North Side Memories

An oral history of Minnesota’s largest Jewish neighborhood

Upper Midwest Jewish History
The Journal of the Jewish Historical Society of the Upper Midwest
VOLUME 2 FALL 2000
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EDITED FOR PUBLICATION
by Phil Freshman and Linda Mack Schloff

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The Jewish Historical Society of the Upper Midwest (JHSM) takes great pride in publishing the second issue of *Upper Midwest Jewish History*, entitled "North Side Memories."

The North Side of Minneapolis once held the largest concentration of Jews between Chicago and Denver. The community began coalescing in the late 1800s and flourished until about 1960. Within the North Side, two neighborhoods developed—an early, immigrant neighborhood and a second-generation one—each centered on different commercial avenues. It is important to bear in mind, however, that the neighborhoods were not geographically separate. One could, and indeed did, walk to and from one and the other. Reva Rosenblum, for example, remembered that during the early 1940s she would walk with her grandfather from her home at 1601 Oliver (in the second-generation neighborhood) to Keneseth Israel synagogue on Olson Highway and Sixth Avenue North (in the immigrant neighborhood)—more than a mile as the crow flies. Everyone interviewed recalled walking. They walked to and from shops, synagogues, the Talmud Torah, and other places. Although streetcars served the area, one could even walk downtown. Many institutions remained for decades in the same locations where they had been established, serving both the older and newer Jewish neighborhoods. Until 1951, for example, the Talmud Torah was situated midway between the two, as were several of the synagogues and other Jewish institutions. Thus it is impossible to draw fixed boundaries between the neighborhoods. Their joint outer borders, however, can be roughly outlined: the eastern boundary was the northwestern edge of downtown Minneapolis; the western line was the city limits; the southern edge was Olson Highway; and the northern boundary was Broadway Avenue.

The immigrant neighborhood—known as the near North Side—was chiefly made up of people who had, like many thousands of other Jews,
fled the Russian empire to start life anew in America. Between the late 1880s and 1900, Minneapolis’s Jewish population swelled from about five hundred to approximately four thousand.

As its name suggests, this neighborhood formed on the northwestern edge of downtown in the vicinity of the present-day Farmers Market. Its central commercial streets were Sixth Avenue North (today Olson Highway) and Lyndale Avenue (now East Lyndale). Here were butcher shops, fishmongers, delicatessens, and all the other commercial establishments, offices, and clubs that gave the area its Jewish flavor. Also near this intersection were the first North Side synagogues: Keneseth Israel, Mikro Kodesh, Sharei Zecheck, Genuclus Chessed, and Tifereth B’nai Jacob. Close by as well were the Talmud Torah’s initial locations—the first building, on Bassett Place; and the second, at Eighth Avenue North and Fremont. On Elwood Avenue stood the Emanuel Cohen Center, a social and recreational facility. Across the street from it was the Oak Park Children’s Home, a short-term-care center. The Labor Lyceum, owned by the Jewish Socialist movement’s Workmen’s Circle, and the Farband House, home to the Labor Zionists, were located a few blocks away.

Tenements were to be found in this neighborhood, as were the remnants of a fine middle-class neighborhood that predated the burgeoning Jewish-immigrant community. Near North Siders utilized their backyards to store scrap metal for resale and as places to slaughter chickens. They taught Talmud in their dining rooms and cultured sour cream in their basements.

The near North Side flourished until the early 1920s. As housing in the area decayed and as Jews there gained an increasing measure of financial security, many began moving west and north, finally butting up against the western city limits. In 1936 the city tore down several blocks of housing between Lyndale and Dupont avenues North and between Olson Highway and Eight Avenue North, replacing them with the Sumner Field Housing Project. Jews and other newly white families, along with blacks, were delighted to move into the sparkling new buildings.

The locus of the second-generation North Side, which flourished from about 1920 through the 1950s, was Plymouth Avenue (particularly west of Knox Avenue). Along Plymouth could be found the relocated delicatessens, kosher butcher shops, fish markets, barbershops, and grocery stores, the Homewood Theater, and the pool room—all of which made the street a magnet for young and old alike. As Jews moved to the newer area so, too, did a few synagogues—Mikro Kodesh, for one, as early as 1926. Generally, the Orthodox synagogues relocated at a more leisurely pace. Keneseth Israel did not move until 1948, Genuclus Chessed not until 1954. Beth El, the North Side’s only Conservative congregation, was based in this newer neighborhood. The congregation had its roots in the Talmud Torah. There in 1923, alumni who were dissatisfied with religious services at Orthodox synagogues and wanted to practice a modern yet traditionally oriented form of Judaism organized the “Young People’s Synagogue.” They met at the Talmud Torah until the following year, when Rabbi David Aronson was hired to lead the congregation, and a house at the corner of Fourteenth and Penn Avenue North was purchased as a temporary site for worship. The synagogue was built on that site and dedicated in 1926.

Significantly, the children of all North Side Jews—whether they lived in the Summer Field Housing Project or in the relatively affluent Homewood area nearer the western city limits—all attended Lincoln Junior High and North High School as well as the same Talmud Torah. In addition, all North Siders mingled at the Emanuel Cohen Center, shopped and were entertained on Plymouth Avenue, and belonged to the same group of synagogues. Although class divisions were present, the shared facilities of the neighborhood tended to mute them. Such divisions were in fact greater between North Siders as a whole and the Jews who lived in South Minneapolis, particularly those who belonged to the Reform Temple Israel.

In sum, the North Side was a complete neighborhood: it had all the institutions and commercial establishments that Jewish communities needed. It also had its great men and women, and it had its rogues.

Although both neighborhoods of the North Side were heavily Jewish, the area also was home to other ethnic groups. Finns lived along Glenwood Avenue to the south of Sixth Avenue North; and along Broadway, to the north of Plymouth Avenue, there were Irish and Poles. Blacks in need of inexpensive housing moved into formerly Jewish housing on the near North Side during the 1920s. Relations between the two groups were good. Indeed, some blacks remembered having served as “Shabbos goys,” turning on lights and ovens for their Orthodox neighbors. The schools, playing fields, and settlement houses drew children from the various ethnic and racial groups together. After World War II, blacks began moving toward Plymouth Avenue. Blacks and Jews remained on generally amicable terms until the mid-1960s. If anything, there were more problems with young white thugs in the neighborhood a mile or two north of Plymouth Avenue, and fistfights in North Commons Park were not unusual.

After World War II the North Side experienced the same vicissitudes as many urban Jewish communities nationwide: movement to the sub-
of the community there that lingered into the late 1970s. We conclude with reflections on the North Side's legacy.

We are sorry that we couldn't include more voices; if we had, this journal would have turned into a book. Nonetheless, because the Jewish Historical Society's commitment to gathering and preserving North Siders' recollections is ongoing, we perhaps will be able to devote a future issue to the same topic.

This issue of *Upper Midwest Jewish History* draws from four oral history projects involving former residents of Minneapolis's North Side. Early interviews represented include those done for the Minnesota Historical Society (1979), the Beth El Synagogue History Project (1983), and the *Jewish North Minneapolis Oral History Project* (1983–85).

The great majority of interviews excerpted here were taped in 1999–2000 by volunteers working on the *Jewish North Minneapolis Oral History Project*; this was part of a more ambitious effort to create a video history of the Jewish North Side. The video-project committee sponsored a North Side Reunion, held at the Jewish Community Center of Greater Minneapolis (JCC) on August 22, 1999. More than twelve hundred people attended this event, and dozens of people's memories were captured on videotape. Since then, far more videotaping has been done, and ancillary materials, such as photographs, news clippings, and city surveys of the neighborhood, have been accumulated. The project will culminate with the premiere of an hour-long video at the JCC on November 26, 2000.

Although this video represents a milestone, the *Jewish North Minneapolis Oral History Project* felt it was important to conduct longer interviews than could be done by the video producer. Respondents in the *Jewish North Minneapolis Oral History Project* ranged in age from about forty-five to ninety years old. An interesting range of memories also is reflected, mirroring the varying times and circumstances in which the respondents came of age. The one non-Jew interviewed is Ronald Beauchaine, who is of French-Canadian Catholic background; his memories provide a valuable counterpoint to those of the many "insiders." Together, the recollections in this issue constitute a vivid mosaic of North Side places, people, and experiences.

The names of respondents, interviewers, and the individual projects in which they are included are listed in the Oral History Sources section (pp. 11–12). Birth years of those quoted here have been included so that readers may better match respondents' memories to specific periods. We
are grateful to the Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, and to Beth El Synagogue, St. Louis Park, for allowing us to quote from the interviews they conducted, particularly because a number of those respondents have since passed away.

Our thanks go to everyone who consented to be interviewed. We are grateful, as well, to those who conducted the interviews. Other people deserving recognition include: Reva Rosenbloom, chair of the video-project committee; Naomi Kastenbaum, chair of the 1999-2000 North Side Oral History Project; high school intern Shira Goldetsky, who not only did interviews but also researched visual sources; graduate school intern Beth Matlock, who interviewed and helped make decisions about the interview questionnaire, the journal’s layout, and much else; Alan Ominsky, who consulted on the project; Phil Freshman, who provided his usual superb editing; and Judy Gillet, who set the type and created the design for this issue and who also supplied calm helpfulness.

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Additional copies of this issue may be obtained by writing or calling the Jewish Historical Society of the Upper Midwest.

Oral History Sources

Jewish Historical Society of the Upper Midwest

NAME | INTERVIEWER
--- | ---
Roz Baker, b. 1923 | Ann Schulman
Maureen Beck, b. 1939 | Miriel Saltzman
Pacey Beers,* b. 1920 | Rhoda Lewin
Stephanie Berman | Linda M. Schloff
Ronald Beuchene, b. 1931 | Naomi Kastenbaum
Shirley Dworsky | Beth Matlock
Arthur Felsen | Nancy Markowitz
Harry Friedman | Sharon Steinfield
Charlotte Arzine/Barbara Goldfarb | Richard Cutts
Sally Greenberg | Shira Goldetsky
Naomi Kastenbaum, b. 1918 | Lillian Raen
Robert Katz, b. 1930 | Linda M. Schloff/Beth Matlock
Mollie Maisel, b. 1926 | Rhoda Lewin
Herman Markowitz | Linda M. Schloff
Irv Nadel, b. 1924 | Marcia Hintz
Allen Oleisky, b. 1938 | Nancy Markowitz
Julius Raen | Marcia Hintz
Martin Ring, b. 1918 | Shira Goldetsky
Harry Rosenbaum, b. 1916 | Richard Cutts
Reva Rosenbloom, b. 1933 | Lillian Raen
Fannie Schanfeld | Linda M. Schloff
Frank Schochet | Linda M. Schloff
Earl Schwartz, b. 1953 | Bette Matlock
Blanche Singer | Rita Fisher
Irene Stillman* | Linda M. Schloff
Allen Stone | Naomi Kastenbaum

*deceased
Minneapolis Historical Society, 1979
Ben Brochin,* b. 1909
Rhoda Lewin

Jewish Historical Society of the Upper Midwest, 1983–93
Rabbi Kassell Abelson, b. 1924
Sam Bellman,* b. 1906
Bernice Gwalt Gordon, b. 1916
Martin Lebedoff,* b. 1911
Dr. Samuel Schwartz,* b. 1916
Helen Ziff, b. 1913

Beth El Synagogue History Project, 1983
Shirley Abelson,* b. 1924
Rabbi David Aronson,* b. 1892
Maishe Berman, b. 1906
Guita Gordon,* b. 1909
Ida Sanders,* b. 1900

*deceased

Immigration

My [maternal] great-grandfather and grandmother . . . came to Minneapolis in 1883 from Quebec. The family had been in Quebec since about 1700. My grandfather's family came here in 1873 from Quebec. They had been in Quebec since 1649. My grandmother's family moved right into a little area in North Minneapolis. In fact, the address is 214 Sixteenth Avenue North.

