

CHAPTER 8

1930-1939 FULL BLOOM

1930

Clarksdale's population had grown from 7,552 to 10,043.¹

1930s the levees were built.²

Alvin Labens said:

There was a time in Clarksdale (early 1930s) when you drove between Memphis and Clarksdale that you would be guaranteed to have to change tire twice. By the 1940s Highway 61 was a pretty good highway, because it was put in by the WPA. Late 1920s, after the 1927 flood and the '1937 flood is when they patrolled the levees with the airplanes and with machine guns...Cars authorized to be anywhere near the levee had to be identified on the roof so that the airplanes could tell.

The people from Arkansas would blow the levee on this side, or the people from this side would want to blow the levee on that side. Cause if you blow the other side that keeps the water from coming on your side. It will go that way.

The forerunners of the cotton dusters these planes that you would see in the movies of these old WWI planes with the machine mounted in front of the pilot was the kind of planes they had. They didn't have the 247 and the 57. It was after 1927 that they built Highway 61.³

From the 1920 to the mid-1930s: Jewish merchants clustered primarily on Sunflower and Delta. Louis Campassi, Jr., mentioned that the idea of Issaquena, not the actual street itself, was actually located on Sunflower in the Thirties or the Twenties, before everybody moved over to Issaquena. That that's where these sharecroppers and farmers would come.

Julia Baker Glassman explained: "It was the shopping area of the cheaper stores. In fact the reason my grandfather Baker moved to Clarksdale from Marvell, Arkansas, was, before that he was in Louisville. People said move south because there are no inexpensive stores for the sharecroppers and the farmers to shop. That's when he bought property and built three stores and had a store there."⁴

Glassman said:

All up and down the street there were Kantors who often had a tailor shop. Rossies was behind? Then on the next block the Levines had a store. I think Isaascons had one there, too...Mr. Cohen had a tailor shop. Around the corner the Binders had a store. Brodofsky had his delicatessen...He was Levines and Mrs. Rosenberg's brother...Bernstein had a furniture store next door [on the corner]. I told - in my memories, mother used to get Octagon soap for washing. Before washing machines. Take the coupons - Mr. Bernstein had a table in his store - small items displayed that you could use these coupons. She would get what she wanted then we could have what was left over, we could buy toys.

Because the trade people were moving around to different locations to buy things. More people were going to Issaquena...Just like my uncle had his store on Delta. It was my uncle, my father, Sol Siegel, Uncle Frank Baker had a store on the corner then John Small took it over, Delta and Third-Street, Joe Weiss had a cotton company, and Bernsteins across the street. Magdovitz...Okun had a shoe repair down on Delta. Close to the railroad. I remember it being Second and Third...I know we used to take our shoes to be repaired there...Shankermans had a store and then they moved up from there.

[Julia remembered working in the store.] Sometimes after school and on Saturdays...that was the busiest time. By the time they got to Issaquena they didn't hang clothes from the ceiling. They got modern...They kept it on the shelves and on the counters...There were some stores that hung them everywhere before that. Like I said, when I was growing up, Daddy had a store in the twenties and early thirties.

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Adele Cohen-Kline said: "Talking about the 200 block of Delta Avenue where the empty lot is. Before empty lot, the store was Allen's, it was Maurice Segal's store."⁶ Maurice Segal owned and operated Segal's Dixie Shop at 242 Delta Avenue, a men's wear store.

Selma James added, "Right, Right, Early 1930s when I was out here. I was 21 years old."⁷

Bobo High School fire-proof building completed.⁸

County seat question finally comes to a close. Two judicial districts are abolished, and Clarksdale becomes the sole county seat.⁹

Tuttle Hotel, 225 Yazoo, closed.¹⁰

August 1930: Mrs. Stewart's continued telling about life on a Mississippi River riverboat:

We put out three trout lines baited with small German carp from two-to-three inches long. The next morning when we raised the line we got between 450 and 500 pounds of fish. One weighed eighty-nine pounds another weighed fifty pounds, and the rest weighed between twenty-five and forty pounds.

At present we retail our fish at Clarksdale, Memphis and Friars Point. We have taken as much as 2,000 pounds a week to these places, but at present, time are not that good.

Mr. Stewart only fishes net in the spring and fishes lines with live baits in the summer There is a bird called the fisherman's enemy that is called the goar bird. It is a black bird with white wings with legs a foot and a half long. They destroy all small fish by stomping the water until it becomes muddy, and the fish have to come to the top to breathe, and when they do these birds grabbed them and eat them.

In low-water we block fish; by this I mean we have small blocks about eighteen inches long with a string ranging in length from five to ten feet with two fish hooks on it and are baited with a piece of beef. Mr. Stewart usually has about fifteen blocks of wood that they drop out in the channel and these flat, and he follows along with the blocks and watches them in a boat. When a fish gets a hold of it the block will begin to bob up and down or even sometimes the fish tries to run away with it. We catch nothing but large fish by this kind of fishing. We seldom ever catch anything under five pounds. One man a few miles up the river caught a fish weighing 138 pounds by block fishing.¹¹

CALIFF

LEON

Leon said:

The Torah reports there are two duties for a father that are incumbent on him, one of them is to teach his son how to make a living. If he can't, he has to see to it that somebody else does. Even if he has to pay for it. He has to teach his son how to make a living. Secondly, teach his son how to swim. So, I may have been three or four, but we went to Moon Lake, which was July 4th. All I can remember is that my father threw me in. I like to have drowned. My mama waded out, she couldn't swim, but she waded out there and brought me in. And she raised hell with him. But the country doctors, when they found out that I had asthma, they said that swimming would be bad for me. So, I was fifty-eight years old before I learned how to swim.

When everyone else would go to the swimming spots, I felt embarrassed and ill at ease. I couldn't do that, and they did. Another reason, I could get on my bicycle and go right into a different world. By myself, but this was the way it played out.¹²

COHEN/KLINE

ADELE

Adele said:

Seven children [were] born in the course of about six months: Hilda Baskind Kaufman (1930), Harriet Baker (August, 1929), Stanley M. Cohen (August 13, 1929), Erline Shankerman, (October 1929) Hermine Bacharach Basist (June 19, 1931), Gloria Plitman (1930), Alvin Binder (February 23, 1930) that was one group that became a cliché. They were all very close. They all stuck together because they couldn't get into the Gentile group, you know. Lennie never tried to get into their social group; but she had Gentile friends, you know.

When Stanley started getting sick with asthma around two and one-half years old (need year), all those people were right there. They helped me; they were there for me from morning to night; helping me with him.

So, I had my own doctor to take care of Stanley for \$50 a month. That was not a lot of money at that time because: A lot, my God, he was there every other minute. Because I didn't know what to do. I was dying.¹³

FINK

MARION

Marion said: "One year I went to Camp Tallaha, Charleston, Mississippi, with Dorothy Stoneman, Betty Bobo and the rest of the group. In fact, Baby Doll Peacock was our counselor. From ten to fifteen years old, I went to KYWY Camp, right outside of Hot Springs. That was the only place I was allowed to wear shorts...I don't remember much about the Girl Scouts. Betty Bobo's mother was our scout leader, and we met at the Bobo home. I hated making knots."¹⁴

KLINE

SOL AND ABE

Aaron's brother and Abe arrived in Coahoma County.¹⁵

NACHMAN

AL

"[As] a realtor [he] operated from a desk in the Boyle and Lanham Office on Yazoo. He is remembered for the people helped during the Great Depression. At his request he was cremated and his ashes scattered over his adopted land—Coahoma County."¹⁶

Sam Abrams said: "[Nachman] was very charitable...[He] put Buddy Brocato, who had an Italian heritage, through college. He became a lawyer."¹⁷

CHILDREN BORN

- 1) **Sallie** 1918 Mississippi
- 2) **Bernard** 1919 Mississippi
- 3) **Howie** 1821 Mississippi
- 4) **Ruth** 1923 Mississippi
- 5) **Bertha** 1925 Mississippi
- 6) **Alice** 1927 Mississippi

ZITROW

Barbara Broad Zitrow shared her parent's correspondence during a group discussion about the Alcazar Hotel and Issaquena Avenue. The following introduces the excerpts from the two letters which are quote:

I'm Barbara Broad Zitrow. I was born in Memphis and my mother was also born in Memphis. My father was a traveling salesman from Pittsburg and came down South and was traveling in the 1930s outside of Memphis, met my mother, and they were engaged at the time. and I have two letters written on Hotel Alcazar stationery, fireproof, Clarksdale, Mississippi, that my father wrote to my mother while they were engaged, and they are absolutely beautiful. It talks about the Depression and the mood of the merchants down in Clarksdale during the Depression. Also, later on, after my father married my mother, he did live down on our farm down in Hillhouse, Mississippi, and we would travel on the weekends and come to Memphis because my mother would not move down to Mississippi. She would not leave her pediatrician.¹⁸

1931

- April: The Planters Wholesale Co. at 800 Tallahatchie suffered a \$31,200 loss from fire.¹⁹
- November 5: Singer Ike Turner born in Clarksdale.
- 1931: F. D. Roosevelt, President and Great Depression

Julia Baker Glassman said: “There used to be a poll tax. I remember one year during the Depression somebody came home, to our house, and said: ‘Ida, are you...are you going to vote?’ And she said, ‘No, we can’t afford it. Morris has voted.’”²⁰

CONFIRMATION CLASS

Alvin Fink talked in a general manner about his impression of the Depression:

(See Appendix.) As the banks continued to close down during 1929, everything went down from there, but it didn’t affect the Delta until six to twelve months later or whenever they cut the credit off. All the small banks had, in that day, they didn’t have the Federal programs. They finally had to sue the farmers. was all the banks. And the local banks use to depend on the regional banks and the regional banks depended on the national banks. In other words, the banks in Clarksdale were national banks. They were just ‘take control’ banks. They didn’t have any of the banking laws. All of a sudden everything shut down. Everyone lost his or her job, didn’t have money.²¹

ARONSON

ANNIE

Blanche Dinner knew Annie. When asked by the author, she said: “This is why I don’t want to talk about Annie, and she was so sweet. A lot of single men were there. All those married people liked her. They liked her too much. You know, I don’t understand about Jewish men. They have wonderful wives, yet they were playing around with other women on the side.”²²

BAKER

JULIA

Julia said:

We had strict teachers. You weren’t just passed. We had the A, B, and C’s for grades. I wasn’t ashamed to say in English, I wasn’t an ‘A’ but I was an ‘A’ in math and in office. I liked to read. And the football boys would never; they just couldn’t make it. They just didn’t have time to study. So, the Coach said: ‘You cannot play football, if you don’t pass. So, some of us were assigned to tutor them in math after school so that they could pass. We worked in a group. Now, they just push them through. Then, they got an education.’²³

Julia stated that she believed the Jews lived alongside the Christians because: “They survived because we weren’t handed everything. Just like I told you what my grandfather did. They worked for everything they had. They earned it the old fashioned way. So did the Syrians, the others, the Chinese, the Japanese. They all worked hard because that was ingrained in them. You worked for what you had.”²⁴

Julia remembered the Depression in Clarksdale, “I had a bank account. I don’t know how much I had but I had more than \$9. That was all I got was \$9, and I was so disappointed. It was a little savings account. Daddy would give some change. Like I said we would walk all over town. Go the bank and put our little money in.”²⁵

SAM

Julia said: "Everyone should have a bachelor uncle. We were raised with a bachelor uncle. He was a bachelor uncle to my children. When he announced that he was getting married, our children said: 'He can't do that, he is Uncle Sammy.' When they met Aunt Janet, they were happy."²⁶

CALIFF

LEON

Leon said:

I remember going to school, and I was bored. Actually, they let me make the kindergarten and the first grade in one year, which was a terrible mistake. I wish it hadn't happened. I was sixteen years old when I graduated from high school. I was socially retarded. I really wasn't as personally developed as people who were older than I was. So, anyway, I remember distinctly that I went to school, I got bored, I told the teacher I had a headache, and she said go outside, sit under the tree, nice warm October day, and when the headache goes away come back in. I really didn't have a headache but I just went and sat there for a while. I left and went back home.

When I am five, still living in Dublin, my mother was supposed to be in the store helping my father. They had an African-American working around the house as a maid and a cook and so forth. I don't remember her name. But I do remember, all of a sudden, here comes my mother, through the front door, I hid under the bed. She found me. Each room had a fireplace, and there was wood stacked up around it. This was the only time that I remember that my mother spanked me because I told a lie. She didn't want that to become part of my personality at such an early age. She spanked me pretty good with that wood.

One of my major problems, asthma, developed when I was five years old. They knew very little about it at that time or how to treat it. They even thought that asthma could be brought on by stress but I don't believe that, it was really brought on by a bronchial infection is what it was. I can remember one October, I was terribly sick, couldn't hardly breathe, my lungs were filled up with mucus, or rather the tubes, the esophagus, leading to the lungs were filled up with mucus. The doctor called my mother out into the hall and he said: 'Look, he has about a 10s opening in there.' But he said: 'I think you can start making funeral arrangements because I think we have no way of stopping that from closing up.' But, the good Lord decided he had other things he wanted me to do. After that, I started improving. But, this was very important because I wasn't able to participate in some of the more active sports. I was very interested in sports.

I was interested primarily in baseball - as a matter of fact, I invented a baseball game.

My parents, my father, used to fuss at me for spending time throwing dice writing all those figures down on paper, he said: 'You're wasting time. You ought to do something more important.'

So I invented this game, based on, you had a schedule to follow, and depending on how you threw the dice - what numbers came up. They didn't know nothing about patents or stuff like that, and I didn't know what to do. It was about two or three years later, that Parker Brothers came out with a baseball game, exactly the same thing. But it was a magnet that drew the boys in my neighborhood to my front porch, and we used to play together. There was a fellow named Wilson Meese. His father was on the police force. There were two other boys named Parks and Mitchell Samaha. It was important to me because it brought people, there that I could be with, I could play with.

I can't remember any more. This was later when we lived in Clarksdale on Desoto before you go under the viaduct. After I moved to Catalpa it was a different area, different types of people.

My mom was known for her meals than for her baking. My father lost his teeth. For some reason he never did have false teeth made. He had to have soft stuff that he could chew. And they loved vegetables. We had a lot of vegetables. They were our big staple at home. Actually, you know, I want to say this, that my father would get the, like a lot of Jewish fathers were, as I understand, but the older I get the more in awe I am of him and her. Now, she only had a sixth grade education. Here are two people without an education, during the Depression, no Social Security, no family to lean on, had to do it entirely by themselves, every other month they had to go buy whatever medicines for my asthma, and they made it!

Railroad tracks and railroads was a major thing for little kids who want to see—walk across those trellises and walking across those tracks. My favorite spot was across from my father's store. I guess. I had a puppy. We left him out in the back yard once when I left the gate open. The train came, hit him, which severed his leg. My mother nursed him back to life. He had a limp but he lived. His name was Caneda—I think it was in the thirties—early thirties while we were in Dublin. We weren't near the train station in Clarksdale. And another little something that sticks in my mind about fifteen or twenty yards away from my father's store was a filling station in Dublin. Saturday, I used to go—I was little, maybe eight years old—I used to go and sit on a Coca Cola box with two people that worked in the filling station and bus station. I felt like a big shot mixing with the elite.

They used to have a little building. I think it was on Delta Street. They called it the Menorah. Ira Kantor's father was in the juke box business. They also had the first motel down there. He used to deliver a jukebox to the Menorah, and we would try to get all the Jewish kids down there and have a little dance. I don't think it was particularly successful I didn't have the only one. I had much in common with was Marvin because he lived around the block from me when I lived on Catalpa. Gerald Pittman lived in a world of his own—far as I could determine. It's to his credit that when the Memphis Symphony was being formed back in the middle fifties, they asked him to be the first oboist in the orchestra. He's used to make trips up here for the concerts and the performances. He had sort of a photographic type mind. He was an 'A' student all the way through high school and college and med school.²⁷

COHEN

FRED AND ADELE

Adele was one of the earliest businesswomen in this town. She started by first coming down to help on Saturdays. She said:

Saturday was the busy day, you know. So, [we] would stay there all-day Saturday. Run home, because I had a young son. After we had trouble with the banks—when the banks closed in 1931. From that time on, I had to be in the store because we could not afford help so, we only opened the store in the afternoons. So, I would go down to work in the afternoons. Then we were able to open more often. Fred only opened in the afternoon when I was there. Yea, then, it got better. We had before that, two girls: Erma McGowan and Mrs. Galal. Erma use to do the sewing and Galal was 'on the floor' as a saleslady. So, they had one come in the morning and then, the other came in the afternoon because they couldn't afford to have both on a full salary. So, that went on for several years. Then business got better; he opened all day and both girls came in all day.²⁸

Adele continued, adding that even her friends would come in and would not buy because it was too high. They would wait until it went on sale.

In all the years, I have been in business, very few Jewish people ever traded with me because I was always too high for them. They would go next door, to a Gentile store and pay the price there

as in 'The Helen Shoppe' [in Memphis]. They would not come to me, and I had the same thing in my windows, in my store. I had one customer that came in one Saturday night. We had just gotten through dressing the window, and she had just come in from Memphis. She said: 'Damn.' She was walking into the store cussing. I met her at the door. I said: 'What the heck is wrong with you?'

She said. 'Do you see that dress in your window?'

I said: 'yea, what is the matter with it?'

She said: 'I went to Memphis and brought that same dress. What right have you got to have that dress?'

I said: 'If you had any sense, you would shop Clarksdale first, then go to Memphis.'²⁹

IRVING

Adele said:

I don't exactly remember when Irving decided to come back here to live, but he wasn't doing anything in Youngstown. So, he came here to live with us. Fred opened or got another store that was between Kerstine's and our store (Maderia Store). We called it the Copy Cat. It had to be before 1932. At that time Alan's was next to Kerstine's and Copy Cat was next to Alan's. The Maderia Shop came next. Weller's was next to that. There were another two stores then, a hat shop. We took that over. Rudolph Landau had the next store. It was turned into Earl's or Jim Sander's. The alley did not happen until there was a fire. It was supposed to be a parking lot, but there was trouble with parking in it.³⁰

BERNARD

Bernard won an honorable mention for a whatnot shelf, which was mentioned in a newspaper article.³¹

DINNER

REUBEN

Blanche said:

When the banks crashed, we were in Clarksdale. It was the Depression, too. My daddy said more 'schnorrers' were coming back for food. They must have marked his restaurant on the outside. He would feed even a bowl of soup, not a little bowl, a big bowl. He wouldn't be happy unless it ran over. He would put a whole loaf of bread, in front of that poor guy. He ate and he gave him more, and he gave him meat and other stuff. When he got through eating, my daddy said: 'Where you going from here?' He'd say he didn't know; he'd keep walking. He'd say, 'It's getting dark. Where you going to sleep?' He doesn't have a place. So he gave him extra money even, to go get him a room.

So, the Jewish people watched him do that. They said: 'Mr. Dinner, you don't know, I bet they got more money than you have but you're schnorrers.'

He said: 'I'll feed anybody that comes in and reports, they're hungry. I don't want to have a guilty conscience. I'm going to throw it out or give it away if it's left over. Same thing.'

I met Adele when Fred was up to my Daddy's restaurant. They used to eat there all the time. And my Daddy used to make us, my sister and me, go up and buy dresses from Fred and Adele, because they were his steady customers. I'd say, Daddy, we don't need no clothes. Buy anyway! Buy anyway!³²

CLOTHES AND STYLE SHOW

Blanche continued describing the Depression in Clarksdale:

I remember Freda Fink was in business at that time. Yea, she had a dress shop. Yea, we had to trade with all of them Sebulsky, everybody. They were our customers. That was my Daddy. He'd send my Mama to shop for new dresses whether we need it or not. He was that kind of a man. He'd say, 'You've got to reciprocate.' After all, they come here every day lunch was our delicatessen. They'd come and eat supper He'd say, 'You've got to reciprocate or else they'll stop coming in.' Not that we didn't trade with them because Daddy would tell us to go. They had the nicest clothes in Clarksdale—Sebulsky's and Adele.

I liked Adele's clothes better. I even modeled. I bought a two-piece darling dress. It was like a top, and it was red and black. Anyway, they had a style show, and she asked me if I would model a dress that I bought. It was so adorable on me, and I said yes. I'll modeled it was in the [movie] theatre—some picture show. We modeled on the stage, and I won the prize. I think I [had] gotten dollars—that was ten dollars! In those years, ten dollars was worth about fifty dollars. No, that was when I was already in high school.³³

THE DELI MENU

Reuben's food was well liked and he did not share his recipes. His granddaughter gave the authors his recipes,

From all over, from all the little towns, they came every Sunday, they bought their delicatessen. They ate on Sunday at my Daddy's place, and on Sunday they would buy bread, their challah [Note: A sweet, eggy, yellow bread, usually braided, which is served on Shabbat and holidays, confusingly named for the commandment to set aside a portion of the dough from any bread. He ordered specially from Memphis, from Rosenbloom's bakery. He had pumpernickel; he had bagel. He did it as a favor, it cost him a lot of money to pay for the expense, but he didn't charge them one penny more than what the bread cost. He was generous.

[My dad] did more favors for the Clarksdale people. They used to come in,--what's her name? - the Friedman that was married to Joe Weiss, well she was always too busy to pay. 'Reuben, make a ticket.'

[Reuben said.] 'OK.' So, he made a ticket. For weeks at a time he had enough tickets, when he'd tell him, 'Joe, your tickets, you want to pay me?'

[Joe would] say, 'I didn't charge all that.'

[My dad would] say, 'What do you think, I made it up out of my head? You think I just put it down, make a ticket if you didn't eat?'

