

Transcript of Interview with Beverly Greenberg
Small Towns Jewish History Project
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Rauh Jewish Archives
Library and Archives Division
Senator John Heinz History Center
Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania
1212 Smallman Street
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania 15222

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Words not audible will be marked [unclear]

Eric Lidji: Today is May 27, 2015. This is the Small Towns Oral History Project. I'm Eric Lidji, and we are in the library of Temple Hadar, why don't you start by stating your name.

Beverly Greenberg: My name's Beverly Greenberg, I'm a member of Temple Hadar Israel.

EL: All right, so we have a lot of congregations we want to talk about, so why don't you start by telling me where you grew up.

BG: I grew up in Ellwood City. I was born in Ellwood City, and I lived there all my life and I'm still in Ellwood City.

EL: What was Ellwood City, how did your family get to Ellwood City?

BG: Uh, well, I'm not Jewish, I'm a convert, but my husband's family, I can tell you about them if you'd like.

EL: Okay.

BG: His grandfather came from Pittsburgh. He was in the junk business with a wagon and junk.

EL: What was his name?

BG: His name was Morris Greenberg.

EL: And he had the junk business.

BG: And he came to Ellwood City in, actually came to Beaver Falls first where he had relatives. Then he came to Ellwood City because there were already too many junk yards in Beaver Falls so they said go to Ellwood City and start a junkyard. Which I think happened in a lot of cases, they just sent you on to the next town because there were too many of whatever.

EL: What year, what time period was this?

BG: He came in 1917.

EL: From where?

BG: From Beaver Falls.

EL: He was born in Beaver Falls?

BG: No, no, he was born in Russia. And he came, the story goes that he was in the Russian Army so he was wounded so he was sent home. He did not want to go back to the Russian Army in any way, so he hiked himself across Russia and made his way to Hamburg, Germany, worked along the way to make a little money and feed himself and whatever, and in Hamburg, Germany, he got on a ship to come to the United States. And so I'm not sure which port he came into, I don't know that information, and I believe he was sent to Cleveland, Ohio, first. And my husband's grandmother was in Cleveland, Ohio, apparently she was married and she was with child, so to speak, and she and her husband were in Cleveland and the husband, this is a very vague story and nobody can give us really date, place, time, whatever. But her husband there was killed in an accident. He reportedly fell off of a roof he was repairing or something, so he was killed. So Morris was there and since she had a child, my father-in-law, they were connected however, and they got married when my father-in-law was two years old.

EL: Who got married?

BG: Morris and his wife, Ida. Ida Rosenberg, she was from Beaver Falls. Anyway, so they came back to Beaver Falls, and then they came to Ellwood City. And my father-in-law, like I said, was two years old when they got married, so then he became, my father-in-law just took the name Greenberg so his name apparently was Solomon, if that was the name of the gentleman she was married to, but we can't find any birth certificates. Of course, my father-in-law would be 107 if he were alive, so back then not such great records were kept so we don't really have those things. The only reason we know about him being born in Cleveland is when he and my mother-in-law went to go to Israel on a trip, he needed his birth certificate. He didn't have one. And somehow they ended up finding that he was born in Cleveland. And I don't know if he ever actually had a birth certificate to tell you the truth. I don't know that. There were a lot of things that happened back in those days that people just didn't keep records of or they didn't talk about it afterwards.

EL: Right.

BG: So anyway they were in Ellwood City and they had this junk business in 1917, which turned into a little more than the junk business. It was a nice business and Morris also was in the coal-mining business. He would open little coal mines here and there. Then, we have papers about this, it was in the newspapers, he bought the town of Koppel.

EL: The whole town?

BG: He bought the whole town, for I think twenty... it's in the article, but I'm going to say twenty-three thousand dollars approximately.

EL: Koppel?

BG: He bought the town on Koppel.

EL: How do you spell it?

BG: K-O-P-P-E-L. And it's the next town over across the river in Beaver County from Ellwood City.

EL: Just a little company town?