When they moved there, it was French. In fact, the area that they moved to eventually, at Plymouth and Logan, was a French farm [later] called the Crepeau Addition. They moved there before that addition was even part of Minneapolis.

RONALD BEADCHANE

My grandfather Victor Greenstein came here in the 1880s [and] ended up in North Minneapolis, on Thirty-fourth and Knox Avenue North. . . . It was a dairy farm, and [it] was known as Greenstein's pastures.

ALLEN GREENSTEIN

[My family] came here in 1924 [from] the Ukraine. My older brother preceded the family and got here in about 1915, served during World War I, saved up some money, sent it back to the family with Harry Mankoff, Marilyn Rosner's father. . . . They came through Montreal, not Ellis Island . . . directly to Minneapolis.

LEV KUBLER
Memories of the Neighborhood
Near North Side

Sixth and Lyndale
The center of the Jewish neighborhood was Lyndale, and it stretched west from there through about Emerson, and even beyond that. . . .

Starting on Lyndale, one of the centers of Jewish gathering . . . was Brochin’s. Solomon Brochin came to this country. He was an educated man, and he was a Hebrew scholar, and he opened a store—a delicatessen. But not a delicatessen as you know them today. He was a principal in selling steamship tickets to help immigrants come over. He sold Jewish artifacts. He carried a line of Jewish newspapers; there were many in those days—daily, weekly, monthly. . . . And his store was a “center.” Jews gathered there and talked about local and national and international problems relative to Jews. . . .

Kitty-corner across the street was a drugstore run by Rotoff. . . . And on another corner was the Kistler Building. The Kistler Building was a social center for the Jewish community of that era and that neighborhood. Most weddings were held there. . . . And Dr. Kistler . . . had his medical offices on the second floor. . . . And on the fourth corner was a grocery store run by some non-Jews. I can’t remember their name. Next to it was a hardware store that was also run by non-Jews. And that continued down to the next corner, which was Bassett Place, and on that corner was a store called The People’s Store that was run by a man named Shapiro. . . . [There were the] Feinmans, who had a dry goods store another block farther down on Sixth Avenue. [And] there was a wonderful shoe store run by a man named Katz, and he was on the same side of the street a few doors down from Brochin’s. And in between him and Brochin’s was a fruit-and-vegetable store run by a family called Pearl.

MARTIN LEBEDOFF

Sixth and Lyndale was a very interesting corner. One corner was my father’s store, Brochin’s, and the southwest corner was the Kistler Building, and the northeast corner was Rotoff’s Drugstore. And then the other corner was Markert’s Confectionery store. . . . And it seemed like
iron out any problem that confronted the Jewish community, the various leaders of the Jewish community would meet in our store—Dr. George Gordon, Rabbi [C. David] Matt, Rabbi [Solomon Mordecai] Silber.

BEN BROCHIN

All grocery stores sold schmaltz herring in those days. The Jews as well as the Swedes used to eat schmaltz herring... They had a long fork, and they'd stick it down in the barrel—they had herring in the barrel in those days—and pull out a herring. He had a dozen sheets of newspaper that he would wrap the herring in.

MARTIN KING

Plymouth Avenue

[By the 1940s,] upper Plymouth Avenue became the mainstream of economic activity. Sixth Avenue lost its ethnic flavor, and all the kosher butcher shops, bakeries, delicatessens, and fish markets moved to Plymouth Avenue. Streetcars and autos stood for the right of way, especially when a driver left his car double-parked along the bakery, picking out a fresh, well-rounded pumpernickel.

MAISIE BRENNER

Plymouth Avenue looking toward Morgan, 1944.
We had daytime cooking schools [at the Homewood Theater] in conjunction with the gas company, where we'd give away a range at the principal prize. And Bank Night was a tremendous thing. And we'd have turkey giveaways, dishes, encyclopedias one night each week until you'd accumulated a whole set, and get a whole set of dishes, maybe eighty or ninety dishes. People would come every week to get a different piece.

MARTIN LEFKOFF

The Homewood Theater is where we went. . . . It was our theater. It was the thing to do on Saturday afternoon and then, when you got bigger, on Saturday night. Tuesday night they gave away dishes with the movie. I think we still have some of the Depression glass that we got . . .

There was an Abe’s Delicatessen. . . . Then there was Maloff's Delicatessen, right across the street from the Homewood Theater. Brochin’s was around there. Stillman's owned a big grocery store. There was a Mr. Silverman, who had a fish market on about Morgan and Plymouth. There was a Gold family that owned kind of a department store, more likely a clothing store, someplace on Plymouth Avenue.

Abe’s Delicatessen, 1901 Plymouth Avenue, 1948.

Blicker’s barbershop was on about Logan and Plymouth. The Kaplan brothers owned a barbershop on about Newton and Plymouth. There was a Jack’s Bar, which was a beer joint . . . someplace around Morgan. There were three bakeries. There was the People’s Bakery that was owned by the Kaufman family at one point. There was a Lehman’s Bakery . . . [T]he people who owned the Lincoln Del had a bakery first on Olson Highway, and then they moved to Plymouth Avenue.

IVY NURDIL

On the southeast corner of Penn there was a sanitarium for mentally ill people. . . . Oh! I remember when I was a little kid . . . one day, somebody got away from there and rang our doorbell. I used to be scared by that.

Then there was a shoemaker. . . . Mr. Goldman used to put the nails in his mouth, and you’d think he would swallow them as he cobbled away. . . . Then, on Newton and Plymouth, was the Sugar Bowl. That was a little candy store where you bought green leaves six for a penny and chocolate soldiers two for a penny. [N]ext door was the Homewood Theater.

NAOMI KASTENBAUM

Homes

[About 1920 we moved] to 34 Royalston [Avenue]. My dad bought a duplex. . . . Royalston is a hard-to-find place. In fact, it doesn’t exist at such anymore. It’s parallel to the Seventh Street Bridge and directly north and east of it. The railroad switching yard was there, and a coal company had their coal piles down there. In the summertime, we could never have our back windows open, only the front windows.

HARRY ROSENBAUM

[My family lived] at 922 Girard Avenue North, up the block from the Gernits Chessed synagogue, hard by the Talmud Torah on Fremont and Eighth. . . . Well, it was a new place. My family lived downstairs, and the Steigler family lived upstairs. Farrell Steigler, Alan Steigler, Mickey Steigler. And I grew up listening to Farrell Steigler play the Mozart Clarinet Concerto. So when I heard it in concert, I could sing along with the clarinet.

PACET BEERS
Then there was a sun porch, and a dining room, and a little butler’s pantry, and a kitchen. Then our dining room... I remember so vividly. There were always crumbs on the floor, lots of crumbs because you ate in the dining room.

Naomi Kastenbaum

There were seven or eight of us living in this house on James, which was real tiny. In fact, I was sleeping downstairs on a couch. It was a wicker couch, and there was an open so my feet could stick through. My uncle stayed with us, and my aunt stayed with us, and my mother had help once in a while, and my two brothers. So there were seven of us. And there was one bathroom. Today, nobody lives like that if they can help it.

Allen Greenstein

We ended up living in my grandmother’s house in North Minneapolis, one-half block from North High School, 1401 Seventeenth Avenue North. It was a real menagerie... [When my Aunt Ruth’s... husband died, which was in 1944, she moved in with us. And my Aunt Ida, who was single at the time... They kept telling me she was sweet sixteen. And when I was sixteen and she was still sweet sixteen, I thought something was weird... Would you believe that there were also two boarders? This was a three-bedroom, one-bathroom house. My [younger] sister and I slept in a double bed together. I must have been a real little bitch because I drew a line down the center of the bed and said, “You stay on your side, and this is my side and don’t you dare put a little finger over!”

Maureen Beck

Libraries

I probably spent three or four times a week [at Sumner Branch Library] when I was a kid. I probably read every book related to sports that they had on the sports shelf and then had to start reading other stuff.

Ivy Nudell

One thing I remember so well from my childhood is reading. Going, when I was a youngster, to the Willard Library during the summer, [where] they’d have summer reading. [You] read certain books and wrote out a little report, and you’d get a star. Later on, they had a circus
and balloons and fish and all kinds of different themes. But when I was a younger, it was a gold star.

BERNICE COWL GORDON

Sumner Branch Library... was a wonderful place to go. It’s still there, this Tudor mansion... They had a large Yiddish collection. They were open on Sunday so that everybody—Jewish gentlemen who were observant on the Sabbath or who had to work on the Sabbath—could... use the facility on Sunday afternoon.

PAClY REES

North High School

I remember when I was living in that house on Seventeenth Avenue, a half a block from North High School, on Friday afternoons listening to the yells and the screams from the football field. And I couldn’t wait to be high school age so I could go and watch a football game and yell and cheer and scream that way.

I think that I was caught up in the tag end of a generation where women were not yet valued as contributing members to society. There was no good counseling. When I was in school you could be a nurse, or you could be a secretary, or you could be a teacher. One of my close friends went to law school, and I said to her, “Sandy, you are so smart to have chosen a profession.” She said, “Maeveen, I didn’t have a prospect for a husband.”

MAUREEN RECK

Emanuel Cohen Center

Emanuel Cohen Center was just a beat-up old mansion that was used by all the young people. We held meetings there. It had a pool table. We had an orchestra, and I played the trumpet. I was probably ten or eleven years old at the time. The conductor was Eli Barnett... One of the thrills we had was the Emanuel Cohen [Center] orchestra playing for civic events.