Anyway, [Joe] didn't trust Daddy, and Daddy shouldn't trust him. So he didn't like when people make tickets for that one reason. He'd rather let them eat free.³⁴

Esther Frances Meyer was Blanche's niece and her sister Mary's daughter. She talked about the Lady Dinner fish balls because everyone believed they brought good luck. Her letter reports,

Esther used a pot that was for the fish. They swore it was Lady Dinner's fish balls that brought the good luck. Then everyone Jewish and non-Jewish customers wanted them, and also the recipe in her own words. I still have this pot, and it is used for the purpose of gefilte fish. Ruben's recipe for Ruben sandwiches.³⁵ [See recipe below]

DINNER'S GOOD LUCK FISH BALLS:

[Note Gefilte Fish (g'-FIL-tuh) Yiddish: lit. stuffed fish. A traditional Jewish dish consisting of a ball or cake of chopped up fish.]

POT PREPARATION

Line bottom of pot with 4 or 5 large onions.

Place two or three washed bones from each fish

Place 1 washed head from buffalo fish and 1 wash head from carp (eyes removed).

Place 5 or 6 carrots and two or three parsnips (ends and tips cut)

Peel carrots. (Save some to garnish with)
Fill water half way in pot
Shake a bissell of coarse salt, a Bissell of sugar, a small handful of whole cloves.
I like to add a small piece of grated ginger root when it's available.
Get pot boiling.
While waiting to boil prepare fish mixture.

FISH MIXTURE

3 pounds buffalo fish ground
3 pounds carp fish ground
Dill pickle juice
5 or 6 eggs
1 or 2 small grated onions
Bissell of table salt and sugar
A small piece of grated ginger root
Ground matzo enough to get good texture
Mix ground fish in dishpan. Add pickle juice to moisten. Break eggs (with a spoon or 2 of grated onion) 1 at a time mixing really good after each egg. Add salt, sugar & ginger.
Bind with ground matzo to get the right texture.
When there is no matzo & not Passover use bread crumbs (ground old bread).
Wet hand=form balls in oval shapes. Drop in boiling pot when water returns to boil, put cover on pot and lower flame.
Shake pot by the handles and cook about 2½ hours
Shake pot 2- or 3-times during cooking.
Put clean dish towel over pot.
Cool about 30 minutes.
Take fish out of pot with slotted spoon.
Place in container lined with wax paper between layers.
Store in refrigerator.
Garnish with carrots when serving.³⁶

REUBEN'S REUBEN

2 Slices rye bread – light or dark
1 slice corn beef (halved to fit bread)
1 slice pastrami
1 slice roast beef
Nice helping of sauerkraut
1 chopped dill pickle
Bear mustard

Spread both slices of bread with mustard.
Drain juices from sauerkraut and replace withy beer to soak a few minutes.
Heat gently in saucepan.
Drain slightly.
Layer meats to alternate with each other.
Spread sauerkraut on layer in layer between layers of meat.
Top with chopped pickle put and put top slice of bread
Wrap in foil
Heat in oven until just warm.
Serve as soon as possible
Cut sandwich in half for easy eating.

NOTE: This sandwich, a favorite Ruben's Beer Mustard, was his exclusive secret. For his more "colorful" customers, he would use 1 dark slice bread and one light slice bread. The mustard was also used in potato salad as well as other times.³⁷

THE CUSTOMERS

Blanche continued about deli's customers:

My Daddy was very tight. He had such a good heart. He didn't get rich, believe me. If he had charged them what was supposed to be, he would probably have made more money. But he gave a lot of things, people didn't have money, he'd let them eat free. I tell you, if people came to buy deli, if they wanted half a pound he gave them two ounces over, and they would holler, 'I didn't want over, I wanted half a pound.'

And he would say, 'What do you care, I'm not charging you, I only charge you for half a pound.' He was the kind. He liked to give more, overweight rather than underweight. A lot of Jewish people put their hand on the scale, make it more. Not my daddy.³⁸

THE ROBBERY DURING THE DEPRESSION

Blanche said:

This is an interesting thing. At 2 o'clock, the police call us, 'Mr. Dinner, your restaurant was robbed. He reports, 'We want you to come in the morning, and we will take you to the prison. We arrested them.'

So he said: 'What did they take?'

The policeman said: 'Oh, they took a big Salami, they took cartons of cigarettes, they took food, you know.'

[Dinner] said: 'Is that all they took?'

They said: 'Yea, just food and cigarettes.' He always left little change in the cash register. And he had left a little bit open, they didn't take the little bit of money, they were hungry, they wanted food.

So Dinner said: 'Well, they must have been hungry. That's OK, let them out.' Isn't that something?

And [the police] said: 'You want it back?'

And he said: 'No, I don't want it back, let them keep it.' And he paid [their bail], what do you call it when they make them pay in order to get out. Somebody had to pay to get them out. It was in the newspaper.

So many things happened. Really, [During the] Depression—every few minutes, people came in, most of them were Jewish people, or even Gentiles. You know, hoboes would come. He'd feed everybody. And the Jewish friends of ours, they would sit there, and they'd tell my Daddy, 'You know, that's remarkable how you don't let one schnorrers get out without you feed them. And on top of that you give them a few dollars to go get a room to sleep overnight.'

Yea. My daddy was really a kind man. And my Mama, all the cotton buyers, next door, upstairs, cotton buyers, they bought and sold cotton. They would come [to] eat lunch [and ask] 'Mama what do you have today?' And she would tell them.

You know my Daddy was jealous. He told my Mama, 'You better not talk to all those men. I don't like for you to talk.' He was a jealous man. My mother was a pretty woman.³⁹

FINK

ALVIN

Alvin said:

I played Center on the football team when we won the state championship. We had several who played good football: M. K. Woolbert, Jake Jacobson, Meadows was principal.⁴⁰

The teacher we were the most afraid of was Annie Pannie. She was very tough as a 2nd grade teacher. We were all scared to death of Mr. Heidelberg. He was a driver. He made that School Board and he had some big people on it. They had a rule that you couldn't be on the board unless you had a child in school. One of my cousins, Little Celeste Woolbert Dansinger was Heidelberg's secretary for a number of years. I also remembered my Aunt Esther taught grammar school.⁴¹

FREDA

Freda's obit reports the following about her life accomplishments:

[Freda] was the daughter of Abe and Fanny Woolbert, early settlers in Clarksdale. Their home at 116 Oakhurst was the third house built in that area in 1910. She attended schools in several Mississippi Delta towns and graduated from Itta Bena High School in 1908. She majored in music at the Mississippi Institute for Women (MSCW) in Columbus and a music conservatory in Memphis...In Clarksdale she was active in the Clarksdale Woman's Club and headed the music department for several years. For many years she owned and operated the Marion Shoppe before retiring in 1971...She was a member of the Congregation Beth Israel B'nai B'rith Women, Temple Sisterhood, the Eastern Star and Hadassah.⁴²

MARION

Marion said: "I was in the Mrs. Long's art class while in the fourth grade. I continued to take art until I graduated. I liked art so well that I decided to be an art major in college."⁴³

HIRSBERG/OKUN

BERNARD

Selma James said: "One of the Hirsberg boys, who settled in Friars Point, went to Ole Miss when I did. It was Bernard...He didn't have anything to do with anybody. Corinne likes him, I think. But he didn't have anything to do with me."⁴⁴

FLORA

Prior to graduation, Flora was very active in sports, such as tennis and basketball. She said they did not have teams but played, such as Greenwood, Greenville, [and] Helena. She was jumping center. Lillian Sack was a forward. She too enjoyed athletics. Also, prior to graduation, Flora believed she went to senior year dances only. She knew individuals, such as the Fink and Cooper families in Memphis that used to visit Clarksdale. She said they did not go to Memphis to socialize or shop because of the roads: "Go to Memphis to a picture show?! Do you realize you had to go on a gravel road, in the car, 2 1/2 hours on the train, and 3^{1/2} in a car! You didn't do that. Well, I didn't do that. There may have been people who did. Not too much. Trouble, too much time killing"

In comparing her graduation from high school with her son or daughters' in 1953 and 1954, Flora said there were no difference, except her graduation was held in the Bobo High School auditorium, and the later ones were held at the Civic Auditorium.⁴⁵

According to Flora, the first movie house in Clarksdale was on Third Street, across the street from jewelry store. “Well, anyway, the first block of Third Street, and then they had that one on what we used to call the Bloody Bucket, on Second Street, and then came the Paramount. Yeah. It cost you 12 cents to go. Can you imagine going to a show for 12 cents—did you ever?”

KERSTINE

SELMA

Selma said: “I had one date in Clarksdale with Nat Okun. That was the extent of my dating. I was a sophomore at Ole Miss. He was not at Ole Miss with me. No, I came home. I didn't date until I went to college.” According to Selma Nat drove around in a car and talked about Reva Kline the whole time. “I was going with James' roommate, and I was pretty well gone on him; so, I was not really interested in Nat.”⁴⁶

Corinne, her aunt, added: “Selma met James, her husband, at Ole Miss. He was a Baptist; she as a Jewish girl who had very little Jewish influence, but she never lost her Jewish identity.”⁴⁷

Selma continued:

You see, James went with my roommate all my junior year, and I went with his roommate, and his roommate graduated in our junior year. They left us. I didn't think anything about it. I went to summer school that summer because I had been out a year (April 1929 to January 1930) I knew James at that time, but I knew he was going with my roommate but we never did date while the two of them dated. I dated very little in college. Well, anyway, I went with James' roommate my sophomore year. When I came back from California, my boyfriend was going with a redheaded girl, but we went out some, but not much. He finished school a year before I did, and he left and that left James and me.⁴⁸

MAGDOVITZ

JOE

Joe said:

Well, the social life picture came to mostly playing bridge and dancing—[I] went to all the dances in that section. In Cleveland, we went to all the dances given by private people, not sponsored by organizations. We drove cars. I ran around with Ben Jacobson. We were close. very close. Matter of fact, I stayed over at his house quite often. I think there was a pool hall or something like that.

I bought a bakery on Issaquena, because it had gone broke and Irving Shankerman was on one side and Harry, my brother, was on the opposite side of the street—on the Square. It was four years later, and he bought the Adler's store on Issaquena used to be, what's his name? Albert Israel was down the street from me. No, no, he was in the inner store and Harry was there and the grocery store was on the corner.⁴⁹

It was before that. Harry was across the street. Before I married in 1934, I bought my store about November 24, 1930, or '31 when I was 23 years old. I bought out the bakery and went into the bakery business for seven years.

There was a red-light district on Issaquena, upstairs. It had moved on by the time I got there. The upstairs of the buildings were not being used at all. The restaurant where the women hung around was down the street from where we were. I don't remember Campassi's store being on the corner when I was there. The only movie house I recall was uptown, not on Issaquena.

Seven people worked for me in the bakery. Well, we went to work at two o'clock in the morning. Now, that was when the first crew that went in because we had to make donuts and things. We used to bake donuts for the bread routes. They'd leave town around four or five o'clock. The only time was when somebody didn't show up, then I had to help out at 2 am to help make donuts. They made the cakes and the breads and everything at the same time. We had a big business on Saturday nights—the biggest time: I can tell you we stayed at the store, the bakery, sometimes until 1 o'clock, twelve o'clock—Till everyone else closed up on the street. The other merchants would close up and then y'all would close up. I don't remember all of the people but I used to have people come into the bakery from the whole section around Clarksdale, especially on holidays when I used to bake bread. No, I don't remember Lenora and Mrs. Sack having a catering business at the same time that I had my bakery.

I don't recall going to Dinner's Delicatessen after the stores closed. We played a lot of bridge back then with the Louis Binders. We'd congregate over there. Jake Fink's poker game was considered the older group. My brother, Amil, used to play pinochle. I learned how to play. They had a club on Second Street—down at the far end of Second Street which was away from town. Desoto and that area, way down in there was where they played most of the time. I don't remember the name, but they had a club.

The only time they called me was when they were short help, and they had to get help to move from Issaquena to over on the street...the bridge—on the other side of the ditch between Front Street—Sunflower and Yazoo...across the ditch—the street was Second Street. We moved the bakery over to that street because it was between Sunflower and Delta. It was on the corner, the opposite corner...This was Second and...I was here, right next to a service station across the street on the corner.

I didn't live upstairs, most of the time I stayed with the Hymen Cantor. His wife rented me a room—I stayed there. Then later on, when my sister, Libby, came down, we bought a house. She came down about eighteen months later. No, she stayed and married a fellow who was working for me; he was a baker.

The Elks Club and the dances: People from the Peabody would come down and play one night. I was there every time. Well, used to be Flora Okun—Flora Hirsberg later on.

Adele Cohen came down from New York in 1928 married to Fred. You remember when she came? I knew Fred before he married her, though because I used to run around with him.

All those dances and everything—all of them...used to be...from Memphis used to come down all the time; such as Bill Angel used to come down—he married a black girl.

Gerald Plitman was younger than me but he and his sister, Gloria used to babysit Joy when she was younger. They lived next door. That's when they lived on Elm Street.

Jerome's wife Barbara Shepp and Gerald were first cousins. Louie used to run around with us...Fred, Jeannette Sack. Yea, they were married.

[Joe talked about the competition on Issaquena Street:] Oh, that was very rough stuff. There was Jake Levinson and his brother had a store on Yazoo. Bill had his store on Delta. The guy on the corner was his uncle. Yea. Then the Okun store was right next door to them—the shoe store. No, on Delta—All of those were on Delta—on the corner. The furniture store was across the street from my Uncle. Then later on, they moved, Fred moved, the street next to the Square on Third between Yazoo and Delta. Later on they moved over...My brother-in-law, Bill, bought a store on the opposite side. This was the same side as the theatre was on but not right next door—several doors down on Second Street.

The minyans and services during the day and night on Issaquena were led by Rabbi Tolochko. He was there most of the time when I was there. I met my future wife in Hughes.

Albert Israel and Abe May and Uncle Harry all have stores on Issaquena at the same time I did. My father-in-law owned the store, but it was originally owned by a furniture company. I came to Memphis and got all of the wholesalers except Ogil Brothers to give me a line of credit so I could open up. And everybody but Ogil Brothers gave me credit.⁵⁰

MARKS

During the interview by Rabbi Plaut with Mr. & Mrs. Katz, one of them said:

[Leopold or Jacob] accumulated...several thousand acres of land. He reared a big family and they all lived there—very, very wealthy. I remember as a child, they had this private train come into Marks with ready to wear from Lord & Taylor's and Henry Bendow for the lady's to select their clothing. That was the most exciting thing I ever saw. They lived there, and they had children. They all intermarried. The second generation lost all the money. They lived so high everything was so high. Before you know it they had lost all the land. The children dissipated it. When they left Marks, people in Marks gave them money to move. The courthouse has a picture of Mr. Leopold Marks in it. He dedicated the entire town site. There are four homes there that they originally lived in...When we got there in '35 there was nobody. When they left Marks they had lost all the land and they were penniless.⁵¹

SACK/LEVY

JEANETTE

Jeanette married Julius Lazarus Levy, MD; she died May 3, 1993.^[146]

During the interviews, the author learned from several interviewees how Jeanette enjoyed strutting around in her clothes made by her mother.

CHILD: Julius Lazarus Jr., M.D

SEBULSKY

1931–1933 ISSAQUENA DEPARTMENT STORE

Maurice Sebulsky, a resident of Tutwiler, Mississippi, came to Clarksdale in 1930 to open retail dress shops. The first one, the Style Shoppe, opened on Delta Avenue and survived for many years. No data were found on when he became one of the earliest Jewish merchants operating businesses on Issaquena. The 1933 city directory acquired its data six months earlier than publication; thus, it can be inferred that Sebulsky opened between May 1932 and July 1932. Few local residents knew the Sebulskys had a second store, Issaquena Department Store, for a very short time on Issaquena.⁷⁷² It closed by February 1933 and can be classified as “you had to be there to remember it.” Sebulsky was born in Grodno, a city in Belarus, formerly Poland-Lithuania, in 1890. He immigrated to Flora, Mississippi, with his mother and two siblings in 1895. Even though his wife Kate Grundfest was from Gary, another small central Mississippi town, both were living in the East when they married in 1920. The couple returned to Mississippi due to the Depression. They chose to move to Tutwiler to open a dry goods store. The couple are remembered for the well-known Style Shoppe on Yazoo Avenue, which sold premium ladies' ready-to-wear. Maurice died in 1958 and Kate in 1985.

According to the newspaper feature article on the front page:

The up-to-date shop is well located on Delta Avenue in the building occupied recently by Levinson Brothers. When the shop doors were opened at nine-thirty o'clock this morning a crowd

of eager shoppers were waiting to avail themselves of the special prices on the lovely men stock of goods and to inspect the new establishment.

Mr. and Mrs. Sebulsky and attractive seven-year old daughter, Natalie will occupy the pretty bungalow on School street which was formerly the home of Mr. and Mrs....Carr. They will be welcomed to the city.⁵²

WIENER

ABE

Dave said:

Abe had two daughters and one son [Dave]. One was Rena Pearlman Grushin. She was really my stepsister because my father remarried to Annie Levenson Pearlman about 1930. Her husband was a Pearlman. Her maiden name was Levenson. She was just like a sister to me. Soon as he remarried, he wanted his family back together. His daughters were all (interrupted). and I'm sure they wanted to get rid of us. I'm sure they loved us and all that.

On Saturday, sure, my father wanted me in the store, and you had to. In the fall of the year, he had another store that was sort of like a variety store. He put me in that one, whenever they went out of town. I was about seventeen or eighteen, I'm sure we ran the damned store. I didn't have to work all the time. I had very little to do with earning living for the store. He had clerks.⁵³

DAVE

Dave continued talking more about his own life:

We played on the high school football team. I played, an end. Yea. We played Greenwood, played Drew; and we played the Clarksdale 'B' team. We played Webb, and Sumner. I wasn't on the tennis team but I played tennis. We had tennis courts and, I went out for swimming at Ole Miss. Track. I went out at Ole Miss. While in high school we had field meets at Ole Miss. Oh, I must have won a few honors but, I'm not known as an athlete.

We didn't have lighted fields in those days, so they played daytime football, they couldn't play at night. We didn't get the gym until later on. It was outside they played. Had good basketball—we had some big 'rednecks.' We really couldn't get near them. Football we could because it took more players; but, basketball, no. They were good.

I owned my first car when I was going to Medical School in New Orleans. There was car in Tutwiler. I didn't own one. But my father had 'ema Model T Ford. I drove it. Yea, it was a big day when he bought the car; we were excited. Most of the cars he had a Dodge, and he had a Nash. I think he had a Buick or something. Most of them were small. When we got a bigger family. we didn't have a Ford...It would be a pickup truck. It was a Model T. Yea, I got to drive that. I didn't need a driver's license to drive it. I was about fourteen when I started driving. First, he'd let me take it to the filling station, put gas in it, we had to pump the gas.

I was confirmed about 1930 or '31. I couldn't find a picture of any of us. All those pictures started about 1934 or 1935. I do not know if it was the first class or not. We didn't go as regular as they did later. We were always skipping. Each one had a little speech, a little sentence to say, and that was about all. They really, if you were a boy, they wanted you to be Bar Mitzvah. They didn't give a damn about Confirmation. I don't remember ever going to Friday night services when I was a child. No. If they had them that much, I don't know. Never hurt me.

During the depression, I don't remember suffering too much. Yes, they would buy some chickens from the farmers, and they would come in. We would put them in a chicken coop or something. and the cook would get them out and kill them. We didn't suffer as much in the cities because there was always a little money in the cash register—damned little. You could get an ice cream cone or something.

I don't remember the famous horse, War Admiral. The movie made it sound like the whole country was watching, but I don't think my father paid a damned bit of attention to some racehorse. I don't think Tutwiler was enamored, but maybe the larger cities were. I think there were other things going on in Tutwiler. I remember something the newspapers had, got his big race, but the little races that he won along the way, we didn't know any more.

I think living in the Delta was different from other locations because I would say we were accepted...and we played with the Christian children. I don't remember them trying to convert me at all. They would take you to their Sunday School, what they called it, the BYTU—the Baptists League, but there was not much on conversion. I don't remember their preachers trying to convert you. Yea, They didn't bother me in any way, there was no recruiting, or 'you're going to die and go to Hell if you don't believe in Jesus.' I didn't hear that. They would come to my father's store. I think that was different.⁵⁴

1932

First stretch of county's concrete road system is completed.⁵⁵

“Promenade Walk” was an ambitious production by the 1932 Senior Class under the direction of Miss Dorothy Middleton. Taking part in the production: Harold Sanders, Ben Ellis, Alvin Fink, Harvey Heidelberg, Alex Gilliam, Harold Jones, Gertrude Bernstein [and others].⁵⁶

CONGREGATION BETH ISRAEL

According to Alvin Labens: “Somewhere between Freyman and Tolochko and up until Tolochko, I wouldn't say they were Orthodox, more traditionalist. They did the best they could with what they had.”⁵⁷

The events of what happened in 1932 to initiate hiring a rabbi to live in Clarksdale were not recorded or found among the interview and newspapers. Freyman did not die until 1939, but Tolochko came to Clarksdale in 1932 to transform traditionalist practices into a more reform congregation. One possibility was the number of Jewish families growing and supporting the Temple may have provided the income to support a reform ordained rabbi.

The following summarizes the events of 1932:

1. Rabbi J. Gerson Tolochko, the first permanent Rabbi, was installed on October 17th. Congregation becomes partly reform. The Rabbi had to please Orthodox, Conservative and Reform members.

