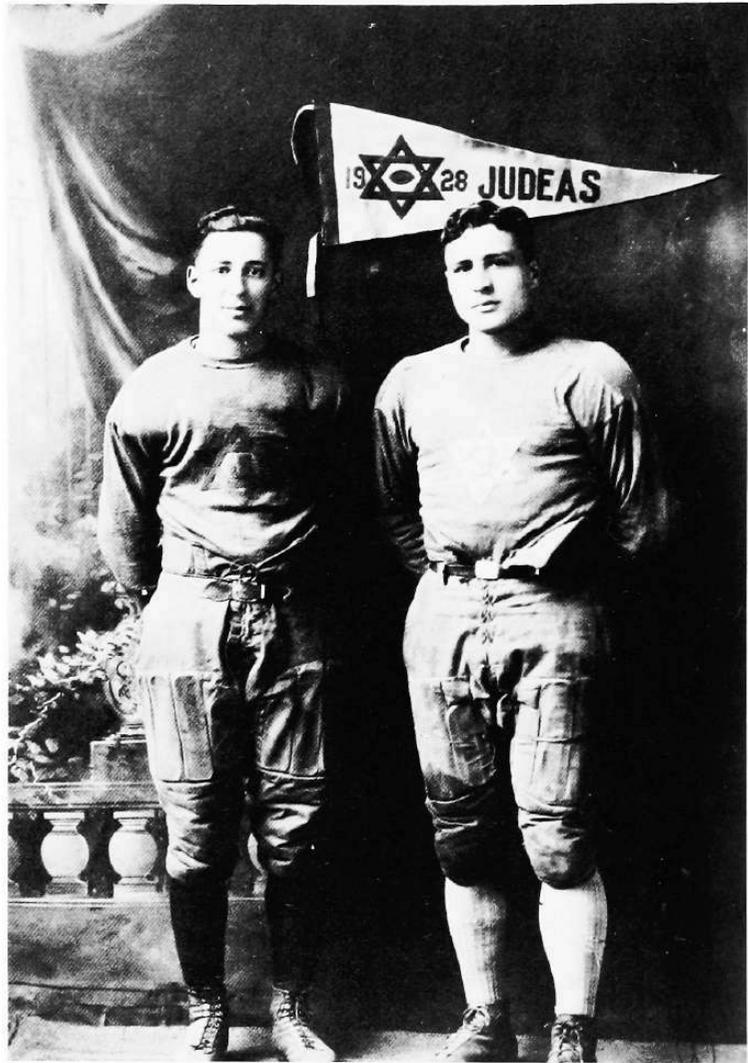


THE PENNANT behind these two players, with its football centered on a Star of David, suggests the larger issue of retaining Jewish identity while assimilating into the fabric of the larger community. The football players are Morris Hillman (left) and Ernie Kaplan. They played on the Judeas, a team sponsored by the Emanuel Cohen Center on Minneapolis' North Side. The Judeas were undefeated for three seasons at about the time this photograph was taken in 1928.



BOBBY GLICK, a cousin of Rhoda Lewin's, is resplendent in his Boy Scout uniform in this photograph taken about 1934.

GROUND BREAKING for the Emanuel Cohen Center in 1939 was a major community event. Wielding the shovel is Dr. George Gordon, a physician who founded the Minneapolis Talmud Torah and later gave up his medical practice to teach. To his left is Flora Ginsberg, president of the Ladies' Auxiliary, which bought the land for the building and donated \$10,000 of the \$60,000 cost of the center.



# Stereotype and Reality in the Jewish Immigrant Experience in Minneapolis

Rhoda G. Lewin

THE STORY of America's East European Jewish immigrants has been told and told again: we know them from histories, autobiographies, novels, photographs, and film. Father is a peddler or a sweatshop laborer, walking in his frock coat among the clamoring vendors of Hester Street on New York's Lower East Side. His wife is either cowering, clinging, feminine, or the fabled smother-mother of popular fiction, with her brassy voice and accented speech. Their bright-eyed, ragamuffin sons and daughters eagerly attend school and are ashamed of their parents' foreign ways. This is the governing metaphor, the classic statement of the Jewish immigrant presence in America.

The use of New York's Jews as a microcosm of the Jewish immigrant experience is understandable. Between 1881 and 1924, 2,800,000 Jews emigrated from Europe to the United States, 94 per cent of them from Eastern Europe, and some 97 per cent of these remained on the eastern seaboard. By 1925, one of every three New Yorkers was a Jew. The 1,750,000 Jews in New York City were the greatest mass of Jews ever assembled in one place at one time, and they offered a rich lode of *dramatis personae* and experiences for a similarly large

concentration of educational institutions and scholars, writers and filmmakers.<sup>1</sup>

Unfortunately, scholars in smaller communities in the vast hinterland west of the Hudson River have tended to consider this New York pattern as their own "given." They have concentrated on local issues but looked for similarities to New York without even questioning, as a rule, the assumption that the New York experience was replicated in smaller cities. When new studies were done in other communities, the "results" were the same. Louis Wirth found in Chicago's Jewish ghetto a duplicate of New York's, and his account, revered for almost fifty years, is only now beginning to come under scholarly fire. Similarly, researchers studying immigrant life in Pittsburgh found there had been an early cigar industry employing immigrant women and children in sweated working conditions typical of the 1890s and triumphantly proclaimed that Pittsburgh, too, was like New York.<sup>2</sup>

Some scholars, though, are looking away from the single "right" account or interpretation. They are focusing on how social process comes about and on individual

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*Rhoda Greene Lewin is an oral historian and writer who teaches in the University of Minnesota's Continuing Education for Women program. This article is excerpted from her Ph.D. dissertation, "Some New Perspectives on the Jewish Immigrant Experience in Minneapolis: An Experiment in Oral History." She is continuing to interview people for a projected history of the Minneapolis Jewish community. Lewin initially collected most of the photographs used with this article for an audiovisual presentation on the Emanuel Cohen Community Center, a settlement house founded in 1919 on Minneapolis' North Side. Not all of the pictures, therefore, are of Lewin's respondents or their families, but they are typical or representative, and they help illustrate some of the subjects the informants talked about.*

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<sup>1</sup>Bernard Cohen, *Sociocultural Changes in American Jewish Life as Reflected in Selected Jewish Literature*, 51 (Rutherford, N.J., 1972); Paul Massernmann and Max Baker, *The Jews Come to America*, 241, 362-365 (New York, 1932); Nathan Glazer, "Social Characteristics of American Jews," in *The Jews: Their History, Culture and Religion*, 2:1702 (3d ed., New York, 1960); Samuel Joseph, *Jewish Immigration to the United States, 1881-1910*, 94, 95, 149, 195 (Reprint ed., New York, 1969). The 1921 and 1924 Johnson Immigration Acts, which instituted a quota system for various nationality groups, drastically reduced Eastern European immigration.

<sup>2</sup>Louis Wirth, *The Ghetto* (Chicago, 1928); Pittsburgh Section, National Council of Jewish Women, *By Myself I'm a Book!* especially 56-63 (Waltham, Mass., 1972).

behavior within the structure. They are searching out memoirs, and they are using oral history to create new archival material.

Oral history celebrates the individual as a repository of knowledge and remembered experience: the oral historian, with his qualitative-humanistic approach, applies skills learned from a number of disciplines. He draws on historical research to find external factors which might have affected respondents' actions, sociology and psychology for knowledge of human behavior and motivation, anthropology for behavioral insights and methodology, and journalism and communication theory for question-formation and interviewing techniques.

This study presents materials from several unpublished sources, plus interviews with a small sampling of the Minneapolis Jewish community, seventeen men and women between the ages of sixty-two and eighty-nine, most of them in their seventies. All of them are children of Eastern European Jewish immigrants or immigrants themselves. This is a small, scattered group, for death, the passage of time, and geographic removal had already performed an irreversible selection process. Moreover, there were no data on which to base a sampling procedure. The group presented here is a random sample, chosen by the so-called snowball technique; that is, the first three respondents are acquaintances of the interviewer, they recommended friends, and the friends recommended others.

