

Temple Israel Archives

Interview of Herschel & Shirley Feibelman, Helen Wax

Date Unknown

Herschel & Shirley Feibelman

Page 1

MEMPHIS JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY
BATCH 2, TAPE 6, PAGE 1
HERSCHEL & SHIRLEY FEIBELMAN, HELEN WAX

WJ 1

Herschel Feibelman

Shirley Feibelman

HF: My father was an immigrant. He had grown up in a small community in Germany, Rulzheim. The Feibelmans had lived there for many years. We have positive identification of forebears going back to 1732, which coincidentally is the birth year of George Washington. And when he had become Bar Mitzvah, he came to Jackson, Mississippi, and lived from that time, which would have been about 1880, through 1922 in Mississippi. And then because of what we would now call the Depression, but what was then described as a panic, it was an economical adversity, and he moved to Memphis and was employed here. By that time I was 2 1/2 or 3 years old. My family was conscious of the difficulties that a young man would have going through life if he had to give as his birthplace, Hushpuckena, Mississippi. So they were kind enough to rush to Memphis and let me be born in the Baptist Hospital here.

My father was a, an employee in the Men's Ready to Wear of a department store. He was 52 years old when I was born, and from the standpoint of one's work life, I think perhaps his better years had been used in, in his own business, which was not successful.

I've pondered when I first became aware of being a Jew, and I cannot fix that upon any age or any time. And I believe as much as anything else, my awareness grew out of the fact that in our home, some things were not done that were done in the homes of people in our neighborhood. I'm speaking of course, of the Christmas celebration, and also the fact that my parents at that time kept kosher, and I was taught prayers from the time I

MEMPHIS JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY
BATCH 2, TAPE 6, PAGE 2
HERSCHEL & SHIRLEY FEIBELMAN, HELEN WAX

could begin speaking. So there's no point in my life in which I can say I'm, I was suddenly aware that I'm a Jew. When I became aware, and it's very difficult for people to know that very moment, I was probably then aware that I'm a Jew.

The popular con... conception is that all Jews were wealthy. My family wasn't wealthy at all. And we lived in a part of town which was not a slum, but was lower middle class, so to speak. I, there were no conflicts in my home or in my life. I have an older sister and my relationship with her was what might be expected among any two siblings. We became much closer in, in adult life and surely as the whole drama of our lives has unfolded.

I, I was, comfortable all of my life with being able to learn. Some part of my development grew out of the fact that almost from the very beginning of my experiences in public school I was two years ahead of the other children. I realize now that that was a mixed blessing. Because I never played anything but right field. And I jokingly say that there was one time in choosing up sides, one side took me and the other side took a girl. When I went to dances or something like that it was pretty tough. I, I had to look around to find someone anywhere near my size to dance with. And that also created a little bit of a difficulty because in the religious school I was dealing with children of my age who were behind me so to speak in school. And I really never developed a close association with any of them. Not relegating the difficulty to age alone, but just, it simply was something that I didn't fully overcome.

Oh, I grew up in Temple Israel. When I was five years old, my, my mother took me to Temple Israel, and I could at this very moment show you the spot where I met Mrs.

MEMPHIS JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY
BATCH 2, TAPE 6, PAGE 3
HERSCHEL & SHIRLEY FEIBELMAN, HELEN WAX

Vosse, who was the lower grade superintendent , and from then on in, that was where I considered myself belonging. My parents were not members of Temple Israel then.

I've never been defensive about being a Jew. And I have always been comfortable in it. I don't even like some people who try to avoid using the word Jew. The euphemism like 'Jewish people' or 'your folks' or something like that. So it was never anything that was repugnant to it. My mother had a limited education, but I never thought of her as anything but fully informed, and that was justified, because she was an ardent reader. And that was the pattern of my early years. And what I learned about Judaism, and what I learned about Jews essentially satisfied me.

I want to quote Dr. Harry Ettelson who was the Rabbi when I began. And he, he was a man who not only was so very perceptive and sensitive to what he was seeking to do , but he also had a remarkable capacity to teach by phrases. And one that he said was, religion is not taught, it's caught. I didn't have to differentiate in my mind between what I learned in the religious school, which was, of course, to some extent academic, and what I experienced in my home.