MEL MADEL

Nursery school class at Emanuel Cohen Center, 1949.
I grew up at the Emanuel Cohen Center. I went to nursery school there, which makes me very modern, before I started public school. Then we hung out there after school and summers. I went to [what was probably] the first day camp ever held at the Emanuel Cohen Center. . . . Later, when I was in high school, I worked in the game room at the center. My brother, Joe, was one of the workers at the center and was very well known. . . . Then, when I was in college, I worked at the center again. And then, I worked at the day camp, which is where I met Charlotte. We were both counselors at the day camp for a couple of years before we got married.

IRV NUDELL

Talmud Torah

I recall the first building on Basin Street. It was originally called the Hebrew Free School. Free tuition was necessary to encourage attendance. Those who could afford to pay were charged one dollar per month. There was no bus charge—there was no such thing as a bus. Everyone lived within walking distance, although I do recall one of our founding fathers picking up slow walkers in his horse and buggy and delivering them to class before the bell rang.

MADIE BERNSTEIN

The Talmud Torah building on Eighth and Fremont was built as a complete center. They had a swimming pool, and they had the auditorium, which could easily be turned into, and was frequently used for, a basketball court. They had meeting rooms . . . for kids. And it was a precursor, really, of the Emanuel Cohen Center, which became the Jewish Community [of Greater Minneapolis]. I think they thought that they could put the two [functions of education and recreation] in the same building. And that was the aim, because in those days the directors of the Talmud Torah were the directors of the Emanuel Cohen Center, were the directors of the Children’s Home, and became, ultimately, the directors of Beth El. . . . [But] they discovered that it wasn’t going to work because the Talmud Torah and post-school activities would be at the same time. And the noise from the auditorium would interfere with the educational groups. And that’s when they began to talk about splitting it and eventually building the Emanuel Cohen Center.

GUITA GORDON

Chanukah play at Minneapolis Talmud Torah. 1960.

[The Saturday morning service at the Talmud Torah] was a very special service, performed entirely by the students. We were the haamim (cantors), we gave the sermons, we took care of decorum. It was a very participatory service, where everybody read in unison, they sang in unison. On the High Holidays, especially after I graduated from the Talmud Torah, we had our service, again with our chaut, and without doubt the Alumni Services at the Talmud Torah were by far the most beautiful, the most meaningful services I’ve ever attended in my life.

DR. SAMUEL SCHWARTZ

[When I came here [from Atlanta] the thing that was so outstanding was the Talmud Torah and the fact that it was a community school, and the synagogues didn’t have their own congregational schools. It was well organized, with full-time teachers, and the children went five days a week. This was very impressive.

HELEN LIPP
In the early years of the Talmud Torah there was, apparently, a small group of ... young [male students whom the Talmud Torah fostered] who ... spoke Hebrew in public constantly, who published the Barka newspaper, who would play chess in Hebrew, and also were involved in the Hachsharah (Zionist youth movement) later on and Poaka Zion (Labor Zionist movement).

I remember relatively good teachers, 70 or 80 percent of the time, through all of my Talmud Torah years. It was a true communal institution, but the strength of its Hebrew instruction had to do with the fact that it was the heritage of farbrente (zealous) Labor Zionists.

EARL SCHWARTZ

I went to Willard Elementary School on Sixteenth between Queen and Russell. Almost all of my friends went to Talmud Torah after school. I always felt sorry for them because they had to go school after we were done with school. But I think it gave them a sense of superiority, in a way, because they were learning a language as well as a religion ... and not just the religion but the whole ethnic culture. ...

Sometimes they had some guests they could invite, and I went. It was very much like going to—I was brought up a Catholic—my church. Everything that wasn’t in Latin was in French, so I didn’t know what was going on at all. And I felt the same way at the Talmud Torah. Once you walked in, you couldn’t speak anything but Hebrew. But it was interesting.

RONALD BEANCHYN

[1] joined the Talmud Torah Auxiliary. They—right away, I think—made me secretary. And then, I don’t know how much time passed, but they approached me to take the presidency, and I was very much against it. I don’t know how many children I had at that time. ... I just recall that they came to my house one evening, the two of them, and they sat there to convince me to take the presidency. They actually refused to leave until I would say, “Yes.” It was about midnight, so I succumbed.

HELEN ZIFF

Keneseth Israel

The men sat in the main sanctuary, and the women and children sat in the balcony to the rear. When we got tired of standing next to father downstairs, we went upstairs to sit with mother for a while. Rabbi [Solomon Mordecai] Silver was the spiritual head of the congregation, a very learned man steeped in Talmudic lore. ... He had a long beard, a stovepipe hat, and delivered his sermons in Yiddish. All the men in the congregation wore hats. ... The Yid (jewels) (selected congregants being called to the bimah during Torah reading) were auctioned off. The price was determined by open bidding. When it came to maftir ceremony, verses of Sabbath, holiday, and fast-day Torah portions) on Yom Kippur, the Book of Jonah commanded a premium.

MADALYN ETZMAN

Mikro Kodesh

When we were at the Mikro Kodesh [during the 1950s and 1960s], it had a balcony and the women sat upstairs. At times we went on some of the women were refusing to sit upstairs, so they were sitting in the back downstairs and pretty soon, they were moving forward. At that time, the Keneseth Israel had not become a strictly Orthodox shul [synagogue], so we had families like the Josuhas and the Kutofs and a few other families that were at Mikro Kodesh and wanted it to be strictly Orthodox. So when they were mingling too much, some of these people had approached Rabbi [Nahum] Schulman to make a separation, to have a mechitzah (physical barrier separating the sexes) even on the ground floor. [Other people] objected.

There were about a half-dozen or more families that left Mikro Kodesh, and they went to [Rabbi Louis] Ginzburg’s shul, which was like a shuk (small Hasidic house of prayer). We remained at Mikro Kodesh,
and we tried to make do with what was. These people that moved over to Ginzburg’s shul, after a few years, had some disagreements there, and that was when they negotiated with the people who were running the Knesseth Israel. And they made a proposition to them that if they would allow the shul to be strictly Orthodox, these families would, then, return to Knesseth Israel. And they would help bring a rabbi, and they would have a strictly Orthodox shul. And that’s how Knesseth Israel (once again became) a strictly Orthodox shul.

HELEN ZIFF

Genesis of Beth El

The Minneapolis Talmud Torah was unique in that it first of all was a community school, and secondly it didn’t adopt the principles of the old-time heeder (Hebrew school). It was a modern school geared to progressive education... In with the curriculum of the Talmud Torah we also had a Saturday morning service. Now these services were geared to the children. The children were taught to pray in unison in Hebrew. They had to behave themselves. It was a dignified service, and it went along very nicely for several years... .

These children, after they graduated from Talmud Torah, would have to take their place in a synagogue, provided there was a synagogue to accommodate them. So the situation was ripe. Here we were building a new synagogue, and here we had children trained in the Talmud Torah to participate in the synagogue service in a meaningful manner... .

In addition to the children’s services, they also had what we called Alumni Services, particularly on Friday evening and also on the High Holidays. This all took place before Beth El was built, which would [place the services] in 1922–23.

The adults had moved away from Fremont and Girard and Humboldt up here into Homewood, and they were thinking in terms of building a new synagogue. And it was presumed that the type of service that we had in the Talmud Torah... would be the type of service we would have in the new synagogue.

MAHSHIE BERMAN

Early Services at Beth El

I came here in September 1924, before Rosh Hashanah. We held the services at the Talmud Torah auditorium on Fremont and Eighth. It was supposed to have been a modern congregation, with decorum. I still remember that every fifteen minutes I had to stop the service and plead for quiet. Now, I plead that I want to hear them daven. Now you can hear a pin drop, and I don’t like it.

The second year we had our new building. The shell for the building, boards were laid on the ground in the vestry rooms, canvas was used for the doors, and we were in our own building. We used... a little movie theater that existed, that was on Plymouth near Knox, for the daily minyan and Shabbos while this building was being finished. We dedicated the building erev chodesh Nisan (the beginning of the Hebrew month of Nisan) 1926.

RABBI DAVID AKONSON

Bar Mitzvah: Talmud Torah versus Beth El

Chuck Rubenstein was the first bar mitzvah at Beth El—downstairs, because we didn’t [yet] have the upstairs. After that I realized that we had no bar mitzvahs scheduled because there were no bar mitzvahs in a synagogue in North Minneapolis. Every bar mitzvah was at the children’s service at the Talmud Torah. And the Talmud Torah wouldn’t give up. So I told the [Beth El] board that I’m through. I’m just not interested. If the synagogue is no place for a bar mitzvah, it’s not my idea of a synagogue, and I mean that’s all. There’s no compromise, on that point I cannot compromise. A. N. Bearman’s [son] Jacob was bar mitzvah in both places.

RABBI DAVID AKONSON
First Saturday Bar Mitzvah

So slowly, slowly, Rabbi Aronson tried to get the bar mitzvah on a Shabbat morning. And of course, the dear Lord had given him a wonderful opportunity—the triplets—the Lebedoff triplets had to be bar and bat mitzvah, so [in 1951] they had a joint service, naturally. And David was called to the Torah, and Johnny was called to the Torah, and Judy was called to the Torah, the first girl. And when they were through with the whole Torah reading, before the haftarah (reading from the books of the Prophets) section, I remember he walked to the front of the bimah (synagogue podium and altar area), and he looked outside and he said, “I don’t see any lightning, I don’t hear any thunder.”

GUTTA GORDON

...and Fallaets

I was the president of the Women’s League [at Beth El] for two years.... I had had some very heated arguments with Rabbi Aronson when it came, for example, to Mother’s Day. He proposed the idea of the women conducting the service, and I objected. And I said that I felt that what we should do on Mother’s Day is for the rabbi to speak to the women and give them a Judic understanding of responsibilities and roles of the women. But I was not in favor of having them participate in the service. So, as long as I was involved, this was the pattern. Then, after they had this first bat mitzvah, they began to make all kinds of changes, so I just didn’t feel like I wanted to be involved.

HELEN ZIFF

Scouting

Now Troop 86 [organized at Beth El] was quite an active troop and one of the outstanding troops in the city.... I had the good fortune to take Troop 86 up to Camp Many Point for a couple of summers, which was quite an enjoyable experience. One of the things that stands out there was Rabbi Aronson’s renewed interest in scouting at that time.... And when we went up to Many Point, he saw it, rather he insisted, that our kids had kosher meat. And the scout office was very cooperative.... Also, we had services on Tisha b’Av [holy day commemorating destruction of the First and Second temple].... And on Shabbos morning, I think it was the first time that many scouts of other faiths witnessed a Jewish service.