2. Rabbi Tolochko, universally loved and popular in the community and decidedly a leader among his people of Clarksdale.⁵⁸

3 Forty-six students in Sunday School. Eighty-six on membership roster.⁵⁹

Before that, it wasn't very well organized. When it was Orthodox, you were Bar Mitzvah, and that was it.⁶⁰

Labens said:

[Tolochko] was not an ordained rabbi. Harry Kantor was a resident buyer in those days. He would go to New York and ship merchandise to each of the local merchants and he got a commission. When he was on his way to New York, H. Damsker or Abe Block thought it was time due to the need for a reform rabbi. I don't remember the Sunday School until Tolochko. If you can find us a rabbi in New York. Tolochko had been in medical school; he had been raised in New York and had a wife and 2 children. He became ordained while he was in Clarksdale. The last time I was in

contact with them, in late 50s and early 60s, they were in South Carolina. I think Rebecca, the oldest daughter, wound up in New Orleans.

Tolochko made the Sunday school. Literally with his own hands, he partitioned off the basement; put in a buzzer bell system. He departmentalized; the bell rang every forty-five minutes, and we changed classes. He did a good job for what he was getting. The reason it probably started in 1935 is because of Tolochko. They wouldn't have had it when the congregation and rabbis were more Orthodox. I am just presuming this. There would have been Bar Mitzvahs. Sam Baker and Charles Levine were older than me and they were Bar Mitzvah. He was a navy captain.⁶¹

BINDER

GILDA JEANNIE

September 3: Gilda Jeannie dies, age 1 year-old. Daughter of Pearl and Louis.

BLOCK

ABE

Mayor of Jonestown, Mississippi⁶²

CALIFF

LEON

Leon said:

It was 1932 or 1933, one of the two, that we left Dublin and came to Clarksdale...I have a younger brother, his name is Irving David, but he goes by the name of Butch, everybody knows him as Butch. There's about four and one-half or five years separating the oldest, Dorothy, from me, and me from Butch. By the time he was born, I believe, we were already in Clarksdale. So he could add something. Our first rented house was on DeSoto Street, South of the viaduct.

They rented a store on Issaquena Street from a man named Abraham. It was a long narrow store. My father used to have to hang socks, bandanas and stock from the ceiling and then it was just he and my mother in the store, so, he thought, a number of times, when he bent over or she bent over they couldn't see the customers and somebody would reach over and grab something.

I went to Elizabeth Dorr School. Bobby Friedman lived a block away. I remember. He used to have somebody come and pick him up and take him home every day. I had started high school at twelve years old...Yes. Bobo Junior High is where we went. Miss Hutton was the Latin teacher, Miss Edith Wilkinson passed me in geometry just to get rid of me. The problem was that I had an asthma attack. I used to have a lot of them in the course of a year. I got behind in geometry; I never did catch up. I never did understand what was going on. So I think she passed me just to help me out, to get rid of me.

I played in the clarinet band. Mr. Kooyman was the band director. Well, he had what he called a concert band and a marching band...Mr. Kirkpatrick had the Coca Cola Company. And he had some children. And his boys used to be the cheerleaders, the bandleaders when we would be marching, and they were very flamboyant. The band was an important element. We thought we had a pretty decent high school band. We never did do well when we used to go to all the contests in Jackson where they brought all the different bands together, I don't know why but we didn't. But we did very well as a marching band. Oh, yes, in the concert band, I played clarinet and

eventually became first clarinet. Once you learned how to play the clarinet, it's easy to play a saxophone. So I picked up the alto saxophone. Then me and a boy named Paul Abel, who played trumpet and another boy whose name I can't remember, played trombone, we formed a little band. In those days, the greatest music in the world was Glenn Miller, Ray Anthony, even somebody I was crazy about, but most people never heard of. As far as we were concerned, we thought of the music the Blacks played around Clarksdale as foolish stuff. The music that was THE music was produced by big bands. We didn't care for blues or stuff like that. When I went to college, I played in a dance band in college.

I remember Vernon Hughes. Well, he had to prove to them what a tough guy he was, that he should be accepted. He played on the football team all right but that wasn't enough. And he used to pick on me. I was much smaller than he was. Sometimes I tried to fight back. Now, here's where I was caught on a dilemma:

I would come home and my mother would fuss at me because, 'here's that clean shirt I just pressed today and here you've got grass stains all over it and you've got a tear in it.'

And my father used to say, 'Good for you. I don't care. You took up for yourself.'

[Leon said:] I didn't know what I should do. Half the time I was scared as the devil because he was a big guy. I didn't know what the hell I was doing. I was wearing glasses.

Vernon was probably a year or two older than me. But anyway, I suffered from discrimination, not only from him, but, really, the things that hit me the hardest was, there was a fellow by the name of Joe Weeks, who was one of the sons of one of the plantation owners. He and I started playing the clarinet together at the same time.⁶³

MOSE

Leon went on:

Sol's brother Mose married a Gentile, Alma Deeds. They had five children. They did make an effort to send their children to the Temple in Clarksdale at the very beginning. But it didn't last too long. Alma, Moses' wife, and mother just couldn't get along. So, actually, the family separated. They were ten miles apart. I remember when we first moved to Clarksdale, maybe once every two or three months we used to drive down there and visit with them. They still lived in Dublin. As time went by, I think in part for the children, they started going to the Baptist Church there. Mose...lived in a world by himself.⁶⁴

COHEN

STANLEY

Adele said: "The thing about it when my kids—when Stanley started getting sick with asthma he was about 2^{1/2} years old. We had an awful time. All those people were right there. They helped me; they were there for me from morning to night—helping me with him. Such a terrible time, that when I would call Dr. Barrett, it was like three times a day."⁶⁵

FINK

FREDA

Alvin said: "When I graduated from Clarksdale High School, my mother pawned her diamonds to send me to school that year to Tulane University."⁶⁶

Another story by Pauline was about how the money was used. She said: “[My mother] had backbone in that straight carriage because, at the time of the Depression, when the stock market crashed, and Jake lost his money, but not his land.”⁶⁷

Amy Greenwood, Freda's niece said: “No one who was interviewed could clarify when or how often Freda took her diamonds and went to the bank to put them up as collateral. She wanted to go into business even though she had never worked a day in her life, not even for her father, Abraham.”⁶⁸

Marion said: “Alvin later attended Ole Miss and George Washington, [in] Washington, DC, to complete his law degree. While Alvin was at Ole Miss, he roomed with Edwin Shackeroff for about six months. They couldn’t stand each other.” Marion had not really known Edwin even though he would come to all of Pauline Kline’s and Alvin Fink’s parties. Marion said she was only allowed to come down stairs once a year on New Year’s Eve. “There was such an eight year age difference between Edwin and me.”⁶⁹

FRIEDMAN

MAX

According to the Mrs. Walton, W. P. A. Project interviewer, “ Max Friedman [is] prominent leader in all civic enterprises and organizations for the good of the City of Clarksdale and county at large.”⁷⁰

ROSE

Mrs. Max (Rose) Friedman was re-appointed to the board of trustees of the Clarksdale Carnegie Library for a period of 3 years.⁷¹

SAM

During the interview with the Friedman family, one of them said:

We had two fires at our house that started from an electrical malfunction. The whole town turned out to put the fire out and to take the furniture out. I was ten once and in my teens during the second fire. They took a complete china cabinet with crystal and china out of our house and broke only one stem of crystal. They took the refrigerator out and broke one egg while the fire was raging. We had an upright piano that two men walked out with and it took about six to put it back in. At the first fire that was in the summer and we lived in the Teacher area home where all the teachers lived during the year. They were gone for the summer, so we took possession. The next fire, we lived with the Marcus [family] until our house was repaired. Both times it was rent free; nobody charged us.⁷²

ELAINE, CHARLES, TUNIE

The following data came from all three during the family interview:

Sickness brought the town people to your home with food. We used the doctors in Jonestown; these included: Dr W. S. Slaughter and Dr. D.O. Pierce who were general practitioners. We went to Clarksdale if we had to be admitted to a hospital. I had my tonsils taken out and when I was in that car wreck in Clarksdale.

We all three had scarlet fever when Elaine was in the third grade, and Charles was in the sixth or seventh grade. I remember Dr. Slaughter sat up all night, maybe one or two nights with Mama.

Charles came down with it New Year's Day. Neither our parents nor the maid caught it. We don't know where it came from that we got it. Nobody else in town had it. There was one child that lived in Lula that had it at the same time we had it but we did not have any contact with the child. It was a black child, and we couldn't have had any contact. The Clarksdale Laundry would not take our linens, and we had to boil our linens at home while we were sick.⁷³

HIRSBERG

BERNARD

Bernard said:

I graduated in 1932. Better talents than I would ever be were walking the streets looking for jobs. I came home. I ultimately got a job, starting November 1. I came back in June. So I came up here. The firm was Joe Ellis. I came up here, and I told him that what I wanted was experience that I would work without compensation. I didn't want to loaf. I wanted to some experience because I wanted to take the C. P. A. Examination. At that time, fortunately for me, he was quite busy. He needed another man, and he put me on, and, of course, started paying me from the beginning. I came to work here July 1, 1932.⁷⁴

Newspaper announcement: "Couple married on April 6. Came as a surprise to their friends as it was planned after Budgie's [Bernard's] graduation in June. Flora graduated in 1930 from Clarksdale High School and working at Carnegie Public Library. Budgie graduated from Friars Point High School and was a football star. After graduation, he attended University of Mississippi for one year; then, transferred to University of Illinois. The ceremony was held at the First Street Synagogue in Louisville, Kentucky; Rabbi Charles Chavel officiated."⁷⁵

KANTOR

DOLLY

"Misses Mozell Critz and Dolly Kantor, school students who were recently elected as pep managers by the student body."⁷⁶

KERSTINE

SELMA

Selma said: "I did not go to many parties in Clarksdale, except Lenabel [Magdovitz] had a raft of showers when she got married."⁷⁷

She said they had games. She had every kind of shower you could have. "I believed I was invited to all of her bridal parties." Selma married on January 7th, which was before she finished college. After her graduation, they moved to Tutwiler. James was a pharmacist. While in Tutwiler, he owned his pharmacy across the street from another pharmacy.

Dave Wiener said: "Mr. Ragland had the big one on the other side of. Right. James went bankrupt in 1936. Mr. James did, yes. He got into trouble. I don't remember. Wasn't anything bad."⁷⁸

James Faulkner lived in Tutwiler. “I think it was six months or so, at that time, with his wife. He was an engineer for Highway 49 in that area. James wasn't a Faulkner but a cousin [to William Faulkner].”

Selma talked about the Faulkner couple:

Selma knew James Faulkner while he lived there, but she does not want this to be told for a book. She used to talk with Mrs. Faulkner daily. Mrs. Faulkner would come in and spend the morning with her. They would have coffee or something in the morning. This was from 1932-1936. They would sit around the laundry or in the kitchen. She had two little boys. I don't know what their names are now. Her mother-in-law was an artist. He was there to build the highway from Tutwiler to Memphis through Clarksdale. He had a book he wrote. She was from Oxford. Her mother had a boarding house. He had a good voice. I heard him over there. I think, he had a little too much to drink. He was singing at the top of his voice. He had such a beautiful voice.

Mrs. Faulkner used to say she hoped the Lord that they wouldn't be geniuses because they had enough of them in the family. They were fine children. She had them refuse a handkerchief in front of them. She wouldn't let them use a handkerchief to blow your nose because it was considered impolite. Yea, she got mad at Mrs. Dickens. She lived on the corner up there. Because Mrs. Dickens said she didn't believe little boys and little girls should play together on the school ground. She said she knew her little boys were good as any little girls you ever saw. I got into the middle of that, but I didn't mean too. Mrs. Dickens had invited her to a party. She told Mrs. Dickens she couldn't go. I didn't know anything about it. Mr. Dickens came into the store. He was the Internal Revenue man. He asked me where Mrs. Faulkner was. I told him she was on the back porch. I didn't know there was a party going on and she wouldn't go. So, I told him where she was. It wasn't my fault. I didn't know what to say. I didn't care too much. I didn't care about Mrs. Dickens.⁷⁹

Corinne said: “[Selma] completed her degree in teaching but she never did teach because she didn't want to.” I remember James and Selma before James owned the pharmacy; it was called the Whittington. He bought the [store] from Mr. Whittington.⁸⁰

Selma told about her great-aunt's robbery during the same year:

[My] grandmother had a sister that she was crazy about. This sister had a boarding house, I think in Helena. It was right after my mother died, and some male boarder told her that if she would let him hypnotize her, he could grant any wish she wanted. She had taken off all her jewelry. She loved to wear jewelry, and she put it in a bag around her neck. She let him hypnotize her, and he stole that bag of jewelry and put some brass rings in there. When she woke up, he told her that he had the word to leave town and he left. She felt that bag and there were all brass rings instead of jewelry. There was one pin left. Mama thought it was a ruby, but I took it to someone down on Capitol Street, Jackson, Mississippi. It is not a ruby, it's a garnet and it's not worth what she thought. It had one little gold leaf that broke off. I don't wear it because I was scared I'd lose it.⁸¹

MAX AND CAESAR

Selma said: “Neither Max nor Caesar worked in Isidor's store but Isidor may have helped them in their stores. Each of them had a store in 1933. Adolph and Caesar had a store on Second Street. Right there at Sunflower between Sunflower and Delta Avenue. I think it was where the Confectionery was later. I don't know when he decided to leave Clarksdale.”⁸²

Corinne said: “[Caesar] was up in his thirties when he went to Florida.”⁸³

When talking with Julia B. Glassman, she said that the three Kerstine men who were unmarried were called the *Kerstine Bachelors*.⁸⁴

CORINNE AND ISIDOR'S MARRIAGE

Corinne said:

After Isidor helped raised his niece, Selma, he decided he did not want to remain a bachelor any longer. Isidor's uncle, Mose Landau, was dating with [Corinne's] aunt, Gussie Weiss Bernstein in Memphis. Isidor used to drive Mose to Memphis to see Aunt Gussie on Sundays. I do not know how he knew Aunt Gussie. One time Aunt Gussie asked Isidor if he would to write to her niece in St. Joe, Missouri. He said that if she writes me, I will write her. That's how it started. I met Isidor on Fourth of July. He brought Uncle Mose up to see Aunt Gussie. Aunt Gussie had me to come down from St. Joe to meet Isidor. That's how it all came about. He took me out, and we got to know each other. We went to the Peabody Hotel for supper. Yes, I liked him at that time. We agreed to write when I went home. This was for six months, and I agreed to get to know him through letters. Then I invited him up for Christmas that year or Hanukkah or whatever. He came up Christmas day. He asked me to marry him at my house the day before New Year's Eve. He asked me if I would stay with him when we went to Kansas City to spend New Year's Eve. I said: 'strictly honorable.'

[Isidor] said: 'Of course.'

Corinne added:

I assumed that as a marriage proposal. We married in Kansas City, Missouri, on New Year's Eve, 1932. He did not tell his father or his family about his marriage until he arrived in Clarksdale with his bride. He also waited to tell his bride about his father until they were on the way to Clarksdale from Memphis. It was the way we started 1933.

On New Years' Eve, we went to the courthouse and got the license first. It was Saturday, and they closed at noon. We wandered around the stores a little while and went back to the hotel. We got married at six o'clock. We got dressed and cleaned up. We had called a rabbi from the courthouse. Rabbi Meyerberg had agreed to marry us after the Sabbath was over. Then it was a short ceremony at his apartment. I don't know who the witnesses were. That night we went across the street to the 'Myron Greens' and had supper. It was across from the Rabbi's apartment on the Plaza. After dinner we went back to the hotel and went to the picture show. No, I don't remember the name of the movie. We went back to the hotel and called Minnie Bornman to tell her and to see if she wanted to be with us (Ben Putter, her uncle). She was at the hotel because she was a guest at a party going on at the hotel.

Yes, I called home that night. My mom didn't say anything. I don't remember what my dad did. I don't remember if Gene was there.

RAPPAPORT

MELVIN

September 10: "Medals Given Here in School Music Contest...Winners of the music proficiency medals offered to members of the Clarksdale school bands by Director Simon Kooyman for the best showing made during the summer session band practices were awarded the

badges yesterday at the formal opening of school by the donor...Melvin Rappaport was awarded the medals from the Oakhurst school students...promoted to the first band.”⁸⁵

SOLOMON

DAVE

Active member of Board of Supervisors, Jonestown, Mississippi.⁸⁶

WISE

JAMES EDWARD

My full name is James Edward Wise. I was born in Sumner, Mississippi, February 11, 1932. Well I grew up in Sumner. We had a very fine school and so forth. I went to school there until my junior year in high school. I went to Clarksdale because after the war the population shift resulted in a lack of funding for the rural schools, and they no longer offered courses like foreign languages, which in my day you had to have to get into a good liberal arts school.

Oh yes, I remember my teachers. (Well, some of them, I don't remember all of them. I can remember the teacher that I referred to as being 'riches.')

Maybe I shouldn't use that term I suppose. It does translate. She was the wife of the school principal. I remember her just berating a child over her father's business or shady business. Nothing directed toward me.

I do remember... the Christmas pageant. I thought I should have been a wise man because of my name, but there wasn't much possibility of that. I dunno if they even got past that, but I couldn't even carry a tune. They all had solo parts, but I did march and sing 'Oh Come All Ye Faithful.'

I can remember crossing the old bridge in Clarksdale, but I don't really remember that. I'm sure it was in the mid to late thirties, but I don't have the personal recollection of it. And so they were very conscious that I also knew about shoes, and we used to laugh. They used to send me to Louisville in the summer time to visit my cousin Helen Fink from Marigold, who was there married and living in Louisville. And I'd stay for weeks, and what they were doing is that they would send me up there to see what Jews looked like. I didn't know it at the time, but that's exactly what they had in mind. In fact, instead of sending me to a fancy camp, they'd send me to a YMHA camp out of Louisville in the summer time. I didn't know it at the time. And also, you know, in my generation in college, if you joined a fraternity you joined a Jewish fraternity 'cause they were totally segregated. And we always had a lot of Jewish connections so it never dawned on me that you would not be a part of the Jewish community.

When I was a wee, small child before I went to Sunday School in Clarksdale, I was enrolled in the Presbyterian Cradle-roll because we affiliated with them...We didn't affiliate with the church, but we had many friends there. The minister and my father were friends, and my mother worked with the women in the church doing charity work. [For example,] running the clothes closet for people whose houses were burned and poor people...who needed clothes. I'm sure there was some anti-Semitism, certainly in thought, if not in deed, but I was never aware of any. I saw what I would call somewhat righteousness in the school, but it was never directed at me. It was directed by super Christians toward those that they believed to be less Christian than they oughta be. Nothing that I ever recognized was ever directed toward me. Things like Debutante Balls and Bachelor's Clubs I just thought were natural...I never gave it a thought...I was always taught to respect myself and my religion and never back from it. And you did, not in a forceful sorta way, but to always know where you came from, and what it was...Always be prepared to answer questions.

Oh course I went to Sunday School in Clarksdale throughout the entire period. Well I can remember Max Friedman being superintendent of the Sunday School. I remember from photographs that Mr. Abramson was at one time, but I don't remember that. Elaine Friedman from Jonestown at that time was a Sunday School teacher of mine. Sissy Friedman taught one of my

classes; I can remember...I don't really remember who else taught our Sunday School classes at that time. Now my father taught me also at home. My father taught me to read Hebrew. He didn't teach me [to] translate but he taught me to read...He saw that I learned the tune...from a Rabbi Atlas in Greenwood. He took me down there to learn the tunes.

Oh there was a tremendous amount of turn over [with the Rabbis] when I was a child. I think I told you last time about, that when I was confirmed we didn't have a Rabbi, and he'd left [during] my confirmation year. My father arranged for Rabbi Rabinowitz from Greenville to come up on Sunday afternoons to meet with us and confirmed us.

Oh there was tremendous, a lot of controversy and even the many of them that considered themselves Reform really didn't know what Reform meant. It just meant that they tried to Americanize is what it was. And when you scratched them a little bit, they didn't like the Reform trappings...There was a lot of social problem in there within the congregation, within the community, not the congregation.

My parents didn't, but I think to them a trip to Clarksdale as I say, they never got over the concept that it was a trip. Of course nowadays it's like one community. Other people didn't. I know I mean I talked with Hermine Davidson or Hermine Jacobs she was, we grew up basically together. And she reports they always went to Cleveland on Friday night. That same sorta deal, but we didn't do it. And the Peals didn't. The Turners didn't go much of anywhere. I don't know about holidays. But we just didn't do that.

Well I know that we had many acquaintances that we were friendly, we spoke, and we were never in their house or them in ours...I can remember that there were some boundaries in my house. Coming from my father, my mother was just 'I love everybody,' but she conformed pretty well. She said that more than she really meant it. She was always pleasantly charming. I loved her but she didn't always really think that sometimes.

My class was Hermine Bacharach. She was then; she moved and became Bassist, Linnie Cohen, Henry Weiss was in and out depending on what year it was. I really think his younger brother Richard was really my age but he was never in my class. Irving Califf—Butch Califf and me.

Richard was a sick child also. I remember Mrs. Lena Plitman, who was probably related. She said '[she] could recall going to the synagogue to change his name because he was such a sick child.' That was the old Eastern European custom that if you would change the name you would confuse the Angel of Death. And they had either given him an additional name or had changed his name. Now whether it's true or not, I don't know. But I can remember Mrs. Lena Plitman telling me this story.

[Lena Plitman] was Gloria's mother. Gloria was older than me by either one or two years, I'm not sure but she and Joann Kaplan [Bloom] I knew better. Our mothers were friends and [our] fathers [were friends too]...There was an Erlene Shankerman...They weren't all in the same group, but [there] was a group that was Stanley Cohen, [and] Alvin Binder [who] were all in there about that age group. Isabelle Peal [Posner] I remember Isabelle, not from Clarksdale, but from wherever because we grew up together quite literally.⁸⁷

1933

March 6-10: Franklin Roosevelt Proclamation invoked that declared a four-day national banking holiday suspending all transactions in the Federal Reserve and other banks, trust companies, credit unions and building and loan associations. In order to permit the continuance of business operations, the use of scrip was allowed. (e.g., cleaning house certificates or other evidence of claims against the assets of banks)

March 31: President Franklin D. Roosevelt established the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), an idea suggested to him during his presidential campaign by F. A. Anderson, a Gloster lumberman.