[BACKGROUND DISCUSSION]

Well, I said that there were no experiences in the religious school which represented conflicts with what I saw in my home. I point out that that's not, that's not the case with everyone. There are people who are taught in the religious school about some observances, lighting candles, saying blessings and it doesn't take place in their home.

MEMPHIS JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY
BATCH 2, TAPE 6, PAGE 4
HERSCHEL & SHIRLEY FEIBELMAN, HELEN WAX

So they perhaps don't call their parents to account, but they are aware that religion is almost focused in one place or another. That wasn't my experience. I knew what Shabbos was. I know what Pesach was, and I knew what the holidays are. And it was part of my life in growing up to participate in a home where this was considered our life.

No. I don't, I don't like adjectives for Jews. My mother was a traditional Jew. She... she was not going to change her attitude by some conveniences. I never will forget in Memphis, for instance, when the Coca-Cola Bottling Company decided that they wanted to exploit the opportunity for a wider sale during Passover, and all of a sudden we had Coca-Cola is kosher for Pesach. And in our family we enjoyed that because it was exactly the same Coca-Cola it was before with a little cap on top of it slightly different. And I don't, I think that I became conscious of being a Jew in a way that was, and this is fortunate of course, a comfortable way of living. There, there was no pain when my father went to services, when we later moved and he davened, as the term is used at the B'nai B'rith Home, we walked. We walked. But I was never told that you can't ride on the Sabbath or something like that. It was somewhat flexible to the degree that I don't want to use the term Orthodox, since that might imply some rigidity.

That is a subject that I'm really close to.

I don't like an adjective applied to the term Jew. If it is done so in a manner to distinguish Jews from one another. There are two aspects about this which to me are very important. First of all, in our lifetime, we witnessed -- some people didn't really want to witness this, some people wanted to avoid it, and even yet some people think it

MEMPHIS JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY
BATCH 2, TAPE 6, PAGE 5
HERSCHEL & SHIRLEY FEIBELMAN, HELEN WAX

didn't happen, but the world witnessed a barbarism, which is unequalled in history. One cannot fully comprehend the destruction of six million people. Now, no one asked these people about adjectives. No one said, are you a Reform Jew, are you a Conservative Jew, do you believe in Reconstructionist and so on. They were Jews and despised and destroyed as Jews. I think the second thing is this. We cannot avoid a common history and we shouldn't. The problem, which is tearing apart the State of Israel is the fact that some people do want to use adjectives, or do want to use distinctions between Jews.

And even though from time to time that's real, I know very well that there are families in Memphis right now who would almost as soon have a daughter marry a non-Jew as a Reform Jew. And I deplore that. I think that Shirley and I, speaking around our dinner table, and that's where children become imbued so to speak, with many of the attitudes they carry on in life, I don't think they ever heard us talk about differences between people. Hopefully we try to talk about something which was common among everyone. And that of course, goes beyond the business of being a Jew or a member of a race.

SF: Well, you know the luck factor in life is a great thing. And Herschel's, one of Herschel's best friend's mother came to visit my family in Kansas. And at the time --

SF: I came to, to Memphis because of a luck factor. One of Herschel's best friend's mother came to this town in Kansas where I'm from. And she .. it was in October. And she said, you know, this is a small town, not many Jewish people. I think you should come visit us over the holidays. And I came. And I barely went back. I went back for about a year or so. And then we were married. And Herschel was in the service at the

MEMPHIS JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY
BATCH 2, TAPE 6, PAGE 6
HERSCHEL & SHIRLEY FEIBELMAN, HELEN WAX

time. So I followed him around through the service until he went overseas. And then I moved to Memphis.

Well, the Jewish community of Memphis seemed, you know, very much like the community I had come from, only much larger. And it didn't take me too long to fit into the, the Temple. And I have always been a doer, so it wasn't long before I was really involved with their sisterhood and with the National Council of Jewish Women, and I progressed from there.

I don't know. I guess what was important to me is that it was very much like from where I had come, only much larger. I had come from a community where many of the people were related to me. And I didn't have too hard a time in Memphis, although I wasn't related to that many people, of feeling like the people here were relatives, also, or good friends.