BG: It was just a small town that had some, you know, some sort of businesses in it to make it a town. I can't remember exactly. And he and this other man, Mr. Eugene Lebowitz, Eugene was an insurance salesman, and my father-in-law bought the property but he was in partnership with Mr. Lebowitz. And then they sold the property, they sold the property back to the people who had homes there because it wasn't their property. However that worked with real estate I'm not really sure. And then they opened a big steel mill there.

EL: What was it called?

BG: B&W. B&W Steel Mill.

EL: What was your father-in-law's name?

BG: My father-in-law was Abe Greenberg.

EL: Okay. And what was his wife's name?

BG: Jenny.

EL: And so their son was Morris.

BG: No.

EL: I don't think I understand the family tree.

BG: Okay, Morris was the grand- my husband's grandfather.

EL: Oh, okay.

BG: Okay, and my husband is Sam.

EL: Oh, okay.

BG: Okay we're getting a little, I'm getting ahead of myself maybe.

EL: No, I just didn't, I thought Morris was your husband.

BG: No, no. My husband is Sam.

EL: Okay.

BG: Although my, his grandfather on occasion called himself Sam, so I don't know, I don't know. You know there's all sorts of variations.

EL: So Abe comes to Ellwood City.

BG: No, Morris comes to Ellwood City and Abe is his son.

EL: Okay.

BG: He came also. Because he was two years old. And then of course there were more children in the family. There were...

EL: So let's, just to make sure we have it, the first person to come from Russia was...

BG: Morris.

EL: Was Morris. And he went to Cleveland.

BG: Yeah.

EL: Because he had family there?

BG: I don't know that, or maybe they, you know, the different places in New York City would send people to different towns.

EL: Yeah.

BG: Where ever they thought they were...

EL: His wife was Ida?

BG: Ida. Ida Rosenberg.

EL: Ida Rosenberg, okay. And then their, their son was Abe.

BG: Right.

EL: Who married Jenny?

BG: Right.

EL: Okay, I've got it now.

BG: And that's my husband Sam, and that's his parents, Abe and Jenny.

EL: So Morris comes to Beaver Falls and then from there to Ellwood City.

BG: Right.

EL: And then he buys this town Koppel.

BG: Yeah.

EL: And then he starts this steel company, B&W.

BG: No he doesn't start it, it comes and he sells the property to B&W, I guess.

EL: Oh.

BG: So I don't know how that went down, financially, whatever, I have no idea it wasn't my business, that wasn't, and my husband doesn't know either because he never really asked. He never got involved in it. But...

EL: So let's pick up the story from there.

BG: Okay, with Koppel and B&W?

EL: Yeah.

BG: Okay, well then, then like I said he sold, Morris sold his interest in that and Mr. Lebowitz apparently sold his interest. And Mr. Lebowitz went on to become a real estate person and Oxford Center in Pittsburgh is his.

EL: Oh really?

BG: Yeah, his son, Eddie Lewis, was head of that. Now his daughter Myrna, who lived in Ellwood City and went to school, graduated with me, anyway, they're all part of that Oxford Development. So they're in the real estate development. So then there were more children with Morris and Ida. And, that's how I got it, I married Sam, that's how I got into the whole Jewish congregation in Ellwood City.

EL: So tell me about the congregation in Ellwood City.

BG: The congregation was quite flourishing, it started in the 19-1894, 1893-4-5 and those numbers because that seemed to be when everybody came and there were four families that were in the original group that came and I'm assuming they came from Pittsburgh. That I'm not positive, but I'm assuming they came from Pittsburgh, and where they came

from before that I'm not sure. Europe somewhere, but I'm not sure. And they were related. They were all related. There was the Schweigers, the Kellers, the Kaplans, and if I had my paperwork with me, there was one more family and I can't think of who they were right this minute. Anyway they came and they had it, everyone was married, and I don't know that they brought children with them but then they, of course, had children. And before you know it there was a little community because more people came. And I think in, I want to say 1916, they, well they met for services in each other's homes is what they did. And then one of the women, Mrs. Keller passed away, and they, she had always wanted to build a synagogue; she thought they needed their own place to worship. So in her memory they decided, well let's try to build, let's try to get a synagogue going here. And they did, they had a small, very small of course, small building on Seventh Street in Ellwood City.