The Civilian Conservation Corps, CCC, was one of the first New Deal programs. It was a public works project intended to promote environmental conservation and to build good citizens through vigorous, disciplined outdoor labor. Close to the heart of President Franklin D. Roosevelt, the CCC combined his interests in conservation and universal service for youth. He believed that this civilian “tree army” would relieve the rural unemployed and keep youth “off the city street corners.”

September 1: Harold Lloyd Jenkins, better known as country music singer Conway Twitty, was born in Friars Point.

US Highway 61. “Concrete road on US 61 northward is built almost to Lulu on an absolute straight line, which is being extended to Evansville and is the longest straight section of concrete highway in the world.”⁸⁸

CONGREGATION BETH ISRAEL

1933-1937: JAKE FINK, PRESIDENT

The year that Pauline Fink Adelson was confirmed, her mother Freda Fink was Superintendent. Freda arranged to have Bernard Cohen, McGehee, Arkansas, to play his violin, and Lillian Small played the piano. Lillian Small and Bernard met during this event. They practiced on the baby grand piano at the Fink’s home on Second St. Later they married. The piano burned in the fire.⁸⁹

WOMEN’S AUXILIARY

The congregation started a Women’s Auxiliary. Corinne Kerstine said: “I can’t tell you whom the president was, but I believe Mrs. Max Friedman was. About thirty-seven women were members at that time, but I am not sure. Only the local ladies came. They did not come from Marks, or Tunica. Yea, mostly Orthodox women because it was from the first temple.”⁹⁰

CHOIR HISTORY

Corinne said:

The first time I played the piano for the service; Becky Bishop sang. The piano was downstairs on the bema. However, Victor Binder and Selma Levine got up and left. Max Plitman made a speech. It had to do with the tradition of Orthodox Jews playing/chanting their own music. Rabbi Rabinowitz, Greenwood, came to officiate during the services.

They started almost immediately after I got there. We used to go down to the B'nai B'rith Hut and practice down there. Then we had a piano on the dais, and there was Lena Plitman, Bea Califf, and Natalie Marks. Later we had Harold Levine. We didn't have males in the beginning. We started with using the piano, not the organ. Rabbi Tolochko was there. I remember when we got the organ more than I do the piano. The piano was on the bema. You said that, it stayed there for years, you mean.

I was never in charge of the choir. Lena Plitman was head of it. I do not know her musical background but she liked to be in charge. Oh yes, we let her. She played the piano. Lena Plitman selected the music and told everyone what to sing. These were not democratic decisions. Yes, whatever she wanted; we did. Yes, we always sang from upstairs. They never came down on the bema after they got the organ.⁹¹

SOCIAL ACTIVITIES

Corinne said:

After I married and came to Clarksdale and before I had children, our social life was going around with Fred and Adele Cohen and Anna and Louis Segal. We used to play Bridge. I learned to play Bridge in St. Joe [, but] I didn't play a lot in St. Joe. I used to go over to Mrs. Freyman's with someone, probably Flora. We got the chickens for the Okuns.

I don't know if Sam Abrams was there at that time. We used to go over to Pearl and Louis Binder's house and to Ben Jacobson. All of us would go over to Pearl's house. We were invited over there. We invited, occasionally to Esther Bernstein's house. Of course, Lenabel and Harry didn't marry until a year after we did. So, we didn't start going with them until after they married.⁹²

Adele said during the interview with Aaron Kline and Corinne Kerstine:

My goodness, Isidor never missed a dance. He never stopped dancing. He was just a heck of a wonderful dancer and good company. We used to have him out for lunch and dinner, just like we did when [Corinne and Isidor] got married. [Corinne] came for lunch, stayed all day. We played cards that night until midnight. Then, I think, [Corinne and Isidor] went home.

[Corinne agreed with Adele that they used to go to the Cohen home every Sunday night for black jack games.]⁹³

Corinne said:

When I first came to Clarksdale as a bride, my husband was a merchant and well accepted in the community. I didn't find it hard assimilating into this new type of culture that I was not familiar with. I don't remember a lot about it really.

I got into the musical activities almost right away when I got there. I was taken in right away. I joined the Woman's Club. The Opera Study Club had just started, and I was one of the first invited in. I didn't go in as a charter member of [Opera Study Club], but I was in the first group that was invited in.⁹⁴

ODD CLUB

Catherine Curtis, a charter member of the ODD club—a local social girls' club—explained the way the club began: “Approximately ten girls in the ninth grade formed the high school's club called the ODD Club (means Our Democratic Daughters). Some of the members included Baby Doll Peacock and Margaret Cooper. It only was for social purposes for the girls who were dating to give parties. Most of these were close friends and daughters of plantation owners and mothers who were in the Daughters of American Revolution (DAR); however, it didn't appear to matter to the charter members.”⁹⁵

WEDDINGS

Corinne said: "I started playing for weddings in 1933. The first one was Shepp, who was Barbara Shepp Magdovitz father's brother. They got married in a home in Tutwiler."

The author asked Corinne if there any unusual things that happened during any of these weddings that she played. Did they all used the same music? But the tape is garbled, and all the author can remember of Corinne's answer is "Nothing unusual happened, and [she] used the same pieces plus the ones requested by the family."⁹⁶

Most of the receptions were held at the Alcazar Hotel on the mezzanine level. Corinne added, "No, I don't remember anything about the catering."⁹⁷ No one in the Jewish community helped plan the weddings.

Corinne said: "I never played for Christian weddings after I came to Clarksdale." She described the difference between the Jewish and Christian ceremonies as "[In her opinion], the Jews would put on a little bit better wedding. The Christians had everything at the church. Then they would go to the Country Club for the reception. Occasionally, they would use the Fellowship Hall or the Methodist Church for the receptions."⁹⁸

Corinne talked about the bridal showers before weddings: "Oh, there were a lot of showers for the bride. Everybody gave showers. Maybe six would go together and give it at the B'nai B'rith building. Some gave the bridal gift at the shower; some gave a shower gift and a bridal gift later on."⁹⁹ She did not remember much about the type of bridal showers they usually had. She said:

They were just general rather than a specific type, such as kitchen, linen, or bathroom. Sometimes they would give a kitchen or a linen shower. No, not silver shower. Some played games at these showers; others did not. Well, the majority of us just gave luncheons. You would go to the luncheon in the home or the hotel. They just had X number of people there to eat lunch and gave a gift and left. If they wanted to give a gift, usually the hostess gave the gift, not the guests. Yes they always dressed up for these luncheons. [She did not remember if they wore hats and gloves.]¹⁰⁰

The author remembers a few and the answer is, yes, they did wear hats and gloves to any dressy luncheons.

BAKER

JULIA

Julia said:

People would come from out of town on Sundays, like the Wieners, the Turners, and the Moyers.

I can't remember other friends in school, other than the Rossies. I think it was Rosy Rossie. They had a store on Sunflower. Another was the Gattas. We were all friends in school because I played basketball. You know we had all these ethnic groups that we call now in Clarksdale. My sister, whom I said had dark skin and dark hair, would go to the Syrian Club to play Bingo. All the Syrians thought she was Syrian and would try to get dates with her.

We had dances at the Elks Club. The building had a big Elk or moose or something in front. When we went outside, we had to go on top of that thing as kids.¹⁰¹

CALIFF

May 18: Newspaper clipping shows Dorothy Califf being presented in a Minnie Shannon Recital held at the Woman's Club. She played several pieces.¹⁰²

LEON

Leon said:

At seven years old, I went to work in our Issaquena store. It was called Califf's General Merchandise. My father had rented a long, narrow store, and the handkerchiefs and bandanas were even hanging from the ceiling. Of course, my job was to stand around and watch. Across the street from us, a man named Rossie had a theater. It was the poorest excuse for a theater you could imagine, but these people coming in from the country—it was such a novelty, such a new thing. We used to have big rushes of people. We had a break about 2 o'clock in the afternoon, and so they told me I could go to the movies. They had a better movie. I think Mr. Aronoff ran it.

There was another theater there in the Thirties. I remember the Levines had a store on a particular street, and a Mr. Kaufmann had a men's store on a street. I think you come up to the corner and turn right and there was this theater. It was primarily cowboys, you know Tex Ritter, Hopalong Cassidy. Well, this was not on Sunflower. It was not far from there on another street. Yea. They had the cowboys. Well, I remember the Dinners, they may have been a block farther away.

They had the cowboys, and then they had the continued Buck Rogers serials. I used to get a quarter, and I'd go to the movies. After about a month I got tired of it. Same stuff, over and over and over. The Buck Rogers was so impossible, I mean so far-fetched, like nothing I had ever heard of or ever dreamed of. I couldn't even imagine it, so I thought it was a bunch of baloney. I used to come back to the store, and they'd give me a quarter and I had to pass by the bus station in order to go to the theater. I'd go into the bus station, and I'd get a big Orange and a Moon Pie and go sit down in the seats, and I'd watch the people. That was what was exciting to me—watching people: how this one dressed, how this one walked, how this one talked, I'll just shift gears just a little bit. Well, I didn't talk to anybody. But I could make up these scenarios in my mind. There was one other thing that I mentioned.

Al Israel's store was on one side and Leon Binder's store on the other side. Califf's was in the middle of the block. OK, Al Israel was on one side, and Leon Binder's store was on the other side. As I recall, across the street from the Campassi's, right at the end of the street by the viaduct.

I remember one time I had made an 'A' on an exam. I came home and was all excited, and I showed it to him. I remember, on the kitchen table, it wasn't round it was a square table, milk was sitting in a jar, in a big pitcher, and I knocked the milk over. He chased me around the house. This was because it cost a lot of money in those days. They used to barter and trade a lot. My father had worked for the Baker Brothers for several years so he knew a lot of the sharecroppers, and they used to bring stuff to him, foodstuffs primarily, to trade for clothes. That's wonderful, except you still have to have money to pay the bank or the company that you got your clothes from to begin with. I'm just in awe. This is ingenuity, perseverance, stick-to-it-iveness, determination, and set of values. This is one of the reasons why Judaism has prevailed over all the difficulties.

Well, mother sang in the choir and my father—at the very beginning, they used to have Orthodox services in the Temple in the morning and Reform later in the day. At the very beginning we used to go to the Orthodox services. And he later stopped...he became...he only went when he had to go, on Holidays, and sit next to Mr. Plitman, who fell asleep, and the Rabbi Tolochko. He and my daddy were buddies.

Rabbi tried to teach me how to read Hebrew. I did it for a couple of weeks. I rebelled. I'm the only one doing this; nobody else is doing this. I asked the other boys. There was Gerald Plitman; there was Charles Levine; Ira Cantor; the Kauffman boy, Irwin Kauffman; they didn't know what I was talking about. I don't want to do this. I'm the only one doing this. When am I

going to use it? Well, he didn't want to fight with me. So, actually, I had very, very little religious background.

Well, we had a very odd situation. My mother came from an extremely dysfunctional family. Her mother died at a fairly early age, she was about ten or so. And her father married a woman who was a widow with one child. This woman became a matriarch.¹⁰³

FINK

JAKE

Alvin said:

After [Jake] left the top floor of McWilliams Building, he moved his wholesale business into the center of 2nd Block of Delta Avenue where the Gift and Art Shop was during the 1950s through 1980s. Kate and Morris Sebulsky moved from that building to Yazoo. He had his wholesale grocery right there. Then when the Alcazar Hotel burned, they eventually moved to Yazoo. That's where Woolworth's used to be, where Shankerman's moved. Woolworth's built that new store on the corner.

During 1930s, when things had gotten a little better, the Planters Bank (prior name before Coahoma County Bank) was closed. Jake got the ledger of the loans and stuff. They used to keep them in longhand writing. They were flipping through the pages to find Felix Balson owed \$50,000. He had a five and dime store.¹⁰⁴

PAULINE

Pauline said:

Among the ODD club's by-laws was the rule that the club members could not ask a Jewish girl. Jessie Kline, Sylvia Basking, Reva Morgan and I did not receive invitations. That is what made the difference in Clarksdale. The club membership included the most aristocratic families of the top 400 families; the plumber's daughter was not included; nor was the electrician daughter's. It was only the plantation daughters or the DAR that were included in this small group. The first Jewish girl to be asked was Betty Jean Salomon circa 1950 because her family was friendly with the Barksdales. Later, my niece, Sandra Leibson, was president.¹⁰⁵

FREYMAN

AARON

Selma James said:

Yea, I remember him. I remember the family. I remember that they lived on Oakhurst. Yes, I know they use to take chickens and stuff there for him to kill. I know that Mrs. Silverstein, you don't know, her, but she lived in Tutwiler. I don't remember her first name. They took their chickens over to Freyman's too. Yea, they would take them in the car. I would go with them. The chickens would get loose and fly around the car. She had the feet tied, but the chicken could still fly a little. She would take me over there. I never watched him kill them because she would leave them at the Rabbi's. He would kill them later by cutting the neck and letting it bleed to death. They thought that was sanitary. They didn't like the idea of wringing a chicken's neck.¹⁰⁶

FRIEDMAN

GERTRUDE AND FLORIAN N. NELSON

Gertrude and Florian married on April 16th in Greenville. She was attended by her aunt Birbie Richberger, Memphis, and the groom chose Max Homeberger of Vicksburg. The announcement mentioned she completed school at Elizabeth Dorr School, went to Nelson's Business School, Memphis, then worked as District Office Manager and insurance underwriter for Franklin Life Insurance Company, Vicksburg.¹⁰⁷

SAM

“After the banks closed, things were terrible. From 1914 until the banks closed, my father, Charles proposed very well as a merchant in Jonestown.”¹⁰⁸

MAX

Dave Wiener commented. “Max Friedman, we all knew him. Well, he very active in the schul. Very active in it. He was always on the bema. They would auction off the Aliyah, [moving to Israel]. He was one of the auctioneers.”¹⁰⁹

“We went back to St. Joe the next day after Aunt Jessie, who lived in Kansas City, gave us a dinner party. Mom and Daddy came down to Kansas City for the dinner party. Mama gave us a reception the next day (January 2).”¹¹⁰

HIRSBERG

FLORA

Flora and Bernard Hirsberg eloped while visiting in Louisville, Kentucky. According to Flora,

[Bernard] was at school then at Bowling Green, and I was on my vacation from the library. Went through Bowling Green at 2 o'clock in the morning, picked him up on the train, went to Louisville, and then he went out rabbi hunting, we called it. And he found one, and the first thing the rabbi said to me, ‘I could tell you were Jewish.’ Of all the things to say, that's what he said to me. I guess he was concerned as to whether Bernard was marrying a Jewish girl or not. That's what brought that comment on.

Prior to her marriage, Flora did date non-Jews because her parents allowed it. It was traditional to live with her parents for a year, and they did so. Although she quit her job, it was difficult for Bernard to find a job as an accountant.¹¹¹

KERSTINE

CAESAR

Corinne said: “Caesar owned a store in Clarksdale where there was a candy store [The Confectionery Store] in the 40's and 50's on Second Street. It was when I was first there; he had the store there—a cheap haberdashery.”¹¹²

LANDAU

MAX AND CARLY JACOBS

Although Selma had been a friend to Carly for years, Corinne summarizes Carly and Max,

“Carly was a short, heavyset brunette and had a conservative personality. She wore glasses and was soft spoken. Max had an accent; she did not. She was a very nice woman from Memphis. She didn't tell jokes. They didn't do that in those days. Women didn't tell jokes, (except our Aunt Gussie). Carly was known for her cooking. She was famous for her chocolate cake. She was a good baker. She didn't sew much, only did mending.”¹¹³

MOSE

Corinne said: “Mose was thin and tall. Mose and Max did not look alike; they differed in their appearances. Mose was bald—wore glasses. He always wore vested suits, even on Saturdays. He came back to Clarksdale [after Carly died] and married Jenny Small. They lived on Leflore Street in Jenny's house on the other side of town. I do not remember the year Max came back to Clarksdale.”¹¹⁴

Corinne and her parents, Rose and Morris Weiss, were closer to Max and Carly because Mose spent most of his time in Memphis.

WISE

JAMES EDWARD “ED”

James said:

I wasn't impacted by the Great Depression simply because I was born in 1932, and by the time I wanted anything or to spend any money, the good times had returned. My father went bankrupt in 1933, I think. I'm not real sure. Yes, he was really aided tremendously by Abe Wiener in Tutwiler—Dr. Dave Wiener's father. He sorta looked after him and got him back started and so forth. In fact, I just paid an insurance premium for three dollars which was a burial policy, that I'm sure he took out at about that time. And just for the hell of it, I have no idea of canceling that policy. It is three dollars a year. Some company in Kosciusko, Mississippi, and I wouldn't dare cancel it. I just think it's great. But yeah, they were badly affected, and I heard mother say that they married in Memphis at the Peabody, but not because they were so rich but because they lived in Mariana so long that if they married there it required a really large wedding. If they married in Memphis it was much smaller deal, and that was the reason. I've also heard her say that my father didn't have anything at that time, 1930, but her mother the German in classic fashion had stashed enough away. And mother what she described as a beautiful trousseau, but it came from her mother who just squirreled away that money in case it ever happened.¹¹⁵

1934

CONGREGATION BETH SRAEL

Julia Baker said: “Before the Temple was built, we had our Temple on Delta, and it was very small. Sometimes we went to the American Legion next door, and then we would go across the street to the Court House. Jeannie Freyman Shepp was my teacher. We would meet in those different places. I don't remember if we had different teacher every year or from class to class. I think we were the second confirmation class because my sister was in the first one, which was 1933.”¹¹⁶ [NOTE: Research from the local newspaper has proven this statement misleading; prior Confirmation services were held in the 1920s.]

According to Alvin Labens, “The reason is confirmations probably started in 1935 is because of Tolochko. They wouldn’t have had it when the congregation and rabbis were more Orthodox. I am just presuming this. There would have been Bar Mitzvahs. Sam Baker and Charles Levine were older than me, and they were Bar Mitzvah.”¹¹⁷

ARONSON

ANNIE

Blanche Dinner Behrend said:

In 1929, the Dinners lived over the restaurant; then later, we lived at 125 Oakhurst. He built a house next door to where the policeman lived and his wife; she was a drunk. I think it was the first block. We were next door to Isaacson’s on Oakhurst. Yea, he had the bedrooms upstairs, and we had up and down. It was a cute duplex. What’s her name, lived there in the downstairs, Mrs. Cantor—Rose Cantor’s sister—Annie Aronson, yes. She married a young man, and he was in the delicatessen business, too. But she was a pretty woman but she had a mouth on her, boy! Annie could get anything. I liked her. She had the best personality of anybody She was funny. She was really funny. She was liked; you would be surprised. Couldn’t help but like her. She used to tell jokes; make you laugh. Even when we were talking, she would tell jokes—dirty jokes. She could really tell them.

I used to play poker with her and all the women. All I remember is from Clarksdale. Rose Cantor and Annie Aronson were sisters. Oh, wait a minute, I knew their maiden names—Rosen. I believe, their mother was in Memphis—little old lady. I knew her. She was the sweetest lady. Fanny Rosen. They had a delicatessen in Memphis. Leon Cantor was her son. Her husband used to travel.¹¹⁸

Lawrence Magdovitz said: “Annie had the store where Leon [Binder] was. He bought her out, and she left.”¹¹⁹

DINNER

BLANCHE

Blanche said:

Oh, I’ll tell you, Ruth Cohen, Colleen Balicer, let’s see, who else? It wasn’t Gertrude Bernstein; she was older; Alma Baker lives in Memphis; she’s the youngest. Lorraine Gordon graduated with me. Yea, I know. Her mother lived in the same project when I lived in Memphis. I used to go to her room whenever I cooked good soup and everything. Her husband was living then, and [I would] bring [the soup] to them. They were so happy to get my food. I cooked like my Mama; you know. I always shared my cooking, baking, with my neighbors. They liked it.

I went to out of town football games—Greenwood and Greenville and other places. I graduated with honors. I have to make all 'A's' for two years straight to get a separate diploma, and I took shorthand, bookkeeping, and typing. Those three subjects I had to make straight 'A's'...spelling was the easiest thing for me. No, the school required this, not my parents. To get a separate diploma, I got two diplomas—one for graduating and one for business—for secretary.

In fact the President of Clarksdale Bank came to school—Mr. Peacock. Yea. He asked my teacher to recommend him one of the students. He wanted a private secretary.

The teacher said: 'Which one would you prefer, the one who types sixty words and no errors, or the one that types seventy-five words with forty errors?'

I corrected their papers. We have to change papers. Each one had to correct somebody else's. I made sixty words a minute. The others made about seventy-five words a minute but they made about forty errors.

Peacock said: 'No way. Give me the sixty words.'

The teacher recommended me. So when I graduated, Daddy wouldn't let me go to work. Because he said...in fact two months before graduation, some doctor or somebody came to check us for TB. I guess they must have had a couple of cases or something. They wanted to stop it. They'd scratch our arm. In a few days if it got red, then that's the sign you had the germ. Me, I was so skinny, and I worked so hard to make those grades. I wouldn't eat...I would practice typing upstairs a clock with a typewriter.

Everybody downstairs would say, 'Reuben, what's that I hear?'

Reuben answered, 'Oh, that's Blanche typing.'