Well, both Herschel and I have been very interested in the Temple, and the Jewish community at large for a long time. And we've belonged to many of the Jewish organizations. And Herschel was President of the Temple when it moved. And a few years had passed, and I was out at the Temple one day and in the, in one of the rooms were a lot of boxes that had never been unpacked. This was about four or five years already. And I decided I'd like to see what was in those. And I found a lot of the old Confirmation programs and a lot of things of Dr. Ettelson's, and just many things that I knew could not be destroyed. And I also knew that if I told anybody about them they'd

MEMPHIS JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY
BATCH 2, TAPE 6, PAGE 7
HERSCHEL & SHIRLEY FEIBELMAN, HELEN WAX

be gone. So I talked to the Joe Boston, who was then the director and we started the archives.

The Archives started around 1985 because it took us a little while to get organized and all. And it's been a slow process of getting people interested in it. And we, we now seem to be going along with, with more people interested in it, and hope to do a lot more advertising in the fall.

Well, the, the most that the Archives has been used so far is by the children in the religious school, and I hope that they will indoctrinate their families into what the archives are as they grow older and be more interested themselves. And through the Jewish Historical Society I hope to get more people interested. It, it takes a long time to get people to realize that what they're giving to the archives isn't going to be lost. It's going to be something that can be found. And that, that if they're keeping it in their attic it is going to get lost. My, my motto is here today, gone tomorrow.

Well, one of the classes, I think about the fourth grade very often, do reports on their parents. And those that can find their parent in the archives have used them in that way. They've done genealogy kind of things and been helped by their parents of course. And that's helped us because then we get the, their report. I don't -- that's mainly the way it's used.

MEMPHIS JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY
BATCH 2, TAPE 6, PAGE 8
HERSCHEL & SHIRLEY FEIBELMAN, HELEN WAX

Well, not quite 55. We've been married 55 years. But when he came home from the ... well I was here, but then when he came home from the service, we really had a home then.

Well, Temple Israel now is much more, much less social I think, and much more religious in its bent. We have so many new people coming into town that we deal with them more at the Temple and I don't know. What do you think?

(BACKGROUND DISCUSSION)

Well, you know, now they have more ritual. They, I think they have some evenings where they have programs that are religious in nature. And that's about it.

Well, there ... there are different things that they do. The Rabbi now wears a Tallis and they, they march the Torah around through the Temple when they take it out. And they use more Hebrew than they used to. Basically that's, I think, the things that seem different.

Well, it, it's more ... this signifies to me that several things. That the movement itself has moved in this direction, The Reform Movement. And the people that have joined our Temple, a lot of them, have been people that had a more religious background than the people that were there before.

MEMPHIS JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY
BATCH 2, TAPE 6, PAGE 9
HERSCHEL & SHIRLEY FEIBELMAN, HELEN WAX

Well, I haven't lived in but this one. I haven't even very often visited any others. So I don't know, you know, what other Jewish communities are like.

Well, [laughter]. .. Well, you know, I've always been a part of Temple Israel. I was president of their sisterhood, and I was president of this district and I was on the National Board. And Temple Israel has always been a big part of the whole Reform Movement. They've contributed many things in the past. And I've, I've liked being in that part.

Well, first of all I don't really -- I guess I've lived here long enough that I should feel like I'm a Southerner, but I don't ever think of myself as a Southerner. I think of myself just as a Jew that lives in this community

In dealing with, you know, mainly Southern communities. But I don't know, I don't feel like it was any different than when I lived, you know, in Kansas. It might be that Kan...

HF: Let's say first of all what it's not. It has little or nothing to do with the climate. It has little or nothing to do with the so-called Southern tradition, the Sir Walter Scott macho type of thing. Not at all. I think that Southern Jews were never huddled masses yearning to breathe free. There never was a ghetto among Southern Jews. I know for a fact that there were at least two neighborhoods in Memphis which tried in a much earlier time to avoid having Jews live there. But that was sub rosa and that was, even in its best effort to succeed a poor gentleman's agreement. Jews in the South can be differentiated between Jews other where .. perhaps in the northern community in this manner. If you're

MEMPHIS JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY
BATCH 2, TAPE 6, PAGE 10
HERSCHEL & SHIRLEY FEIBELMAN, HELEN WAX

on an elevator with a Jew in Memphis, you understand, and a person says, to that person "Are you a Jew?" And if the person addresses you, you say yes. If you were doing that in New York or perhaps even now in California, and someone said to a person on the elevator, "Are you a Jew?" They would say, yeah, why? We, we have been made to feel comfortable because we have been comfortable. Jews provided the South, which had an abysmal caste system throughout much, for instance, of the Mississippi Delta, but we've provided the South with a viable middle class. I think that speaks for the benefit of a community as well as the fact that Jews have prospered in doing so.