The project, which focuses on the immigrants' adjustment to life in America, was designed as a preliminary investigation to establish a methodology and conceptual framework for a much broader community history project. The patterns, if any, were to establish themselves, and it was expected that each respondent would make a different, unequal, and often unexpected contribution to the study.

The small size of the sample would thus be no handicap. Elizabeth Bott's seminal study of twenty working-class London families and Kenneth Keniston's study of twelve alienated college students indicated that my own seventeen interviews might well produce not only the well-worn truths but enough clues to make possible new insights and new formulations. The lack of statistical evidence might be more than made up for by the appearance of interesting hypotheses which may differ from the conventional wisdom about immigrant experiences and adjustments to America, might be applicable to other ethnic groups as well, and might offer possibilities for further research. While oral history may not produce the last word on any subject, it does sometimes produce the first, as it rambles spontaneously, disorganizedly, but full of clues or truths the respondent might never have committed to paper.<sup>3</sup>

In the end, the sampling technique worked well. The seventeen respondents represented both the North Side

and the South Side Eastern European Jewish immigrant communities. Most are "ordinary people," not community leaders, and they differ widely in socioeconomic status. They had lived childhoods ranging from poverty (all but three) to affluence. Some had come from happy families and others from broken homes. Some had left school in the eighth grade and others had graduated from college or medical school. Some had a talent for remembering detail while others were neither as observant nor as eloquent. In short, they represented as many attitudes and varieties of the human condition as there were respondents.

Small as it is, this sample suggests that although the Eastern European immigrants' life experiences in an urban milieu of lower density than New York's were in many ways the same, there were also significant differences. This study also suggests a redefinition of the word "generation," a slightly different view of marginality, and a more optimistic assessment of the immigrants' movement away from religious orthodoxy. It suggests that the smothering Jewish mother and the failed Jewish father are myth, not fact. It presents a host of possibilities for those who wish to do further research on immigrant acculturation. And it suggests that the mote in the eyes of small-city historians might be partly a matter of semantics. The memoirist who describes Lyndale Court apartments as a "tenement," for example, is not speaking of tenements in the style familiar to the East Coast historian; Lyndale Court was a twelve-unit building, a block long, and only two stories high! It is impossible to know how many historical and statistical errors have occurred because of just such a lack of definition of terms.<sup>4</sup>

TO READERS and movie-goers the scene that preceded the departure for America is all too familiar — the *Fiddler on the Roof* depiction of poverty and a threatened existence in the Russian *shtetl* or village. Take, for example, the story of two immigrants who eventually settled in Minneapolis. Zudik is the only son of Levi, the tailor. He wants two things: to avoid military service and to marry his sweetheart, Molly. Molly's father is dead; her mother ekes out an existence as a seamstress and a

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<sup>3</sup>Elizabeth Bott, *Family and Social Network: Roles, Norms and External Relationships in Ordinary Urban Families* (London, 2nd ed., 1971). Kenneth Keniston, *The Uncommitted: Alienated Youths in American Society* (New York, 1965).

<sup>4</sup>Author interview with Isadore Goldberg, May 12, 1976. All of the tapes, with the exception of those of David Bank, Dorothy Gantman, Fanny Abramovitz Yurko, the Norman McGrew interview with Ernie Fliegel, and the panel discussion conducted by the Jewish Community Center of Greater Minneapolis, are in the audio-visual library of the Minnesota Historical Society. The author retains copyright to all interviews conducted by her.



*THIS CASUAL SNAPSHOT of the Greene family was taken in about 1940 in front of the family home at 1530 Newton Avenue North, then the heart of the Homewood area, now a vacant lot. Florence, one of the respondents in this study, is at left; Rhoda, next to her, is author of this article; on father Louis' shoulder is Myrna, the youngest. Lou was a sports writer and copy desk chief at the Minneapolis Tribune.*



*AMONG THE RESPONDENTS for this study were Eddie Schwartz (above right), Ernie Fliegel (right), and Florence Schoff (below). Schwartz is shown in his cluttered office in his printing firm, Schwartz Printing Co. Fliegel holds a twenty-two-pound turkey prepared at his restaurant, the 620 Club, for then vice-president-elect Hubert H. Humphrey for Thanksgiving in 1964. The slogan of the renowned club was "Where Turkey Is King." Florence Schoff is past president of Hadassah and the Association of Jewish Women's Organizations and has been active in many other organizations. In 1971 she received the Eleanor Roosevelt Award for outstanding service to humanity.*



mender of clothing, and for her daughter the tailor's son is a suitable husband. When Molly is sixteen, the matchmaker arranges the match with Zudik. Quietly, secretly, Zudik and Molly plan to escape from Russia, hidden in the false bottom of a load of hay, along "roads that were closely guarded, but not always by honest watchmen."<sup>5</sup>

In Austria, they are met by representatives of the fabulously wealthy Rothschild banking family, who are helping escapees from Russia. Zudik finds work as a tailor. Molly as a seamstress, and after several years they have enough money saved for steerage passage on a freighter to New York. In New York, an immigrant aid group finds Zudik a \$2.00-a-week job and a room on the top (sixth) floor of a Lower East Side tenement. Zudik and Molly, now known as Charley and Molly Rosenfield, become citizens. Four children are born.

It is 1891; thirteen years have passed since the newlyweds hid in a hayrick and escaped the czar. Now Zudik has a new plan. He has a second-cousin in Minnesota, who tells of great money-making possibilities in the lumber country. Zudik, or Charley, makes up his mind to go there and see for himself. He buys his ticket, tells Molly and the children he will send for them soon, pins his last \$10.00 to his heavy woolen underwear, and boards the railroad coach for Minneapolis, Minnesota.

For most who went to Minneapolis, however, the journey was faster, more direct, less arduous. The Cohen family, for example, left Kalvarija, Lithuania, in the spring of 1892 in a horse-drawn covered wagon, and made a night crossing of the border to Tilsit in East Prussia. Their baggage was in a tarpaulin roll: linens, featherbeds, copper pots, a mortar and pestle, Sabbath candlesticks, and mother's favorite rolling pin. From Tilsit they went by train to Hamburg, sailed immediately for America, and then traveled by train to Minneapolis, where relatives awaited them. The Halperns, parents and seven children, packed feather quilts, housekeeping items, silver, clothing, and sacks of food, and traveled on the famed Orient Express to Vienna, then through Germany and on to Rotterdam in The Netherlands, where they would sail for America. They had always had servants; it was strange to be "washing our own clothing, shampooing our own hair, polishing our shoes." And Vera Lyons reminisces about touring Versailles and such French cities as Marseilles and Cherbourg and many of the European capitals en route to the United States.<sup>6</sup>

The old home town in Russia, Rumania, Lithuania, or Galicia had been a place of poverty for some, but a remembered idyl nevertheless. Kalvarija, for example, was a small Lithuanian garrison town with two main streets, one Catholic, one Jewish. Behind them huddled "rows of mean little houses on lesser streets and narrow alleys . . . bent and crooked, their windows almost level with the ground and their moss-covered sloping roofs

within reach of a child's hand [and] . . . the town goats." Ernie Fliegel remembers Barlad, Rumania: in the summer, they took baths in the river; in winter, they bathed in a big washtub next to the stove. "but not very often . . . we didn't know you had to take a bath once a week." He recalls a "large kitchen — but when you're small, everything looks large — [and] we had a sitting room, or a parlor, and one bedroom," all with dirt floors. "We lived on a street where farmers would take their cattle to market," and his grandmother would "make a paste out of cow dung . . . and smear it over the floor, and after you had thirty, forty applications it would be like cement. It was clean, and didn't smell."<sup>7</sup>

Readers who are fond of immigrant history know why people emigrated to America; the respondents in this study tell the familiar stories. Some were fleeing the czar's draft; Viola Hymes' father, for example, "had four brothers and they all came here. His father was a widower and gave up his sons, one by one, to come to America. He was always going to come, but he never did." Many left because of pogroms — officially sanctioned massacres of Jews. Vera Lyons recalls that "during the Easter holidays you could not set foot outside your house, because you would have been slaughtered. The idea of the Jews as Christ-killers was absolutely indelible in the minds of every peasant." She has nightmares even today about a group of "very drunk peasants, with their faces masked," who brandished rifles and terrorized her family. Still others came for economic opportunity, or because they were restricted in education, employment, place of residence, travel — almost every aspect of life.<sup>8</sup>

At the end of the voyage lay Castle Garden, Ellis Island, or a processing center at some other port of debarkation. Here, too, the stories in this study repeat the familiar picture. Florence Schoff tells how her mother, arriving alone at Ellis Island in New York Bay, failed to recognize her fiancé, who had preceded her to America by six months and came to meet her dressed in American clothing and a derby hat. Exultant immigration officials thought they had caught one of the white slavers who

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<sup>5</sup>For this account here and in the following two paragraphs, see Sam L. Royce, "I Promised Mother," pp. A-K ([Minneapolis], 1954), unpublished manuscript owned by Mrs. Sam L. (Lily) Royce; copy in MHS.

