

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Rabbi Sidney Berkowitz

Personal Experience

O.H. 1507

CHESTER A. AMEDIA

Interviewed

by

Matthew T. Butts

on

July 21, 1992

CHESTER AMEDIA

Mr. Chester Amedia was born on January 26, 1922, in the mining town of Erico, Pennsylvania, the son of Frank and Lucille Amedia. The Amedia's soon moved to Youngstown, Ohio, where Amedia attended the Rayen High School until dropping out at age 16. Amedia decided at this point to move to Toledo, Ohio, where he finished his secondary education at Toledo Scott High School.

Amedia returned to Youngstown soon after graduating from high school. He soon entered the United States Air Force due to the entry of the United States into World War II. During World War II, Amedia served as a pilot in the China theatre of operation. He was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross during this grueling period of his life. Amedia returned to Youngstown following the end of the war. He attended Youngstown College, receiving both a degree in business administration and education. He also gained employment with the Youngstown Metropolitan Housing Authority. Throughout his life in Youngstown, Amedia served the community in various civic and business endeavours. He also maintained his involvement in United States Air Force Reserves until his retirement in 1974.

Presently, Amedia is enjoying retirement. He is an active member of a number of organizations, including Rotary, Amvets, and Easter Seals. He resides with his wife, Cecilia, at 143 East Everett, Hubbard, Ohio. He spends much of his free time flying, restoring classic cars, and participating in vocational education.

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INTERVIEWEE: CHESTER A. AMEDIA
INTERVIEWER: Matthew T. Butts
SUBJECT: Youngstown, Rabbi Berkowitz, religion, Rodef
Sholom, Rabbi Berkowitz's impact on the
development of the Jewish community
DATE: July 21, 1992

B: This is an interview with Chester A. Amedia for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, on the Rabbi Berkowitz project, including information regarding the Youngstown community and the Youngstown Jewish community, by Matthew Butts, at 5930 Everett East, Hubbard, Ohio, on July 21, 1992, at 3:00 p.m.

Okay. Let's start off with the general biographical questions. Professor Earnhart likes those at the start. Tell us something about your background [such as] where you were born [and] where you were educated.

A: Well, Chester Amedia, here, was born in Erico, Pennsylvania, a little coal mining town, which is now a ghost town. [It's] no longer there. It's a little town between Boyers, Pennsylvania and Murrinsville, Pennsylvania. Murrinsville [is] about 4 miles from Harrisville--not Harrisburg, Harrisville. Harrisville [is] about 6 miles from Grove City. As you progress out of Grove City to the east, you go into Murrinsville, turn right, [and] go toward Boyers. The first road to the left would take you through a sandstone quarry and into a little area there that was very well known for its coal, called Erico, Pennsylvania. [It was] named after the Erie Coal Company. I tend to think that I was almost born in a log cabin. It was a miner's cabin,

January 26, 10 below zero [degrees], 1922, and how I survived, I don't know. I had none of the incubators or any of the things, which people have at their disposal today.

My folks left that region when I was 6 years old. The coal played out. My dad came to Youngstown and bought into a service station, started operating a service station over on the East Side of Youngstown, right near Rigby [Street] and--let's see, I'm trying to think of the name of the street. Anyway, the station's been torn down, now. There used to be a theatre over in that area, too; which, incidentally, many of the areas of town had theatres, moving picture shows: [The] Rialdo, The Strand. Every neighborhood seemed to have one. There was one on McGuffey [Road], and that's where people spent their leisure time on Sunday afternoons, children usually on Saturday.

Following the service station, which he didn't make any money in--I guess he didn't like it--he ventured into a couple of concessions at Idora Park. One of them [was] the large restaurant that they used to have there. Two years in a row it rained real hard, and they used to have company days. Sheet & Tube would have a day. Strauss Hirshberg would have a day. The Vindicator would have a day. All the employees would congregate out there, and they would have specials on rides for the children. That rainy season cost him more money, so then, he went to work in the mill.

