

**Transcript of Interview with Marvin Lebby**  
**Small Towns Jewish History Project**  
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Name of Interviewer: Eric Lidji  
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Transcription:

**Eric Lidji:** This is the Small Town Oral history Project, my name is Eric Lidji. I'm with Marvin Lebby and we are at Temple Hadar Israel in the classroom and it is April 15, 2015. And we're going to talk about the Lebby family and also the Edelstein family. So if you could start by telling me how your family got to New Castle.

**Marvin Lebby:** My father moved from McKeesport, Pa., in approximately 1915 with his mother and brothers to New Castle. The reason they came to New Castle, my father's sister was married to Dr. Ben Berger who was the first Jewish physician in New Castle and established a practice in the community. And he brought them to New Castle.

EL: Do you know how your parents got to McKeesport?

ML: Uh, no, I don't. My grandparents as far as I know, I don't know how they got to McKeesport. My father's father had a bar or tavern in McKeesport.

EL: Were both of your parents born in the United States.

ML: Yes, my parents were both born in the United States. My grandparents were not. My mother's family I think was born in Lithuania and my father's family was Hungarian, from the Hungary area and immigrated to the United States.

EL: And this is just your father who came from McKeesport, or both of your parents?

ML: No my father and his mother. His father passed away. His mother and my father's three brothers, his sister and her husband were already living in New Castle, as I say he was a doctor and established a practice there.

EL: And how did your mother get to New Castle?

ML: My mother, my mother's father, came from Evans City to New Castle and went in business with a Myer Levine and established a business called New Castle Junk Company which is now nonexistent. And my mother had three sisters and a brother. Her brother had S&M Tire Company and my father went to work for them in Washington, D.C., then came back to New Castle. And my mother, one of my mother's sisters, Minette went to Slippery Rock, back then it was called Slippery Rock Normal. She was the first Jewish graduate student from Slippery Rock. My mother's other sister, Sadie, was married to Sam Friedman, who had a shoe store down in Little Washington, PA, area. Her one sister Minette, the one who graduated from Slippery Rock went to New York after graduation and met Mendel Fischer who was, for years, executive director of the Jewish National Fund. Her younger sister Shirley, I don't know where she went to school, went to New York to live with Minette and met her husband, Sam Cohen, who was an attorney in New York City.

EL: C-O-H-N?

ML: C-O-H-E-N

EL: E-N. S&M Tire Company, was a manufacturer?

ML: No, it was a retail place.

EL: And what was the connection between Washington, D.C., and New Castle?

ML: Little Washington not D.C., Washington, Pennsylvania.

EL: Oh, okay. So that's how your father met your mother.

ML: That's how my father met my mother, right. Then eventually they got married in 1920.

EL: How long was he with the tire company?

ML: 'Til 1925. And his brother Bill, who was in the insurance business, decided to sell out and my father bought his interest in the business and went into the insurance business in 1925 and the name of the agency was Williams-Cleaveland Company. And when I came back out of the service in 1954 I went in business with my father, but the agency was well known in the community and we decided just to leave it the name as it was, Williams-Cleaveland Company.

EL: Do you know how they got that name?

ML: Yes. The two founders, Joseph Williams and Chester Cleaveland.

EL: So your uncle had bought it from them?

ML: Beg pardon?

EL: How did your uncle Bill get involved?

ML: I don't know how he got involved. When he left here, he moved to California and became state agent for a big life insurance company and did very well for himself. He was the first American to be called to England representing Lloyd's of London. And I'll always never forget, one time he insured Betty Grable's legs with Lloyd's of London and other things like that and he made a very nice living.

EL: So around 1925 your father buys out his brother's half, his brother's part of the insurance company, from that point on he's in the insurance business.

ML: Right. His one brother Morley moved to Cleveland and established the Atlas Paper Box Company. His brother Ed went to California or Colorado, California, and went to work for Warner Brothers as a salesman for Warner Brothers.

EL: The Warner Brothers were from New Castle, weren't they?

ML: The Warner Brothers were from Youngstown, but they established their first theater in New Castle, and that's downtown at the Cascade Galleria.

EL: That was Ed?

ML: No.

EL: But that was Ed who was involved.

ML: Yeah, Ed. And his brother Ben moved to Kittanning and established a little men's store. And his sister Belle was married to Dr. Berger.

EL: And just so we have it on tape, the Kittanning men's store, what was the slogan for that?

ML: Lebby's Men's Store was the name of it. It was next to the theater on the Main Street of Kittanning, and he advertised as the biggest little men's store in the United States. The place couldn't have been more than ten by twenty. He was the first person to start a suit club.

EL: In New Castle, or the United States?

ML: In the United States.

EL: So the brothers were Jack, Morley, Ed, Ben, and Bill?

ML: Correct.

EL: And the sister was Belle.

ML: And Belle, right. And mother's family was Sadie, Shirley, Mim, Pearl, Bea, and Sam.

EL: So you were born in 19...

ML: Thirty-one.

EL: Thirty-one. What are your early memories of New Castle?

ML: My memories of New Castle? It's hard to say. It used to be a very progressive industrial town. We had steel mills here. We had at one time the Shenango Pottery which manufactured Haviland china for the Haviland Company in France. And my mother, my daughter now has, my mother had a friend who worked at the pottery and she got her a set of Haviland china which is marked on the back, it has all the markings on the back. My daughter now has that that. And my daughter lives in Concord, New Hampshire.