<sup>6</sup>Reuben L. Berman, ed., "Sarah and Alexander Berman: A Family Chronicle by Their Children," 38 (Minneapolis, 1973), unpublished manuscript, copy in MHS library; Bessie Schwartz, "My Own Story," 2 (Minneapolis, 1956), unpublished manuscript owned by Blanche Halpern Goldberg; author interview with Vera Nissenson Lyons (Mrs. Arnold), February 11, 1976.

<sup>7</sup>Berman, "Family Chronicle," 35-37; author interview with Ernie Fliegel, May 7, 1976.

<sup>8</sup>Author interview with Viola Hoffman Hymes (Mrs. Charles), May 10, 1976; Lyons interview.

frequented Ellis Island looking for young prospects. To set the mistake right, the young couple was married then and there.

Ernie Fliegel still remembers his arrival in America seventy years ago: "We were waiting to debark. . . People were crying, pointing to the Statue of Liberty, and I asked my Grandma why people were crying and she told me they were crying because in this country you don't have to be afraid. And then in Ellis Island they were so cruel . . . They just pushed you around, no translators, no help, nothing. They just fed you slop." The crossing was seventeen days, Fliegel recalled: "We hadn't had a bath all the way across [and there was] this toilet, with a line about a block long. . . Grandmother took us kids in, and took our clothes off, and washed us and wiped us off, and somebody told the guards, and it was just like the Gestapo. . . They shoved us around, and pushed us out."<sup>9</sup>

For some, New York was only a way station. It took Ernie Fliegel's mother six months in a New York City sweatshop to earn the money for her family's train fare to Minneapolis where her two brothers had already settled. Others left immediately for the new home, with train fare paid by those who had gone earlier. Still others left the port of arrival as homesteaders, sent to the Midwest by Eastern Jewish philanthropists who wanted to break up the heavy concentration of Jewish immigrants on the eastern seaboard or to destroy the ignoble stereotype of the Jew as moneylender, petty tradesman, and peddler by making him a man of the soil. Only a few persisted at farming, however. Most went to the small cities as peddlers or clerks, and some opened up general stores. "Later on when their daughters wanted to get married, [some of them] moved to Minneapolis." Florence Schoff's family's experience was typical: her father received a land grant in South Dakota, so he "became a sheep rancher, never having seen a sheep before." There were "droughts, very cold weather, very hard

winters, and the sheep froze." Then Canada enticed her father, and he moved his family there, although he "never settled on the land, he never got further than Edmonton." The family moved to Minneapolis when Florence was sixteen.<sup>10</sup>

Immigrants also went to Minneapolis for other reasons: because it was the spot on the railroad where the money ran out, because Minneapolis was rumored to be a rich lumber town where there was money to be made, because a sack of flour purchased in Vitebsk, Russia, said "Pillsbury Company, Minneapolis, Minnesota," and there must be big companies, and therefore jobs and a living, in a place where mills produced flour that traveled all the way to a Russian *shetl*. Like many states, Minnesota actively sought new settlers. Agents were sent to Quebec, Milwaukee, Chicago, and New York, and Bremen as well, to tap the incoming flow. Minnesota railroads set up temporary housing for new arrivals, and advertised as a "fact admitting of no dispute" that Minnesota "contains more natural wealth within her borders than any other area of corresponding size on the face of the earth." In an 1878 pamphlet, the state's immigration board addressed "Laboring Men . . . Landless Men . . . All Men," urging them to "Bring Forth the Rich Treasures Hid in the Bosom of the NEW EARTH." And another described Minnesota as a state of "unparalleled opportunities and matchless resources" whose "lofty hills, graceful slopes, verdant nooks, crystal streams, limpid lakes . . . boating, fishing, outdoor sports" would surely make the immigrant "physically and mentally stronger, purer and nobler."<sup>11</sup>

GERMAN JEWISH IMMIGRANTS had been arriving in Minnesota since the 1850s, but the state's Jewish population grew very slowly until about 1890, when the East Europeans began arriving in large numbers. By 1907 there were an estimated 4,500 Jews, most of them of Russian, Lithuanian, or Polish origin, living on Minneapolis' North Side between Glenwood Avenue and Sixth Avenue North (now Olson Highway), and between downtown and Colfax Avenue. On the South Side, in an area bounded by Twenty-fourth Street, Chicago Avenue, and the coalyards and railroad tracks south and east of those streets, there were an estimated 3,500 more, some Hungarians and Russians, but most of them Rumanians. There were also scattered families and small groups in other sections of the city, in the Seven Corners area, where Cedar, Fifteenth, and Washington avenues South came together, in the "Wald" (forest) near Thirty-third and Dupont avenues North, and in the more desirable residential area known as the "lakes district," around Lake of the Isles and Lake Calhoun, where the earlier arrivals, the Germans, were beginning to settle.<sup>12</sup>

By 1920, the fourteenth United States census would find that 5.1 per cent of the white foreign born in Min-

<sup>9</sup> For this and the paragraph following, see author interview with Florence Karp Kumian Schoff (Mrs. Francis), April 29, 1976; Fliegel interview.

<sup>10</sup> Author interview with William Mayberg, January 15, 1976; Schoff interview.

<sup>11</sup> Saint Paul and Duluth Railroad, *The Land of Promise*, 3 (St. Paul, [1893]); Minnesota State Board of Immigration, *The Empire State of the New North-West*, 3 (St. Paul, 1870), and *Minnesota's Fiftieth Anniversary*, 2, 3, 65, 67 (6th ed., St. Paul, 1908).

<sup>12</sup> Ruby Danenbaum, "History of the Jews in Minneapolis and St. Paul," in *Reform Advocate*, November, 1907, p. 34, 35; Calvin Schmid, *Social Saga of Two Cities: An Ecological and Statistical Study of Social Trends in Minneapolis and St. Paul*, 150-153 (Minneapolis, 1937); Judith B. Erickson and Mitchel J. Lazarus, *The Jewish Community of Greater Minneapolis. A Population Study, 1971-1972*, Chapter I:2, Chapter IV:4, Fig. IV:2 ([Minneapolis, 1973]).

neapolis gave Yiddish or Hebrew as their mother tongue. But in the North Side and South Side communities the density was far greater, and the closeness and the neighborliness of Old World *shtetl* and New York ghetto life were much in evidence: "Everybody knew you, and you knew everybody; you were part of the community, and the community was part of the family." On Fridays one "could literally smell the Sabbath, the fish and the chicken and the preparations." The sense of community was fostered as much by "the *rey-ach* [aroma] of Judaism as the *ru-ach* [spirit]." The Abramovitzs' home was called "Castle Garden," after the immigrant reception center that preceded Ellis Island, and was one of many where there was always a houseful of roomers and boarders newly arrived from the Old Country.<sup>13</sup>

Charity and concern for others were a part of the Jewish tradition in Minneapolis, as in New York, for poverty was endemic. Florence Greene remembers as a child receiving her precious allowance of two pennies each week - - one penny to spend for candy and one penny to put in the *pushke* (charity box), and asking her mother wonderingly, "Are there really people who are poorer than we are?" Another remarked, "I didn't think we were poor; nobody had anything." And he remembers one family "where the social workers would come . . . and it was a disgrace. The neighbors would all say 'That family takes charity.'" Nate Shapiro's grandmother was called "the grandmother of the poor," because she spent so much of herself providing for poor people, particularly new immigrants.<sup>14</sup>