EL: They built, or they bought?

BG: They had, I believe, there are two different stories. One said it was a former building that they bought and another one said that they built it. And I kind of think they built it.

EL: Does it have the look of a...?

BG: Yes, it has the look of a little synagogue. And anyways, so I think it was 1917, '16, '17 that they had this building built, very small. And that's where they had their services.

EL: And this was called?

BG: It was called the Tree of Life Synagogue. And it was more Orthodox then as time went by it became a Conservative congregation. So they were in that building for quite a long time. My husband was bar mitzvah there. And, then they decided, well they were growing out of this building. They had by then maybe a hundred and fifty people.

EL: Really?

BG: Yeah, so they didn't fit in this building anymore. So they decided to build a new building and in about 1950 they started talking about this and in 1951 they broke ground for the building and it was in an area of Ellwood City called Ewing Park, E-W-I-N-G, Ewing Park. And they built a lovely building there that still stands.

EL: Does the original building still stand?

BG: Yes, the original building is also, and it's a church, but I don't know that it's active, really active. So they built this new building, which was beautiful, and in 1952 they had services. And when Ellwood City was at its highest number, census-wise, there were around two hundred and seventy-five people.

EL: Jewish?

BG: Jewish people.

EL: And when was that?

BG: That was in the fifties.

EL: And what was the industry in the town? What was keeping the town...?

BG: Steel mills.

EL: Which were they?

BG: National Tube and Etna Standard, and there was another one, Matthews Conveyor, they built conveyor belts, but the steel business was the, National Tube was the big thing. And, so the people that came, came because they know that they could open businesses, you know mercantile businesses and they would be good because the population of Ellwood City at that time was around twelve thousand or if you brought in the outlining areas, around fifteen thousand.

EL: Do you remember some of the Jewish businesses?

BG: Oh, well I, yeah, there were, we counted, we put together a list and we came up with fifty-seven Jewish businesses of various kinds. There were grocery stores and dry goods stores and dry cleaning places and pharmacy. And we had two doctors and two dentists that were all Jewish. Women's clothing, men's clothing, children's clothing, just about every kind of store, shoe stores, everything that you would need. And the main street in Ellwood City is called Lawrence Avenue and that was just filled with Jewish merchants, and on the high holidays the whole street was closed. There were very few non-Jewish merchants on Lawrence Avenue, so it was like okay, can't shop today because it's Rosh Hashanah, it's Yom Kippur.

EL: Wow.

BG: But it was great in its day. And until around the sixties, toward the seventies, it started to slow down and the steel mill closed. I can't be sure, I think in the early eighties the steel mill closed, which was like devastation to the whole town, because that was the biggest employer.

EL: Your husband was still in the junk business?

BG: Yeah, well they evolved. They evolved from junk, to scrap metal during the war, to auto parts and automobiles, and then when my husband joined the business in 1956, he was interested in cars and repairing cars, and he could do that beautifully so they moved into the auto parts and repair business.

EL: So he sort of became like a mechanic auto parts?

BG: Right. And that's what we, when we finally closed in 2001, that's what it was, auto part and repair, it wasn't a scrap business or a junk business anymore. And it was a very nice business, it did very well, it did very well.

EL: Did changing allow him to weather the closing of the mills?

BG: Yeah, it did. It did because in those days you repaired your cars and there was a big need for repair, mufflers, tailpipes, brakes, you know, gas tanks, whatever, people repaired their cars. Nowadays, you really can't do that so much, there are still places open, but they don't buy used parts, we used to sell, we'd have maybe three hundred, three hundred and fifty cars in the lot that we could take parts from. And they don't do that anymore. Everyone takes their car to the dealer and the dealer repairs it.

EL: Yeah.

BG: Not too many of these small repair shops are out, it's, environmentally it's very difficult to keep up with all the requirement for the environment and whatever.

EL: Was Tree of Life always lay-led congregation? Was there every a rabbi?

