

6/13/1979-80  
Mr. & Mrs. Chasan

Q. What are your early recollections of the first steps of the founding of Jersey Homesteads?

A. There was an advertisement in the Jewish Newspaper, called The Day, which my father called my attention to, advertising the organization of a group that would settle a community in the town of Hightstown for needle trades workers. That was 1934 and I was 34 years old. My father at that time was running a small grocery store, and he was an active Zionist. He said it was out of the question for him, but he wanted me to take a look at it. (In answer to a question Morris said he did not meet Benjamin Brown when he first came out here; not until 1936). I first made out an application, sent it out and eventually got a letter to come down and meet the Senior Selection Specialist. That was his title. His name was Samuel Finkler and the meeting was in the Hebrew Immigration offices somewhere on Lafayette St. in New York. At this time it was the height of the depression; I was working on a job which was very difficult. The hours were long; maybe 70-72 hours a week, and I was ready for anything. So we went down and the first question he asked me, "Was what fraternal organization do you belong to," and when I asked him why he wanted to know that, he said that the project was looking for a homogenous group of people who have had labor experience, union experience, and we look for people who have had this, and as long as the whole project is pointed towards needle trade workers, therefore they would be Jewish, and being Jewish they would belong to fraternal organizations, and this is true. But I said I didn't belong to any fraternal organization (I didn't tell him at that time that I was a surrogate for my father in this thing). The only organization I belonged to at the time was the Jewish War Veterans. He couldn't understand my desire. By trade I was an electrician and he couldn't understand why I wanted to go at all. But I said I wanted to go; I was a veteran, and supposedly he accepted me. I didn't know that until I got a letter to go to a meeting

[Augustine] of prospective members in this cooperative venture.

Gus: I was enthusiastic about this for one reason, only one selfish reason. I lived in an apartment house in New York, and down the street there were little homes, and I said to myself that someday I would love to have a little home. I would see these little cottages with flowers around and this was my opportunity to get into a little home of my own. At that time my son was 9 years old, but when we got ready to move in in 1936, my son was 11 years old.

M. We had discussed the possibility of going there, and then we decided that we would give it a try for a couple of years and if it failed, we could always go back to New York. We felt we were young enough to take this chance. We were excited about this somewhat and I'll tell you why. We lived on the lower east side of New York. Actually, we can start even before that. We came as immigrants in 1907 to Ellis Island. My father was a Jew who thought that a Jew should go back to the land, so he had already prepared us a farm in Englishtown and my mother, at that time with 4 children, went from Ellis Island to English-town. My father had a great desire, but sitting at a machine sewing coats doesn't give you the necessary muscle or knowledge to be a farmer. But I had it. I was in my prime. At that time I was working at a hardware-crockery distributors' place, and we were lugging mostly glassware, as much as 60-70 lbs. a day

Q. How did they treat you at this meeting that you went to?

G. I must tell my story. When we got to the meetings, the people who had registered to become members were about 45-50 years old, and to us that was old people. So I looked around, and around, and said "These are the people I'm going with?????" And suddenly I see Fay and Leo. They came in with Fay's mother. They were sitting in front of us and she eyed me and I eyed her and finally we began to talk to each other. I asked her if it was she who was

going or her mother, and she said not her mother, that she and Leo would be going, and she asked me about us and I said, I think so, ~~she~~ she said, "let's sit together, and we did, and she said, "let's be friends" and I said yes and we were and we are. They lived with us when we first came because their house was not ready and ours was, so they stayed with us until their house was ready.

M. To get back to the meeting. We went to the meeting and there was a lot of talk, mostly in Yiddish, and I didn't know it then, but I did learn it later, that each one of these people wore 2 hats; their personal feelings, needs, and desires, and their public position. And each one was spouting his public position. I remember Frank Hecht particularly, who rose and declaimed, "I am a good union man" and he recited the Socialist Call. "If I ever do anything against anybody that will effect his life or his things, let my right hand fall off". Strange to relate, I'm just reading that in Irving Howe's book. This was their public position which I found out later when I became the President of the Consumer's Cooperative. Then we went to another meeting at somebody else's home, and we got acquainted with the people, and eventually in July of 1936, I was called in and told that there was no job for an electrician; that had already been taken. But they offered me a truck driver's job and I took it. I had given my boss 6 months' notice and I was glad to go. I left my job, I left my wife in New York, and I came out here myself because the house was not ready, and I was a boarder. At that time the first 7 houses had been completed, on July 10th.