Yes, your question was how would one describe the difference in the patterns of worship now and at an earlier time. Now, I do a little bit called Rip Van Weinberg. And this is a man who fell asleep in Temple Israel when it was located at Poplar and Montgomery, and just about that time everybody was rising for the closing part of the service, the Adoration. And no one paid much attention to him and they just moved him along with a few other things from the building to where we are now. And 30 years later he woke up and he saw a different pattern of worship. Yeah, a different group of people, to be sure, but a different pattern of worship. And I think that it could be dealt with this way. Classic Reform Judaism was essentially rational intellectual and not necessarily focused upon the emotional aspect. We had a choir, it was a double octet of fine people as far as their vocal talents were concerned, but they were not Jews. And it always seemed to me to be incongruous. That here I was sitting there worshipping in a passive sense, so to speak, while some Gentiles sang to me the Hebrew responses. That, of course, no longer exists. I think also the Jews everywhere have been sensitized, and I would apply to that the two significant events in this century. I don't like the word Holocaust. It's

MEMPHIS JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY
BATCH 2, TAPE 6, PAGE 11
HERSCHEL & SHIRLEY FEIBELMAN, HELEN WAX

too antiseptic to suit me, but that tragedy, that barbarism will linger with us. And the second thing is the establishment of the State of Israel. These are emotional experiences no matter how little we want to attach ourselves to them. I saw that clearly in 1967 when I saw some people who were almost detached from Judaism --

[END SIDE A -- BEGIN SIDE B]

-- If you were to compare the services of an earlier time, you would say, the Minister or the Preacher. In the true sense now, these men who conduct our services now are Rabbis. They are teachers. I can, I can give you an idea about the ceremonies. I will use myself perhaps as an example. When I became 13 in 1932, [clears throat] there had been no Bar Mitzvah in Temple Israel. And when my mother spoke of this with Dr. Ettelson, he, he was not, he was not opposed to it, he just didn't know how to say yes to it. And so nothing happened there. I celebrated that ritual in the B'nai B'rith home. It was a remarkable experience for a youth or a boy, 12 or 13 years old. And it lingers with me. Now we now have a Bar Mitzvah almost every week and it... it would ... It's worthwhile taking a moment now to say this. Bar Mitzvah is a term that is grossly misunderstood. It doesn't describe a ceremony. It doesn't describe an orgy of gift wrapping and all that. Bar Mitzvah means a son of the covenant, and it applies to the person who is participating. And if you attend one of our Bar Mitzvahs now, you will find in a very meaningful fashion that there has been a preparation for this in which the child, as well as the family, have come to see themselves as a part of a heritage. I don't I don't invite Dr. Ettelson and his generation with having failed us. I don't see that at all.

MEMPHIS JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY
BATCH 2, TAPE 6, PAGE 12
HERSCHEL & SHIRLEY FEIBELMAN, HELEN WAX

But I think now we have different needs, and I think they're being met in a different manner.

There are still residual oppositions which to me are hardly in keeping with the 20th century among traditional Jews. A woman is allowed nowhere near the Torah. The, the ceremony of Bat Mitzvah in Temple Israel is a beautiful example of how a young woman at this, you know, stage of life, this blossoming part of her life, participates as does anyone else. Gender is, is overcome so to speak. Because a woman might be in her impurity, as we would say in Leviticus. She's not going to get near that Temple or that Torah in a... in an Orthodox Synagogue. So the manner in which Bat Mitzvah is celebrated there and in some far reaches of the Conservative movement is something of a nature on Saturday afternoon or Saturday evening. You know what I mean, that kind of thing.