At the age of 15, I left home and went to Toledo, Ohio for the summer to help a sick uncle out, who had two businesses there. One [was] a large service station business across from the DeVilbiss Plant on Detroit Avenue, and one [was] a coal yard and fuel oil sales place. I liked the service station work. I learned a lot about cars and met an awful lot of real nice people. Would you believe that I met the Stranahans of Champion Spark Plug Company. I used to service their car. Frankie Stranahan became one of the well known golfers of the Ohio--very, very sharp golfer. I knew Howard DeVilbiss who manufactured air compressors and medical equipment. I knew Harry Hackathorne and George Whitlock. Harry Hackathorne and George Whitlock later came into the Salem-Warren area and bought out the Mullen's Manufacturing Plant. By the time I was 16, I was managing the station. I stayed over, went to night school, and graduated from Toledo Scott, going to school every night from 6 o'clock until 10 o'clock, besides working in the daytime. I got my high school diploma, just like I would have had I remained at Rayen, which incidentally, I had left in my junior year. [I] came home here one weekend and met a young lady, and I decided Toledo was not for me. I was going

to stay with my folks awhile. The war was just breaking out in 1941. September [of] 1942, all my friends had practically left for the service, so I joined the service as a private [in the] regular Army. Six months and seven days later, I was Lieutenant. I was assigned the 88th Infantry Division [and] served in the South on the big maneuvers as an umpire, planting battle flags and working with some very, very fine generals, who later became quite famous.

Following that, I was called up into the Army Air Corps [and] sent to the pilot training as a lieutenant. I went through the flight training program very rapidly. Where a normal cadet would take 18 months to two years, I went through in nine week increments, three of them. In 27 weeks, I was a pilot. [They] presented me my wings. From there, I went over to the training of the C-47, which is the DC-3. That was [in] Alliance, Nebraska. Then, we moved to George Field, Illinois, because the Air Force decided to take on another mission at Alliance. They went into B-24 training there. So following my completion at George Field, Illinois, I took an airplane and went all the way into China. [I went] by way of India, through South America, across Africa. There, I was assigned to the First Air Commando Group, Phil Cochran's famous "Terri and the Pirates of the Funny Papers," and it was also Milt Canniff's idea of paying tribute to his good friend Flip Corkin, who is Phil Cochran in real life from Erie, Pennsylvania. I flew 153 combat missions, some for the office of strategic services.

My last mission, incidentally, was one where I was landing in Rangoon, Burma, which had just been recaptured by the allies. A truck came across the battle field runway and ran directly in my path after hitting a guard at the runway intersection. A British soldier was knocked through the air [and] broke his leg. The truck kept coming and hit me in my right propeller, and I had 4,500 pounds of composition C and demolition supplies on board--dynamite, too. I thought it was my end. God was good to me. The airplane didn't catch on fire, and I lived through it. Unfortunately, six people in the truck lost their lives. No one on my airplane was injured. But, it wiped the airplane out. We had to bum a ride back to Rangoon. I came home [and] went through Youngstown State University in two years.

[I] built this house while I was going to school and worked eight hours a day, at night. I was working down at the William B. Pollock Company, from 11 o'clock to 7:00 a.m. I'd leave the mill at about 15 minutes to

7:00 and go to the 7 o'clock classes at Youngstown. [I] carried an awful lot of hours. One semester, I had 26 1/2 hours!

B: Wow!

A: I finished that, and then, I went to work. I got two degrees, incidentally, out of Youngstown. I got a degree in business administration and a B.S. in Education. I wanted to be a school teacher. I was unable to get anything that would reward me decently to a good standard of living--at that time, I think they offered me \$2,500 to teach up in the Courtland system. I chose instead to become a superintendent of maintenance for the housing authority. From there, I worked my way up to Director of Development and Management, followed by the directorship. I served under a very fine board, and it was then that I had met Dr. Berkowitz.

B: What capacity did you meet him in? What was it involved with?

A: Well, we were in many projects together, everything from the Red Cross--Sid became the chairman of the American Red Cross Society. I served on that board [for] quite a few years, and served as the Disaster Chairman [for] several years. The biggest disaster we had--well, we had a couple. We had some high winds go through the East Side. I still say, to this day, it was a light tornado, up in the Republic Avenue area. The worst one was the flood on Crab Creek, on Andrews Avenue. On Andrews Avenue, we had 5 feet of water.

B: Wow!

A: We had one lady down there, 80 years old, who just refused to be evacuated, so Sam Camen and I used to take her food twice a day in a row boat. Those houses have since been cleared. I think the university has probably taken some of them, now.