New clothes were for many a once-a-year treat: "One of the big events in our lives was when the Passover and *Rosh Hashanah* [New Year] holidays came and we could have new ribbons for our hair; that was when we got new shoes." Ernie Fliegel remembers a cold winter day, and his mother crying because they didn't have overcoats: "I was twelve years old . . . I would sell papers, and if I made sixty cents, I would give my mother fifty cents and I would hide away a dime . . . I saved \$12.00 that way." He told his mother about the money and "We went to Holtzermann's, and we each got an overcoat, \$4.00 apiece, my sister, my brother, and myself. It was one of my proudest days." Food, too, might be in short supply. One mother had a rule: "Eat bread with everything." Flour was ninety-five cents for a 100-pound sack, so her family "had plenty of bread and bread and bread. An afternoon snack consisted of a mashed potato sandwich with molasses and a glass of milk." *Mamaliga* (corn meal mush) was a staple: "We would have it for breakfast, and for dinner at noon with a stew of some cooked meat, and for supper we would add sugar to it and bake it."<sup>15</sup>

For those who lived first in a New York tenement, Minneapolis was in some respects heaven, heaven being

a two-story house on a lot by itself, giving the family a chance for sunshine and fresh air and privacy. It might have an outside privy, and an outside pump for water, but at least the water did not have to be carried up six flights of stairs. Central heating was a luxury for many: "The only heat we had in our bedroom was what went through a register in the ceiling from downstairs." Shepsel Roberts remembers a tiny home at 619 Lyndale Place where in winter "you could go with a sled on the [inside] walls: it was all snow and ice." To keep warm, the family burned old battery boxes in a little stove by day and at night snuggled into goosedown quilts.<sup>16</sup>

Paying the rent, buying a house, or making a living were family affairs. Children worked, too, and their earnings went into the family fund. "After we bought our home . . . a good part of what I earned I had to give to my folks. [My brother] Ed and [his wife] Mary helped support the family." Another says, "My sisters were older and they were working and of course they helped." The three Roberts children, ages five, seven, and eleven, would get up at 2:00 A.M. Thursdays and Fridays to help pluck the freshly killed chickens their mother would sell that day. The most common childhood occupation was selling newspapers, but "nobody would sell papers because they liked it," Ernie Fliegel says today. "You had to do it to make a living. . . . We sold in storms, and rains, and twenty below zero, and get up early in the morning, it was no fun. Nobody forced you to do it. You were a boy and you had to go and help. It was a way of life. . . . I didn't know anybody had it any better." Iz Goldberg was a twelve-year-old "stuffer" in the *Minneapolis Tribune* mail room, putting the Sunday picture magazine, comics, and rotogravure sections together and then inserting them into the rest of the pa-

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<sup>13</sup>United States, *Census, 1920, Population*, 2-1009. Albert I. Gordon, *Jews in Transition*, 175 (Minneapolis, 1949); Jewish Community Center of Greater Minneapolis, panel discussion on "The Quality and Design of Jewish Life in Minneapolis: Family Life and Demographic Trends," March 23, 1976, one in a series entitled "Community Self Discovery," tapes owned by the Jewish Community Center; author interview with Ida Levitan Sanders (Mrs. Max), February 16, 1976; untaped conversation of author with Fanny Abramovitz Yurko (Mrs. Louis), August, 1975.

<sup>14</sup>Author interviews with Florence Glick Greene (Mrs. Louis), August 13, 1975; with Nathan M. Shapiro, May 12, 1976; Evelyn Silerman interview with David Bank, April, 1976, owned by Jewish Community Center of Greater Minneapolis.

<sup>15</sup>Sanders interview; Fliegel interview; Royce, "I Promised Mother," 4. J. D. Holtzermann's department store was located at 417 Cedar Avenue in Minneapolis from 1890 to the mid-1970s.

<sup>16</sup>Isadore Goldberg interview, author interview with the Reverend Shepsel H. Roberts, March 5, 1976. The Reverend Roberts was trained in a rabbinical college or seminary; he is a *mohel*, the man who performs the circumcision of male infants.

per. "You could go down there anytime, twelve o'clock at night, if you wished," he recalls. "I was awfully fast, I used to do 3,000 in an hour, just like a machine, so I made fifty-two-and-a-half cents an hour. . . . Once I did 30,000 of those in one day, so I made \$5.25. . . . I felt like a millionaire." It was, after all, not such unreasonable pay, when one recalls Florence Greene and her sisters, little girls sewing pearl buttons on cards, one dozen to a card, one penny a gross.<sup>17</sup>

For the parents, the omnipresent sweatshop in the folklore of the immigrant experience was not the mid-western way. Minneapolis had its sweatshops, but they were small and few, and a man could find other ways of making a living. One man had been a shoemaker in Russia, now, in Minneapolis, he repaired shoes. Another had been a tailor; in Minneapolis he continued to be a tailor, sometimes bartering his skills to pay a doctor's bill or other expenses. William Mayberg had been a *melamed* (teacher) in Russia; he tried peddling and selling insurance, but the prospect of wives "cry[ing] in my face" when he told them their husbands might die was too unnerving for him, and he sold groceries for forty-one years in a tiny "ma-and-pa" store. Florence Greene's father, another scholar, made a meager living as a *meshkiah* (inspector), examining freshly killed meat to make sure it was kosher — free of disease, clean, and fresh. Lazar Cohn, a lawyer, joined relatives in the wholesale meat business. Lil Cohn's father was a miller who came to Minneapolis to work for Pillsbury Mills; he became ill and turned to shopkeeping, first selling secondhand tools, later becoming a locksmith and then an umbrellamaker. Sometimes the wife and mother led the way. Shepsel Roberts' mother started the family chicken business: she wrote down in Yiddish, Russian, French, Rumanian, "all the languages she knew, 'Mister, how much it costs a pound of chickens?'" And she went to a "goyische firm" that sold live chickens, bought maybe a dozen, and brought them home in a little wagon.<sup>18</sup>

Although the immigrants worked hard, there was time for play, too. The children played raucous stickball games, just as their New York counterparts did among the vendors of Hester Street. But Angelo Cohn recalls homemade movies shown in the Spiegel boys' barn, bonfires and wiener roasts, and "many a communal hour

around the paper-burning stove in the wagon that Mr. Silver used for peddling sour cream, cottage cheese, eggs, or potatoes." Sam Royce remembers skating on neighboring Silver Lake. The irrepressible Emie Fliegel remembers basketball and boxing at Pillsbury Settlement House, and Pillsbury House Camp: "You went there for two weeks for \$3.00. They'd weigh you in when you first got there and weigh you out when you left, and it was not uncommon for little boys to gain eight and ten pounds in the two weeks. Boy, to get all the milk and bread you wanted, and all the oatmeal." Like children everywhere, Minneapolis girls and boys played jacks and horseshoes and tennis, jumped rope and rollerskated. They took piano and violin lessons. They played house and dressed up in their parents' old clothes or piano shawls. They went to the public library. And, as they grew up, there were the same Saturday nights at the dance halls, "two-steps, waltzes, all kinds of dancing" at Spring Park or at Hawkins Hall on Nicollet at Sixth. They rode the streetcar or went in "rattletrap cars" or horse and buggy to Minnehaha Falls, a good fishing lake, the free band concerts at Lake Harriet, or boxing matches and concerts at the old Kenwood Armory. People who were not crowded into tenements could party at home, and Minneapolitans did, singing around the piano, playing the phonograph, dancing, playing cards, staging amateur theatricals. Everyone, young and old, participated in the parties on Saturday nights, recalls Lil Cohn:

You know what we used to do at parties? Sit around the table and make the table go up and down like the Ouija board. We had a big, round dining room table, and we would all get around the table and talk to it in Jewish, and we would raise the table. I could never figure it out

And these two men who were of Russian descent would dance the *Kazatski*, and we would sing. One of the men would play the violin.