G. The first 7 families moved in, and then, in order to start with a group of workers, they called in others that would fit in, like an operator and a hand-sewer, and these people then lived with the 7 families that were already here. And then the next few houses were completed and they took boarders in too.

M. The idea was to have enough people to man the factory, to make the samples to

show. They were doing winter coats. In the meantime they had opened up a production office on 38th Street in the garment district in New York and they started the group to make coats. I came out and drove the truck which they had already bought. It had a compartment with racks for carrying coats, and in back of the driver's seat there was a compartment separating it from the back, for carrying groceries. I made daily trips from here to 38th St. and on the way home, we'd stop at, I think it was Lowell; somewhere down below Canal Street, there was a consumers' wholesale grocery and we would stop and pick up things that we needed for the store. When I came out the Coop Store was already rolling.

The setup was agreed that every accepted member would buy a share of stock in the industrial cooperative whose name was Workers Aim Cooperative Association. And it was \$500 a family. This \$500 was used to buy machinery. It was indeed a strain to raise \$500.

Question - How did you feel when you actually saw the place?

G. We just loved it. Everybody came with such excitement and they were all so friendly. It was wonderful.

M. The Jewish press had taken this whole thing to heart and it got a great deal of publicity. This was called the Hightstown Colony.

G. We were about the 35th family here. At that time they needed somebody to bring the material in and that's how they got Morris to come. In the meantime, she got tired of waiting and she came out. One day I came in from the road and somebody told me I had picked a house, and this was it. Somebody had picked it for me.

Somebody, maybe the bookkeeper picked the number out of a hat and this was it.

And when I came out somebody showed me this house and boy, did I love it.



M. One fine day, my wife got herself a truckman and loaded the furniture on in New York, and took her son and sat besides the truckman and they came out to Jersey Homesteads. But the authorities then..... the thing was that the government had a management office in the person of Walter Simon who was a West Point man, and he was in charge of the office and there was also the cooperative things. The prospectus had told us that it was a cooperative. When I got here I found that there was this cooperative organization, Workers' Aim had already been formed; it had a Board of Directors and it had Mr. Benjamin Brown as a guide. And yes, he was the greatest influence. Benjamin Brown was a man who had previous cooperative experience; way back in 1912 or 1914, he took a group of needle trade workers out of Philadelphia to Utah and they formed a cooperative. It's not still there; in fact, it didn't last long. The idea was to be a farmer, or to raise animals and raise feed for them, and live in a house. But this needs certain kinds of muscles and certain kind of background. And they were not fit to do this work. And another thing, Benjamin Brown made the same mistake in Jersey Homestead that he had made in Utah - the average was 50 years of age. A man of 50 who has been knocked around in a factory or shop, has nothing to give. He's looking for a home. And that was our problem here. They had nothing to give.

G. They all wanted to be a boss. Everyone was looking to be a boss. Nobody wanted to be the worker. They knew better than the next one.

M. You know, it is not axiomatic that if you worked in a cloak factory all your life, you know how to manage one. You know how to make a coat, although there were some of our members had been making coats for 20 years but still couldn't make a straight seam. Some were very good. Some were fine.

Q. How was the factory run, exactly?

M. The Board of Directors hired a production man, an outsider. Mr. Herzling (?) was our first production man. They rented a loft on 38th Street and bought piece goods in the garment center where you can get everything you need. He hired a designer and the designer hired a cutter who would cut up the layouts, and at this end they bought the machinery, and by the time that I was here, some men were already working. It was organized by electing the Board of Directors. This was the so-called Rochdale type of cooperative where the final answer is the general meeting. The general meeting settles all questions by a majority vote by a show of hands. The Board of Directors, with the consent of the general meeting, appoints a Foreman who would be the major domo for the whole works.