MAHSHIE HERMAN

United Synagogue Youth

[My vision of USY in 1948 was] that it would be a dedicated youth group, people who would try to make Judaism live in their own life and would involve other young people—teenagers—in it, and through them to revitalize the synagogue in the Jewish community.... One of the first things that was organized was an athletic league where the youngsters competed not only with the other USY groups in Beth-El and in the city but got involved in a citywide league representing the synagogue.... For me, at that point especially, the conception was that if you live a total life and [if] the synagogue is the focal point of that life, the synagogue should reach out and include everything.

RABBI KASSEL ABELSON

Young People’s League

[Beth El’s] slogan was, “We shall go with our young and our old.” And therefore the emphasis was on the young people. We organized the Young People’s League. We had the collegiate age... though most did not go to college. That was the finest group we had. They were dedicated, they were alert, [and] in those days [the 1930s and 1940s], you didn’t have to date in order to make an appearance anywhere.... Two girls came in,
they were sure they would find boys [and vice versa]. And many, many of those couples who were married forty years ago or so met right there at those groups.

RABBI DAVID AKONSON

Women’s League

Rabbi Aronson and [his wife,] Bertha, were extremely active in the founding of Women’s League. They came up—they may have gotten it elsewhere, but I only know of it in this context—with the Fellowship for Jewish Living. [The women] met for a number of years—this was before I came—with Rabbi and Bertha in their home, and they worked out basic points for Jewish living... a list of five or six points which involved Jewish worship, Jewish study, Jewish living—a minimum. They introduced it into our Women’s League and then into the Regional Women’s League in its early years. [The Fellowship] still existed when I came... It was extremely influential... in setting the tone at Beth-El and, to a great extent, the tone of the region as being educational and spiritual.

RABBI KASSEL ABELSON

Every synagogue had its women’s group. Pictured here are the ladies of Tifereth B’nai Jacob Synagogue, Eighth Avenue North and Elwood, 1944.

LOAN SOCIETIES

If someone was in need, there was a synagogue [Gemilus Chessed] on... about Ninth and Girard... I remember fully well, my father in the depths of the Depression borrowed a small sum. But to him it was probably a large sum. On a weekly basis, I would make payment on his behalf, whether it was fifty cents or a dollar. One would step up to the window, so to speak, in this tiny little structure, actually affixed to the synagogue, and make payment.

MEL MAISEL

Some poor people got money from the synagogues. There was always a collection taken up at the end of each day’s minyan, so transients and wayfarers would come to the synagogue. There was also a Hebrew Free Loan Society, which was part of Gemilus Chessed synagogue. I know my parents used that frequently.

They would charge their groceries and stuff like that and then, when the bill got big, they would go to the Hebrew Free Loan Society and take out a loan, which you repaid at the rate of fifty cents a week. And there was no interest charged. So that’s how a lot of the people in the community got by.

IRV SODERL

[I]n my last quarter at the law school, I had to have tuition. I think it was around forty-eight dollars, and I didn’t have forty-eight dollars, and none of the brothers had forty-eight dollars. So I said, “Pa, will you take a loan from the [Workmen’s Circle] Loan Association?” He said, “No, I can’t do it. I [already] signed [collateral] for somebody[’s loan] for coal...” I finally got the last few dollars for tuition a day before the school started.

SAM BEILMAN
Memories of the Texture of Life, of Feelings, and People

Childhood

[In those days the city would open up the hydrants so the kids could cool themselves off during the day. The sprinkler man would do that for us, too. This was on the main highways. They would sprinkle the side streets, too, but you didn’t dare sprinkle them too much because the streets weren’t paved. They were dirt streets, and after a heavy rain, if you walked through them you’d be ankle-deep in mud. An interesting sight on Sixth Avenue in those days was at dusk to see the man come with his long stick. It was a punk at the end of a stick to light the gaslights.]

Ben Brochin

We played outside until they called us in. We had a big arc light on the corner of Washburn and Twelfth, and we’d play Run, Sheep, Run and Washington, Poke, and Lemonade. [On] Passover, we played ants... It’s a great game. You roll [hazel]nuts, just like marbles. If you hit the center one, then you take all the nuts back.

Naomi Kastenberg

Walking

I can remember walking from my house all the way downtown and back, not necessarily because we had to, but we were used to walking... I can remember going home from Talmud Torah on the 600s-700s shift at night. Sometimes, we wouldn’t get home until 1000 at night because we horsed around all the way up. We would walk up one block and back two, but we always had a lot of fun. The cold never really bothered us, and we survived quite handsomely.

Martin Ring

When I went to Grant [Elementary] School, there were Jewish people living on Humboldt and on Fremont and down around those areas, which eventually became the areas where the [Summer Field Housing] projects... were. There were Jewish people in the first buildings when the projects went up. There weren’t too many neighborhoods in those days.

Ben Brochin

We would walk downtown from where we lived.

[To walk] from Eleventh and Sheridan to Sixteenth and Girard. It was quite a walk. Sometimes we were able to get a ride. But you know, when you walk to school you walk fast, especially in the winter. But when you walk home, you saunter.

Allen Greenstein

I [lived] on the east side of North Commons Park, which was a three-block square park. I remember until I was in sixth grade, walking every morning, coming home every noon, walking back, and coming home again every single day through that park.

Maureen Beck

Social Life

A popular place for the people of the North Side to spend their recreation hour was Keegan’s Lake, which was later known as Glenwood Park, which is now known as Theodore Wirth Park. And every Sunday afternoon everybody would pack the picnic basket early in the morning and run over to Brochin’s and get their fifteen and twenty cents worth of salami... They bought two pounds of corned beef for seventy cents and a couple of pounds of wiener for thirty-five cents.

Ben Brochin

My parents were very much involved in the Labor Zionist movement, particularly my father. Between the people in the movement and the two aunts and their cousins, of course, that was their social life... Otherwise, there were numerous meetings that my father went to with the Labor Zionist people, and then they’d have banquets. I remember my mother, on a hot summer night, getting into her corset and sweating... and having the fun blow on her while she was getting dressed to go to the banquet.

Then there were the picnics they had. They were wonderful. Most people don’t know that’s how Israel was built—these picnics that were fund-raisers. They would raffle off bricks, bricks for building Israel, symbolically. "Who will give a dollar for a brick?" The picnics...
were at what was called Glenwood Park. . . . My mother and I and the picnic basket would take the streetcar there because I was a skinny little kid and couldn’t walk so far. . . . We brought our picnic lunches, but we would buy the pop and the ice cream and so forth. We would ride with the lunch and the rest of the family would walk to Glenwood Park.

BOB BAKER

[My parents] joined the Workmen’s Circle because then they had some place to socialize. [It wasn’t] necessarily the ideology of socialism. . . . I would say they had 400 members. There were three branches. They were associated because of their own personal needs. . . . If they had a party, some people brought food; some didn’t bring food. But they all met, and they had a good time. . . .

I know that when I was about twelve, thirteen years old, every other Sunday, Holman, who peddled fruit, would hitch up his horse and we’d go out to Glenwood Lake . . . for the Sunday. That was the entertainment for the family. . . . Gradually, as the group became Americanized, the children dropped off and it disappeared.

SAM BELLMAN

My parents had a social group of people that they played cards with. I think they would go to other people’s houses for dinner, like once a month. The host would have dinner. Maybe they would play bridge or pinochle or gin rummy. Then I think my father belonged to a poker club where he would go once a week with friends. I know he went to these B’nai Brit meetings, which was either weekly or bi-weekly. My mother would go to these City of Hope meetings. My mother had four boys, and they didn’t have all the modern appliances. We only had one car. My mother never drove. I think just raising a family was very time-consuming.

ALLEN OLKISKY

Bar Mitzvahs

Nobody [from my family] came. Nobody! There were several other guys getting bar mitzvahed at the same time, so there were people there. But for me, my treat—I was working at the grocery store—was I got Milky Ways. . . . I bought two boxes of them, and my boss gave me the wholesale price on them. . . . I handed out one to each one of the kids. And near the end, I knew I was going to run out, so I took my little pocket knife, and I cut the last half of the ones in the box in half, and I had just enough to go around. That was it.

PARRY ROSENBAUM

My bar mitzvah was at Beth El. [I took lessons there] from a man named Mr. Turchick. . . . He would meet you at Beth El, and he would yell at you. He’d say, “Dumbkopf!”—dumb-head. He would yell at you in Yiddish, and . . . we were scared of Mr. Turchick, so we kind of learned it. I remember Mike Pitman’s bar mitzvah was a couple of months before me, so he was a little ahead of me. He would say, “Don’t worry about it. This man just yells. He yelled at me, too, till you learn it.”

We had a bar mitzvah at Beth El. [W]e had a luncheon for the whole congregation. They served potato salad and herring and kishke, which was some type of a hard roll, and wine. That was it. We didn’t have a big party or a dance or go to the country club or anything like that. I remember getting some gifts, but I think most of the money my father took and put it in a bank account. We didn’t have any special party like they have today. Most of my friends had it the same way.

ALLEN OLKISKY

Jewish Holidays

Most of our friends . . . were Jewish, and our families were probably quite alike. We’d all observe the holidays. In fact, I remember when I was in grade school, when it would be a Jewish holiday, there were so few non-Jewish kids in the school that they would combine the classes so they would have good-size classes. [W]e used to stay out on all of the Jewish holidays: two days of Passover, two days on Sukkoth, two days on Shavuot.

MARTIN RING

The holidays were tremendously significant—Pesach, Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Purim, Chanukah. [My father], in the operation of the Liberty Theater, he used to have a large Hanukah party for all the kids from all the shuls. And they’d come and they’d fill up the six hundred seats, and they’d give them gifts. And it was a wonderful occasion.

MARTIN LEHEDOFF
I remember my synagogue days and all the High Holidays that I would go from one synagogue in North Minneapolis to the other. I would make the rounds because my aunts were at the Sharei Zedek [synagogue], where the sermons were all in Yiddish . . . and to the Mikro Kodesh . . . . I went to the Elwood [synagogue], where some other relatives were and the Beth-El. I just made the rounds. That’s what we kids used to do.

MAUREEN BEECK

We would go as a pack from synagogue to synagogue to where the parents were to kiss and greet them, and then we’d go on. Then we would usually end up at somebody’s house and eat them out of house and home. I remember going to the Strausses, who were on the corner of Twelfth and Russell—Rivoli Strauss. Her mother baked wonderful things. Her parents were in the synagogue, and we’d eat everything.

[When we would sit down to the Seder in my parents’ home, my mother would always go and lower the window shades. This was a carryover from Europe, where they didn’t want the goyim [non-Jews] to know they were celebrating Passover.