The more I practiced the faster I typed. And I wouldn't dare make a mistake...I had worked so hard. I was my history teacher's private secretary. I have to pack all of her papers, test papers and everything. I was so exhausted, and every day I would leave school when she left...after four o'clock most of the time. I came home; we had living quarters above the restaurant. I would start studying. Some don't study right away when they first got home. Everything wasn't so easy for me, like the American kids. I worked hard to earn what I did.

I never finished telling you why I didn't go to work. Remember they tested us for TB? Well I had the biggest spot of anybody at school, and then I had TB. Bad germ—I used to cough all the time. I'd catch a cold and cough up blood and everything. [I] didn't know I was so sick with the cold couldn't get rid of it. So the doctor called my Daddy's place, the restaurant.

The doctor said: 'Mr. Dinner, your daughter has the germ, TB, and she really needs to go to sanitarium.'

My dad was so worried he reports, 'I'm going to put you---.'

It was two months before graduation, and I had to work so hard to make all A's. I said: 'Daddy, I'll do anything you tell me. Don't send me to Sanitarium. I worked so hard to graduate. I finally made it.'

So he said: 'On one condition. That you have to drink a quart of rich milk a day, a quart of cream a day and you got to start eating.'

So, I drank coffee cream, a whole quart a day. And the richest milk, a quart a day. Listen, it almost came back but I forced it down. I wouldn't dare throw up because I was scared he would put me in the sanitarium. So, I gained one pound in one month—one pound. But, that was a start, anyway. And so he let me graduate. He was so proud when they called out my name for this, not the four years diploma; but the one I won for secretary. And so he was so proud and, what's her name, Ruth Cohen was with me; she's my best friend.

Celia was Ruth's mother, and Harry Cohen, her father. Celia used to come for coffee and maybe eat maybe a little lunch, and Harry did too.

My mama used to tell Mrs. Cohen, 'Would you please let Blanche eat at your house?'

Blanche added, 'You know, I used to study with Ruth. We'd spend the night over at her house.'

My mama would say, 'I'll pay you if you will make her eat.'

Mrs. Cohen answered, 'No, don't worry, she'll eat.'

I ate better at [Ruth's] house than in a restaurant. In a restaurant, you see so much food you lose your appetite...and here I had all the food, and I didn't want to eat.

Ruth used to say, 'How come I don't have no trouble, Blanche, eats good at my house.'

When [Peacock] wanted me to come to work, I couldn't work.

Because [Peacock] said: 'She's sick. She cannot work. I'm not letting her work.'

That's why I never worked in my life for anybody. I didn't have experience. He wouldn't let me work and keep up my speed in typing or anything.

Peacock said: 'I'm not going to let you be a secretary—be a TB patient.'

Well Daddy, how in the world will I get the practice and experience?
Reuben said: 'Your health is worth more than your money. You don't need to work.'
He gave me anything I needed. We had plenty. He had property in Clarksdale.¹²⁰

LABENS

ALVIN

Alvin Labens recalled meeting a gentleman at the Delicatessen. He believed his name was Lieberman who was from Ohio. "I was a kid in the Reuben's Delicatessen on a Sunday. He told me that he was instrumental in locating most of the people in Clarksdale through the HAIS (Hebrew American Immigration Society)."¹²¹

Alvin said:

We moved back to Clarksdale...I went into the 6th grade which would be more between 1932 and 1934. We moved to 318 Delta. My father had a dry goods store at that address. Even though the economics were good for the Labens family in Itta Bena, they moved to Clarksdale for Jewish influence for children.

Mr. Heidelberg, the principal, lived across the street from Elizabeth Dorr School; he brought his Doberman, Black Boy, to school. It was not a racial designation. We had enough of our own there...just like the 30's, we had enough Jewish kids there we didn't have to go look down in Greenville or somewhere for something to do.¹²²

MAGDOVITZ

JOE

Joe said:

I met my wife Hilda as a blind date. My brother Harry was in Memphis at that time. He had two stores. He was running around with that group. He got me a date a blind date...and she was from Memphis. We married in 1934. We stayed at the Peabody but we married at her home. Rabbi Ettelson married us.

At this time I was still working in Clarksdale. Well, Mrs. Sacks rented us a room to start with, and then finally we got our own home on Maple Street right across the street on the back side of the Clarksdale Hospital. The Plitmans lived right next door to us.¹²³

SHANKERMAN

PHIL

February 6: "Musicians Will Organize Group." Organization of a community orchestra will be started tonight at a meeting of local musicians at the home of Phil Shankerman at 340 Elm Avenue...Professor Kooyman, bandmaster and orchestra director of the local schools, will direct the community orchestra and give instructions to the musicians.¹²⁴

TONKEL

ROBERT

This information is a combination of what Dan Tonkel, Robert's son, said about his family and a magazine article by Robert Tonkel and Olive Edward. Robert and Fannie and the five children (Beatrice, Edith, Mildred, Daniel and Bernard) moved to Clarksdale in 1933 because he was able to rent a store space from M. R. Blouin on Delta. He bought the stock and contracted E. P. Peacock, Sr. to rent the building for \$75 a month for five years.

Robert was born in July 17, 1888 in Riga, Latvia, as the fifth of eight children. At age fourteen, he left his parents to join his two older brothers, Morris and Aaron in Shaw, Mississippi. Dan said his father told him:

I did not have much to eat during the forty-eight hours on the train [from New York City] as I did not know where to buy food. I had a five cent apple pie I bought in Washington at Penn Station. I recall the board walks around the station. I arrived finally in Memphis on 18th of December 1904 and had to change trains. So at 11 am that morning I took the train to Shaw, Mississippi, and arrived there at three p.m. My brother Morris met me in Shelby. The train going North and the train going South met at Shelby, and he had come from Shaw to meet me. When I got off the train I saw a sight I had never seen before in my life. I saw big cotton wagons pulled by mules, so bogged in the street the wagons had to be left there until the street dried out.

The article reports:

Robert lived in the back of the store. He slept on a counter with quilts for a mattress. He cooked and stayed warm with a small wood burning stove. By day he helped to clerk. In March, Morris suggested that Robert should go out into the countryside and peddle. This was mutually satisfying. Robert's back-pack held some places, embroideries, handkerchiefs, ladies stockings and black silk petticoats, men's socks and the like. On foot and glad to be out in the open country, he made a circuit to Shaw to Boyle and Jones Bayou and Cleveland and Choctaw. On weekends, he worked in the store. Delta heat stopped the peddling from July until September.

By September 1906 he had peddled by foot or by mule all week and worked in his brother's store on weekends enough to purchase a horse and a Tennessee Wagon. His stock had increased to five large packs of goods including counterpanes, tablecloths and men's heavy underwear. In two years he had saved \$900 before the Panic. This caused the banks to freeze all the money and issue script (paper) that was good only in the town and bank with which one did business. In January 1908 they released the money. He was 18 years and at that time Robert opened his first store in Leland, next door to a saloon.

Because Robert wanted to go to school but not allowed to enter the one-room schoolhouse with thirty children, he had to take up reading and writing in his own spare time. [Another boy and Robert] would take the train-[because] Jewish people lived [in Hollandale]. He said: 'so we took the train at 11 am and we'd go to Hollandale and we'd spend the day and evening. About 5 pm, the train came back from Vicksburg to Memphis, so we'd get on the train and come back to Leland. That was our trip. And that's when I met my wife. I was with some Rubinstein. They had two girls and I was in their house. [I saw Fannie Lockowitz; she lived in Percy, Mississippi,] and she rode on a mule from Percy to Hollandale.'¹²⁵

It was two years later that Robert and Fannie married on March 14, 1909. They lived in Leland until that Fall. He sold the store for \$2,400 and joined his brother, Aaron, in Durham, North Carolina. Although he first went into business with this brother, he opened a shoe store that was unsuccessful. He went back in partnership with his brother that lasted until 1912. After his daughter, Beatrice was born, he moved his family to Henderson, N.C., to open a second store while Aaron remained with the Durham store. Two months later, he went to bed with typhoid fever for fourteen weeks. 'He had sent for his younger brother, Ben and sister, Lillie. Business was at a very low level'; the family was deep in debt but Robert went about recouping his capital.

He rented a store in Goldsboro, NC, and he convinced the Credit Manager of the Baltimore House to give him \$3500 [and] he was in business again and he was 22 years old.

There was a 1914 recession, a 1919 flu epidemic and the loss of their 21-month old baby daughter Ruth who succumbed to whooping cough and pneumonia. During the flu epidemic four of the fifteen clerks in the successful store died...After 1921, things roughed up again, The Tonkel brothers had invested in lots of property and values slumped dreadfully as a depression gained momentum. Business was so bad that to survive they dissolved partnership, and Robert and his family, now with five children, moved back to Hollandale. There they lived with Mrs. Tonkel's father for three months. All children came down with measles.

In 1921, the Tonkel brothers brought over their parents from Latvia. When they died during the thirties, the mother and father were buried in Durham...[They] bought a newly established store in Shaw from a Mr. Gordon for \$9,000. I had high grade merchandise—Florsheim shoes and Hart-Shaffner-Marx clothing in the store. He went to the Chicago market for a few days to supplement his stock. Returning home he was met at the railroad station by his brother, Morris ...[who told him that someone broke in the store and stole all the merchandise]. He borrowed monies from Aron and Bennie and stayed in business but business was bad and he had to leave Shaw in 1923. He was lucky and was able to rent a store in Rosedale because of a successful encounter with a banker, which led to expansion of a chain of five stores: Rosedale, Benoit, Drew, West Point and Houston. Things went well until the flood of 1927 and then the depression of 1929. By 1931 there was not enough business to take care of his obligations.

In 1933, after Robert opened the store on Delta, business boomed. He had eight clerks. I paid the girls \$1 day and the men \$12.50 a week, which was the average wage at that time.

In 1921, the Tonkel brothers brought over their parents from Latvia. When they died during the thirties, the mother and father were buried in Durham. He sold his business to Beatrice 'Bea' in 1955.¹²⁶

WIENER

DAVE

Dave said:

In going through school, they had prepared me for math. I could go into college math, and English we had more trouble. I started at Ole Miss in 1934. They put us in a special [program]...for the ones who came from small high schools...I don't think we stayed in it but about one semester. Second semester we were in the same classes as all the rest of them. I didn't have any trouble in college at all. Well, we had a Jewish fraternity there—called Phi Epsilon Pi. We had quite a few from Clarksdale. Harold Levine was there the same time I was. The Fink boy was there—Alvin Fink. We must have had 12 or 15 groups. There were two Jewish girls there. One was Segal, and she became a lawyer. She was from Morehead or somewhere down there. Then there was one girl from Jackson, Mississippi. We thought she was Gentile, There were only two that I knew of. They had some Jewish people in Holly Springs that they would go and date, but mainly the Jewish boys at Ole Miss came to Memphis. They came from all over. There were quite a few Jewish boys from Vicksburg, quite a few...There weren't many from Jackson. From Tupelo they had Jewish boys, and we had some from down in Hattiesburg. Yea, they came from all over. Mainly from the Delta because, I think, there were more Jews right around there [and] certainly from Vicksburg [and] Natchez.

Mose Wonder was from Charleston, Mississippi. He had something to do with the sports thing. I don't know what ever happened to him. Shankerman had a store. He had the first one of those linen suits about 1930 or 1929.

I guess it was in 1934 I was out of there. I moved to New Orleans in 1937. I went to Tulane Medical School. We were accepted. I was accepted at Tennessee, Vanderbilt, and Tulane. Any

one we applied to; we were accepted. The Northern Jews did have more trouble being accepted. There were quotas. There weren't any quotas in Mississippi. You had to have the grades.¹²⁷

YAFFE

SAM

Alvin Labens said: “One family, Sam Yaffe, who had an emotional problem really suffered. The [four] young girls [Ruth, Bertha, Sarah, Alice] were placed in the Jewish Children Home in New Orleans...Ruth had a scholarship to LSU; she was really smart. Bernard was the one of the founders of Beth Shalom. The father was sick and they had to send them to New Orleans. The mother and the two boys [Harvey and Bernard] had a [*Memphis*] *Press Scimitar* [newspaper] route. They lived on Delta. They came during the depression when this actually started.”¹²⁸

The 1920 US Census shows the family living in Shelby, Bolivar County, Mississippi. The data reports the he was a retail dry goods merchant. Sam was born in Kovona, Lithuania in 1898; his wife, Annie Ostrow, was born in Russia in 1892. They both immigrated in 1900 but did not marry until 1914. They had four daughters and two sons between 1918 and 1927.

According to Sam Yaffe's obit on October 24, 1940, the family came to Clarksdale in 1934. He was employed by the Memphis Press Scimitar in the circulation department. He was 25 years old when he immigrated to New York City. Twenty-seven years prior to coming to Clarksdale, he had mercantile businesses at Huspuckens, Shelby, and Round Lake.¹²⁹

1935

January 8: Elvis Presley was born in Tupelo.

Farmers further cooperate by entering into written contracts with government to agree to reduce their cotton acreage to reduce the cotton supply¹³⁰

Tenth Street Bridge across Sunflower River on Highway 61 is constructed.¹³¹

CONGREGATION BETH ISRAEL

CONFIRMATION CLASS

The newspaper reported: “A most elaborate program is arranged for the exercises which is the outstanding event in the year's activities of the temple. The sermon will be delivered by Dr. B. A. Tolochko. The confirmands included:

- | | |
|------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1) Maurice Aronson | 2) Pauline Bernstein |
| 3) Shirley Block | 4) Edith Bloom |
| 5) Bernard Cohn | 6) Sylvia Jean Damsker |
| 7) Elaine Ray Friedman | 8) Betty Gordon |
| 9) Goldie Isaacson | 10) Miriam Inez Lipson |
| 11) Sam Schwartz, Jr. | 12) Norman Coleman Sebulsky |

13) Edith Tonkel

14) Sarah Lee Yaffe¹³²

B'NAI B'RITH WOMEN AUXILIARY

Corinne said: "We had a very active B'nai B'rith. The men's organization was very active. They wanted an auxiliary to go to the meetings and participate; so, the organization started about 1934. The Women's Auxiliary of the B'nai B'rith was a social group, rather than a service club. Dottie Turner and Sylvia formed B'nai B'rith Auxiliary. They felt they needed two organizations because their husbands went to B'nai B'rith conventions, and they could go along if they belonged to the Auxiliary."¹³³

SISTERHOOD

According to Corinne Kerstine, "Ladies' Auxiliary was disbanded and became Sisterhood. It was the same group of women. It was not the Reform Jewish women We joined Sisterhood when they joined the Hebrew Union Congregation. Sisterhood started 1935."¹³⁴

Corinne said: "During that time and prior to that I don't remember what kind of projects they did. I just attended the meetings. I don't think they did anything. They just had meetings. They met in the homes. The only meeting that I can remember was at Mrs. Myer Kline's home. I don't remember any of their meetings. No, we did not have luncheons in the beginning that didn't come until later. This was during the Depression. I don't remember the type of activities that were done those years Mrs. Friedman had charge. She was president for three years."¹³⁵

Sadie Kaplan mentioned the Sisterhood luncheon: "Whenever the last meeting of the Sisterhood would come around, we would go to the meeting, and we would get so dressed up, with summer dresses and hats and gloves, and we would go to that meeting, a big affair...I enjoyed the speakers...The Sisterhood never went down until recently when there were just no members. You know. They started meeting at noon with luncheons, and we had three or four women to be hostesses. I remember about thirty or forty women used to meet in the Temple. Yes, we had good crowds."¹³⁶

FINK

HOUSE

Marion said: "When the house burned in 1935, the family moved."¹³⁷

Pauline said: "Alvin was off at school. Marion and I shared a bedroom and Mama and Daddy shared a bedroom. We were on the mezzanine [at the Alcazar Hotel], which was like a living room. It had a baby grand piano on that level. Marion sent a great deal of time with her friend, Selma May Kantor."¹³⁸

According to Judy Tucker's manuscript:

When their rented School Street home burned in 1935, instead of rebuilding, Freda and Jake moved to the Alcazar Hotel in downtown Clarksdale on the corner of Yazoo and Third Avenues where they took a large three room suite and made their home. This unusual living arrangement, made comfortable by room service and the Fink's personal cook, suited the busy couple. Daughters Marion and Pauline remember that the family's lifestyle never changed with the move to the hotel. As it always had been, the Fink's elegant home laid out the welcome mat to family, friends and traveling salesman who often joined Jake's pinnacle games.¹³⁹

FRIEDMAN

SAM

One of the Friedmans said during the interview:

Most of our lives, Sam was a merchant. About 1935, he became a farmer of a 600- to 700-acre farm after the depression and the banks closed. He was one of the few farmers who lived in town and farmed about two-to-three miles away from Jonestown. He had learned plenty about farming from being a merchant as he talked to and dealt with farmers. We all lived together, farmers and merchants. Abe Block also farmed in Jonestown. Sam was the kind of farmer that got out of his car and walked his 600 acres practically every day. He was one of the first to get a CASE tractor, and it was a really big deal. One day we walked up to a field where an old black man was plowing with a mule. Sam had his tractor over in the next field. He said: 'Well, Uncle Ed, what do you think about that thing?'

Uncle Ed said: 'That thing is never going to work, Mr. Sam.'

Sam replied: 'Why do you say that?'

Uncle Ed answers: 'Because a man just can't work sitting on his butt.'

One of the Friedman's said: 'Sam never used an alarm clock. When he had to get up at 3:00 or 4:00 a.m., he just woke up. On the weekends, he maybe would sleep a couple more hours. He did his own farming as he never brought in additional help. He used about 10 or 12 sharecropper families at one time. These families had from three-or-four up to ten or twelve in the family. Each family had its own shack.'¹⁴⁰

GORDON/SOLOMON

LORRAINE AND THEODORE 'TEDDY'

Rabbi J. Gerson Tolochko officiated at the wedding held at the Alcazar Hotel.¹⁴¹

JACOBSON

Gilbert reported, "This house burned down in about 1935. Almost everything they had was destroyed. Grandma saved her family and her pictures of her parents and her prayer books. I have a Yom Kippur prayer book that is burned; it was on fire when she took it out of the house."¹⁴²

KATZ

NAT AND CLARA TEMPLATE

Clara said: "In Marks, you see, now we live in Marks. I lived in Lambert. From there I went off to college at the University of Alabama. That's where I met Nat. He was from Hartford Connecticut."

Nat said; "That's right. I went to the University of Alabama. You ever heard of the Depression? They wanted \$1,200 for the first year there. At the University of Alabama I could go for \$1,200 dollars for four years. So I married a local."¹⁴³

Clara said:

There were no jobs available. He was an engineer. And there were no jobs available in 1935. So he came to Lambert, and we got married in Clarksdale. Rabbi Tolochko performed the ceremony. We lived in Lambert for two years and ran a store. My dad put us in a store. We didn't have anything to do. We didn't know how to do anything. There were no jobs for engineers. So my father owned a building four miles away in Marks, and he asked if we wanted to move there. We

said yes, and it was much more of a progressive little town than the one that we were in. Lambert is half the size of Marks. it must have had about 1,200 people there in Lambert. By then two other families of Jews had moved into Lambert. So when we moved to Marks.¹⁴⁴

KERSTINE

SELMA

Selma said:

One of the people that lived in Tutwiler was Frances Bailey. She had problems. She was the first person I knew in Tutwiler. They lived on the other side of the house He had to do everything. He had to climb poles, go out in bad weather, he had a long Clarksdale-Tutwiler territory, all over. She would get so scared when he had to climb poles with raining, thundering and lightning. She would come over there and sit with me. Bob, her son, would come see me every day.

According to Selma, she was never told that she was pretty until she was a young woman. Hattie Ross told her. She mentioned that her mother-in-law, Mrs. James, would always write to her husband as 'my dear beloved son'. She would write a lot about how much she missed him and loved him. Selma said she never once mentioned her name in any of these letters. This hurt her very much.¹⁴⁵

KRIEGER

Lawrence Magdovitz said: "I understand J. Krieger died from blood poisoning. He cut his hand. He didn't go to a doctor ,and it got infected."¹⁴⁶

RAPPAPORT

SAM AND ROWENA

Rowena said: "I was born in Tallahatchie County, 1917. I had always lived in the Delta. My parents were Floyd and Beatrice Ellington. I grew up in Tunica County, out in the country. My family were farmers. I met Sam in 1935."¹⁴⁷

SHAPIRA

ELLIS HENRY

Ellis Henry Shapira's obit provided this data: "Moved to Clarksdale this year with his wife. He was born in 1886 and was raised in Dallas, TX. He was owner of [The] Shapira [Shop], a retail store and was a prominent Jewish leader. His brother was Louis H. of Helena, Arkansas."¹⁴⁸

1936

According to Alvin Labens, "The roads between Memphis and Clarksdale you would be guaranteed to have to change tires twice. Roads paved in early 1930s with WPA funds: prior to that was rocks, etc.—concrete road from Batesville to Oxford (Highway 6). By the 40's, Highway 61 was a pretty good highway."¹⁴⁹,

LADIES AUXILIARY

Corinne said: "Mrs. Friedman was the first President."¹⁵⁰ She summarized the activities:

Somewhere around 1937, we met at the Temple. The Rabbi's wife, Mamie Tolochko, was the Vice President. [Later], Mamie [became] President; then they left because he got another call in Greensboro, NC. During the middle of her term, she had to leave. Eva Kantor was President about 1937, 1938, or 1939. We were still meeting at the Temple; there were no luncheons. We raised money by dances we had. I don' remember what else. We raised money to maintain some of the things in the Temple: Prayer books, maintenance, bema flowers at the Temple on Friday nights, took care of the Oneg Shabbat which was only once a month, not every week.¹⁵¹

September 3: "Present population of Clarksdale is estimated at 12,000. Most important industry is cotton ginning, seed crushing, lumber, Planer mills, sixty-five gins and two oil mills operate within Coahoma County."¹⁵²

Chamber of Commerce officials estimated the yearly value of manufactured products was in the neighborhood of \$3,000,000.