BG: Oh yes, we had rabbis.

EL: Really?

BG: Oh yeah. Almost always. We were only without a rabbi a couple of times. Although when my husband was bar mitzvahed there was no rabbi, so one of the men in town who was very, very learned taught him, and taught him his haftorah and whatever. But I would say 80% of the time, at least 80% of the time there was a rabbi, a full-time rabbi.

EL: Where there Jewish organizations in Ellwood City?

BG: Oh yeah, we had B'nai B'rith, we had Hadassah, we had the Council of Jewish Women, we had, what else is there? Kids things, you know, BBYO and AZA, and I'm trying to think, well eventually when we got to be not quite such a big group, we, instead of having Hadassah and Council and Sisterhood we combined that and we were called the Jewish Women's League, and so that was like combined. And women who belonged to Hadassah came here to New Castle to Hadassah, or they went to Beaver Falls, because Ellwood City's like in the middle. Like twelve miles this way, twelve miles that way, you know you could pick your town, whichever you wanted.

EL: So the Jewish Women's League sort of consolidated a lot...

BG: Right, right. And the activities were done, and they did fundraising. We used to have parties and dinners and dances and the synagogue was really the center of the Jewish community. And everything went on there, weddings, bar mitzvahs, we finally had bat mitzvahs.

EL: When did that start?

BG: In uh, oh gee let me think, probably in sixties?

EL: Was it controversial?

BG: Well you didn't do bat mitzvahs prior to that I guess. And this one gentleman had two daughters, he had no sons, so he really wanted an event, so that was the first bat mitzvah that we had was his older daughter. And then after that everybody did it, you know. And we had Hebrew school, Sunday school, and we had a lot of kids, a lot of kids in the classes. It was nice. You know, if you were in school, you weren't like, maybe the only Jewish kid in the class, there might have been like maybe two or three other ones.

EL: In the public school.

BG: In the public schools, yeah.

EL: Did the Jews and the non-Jews get along?

BG: Yeah, they got along pretty well, yeah I don't think they had, you know, I don't think we had anybody really, except maybe a fanatic here and there or whatever. And the kids in school got along pretty well. My three daughters, our three daughters, were in public school and they didn't have much trouble so, well our younger daughter did, but it had nothing to do with being Jewish, it was just somebody, a couple of girls felt they needed to throw their weight around so, so she went to high school at Catholic school, she didn't stay at public school. But the older two, they, because they had each other for one thing and they had a lot of kids around them, so they had a good time.

EL: Did, what was the level of observance in the home?

BG: You mean...

EL: In your home.

BG: In my? Oh, oh we did, and still do, we observe the holidays, we observe the Sabbath, you know. We do it all.

EL: Did you keep kosher?

BG: No, we did not keep kosher, no.

EL: Was it possible for families to keep kosher in Ellwood City?

BG: It was hard, it was hard, because you had to go to Pittsburgh. There wasn't a kosher butcher or anywhere right near by, there used to be in the old days.

EL: In Ellwood City?

BG: There was a kosher, yeah, a kosher butcher in Ellwood City and there were a couple in Beaver Falls, which was twelve miles away, there was one here in New Castle, which was twelve miles away. So you know, you could do it. But I, I never, I never started with being kosher in my house and my husband didn't have any preference. And my mother-in-law was kosher, she kept kosher. But we didn't, but we observed, and we still observe the holidays and our grandchildren do. And we had our great-granddaughter named here in Temple Hadar Israel, she's two now, and so we had her named when she was like three months old. And you know, the kids have Hebrew names, we try to keep it going, you know, don't want it to fall apart. But in Ellwood City now, I think I said, there's like six of us. So it's a little...

EL: Six families?

BG: Six people.

EL: Really? Wow.

BG: Yeah, so six people, you know it's...

EL: When did it become clear that it was time to close the synagogue?

BG: In the eighties. In the eighties. I should know the date because I was there, but I can't really give you that date. And what happened was we didn't have a rabbi, and we didn't have any, very few children left, young people. They went through school, they went to college, they left.