The whole realm of life cycle events is not only a necessary part of a congregational program, this is true in Christianity. I'm sure it's true in Islam and so on. And we have life cycle events. I can hardly believe that anyone would expect a funeral for a woman to be different than that of a man. And fortunately, that is the manner in which we approach the ritual of Bat Mitzvah. [clears throat] Because it's important to know that the role of a woman in Judaism is not simply the last chapter in the Book of Proverbs, where a woman of valor is described. Or something, if I may be parochial for just a moment, where the Baptist group describes a woman as being happily submissive or something like that. A girl who becomes a Bat Mitzvah, is made to feel as much an integral part of this congregation, this family of Jews, this religious community as the boy.}

MEMPHIS JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY
BATCH 2, TAPE 6, PAGE 13
HERSCHEL & SHIRLEY FEIBELMAN, HELEN WAX

I said that the other day and I really don't want to say that. All of my life up till now.

Let me begin, an answer to a question that I've frequently dealt with in my own mind by quoting Robert Burns and wishing for the gift that we could see ourselves as others see us. Because to non-Jews in Memphis, we are not only in any peril, we occupy a wonderful position of security. If you were to indulge a Christian family with the same experience that you're doing with Shirley and me, and you were to say how many Jews are there in Memphis, it would very likely produce an answer of oh, maybe 50,000, or maybe 60... 40,000. There are actually hardly 10,000 Jews in the whole metropolitan community. And the reason that there is such a disparity between the numbers is that Jews in Memphis, and I think that this applies throughout the Southern community, are part of the community. They make contributions. There's hardly a cause in which Jews are not involved. And if they're not involved, people want them to be involved. Not merely because they can contribute, but because there's a vitality there. Now let me quickly say that there's another side to that. And it is a disturbing element. Namely the fear, sometimes almost a sense of panic that Jews have about their own continued existence. When I was a boy growing up, if there was such a thing as the term intermarriage, it was used so infrequently that it made no impression upon me. Now, particularly in the Southern community, but perhaps elsewhere over this country there is a percentage that is, if not alarming, a subject of great concern. So for the first time, maybe in the thousands of years, we are having to consider survival values. We have to ask ourselves what can be done and conversely what should not be done to make sure that there will be a continuity of Jewish life. But not just, mind you now, not just the

MEMPHIS JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY
BATCH 2, TAPE 6, PAGE 14
HERSCHEL & SHIRLEY FEIBELMAN, HELEN WAX

study of a religion. That can be done by an anthropologist. But people living as Jews. I read many formulae for survival, but I find that each of them is written by a person who qualifies what he says with the caveat that this may or may not work. And my hope is that even if there are dangers from within, you realize that I'm speaking of Jews who want to have all of the blandishments of a larger society. I would say to you that among the children of Temple Israel you will find a significant number, perhaps even something approaching a majority number of children who are not in public schools, who are in private schools and parochial schools. And we're going to have to deal with that, because they are going to have to ask themselves what should I preserve? Surely (?) which there aren't in the archives (SOUND LOW). We have artifacts to prove what Jews were. If you go to Temple you can see a beautiful exhibit of artifacts back into the Middle Ages, but that won't teach you (?) [LOW SOUND]

My hope is that we develop, not just for my generation, but for those succeeding, a determination to preserve and to continue something that is by any test of history, unique. Civilizations have come and gone and Jews are here, and my hope is that they are here to stay. I think that it is not within the providence of any one person or any one institution to ensure this. I think it has to be something along this nature. We have to want to be in order to be.

I have ambivalent feelings. There was a time in my life when I was prepared to champion my ideas about publication . . . public education to the degree that wherever I was, if the subject came up, I would become almost extreme in my expressions. But I

MEMPHIS JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY
BATCH 2, TAPE 6, PAGE 15
HERSCHEL & SHIRLEY FEIBELMAN, HELEN WAX

have learned that that is almost immature in our present environment. And I say that for this reason. If we will be a saving remnant, a cliché that is used in Jewish history from time to time, we have to have some Jews that are educated as Jews. And the public school experience for the many, many advantages that it has will not provide that. If you, if you find people who think that they can supplement the public school experience by something else, and the afternoon and so forth, you're going to find the family whose daughter is more interested in ballet, or a son who is more interested in Little League Baseball and that will be given priority over the study of Judaism. Let me, let me summarize my feelings in this way. I think we should be conscious of the fact that the word study does not have its derivation in scholarship or in learning. The word study, if I may be pedantic, comes from a Latin verb meaning "to be eager." And as long as there are Jews who are eager, I know some who are on each end of the spectrum and those who float around the middle, as long as they have the eagerness to be Jews, I think we will survive, and think that whether or not these Jews are products of public school or private school will not nearly be so important as their feelings about what they themselves want to be.