My father played the accordion.<sup>19</sup>

IN THE MATTER OF EDUCATION, two familiar themes run through the popular folklore about the East European Jewish immigrants. One is the importance of Jewish education, the other is the compelling desire for secular education, especially college. A third theme, a plaintive minor chord, is the pathos of adult men and women, fluent in two or more European languages, never learning to speak English properly, or to read and write English. For some, indeed, college was a "must," despite the absence of money. Vera Lyons says simply: "You worked." And she adds, "There's a certain groceryman who says he put more dentists through school than anybody else. There was no one who didn't work their way through school. [There were] loans: my husband for ten years after he graduated was paying off

<sup>17</sup> Greene interview; Sanders interview; Fliegel interview.

<sup>18</sup> Author interviews with Dorothy Cantman, May 11, 1976; with Lillian Besler Cohn (Mrs. Louis E.), February 25, 1976; with Angelo Cohn, March 5, 1976; Mayberg interview; Greene interview; Roberts interview; Royce, "I Promised Mother," p. C.

<sup>19</sup> For this and paragraph following, see Angelo Cohn, "A Long Way from Ninth Street," in *Identity*, April, 1971, p. 12; Royce, "I Promised Mother," p. J; Fliegel interview; Lyons interview; Sanders interview; Bank interview; Hymes interview; Greene interview; Lil Cohn interview.



*PLYMOUTH AVENUE NORTH was a thriving business community in about 1946–48 when this photograph was taken. Among the businesses along the avenue were North Side Bakery, People's Printing Company, William Strimling Drugs, Abe's Delicatessen, Grossman Plymouth Food Market, Jack Margolis' Garage, and the Homewood Theatre.*

loans." Shepsel Roberts remembers that during his first year away at school he "ate only once a day, at 3:30, in a little restaurant. I ate so much bread with the meal that it lasted me until the next day."<sup>20</sup>

However, others belie the popular historians' emphasis on education. Eddie Schwartz says he intended to go to college, but when he found he could earn \$2.00 a night making up the student newspaper, he decided he could learn just as much that way as by paying tuition in the school of journalism. Iz Goldberg wanted to go to work when he graduated from high school at age sixteen, but his mother, as Jewish mothers are supposed to, decided that Iz should be a doctor, "the pinnacle of success." Yet Sam Royce's mother prevented him from getting a college education; his chance to study pharmacy at the College of St. Thomas on a football scholarship was spoiled by his mother, who "wouldn't have me[,] a Jewish boy[,] attend a Catholic school."<sup>21</sup>

Indeed, only four of the eight men interviewed for this study are college graduates, certainly less than might be expected considering the popular belief that East European Jewish immigrants yearned unanimously for higher education. Moreover, they belie the belief that education was the object of much parental sacrifice, for all four paid their own way. In addition, five of the nine women respondents are also college graduates, an unexpectedly large number in light of the general belief

that daughters of immigrant families went to work young to help put their brothers through college.

TO SUM UP, then, many of the adjustments that were made in New York were made in the same ways in smaller cities to the west. But, like the popular belief about the importance attached to a college education, some of the myths are less than true, at least for this Minneapolis sample. One such myth is that of the smothering Jewish mother and the failed Jewish father. The stereotypical Jewish immigrant mother expresses her love by feeding and bullying those around her. The stereotypical Jewish immigrant father stands behind her, a failure in the eyes of his children, that line of little boys stretching from Hutchins Haggood to Irving Howe. He is a failure either because he failed at both business and at Americanizing himself, or because he succeeded but was too busy making money to "understand" his wife and children.

Yet the interviews for this study make an entirely different view overwhelmingly clear. Nine of the seventeen respondents speak of their fathers with great admiration, sometimes awe. Only four speak more of their

<sup>20</sup> Lyons interview; Roberts interview.

<sup>21</sup> Author interview with Edward P. Schwartz, February 25, 1976; Goldberg interview; Royce, "I Promised Mother," 6.

mothers than their fathers, and only two of those do so with real respect or affection. Mothers, in fact, do not appear in the interviews very often. When they do, they are usually objects of pity or dutiful respect, in cursory references to how well they seemed to cope with the problems of feeding or caring for their children, or how well they kept a Jewish home.

When the attitude toward father is a rejecting one, it is stated briefly, succinctly: "Almost everybody loved Pop except his wife and children. It's hard to love a weak man." Another said, "My father wasn't around very often, so we were on our own." More typical is the woman who speaks with admiration of her father opposing the czar, then fleeing for his life: "He was rather a gallant person." Another respondent rhapsodizes about his father's voice, his "magnificent hands" that could build anything, his business success, how he educated himself. Another remembers her father as "very good looking very active, vibrant. The woman he loved was engaged to another, but he wanted her. She broke her engagement, and she married my father."<sup>22</sup>

Is it that the immigrant mother as a role model or family member was not very exciting? It could be the expected closeness of daughter to father that makes women erase their mothers from their reminiscences but remember their fathers as "so handsome, blond with blue eyes, and a great auburn beard," or characterize them as wonderful, a good citizen, much beloved in the community, pious, generous, well-read, scholarly, sophisticated, and a progressive thinker, adjectives used by several of the respondents. One called her father an "uncommon man," another said, "He was to me a symbol of everything that was good, and everything that was human," and yet another — speaking for many, including all but two of the male respondents — said "I worshipped my father."

Another respondent says revealingly, "My father came here. *His eighth child, Saul, was born six weeks after they arrived*" (italics the author's). Only a vague reference is made to the mother who had to travel with seven small children, seven months pregnant with her eighth child, by train and ship from Rumania, to Amsterdam, to Quebec, to Minneapolis! Irving Howe

writes about the *World of Our Fathers*. Judith Kramer defines the third generation as those whose *fathers* were born in the United States or came here before they were ten years old. Why fathers? Why not mothers, especially among Jews, where it is the Jewish mother who makes her child a Jew by birth and by keeping a Jewish home? If more women wrote immigrant histories and novels and did more of the social research, would the mother/father stereotypes be different? Perhaps, but the testimony of the respondents in this study indicates that it is the Jewish mother who may be a pale, shadowy figure, and that there may be little historical accuracy in the accepted view that immigrant children were ashamed of their fathers.

ANOTHER SET OF MYTHS surrounds intermarriage. One respondent tells the familiar story of a young woman who was taking her master's degree at the university when she married her professor, who was not Jewish. "Her parents mourned her as dead, they just cut her off completely. . . . She had been the pride and joy and light of the family [with] this brilliant mind that she had." Another respondent married the child of a mixed marriage, a young woman whose parents had left the state; the bride had never known she had aunts, uncles, and cousins in Minneapolis.<sup>23</sup>

Yet it seems clear that intermarriage was not the ultimate rejection of father, mother, religion, and community, as popular fiction and some traditionalists would have us believe. When love won out over family pride or religious tradition, families, at least in Minneapolis, tended to adjust, and the hurts healed, at least on the surface. One respondent's brother married a girl whose father was president of a Unitarian college; his Orthodox parents accepted her. Another chose exile with his Swedish-Norwegian bride, but within two years they were back in Minneapolis, where his mother welcomed them home, "quite something for an Orthodox Jewish lady." Intermarriage may also have been far more common than is supposed. Five of the seventeen respondents in this study married non-Jews, an unexpectedly large number. The snowball nature of the sample is not responsible for this frequency; it is sheer chance, for the five who intermarried are not all acquainted with one another.<sup>24</sup>

THE ORAL HISTORIES in this study also cast doubt on several of the fundamental concepts in social history and immigrant history. One is the concept of the marginal man, defined by Kurt Lewin *et al.*, as a man whose world was divided into three areas. There was his own life space, the person and the psychological environment as it existed for him. There was the physical and social world outside. And there was a boundary zone, or marginal area, where the two met. Lewin also discerned a

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<sup>22</sup>The author has chosen to keep the sources for the first two quotations in this paragraph anonymous. Other sources for this and two paragraphs following are Schoff interview; Shapiro interview; Hymes interview; Greene interview; Lyons interview; author interview with Blanche Halpern Goldberg (Mrs. Isadore), May 4, 1976; Irving Howe, *World of Our Fathers* (New York, 1976); Judith Kramer Leventman, "Fathers and Sons: Conflict Resolutions of Third Generation American Jews," Ph.D. thesis, University of Minnesota, 1958.