ROZ BAKRE

My mother’s background was Orthodox, and she was observant. I have memories of her sending me to Brochin’s store on Lyndale and Sixth at Passover time with a coater wagon, and I would bring home gallons of milk that was Pesachka [kosher for Passover] milk. And my mother used to take her silverware out in back of the house and wash it in ashes. And she’d bake challah every Friday and kept a very kosher home.

MARTIN LERBDOFF

My father had a little room . . . and he used that as his Pesach store during the Passover season, so he wouldn’t mix the chametz (not kosher for Passover) and the Pesach items. That was on the Lyndale side of the store area.

BEN BROCHIN

The holidays were a big thing. Passover . . . I still remember how [our maid Jenny] used to tie the cupboard with strings so you couldn’t get at [the non-Passover contents]. The old dishes . . . they’d bring . . . up from the basement. I hated our kitchen. It was a big kitchen. They had two great big pans. You washed the dishes in one and dried them in another. . . . Then you’d empty the water out . . . Jenny would wash the dishes, and we helped. . . . Rabbi [David] Aronson used to talk about her in his sermons, sometimes. She wouldn’t let us mix meat or milk. Yet she was an ardent Catholic.

NAOMI RAYENBAUM

At Passover my job was to go down to the basement and take a bunch of stickers and put them on the Pepsi bottles that we already had. [The stickers read,] “Pesachkha [Pesach] Pepsi-Cola.” I’m sure the stuff was not Passover-quality Pepsi-Cola, but, effectively, it was after we put the stickers on. I don’t know where my boss got the little stickers. They assured everybody then that the rabbi had . . . inspected the manufacturer.

RONALD BRAUCHANE
Friday morning on the North Side you knew it was erev Shabbos, just as today in Israel you know that Friday noon it's erev Shabbos when you see the shops closing [and] people hurrying home to prepare for Shabbat with the fresh bread and flowers, etcetera. . . . I remember what Dr. George Gordon said: "Rosh ha' shabbos is as important as Rosh ha' yahadut. The aroma or the odor of Judaism is as important as the spirit of Judaism." . . . because one Friday morning . . . as we were riding through the North Side streets, we literally could smell the fish cooking.

IDA SANDERS

My mother kept a very traditional . . . kosher in our home. She always observed the Sabbath. We always lit the candles on Friday night and said the blessings. We always had Passover . . . We always took the days off from school [for] holidays, obviously.

My brother, as he became older, became very active at uay [United Synagogue Youth]. He made the football team at North High School as a starting fullback. Then they started playing games on Friday night, and he refused to play football on Friday night. So he quit the team. My parents supported him on that.

ALLEN OLISKY

Shopping

I would walk out with my mother on Sixth Avenue or, later on, to Plymouth Avenue. . . . I would be along to help carry. It was something that my mother enjoyed tremendously because she could stop and chat with all the other women who were shopping. Later on, on Plymouth Avenue, I [also] remember the butcher shop that Shepsel [Roberts] had. That must have been after I was married, though. That was when I decided I really understood the Yiddish phrase Schoor tex sasyn a Yid. (It's difficult to be a Jew.) Shopping before a holiday at the kosher butcher shop was really tough. . . . A mob scene, and women having to examine everything and wanting to touch things. It really was an unhappy thing.

[For the chickens, I was sent on my bike to Rabinik's, Rabinik was [the original name of] Shepsel Roberts's parents, who [killed and packaged] chickens in their backyard. For me, that was an awful experience. I couldn't stand the smell. I just couldn't tolerate it. I would take a handkerchief and put cologne on it and put that in my pocket. And then, while I was there, I would hold the handkerchief up to my nose.

ROX BAKER

You knew it was a yom tov (religious holiday) because, the day before, everybody would be getting their fish, getting their meat, getting their vegetables. You exchanged pleasantries. You went into a place like Brochin's, and not only did you get your Passover supplies, you got recipes. My children knew the grocers and the meat man and the fish people and all of the other shops along Plymouth Avenue, and you did a tremendous amount of socializing there.

SHERLEY AREFSON

Social Relations

Friendly

I [lived] in the Ascension Parish. So before I went to school, most of my friends were non-Jewish. I had one close friend named Phyllis Rose. . . . She lived on North Sixteenth Street. We played together. In fact — would you believe? — I went to confession with her on Saturday a couple of times. I wouldn't kneel, because that was a no-no. And she remembers going to Hebrew school with me down on Fremont.

MAUREEN BECK

There were three Gentile people on our block. [One of them] was a schoolteacher at Edison High School, Miss [Irma] Todd . . . she was a lovely woman. Someone once said to her . . ., "Irma, why do you live up there with all Jews? They weren't like you, or anything." She said, "When Miriam Ber- man got married, I was the only neighbor invited to the wedding."

NAOMI KASTENBAUM

I remember once my sister . . . they were making candy, and they poured hot boiling syrup on her hand. She had third-degree burns and ran out of the house. The neighbors from all over came to help and took her to the hospital and fed the

Irma Todd, beloved North Side teacher, about 1940.
family while my folks were up to the hospital. She was very, very bad off for a couple weeks. Our neighborhood took care of us.

I used to wake up in the middle of the night and walk in my sleep. I'd go over to the next-door neighbor and knock on the door, and they'd take me in. Then they'd go next door to tell my family.

RONALD BEAUCHANE

guarded

Having gone to Grant [Elementary] School, we always thought that the kids who went to Willard were stuck up. I don't know that once we got to North [High School] we could differentiate very easily who was who. The more affluent people lived in the Homewood district. But we had friends there. We visited in those neighborhoods without any problem.

LEV RUDELL

When I was living on James and they talked about Homewood, I didn't know much because I was a young kid. But I knew that was an exclusive neighborhood. You knew, they kept the Jews out of there, too, for a long time. And then when [Jews] moved in, I knew everybody. I knew every family because we used to deliver meat to most of them. I knew who lived where, and if you dated a girl there, you always figured they had something more than what you had. But when I moved up to the neighborhood, there were a lot of nice people here, and we were all friendly. To me, the real [class] difference was with South Minneapolis.

ALLEN GREENSTEIN

I think there was a class structure. I don't know that I could have articulated it in that way when I was younger. Of course, I knew who the rich Jews were. They had the bigger cars. They had more cashmere sweaters. They were the ones who were going off on summer vacations.

MAUREEN BECK

It was kind of cute. . . . The old Finnish grandmother didn't speak any English at all, and she really disliked, from what I could understand, living next door to Jews. But she baked this Finnish flat bread. Now, her grandchildren wanted what we called the "white death" bread from the grocery store. I tasted this flat bread that she made, and I loved it. So whenever she would bake the flat bread, she would tell her granddaughter Frances, "Go get the little Jewish girl. She likes my bread."

ROS BARKER

I always worked part time when I was a kid. One of my jobs for a long time was working at Strimling's Pharmacy at Morgan and Plymouth. I used to be able to sell the Jewish newspaper called the Forward . . . . People would treat me differently when they found out that my name was Beuchane or that I wasn't Jewish. I think there was just a little bit more coyness. Then, I always felt kind of left out when they'd be speaking Yiddish among themselves, and I didn't know what was going on. But then, I felt that way amongst my family, too, when they were speaking French among themselves . . . .

I was a minority kid among a minority. . . . Especially when I went to the butcher shop, and I couldn't explain to the man well enough exactly what I wanted, and somebody would interpret for me. I felt like I was a kid in a foreign country sometimes.

RONALD BEAUCHANE

. . . and Not So Friendly

The first non-Jew I really knew—my father bought a house on the corner of Tenth and Queen in 1922—I was eleven years old . . . . and I went to John Hay School. And my first day on the playground, a non-Jewish boy walked up to me and said, "We don't want any Jews at our school."

MARTIN LEHRBOFF

[I served in the State Legislature from 1935 to 1939. The first time I won was by 311 votes. The second one was 120. The third time I ran, I got beat by 98 votes. That was out of about 22,000 to 23,000. Governor Floyd B. Olson] carried the district by 22,000 votes. But for a Jew to be elected, it was a different thing. . . . We made the [rounds of the] saloons the last night of reelection. Usually, we'd pass drinks and whatever. I remember going in, two, three, Emil, and I were two pictures on one card. They'd cut off mine and say, "We don't want no goddamned Jews."

SAM REILMAN

Only once do I remember being called "dirty Jew." It had to be before I was in sixth grade . . . . on the street in front of my house. I don't remember who did it . . . . Then, I do remember very distinctly my mother
telling me, "Don't talk with your hands. Don't gesticulate."... I see them as trying to fade into the walls so that they would not be pointed out as being Jewish.

MAUREEN BECK

Feelings of Security
[We] just had this security. It was an insulation to the real world, maybe, but I think it was good... I never felt insecure. I knew about Judaism. And to this day, I have many non-Jewish friends... I'm comfortable with Jewish people, too, but I feel equally as comfortable with non-Jewish friends.

NOAMI KASTENBAUM

... and of Distance
[When I was in the tenth or eleventh grade], there started to be a separation, because I couldn't belong to the Sons of Herzl and I couldn't belong to the YMCA. They didn't have any Catholic organization, so I was kind of out by myself... Then... sometimes jokes would be ethnic Jew, jokes, people calling each other meshuggah, talking about the goyim, and a Jew, and so on. I think that's probably when I really noticed a dichotomy developing. Until then, Donald Fink and Harold Swatez and Rod Cooperman and all sorts of Jewish people were [any] friends.

DONALD BEAUCHANE

I was with some friends who'd been to see a movie at the Homewood Theater on Plymouth and Newton, and I remember somebody ordered a corned beef sandwich and a malted milk, and I was so shocked. I didn't think anybody that I knew would do anything like that!

FACEY BEERS

I remember once Leo Gross said to us that even though he doesn't observe kashrut (dietary laws), if the community is sponsoring a function and if there's only one person in the community that observes kashrut, that function should be kosher... People themselves who observe these things have to be the ones that promote it and make it clear to the community why it's important.

Some people have said... that we gave an image of Orthodox Jewry that maybe not all people understood. [You know, the] stereotype for the Orthodox Jew as a Hasid (a movement characterized by ecstatic prayer and charismatic leadership) with payot (sidelocks), or the man with the black hat and that sort of thing... We felt that as moderate Orthodox Jews, we were presenting an image to the community of what an Orthodox Jew is.

HELEN ZIFF

Memorable Characters

My dad [A. N. Bearman] was president of the synagogue, so naturally they'd bring the people home... When my father and mother went to hear Woodrow Wilson in 1919 speak on the League of Nations and then came home, my brother Pete was sitting on the top step... waiting for them. [T]hey got out of the car, and he looked and he looked, and he said, "Where's the president?" He didn't know that you [could] go to a meeting and not bring the speaker home.
[A]ll of the people that came to Minneapolis—[Chaim] Weizmann and [Nahum] Sokolow, all the Zionists, [Vladimir] Jabotinsky—all were at our home for dinner, and then they would go to the lecture. Weizmann was in our house several times, including on my sister's sixteenth birthday. I remember him saying to my father... "You don't have to bemeshugah to be a Zionist, but it sure helps."