EL: Where did you live growing up?

ML: I lived in New Castle. Basically on Highland Avenue 'til 1941, then we moved around the corner to Sumner Avenue. My father bought a home on Sumner Avenue and I lived there 'til I went into the service in 1951.

EL: What was your childhood like?

ML: I was active in the Boy Scouts, I was active in the local YMCA, I was counselor at Boy Scout Camp for several years. I was the first Jewish Eagle Scout in the community. And I was active in AZA. I was an only child.

EL: What was the religious life at home, were your parents observant, at all?

ML: Life was good at home. Life was very good at home. My mother didn't work, my father provided a decent living. My mother never worked, of course back in those days the female end in the family, very few of them worked.

EL: Was your family religious?

ML: Family religion?

EL: Were they religious, were they observant?

ML: They were observant, yes, they were Reformed Jews. My father was very active at the old Temple Israel. And when the building ground breaking, he was the secretary of the board. And I would say we were active. I've been on the Temple board basically since 1954 with the exception of one or two years.

EL: What about synagogue involvement? Did you guys come for the High Holidays, on Saturday, how often were you...

ML: The Reform had services Friday night, we never had Saturday Service, we had Sunday school on Sundays. I was bar mitzvahed and confirmed both at Temple Israel.

EL: What was the relationship between Jews and Gentiles at that time?

ML: I never had any problem growing up. I had a lot of Jewish friends, I had a lot of Gentile friends. I was fairly active in high school, I was manager of the cross country team. We won the first state cross country championship. I was manager of the track team.

EL: Very athletic.

ML: I wouldn't say athletic, I enjoy athletics. I was a real klutz.

EL: You had mentioned AZA, were there other Jewish organizations in town?

ML: The B'nai B'rith, the AZA, basically those were the two. My father at the time was inducted into the Masonic Order. He was the first Jewish man to get into the Masonic Order and he enjoyed going to the Elks Club with some of his friends, which is now a parking lot downtown.

EL: You had mentioned Temple Israel, how long was that around?

ML: 'Til we merged with Tifereth Israel to form Temple Hadar Israel. Probably, I can't remember how long ago the merger was. You'll have to check that out.

EL: Was Temple Israel around when your family came here or was it built after?

ML: It was built after. It was built, they used to meet in a home, Marcus Feuchtwanger was the first president of Temple Israel.

EL: What was his last name?

ML: Feuchtwanger, don't ask me to spell it.

EL: There are some Feuchtwangers in the archives.

ML: His picture is in...

EL: In the collection that he...

ML: In the classroom. All the past presidents of Temple Israel have pictures hanging in the room there.

EL: Do you remember any of what services were like, or what school here was like back when you were a child.

ML: Uh, Jewish services?

EL: Yeah.

ML: They were Reform, not ultra-Reform as we know ultra-Reform today, but they were Reform. We had Bar Mitzvahs on Friday night instead of Saturday morning. I don't recall, I don't think we ever had Saturday services. I was observant for all the holidays, I didn't go to school for Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur. We celebrated one day for Rosh Hashanah at the Reform Temple. But I never had any knowledge or sign shown to me of anti-Semitism in the city. During the second war there was a group of people called Silver Shirts who were very anti-Jewish, but again I never had any problem.

EL: What do you remember of World War II? You would have been a high school student right?

ML: Uh yeah. 1941, I graduated high school in '49 so I was in junior high, '41 I was in grade school.

EL: Yeah, I'm guessing that in a steel town there would have been a lot of activity during the war.

ML: There was, yes. It was very prosperous, a very prosperous community. We had a lot of industry, we had Johnson Bronze, they say we had Shenango China, back then it was known as Shenango Pottery. We had several steel mills in town. We had quite a bit of industry. During the first war my father worked at the munition factory, I think it mentions that in the article I gave you. In Ellwood, he took the train to Ellwood every day, actually it's basically a streetcar.

EL: This is during World War I.

ML: I think it was World War I, yes.

EL: So you said you went into the service after high school.

ML: I went to Slippery Rock University for a year and then went into the service in '51. Graduated high school in '49 and went into the service '51 through '54.

EL: Where were you stationed?

ML: I ended up in Korea.

EL: During the war?

ML: Yeah. Fortunately I was down in the southern part I didn't see any action, and I was stationed in Arizona, then I went to leadership school in California. Then our outfit was sent to Korea.

EL: How long were you there for?

ML: Approximately a year in Korea. I was stationed at an air force where I was in charge of an aviation supply depot. It was ironic, I have to tell you, we got a load, a shipment in of supplies and one whole carload would be electric fans. It was, we just cracked up you know, we were in Korea, we were in war, and they ship electric fans over.

EL: So you come back to New Castle what year?

ML: I came back and went into business with my father in '54.

EL: '54.

ML: January of '54.

EL: And you stayed in the insurance business.

ML: I've been in the insurance business my whole life.

EL: Ever since.

ML: Ever since. My son came back after graduating college in Boston, he came back and I've sold out to him.

EL: Is it still called...

ML: It's still called Williams-Cleaveland Company, yes.

EL: What was your involvement with the synagogue once you were, well let me go back, how did you meet your wife?

ML: Beg pardon?

EL: How did you meet your wife? Wife.

ML: My wife?

EL: How did you meet your wife?

ML: Uh, turn that off.

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