Sid and I served on the United Nations organizations together. We were on the Health and Welfare Council of the Community Chest, the Mayor's Commission on Human Relations, [and] boards similar to that. He was a very compassionate individual. I always considered Sid Berkowitz, Rabbi Berkowitz, to be the smartest man in Youngstown. To this day, I think no one could come up to his standards. He was brilliant. We served in the Rotary together. I followed him as he was elected president in 1975, and I was president-elect for the following year. I succeeded him as the president. We got to go to Montreal together. We were in New Orleans together when Bob Manchester assumed the presidency of International Rotary.

Sid was also in Jewish War Veterans, post-59 locally. He had another good friend, who was not a doctor. He was director of the welfare program, locally, Isadore Feuer. Isadore was a good friend of ours and a good friend of mine. Many times we would have lunch together, talk over the situation involving [the] United Veteran's Council. Later in 1952, I was the commander of the United Veteran's Council, and Sid worked on many of my committees for me. [He] did Yeoman work!

Probably one of the most outstanding things, which people failed to realize, was his ecumenical composition. He was very close to Bishop Malone. You might want to talk to Bishop Malone about Sid Berkowitz if you can get an appointment.

B: Yes, right. Last week, I had an interview with him. Yes. It was really good.

A: Did he tell you about his dealings with Berkowitz?

B: Yes.

A: Yes. They were very good friends. In fact, when Sid died, Bishop Malone eulogized him in the temple, which was very unusual. There were a few of us gentiles there. I felt very honored. Of course, Mrs. Berkowitz, Pauline, is a very close friend of my wife's and mine. She is a beautiful lady.

We had an extremely good time in Montreal. You know, Montreal is a town with many restaurants, and Pauline was a French teacher, could speak perfect French, and she did all the ordering. My wife and Pauline really got a big kick out of that. There was another couple that went with us to Montreal, and that was Bob Brooks, from Safety Tire. We drove up--I'll never forget. Dr. Berkowitz was riding with Brooks on the way back. We decided to get on Queen's Highway, and I was doing about 75 miles per hour. The speed limit was 70 [mph]. [There was] bumper to bumper traffic, and there was a car in front of me that just wouldn't get out of our way. Finally, I maneuvered around it. Half a mile down the road, I was stopped by the Canadian Mounted Police in an unmarked car. I was standing by the side of the road, taking the ticket, they drove by, and Sid waved at me and laughed. (Laughter) I mailed \$28.50 into the Canadian government, and that took care of that!

Sid was a resource person for many, many fine boards and commissions that seemed to be necessary at the particular time. He was very active in trying to keep the mills open, if you remember, with Bishop Malone and the rest of the clergy people that tried it. He was

the National Chaplain for the Jewish War Veterans, and you might want to interview Dr. Seymour Feuer. His dad was close to Sid, as I said before. That was Isadore. I'm sure Seymour could tell you many things in his life-time [about] the Rabbi.

He got many awards. I think you know that he was given the Humanitarian award by the Eagles. I don't know if they do that anymore, but at that particular time, it was quite an honor. He did a fine job in Rotary. He had many, many friends there. Although Rotary was considered to be a closely knit organization, they respected Sid; and they elected him president. He did a very fine job there. He had an honorary membership in the Buckeye Elks, too. I remember that.

B: Okay. A couple questions. A little bit about your background, too. Were your parents immigrants from Italy?

A: My mother was born in West Liberty, Pennsylvania, which is a little town between Slippery Rock and Grove City. My father came from Italy when he was 8 years old.

B: Do you know what town or province he came from?

A: Yes. If you can spell it, I can try to pronounce it. Ascoli Picerno, which is up near the Yugoslavian boarder on the Adriatic Seaside, up in Northern Italy.

B: Did you get to know your grandfather at all?

A: No. My grandfather died. Incidentally, my father and my grandfather opened up one of the largest limestone mines in the world, in Boyers, Pennsylvania, also known as Annandale. My dad was a very, very talented man with explosives. When it came to dynamiting, he could do anything. He could take that tree right there and knock it out, and it wouldn't hurt this house. That's how good he was. He worked for William B. Pollock in his later years as the estate caretaker, close to retirement. Prior to my dad, Pollock used to use power shovels to dig trees out. The way my dad ended up working there, he was working for a contractor and--I'm trying to remember their name. [It was] Kane Brothers. They did the South Avenue job. Anyhow, they had the excavating job for Pollock's new mansion in South Orchard, and Pollock hit solid rock. Mrs. Pollock was very much disturbed about it, because she didn't want the house setting any place else. So my father, being an explosive dynamite specialist, blasted all that rock right out, and they used the rock to build the road. They even thought so much of Dad that they hired him. He became the caretaker, manager for the whole estate for about 20 years.