[O]n the way home, my mother said to [Weizmann], "Is there anything particular you would like?" And he said, "Mariniert (marinated) herring and some pumpernickel bread." What house didn't have mariniert herring in it and pumpernickel bread? So that was no effort. But mother wanted to stop and get something, so she bought a fresh [bread], and I can see him sitting in the back of the car squeezing and smelling it... At my sister's birthday my mother had a birthday cake, and I remember he kissed her... Chaim Weizmann kissed my sister!... I guess I looked kind of sad, so he kissed me, too.

GUTA GORDON

This little Mr. Kass was a giant when it came to teaching Hebrew, and he had a number of fascinating techniques. He had a closet, which was filled with toys, where each of the toys would represent something in his lessons. If he talked about a dog, he would have little toys of dogs, or cats, or mice, or whatever it was that he was talking about in the classroom...

I first met Dr. [George] Gordon... the day I was born. He delivered me, as he had so many other children on the North Side. And before I knew him at the Talmud Torah, I had heard stories about this very special doctor, who, when he left my mother and father's home with a prescription, would hide some money—a dollar bill or whatever; it would cost to pay for the prescription—because he knew my mother didn't have any money. ...

[When I studied with him, he] had a special way of interpreting Talmud and a big emphasis on what he called "social justice."

DR. SAMUEL SCHWARTZ

One of my buddies had an older brother that was working for the Combination. He said, "How would you like to make some extra money?" I said, "Sure"—not "What's" but "Sure." He said, "When you're out delivering, deliver some packages for me." I said, "Great." He said, "Two bits apiece... right in the neighborhood." I did that for maybe three months or so. And [then] I said, "You know what? I've got some buddies, some friends, that would like some of this, too. I want a cut for it." So he said, "Sure, for you, it's a different price. You get the wholesale price." I did that for about six months.

Then we went over to Wisconsin once, and we were able to buy some stuff called Ever-Kleen, which is 200-proof alcohol. We cut it [so there was about 20 percent. Now, 200 proof is pure]... [S]cotch will usually be 80 proof. So this is two and a half times as strong. So we cut it so that it was milder, and we found out that the young guys, my guy's buddies, didn't like it real strong. So we cut it down a little bit more. The more we cut it, the better it was. We used Glenwood Inglewood water.

There was a guy named Moshie that I had been buying booze from before. He was making it, but he would sell it to me, like a half a pint or a pint at a time. He told me how to make the caramel color by burning sugar. I could buy the scotch and bourbon flavors from him. He charged me a fortune, but it was worth it. I could sell it... I was just, maybe, fourteen by then.

The Combination was a combination of the Italians and the Irish and the Jews that controlled the illicit things in Minneapolis. They had whorehouses. They had the booze. And they had the gambling. Some of the people that I wouldn't mention names of, they all have derivative names now. But in the old days, they had the old-fashioned names, the long Jewish names. [In the Combination there were only a couple of Irish people that I knew of], and there was only one Italian and he was also in the fruit business—no Greeks. [...] If you had a problem, you went to somebody in the Combination and said, "Hey, help me." If you were decent, you'd get help from them. The police, you never went to: that was out.

HARRY ROSENBAUM
Dorothy Brochin Witteff tells the story about when she graduated in social work that she went to work for, I think it was, Jewish Family and Children's Service or the precursor. And she came home from one of her first days at work, and her father asked her how it went. She said, "Psst, today, I was dealing with a prostitute." Of course, all the clients were Jewish. He said—I'll say it in Yiddish first, and then I'll translate it—"Naṿishe maṿidel, mir khan nis aneyn. Foolish girl, we don't have that kind of people."

ROZ BAKAR

Jack Haskovitz had a bar on Plymouth next to the Homewood Theater, and next to that was a billiard parlor. . . . I went there every once in a while, but I never knew what was going on. My grandparents and my mom used to say, "That's a place for thugs and ne'er-do-wells." A group, including somebody named Kid Cann, spent a lot of time there. When I was a kid—I think I was about twelve years old—somebody who had gotten in the way of the group was found shot to death in his car at the end of Plymouth Avenue, at Glenwood Park. That was the only time I remember anyone ever being hurt or anything from the time I was born till I came back from the Korean War. . . . It was a Jewish guy that got killed, and it was a Jewish guy that probably killed him . . . and it was a Jewish guy that led the group that was probably responsible. People just let it go by. It was something that didn't affect us because it was not part of our everyday life.

Another place that I was always warned about by my grandparents to stay away from was the bathhouse. We had a bathhouse on the corner of Plymouth and Logan. In the basement of the bathhouse there was a gambling den, and that was bad news. . . . The walls were all concrete, painted green. I remember it was dull and dingy, and no one was there at the time. But I saw the gambling tables and a bunch of cards piled up.

RONALD BEACHANE

Work

I must have been about eight years old [when I started working]. I had a big can, and I would rake in those pennies for the Jewish newspaper, and nickels and dimes. . . . One night Mr. Heilischer, my Hebrew teacher, walked into the store. He came in to get a herring. And he looks at me, and he says, "What are you doing in the store at this hour of the night?"

"Well, it's my share. I alternate with my older brother, and my sister Ida works also." . . . We all had duties. Some had to go down in the basement, where we had an earthen floor with big vats of pickles, and sauerkraut, and pickled watermelon, pickled crab apples, and whatnot, and fill up the big pails.

Another means of income for a lot of the young Jewish men [was boxing]. They were both amateur and professional. If you were an amateur, you got five dollars for a four-round bout. And a lot of times, these boxers would box their friends to earn the money. So naturally, they wouldn't box themselves up unless they were boxing a stranger. One time one would win, and the other time the next guy would win! But these same amateur boxers later turned professional, and they were very good. Some of them went the wrong way. In those days a fifty-dollar purse was an awful lot of money. They fought in the old Kenwood Armory. Mostly, the kids had older brothers who were boxers, and if we couldn't get any passes, we used to sneak in to watch the fights.

BEN BROCHIN

[My] grandfather was a middleman. My mother remembers his going out, picking up items. I think he . . . tried very hard to trade in usable items, because she remembers Sunday mornings when other traders would meet at the house, and they would deal. They would seal their deals with schnapps. . . . So it sounds like he was out hustling used furniture and that sort of thing pretty early and was turning it around without any location outside of his home.

EARL SCHWARTZ

My parents were relatively recently arrived immigrants. And what happens to the immigrants in that situation is that the parents sort of lose control . . . because they don't know the mores of the country as well their kids do. So [my father] did not press anything in terms of education and stuff like that. The work ethic you learned from observation. Everybody in my family worked and worked hard and was expected to do their best. There wasn't much talk about it.

Irv Nudell

We had my Uncle Izzy, who was a bootlegger during the Depression. . . . My uncle owned a very famous speakeasy bar in Minneapolis called the Keystone, which was a well-known black bar on Olson Highway and Lyndale. I remember going there with my dad a lot. My dad seemed to
know a lot of characters. My dad himself had gotten in some trouble during Prohibition. My uncle and my dad were bringing in some liquor from Canada, and my uncle got caught, and actually, my dad got caught, too. He was put on probation. But my uncle was sent to prison in Leavenworth, Kansas.

**ALLEN OLEKRY**

[My father ran a garage on Plymouth Avenue]... In 1935 my mother opened a children's clothing store across the street, next door to Maley's. She claimed she couldn't find cute children's clothes, but I think the real reason was that we needed the money. In the beginning we lived behind the store.... [Later] her business was doing very well, and the garage [was only moderately successful] They decided to remodel the whole garage and make a big store out of it, and the store moved across the street. I still remember the number: Cherry 4518.

My life was spent going back and forth from [our home at] 1601 Oliver to the store.

**KEVA ROSENBLUM**

I put in seven hours a week. I was up at a quarter to five some days, and I'd be at the packing house by six o'clock in the morning, picking up the meat. ... And then when I got through work, I went to the St. Louis Park store and finished up there at six-thirty. So it was that way Monday through Thursday, Friday, I was done about two in the afternoon. Otherwise I'd never have had time to get a haircut or go to the bank! And Sunday, it was back to six until one or so. And Shabbat, thank God for that!

**ALLEN GRENSTEIN**

[When I was thirteen, I worked first for the Lebedoffs at the Homewood Theater, answering the telephone on Saturday mornings, making popcorn, selling candy. And then I went to work for Bill Strinling in the drugstore. [Then I worked for Iazy Balick and sold newspapers on the corner of Eighth and Hennepin, downtown. I used to ride my bike there.

[When] I was still in high school... I started at Baker Shoe Store on Sixth and Nicollet... [and] I worked there pretty much all the way through college, with a break in between when I had a falling-out with the manager. And I worked in a battery factory for several weeks, lug-

ging battery acid for submarines. That was the dirtiest job I ever had, and I went back and begged my boss to give me the white-collar job back in the shoe store.

**ROBERT LATZ**

Decline of the Jewish North Side

Movement of People

The argument was that, when many of the young people were coming back after the Army, that there weren't too many available on the North Side for them to build houses. And, therefore, they were having to move into [St. Louis Park]. To a certain extent it may have been true, although there was some building that went on [on the North Side] even after the war. They had this idea that in St. Louis Park the schools were better and more elite, ...

Gradually, the shul began to move too. We were distressed that the movement was taking place, but as long as Knesseth Israel remained on the North Side, we were content to stay there. But once the shul moved and so many of our neighbors and friends had begun to move, we just felt we had to make the move also, ...

We had a Negro family living next door to us, a very nice family. She worked for the telephone company, and he, I think, worked for J. Phillips Liquor Store. ... When those riots happened on Plymouth Avenue—when there was a fire and Brochin's was attacked—he came over to us the next day and he said, "You don't have to worry. If anybody tries to bother you, I'll take care of them." ... But there were incidents on the North Side, and people were beginning to get frightened, and one by one they were leaving.

**HELEN ZIPF**

[As the Jews moved west, the black community moved into the ... old Jewish neighborhood around the Talmud Torah and the Summer Field [Housing] Project. And the movement then continued westward, very gradually, until you got into the '60s. There were no blacks living, for example, on Knox, Logan, Morgan, or Newton when I lived here. When Carolyn and I were married and I [was elected to the State] Legislature, at that time, which was in the late '40s, there were already black people...
who were living in that same area off Plymouth Avenue and north of Plymouth. Some of my strongest black supporters lived on Morgan Avenue, for example.

ROBERT LATZ.