<sup>23</sup>Hymes interview; author interview with Maurice J. Schanfield, January 13, 1977.

<sup>24</sup>Greene interview; Schwartz interview.

strong tendency for more privileged members of the minority group — those who were better educated or more successful or more handsome or beautiful — to cut themselves loose from the minority and try to join the majority. Thus, marginality included a dominant and subordinate culture or, more specifically, a superior and an inferior one.<sup>25</sup>

More recently, Milton Goldberg has suggested that the marginal man who exists on the cultural borderline from early childhood in the company of a large number of others is not an outsider; he is a participating member of a marginal culture (or network) in which he, too, can feel comfortable, normal, and integrated. And other scholars have suggested that the problems ascribed to marginality are really the dilemmas of living in any rapidly changing, socially mobile culture, and that almost everybody finds himself in marginal situations at times.<sup>26</sup>

However, the respondents in this study, and the memoirists, consistently refer to themselves as "we" and "us" and to gentiles as "they" or "them." They also validate Joshua Fishman's theory that an individual who is uncomfortable in his marginal status learns to speak the language of the dominant culture more rapidly, because his feelings of self-worth are related to his ability to communicate. For example, of the two women who arrived in Minneapolis at age twelve, one speaks with an accent, the other does not. The one whose spoken English is grammatically perfect and without accent speaks fiercely still of those children who fifty-four years ago called her "greenhorn"; she is a leader in the community. The one who still speaks with a foreign accent is shy, withdrawn, and has few social contacts.<sup>27</sup>

The respondents in this study also make strikingly clear that the idea of a "generation" as a definable group set apart by age or date of arrival in the United States is an intellectual construct that should have been abandoned long ago. Unfortunately, "generation" is an exceedingly convenient word to use, and many respected social scientists have devoted a great deal of time to its explication. Karl Mannheim was one of the first to concern himself with generations as a framework for social change. Mannheim posited that members of a given generation shared a common location in the social structure and in the historical dimension of social process and exhibited certain characteristic ways of thinking and responding. The first generation was defined as immigrants who were five years old or older on arrival in the United States and the second generation as native-born of foreign-born parents or those who were under five on arrival in the United States. Using this definition, W. Lloyd Warner saw older and younger generations of immigrants as estranged and isolated from one another, because the children felt the full force of the dominant society's assimilating pressures. And Will Herberg saw a

first generation using its traditional religion and religious organizations to provide location, identity, and status, while the second generation rejected its religion to resolve the conflict between their parents' culture and American culture.<sup>28</sup>

There is, by now, evidence to the contrary. Marshall Sklare and Joseph Greenblum found a distinct generational decline in ritual observance in the Chicago suburb of "Lakeville," but noted a similarity in levels of ritual observance between contemporaneous second- and third-generation respondents. Earlier, Judith Kramer in her 1956 study of Minneapolis Jewry accidentally included sixteen men who were chronologically second generation in her study of the third generation; when she cross-tabulated, she found the two groups had the same social characteristics.<sup>29</sup>

If one looked at the Eastern European immigrants of 1881–1914 in their New York ghetto, it was fairly easy to see them as a mass, rather than as individuals, and to refer to them as an amorphous "first generation." The children who came of age in 1910–20 were then the second generation, and they produced a third generation which reached adulthood in the 1940s. However, there is an undeniable fanning pattern resulting from the fact that persons born between 1895 and 1914, for example, have children whose birthdates may fall as early as 1910 or as late as 1960 or even later. And this fanning pattern makes it impossible to describe the children of the 1895–1914 group as a "generation."

In this study, for example, those who are first generation by definition were born between 1887 and 1914; the so-called second generation were born between 1895 and 1911. Thus the youngest members of the first generation are actually younger than any in the so-called sec-

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<sup>25</sup> Kurt Lewin, *Field Theory in Social Science: Selected Theoretical Papers*, 57, 143 (New York, 1951).

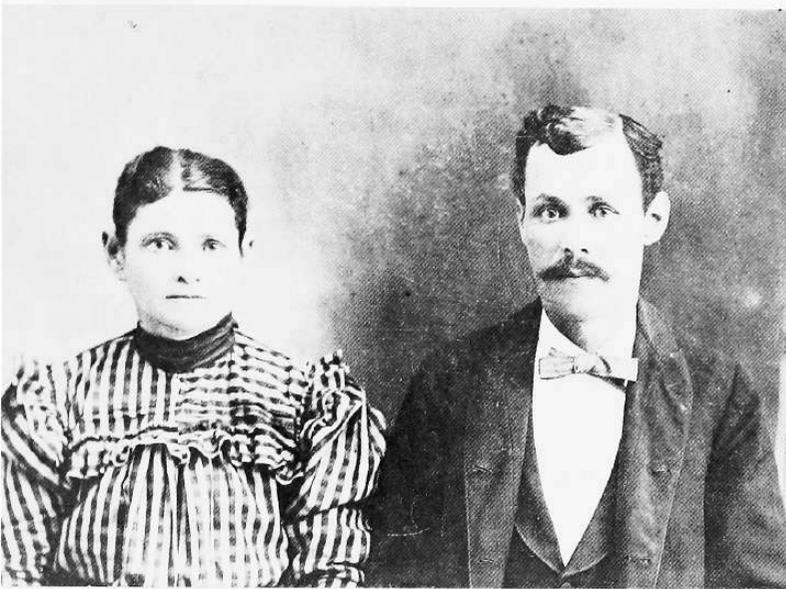
<sup>26</sup> Milton M. Goldberg, "A Qualification of the Marginal Man Theory," in *American Sociological Review*, 6:55–58 (February, 1941).

<sup>27</sup> See, for example, Joshua A. Fishman, *Language Loyalty in the United States: The Maintenance and Perpetuation of Non-English Mother Tongues by American Ethnic and Religious Groups* (The Hague, 1966); Simon R. Herman, "Explorations in the Social Psychology of Language Choice," in Joshua A. Fishman, ed., *Readings in the Sociology of Language*, 492–511 (The Hague, 1968).

<sup>28</sup> Karl Mannheim, *Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge*, 276–322 (London, 1952); Bernard Lazerwitz, "Contrasting the Effects of Generation, Class, Sex and Age on Group Identification in the Jewish and Protestant Communities," in *Social Forces*, 49:52 (September, 1970); Will Herberg, *Protestant, Catholic, Jew: An Essay in American Religious Sociology*, 179–223 (Revised ed., New York, 1960).

<sup>29</sup> Marshall Sklare and Joseph Greenblum, *Jewish Identity on the Suburban Frontier* (New York, 1967); Leventman, "Fathers and Sons," 289–292.

**GRANDMA AND GRANDPA NATHENSON**, Fern Wolf's grandparents (first names unknown), were both born in the United States but of Lithuanian parents. The picture was taken in about 1904. Note the mismatched top of Grandma Nathenson's dress, pieced from leftover fabric.



**THE HANDSOME**, smiling, prosperous-looking people below are, from left, Mary Nathenson Bloom, Abraham S. Bloom, and children Fern (now Wolf) and Jerome F. The picture was taken in 1917 in Kansas City, Missouri, where Bloom had a wartime military supply business for a couple of years.

**TENNIS, ANYONE?** Not everyone was poor in the 1930s. Irving Greene, an uncle of Rhoda Lewin's and a young newspaper reporter, poses with his bride Nioma in front of his wife's parents' home. **THE PHOTO** below of two unidentified children is from the Wolk family album.



# Oral History Techniques

Rhoda G. Lewin

ORAL HISTORY has become an increasingly popular research technique since historian Allan Nevins first gave it the scholar's imprimatur as director of the Oral History Research Office at Columbia University in 1945. Oral history goes by other names in other fields: to the public opinion analyst, it is elite interviewing; to the social scientist, it is qualitative research. Whatever the name, though, the technique seems to be simplicity itself: the interviewer/investigator asks the respondent to talk about an event, a period of time, a job, a way of life — whatever has happened in that respondent's life that is unique or of interest to the interviewer.