B: Well, that's interesting. Could you physically describe Youngstown for me, what it looked like when you were young?

A: Youngstown, when I first came to Youngstown in 1929--well, 1928. I was 6 years old. I have a brother that's two years older than me. He's 74. Youngstown had a population of 170,000 people.

B: Wow!

A: [It had] 170,000 people. It was a town consisting of many ethnic groups. The Slovaks were in the Lansingville area. The Italians were in Briar Hill with the Germans. The Irish had the Kyle Corners and areas on the East Side. Immaculate Conception was a big Irish parish. And, of course, at the top of all these was St. Columba. I graduated from St. Columba school in 1935, in a three story building that used to set at the corner of Phelps--no, it wasn't Phelps Street. It was Elm Street and Rayen Avenue. And next to it was a convent. It was a big, old stone building, three stories high. The principal of that school was Sister Malachi, a very strong disciplinarian. The seventh grade teacher was Sister Monica Ruby. Later, they took on her name, Sister Monica Ruby. She used to spend every Christmas out here with my wife and family here, sitting right here where we are. I can almost sense her presence, now. Then, there was Sister Helen in the fifth grade, and I can't name the others. Ellen Manley, who is now a sister, was one of the students there.

Youngstown, itself, had ribbons of steel in the concrete, and bricks and asphalt. We had streetcar lines running out Mahoning Avenue, out Market Street, up Belmont Avenue, [and] over to the East Side. There was a Youngstown Railway that went all the way from Youngstown to Leetonia. You could jump on a streetcar and go that far, you could jump on a street car and go to New Castle, or you could jump on a streetcar and go to Sharon. I remember several times when we saved our nickels, and for 20 cents, we got to ride all the way to Sharon, which was quite a Sunday afternoon ride. One of the curious things that I don't think people know about, that many of them are going to forget, is the railway company was owned by the streetcars or buses. They later changed from streetcars to electric buses. They had trolley cars with big overhead trolley wires. You used to have these big heavy lines with DC current overhead, and sometimes the trolley driver, which was nothing more than a big bus with these big extended arms to catch the wires, they'd turn too far and lose their power. They'd have to stop, get out,

[and] put the pulley back up into the wire. Then, they had power to go. The Ohio Edison Company sold passes. For a dollar, you could buy a pass that was good all week long anywhere, any time. There were people in Youngstown that used to rent these passes out. They'd buy maybe a dozen of them, and for 20 cents or a quarter on a Sunday afternoon, you could rent that pass. You could use it. I can still see one of those passes. They were gray in color. [They] looked like an identification card. For those that didn't have a pass, you could go in and throw a coin in the chute. For 10 cents, you could almost ride anywhere. If you were going to, say, to the South Side, and you wanted to get off to go the West Side, there were routes that you could ask for a transfer. They'd punch the transfer, and you would get on the next unit.

As I stated before, most of the sections of town--there were two movie houses on Market Street, the Rialdo being one of them. Right where it says "Barbershop" at the corner of Myrtle and Market, you can still see one of the old theatre units. On McGuffey, just above the McGuffey Plaza, about a block on the right hand side, near the projects a block a way over, there would be another movie house. Briar Hill had one up near St. Anne's church. These all have been ripped down.

The steel mills, of course, I watched them--I used to have to write programs whenever we were trying to get government funds to assist us in building a housing development for elderly or otherwise. It's an awful lot of statistics that I'd have to gather. I can remember when Republic Rubber had 4,500 people working for them. General Fireproofing [had] 6,500. Sheet & Tube [had] 12,000. U.S. Steel [had] 7,000. Commercial Shearing, which is now probably the biggest fabricator in the area, was hardly known at the time. We had pattern making shops down in Campbell.

At one time, Youngstown could have been the aluminum capitol of the world, but the company that had labor problems moved south to Atlanta, and that was the end of that. At one time, Ford wanted to come into the valley. In fact, they did drillings all the way up through Coalburg, just 1,000 feet from here probably, on the other side of the tracks. There's a lake down here called Sheet & Tube Lake. Ford wanted to put a big plant here, and of course, the steel industry guarded their labor potential very carefully. They were determined that there wasn't going to be any of these other big industries come in and take their labor forces away from them. At one time, Youngstown had a population [of] 170,000. About 72 percent of the people owned their own homes. This was one of the ambitions of the people. You worked, not for a car.