EL: Because....

BG: There's nothing in Ellwood City. What're you gonna do? And they went off to be whatever they became in other places, and they're all over the county. They're everywhere. And that's, I think that's a story in all small towns.

EL: Yeah. So what was involved in closing the synagogue?

BG: Oh, you mean with the board, or with the people, or...?

EL: I mean do you have to, what do you have to do, do you have to close, sell the building, sell all the...?

BG: Right, well we couldn't sell our building in Ellwood City; we didn't have anybody that would buy it. There were no churches that had that kind of funding. Not that we were asking a lot of money, we would have taken whatever. But there was nobody that could take it, so we donated it for an exchange of one dollar to the Ellwood City hospital, and the only stipulation was that once a year, at the end of school, scholarship time, that the hospital would make, donate, make a scholarship in honor of the Tree of Life Synagogue, which they did for a long time. I don't, they haven't done it for a while though. I think that maybe the time period, maybe they had to do it for ten years or twenty years or whatever. But they did it. And they don't do it now.

[phone rings]

BG: I bet this is Sam.

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BG: He was one that was gonna come for an interview.

EL: So what else is involved? Did you have to sell torahs?

BG: Yes, we sold torahs.

EL: Who did you sell those to?

BG: Different congregations, some of them we donated.

EL: In the region, or...?

BG: Well, I know one went to California. There was a boy from Ellwood City who became part of a Jewish group in California and so we sent him a torah. And the rest I'm not, I couldn't tell you where they went, I couldn't tell you, it's like twenty-eight years ago. I can't really remember. And in Beaver Falls, we can talk about Beaver Falls.

EL: Was there any like cemetery association?

BG: No, we didn't have a cemetery so we didn't have to deal with that, we didn't have to deal with that.

EL: Okay.

BG: And since we didn't get any money from the sale of the building we didn't have any money to invest anywhere for any purpose. The amount of money that was left, we donated annually to various organizations until it was all gone. And I happen to be the last person with the checkbook. That's why they call me the closer.

EL: So from Ellwood City you started attending services in Beaver Falls, and what's the name of that congregation?

BG: Agudath Achim.

EL: Do you know anything about its history?

BG: Well it was, it was a, there was a synagogue in the lower side of Beaver Falls, an Orthodox, I think they all started Orthodox, and they used that. It was a good size building, it wasn't a real small building like we had in Ellwood, and they had a lot of Jewish population in Beaver Falls, too, because it was a bigger, a bigger city. And then, at some point in the fifties, I believe, they decided they wanted a bigger building so they built a bigger building in an area called Chippewa that's part of Beaver Falls but it's just a new area, Chippewa. And we joined, when we joined that's where we went, to Chippewa.

EL: Did you join after Ellwood City closed?

BG: After Ellwood City closed, yeah. Well, we had a small chapel in Ellwood City in the building after we sold, or gave it to the hospital. But we were there, we had that little building, or that little chapel, for eight or ten years or something like that. And then it got to be just like, nobody was using it, we weren't having services, we weren't even having minyan for a yahrzeit, nothing. We weren't using it all so we close that also. And an interesting thing with our chairs that we had in the sanctuary, we gave them to a local summer theater because they had folding chairs, they had folding chairs in there so one of the men on the board said we'll give them the chairs, and they're still there.

EL: The actual pews?

BG: The actuals pews. They were individual seats.

EL: Yeah.

BG: And we gave them there and so they got these great theater seats and they're still there which I think is kind of nice. Ellwood City's still around. And anyway, in Beaver Falls we started there and they had quite a large congregation because on the High Holidays they would open up the doors that divided the social hall from the sanctuary and people were seated back there. But then that, of course, dwindled and dwindled.

EL: Was it, had it already started dwindling by the time you guys arrived?

BG: I think it was probably in its like best time when we went there.

EL: So the decline of industry didn't hit as quickly.

BG: Well they had, they had different industry and different, they had steel mills, of course, but they had other things, too, so, and they had a lot of, of course every, they were all in, they were all merchants also, pretty much. And so they held up, they held up, I guess we were there ten years and then couldn't handle that building anymore because it was a gigantic building. And luckily for them a dialysis center bought the building.