The immediate retail trade area served by Clarksdale is approximately sixty miles in diameter and has expanded steadily over a period of years and is still expanding thanks to great extent to an improved system of highways, many of which are concrete, recently built throughout the county.

Clarksdale has twenty-five wholesale and 223 retail concerns to supply the large trading area.¹⁵³ The Sixth Annual Horse Show was to be a big event staged on September 11 at the ballpark More than 200 entries sought the \$1000 cash prizes.

Second Street Bridge (\$77,000) over Second Street constructed with funds supplied by the Works Progress Administration and the City and County. The Centennial Celebration is staged in conjunction with the 8th Delta Staple Cotton Festival.¹⁵⁴

ISSAQUENA JEWISH MERCHANTS

Previously included are the four Jewish merchants doing business on Issaquena prior to 1936. Most of the merchants migrating from 1936 remained on the street for longer periods

Julian Bloom said:

The Sebulskys had the Style Shop in town; Nat Okun's shoe store; The Madeira Shop; Cohens and Resnecks had a shoe store and then they opened up later, Alan's. Yaffes, had a store on Sunflower Street; the Rappaports...I think Sunflower was the main business street before Issaquena started. Kaufmans had their tailor shop on Sunflower.

Actually, the whole Jewish community was merchants, except the Friedmans and the Blooms in the scrap business. The Sacks and the Klines were in farming, cotton. Jake [Fink] was a cotton merchant. Aaron Sack had one for a while here. He had a cotton brokerage and farms. He had all kind of stuff. Back in his days, he was one of the wealthiest people here.¹⁵⁵

COTTON STATES EXHIBIT (WHOLESALE MERCHANDISE SHOW)

The following tells about the Cotton States Exhibit (wholesale merchandise show) held at the Alcazar Hotel starting possibly in the 1930s.

Lawrence Beck reports:

They drew a lot of people. I think it was something like two floors I believe. Every room had a salesman in it, and we had a lot of Memphis wholesalers at that time. They all had a room, and then they had salesmen that came from other places. Most of the ones I knew were from around here but they could have lines from other places. But all the local ones [came]: e.g., Bloch Brothers, and Gruenwald, people who sold hats. Marcus had a place [in Memphis].

The show lasted a long time. I remember when I grew up and got into business I was still going down there. I don't really know when it started...I was probably down there, sure in the 40's...started in the business in '48...I finished school [Southwest University] in 1948. I was going to Clarksdale then. Well, I remember going as a little kid. My parents would go, and I'd go, and sometimes I'd go over and play with Stanley Cohen [son of Adele and Fred Cohen]. I'd also go down there a lot of summers as a kid and stay with the Rosenbergs, and I'd just spend a week down there. I can remember going when it was a two-lane road and it went back and forth across the railroad tracks. I rode the bus down there.

[Shows were] probably very seasonal. Probably in the fall, getting ready for the picking. Getting ready for Easter too...[They had only] one day, Sunday...We would all eat dinner. Usually they had the deli kind of thing. It was very good. All the salesmen would eat there...They were across the street at that time in the 1940s. They were down closer to [my] dad's store in the early part. They were on Third Street.

A lot of us were ones that had the merchandise in stock so we could send it right out. One time we had a wholesaler's association in Memphis. We had as many as twenty-four different wholesalers. I don't think so. It was a different scale.¹⁵⁶

AUERBACH

DAVE AND SADIE

General conversation with Laura Osofsky about her great aunt and great Uncle Dave and Aunt Sadie who had a shop on Issaquena:

She was Fannie Feinberg, my grandmother's youngest sister. Yes, I stayed with Auerbachs some [in 1950s], and I stayed with the Okuns some. I don't have that much in the way of memories of his store or business. I remember going there. I think he was like a shoe repair man...He repaired shoes. I don't remember that much. I just remember through the front [of the store] being your basic shoe repair kind of place. You know. He would be hanging out there. He spent all day there. He would leave early to go down there. [Sadie] was at home. I don't remember her being down there. I just remember her being in the house...I remember her more than I do him.

The house was spic and span. You could have eaten off the floor. I am not kidding. She was an unbelievable housekeeper. We drove her a little crazy when I came to visit. I remember there were like three bedrooms and wooden floors highly polished. Everything was just so—always just so. His shop [was not] as spic and span as the house. I wouldn't go that far. I don't know that it wasn't. It wasn't yucky-looking but I don't remember. Aunt Sadie's house was like, you know—oh my god—just so. The kitchen, you know, was where everything was always in its proper place—nothing left around.

I remember being there [when]...she made the best sponge cake. I can remember as a child being aware of how delicious it was to the point that I can remember the taste. It is so good. So

many of the Pesach (Hebrew for Passover) things are just dry. It is just wonderful—absolutely wonderful!

[Dave] was a good-size man, yea. He was tall. It seems to me that he was a large frame, but not fat. He was a nice size man, and he had beautiful hair—salt and pepper curly hair. He would not have worn a suit. I think right, he did wear suspenders. He just wore a workshop shirt and pants

[Sadie] never dressed up a lot. I never saw her dress up. She was always, you know, plain, not dressy, [more like] old-fashioned European dress. Aunt Sadie was probably a little over five foot two inches. I wouldn't say tall. The one that was the tallest of the three sisters was Aunt Bessie [Okun].

When I went to stay with Aunt Sadie (this is hilarious), she would listen to the show operas on radio. So, I would listen to them too. My mother almost plotzed when she found out I had been listening to this stuff. But, you know, my mother wouldn't listen to that stuff, but, Aunt Sadie loved it. Just I loved it. I remember 'Pepper Young's Family' and 'Stella Dallas'. All this stuff. Oh, she just loved them. She had all her work done, and she be listening. She organized herself for that.¹⁵⁷

CHILDREN

- 1) **Eva**
- 2) **Benjamin**

BORN:

- 1914 New York
1919 Tennessee¹⁵⁸

Dave was born in Warsaw, Poland, in 1889 and immigrated about 1906. His wife Sadie was born in Sereijia, Lithuania, in 1892 and immigrated in 1909. In her naturalization's papers, she described herself as five foot two inches with blue eyes and brown hair. In his World War I Draft Registration Card, Dave described himself as tall, stout, with blue eyes and brown hair. He was exempted due to a physical disability not listed specifically, and because he was the father of one child in 1917.

As stated before, Flora Hirsberg, Sadie's niece, talked primarily about her family. Flora said her parents, Israel and Bessie Okun were married in Europe. Her father was first to arrive, then sent for his Bessie. They lived in New York until after 1912 when the last of their three children were born. The family moved to Dyersburg, Tennessee. Dave and Sadie who married in New York, in 1914 soon joined them in Dyersburg. The Okuns moved to Clarksdale before 1920, because their oldest son, Morris, wanted his father, a shoe repairman, to help with his shoe business in Clarksdale.

Edith Jacobson said: "Dave Auerbach was a sweet man. When Gilbert was an infant in 1956, and [she] parked in front of Jacobson's Department Store, Dave would see them and run out to play with Gilbert even before Edith could remove him from the car seat. Dave repeated over and over again, 'boytshikl,' the American Jewish Yiddish to mean a sweet young boy—a darling young boy."¹⁵⁹

BAKER

HARRY

Lawrence Magdovitz reported: "You know, back in the thirties, around the corner of Delta and Third [was] Bakers Department Store, supposed to be one of the best men's stores around. Maurice Segal had a brother called Sol Segal, and he worked for him. Said he brought in accounts. Harry told him he didn't have enough money to pay his salary during the depression. So, Sol, tore up what Harry owed him."¹⁶⁰

Julia Baker Glassman said:

Frank was the first one to die. When he was sick they said he had a stomach problem. It was cancer but no one said cancer in those days.¹⁶¹

My grandmother was my grandfather's second wife. She died, we think it was 1940...in Skoviedill, Russia. At that time, it was Lithuania or Latvia or whoever was powerful at the time. We would hear from her. She wrote with a return address of 'Becker' but it was pronounced 'Baker'. So when they came through Ellis Island, and said 'Baker' they spelled it *Baker*.

Daddy said: 'Sure, she was a Baker, she knew I would marry a pretty lady who couldn't cook so she taught me how to cook.' She did have a bakery. When Grandfather traveled, she ran the bakery. When he came, he helped her.

My grandmother never came to this country but she was the mother of the Baker children. She was the second mother. She was my daddy's mother, and he had some sisters and a younger brother. One sister reached maturity; the other two died young.¹⁶²

BALICER

LILLIE

The newspaper obit reports:

Lillie Balicer lived at 205 Maple and died from swallowing a quantity of carbolic acid and iodine. Her two daughters Pauline and Martel came home from the picture show about 6 p.m. and found her on the floor in the hallway near the telephone. Medical aid was summoned but she died shortly after the physician arrived. Her note indicated that she was despondent over ill health. Her husband, Felix, operated a dry goods store on Sunflower Avenue for a number of years. He was in Greenwood at the time. Her two brothers were Joe and Isadore Frank. Three sisters were Mrs. Harry Baker, Mrs. Morris Baker and Mrs. H Mostkoss of Rosedale.¹⁶³

BERNSTEIN

GERTRUDE

The marriage announcement reports, Gertrude married Ralph Levy in October. Her sister, Mrs. Bernard Schwartz, sang *I Love You Truly*, accompanied by Stanley Baskind.¹⁶⁴

BLOCK

ABE H.

According to the Donna E. Dance and W. M. Walton, Canvasser and Interviewer respectively, Block served as mayor of Jonestown; no dates could be confirmed.¹⁶⁵

CALIFF

LEON

Leon said:

There was one other thing that I mentioned. About 1936 or 1937, I don't remember exactly, about '36 I believe it was, we left DeSoto Street. My mother and father built. Mr. Harry Cannon had built a house on Catalpa Street. I had a bicycle. At that time we were near the end of town. Since

then, I believe, it has spread way out past there. At that time, we were near the end of town. My brother was more a stay at home type of fellow, but I liked to travel, to move about, see what's on the other side of the hill. So I used to get on my bicycle and go riding into the country. Paths or little roads, just anything to see what I could see. And I'd take a sandwich and a bottle of water and maybe find me a little place in the woods to stop and eat and so forth.

One time, this was in April, I believe it was, and I was sitting under the tree when I heard a lot of noise off to the side. And I crept over there...I believe, I'm not positive about this...I believe that March and maybe early April was the time when the Negroes had the least amount of work to do on the plantation. January and February was repairing all of the equipment that they had for the next season. They were building a church, of course they were using second hand lumber which means that there would be holes. I used to watch them. I was really surprised, and then I'd come back. [Then] I'd leave. Toward the end of the summer, maybe August or early September, they finished building the church. I wasn't supposed to be out at night but I was out this night. They were holding services, and I could creep up to the building. They hadn't put mud or something to cover up these little holes yet and I could look inside. I been to [their] Temple. These people were laughing and happy and singing, and I just marveled at what I saw at this church near Mattson, [Mississippi]. I didn't go all the way to Mattson. I know I was going in that direction, because there was a two lane, like two lane little road of some sort that had been developed over the years, but was now unused and that was what I rode on.

The difference of course, as I realize now, or think, that religion was a very essential part of their lives, and they were preparing themselves for like after they left this dreadful earth. They were thinking in terms of a joyful, happy place to go to. They were preparing themselves for that. Singing is an important element in any congregation because it creates unity. I see the same thing. I belong to the Baron Hirsch [Synagogue]. I've seen the same thing going on there. They sing, and they're singing the same thing, but everybody's doing it. It doesn't make any difference if you're a millionaire or you're on welfare, you're sitting there, and you're participating, and you're a member. It's unity.

I was interested primarily in baseball. As a matter of fact, I invented a baseball game. My parents, my father, used to fuss at me for spending time throwing dice [and] writing all those figures down on paper.

[My dad said:] 'You're wasting time; you ought to do something more important.' So I invented this game, based on, you had a schedule to follow and depending on how you threw the dice—what numbers came up. They didn't know nothing about patents or stuff like that, and I didn't know what to do. It was about two or three years later that Parker Brothers came out with a baseball game, exactly the same thing.

It was a magnet that drew the boys in my neighborhood to my front porch on Desoto, and we used to play together—Wilson Kessie, his father was on the police force, there were two boys named Parks and Mitchell Samaha. I can't remember any more than that. After I moved to Catalpa it was a different area--different types of people. But it was important to me because it brought people there that I could be with, I could play with.

My father gave me about two lessons in Hebrew when I was about ten, eight, or eleven. I felt I was wasting my time because nobody else had to do it. How was I going to use it after I learned it? Of course, I read Hebrew pretty fluently although I can't speak it, and I can't read it but it's interesting. Self-taught since I came here.

We seldom went in the Dinner's delicatessen. May have gone in there a couple of times, that's all. We used to come to Memphis for my folks to buy merchandise at William R. Moore and Jetsons. I don't know...But I know we used to stop on the way out, on Third Street, there was a Siegal's Delicatessen. They used to buy some things to take home. I wouldn't go in there because you go up to the front door. It just looked like a big dark cavern. It was poorly lit. He did that on purpose. But it was poorly lit and it scared me. I wouldn't go in there. I would stay in the car.

Much to my regret, there was a girl there named Miriam Davidson from Marks...There was another little town next to Marks. I asked her to meet me at the theater. I wanted to take her to the movie. When the time came, her parents brought her there, and I didn't say nothing to my parents,

I was afraid to go. They stayed and they waited, and I never showed up, and they left. So they said something to my parents about it.

My daddy said: 'What's going on, what happened?'

I just told him I had forgotten, but I was really afraid but that was the only time something like that came up. We didn't date the Jewish girls—didn't have cars like they do now.

There was one fellow by the name of Joe Weeks. He was about my only Christian friend...In the summertime, we could use the school grounds for, like a baseball diamond, so we used to meet there and play but I never did leave with any of them. When it was over, I went my way they went their way.

I think I told you about that the band was going to make a tour. That was the one bright spot I guess in the Mississippi Delta was the fact that Clarksdale had such a well-known high school band in those days. We're going to make a tour. Thought automatically that been buddies with Joe Weeks now for years that we would stay together, the people would take two. He told me he couldn't stay with me.¹⁶⁶

FINK

PAULINE

Pauline remembered:

As a teenager, I bought my clothes at Powers and Memphis. We went to Gerber's and Lowenstein's because we were just in the habit of going there.

I graduated in 1936 and attended art school at the Vogue Art School, Chicago, because it was well known and on the same level as Pratt Art Institute, New York. I couldn't go where I wanted to go, Sophie Newcomb, New Orleans. I chose it because Alvin was still in school, and because I could finish in a year. I didn't take fine art; I took advertising and fashion. It was more business than art school but offered commercial training.¹⁶⁷

Marion remarked, "Pauline spent some of her time eating at fine restaurants."¹⁶⁸

FREDA

This was the year that Jake suffered severe losses as he lost the land and all his money. However, Freda, who had lots of jewelry, gave Pauline the diamond ring that her father gave Freda when Pauline was born.

Jake's bookkeeper, W. E. Mercer, had been the bookkeeper for years; however, he drank a great deal and might not show up for work for a week. Freda had been helping Jake in the grocery. Jake didn't really want Freda in the shop. He gave her \$2,500 to open the dress shop. I remember Harry Kantor was doing a buyer's job in New York City by this time. Freda went to New York to buy her opening stock. She stopped in Washington, D.C. to spend the night with Alvin, who was working there for the government. She was always worrying...If they weren't going to be perfect, don't do it.¹⁶⁹

Jake, not Freda, had the management skills. He set everything up because he had a mind like a computer. He could look at a row of figures and, in two seconds, tell you what the total was.¹⁷⁰

ALVIN

Alvin said: "I practiced law in West Memphis for four years before the war was declared."¹⁷¹

According to the author, he did not clarified whether he worked for the government in Washington prior to starting a practice in West Memphis.

FRIEDMAN

MORRIS

According to the Donna E. Dance and W. M. Walton, Canvasser and Interviewer respectively, Morris was listed as a prominent leader because he was prominent in the Young Men's Business Club.¹⁷²

GOLDSTEIN

LOUIS

According to the Donna E. Dance and W. M. Walton, Canvasser and Interviewer respectively, Goldstein was listed as a prominent leader who "was a pioneer."¹⁷³

JACOB

According to the Donna E. Dance and W. M. Walton, Canvasser and Interviewer respectively, "J. [Jacob] H. Hirsberg, an outstanding citizen, leader and prosperous merchant of Friars Point, Mississippi" is listed among prominent leaders.¹⁷⁴

KAPLAN

ROBERT AND SADIE

According to Sadie Kaplan, she met Robert at a service station when she and some friends stopped in Alligator, Mississippi (Bolivar County). This is thirty-one miles directly north of Cleveland, Mississippi. She was visiting her sister there. They discovered they would be attending the same dance during that week. They married in 1930, and Sadie moved from Chicago to Alligator. She said they did not move to Clarksdale until 1936 when their daughter, Joanne, needed to attend school. However, they belonged to the Congregation Beth Israel and participated in Jewish social life prior to 1936 because Alligator is only twelve-to-fifteen miles southwest of Clarksdale.¹⁷⁵

During an interview with Sadie in 1993, she said the following:

Yes, this is the only place I've lived, and this house is a duplex, and it belongs to Julian [Bloom]. Julian's mother lived in this place, and then Julian's brother lived here. See, we came with the idea, Bob did, of building a house and moving but right at that time, all the contractors were so busy they wouldn't even talk to us, so Julian, or maybe it was Arthur, said, why don't you take the house that I'm in? I said, well you're in it. So I said something to Bob about it. Bob said, if we take it, we'll have to fix it the way we want it, and that's what we did. Arthur moved out, he moved to Memphis, and then we started working on this house. We spent a bunch of money on this house...It got to a certain point and Bob said, 'I'm going to stop now.' So we stopped. It needs work now on the inside...Belle came to work for me when we moved to Clarksdale...She was with me for 28 year. I have two friends right now who come to visit me here [from Alligator].¹⁷⁶

KERSTINE

ADOLPH

Leon Binder said: “Adolph told me that he didn’t believe in God. He was an atheist.”¹⁷⁷

Corinne talked about Adolph’s religious activities by saying:

[Adolph] never belonged to the Temple nor supported the cemetery. During the High Holy days, he attended all the Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur services. He sat all day long at the services and never left. He observed all the Jewish holidays. But, he didn’t believe in God. I never understood that and never tried to. He had a strong Jewish identity because he was a Jew, and he wasn’t ashamed, but he had lost his belief in God.

Because Adolph went around town talking about atheism and did not belong to the Temple. He never participated in anything in the Temple, which meant he never helped in the Temple. Isidor had trouble arranging for Adolph to be buried in the Jewish cemetery in January, 1936. It cost Isidor a ‘pretty plenty’ as Louis Goldstein was against him...He wanted to keep him from being buried in Clarksdale. He was the most out-spoken opponent. Isidor always regretted that he buried him there, and said he should have buried him in Helena. He wanted to bury him where the family lived because it was convenient.

Corinne always believed that Louie Goldstein held such a big do over this because he had a big mouth. He was a partner of Max Kaufman but never president of the congregation.¹⁷⁸

Sam Abrams said: ‘I never will forget Isidor Kerstine when your grandfather died. I was single. I helped sit up with the body. In those days, people sat up with the body to say Kaddish. A mirror fell off the wall on top of the casket. Isidor had a fit.’ Sam also described Adolph as a very stubborn man.¹⁷⁹

MARGERY

Corinne often described the author’s birth by saying, “Frances was head nurse, a Myrtle Moore, and Ilene Johnson referred to a Johnnie, a night shift nurse. I believe Myrtle Moore was in surgery at the time of [the author’s] birth...Johnnie met Dr. Carr in the corridor between [Corinne’s] room and the other lady in another room. She told him: ‘he should get out of the way if he couldn’t deliver these two women at the same time.’”¹⁸⁰

SELMA

Selma said: “Evelyn married Emanuel H. (Manny) Silberman on September 6, 1936. Manny, a distributor for Paul Mason wines, was born June 27, 1914 and died September 9, 1989. He is buried in Hillside Memorial Park, Glendale, California.”¹⁸¹

Selma continued talking about James’ drugstore, and their move to Jackson:

James owned the drugstore in Tutwiler except for the fixtures. Well, it wasn’t good business. We managed to live out of it for a little while. We left on Christmas day. Came to Jackson because he had a job with Heidelberg Drugstore. We just didn’t have too much stock. Roy Flowers had talked to him. He owned that hospital in Clarksdale. He was a fine fellow. He let us be most anywhere we could. He knew we didn’t have any money. He was mighty good to us. We had managed to live there and managed that drugstore for four years. Didn’t owe anybody. Didn’t owe a soul. Paid cash for everything. That was the hardest part of the Depression.¹⁸²

Corinne said: "James was from Mount Rose, Mississippi, and most of his family lived in Mount Rose. I guess he wanted to be closer to them and to be in a bigger area where he could make more money. They moved to Jackson."¹⁸³

KLINE

MYER

According to the Donna E. Dance and W. M. Walton, Canvasser and Interviewer respectively, Myer Kline was listed in the prominent leaders lists.¹⁸⁴

LABENS

ALVIN

Alvin said: "I was Bar Mitzvah there around 1936. Harry Kantor a resident buyer in New York, my grandmother bought my tallis for my Bar Mitzvah from Rosie Kantor. She had a side line."¹⁸⁵

LEVY

JULIUS, M.D.