Decline of Business

I ran theaters. I booked pictures in the theaters for forty-five years, starting at a very young age, until I finally went out of the movie business in 1972. I worked for my father when I was a youngster. I was a cashier, I was a doorman, I was an usher. . . .

As the business started out there were many pictures made, and when you ran a theater you had about five hundred pictures a year to choose from. And in the course of your business, you didn’t want a competitor down the block, so you tried to absorb all the pictures you could. So that’s why the theaters went to double features; and that’s why they went to midnight shows; and that’s why they went to four [program] changes a week. They wanted to use up the film! And it was a profitable business in most of its years. But the advent of television changed it completely. Television came along at the same time that there was a decay in older neighborhoods—the Plymouths, Broadways, Lake Streets, Central Avenues.

MARTIN LEBEDOFF

Homewood Theater, 1949 Plymouth Avenue, 1959.

Decline of Schools

In the early 1960s, the newspapers carried accounts, in the spring, of gangs that preyed on students at Lincoln Junior High—they didn’t specify Jewish students—taking their lunch money from them, beating them up if they protested, and so forth. . . . Between [one] spring and the next fall, those young couples who had said they were going to stay on the North Side picked up and moved. Their children were exposed. That marked the rapid downturn of the Jewish community.

I went with my wife to talk to the principal of Lincoln [Junior High School]. The principal told me, “You know the school has changed. It is no longer academically oriented. We have different kinds of students, and the whole school has changed its emphasis.” Which signaled to me that my kids were not going to get an education there. My two younger [kids] were shifted to Torah Academy. The school system was not viable. . . . There were not enough homes on the North Side for young couples who married and came back from the war—small homes. They shifted, mainly, to St. Louis Park. The community had begun a gradual drop in numbers. But many people were devoted to the older Jewish neighborhood. That [school situation] changed it.

RAABE RASSEL ADELSON

Joel was leaving [Lincoln] Junior High and . . . going to North High. At junior high, they had a very progressive principal who had set up an accelerated class in the seventh grade. There happened to be, maybe, a dozen or more Jewish students in this class. Joel was in that class. They were giving them an accelerated program. They gave them geometry earlier, and they started them with languages, which they hadn’t been doing. And so forth. So when they finished ninth grade and they were going up to North, some of us parents had a meeting with the principal [and the assistant principal] at North High to request that they continue this accelerated program.

North High prided itself on the fact that it was very democratic. It mixed up everybody, and they did have a mix of minorities. They had, from the North Side Jewish population, a more or less middle-class, upper middle-class [group]. Then they had a percentage from the black community, and then they had that upper North Side, which was the blue-collar, white, Christian groups. . . . We’re meeting, and we were all Jewish parents that had come to see the principal. They [told us they] can’t make homogeneous groups. They insist on being democratically
organized. We kept saying, "Look, these kids have had this accelerated program. It's a shame not to go ahead with it." The assistant principal turns to us and he says, "The trouble with you Jewish parents is that you're always pushing your kids." They wouldn't listen to us.

HELEN ZIFF

Beth El Synagogue's Plans to Move

[In 1957, 1958, when I came back to Beth El from another pulpit, we began dreaming ... of an activities building, which would serve the young couples who had moved to [St. Louis] Park. Our vision, at that point, was that we bought enough land to transplant the entire synagogue [from the North Side]. We placed the building on the lot in a way that could be expanded, as actually did happen. Then we said we would stay on the North Side for maybe twenty years more, but we would shift our preschool and our youth activities [to the St. Louis Park activities building]. And, eventually, we established a minyan here that I ran for many years. I think it would have gone on that way until [July] 1967, when the riots came, and opposite my home in [Farwell] Park, the National Guard encamped. Brochin's was burned out, and the Jewish stores were gone. That was the end. There was no saving of the North Side. Until then, even though the young couples had left, there was no push to move the institutions from the North Side. But with the riots, Jews no longer felt safe coming to the neighborhood.

RABBI KAROL ABELSON

I remember some of the arguments and the soul-searching that we did before [Beth El] moved from Penn Avenue to our present location ... [W]e first built the activities building because so many of our young people were moving out to the suburbs, and we wanted to make it more convenient for them for Sunday school, ... When the time came, there were, of course, many people who were still opposed to the move and thought we ought to stay on the North Side. I remember particularly the moving and controversial meeting that was held where the vote was taken. This was, of course, a very important time for us because the whole future of the synagogue, we felt, depended on what decision was made that night. And the decision to move was made that very evening. I think we lost very few members ... and I think the years proved us to be correct. I remember that last service held at Beth El [at] the end of services, [I left] immediately because I couldn't stand the thought of saying goodbye. It was a regular Shabbat service, but everybody knew. There may have been some special prayer[,..., but I'm not sure]. I think I was crying so hard during the service that I don't remember much about [it].

SHIRLEY ABELSON

The July 1967 Fires and Their Aftermath

[We got the call from Helen Toretsky. [She and her husband] owned the little grocery store on James or Irving and Plymouth, and they lived upstairs. ... [S]he called in a panic at about two o'clock in the morning saying, “My God everything is burning around me! Bob, can you do anything to help us?” ... I just felt that I had a responsibility to go see if there was something I could do to keep a lid on the stuff. Carolyn didn't want me to go because there was a matter of physical safety. But I got up, and I went down to Plymouth Avenue, and I ran into Larry Harris. Larry was a caseworker for the Wells Memorial House, down on Glenwood Avenue, and had worked with [many black] folks. ... And Larry and I went together down Plymouth Avenue ... but by that time the police were there and the fire engines, and it was just a mess.

ROBERT LATEZ
I'm on, it's one o'clock in the morning, and the phone rings. And it's Hymie Pesis, the guy who works for me. And he says, "Hey, they're burning Plymouth Avenue. Are you coming down?" So I get in my car, and I get over there on Penn and Plymouth, and the cops wouldn't let me through. But I said, "That's my building over there," and they let me through, down close to the fire. But ... they didn't burn us out, so we stayed in business. We had smoke damage, but that was all.

Allen Greenstein

Following 1967, there was the setting up of the Urban Coalition [which] involved the leadership of the major industrial corporations, the leadership of the black community, some of the political leaders. And I was kind of the representative Jew who served on the executive committee. I was there for many years, until I went on my sabatatical in 1977. We dealt with it, and we had all kinds of bitter attacks by the blacks on "the Rothschilds of the North Side." They never said, "the Jews." It was "the Rothschilds." Then they were talking, "Every revolution has to have its bloodshed." I remember responding, "But you're talking about my blood, and I'm not going to shed it." So there were bitter exacerbated feelings that grew and were never bridged between the Jews of the North Side and the blacks ...

Let me say that the relationship to the top of the community with the Cecil Newmans and people [like him] was cordial, with a sense of sharing a common problem. ... I remember meeting many times at The Way (a community center that served the North Side black population). The meetings themselves were angry meetings. There's a difference between your top leadership and your street leadership that we dealt with; and they were appealing to their own constituency, and so [had] nothing to gain from cultivating the Jews or stores they burned. ... I did some real shouting. I was not a patsy. ... but I wasn't their image of Mr. Moneybags [either]. It was strange, but when we weren't talking at each other at meetings, but sitting and talking, we got on fine. We were both representing constituencies at meetings, and you have a different voice and different arguments to make ...

They were pouring out rhetoric ... But the rhetoric was inflammatory, and we were the people on the spot. Even if we weren't the real target, we were on the spot. There was a need to distinguish between their resentment of Wall Street and the Rothschilds of the world and the bankers who were doing whatever they were doing and the Jewish neighbors next door. The others, whoever they meant, were unreachable.

When they burned stores, they didn't go down to Dayton's and burn in they burned Brochins' and Gold's and the others.

Rabbi Kessel Arelson
Last Remnants
of the Jewish North Side

Teen Life

I and some friends were chased by a group of black kids and also saved by another group of black kids, which is an integral part of the story. There were isolated incidents of intimidation. But it is interesting that that became much less common, and there were no serious examples of it that I can think of by the time I got to North [High School in 1968]. I would guess that in the school as a whole, there were maybe eight [Jewish kids] by the time I graduated ... maybe ten. ... I think I and my Jewish friends were kind of proud to be on the North Side. We thought of ourselves as a little tougher, a little more streetwise—sneered at our suburban counterparts. I don’t know if we saw ourselves as heirs to any history. The group of kids that I was closest to had a very strong Jewish flavor. Even the kids who weren’t Jewish had a very strong Jewish flavor about them. ... 

We had a surprise party in our house [once] when I was about fourteen for an African-American friend. His family came and our classmates. We had a friend whose mother was Jewish and father was African American. He was a good friend who spent a lot of time in our house. There were white non-Jewish kids who were close friends. I think ... if I were to say what my parents at ease about this, what made the whole process relatively comfortable, was that the circle of friends that I moved in was dominated by behaviors and expectations and language and a tone, which was Jewish. That was a plus. I think, in the case of at least of some of my non-Jewish friends in the eyes of their parents, who were quite pleased to have their children moving in a Jewish-dominated group.

From 1971 through about 1976, almost till the time I moved out of my parents’ house, every Friday night, my friends knew where they could find me. I would be home. For that reason, they came to our house week after week and brought guitars, and we cracked a few beers and sang for hours and hours and hours, and then we’d schmooze. In this group, there were two or three Jews occasionally, two or three or four white non-Jews, and occasionally African Americans. The whole thing revolved around the fact that it was Shabbat and so, on the one hand, the parents of the kids who were coming knew exactly where their kids were and what they were doing. My mother, on the other hand, couldn’t have asked for more, to know that every Friday night I was with my friends and they were in her house. She was willing to put up with terrible racket. It was just very warm and homey. When my father came home, if we were still singing, we’d go downstairs and argue politics with him. That aspect of the dynamic among my friends was stabilizing and comforting. I think, to Jews and non-Jews alike. It provided a certain security and stability.

KARL SCHWARTZ

North Side Minyan

In 1972 Richard [Weldorsky] told me about this near little minyan that was meeting on the North Side in a person’s house, and I would like to check it out. So we went one Shabbat morning, and I ended up living at the North Side minyan off and on for the next ten years.