You worked for a house. A lot of people didn't have automobiles. Some of the industries that have left, have left some good history, and others have not done so well.

B: Describe for me, [during] World War II, what the university looked like.

A: Yes, I will. [When] I came out of the service, I had one semester at Toledo University. I was going to take a course in engineering. I just didn't have time to do the work [at] the station and do my homework and stay up with the requirements, so that's why I gave that up. When I came back to the United States as a first lieutenant with a good war record, I got my share of medals and had my share of experiences. My wife was a registered nurse, taking care of a very prominent man in Youngstown, known as John Tod. Mr. Tod owned much stock in Youngstown Sheet & Tube, and he said to Cecilia one day, "Your husband is about to graduate. Why don't you have him come up and talk to me?" So, I visited him one day. We became good friends. He liked the Cleveland Indian baseball league, and I tried to talk him into getting an early television set. But he didn't want to put one in his house, because it took a big, tall roof aerial. Today, it's a funeral home. But, Mr. Tod said, "I want you to go down and meet with someone from Sheet & Tube and see if you can't get a job with them."

Well, I had my degree, and I thought, "Well, I can't lose anything." I went down, and Pete Mauthe was the president, and he gave me a personal interview. I was surprised. Of course, anybody with as much clout as Mr. Tod had could get that interview for you. He wanted me to start in the mills on the scales at 40 cents an hour in 1948. I couldn't afford to take that kind of a job, so I said that to him. He said, "Well, what can you do?" I said, "The best thing I'm equipped to do is fly an airplane. There are many companies that are buying surplus military aircraft. I can buy you a brand new DC-3 for \$11,000. You can get that thing re-outfitted and pass the FAA requirements. You'd have to do a little work on meeting some of the requirements that they have, that we didn't have in combat aircraft, but they would be brand new." He says, "I would never, never, never allow my sales people and my executives to travel by air. We go from here to Chicago and here to New York, and we ride the Pullman." [It] kind of made me mad. I said, "I'll tell you something, sir. I will predict that, within two years, you will have not one airplane but two," and I was right. They had to come in, but I didn't succeed in talking him into it. I guess it was my young age.

I was born in 1922, and this was 1948. I was 26 years old. You know, I was just a youngster in his mind. I did just as well staying out of [the] Sheet & Tube.

I had another chance to go with Braniff Airlines. At the particular time, one of my friends [who] was over in combat with me--Red Austin was the operations officer--and he called me one day and said, "Chet, I got a chance. We're looking for some pilots, and I know you can fly and what your capabilities are, having flown with you a lot. Why not come down and let me get you a quick interview, and we'll hire you. In six months, you'll be in the left seat as the commander." I talked to my wife and she said, "No," she didn't want that. She didn't want me to be an airplane pilot, so instead, I joined the Reserves. I did more flying in the Reserves than most airline pilots. (Laughter)

B: You mentioned some of the ethnic neighborhoods within Youngstown. How about the Jewish community? Was it centered anywhere?

A: The Jewish community, yes. The Jewish community was Elm Street, from about up to Gypsy Lane and from about Fifth Avenue over to Elm. Elm Street was predominately Jewish. There was the Amthene Temple and then the Rodef Sholom Temple. You wouldn't remember Amthene there. It's now, I think, a Baptist Church, but it's right across from that little Wee Totts Playground there, at the corner of Park Avenue and Elm Street. But, Elm Street was very, very popular.

There's another thing you might be interested in. Throughout the entire city of Youngstown, you didn't have any supermarkets like you have today. You had little stores on the corner. These stores were almost always operated by Jewish people. They would extend credit to everybody. You would go in and buy your groceries, and at the end of the month, you'd pay them \$40 or whatever it came up to; and they carried you. They were very clean, and they had little stores. There's still one that's been converted to an apartment that I could tell you about. It's there at the corner of Broadway and Ford Avenue. [It was] Cornhouser's. They had a store there. Then, there was another one, Heyman's, over on the South Side. The South Side had a lot of stores.