And I, I would like for Shirley to tell you how emphatically the Jewish home and the Jewish family play its great part along with the Synagogue and the tradition. We have that, we're very fortunate we had that.

[BACKGROUND DISCUSSION]

MEMPHIS JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY
BATCH 2, TAPE 6, PAGE 16
HERSCHEL & SHIRLEY FEIBELMAN, HELEN WAX

SF: Well, one of the things that Herschel and I have been very lucky about is that we have four children and fortunately they're all married to Jews and they have always been very close. We, we are a family that celebrates together and everything we do when we, when they went to religious school they went together and their father took them, and I, at times have taught in the religious school, and it has been a wonderful experience. We also have nine grandchildren, and they are all very, very close. Kind of interesting because for the most part they are in pairs except for one group who are in threes. All born in years like that, and it's made them very, very close. And whenever, we have never had a family celebration and many of the holidays that we celebrate, all of these children, although they're all grown and some of them have families of their own, have missed coming to these events.

HF: It gets down to single things, sometimes mundane things. I want to talk about something that's very important, brisket. In our family, brisket is not just the description of a type of meat or a portion of a cow. Brisket is a celebration. And our children and grandchildren know that there may be good things you can get somewhere else, but here is the place for brisket. And we have resolved, Shirley and I, that if you could go to North Ireland, and find some of these maniacs who are still trying to bedevil each other, and sit them down to some of our brisket it would be peace on earth.

SF: I think there are other things in our family also. We did, we're just a fam... we're not a negative group of people. And things are always fun when we get together. We're always laughing and talking about all the things that happen to us. And sometimes that's Jewish things, sometimes it isn't.

MEMPHIS JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY
BATCH 2, TAPE 6, PAGE 17
HERSCHEL & SHIRLEY FEIBELMAN, HELEN WAX

BEGIN HELEN WAX

HW: I was raised in a Reform Temple. My family was active. My father was on the board. My mother was President of the Sisterhood, I was President of the Youth Group. That's how ultimately we taught the little things in life that change your life that you don't know about. We respected our Rabbi. Our Rabbi was an intellectual. He didn't give inspiring sermons. But I respected the things he said, and I just believed in Judaism without analyzing in the Temple... the Temple, so to speak. You know, we'd go to services. My family was involved. And I knew I was Jewish, and I had no shame about being Jewish. And I must say, I have never faced anti-Semitism in my life. When I went to college, there were no Jewish sororities. There were other sororities. I knew we weren't invited into them. But a Jewish sorority came and try... asked us, did they want us to set up a chapter, and we said no. We didn't want to divide up the Jewish girls and then who was in a sorority and who wasn't. But we didn't run around talking about being Jewish. When my son was at college at Princeton, he got a card at Hanukkah from a friend named Larry Kelly. And it was a Christmas card where he had cut out the word Hanukkah from someplace, Larry had, and pasted it over Christmas, and had written, just like you to cause a fellow trouble. This was a relationship that I never would have envisioned in my day, where a Jewish boy and a Gentile boy would be you know, palsy about that kind of thing, and joke, be able to you know, joke about it, but he still recognized it. And when this boy was a pilot during the war, and he was stationed out here for a while, and he left, well, it was a long story. But anyway, he wrote me a thank you note after he stayed with us, and he said, something about, it was like a year or two