There is far more to good oral history, however, than finding a respondent and turning on a tape recorder. Oral history is an art, an empathic one-to-one relationship between a source person and a good listener. It is a demanding art, for the interviewer must be able to think and react on many levels simultaneously. He must listen to what the respondent is saying while he thinks of the question he just asked to make sure it is being answered. He must remember what has already been covered in the interview, what topics he wants to return to to explore more thoroughly, and what he hopes to cover. He must anticipate where he is going to go conversationally if the respondent seems to be almost through with the subject, and must be formulating in his mind the transition to a new topic while he considers whether the current subject has been completely exhausted. He has to have researched his subject and the era or topic under discussion so that he has a list of subjects or questions to refer to and a theoretical frame of reference which includes areas of knowledge to be explored during the interview.

The oral historian encourages the respondent to structure his own account and lets him introduce to a considerable extent his own notions of what he considers relevant. The good interviewer avoids questions which can be answered with a simple yes or no, questions which suggest their own answers, long and complex questions, and academic jargon. He avoids ambiguous wording and threatening questions, using instead questions which are open-ended and thus will, one hopes, elicit long-forgotten thoughts and feelings. His follow-up questions are usually of the "reason-why" variety; the simplest is "why?", but the variations are infinite. They may include "Why do you say that?" or "Why do you feel that way?" or "What made you change your mind?" and

"What do you think are the reasons?" Such questions explore both knowledge and memory and provide the quotable quotes which add sparkle and credibility to research. Through oral history one learns the picturesque details, the atmosphere, the informed guess, the unintended insights that teach us how people interacted and why they behaved as they did. History becomes accessible to us all, and is made vivid through the description of events on a human scale.

Here are some additional, often basic but sometimes neglected, "how-tos" for the oral historian:

Use the best equipment you can get, preferably a plug-in tape recorder. If your tape recorder is battery-operated, buy fresh batteries before an interview.

Start with a new, clean tape for each interview. Sixty-minute tapes are best.

Practice with your tape recorder at home.

Learn something about the history of the time period and the person you are studying so that you know what the important questions are. Then you will not have to interrupt to ask for factual details, and you will understand why people did what they did, when they did.

Make an appointment for the interview. Be on time and be neat, clean, polite. Remember, your respondent is doing *you* a favor.

Find a quiet, relaxing place for the interview.

Set up your equipment, then set the microphone down and do not touch it during the interview. *Never* hold the microphone or hold it in the respondent's face.

Get acquainted first. Talk about something of mutual interest — sports, weather, or explain how the tape recorder works. This gives you both time to relax.

To make sure you are recording, ask your respondent to tape a testing sentence first. Then play it back to make sure you are recording and at the proper volume.

During the interview, talk as little as possible. You know about yourself. It is your respondent you are interested in.

Be a good listener, eager, attentive. Look interested. Even good respondents need to know they are talking about the right things.

Have a list of subject areas or questions handy to refer to; they are your "security blanket." Make sure they are broad subjects such as the depression, or World War I, or the respondent's business or organization.

While the respondent is talking, have paper and a

pen or pencil handy for two reasons: (1) you may think of a question to ask or hear something you do not understand and want to ask about later; (2) you can jot down names of people and places the respondent mentions so you can ask him or her to spell them for you at the end of the interview.

The *kinds* of questions you ask and *how* you ask them are crucial. Avoid questions which can be answered with a yes or a no. Ask "reason-why" questions — "Why do you feel that way?" and so on. Phrase your questions carefully so they do not sound insulting.

Let the respondent structure the interview; let him or her tell you what he or she thinks is important. Do not try to *make* your respondent talk about what *you* are interested in. Do not press for more or for details when your respondent wants to stop or change the subject. Do not make your respondent angry. *Never* argue.

When the interview is over, make sure you have written down the following data: full name of respondent (if a married woman, include maiden name); full name of interviewer, respondent's address and telephone number; date, time, place; any other pertinent information about circumstances surrounding interview.

You *must* ask your respondent to sign a legal release form. The Minnesota Historical Society form is simple but adequate.

Always remember to say "thank you."

When transcribing your tape, do not make any changes. Do not omit anything unless you note the omission in your manuscript. You can, however, omit "filler" words like "uh."

Never destroy your tapes.

For miscellaneous works on techniques, see:

Willa K. Baum, *Oral History for the Local Historical Society* (Nashville, Tenn., 1971).

———, *Transcribing and Editing Oral History* (Nashville, Tenn., 1977).

Lewis Anthony Dexter, ed., *Elite and Specialized Interviewing* (Evanston, Ill., 1970).

Amelia R. Fry, "The Nine Commandments of Oral History," in *Journal of Library History*, January, 1968, pp. 63-73.

Leo A. Goodman, "Snowball Sampling," in *Annals of Mathematical Statistics*, 32:148-170 (March, 1961).

Norman Hoyle, "Oral History," in *Library Trends*, July, 1972, pp. 60-82.

James Hoopes, *Oral History: An Introduction for Students* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1979).

Stanley L. Payne, *The Art of Asking Questions* (Princeton, N.J., 1951).

ond generation. Members of the "first generation" had to learn English after their arrival in the United States; otherwise both generations are of similar age, place of early residence, and cultural and religious backgrounds, and they struggled as one against poverty, the depression, anti-Semitism, and other social trauma. It should therefore come as no surprise that the respondents in this study form a remarkably homogeneous group despite their generational differences. There is no discernible difference in adjustment between Ida Sanders (first generation) and Florence Greene and Isadore Goldberg (both second generation), all of whom were born in 1900, or between Ernie Fliegel and Maury Schanfield, one "first" and the other "second" generation, but both born in 1904 and twinlike in their life patterns. Moreover, the 1920s' first generation is in many ways different from the first generation which had come earlier, both in a far more rapid acculturation and in a strong resemblance to their age-mates, the second-generation children of the 1905 immigrants, perhaps because the so-called first-generation immigrant of 1924 encountered a far different world from that of the first-generation immigrant of, say, 1905. Talking pictures, the radio, automobiles, unions and higher wages, women's rights, prohibition and repeal, the decline of the extended family, mechanization of work and housekeeping, improved international communication, and a host of other historic changes made acculturation different, and less traumatic in many ways, for 1924's "first generation."

A new definition of generation, then, well-supported by the life histories in this study, is that of a loosely defined group whose members share a common location in the historical dimension of the social process. They are all at the same place at the same time, they are exposed to common experiences, they are all adults, and that is all. Their place of birth and age of arrival in the United States appear to have no bearing on their social and cultural adjustments.

BOUND UP with the questions of marginality and generation is one of the most prominent themes in immigrant history, the assumption that the passage from *shtetl* culture and American ghetto into American modernity usually had to be made at the expense of one's Jewishness. In this study, however, the respondents' ambivalence toward their parents' religion would seem to be more the healthy ambivalence, the adolescent rebellion, of the maturing child in a changing society. Of course, to interview seventeen persons and not have one mention a youthful rejection of his or her origin and religion is not to say that such feelings did not exist. But it is to suggest that the rejection theme is too final, that what happened was a tempering, a modification of orthodoxy, an adjustment to a modern and very different society that was quite in keeping with Judaism's tradi-

tional ability to adjust to new conditions in the Diaspora, the dispersion of the Jews outside the Holy Land.

The newcomers to America felt the full effect of the Talmudic saying "If you live in the generation of Rabban Gamaliel, do according to the precepts of Rabban Gamaliel — and if you live in the generation of Rabbi Yoseh, do according to the precepts of Rabbi Yoseh." Each age had emphasized different values in the Jewish religion; the industrial revolution of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries brought with it civil emancipation and breakdown of the Jews' ghetto-isolation. European Jews, eager for secular education and a place in society on an equal footing with gentiles, began to modify or even to abandon their age-old ceremonies and forms of worship. And the changes accelerated among the immigrants, suddenly freed from the pervasive religiosity of the old ghetto community.<sup>30</sup>

Before the beginning of the nineteenth century, almost everybody in the Jewish ghetto was "Orthodox." Orthodoxy's adherents revered all the dogmas, doctrines, statutes, and commandments of their ancient religion as fixed and unalterable. The commandments — the 613 *mitzvot* — governed everything an Orthodox Jew said and did each day. The younger, more Americanized Orthodox Jews might abandon their beards and long sideburns, and their wives might stop wearing the *sheitel* (wig) customary for married women, but they observed with close attention to detail the Sabbath and all the many holy days on the Jewish religious calendar, they continued faithful to the dietary laws (*kashrut* or kosher) and moral laws; they did not ride or work on the Sabbath and holy days; men and women sat in separate sections of the synagogue; the men wore prayer shawls and covered their heads when they prayed.