EL: Huh.

BG: So that was great.

EL: When was that? In the nineties?

BG: I would say. Early.

EL: And the problem with the building was just that the maintenance was too much to...

BG: It was too much. It was too much for all the (unclear) people.

EL: Yeah.

BG: So we moved into, they bought, they leased a little, a section of a little strip mall that had a bank on one end and a builder on the other end that owned the building and we took the center section and put in a beautiful small sanctuary. I think it seated seventy-five people. And then there was an office and a social hall and a small kitchen, and you know it was a beautiful little building. And we had services there for a number of years.

EL: Was there a rabbi?

BG: We had a rabbi. We did have a rabbi. In fact when he moved into Pittsburgh-

EL: What was his name?

BG: Uh, right now the name escapes me but it'll come to me soon here.

EL: So you said he came to Pittsburgh?

BG: He moved in while his wife was very ill and he was ill and they moved into Pittsburgh to be closer to their doctors and in the meantime then both of them passed away. Asper, their name was Asper, Rabbi Asper. Now they had rabbis all along, too, you know whenever they had their synagogues and I may have that written down somewhere but I don't, all my paperwork I gave to Heinz History Center so I don't really have all that stuff anymore.

EL: Okay. What was involved, when did the decision come to close?

BG: Well when we were in this small building and then we didn't have a rabbi. Our rabbi came here to New Castle.

EL: Rabbi Asper?

BG: No, Rabbi... honestly, I'm sorry these names just escape me. He just left, and it was a very difficult situation, but he was rabbi for about four or five years there, and then we were so small and there were no children, absolutely no children, it was all elderly people. And, so he came to New Castle so we didn't have anybody and we certainly didn't want to hire somebody for the amount of people that we had so we just had laypeople do the services, which worked out. There was one gentleman, he was a doctor, he was an OBGYN, and he was from Persia, he was really, really knowledgeable, and a really great guy and he would conduct services and so would other men.

EL: Was there a minyan?

BG: Uh yeah, we had minyans and whatever, and then people got tired of that, who's gonna conduct the service, it becomes a chore, so they said okay, we'll just have to close. And this doctor was gonna retire and move to California so if he left the whole thing was gonna fall apart. So we closed that little building.

EL: And disbanded?

BG: And disbanded. And there was a, there is a shul in Ambridge, so people from Beaver Falls who wished to went to Ambridge. And a few people came to New Castle, and my husband and I came to New Castle because, like I said, we're in between, we can go either way, Beaver Falls, New Castle, it doesn't matter. But we didn't want to go to Ambridge. That was a little further. So we came to New Castle and I think we've been here eight or nine years.

EL: And when did it become clear that New Castle was going to close?

BG: When we got down to no people?

EL: Yeah?

BG: It's not, a woman from down in West Virginia said in the video that we made, she said it's not that you don't have the money, it's that you don't have the people. And if you don't have the people you can't, you can't function. You really can't function. So we function, we keep going here in New Castle, there may be six people attending a service, there may be ten people if we're lucky. And like I said before, if you're feeding them a really nice oneg after, you may get fifteen people, or eighteen people, you know. But that's the governing factor I think, in a closing, is if you don't have the people you can't make it work. You can't. And I always say, it's not very nice, but I always say it's like beating a dead horse. You're not gonna get more people, some great influx of young people is not going to come in, and if they do, they're not going to belong here to

synagogue, they're going to go to a bigger place if they have children where they have Sunday school and whatever.

EL: Is it frustrating that the decline in membership doesn't seem to have much to do with decisions that the congregation made or didn't make, that it's the nature of the town and it's sort of out of the hands of the congregation?

BG: Well, sure. Because you would like to stay. You would like to keep having services, you would like to, you know, continue the status quo, but it just doesn't, it just doesn't work. It just doesn't work, you can't, you can't, this building that we're in now, isn't it kind of sad that you have this nice big building and you get eight or ten people to participate in anything that you have?