The uptown district in Youngstown, probably the only area that's really left--well, Mahoning Avenue--had a lot of activity: the theatre and then, of course, Idora Park, which was the hub of all activities in the summertime. Stambaugh Auditorium played a key role. Big auto shows used to come into that place, sportsman

shows. I can remember in 1937, General Motors had a complete auto show in the basement with all their new models: Cadillacs, Pontiacs, Oldsmobiles, and Chevrolets. Then, in the upstairs, they had a two hour--not a recital, not Cab Callaway, but Art Castle and his "Castles In the Air Band." I almost forgot him. They used to get some big name bands into Youngstown, especially at Idora Park. And everybody, all these younger people would go to them, and some of the older people, also.

Then, of course, I mentioned the ethnic groups, and I mentioned the industries having days. The Slovaks used to have their Slovak day. The Italians used to have Italian day. The Polish had their Polish day. They didn't have a Black day out there at Idora Park, and I don't remember the Jewish, either. I don't think they had a Jewish day. But, they used to book these days up. Then, of course, Idora used to have a 3 cent day. Every once in a while, they'd have a special, like the Vindicator. If you [were] a youngster, [you] could get on the streetcar and go out there. They'd run buses free from downtown out to Idora Park, and you'd pay 3 cents a ride. You'd get to ride the Wild Cat for 3 cents. Anybody that went out there with a dollar had a good time.

The downtown area was something else. Federal Street was as wide as building to building, with just the sidewalk laying maybe 10 feet on each side of that. It was a big wide street, and they had parking on an angle--angular parking. Then, the law in Ohio was changed where you couldn't back up on a parking spot. You had to pull in and out, and that hurt the town a lot. But, you could buy anything in Youngstown on Federal Street, from Westlake Crossing on down to Andrews Avenue. There used to be a [college called] The Barber College. People forget about that one, I'll bet. Barber college was down near the Pollock Plant, right there at the corner of Basin Street and--where Basin Street intersected East Federal Street.

- B: Could you describe what Dr. Berkowitz looked [like] physically, for me?
- A: What he looked like?
- B: Yes.
- A: Yes. He wore thick-rimmed glasses. He had a defective lip that few people knew about. I don't know if he was born with a hair-lip or not. I'm trying to think of what movie star he would have looked like. King. What was King's first name, master of ceremonies in many programs.

B: I don't know.

A: I'd say Dr. Berkowitz was about 5 feet 8 inches tall, weighed about 160 pounds, wore glasses, [and] had a good head of hair. One of the remarkable things about him, that we respected him so much for in the Rotary, [was] when he was called upon to give an invocation--alot of them today will go today for 5 minutes, and you'll think they're the main speaker. Dr. Berkowitz had the reputation that, when he gave the invocation or benediction, it was a one-liner! Five words or so, and he was done; and he said more in those five words than basically someone talking for 10 minutes. He was very well-known for that. Many of the Rotarians used to appreciate him for that.

B: Do you remember any of them that were especially good or anything, which stands out in your mind?

A: Well, it's kind of hard for me. You're going back quite a few years, but what I could say is [that] it would depend upon the program. When he would give it at the start of the program, it tied in with the program. "God give us the talents to absorb what we are about to hear and experience, Amen." That'd be it, something like that. But, he was great on those. He had those one-liners that we used to marvel at. I can't say that today about--a lot of them that give the invocation stand up there and talk for 5 minutes. (Laughter)

One of the things that Dr. Berkowitz was involved in was the Commission on Aging for the state of Ohio. Many of things, which us old people today are enjoying, came about because of his wisdom [and] his talents, like getting some laws changed, [the] Buckeye Club and things like that. I'm not saying that he was the one that did it, but I'm sure that, when he went to meetings, he participated very good in that respect. There was a big charter revision committee in Youngstown--I'm trying to remember under what administration. I believe it was under Charles Henderson, where the whole charter was going to be revised. Youngstown is an unusual city with regards to their operations, which are controlled by the charter, and I know he spent a lot of time and effort in that. But, he was certainly great in his ecumenical attributes.

B: Okay. You mentioned you had the opportunity to attend services or something at Rodef Sholom Temple. What's it look like inside or from the outside?