Reform Judaism was begun by western European Jews who wanted to be accepted on an equal footing with gentiles in every area of life. These westernized Jewish intellectuals, the prosperous merchants, their educated wives, all saw traditional Judaism as embarrassingly exotic and restrictive. Denying that the Torah was divinely revealed, they abandoned much of the symbolism and traditions of Judaism. In Germany, where Reform was worked out in detail, their hymns were in German, sung to German Protestant tunes with organ accompaniment played by a Christian organist. In America they would pray and sing in English. Men and women no longer sat apart in the synagogue but occupied family pews. The men were bareheaded. Instead of the familiar babble of Orthodox prayer — each man talking aloud to his God — people prayed silently. The Mosaic-Rabbinic laws on diet, dress, and behavior were modernized or discarded.

In the middle, as it were, was Conservative Judaism, a new American variation based on the belief that life is fluid and conditions constantly changing; that to survive,

the Jewish religion must change, retaining as many as possible of the traditional beliefs, ceremonies, and practices *if* they are relevant to contemporary culture and do not conflict with scientific fact. Conservative Judaism modified rather than rejected tradition and ancient laws. For example, Conservative Jews did not feel that they had violated the Sabbath ordinances against making a fire by pressing a light switch to create illumination. Men and women sat together in the synagogue and prayed in both Hebrew and English. However, they observed every festival and fast day, covered their heads and wore prayer shawls in the synagogue, and said the appropriate blessings.

To some, the transition seemed abrupt, almost frightening: "I can well remember how some of these immigrant families, real Orthodox and real observant — it wasn't a matter of more than one year, or two years, or three years, the boys, especially, became nonaffiliated. It was all so quick!" For others, it was a gradual transition. The parents were Orthodox, but the boys were *Bar Mitzvah* at thirteen in a Conservative synagogue. Fifteen of the seventeen persons interviewed for this study began life as Orthodox Jews. Today, two are Orthodox, but only one is affiliated with an Orthodox synagogue, nine are Conservative, and seven are Reform. One is "intoxicated with the richness of the Jewish tradition" but finds the Conservative way more orderly and therefore more enjoyable. Others, like her brother, "didn't decide to go a different way, I just drifted."<sup>31</sup>

What was rejected, judging from this study and from the evidence all about us, was the sometime inconvenience of Orthodox religious observance. The first thing to go was the Lord's injunction to remember the Sabbath and keep it holy. One of the most Orthodox respondents was the proprietor of a grocery in a non-Jewish neighborhood, who felt he had to stay open on Saturday to make a living. Children who sold newspapers to help support their families worked on Saturdays, too, and the parents could not afford to demur. If you owned a fish market, or were a peddler, or worked for a Jewish firm, perhaps you could rest on the Sabbath. If not, you worked.

Also symbolic of the breach in the "fences" that surrounded the Orthodox Jew was what one man calls "the

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<sup>30</sup> For this and three paragraphs following, see Nathan Anshel, *The Book of Jewish Knowledge*, 230–236 (New York, 1964). Forms of Jewish worship vary slightly, of course, from country to country and congregation to congregation, just as they do in other religions.

<sup>31</sup> For this and two paragraphs following, see Jewish Community Center, "Community Self Discovery: Family Life," March 23, 1976; Schanfield interview; Mayberg interview; Flicgel interview; Schoff interview; Berman, "Family Chronicle," 21.

*kashrut* revolt," the young people's move away from religious restrictions on various foods and food combinations. Some of the symbolism also disappeared, the outward trappings of Orthodox ways more fitted to smaller communities and a slower pace of life. After a few years, nobody seemed to have time to carry the symbolic *lulav* (palm branch) and *ethrog* (citron) from house to house during *Sukkoth*, the harvest festival. Friday night was still "special" for many, with the family gathered for a festive meal and the lighting of the Sabbath candles, but in the Old Country there had been no Friday night high school basketball or football games, no Friday night symphony concerts or plays in a concert hall or theater too far away to reach on foot. Gradually, things changed.

Some, indeed, would say that it was the immigrants themselves, the parents, who led the way. One remembers parents who were "proud of being Jews," although they were never very religious, and another remembers a father who "didn't have too much interest in religion." The Halperns, newly arrived from Rumania, argue in their Minneapolis kitchen:

Ma: You've got to do that because it's the Jewish way.

Pa: You've got to give, if you want to keep your children. . . . If you don't go along with your children, you get left behind.<sup>32</sup>

However, the sense of Jewishness persists, even for the most assimilated, in affiliations with Jewish organizations, in associations with non-Jews made self-conscious by their knowing that they represent all Jews in the eyes of the outsider, in self-acknowledgment as Jews, in a continuing concern for "my people." One of the most assimilated speaks with great pride of being descended from the great tenth-century Rabbi Meir of Rothenburg. Another who attended synagogue recently for the first time in many years says, "God, how ignorant I am! Why didn't I have enough study to learn all this, to know all this?"<sup>33</sup>

American mass culture, industrialization, urbanization and geographic mobility, free public education, the American emphasis on childhood and youth with its concomitant de-emphasis of adult values and culture patterns, and the generous financial and social rewards

often enjoyed by the immigrant who cast off his Old World ways — all worked to integrate the immigrant into the national language and the common culture. Philip Taylor has coined the term "disappearance phenomena" for the speed with which immigrants supposedly abandoned their ethnic heritage and became culturally indistinguishable, but the inherent anomaly in the "de-ethnization" of the immigrant — that so many could be "de-ethnized" so rapidly but did not disappear — bears more study than it has had. We are only beginning to realize that "maintenance phenomena" always existed, but were considered unimportant by scholars and writers bemused by the melting pot concept. Certainly oral histories and memoirs can be a rich source of materials documenting how Jews or other groups retained their ethnicity.<sup>34</sup>

To sum up, then, a problem with much of immigrant history would seem to be what Gavin Langmuir calls social epistemology, a process wherein ideas are accepted and stay current because "everybody" believes them, because "authorities" with academic titles or religious positions espouse them, or because no one bothers energetically to criticize them. It is social epistemology which provides approximately the same warranty for the myth of the failed Jewish father, the so-called second generation's rejection of its parents' ethnicity and religion, or the widely held belief that Jews have a peculiar, innate ability to make money, as it does for the scientific truths derived from the most rigorous investigation. Oral histories and memoirs can be a first step in the re-examination of such stereotypes. They can be of immense and continuing value to scholars in many disciplines whose perceived image of the immigrant is sometimes flat, distorted, or incomplete. Scholars might also find that immigrant Jews, who have probably been studied more extensively than any other ethnic group, are basically just like everyone else in their adjustment to American society and therefore useful as models for other ethnic studies. And perhaps most important of all, oral histories and memoirs can be a rich source of questions to investigate through quantitative research.<sup>35</sup>

THE AUTHOR would like to thank the following for allowing her to use various photographs: The Jewish Community Center of Greater Minneapolis, Florence Greene, Sally Lazarus Krishel, Harry Rapaport, Fern Wolf, and Deborah Wolk. The photographs of Eddie Schwartz and Ernie Fliegel are published through the courtesy of the *Minneapolis Tribune*; the one of Plymouth Avenue North in the 1940s is from the Minnesota Historical Society's audio-visual library.

<sup>32</sup> Hymes interview; Blanche Halpern Goldberg interview.

<sup>33</sup> Shapiro interview; Schanfield interview.

<sup>34</sup> Philip A. M. Taylor, *The Distant Magnet: European Immigration to the U.S.A.*, 21 (London, 1971).

<sup>35</sup> Gavin Langmuir, "Tradition, History and Prejudice," in *Jewish Social Studies*, 31:157-164 (July, 1968).



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