MEMPHIS JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY
BATCH 2, TAPE 6, PAGE 18
HERSCHEL & SHIRLEY FEIBELMAN, HELEN WAX

later, it was for a Jewish holiday and he said, I have trouble keeping up with moveable feasts. See this was a relationship that didn't exist in my day. You didn't talk about being Jewish. You didn't joke about it with other people and they didn't comment on your being Jewish. You just knew you were. I went to, I worked for the Union for the American Hebrew Congregation. I was in charge of their Youth Department all during World War II. And that's where I came in contact with Jewish communities around the country, with Rabbis. And I respected what the people were doing, because the ones I came in contact, the Reform, were not ritual minded. They were talking about principles. They may not have been going out on the streets and the _____ going to black homes to find out how... whether they had any money. But to me, Judaism was just trying to live a good life and maintain your Judaism. Going for the holidays, going to Temple for that... and Yahrzeit and Kaddish. I remember we were in Canada and my father sought out the Temple, because he had Yahrzeit for his mother that week, and I said to him, why are you doing this? And he said, it's a matter of respect for your parents. You see this is what, the way I thought of as Judaism . . . you did these things out of respect, because it was an honorable thing to do.

Jews have always argued, discussed, had difference of opinions. Basically because I believe Judaism believes in the individual. There's nobody tells you exactly what to do all the time. You learn principles to live by, but you don't have to follow a script. And therefore, since Judaism is individually based, the congregation is made up of families, and families have differences, you, you, the Jews have always had the opportunity to express what they feel. So they argue with one another, which is the basis of democracy. Rabbi Wax was here for 30 some years. He was in the tradition of the Rabbis of Temple

MEMPHIS JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY
BATCH 2, TAPE 6, PAGE 19
HERSCHEL & SHIRLEY FEIBELMAN, HELEN WAX

Israel. When Rabbi Samfield, who was here for 44 years, died in 1915, he had been such a part of this community, had helped during the yellow fever and so on, the streetcars were stopped for a minute at the time of his funeral. Other Rabbis, Rabbi Fine... Rabbi, oh God -- see I'm getting stuck now. Rabbi Fineschreiber was the first one to speak out against a horrible lynching that was in this city Rabbi Wax took part in everything that he thought was for the welfare of the city, of... part of the building of the Mental Health Hospital is named for him because he was on the State Mental Health Commission for so long and was active in getting that hospital in Memphis. When he died, I have to say, the editorials, the television were unbelievable. And the one quote about him was, Rabbi Wax was the conscience of the community Rabbi, I mean, Monse... Father Vieron of the Greek Orthodox Church, he said, everybody in Memphis has his own minister, but everybody also has Rabbi Wax.. There's an article I have, my son had framed for me here, from the Catholic Diocese paper, which was entitled, "A Cedar Has Fallen In Lebanon." I'm not saying it just to praise him, but to show as a representative of Temple Israel, he stood very high in this congre.. . in this community And to this day, I was in the beauty shop today, and the lady said to me, oh, Mrs. Wax , I just heard the most marvelous comments about your husband. There isn't a week goes by all these years later that people still aren't talking about it. So I think the Temple can be proud that it has meant so much to this community.

Well, whatever it is, she's a descendent of his. Her father was Joseph Andrews who lived here. The Andrews lived here all through the years. And she is married and lives in Atlanta. John's been living in Atlanta for 20 years and I've been going there, and I always see Helen Andrews Revson when I go there. Her husband's in the hospital. I just

MEMPHIS JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY
BATCH 2, TAPE 6, PAGE 20
HERSCHEL & SHIRLEY FEIBELMAN, HELEN WAX

-- John took her fl. .. flowers . She wrote me and I just wrote her today. It's just there waiting to be mailed.

[BACKGROUND DISCUSSION]

We have in Memphis today, descendents of the original founders of our congregation, which was really the first congregation in the city . I .. Baron Hirsch says, it was, it came later. The families, even Joseph Andrews, the first man buried in the cemetery in Memphis, his descende nt , who now lives in Atlanta, is still an integral part of her congregation. But other names, descendents of the early first born of the co ngregation. We have families today who are still loyal to the Temple. Now they may not wear out the seats at the services but they are contributors and loyal to the Temple.

Just to day, I wrote a note to Helen Andrews Revson in Atlanta, whose parents are buried here in Memphis, and who herself is a descendent of Joseph Andrews, the first Jew buried in the cemetery in Memphis, Jewish cemetery in Memphis, and she is still connected with her own congregation in Atlanta, just as her family was connected here through generations.

[ROOM TONE FOR HELEN WAX]