EL: But it's not that there's the people and they aren't coming, it's that there's not even the people, right, in the town?

BG: Well actually here it is that there are people, and they don't come. And that's what's frustrating. But you can't make people go where they don't want to go, and they can go to Youngstown from here, Youngstown, Ohio, which is twenty minutes away to a bigger congregation there, so you know.

EL: Do you think there's advantages to a smaller community?

BG: Oh there's lots of, yeah. It's a close-knit group, and you know everybody and it's friendly and you know it's fun. Especially when there are kids, it's very nice, it's very nice. It's, you know, it makes it more pleasurable to come. When you know people, when you go to a great big place, well you might know what, half a dozen people there? I've attended services in synagogues that have a thousand people in their membership, and how would you know a thousand people? You wouldn't. So you go with your family and maybe a few close friends that you met and that's what you do there. And as far as being able to participate, you'd have to be really a stand-out person to be able to participate in the workings of that synagogue, you know on the board or whatever. And I've been lucky, I've been on the board of all three synagogues because I put myself out there. I like to be involved. I don't like to belong to anything if I'm not going to actually be involved in any group, club, organization, anything. And so I, you know, step up when they say, "Will you do this?" and I say, "Sure."

EL: The sale of this building, was that seen as a way to maintain the congregation, but remove some of the financial responsibility? The arrangement.

BG: The arrangement that we have, yeah that's kind of neat. I don't know how long it's going to last.

EL: Explain the arrangement.

BG: Well the thing is, we have a small chapel and we have a big sanctuary, and we have a social hall and we have a kosher kitchen. And the new owner is letting us use those facilities for a very, very nominal monthly rent. Very nominal monthly rent. And the rabbi will still come. So we can continue to have services as long as we want to. I don't know how long that will be. I don't know how people will feel about coming in to this building when it changes hands. It's the same building, but it's not the same. So we'll see how that goes, and like I said, Youngstown is right there, and they have Conservative and they have Reform, and so whatever your tendency you can chose and go there if you want. My husband and I probably won't go there, we may, it depends because we're getting up in years and we may not want to drive that far especially in the wintertime, but we do have two daughters who live in Ellwood City, and they would drive us if we wanted to do that and they would probably join, too. We haven't gotten that far in discussions yet, but I'm sure that the New Castle people, I know that a lot already have decided to, especially Reform, the Reform people, they have a lovely, lovely temple there.

EL: Was the decision to sell this building something that the congregation pursued or it came, it was an opportunity?

BG: Well, an opportunity that it came. The man who, the man and wife who are buying it live right next door. And because they have this therapy business, they thought this would be a great place, it's got private rooms, whatever. And so they approached us, and that was like a couple years ago and then just recently, I think, I think our president approached them again.

EL: It seemed like it was time?

BG: Yeah, and they were still interested so that was, that was good. And it was time because whenever you, I come from Ellwood City, the services, not that it's a long way, it's a twenty-five minute ride, it's not you know an hour and a half. But when you get here and you're the fourth person in the sanctuary... it's a little, a little you know, what did I come for? It's four people. But then I make four people, so I look at it that way. Or if you come in and you make the tenth person that's always a good thing. So I don't look at it that I came, it's not a chore for me to come, I enjoy it and that's why I come.

EL: What have been some of the challenges of the sale in terms of things that have to be taken care of?

BG: Oh you mean internal, getting rid of things?

EL: Well, we were talking about the books for instance, that was, I thought, interesting.

BG: Oh right, yeah.

EL: So we're in the library, there's a lot of popular books, but then there's also a lot of religious book.

BG: Right. And those are a problem.

EL: Why are they a problem?

BG: Because we don't know where to place them. We don't have people who want them, especially the old books.

EL: These are the old Union prayer books.

BG: Well we have those, and then we were, you know we have to go all over the building and we're in behind the stage and we're in behind the bima and we found more books! I mean not only we had books here, we found more books behind there, so it's, but what we're going to have to do is bury them.

EL: You were saying that no congregation wants an older book to sell.