According to the Donna E. Dance and W. M. Walton, Canvasser and Interviewer respectively, Levy was a prominent physician in Clarksdale.¹⁸⁶

NACHMAN

AL

WPA's selection of Al Nachman was based on his prominence in Masonic circles of Clarksdale and a pioneer.¹⁸⁷

During the interview of October 24, 1936, Tom Gibson reported the following: [Nachman] has been an ardent supporter of the Cotton festival oration which at present quite an affair in Coahoma County, and the entire Mississippi Delta.

He is president of the State Tax Payers Association and was twice elected Department Commander of the Spanish War Veterans of the state, an honor that never been accorded any one before. He is one of the board of directors of the Coahoma Bank and Trust Company, member of the legislature, the Delta Chamber of Commerce and other local organizations of like character.

One of his colorful stories of western life is of a time he met up with a Jaulapai Indian one evening, who was a little off of his trail in the Megallen Mountains in Nev Mexico and together they traveled to where they were to make camp that night. At the cabin there were two blanket Indians. Neither said anything to the two newcomers, but once in a while they would carry on a few words between themselves.

Long late in the evening the fire was dying out, one of the Indians dropped his blanket a little and said, 'Do you think the present administration will do anything for the cause of silver?'¹⁸⁸

SACK

LESTER SR.

According to the Donna E. Dance and W. M. Walton, Canvasser and Interviewer respectively, Sack was the prominent US District Attorney of Clarksdale.¹⁸⁹

Another interview for the WPA reports: "Graduated from the Vanderbilt University of Nashville, Tennessee, in 1925. Admitted to the bar in Mississippi, Coahoma County in 1929. Appointed Assistant United States Attorney of the North Mississippi District in 1929 and is still holding the same office in Clarksdale."¹⁹⁰

SMALL

JOHN

According to the Donna E. Dance and W. M. Walton, Canvasser and Interviewer respectively, John Small was a prominent pioneer and successful merchant of Clarksdale.¹⁹¹

WEISS

JOE

WPA's selection mentions Joe Weiss, cotton factor and president of ball club.¹⁹²

1937

JANUARY-FEBRUARY: THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER FLOOD

According to Burt Jaegar:

Mississippi River flood did affected Coahoma County rather than Clarksdale. Some farmers got rich off of it. The Red Cross came in to help the victims with a large tent living area food and clothes. They stayed during the planting period until the water drained off. After the Red Cross left, these big farmers charged the sharecroppers for the tent and food they were given by the Red Cross.¹⁹³

Harriet Damsker Jaegar said her father sent his daughters somewhere during the flood. Her father's company Rose Seed Co was there on Delta Avenue. Because the newspaper picture went up in a fire, there are no pictures of the community.¹⁹⁴

Corinne said:

The flood came in January 1937. [Corinne took Margery and Richard with her.] Men were putting up sandbags to stop river at Friars Point by the river. I knew a day ahead of time that Isidor had decided we should leave and go to St. Joseph, Missouri. Margery [the author] was less than one year old. I caught the Illinois Central to Memphis that was about to pull out. The 'Yellow Dog' went in another direction. I caught train to Memphis They yelled 'refugee' so they stopped the

train and put us on. At Walls, the conductor stopped the train, threw down his coat and refused to go on river was about to overflow. He stopped train for about 1 hour. Took about two hours to go six miles to Memphis from Walls. No water on track so I do not know why it took so long. The conductor was terrified of what was happening. May have been going through water. He was not going to be responsible for women and children. Last train from Memphis to Kansas City. They had water at Marked Tree, but after that, we were OK.¹⁹⁵

CONGREGATION BETH ISRAEL

Al Nachman had the mortgage on the Temple. This is Bernard Hirsberg's quote: "Before I back off of this mortgage, I would have the pleasure of tearing this building down brick by brick. Each brick would give me more pleasure."¹⁹⁶

Labens said: "If you find 1937, you will find the Torah cover is black. In 1938, it is white because of my class. We paid \$35 with nickels and dimes."¹⁹⁷

According to the Historical Research Project Assignment #26 for Church History Services are held every Friday evening, Saturday morning and Sunday...Beth Israel Temple, located on the corner of Catalpa Street and Seminole Avenue...From the Jewish point of counting only the head of each family is counted as a member but in a total account of the whole family the membership amounts to 550 people.

The ...Temple...is of pure Gothic design. The building is of brick, having two large domes and all of the windows are stained glass...The Sunday school departments are graded and the finest in Mississippi. The literature for the classes is written by the Rabbi and mimeographed in the Temple. There are fourteen regular teachers and nineteen in the training department. Woman's Sisterhood and Junior Congregation.¹⁹⁸

INTERNATIONAL ORDER OF B'NAI B'RITH

According to Max Landau, interviewee for the WPA Historical Research, Assignment #29, Project No. 6055-4120, the B'nai B'rith Chapter was:

Organized in Clarksdale in 1904. Some of the charter members were: Max Kaufman, Max Friedman, Berthold Landau, and Aaron Sack. It was first called Max Kaufman Lodge; then the name was changed to Clarksdale Lodge No. 660. In 1927, it was reorganized and named Delta Lodge No. 660. This Lodge is a subordinate lodge of District No. 7 comprising the states of Mississippi, Tennessee, Arkansas Louisiana, Texas, Oklahoma, and Alabama.

The purpose of B'nai B'rith are fraternal and benevolent. Major institutions receiving appropriations from District No. 7 are Jewish Orphanage at New Orleans, B'nai B'rith Home for the Aged, Memphis; Leo N. Levy Hospital, Hot Springs; Hospital for Consumptives, Denver Colorado.

The Order of B'nai B'rith exists for the interest of humanity and while it is a Jewish organization does not confine its work alone to its people, but through the institutions which it helps to support and sponsor lend a helping hand in time of distress and sickness to men, women, and children irrespective of their religion.

About the year 1930 the B'nai B'rith Home was sponsored, equipped, and maintained.

Present Officers:

Max Landau	President
Herman Damsker,	Vice President
Maurice Segal	Secretary
Myer Kline	Treasurer ¹⁹⁹

ABRAMS

SAM

Sam said:

In 1937, I got a job in the Levee Board Payroll Department. We had all these problems, and everybody was working on the levee. I was one of the last ones to leave there because I found duplicate payrolls. I stayed off a long time while each section was being distributed. I never knew if they were paying them twice, or if this was a fraud or a mistake.

We had a man, H. Dabney, who was head of the Levee Board for years and years and years, and he died. I went to work after he died. We had a black boy work for us at this payroll in 1937. So one year we were playing a prank on him and sent him to the top of the building. He didn't know I was going to be there. I scared him by rattling some chains that he thought could be a ghost up there like a Halloween trick.²⁰⁰

AUERBACH

According to *Merchants on Issaquena*, Auerbach Shoe Repair moved into three Issaquena locations starting in 1937:

1. 1937–1940: Dave Auerbach opened his shoe repair shop in October 1937 at 385 Issaquena and the 1939 city directory shows his street address, 387 Issaquena.²⁰¹
2. 1940–1955: He was the first occupant of the building, signed four leases with K&A. The leases signed in 1940, 1943, 1944, and 1945 labeled the location as 'the storeroom.' His first rent, \$37.50 per month, expanded to \$42.50 per month in 1945. Prior to moving to 367, Dave started at 387 Issaquena or Building 13, only four stores south in 1939.²⁰²
3. 1955–1967 Dave Auerbach started in 387 Issaquena, moved to 367 Issaquena, and in 1955 moved again to this building at 335 Issaquena. He did not retire until 1967, when he was seventy-nine years old. He died in 1970. Auerbach's great-nephew George Hirsberg smiles when he recalls the six customer chairs lined up against the left wall in the front of the shop.²⁰³

BAKER

JULIA

Julia's said about her school days:

I have been to two class reunions. Each time we all said that we got a good education and we had a good time. Mr. Heidelberg was a good principal. I don't remember any bad stories about him. He was strict because he was German—a tough German. The boys always thought he was a mean man because he was so strict.

Miss Johnson was the math teacher. Miss Payne was the study hall teacher. When Mrs. McCain became pregnant she had to leave the end of the school year. Mrs. Johnson was one of the couple that they let come into the high school.

I won honors in typing. At graduation, I receive certificates in typing and home economics. Miss Walker we had as our Counselor. When it came time to take Latin, they didn't offer Spanish, just Latin or Home Economics. I said to her 'What shall I do?'

Miss Walker said: 'You are never going to need Latin; continue your Home Economics'

Julia continued:

We took one year in Junior High, and then we could finish off in Senior High. We took cooking and sewing. Miss Johnson taught my older and younger sister. We had the manuals or the treadle type [sewing machine]. I think by the time my younger sister got there they had the electric.

I played second fiddle in the orchestra with Mr. Kooyman. I can't remember anything except that he would tap that baton on that music stand, and he would tap our music stand. I took violin from Miss Rust beginning in Junior High, I think.

Mama use to tell us that even at the playground in the summertime: 'If it cost a quarter or less.' So, I don't know what she paid for music but we got the violin. I still have the violin when I moved here over twenty-years ago. I gave it away. I don't know why I kept it; We all took piano lessons. I was about fourteen or in Junior High. I took from another lady, not Miss Ada Chapman or Miss Minnie Shannon. I don't remember her name but I do remember she was a beautiful lady. I remember if we did well we could have chicken fingers at the end of the piano—that was my old sister and me. My younger sister took from Miss Shannon, I think. Both my sisters can still play. My brother took clarinet. At that time Junior High School was six, seventh and eighth grades.

I took lessons and swam a little in the Elizabeth Dorr indoor pool after Hazel Coleman, a friend of mine pushed me in the Mullins' pool. When she pushed me in she said: 'She cannot swim.' However, I swam. When I took lessons in the indoor pool, I took a Red Cross lifesaver's course This happened the beginning of high school. That is when I found out I had sinus problems. Because I couldn't go under water. I still swim with my head up.

We had night football games down at the river, the Wildcat field. It never failed that the football games came during the Jewish holidays.

All my mother said [was] "You buy the ticket at school and you can go. You can't go down there and buy a ticket."

'Cause we would buy the ticket, and we would all meet together at some point and go down there to sit together.²⁰⁴

BALICER

PAULINE

The *Clarksdale Press Register* news article of July 21, 1937 about Pauline's wedding reports:

Pauline Hilda Balicer weds Ben Brook of Dayton Ohio...Mr. Felix Balicer announcing the marriage of this daughter...The wedding was solemnized last-night at a late evening wedding in the reception rooms of the Glenwood Hotel in Mount Clemens, Michigan...Mr. Brook is a son of Mr. and Mrs. Sam Brook of Dayton, Ohio. A student of the Dayton schools, Mr. Brook is connected in business with his father.

Mrs. Brook is a graduate of the Clarksdale school and has made her home in Clarksdale since her departure for Dayton last May.

The couple will reside in Dayton and after a bridal trip through the east they will visit Clarksdale the latter part of next week.²⁰⁵

BLOOM

Julian said:

My father came from Russia about the age he was to go into the Russian army. His parents picked up and brought him to this country. They went to Helena, Arkansas, because they had landmen in Helena who were from their town in Russia, I don't know what year, maybe somewhere around 1905-07. It was real interesting. I don't know if you remember him but there used to be a man

here by the name of Mr. Benenson. He was a cattleman. He lived in Helena at the time, and he remembers when my grandparents came from Russia to Helena. Then, they moved to Memphis.

Joanne's [Kaplan] family, I guess it's her father, had people in Helena too. I think their name was Dumont, and that was a very prominent family in Helena. And the Solomons, they were the bankers over there.

My mother had been in Memphis most all her life. She was from Poland and came to this country when she was a little girl. Her family went from Poland to Canada and from Canada to Memphis. My grandmother had a brother, Steinberg, that lived in Memphis. He was in the hide and fur business. He sent for them because it was so cold in Canada. I think in order for them to come into the country, they had to go to Canada first. It was an immigration thing. He brought them to Memphis.

My father was a representative for Endicott Johnson. They made shoes, etc. He used to buy the hides for the leather. He went all over. Back in those days they used to have slaughter houses, and people used to sell the hides. Then he would buy them from the hide dealers, like Delta Packing. All my family, some in Paducah, Kentucky, was always in the hide, fur and junk business.

My father and mother met in Memphis. In fact, he met her before he moved there. He used to come in to see her. She worked as a clerk or something for Eddie Alperin, a Jewish dry goods merchant on North Main Street. She would tell stories about my father coming there. They got married in 1912. My great-uncle, my mother's uncle, trained my father in the hide and fur business in Memphis. My dad went on the road. He traveled and went to Meridian, Mississippi, to a man named Golden who was in the hide and fur business.²⁰⁶

Mr. Golden told my father: 'Well you know all about the business and everything else, and I've got the backing. You can come in and go in business with me.'

My parents moved to Meridian, Mississippi, and they lived there when I was born. I was born in Memphis as my mother came home because her parents were there. Then, my mother missed Memphis, and her family and all. So they decided to move back to Memphis. Mr. Golden moved to Memphis and opened a place. He was a competitor to my mother's uncle. I don't know whether they had children or what it was but he kept his place in Meridian too. They opened up and did real well in Memphis but Mrs. Golden didn't like Memphis and wanted to go back to Meridian—the same old story. So he sold out his interest to my father and the Golden's went back to Meridian.

We remained in Memphis. My father was in that business until the Depression came along. Yes, the Depression wiped him out just like it did everybody else. He always told a story; he had 100,000 possum that cost a dollar apiece, and overnight they went down to \$400. So that's \$60,000. Back in those days, I guess it's like \$600,000 today. That's how he lost his money; the value of stuff and everything.

By 1933, Nat was already out of high school; he got out during the real Depression. He just kind of hung around, couldn't get a job or anything else. After I graduated from high school, we decided we wanted to go into business.

A friend in Memphis told us to look at two places—Clarksdale and Paducah, Kentucky. My mother, who was living in Memphis, wanted to know how far Clarksdale was. We said seventy-five miles, and Paducah was about 150 miles; so she said to go to Clarksdale because it's closer and try. She didn't think much of it anyway. She thought we'd be back. So we came down here and opened up on Sunflower. I think 133 Sunflower by Third Street. My brother Nat and I went into business on September 1, 1937.

In the fall of 1937, we started buying pecans. Back in those days, the levee was full of wild pecan trees, and they called them seedlings. We started buying pecans, and I think we paid five cents a pound for them that year. We would buy; and as soon as we got a truckload, we would take it to Memphis to sell. Then we started handling a little metal because all we had was a building.

Then we kind of got into more of the metal scrap trade. We rented the small lot that was right next door. We started buying a little scrap iron and some old cars. The people would come in from the plantations and want to know if they could buy a piece off the car, and a piece here and there.

[These people] knew that we went to Memphis every weekend, and they would ask us: 'I can't find something for my car, and I can't find this, would you see if you could get it for me?'²⁰⁷

Julian continued:

So, we got to the point where every weekend we were shopping for parts for customers. We bought nine old cars from the Ford Co. here for \$45 and put them on the lot to scrap them. Actually, it was the beginning of a used auto parts business.

One of the men who was in that kind of business where we used to go shopping said: 'if we were going to be in that business, we needed to be on the highway. That's the place to have a used auto parts business.' So after we got back, we looked into the possibility of coming out here on the highway. We bought these highway lots, and a couple of more here from Clark, who were the founder of Clarksdale.

It wasn't very difficult to be friendly with people in Clarksdale when we first got here. Course, we really didn't know anybody or anything, and there was a second floor where we had our business, We fixed ourselves up a room with a coal heater, and that's where we slept. We used to eat our meals at Reuben Behrend's. He had a restaurant right around the corner.

My mother decided it was silly for her to be in Memphis, and we were in Clarksdale. She felt we didn't have a home. She talked about it but she never, I don't think realized, she was going to move down here.²⁰⁸

CALIFF

LEON

Leon said: "Well, I remember all of the worries about the flood of 1937. It didn't mean anything to me. I just heard people talking about them. I couldn't imagine. I didn't see it in my mind's eye. I remember thinking what's going on here?"²⁰⁹

DAMSKER

ROSE SEED COMPANY

According to Olive Edwards in her feature article about Herman Damsker, "1937-38 brought changes in Clarksdale. Where once Desoto Avenue, and State Street and the cotton fields began, a new paved Highway 49 now rolled to Tutwiler and points south. Oil companies reserved sites for their service, station, and Herman Damsker decided to buy frontage and build his own building. Seed was moved to its present location. The fleet of trucks increased, Ed joined the sales staff, and Miss Rose again reserved a small space for her shrubs, bulbs and flower seed."²¹⁰

DINNER/BEHREND

BLANCHE

Blanche said:

I met Julius in Houston. My brother in law's cousin was President of Hadassah Junior, and they had a dance to make money. I was visiting my sister. She told me she met a nice young man from Memphis—that's where we lived later on. I said: 'What's his name?'

My sister said: 'Julius Behrend.'

I didn't know him. The funny part, at that time, I lived in Clarksdale. I had a girlfriend in Memphis, and I came to visit her. He worked in a store. I don't know whether it was shoe store or what kind of store, anyway, he worked downstairs. There was a store, and they lived upstairs; [they] had living quarters. I came [to Memphis] a million times, and I never met him. Right there where he was I never met him. Excellent salesman, he knew all about shoes—how to fit them and everything. I visited the girlfriend upstairs—you know they lived upstairs. I have to go to Houston.

His little mother's name was Helen Rosen. She was chosen the most beautiful woman in Memphis. Her husband's name was Morris Rosen. He was a shoe salesman you know, on the road selling. Whenever they had conventions at one of those hotels they would write my Daddy a letter and tell him to prepare for like a hundred salesmen, and hundred-fifty, and he would be prepared to cook for that many people. They would come through Clarksdale. He would cater those affairs.

Morris Rosen was Julius's uncle, and his Aunt Helen. [Julius] was crazy about her. She was gorgeous. And they came to eat in my Daddy's restaurant. He brought his wife and one of his daughters. Her name was Bernice Rosen; she was single then but she didn't look nothing like her mother. She was mannish looking—tall, walked mannish. She talked mannish. She was one of those big shots. I never got along with her, after I married Julius. No. We were neighbors at one time. I had an apartment on Mount Moriah in the apartments and every time, at that time, her daddy retired, when we lived in [Wolf's] Apartments, and he lived with Bernice. He used to love Mama's cooking so every time I fix good soup or I would bake, I would take it to Uncle Morris but I couldn't get along with Bernice. She used to make fun of Julius. Always repeat the same thing. I forget what she would repeat. And I didn't answer her. It's none of her business. She thought everybody. She thought I wouldn't live with Julius. She gives me three months after I married him. Well, we lived fifty-seven years. She took back her words. That was a sure thing.

Julius was adopted. Julius had two brothers trying to find him when his mother was in the hospital with tumor on the brain. She used to be Jewish opera singer, she played in Jewish operas. And she also sang in the Temple. I named Freddie after his real mother, Freda Hecht. But he goes under his adopted name because he didn't know he was adopted until he was twenty-one. His brothers finally got hold of me. Julius' brothers lived in St. Louis. And the oldest brother, Morris, he worked in some kind of company that sold cars. He had a night job—the worst job. Go and steal the cars, people that didn't pay for it. Morris Hecht is still alive. He's more than 91...When his mother died, he was about seven years old. His middle brother was five and Julius was a baby. Before they put them into Catholic home, his daddy paid a very, very religious woman, lived in Memphis. They give him up for adoption because his mother died.

Rabbi Tolochko married me. He lived next door on Oakhurst, and we married at his house. I didn't have big wedding.

No, nobody taught me to cook. I learned when I got married in Houston. I didn't learn from my parents because they were too busy. I couldn't stand there and learn how to cook when I was in school. My Mother was the cook.

Flora Hirsberg was our best friend. And her brother and Nat were like attached twins. My brother was a little older than Nat. Nat was much younger—they got along so beautifully, Nat slept at the Okun's house, and Pasha [Bessie] was his mother's name. And when, I was pregnant when I had Freddie, she adored her. So she crocheted a little blanket. I still have it in the cedar chest—and little booties, and little, what do you call it? No, what do you call it when they eat? The bibs and little shoes, she crocheted them. It was so cute. She loved her, she loved all of us. She was the best person.²¹¹

Freddie, Blanche's daughter, said: "I remember when we went over the Second Street bridge, and there was a Fire Station there. I remember, during the summer, against the wall would be black with crickets."²¹²

FINK

PAULINE

Pauline said: “Afterwards I finished the one year at Vogue Art School, I was able to help my mother in her store; I did the windows. I helped with selling and dressing the window. I married [when I was 19] at the Temple. Rabbis Tolochko and Rabinowitz (Greenville) officiated. Lillian Small and her husband, Bernard, played the violin.”²¹³

FREDA

Greenwood said: “Freda wanted to go into business even though she had never worked a day in her life, not even for her father, Abraham.”²¹⁴

Pauline said: “When Freda dressed for work she always wore her work oxfords, not high heels or fancy shoes, because it saved her feet. She gave up her participation in clubs except her fashion shows that she gave at the Woman’s Club.”²¹⁵

KERSTINE

CAESAR

Julian Bloom said: “Caesar was kind of a loner, very shy. He would nod to say hello when you passed him on the street, just to acknowledge that he knew who you were, but that's the extent of what I know.”²¹⁶

CORINNE

Corinne said:

I tell you, Margery, in my youth, I associated a great deal [with gentiles] because when we lived in Smith Center, Kansas we were the only Jewish family there. In fact, not only in Smith Center, but also in the county, we were the only Jewish people. I was compelled to, but I wouldn't say forced, but I had to have friends. All my friends were Gentiles. I used to go to Christian churches. I used to participate in all the Sunday school things. It didn't make any difference. I was still Jewish at home. I got over that hump—the prejudice. They forgot about the fact. They were some voiced; there were some that like to make remarks, but they didn't bother me. I was affiliated with the Jews and the Gentiles in St. Joe. In Joplin, we went with Gentile kids all the time.