It was in the basement of a house on Tenth and Thomas. The name of the family was Shipley. ... They were an older couple who had had their basement very modestly remodeled to allow for davening (praying) there. It was about fifteen feet long by about fifteen or twenty feet wide but divided down the middle, I think originally, between a very small recreation room and a very small laundry room. The wall that divided those two areas had had the top of it cut out so that it could serve as a mishkan (physical barrier separating the sexes), and people on the other side could see across that cutout. It was small—a very simple, portable Aron Kodesh (ark holding the Torah), Sifre Torah (Torah scroll), various and sundry chairs, a couple of shneiders. ... A shneider is like a ... personalized davening podium ... [There was] a little table in the back for a little kiddush (refreshment after services) and a davening table. That was pretty much it and odds and ends of tefillin, tefilin, tefillin, tefillin, tefillin (phylacteries), prayer shawls, prayer books, and Peninei Tzvi). ... After a while, Richard disappeared, and I was drafted. ... One was that they knew where to find me, and if they needed a minyan, they weren’t shy to check on me Friday afternoon and make sure that I could come, if I was at my parents’ house over the weekend. The second was that there was Mr. Cherrinow, who lived about a block away from me ... [who] had lost his license because of erratic driving; I believe, and needed somebody to drive with him. ... He couldn’t walk. He had heart trouble. ... I also could daven a little bit, which made me a little more valuable to the minyan. But really, they needed warm bodies, whoever they could get. Especially in the winter, a few people would disappear.
Upper Midwest Jewish History

[T]his was the last vestige of Keneseth Israel, which was the last shul to have a building on the North Side. ... Certainly after Tifereth B’nai Jacob merged with B’nai Abraham, the North Side minyan was all that was left...

When I first started attending the minyan ... the most prominent members were Mr. Leon Fishhaut, known as Reverend Fishhaut, who was the be’al’ t’fillah (service leader). ... He might have had some delegated responsibility from Keneseth Israel, or it might have been self-imposed; I’m not sure. There was the Friedman family that was in the oil-recycling business. Mr. Friedman, his children, and his father, who was this very distinguished elder, lived a few blocks away. They lived in a duplex; the younger Friedmans down below and the older Friedmans up above, I believe. I’m quite sure they could have—and would have liked to—have left the North Side and dided shortly after Mr. Friedman, the elder, died. ... There was Mr. Ikleikopf, who was a man in his fifties, I believe, who nevertheless was always called up to the Torah as chasen (bridegroom) Ikleikopf because he was still available. There was Mr. Scohchleier, who was a survivor, who lived in a house on Broadway. ... He was kind of a volatile fellow. There was Velvel Green, who used to walk to the minyan from his home in Golden Valley, about a mile to two-mile walk, most often with family members and quite often with [college] students that he brought home for the weekend. This was in all sorts of weather and all sorts of students with all kinds of Jewish backgrounds.

There was Mr. Bergazon, who ... was the shammas (seminon) of the shul. And he, once on a memorable occasion, got into a fistfight with Mr. Fishhaut ... about what was the proper hafarah for that particular Shabbat. It was unbelievable. At one point, it looked like it was going to be resolved. Rabbi [Milton] Kopstein occasionally attended this minyan because he lived just on the other side of North Minneapolis, in Golden Valley. When the issue was turned over to Rabbi Kopstein to adjudicate, Mr. Bergazon had a calendar listing hafarah readings for each Saturday, which he gave to Rabbi Kopstein as evidence. Rabbi Kopstein was about to give his ruling when Mr. Fishhaut ripped the calendar away ... insisting that Rabbi Kopstein didn’t have to give a decision because, obviously, he knew what the proper hafarah was. This was reignited when Mr. Bergazon closed the Aron a little too quickly during “Ezra Chaim” (song sung as the ark is being closed) [and] was reignited again during kiddush. ...

There was Mrs. Pichay ... who came on yomim (religious holidays).... She was quite old but would walk from about Fourteenth or Fifteenth and Knox—quite a ways. She would bring a hot kugel on yomim. There was Mr. Shpayzner, who was ill through much of this period but who would also come down, and Velvel’s daughters, who would come to shul as well.

There was Mr. [X], who lived in the projects. [He] was a shoemaker, I believe. He had an alcohol problem and would sometimes come to the minyan already having had something to drink. It was somewhat of an issue in the minyan as to whether he would be allowed to daven, because he was a be’al’ t’fillah and loved to daven. But the halacha (Jewish law) doesn’t allow inebriated people to daven publicly. I remember one occasion when he was not allowed to daven, and he stomped off to the Homewood Park to walk. I learned words from Mr. [X] about parts of the anatomy and what people should do themselves to those parts of the anatomy that I had never heard before. ... There was Ike ... I don’t remember his last name now. Ike was this man who also, I think, lived down by the projects but not in them. He had a long silvery ponytail. I think he had been a bit of a bohemian for quite a while [and] found a home in the minyan, from the mid-1970s on.

The ka’dosha were extremely humble. Once in a while, there was a beer, a little wine, a little kischel (sweet dry biscuits). Unless it was the yomim, and then there might be something warm. ... On the other hand, it was so devoid of pretense that it was an absolutely unique davening experience. There was simply no one to pretend to. There was no audience. There was no gallery. You just were there, and that was very, very valuable. That ... and knowing that if you didn’t come, they knew it, and they needed you.

Eventually, the minyan ended up on Nineteenth and Vincent, in Joe Weitz’s apartment building. I believe Mr. Shpayzner moved in with his daughter in St. Louis Park. When they moved, the minyan moved to a little tiny sunroom of an apartment building on the northeast corner of Vincent and Golden Valley Road, half a block from my parents’ home. That was its final home. It was there until 1982, I believe. ...

There was one very sweet occasion. The minyan had finished davening, and we were coming upstairs. The stairs let out to the backyard of this house. Immediately to the right, there was a wedding going on of an African-American couple. As the minyan was breaking up, these Jews of all stripes just flowed right into this wedding. There was no exit. You were immediately in the wedding. The couple happened to be people that I knew. The wonderful thing was that, what could you do? You wished them too ... The wedding stopped, and they came over. Preparations stopped, and it was just a moment of great human sympathy. A wedding
is a wedding. If there had been an escape route, I would guess that people would have taken it. But fortune did not allow it, and there was this meeting of human beings over the fence.

EARL SCHWARTZ

Reflections on the North Side’s Legacy

My kids never experienced the North Side, and I am sorry for that. It was a wonderful community to grow up in because it *was* a community. There were very few communities that were as cohesive, even though Jews fight all the time. The sense [was] that everybody cared about everybody else and that people were aware. You knew that people were watching you, and you had to behave in a certain way because it was expected.

ILY SUDELL

I think it was the whole milieu of the North Side. I definitely think that left an impression on me, the fact that we were all one community. It was instilled in us from the time we were kids that we were responsible for one another. As I got older, I realized what it meant more. I also remember when we were kids that we had to be better than other people . . . [My] dad used to tell us that as Jews, we had to be better. We had to excel in school. We had to take piano lessons and all of that, and also that we had to have integrity. That was drilled into us. As I say, we were left a wonderful legacy.

NAOMI KASTENBAUM

It was such a nice neighborhood. First of all, you knew practically all your neighbors, and the children knew everybody, and they could comfortably walk to school and walk to Talmud Torah and not have any fears. When there was a Jewish holiday, with all the shuls in the neighborhood, you knew that it was a holiday because you saw people walking to and from shul. Even people that maybe weren’t so observant, nevertheless, were walking. John Hay [Elementary School] couldn’t conduct classes not only on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur but even on Sukkoth and Pesach. The children stayed out both days.

HELEN ZIEFF

Well, we’ve lost something, but on the other hand, we’re much healthier, psychologically and socially, than we used to be. When we were isolated, we really didn’t feel comfortable in non-Jewish environments.

PACETE BEERS

I never thought in terms of “what if.” I would say that if I were as politically informed then as I am now, I might look at what was happening in the schools and try to apply pressure through the board of education. I wouldn’t have looked at real estate and banks and seen what was happening. That’s a sophistication that grew up after 1967. The die was cast already by then, and that’s when the whole thing changed, when the element of fear and panic hit the Jewish community, and the game was over. It was gone, and we were then looking not toward saving the North Side but toward relocating.

RABBI KASSEL ABELESON

I think there are a few factors [destabilizing the neighborhood] that came into play before the 1960s. One is that the G.I. experience was terrifically disruptive and had a profound impact everywhere on the attitude of Jewish men towards the traditional world they had left behind. In addition . . . synagogues in North Minneapolis were relatively weak, especially the Orthodox synagogues, as compared with, say, the Talmud Torah as
a civic institution. The rapid decline of genuine Orthodoxy, and the fact that Orthodoxy became, by and large, a missionary presence in North Minneapolis pretty early—something that had to be constantly replenished from the outside—meant that the desperate need to establish walking communities really wasn’t an important part of Jewish life on the North Side, certainly after the war. There wasn’t a strong rabbinic presence. I mean, there were prominent figures. But in the end, I think they were weak spokespeople for community and were much more accomodates or facilitators of comfort than challengers to community.

There was this huge upward mobility, an enormous influx of wealth and expectation of wealth and the allure of broader horizons. The flip side of it is class divisions. The North Side was, by no means, the homogenized Jewish community. I remember when I spoke at Adath Jeshurun [synagogue] a couple years ago about this, I was taken to task by one person who said, “It wasn’t true. It wasn’t true. There were no class divisions.” Finally, I said, “What did your parents do for a living?” She said, “My father was a lawyer.”

When I was out playing with the guys on Plymouth Avenue, we were all Plymouth Avenue kids. Our families’ cultures had very little, if anything, to do with anything. Then we went home, and Harold [Swartz] lived in a kosher home, and I lived in a French-Canadian home, and our food would be different. My grandfather and grandmother, uncle, would be speaking French. His would be speaking Yiddish. But then we walked outside, and we were in our own milieu. I think you can maintain the culture, but it depends upon the family, not on the community. I think that religious organizations have always served to help the families maintain their identity—the French church, the synagogue, whatever. I don’t think in my youth that they were as divisive as a lot of organizations are now.

[There was a lot of push on the part of Jewish families, more so than the non-Jewish families, to overcome an economic impasse by education. The parents pushed and got their kids educated, and the kids did the same to their kids. Whereas, in my family, that had never been the case. I was supposed to be a truck driver because my dad was a truck driver.]
Everyone’s a winner! Left to right: Buddy Shapiro, Rocky Berg, and Phil Levin showing off trophies on Plymouth Avenue, 1953.

... I think that [push] just carried on, and I think that affected me a whole lot. I think without the [neighboring] Japanese family and my Jewish friends, I probably would have been a truck driver.

I think a lot of times a Jewish audience of today, thinking about the Jewish neighborhood of then, forget how important their attitudes toward life and advancement were to the non-Jews in the neighborhood as well as to themselves. I think they fail to take credit for that. I think it certainly is important that they do—and how much they added to the diversity and the whole richness of the community. We had a little bit of everything in our community, and it really made it an interesting one. You could never get bored in our neighborhood... I keep thinking of growing up on the North Side in the 1930s and 1940s as being a rich cultural advantage, really.

KONALD ERACHIANE

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