A: Beautiful dome, area. Yellow brick--well, yellow-white. It has a new porch. It was installed about 10

or 12 years ago, new entry off of Elm Street, which, incidentally, was the gift of a friend of ours, Dr. Bernard Schneider. The inside, the seats [were] sort of a velvet-velore; very comfortable seats. Of course, there was a center isle and an isle on each side. The family of Dr. Berkowitz was down on the lower left hand side during the service. The cantor, at that time, was Dr. Erlich. I'm trying to think how you address him--Cantor Erlich. E-R-L-I-C-H, I believe. It's a beautiful, beautiful structure.

B: How about, a lot of people also mentioned Dr. Berkowitz's sense of humor.

A: Oh, yes. He'd come up with some good ones. We'd be talking about something, and he'd interject a sentence that would just automatically take the front. Yeah, he was good there. He was very humorous. He had a good sense of humor. He could be very serious and, if somebody did something that he felt was wrong, he felt it, and he would express it immediately. He wasn't afraid to take the forefront in that direction.

B: How did you perceive his role within the Youngstown community?

A: His role?

B: Yes.

A: Oh, he was one of the outstanding leaders of all times. I think he--I'm trying to remember--he succeeded Dr. Philo. It was P-H-I-L-O, I believe--who had a long time standing at the Rodef Sholom, and he had a hard pair of shoes to fill, but he filled them and filled them well. He got along very well in the community. He was the outstanding leader in the Jewish community, as far as I'm concerned. I don't know how others may feel, but I know one thing. If there was a problem and I wanted any advice on it, I could call him and he could give me the proper advice. He'd either say, "Yes," or "Don't do it that way. Do it the other way."

B: How about, you mentioned a lot of the activities he was involved in. Do you know if he was involved in the civil rights movement?

A: He was very sympathetic, and in my opinion, [was sympathetic] to the civil rights movement. As far as activities, no. He was not like--I know there was one minister that came to Youngstown by the name of Sharp. [He] came in during the 1960s. He led a local group down to Selma, Alabama. But, Sid wasn't involved in that like Sharp was. I know he had many, many Black

friends. He was well respected amongst the Black community. Did you talk to Lonnie Simon about him?

B: The day we were scheduled to meet, he had something come up, and we weren't able to meet. But, we've got to reschedule in the near future.

A: Well, Lonnie could tell you more about that than I could. I was so involved with my own way trying to get some good additional housing in Youngstown, though I've served on the Community Action Council for a good many, many years. Alice Lev might be able to answer that question for you.

B: Okay.

A: She would be able to answer any civil rights activities, because I know she was very active with a fellow named Ron Pittman. There was a Walter Pittman that flew with me. No, I think that was his name, Ron. Well anyway, Pittman and Lev, Alice Lev, worked very closely together for civil rights.

B: You spoke a little bit about the way he would give a speech. What made it so energetic or so full of. . . ?

A: Well, when I said he was the smartest man in Youngstown, I still say that. You know, he was a rhode scholar. In fact, he met Pauline while in England, his wife. He had the knack of expressing himself very energetically, and he would keep you at attention as he spoke on almost any subject. I can still hear him. He'd talk kind of slow. Then, he'd speed it up a little bit, and then he'd go back to slow, almost a drawl, and you would know that this was the way that he was going to succeed in getting his message across to you. But, he could command attention, and did. At any meeting, any civic meeting where he was a participant in the audience, he wasn't afraid. He'd stand up and ask a question. If a reply wasn't there, he'd take the other side and start arguing with it. He was a good debater.

B: Is there anything that we haven't really touched on that you really think we need to add?

A: His own congregation's efforts in the Jewish community, they give out an award each year [at the] brotherhood banquet. He was selected for the honor. I remember going to that dinner. He was probably honored more than anybody in Youngstown with regards to Man of the Year, humanitarian awards, and so forth. I wish I could say more.

B: Well, thank you very much for your time. This is really helpful.

A: Would you like a real quick, single-line expression from my wife on him?

B: Yeah, if she wants to say something.

A: She might feel neglected. I'll see. Maybe, this isn't fair to her. Cecilia? (he calls her)

CA: Yes.

A: Is there anything you'd like to say about Dr. Berkowitz, that I haven't said?

CA: How would I know what you've said?

A: Well, what would be your opinion of his qualities and so forth? [Chester repeats for interviewer].

CA: Well, his death was a great loss to the community. He had all the fine attributes of a great spiritual leader.

A: Okay, honey. Thank you.

B: Okay, thank you very much.

A: You're welcome.

END OF INTERVIEW