BG: No, no they don't, they don't.

EL: And that overseas they don't want them because they're in English.

BG: They're in English, they can't use them.

EL: Yeah.

BG: And then as far as all the other Sunday school books and children's things for Sunday school, we have a selection of those things too. So we're planning to have an indoor yard sale and see what we can manage to disperse. Somebody will maybe come in and say "Oh, I love this thing I'm takin' it with me," great. And it'll be open to the public, of course, and we'll see how that goes. But if you look around in each room you see, you see so many things that have to be dealt with, and it's really a daunting task, it really is. You just don't say okay, here we're throwing this all in a dumpster, you end up doing that anyway, you do get a dumpster. We did that in Beaver Falls, you do get a dumpster eventually. But it like breaks your heart, it does. Because you think somebody, surely, somebody could use this somewhere. So we're gonna try our best, we're going that now. We're taking down all the plaques and the donation boards and whatever off the walls that we can because the new owner wants them off the wall in the hallways and out of the rooms, and so working on that, working on that, trying to get that accomplished.

EL: Is the current setup where you're selling it then renting part of it back, has that made it more complicated than the previous two that you were involved in? Legally, or anything like that?

BG: No, no I don't think so. No, we have a, we have an attorney on the board and he's taken care of that, he you know, it's all, it's all done the proper way. Plus we've had

advice for the past five years from the Jewish Legacy Project and David Sarnat, who's been tremendously helpful.

EL: In what way?

BG: Well, telling us this is what you need to do, step one, step two, now you're at this point, now you need to do this. And so it's good for the other members of the committee to hear that. I kind of have been there, done that, so it's not new to me what he's suggesting, but it is to them, and coming from him is much more, I don't know, sound to them than me saying that.

EL: What kinds of thing?

BG: Like what you should do with the money, and you get all this money, what are you going to do with all this money? You have to, they have two cemeteries here in New Castle, they have Reform and a Conservative Orthodox and they have to be maintained in perpetuity. So you have to put money away to do that because it's not gonna happen otherwise. So that's what we did, we put money in the Jewish Federation, and we'll be adding to that eventually, and then we'll turn it over when there is no one here. I don't know if they're gonna do a cemetery board like they do in Beaver Falls, there's three of us that are on the cemetery committee and so far we're able to maintain it ourselves and we haven't had to use the money from the Federation. But we're all in our eighties so we're not going to be doing this for a long, long time. So in another couple of years we're going to have to turn it over to the Jewish Burial Association in Pittsburgh, and then they'll maintain oversight of the cemeteries, and they'll check to see if the person who's contracted to do the care and maintenance is doing it like they're supposed to be and not sending a bill and not doing anything. And if something drastic happens like, you know, a tombstone falls over, or there's some sort of storm that damages things, then somebody has to repair that and that's what that money's there for. But it's there for hopefully for a long, long time.

EL: What do you think the future of this congregation will be?

BG: I, I don't think, well as long as there are people here in New Castle, maybe they'll get together, maybe they'll continue to get together for social things or something like that, you know? I don't know. It's cause I'm not from here; I don't know what their community, what their interaction is with other people. For the most part, I know they'll join over in Youngstown or wherever they want to go and join in with those congregations and then there won't be much activity here anymore. 'Til the last person turns out the lights as the saying goes. Everybody says I don't want to be that person that turning out the lights! That's too much responsibility, but if you have it all set up legally then you don't have to worry about it. But in the meantime that's what happens with a small congregation, nobody, nobody sets it up, so you can't leave for just anybody to take over because like David Sarnat said, and I said too, maybe you don't want that guy being in charge of the money, that's not the best person, so you have to have it done where people are obligated, legally obligated, to do what needs done. So we're hoping that the

Burial Association will be around for a long time; that there will be people to do that. And that the Federation will be in business a long time and they'll maintain, I know they have a lot of cemeteries to take care of so far, you know, not just ours. There's a lot of little ones.

EL: All right, well thank you so much.

BG: Oh sure!

END OF SECOND RECORDING

END OF INTERVIEW