a writer I guess you'd say, excuse me.

I: That's okay.

SS: He didn't say anything too good about Jewish people. I've read a couple of his books. His first book was Look Homeward Angel and my sister's name is in a group of girls that were at a party somewhere, Lillian Schochet. One thing I remember about his first book, Thomas Wolfe, came out in 1929 and you know it criticized and was very critical of alot of the outstanding people in Asheville, public officials and professional people and so forth. He gave them different names of course, but they were pretty easy to recognize as I understand it. I went to the library, at that time it was up there at Pack Square, Pack Library, and I asked the woman if she had Thomas Wolfe's book. She said, we wouldn't think of having that man's book in our library. Today, I think they have a whole Thomas Wolfe section.

I: Now he's honored.

SS: But I'll never forget that lady, she was incensed. Why, we wouldn't think of having that man's book in our library.

I: Let me ask you this, during the boom time, 1929-35 or whatever, when all that busted, did alot of the business go down, alot of Jewish merchants leave? Did

that have any correlation, I mean as far as lots of Jewish stores in town and then business busted.

SS: I don't recall. Some of them went bankrupt, my own father went bankrupt to tell you the truth. He pulled out of it. See the money was all tied up in the Central Bank. Everybody had their money in the Central Bank which is up on the square where JC Bradford now has their stockbrokers office. That building, that whole ground floor of that legal building was the Central Bank. That was the outstanding bank. Wachovia was here but they were in their infancy. They were small. And there was another, American National or something or other. But Wallace Davis and his brother, Russell Davis, they were the main officers of the bank. They had the city's money and the county's money. I guess the majority of the money, tax money, you know, and they had loaned out money helter skelter, right and left, the boom was going on and everybody's was going to make a fortune. This was going to be Miami, Florida. And then the bottom dropped out, they couldn't collect nothing on those loans and the real estate wasn't worth anything. The bank just had to close.

I: Didn't one of them commit suicide?

SS: Oh yeah, the mayor committed suicide, Gallatin Roberts, he was the mayor, he shot himself. Another man, I forget who he was, a city official, jumped out a window and killed himself, downtown.

I: Which building was that?

SS: I'm not sure. But I'm sure it happened. I know the mayor shot himself, I think in his office.

I: And did one of the Davises?

SS: No, they both lived.

I: And that was right after the stock market crashed?

SS: This was about 1930 I'd say.

I: And they had loaned out so much money on these options on property...

SS: It would be worth \$100,000 today and the bottom just dropped out and tomorrow it was worth maybe \$2,000 or something, you know. And the people didn't have the money.

I: So actually the county went bankrupt or the city.

SS: Well, I'm not sure they went bankrupt but the city, I know, they were in dire straits. I remember the teachers had their money in this bank. I was in junior high school and I remember one morning seeing all the teachers, they took off and went downtown. I asked somebody where they were going, they're going down to Central Bank, it closed. They stood out in front I guess like everybody else trying to get their money.

I: So there was a rush, panic. And that lasted for several years I guess.

SS: Oh it had a tremendous effect on _____.

I: I noticed in the newspaper, I was doing some research, there was a big guy and his son from Tennessee...

SS: Yeah, Luke Lee, Colonel Luke Lee. They brought him in, they had a big trial here and the same lawyers, those two lawyers, Williams and Harkins, I think they were both appointed U.S. Attorneys. They tried this Colonel Luke Lee, he was from Nashville, he was a WWI hero and everything. His son was with him. They were connected somehow with the Central Bank. They tried them. I went a couple of times and sat in on the trial and listened to it.

I: They convicted them didn't they?

SS: Oh yes. They served time.

I: They evidently or supposedly had just borrowed more money, I mean the bank had loaned them more money than they should have. And what ever happened to the Davises?

SS: Well, Wallace Davis moved to Washington. The last I heard, I think he moved to Washington. Russell Davis, his brother, stayed around here and he operated some sort of a small wholesale business of some sort. Wallace Davis, I think, served some time. I'm not sure about the other one.

I: And the mayor was just distraught that everthing had happened under his leadership.

SS: He was a fine man I understand. It was just too much for him.

I: The boom was from people, almost like now, people moving in.

SS: Well, sort of, came up from Florida as I understand. They thought Asheville was going to be the next Miami Beach, Miami. Because of the climate and the setting. They just started buying property like mad.

I: I've read that people would trade options two or three times a day on the same piece of property.

SS: Doctors were doing it, lawyers were doing it, businesspeople and everybody was trying to make a big buck from what I understand. Then the bottom dropped out. They didn't have many laws, they didn't have many regulations like they have now.

I: So that would have been one of the bigger events in the Asheville community as a whole ever I guess.

SS: Yeah. The boom set the city way back. They just retired, about 12-14 years ago, they just retired the last of the bonds that they had to sell to get money, you know.

I: Just to sort of wrap it up, is there any other thing that you can think of that stands out as far as the Jewish history? We've talked about the rabbis and we've talked about Pelley and we've talked about your family specifically. Is there any event or anything that we haven't talked about that you think might be

important?

SS: Not really that comes to mind too much. Of course we've had all these different organizations that have been very dynamic and helpful, like Hadassah and B'nai B'rith, which now is dormant you might say.

I: I started to say do they still meet? I haven't heard anything about them.

SS: They don't meet but they still have members. They've lost hardly any members, still have about 90 members or so. And when I was coming up we had the AZA which is a junior order of B'nai B'rith. We were very active, used to go on alot of conventions and used to put on plays, raise money to Israel or at that time Palestine.

I: Was there any interfaith dating or anything?

SS: Very little. It was practically unknown. You knew girls, you know, you'd talk with them at recess or so on. Interfaith marriage was, it was happening.

I: Didn't Jerry Sternberg's grandfather or something, there was a story about he when his daughter married a gentile, he had a funeral for her, buried a casket or something. Do you know anything about that?

SS: I don't know anything about that. Jerry's father, Joe Sternberg, I think he was a doctor and he was not born a Jew, but a better Jew you never saw. I keep using this word, but he was a _____. To me, a top guy is a _____.

I: And Joe Sternberg was Siegfried Sternberg's adopted son.

SS: Yeah. So actually Jerry is half Jewish, although I wouldn't want to tell Jerry that, he's too much of a Jew. But I guess he'd laugh it off. Jerry's a good guy. Joe Sternberg was a hell of a guy, a nice type of person. We have alot of good people, Leon Feldman. Isaac Gradman, anybody ever mention Isaac Gradman to you, Barney Gradman's father? He and Leon Feldman were very close and they did alot of good B'nai B'rith work.

I: Was he in business too?

SS: He was in the same business Barney's in, Barney's got the business now. It was buy and sell, broker, various items.

I: And that's what Sternberg did too, didn't he for a while?

SS: Yeah. You know Jan and Fred Conn? They had a big business in west Asheville in hides. They'd buy hides and ship them, big business.

I: Well, I think that's probably all we'll do today. But I appreciate all the information.

SS: Well, if I think of some more, I'll call you.

I: Again for the tape purposes, this is April 10, 1994 and I've been talking to Sid Schochet at his home in Asheville. Sid, one of the original Jewish families in the history of Asheville. Thank you, Sid.