So, it wasn't a problem to me when I moved to Clarksdale for the Jewish/Gentile association. I associated right away with the American Legion Auxiliary, which I was not a charter member. I wasn't of the very first, but I was in the second group that started the American Legion [or] when they re-founded their organization. It was never difficult for me to be around Gentile people because I was used to it—from going to Sunday School, from affiliating with them, from playing in churches and from school friends. It was easy for me. I felt a prejudice occasionally, yes but, not all that much. I was invited to parties. When Walter Chapman was living in Clarksdale, I was one of those invited to the recital at the Cutrer home. Francis [Cutrer] used to invite me to these evening musicals in their home.

After my children were born, I did not find it difficult to go out to enjoy myself because I always had baby sitters. My Negroes helped. I had to depend on Viola, the maid and baby sitter. I can't remember the names of the other girls, but Viola was my main stay. Daddy and I use to go out all the time. The baseball games, the picture shows and visits with people in their homes. As an adult we participate. Well, I was in charge and I had a lot of them.²¹⁷

COMMUNITY SERVICES

Corinne said:

I did a lot to promote social activities in the community; like I was Chairman of Music Week of the Civic Opera. I got up parades and ran around and had all the churches to observe Music Week, the schools. I don't know the dates. When we wanted to go out and have a good time, we would go out to eat. Daddy and I would go to Memphis. Occasionally, we would go with Pearl and Louis. We would go to Memphis to the Opera once a year. We had Community musical events here in Clarksdale in which I was in charge of. I did a lot about bringing people to Clarksdale. Later, they became very well known, such as Ferrante and Teichert, but I can't remember the other names of the well-known people. There were quite a few of them, I know. We had big concerts in Clarksdale. We brought good talent there. We did not go to Jackson or Vicksburg for entertainment, [we] only went to Memphis.²¹⁸

WPA PROJECTS INTERVIEW

Mrs. Kerstine's parents were Rose Baum and Morris J. Weiss of Pittsburgh, Kansas. The greater part of her literary education was received in St. Joseph, Missouri, where she began school in the public schools; after graduating from the High School she attended both a Junior College and a Business College of St. Joseph. Later, studied at the University of Wisconsin majoring in piano music. She studied under Epstein at the Beethoven Conservatory, St. Louis. The music world of St. Joseph, Missouri, have the artist teacher Frank Mannheimer of London, England, come nearly every summer and give a ten day Master Class. Mrs. Kerstine has studied in this class.

In the high schools of St. Joseph, Missouri...the unusual pupils were permitted to teach as apprentices. Mrs. Kerstine began teaching piano as an apprentice in High school and taught for eight years before her marriage.

Miss Corinne Weiss was married to [Isidor] Kerstine Dec. 31, 1932. To this union has been born two children a son, Richard Stanton, and a daughter, Margery Helen.

Mrs. Kerstine is a member of the Opera Study Club, Clarksdale and chorus-accompanist of the Woman's Club and gives freely of her talent on programs.²¹⁹

KLINE

AARON

Aaron said:

I came to Clarksdale in 1937. I went to Alligator to join my brother, Charles. My uncle Myer was there too. The store was already there. It was established in 1929. There was the Kaplan store. Kline's Store was kept like a general department store. I was in dry goods; called it general merchandise; had a little bit of everything. Myer Kline, when it was incorporated, had the whole town, the whole block...Next to the store there were several commissaries, such as Clemens, Butlers, non-Jewish people. There was a café down the road. Before that, I believe Baskind had a store there. There were two-to-three Chinese stores. There was a Chinese store next to me. There was one at the end of the block. There was still like an office and commissary for R. A Butler & Son.²²⁰

HENRY

Aaron said: "Henry is my late uncle; that's the one that did the farming in Anguilla, MS. They built a house and moved to Vicksburg at the same time that Myer Kline moved to Clarksdale. An article said he traveled a hundred miles every day to go to his work. Aaron said that was probably because after he moved he kept the store in Anguilla. He also had a farm with his son, Milton 'Micky' in Onward, Mississippi, that is between Anguilla and Vicksburg. Micky married Helen Baskind."²²¹

MYER

Corinne said: "Myer Kline had all his holdings alone. Then Henry Kline separated from the Adelson family holdings. I know that Henry Kline was a wealthier man than Myer. He made more than his brother. They built homes that were identical."²²²

OKUN

NAT

According to the WPA Historical Research Project in August 2, 1937, L. C. Hudson interviewed Nat Okun and made the following report:

In 1936 Nathan Okun was installed as Chancellor Commander of Clarksdale Lodge No. 45, Knights of Pythias, to succeed A. C. Edwards who served the lodge for the term of 1936."²²³

SEGAL

SOL AND LENA

"Brother to Morris; married to Lena Abrams," according to Sam Abrams. "They moved to Kansas City approximately five years before we married in May 1942. Sol had a job traveling out of Kansas City, and they moved, according to Sam Abrams."²²⁴

CHILDREN BORN

- 1) **Sylvia** 1920 Mississippi
- 2) **Helen Rae** 1924 Mississippi

1938

A birds eye view of Coahoma County, 1938, Coahoma (County Chamber of Commerce Brochure) lists:

Coahoma County was called 'the golden buckle on the cotton belt.'
Stadium, municipal swimming pool, and baseball park lighted for night use,
1588 homes
Reference, circulating and school libraries
Daily newspaper circulation of 5,200
19 churches
Federal court seat
Industries: Meat curing plant in cold storage;
 ice cream plant
 three bottling works;
 only plant in Mississippi of Continental Baking Company

three lumber mills
largest bank in a farming area in the United States

CONGREGATION BETH ISRAEL

MS Institute of Jewish and Cognate Studies trained Sunday school teachers, only program of its kind, and conferred degree of Bachelor of Hebrew History and Literature. 10 students graduated from Institute of Jewish and Cognate Studies.²²⁵

SOCIAL LIFE

Julian Bloom said:

B'nai B'rith Club on Delta was really the Jewish social life. The men had a poker game going on Sunday afternoon. They used to have New Year's Eve parties that we would cater it ourselves. B'nai B'rith Men's Club always made up social events, especially if they were trying to raise money.

When the Elks Club was popular that was for big events. We used to have dances up there, like maybe twice a year. We would have people from Cleveland and Greenville and Greenwood, that would always come to The Cotton Ball. It was held maybe in the spring, before it got too hot. We always had that, then the B'nai B'rith Club always had some kind of a function going on.

The Sebulskys had the Style Shop in town; Nat Okun's shoe store; The Madeira Shop; Cohens and Resnecks had a shoe store and then they opened up later, Alan's. (Bloom, 11) Yaffes, had a store on Sunflower Street; the Rappaports... I think Sunflower was the main business street before Issaquena started. Kaufmans had their tailor shop on Sunflower.

Actually, the whole Jewish community was merchants, except the Friedmans and the Blooms in the scrap business.

The Sacks and the Klines were in farming, cotton... Aaron Sack had one for a while here. He had a cotton brokerage and farms. He had all kind of stuff. Back in his days, he was one of the wealthiest people here.²²⁶

BAKER

JULIA

According to Julia,

Six months after [I] graduated from high school [I] went to Memphis. Uncle Harry sent me here. The Grounds Business School had what they called 'Salesman.' They go around asking people if they wanted to send their children to business school. Uncle Harry had a store. Alma was already working for him. He asked me if I wanted to go.

In 1938, Mom and Dad said now you call us once a week, either Friday or Saturday; reverse the charges; 35 cents. Thirty-five cents was a lot of money then. So I would try to call on Friday night. One Friday night I called. Mary Belle, who lived down the street from us, was the long distance operator. I would call and get her. 'Mary Bell, this is Julia Bell, I want to talk to my parents.'

Mary Belle answered, 'Oh, Julia Bell, I don't think you can talk to them. I just saw your mother walk into the Temple when I was walking to work. So, there is nobody at home.'

Well, then we didn't have a phone that you had to ring. We had a party line for a while. When I'd go down to Rosedale, Mississippi, you had to ring with the operator. That phone is still in my aunt's house. They haven't paid the money to make it useful. But after I was married, and I had one or two or three children; I have forgotten. My cousin who was from Rosedale who lived in New York, and she came home to recuperate from surgery. My aunt was no longer living. I called

her brother's house. I get the operator and ask for Louise Mostkoff. She is at Adolph Moskoff's house.

Operator said: 'just a minute.

I said: 'Would you try Toby's house?'

The operator answered: 'Julia, if you are trying to get in touch with Louise, they are having a party for her down at the Country Club. Do you want me to ring the Country Club?'

I said: 'No; I'll call her another time.' Mrs. J. Mostkoff, Ida and Nellie's sister eventually moved back to Rosedale when her brother got sick and took over the mercantile business.²²⁷

FRANK

Julia Glassman said: "One of them in Riverton. For a while he had the same store that Mr. Small had. I don't remember anymore." Frank was Dave's father. He named his son after his father.²²⁸

CALIFF

REBECCA "BEA"

Leon recalled:

We went back to St. Louis to visit my mother's family a couple of times. I don't remember how we went. I only remember going once. May have gone twice. She didn't get along too well with those. I think her father was put in an old folks' home She went a time or two by herself then she wanted somebody to go with her. I went with her one time I think. And of course, I think, one of the...she met with her brothers and their wives and one of them had a son that appeared to me to be homosexual. That was a no-no in those days. So I didn't have much to do with them.²²⁹

DINNER/BEHREND

BLANCHE

Blanche remembered being in Clarksdale with her new baby, Freddie, She said: "When Freddie was little, she was in the buggy, had a mosquito net over, outside Daddy's restaurant, everybody came in said 'you'd better take that baby in, somebody's going to kidnap her, because she was such a beautiful baby.'

I said: 'Nobody's going to kidnap her.'"

She added: "I did play poker with Rose and Annie and Gertrude Bernstein. She's something."²³⁰

GOLDSTEIN

LOUIS

Sam Abrams said:

Louis Goldstein was a bachelor. Of course, he showed off a lot. What he would do on the High Holy Days when people would donate money to show this message, he would donate a lot of money and never paid it. He wanted the honor was the main thing because he wanted to be known as the one who gave the most.

That's right. I never will forget Mr. Levine lost his house and Louis Goldstein got it. The whole family had to move to the upstairs in the balcony of the store on Sunflower. Somehow or other, they got the house back after Louis Goldstein died. He left a lot of money to the schul.²³¹

Julia Glassman said: "I remember Louis Goldstein. I just remember that he had a store. I believe he [was] Mrs. Gordon's brother or maybe he was her uncle. I know they were kin."²³²

Goldstein's obituary reports: "He had lived in lived in the city for the past forty-five years. He was a philanthropist and was instrumental in the financing of the Beth Israel Temple and was a charter member of the B'nai B'rith."²³³ It did not mention any local citizen as part of his family.

JACOBSON

Gilbert said: "The business was open on the Sabbath Grandpa and Uncle Louis had expanded it from shoes to general merchandise and had moved the store from Sunflower to Issaquena before he died. Aunt Ella couldn't have inherited Grandpa's store. She lived in Lambert when he died. Daddy and Aunt Nell took over his store. Uncle Louie joined them later...My father and uncle's business was named G. Jacobson Bros. When Aunt Nell married Uncle Sam; she went into business with him. Aunt Ella and Uncle Phil had a store down the street."²³⁴

KANTOR

HARRY

Adele Cohen-Kline said: "[Harry] used to hang out with them (on Issaquena) but he didn't have a store over there. Harry's uncle used to sell jewelry or something. Harry's brother was Leon. Hymen had a store over there. Harry hung around that store all the time. On one corner was Sherman [and] Campassi's store and Abe Isaacson's was the other corner store. There was Simon Lurie store. There was a picture show that was on the street. There was a Grober. The Shepp store was over there; the Levites, Dorothy's parents."²³⁵

Aaron Kline said: "I know that it was hard to get the Jews to deposit money in the banks before the bank crash."²³⁶

KERSTINE

CAESAR AND MAX

Corinne said: "Max sent Caesar out and did the dancing. He loved to dance."²³⁷

Lenore Sack Beatus told how much she enjoyed dancing with them.²³⁸

Selma added:

Max and Caesar went to every dance. When Caesar left Clarksdale, he went into the government at Washington. He was in the Army between the two wars. I was living in Jackson when he did this. This was after 1936, I had moved down here. He was living in that one-way experiment station. [Selma said that he signed up in Vicksburg.] I went with him and spent the day with him in Vicksburg before he left. I thought that was the end of the world when he went but he had the best time he ever had in his life.

Caesar never had to leave the United States. When the Army sent him to Ole Miss he began to fool with his music. He wanted to go on stage. He was in a play at Ole Miss.²³⁹

Corinne said:

Caesar worked in Chicago for a while. He took piano lessons there and when he worked in Washington, DC, and he learned to play a piano pretty well for what he had. Had he had a chance; he would have been good. Caesar composed words and music. Caesar did have his music published but he had to pay for it himself and never sold any composition. That cost a good bit of money. He could not get the music recognized. He went to Amos and Andy to get published. Supposedly, Selma believed no one encouraged him or talked him into it. He did it on his own. It's awful hard to get it published. She said that no one truly encouraged him or supported him; he did it on his own. Although he never made anything out of it, he worked hard at it. I just remember him carrying it. He never got the chance.²⁴⁰

RAPPAPORT

ROWENA

Rowena said: "I married Sam in 1938. I was living here in Clarksdale when I met him. I had been living here from 1935 till I married him. Prior to 1935 I had been living in Tunica. All I can say is, if a non-Jewish and a Jewish person get married, they need to get the religion straight before they get married."²⁴¹

SALOMON

March 25: Lorraine and Teddy's baby daughter dies.

WEISS

Corinne said: "Gene Weiss, my brother, came to Clarksdale in 1938."

1939

WROX (ALCAZAR HOTEL)

A second radio station was established in Clarksdale in 1939, WROX, and an affiliate of the Mutual Broadcasting System with offices in the Alcazar Hotel. Originally owned by Birney Imes of Columbus, MS, WROX featured programs over the years including "Coffee Club" with Helen Sugg and the Early Wright Show. Wright went to work for WROX just after World War II.

CONGREGATION BETH ISRAEL

Sunday School had 131 students with the largest Jewish membership in Mississippi, 148 on membership roster. (Photograph in front of Temple, See Appendix).

During this year, the congregation celebrated its 45th anniversary.²⁴²

BLOOM

ISAAC

Isaac Bloom died on March 6, his obit reports:

Isaac J. Bloom, sixty-nine, died at the B'nai B'rith Hospital, (Memphis), Saturday afternoon at 3:30 o'clock, following a short illness. He was a resident of this city for many years, but had recently moved to Memphis.

Walter J. Boom, Brother and Jacob Bloom, son of the deceased, both of Clarksdale were in Memphis at his bedside at the time of his death...The deceased had many friends in Clarksdale who will be grieved to learn of his passing...He is survived by his son and brother of this city and two other brothers, Harvey Bloom of Helena and Ed Bloom of Memphis. Also one sister, Mrs. Fanny Woodbury of Tulsa, OK.²⁴³

JULIAN AND NAT

Julian said:

Mississippi had just cut the highway through here, just completed it. In 1939, we moved out here on the highway. We built a small building with leftovers from Rose Seed Co. We put up a fence and started buying old cars and stuff to sell parts off of and scrap iron, and that's how we got into the junk business after we had room. So we were in the pecan business and the raw fur business. We bought raw furs because my father taught us all about that. We would take all this stuff to Memphis to sell: mink, coon, and possum, three items.

The Levines [were] involved in furs at the time as a sort of a sideline with them. Mr. Levine used to buy and sell cattle, and he farmed a little bit. They had a dry goods store. People did all kind of things.

After my father passed away, we moved my mother to Clarksdale on July 4, 1939. We moved to a house right down here at 716 Leflore. We moved here in 1937. We were actually here two years before she moved here. And then, we started meeting people in Clarksdale. Amazingly enough, my mother loved living here. She thought she was going to the end of the world, but she did it for us. Left all her friends in Memphis, and she had lots and lots of them there. And had her poker club, etc. When we came down here, of course we became a part of the Clarksdale community little by little.

During the first two years, we really didn't live here, and we were busy. We met people at the restaurant, and they knew that we were Jewish, but we just never socially didn't get involved till after we actually moved here, in 1939. My mama was always a good one, for socializing.

I'll tell you the incident that really happened after the first two years of moving back and forth to Memphis. We were out here on the highway working, and Mrs. Sebulsy drove up here and kind of tooted her horn. I went out there to the car. I didn't know who she was or anything.

She introduced herself, and said: 'I understand that y'all have moved to Clarksdale. My daughter is coming home for Thanksgiving, and I want to have a little dinner party for her. I would like for you and your brother to come and meet my daughter and some of her friends.'

Which was really wonderful, and we went. Natalie had come home. That's where we met some people. And my mama, bless her, she reports, 'Well you know why people invited you, her daughter's home from school. Y'all need to take her out.'

So Nat called her and had a date with her, and paid off his obligation. I called her and took her to a dance, or something that was going on here, either in Greenwood or Greenville, I think it was Greenville, during the holidays. That's how I really got to know Natalie. I liked Natalie, and we became real good friends. In fact, we became very close to the Sebulsy family, very close. I dated others too. I used to date Marian Fink Shackeroff quite a bit. Of course, Natalie went off to college, and Marian was here in high school.

Our business kept growing, and we used to go Saturday nights up on Issaquena, just for the sights and the doing. Nat dated Goldie Isaacson Himelstein, and Mr. Isaacson used to get him to come up there and help them on Saturday nights in the store. The whole Issaquena was nothing but Jewish merchants.²⁴⁴

CALIFF

LEON

Leon said:

Mr. Jones, who was Mr. Kooyman's assistant, was our teacher. We used to hypnotize each other and we would talk, and we were buddies, I was either thirteen, fourteen, or fifteen. We were big buddies, and we got along beautifully. Now the band was going to make a tour of parts of Mississippi. People in different cities, [or] towns that we stopped in...would offer us the night at their house. Usually they would like to get two, like somebody would have two single beds in a room. So, I asked him, 'Let's me and you stay together,' and he told me, 'No.'

Now, he was going to stay with somebody more his social equal, and that just hit me hard. Every once in a while, not always, but every once in a while, we would hear this business about Christ killing. I remember thinking to myself, first time I ever heard it; I didn't know what the hell they were talking about. I don't know nobody by that name, I never killed anybody. But there was a lot of anti-Semitism, most of it was right beneath the surface. Of course, we couldn't go to the country club.

I was confirmed, [but I] did not have a Bar Mitzvah. I'm surprised I'm not in that picture because it could have been about that time. My brother was Bar Mitzvah in Israel later in life and had it done. He had several friends who belonged to the Baron Hirsch. You could go to Jerusalem and go to the Wailing Wall, and there are Rabbis by the thousands. One of them trying to hustle me for money so he would say prayers for my good feast for my family every day. In a way I have to sympathize with him because if you really are committed, and you follow what the Torah Chapter 8: 1930-1939 Full Bloom Endnotes

reports it puts you at a disadvantage for earning a living. They're beginning; there is a section in Jerusalem called Neiri Sherem where the ultra-Orthodox congregated. That's where the ultra-Orthodox live. They're beginning to change their minds a little bit. Instead of a boy studying until he was forty and had a wife and five or six children and then had to go out and...he couldn't earn a living. This delayed it. It's not right. It doesn't follow some kind of sequence. Of course...in Israel now...you see, I'm not worried about the past—the past doesn't bother me at all.²⁴⁵

DAMSKER

ROSE SEED COMPANY

According to Olive Edwards in her feature article about Herman Damsker,

By 1939 the business consisted mainly of bulk purchase of seed corn, oats, seed wheat from local planters. The volume of seed cleaning, a dusty a became so great that it was necessary to move the small homemade contra from the back of the office to a small shed nearby. This small building is today in the midst of the complex of buildings comprising the major part of Seed Co. A sentimental reminder of how an industry is born and grows, the crude, simple seed cleaning device, hand-operated, that offers stark contrast to the sophisticated machinery housed in its own huge building used for the same purpose.²⁴⁶

FINK

THE MARION SHOPPE

According to Alvin Fink's interview with author, Jake had frustrations with his wife Freda as they both worked in the grocery business. Thus, he took the opportunity in 1939, when The Style Shoppe moved to

Yazoo, to put Freda in the ladies-ready-to-wear business. Jake gave Freda \$2,500 to start The Marion Shoppe. With Jake's business acumen and Freda's natural sense of style, the shop was soon successful. Freda loved to take buying trips to New York to stock her dress shop with the latest styles. Women from all over the Delta came to Freda who filled their special orders when she went to New York. They knew they could rely upon Freda's impeccable taste to choose fashions for their special social occasions. Debutantes and brides flocked to Freda, and she thrived on pleasing them.²⁴⁷

PICARD

Julian Bloom said: "I remember Julius Picard was a merchant here. Julius Picard was the father of Mabel Picard, who was a beautician. He used to sell meat; go out to butcher cattle and sell meat."²⁴⁸

Corinne Kerstine said: "He was a little man."²⁴⁹

Adele Cohen-Kline said: "I just knew he was her father."²⁵⁰

Rowena Rappaport who remembered him, said: "Picard had a meat market. He killed his own or the rabbi killed them, and he butchered. I knew his daughter, Mabel. She was a neighbor when we lived on Madison. Yes, said she was French. When she died, a first cousin from the East came as she was a big shot with a bank. He came to see about her estate. He had a will and did not leave them anything. She never married. I inherited a rocking chair from her which we still have. She was a beauty operator. Her mother's name may have been Mabel also."²⁵¹

CHAPTER 8: 1930 TO 1939 FULL BLOOM ENDNOTES

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