Q. Did the Garment Workers Union have anything to do with this?

M. Prior to this - before anyone came out here, Benjamin Brown, who conceived this thing, gathered around him a group of sponsors. Originally, way back, the original concept as it started by the Department of the Interior, was that all of these projects would be subsistence homesteads. There were people in Washington in the Department of Agriculture that conceived this idea that what you can do for a man, no more than give him a house, give him some land, maybe an animal or two, and he would have subsistence that would never stop. But, it was not true. If you read that report, you'll find it isn't true. On this basis, Benjamin Brown originally went to Washington, and he had a close relationship with a man by the name of M.O. Wilson. Wilson was the assistant to the Secretary of Agriculture, but the Department of the Interior started these projects. He went to see Wilson, and when the projects were transferred, the whole concept of subsistence homesteads was transferred from the Department of Interior to the Department of

Agriculture, Brown had an "IN". And he came to this Department with this proposition because when you passed by on Etra Road, you could see these houses made out of tile - chicken houses, made out of tile - well, that was Benjamin Brown's. That was his own cooperative that he started to build prior to this one. And then along came this Homesteads thing, subsistence homesteading. So he transferred his efforts from there, including his Senior Selection Specialist,

; he had a handout, he had a good deal here. As it is written out there, the Department of Agriculture accepted his concept of an Agro-Industrial Community. The clothing factory, which was a part-time operation, which in those years, the cloakmaker worked for six months a year. My father was a cloakmaker up until 1916, so I know. The Department accepted his concept, - that agriculture was a part-time industry, clothing making was a part-time industry. So, it's only natural. We'll combine the two, and they'll work there, and then they'll work here. And they set aside, I think it was \$680,000, for the building of the community. This was Brown's estimate. The original concept was that they would take this money and give it to the sponsors and let them go ahead and work with the money. Before the actual consummation of this deal, Congress changed this thing and took it out of the Department of Agriculture and set up a Resettlement Administration. That made Mr. Brown very mad, and from that time on, he and the government never agreed. When something went wrong, the government did it; the government was always in the way of what he wanted to do.

G. None of the others would dare say anything like that about Benjamin Brown.

M. Of course not, but I'm telling you how it was. I'm telling you from memory but you can read it right there.

Q. How did you feel about Brown when you were actually here?

M. I respected him and loved him. He was our God. But we started to work and I remember the first season we made nice coats. I remember taking a truck load of coats to Bambergers in Newark when they had a promotion sale. Bamberger bought 400 coats and we gave them 400 on consignment. That was the first season. At the end of the season we had no more money. Our original capital was \$56,000. We only had 112 members but there were 200 homes here prepared for them. You couldn't get any more.

Prior to the first season the Board of Sponsors met, and according to the printed matter, also part of the prospectus, it had been agreed that this factory would not manufacture for itself, it would work as a contract shop for a large manufacturer in New York. And at a public meeting which I did not attend, there was a conflict between Dubinsky with union labor, under union control - "You go with me. He don't know about cloaks" pointing to Benjamin Brown - "He only knows about turkeys". And then with a show of hands at the meeting, it turned out they didn't want to go with Dubinsky; they wanted to go with Brown. And Dubinsky said, "If you want to go with him you cannot have a contracting shop in Hightstown." This was the area in the time of life of the Union, when there was a constant fight about how many contracting shops and manufacturers could have away from New York. Because originally in the 20's, there was a continuing conflict between the Union and the Manufacturer about having shops away from New York. And there was a rigid hold on that from the Union's point of view. The only reason the manufacturer wanted to leave New York was to run away from the Union. So they limited and watched and checked the contract shops. And Dubinsky said, "you can't have a contract shop here because I don't trust you." You'll

be strikebreakers; you'll all be scabs. But if you want to go with me, you can have that contract where you won't have the responsibility of manufacture." And the meeting went along and Dubinsky left and he resigned as a sponsor. And the meeting said, "don't worry; we'll manufacture". If they didn't have to manufacture they could run a factory here without a production office, a production manager - they would get cut stuff, or bring material here, cut it here and make it, and ship it to New York. And I maintain it could have been successful right until today. But once Dubinsky said, "you have to manufacture", we were dead. I became aware of this much later, Not at that time.

Q. So this was really the beginning of the end?

M. The beginning of the end was right in the beginning, and it was doomed.

Q. But how did the cooperative work within the factory? Did that work out?

A. There were times here when there was a meeting every night. We had the Industrial Cooperative, the Workers Aim; we also had an agricultural cooperative that farmed 450 acres; we had a cooperative store, a consumers cooperative.

G. It was called the Tripod Cooperative because there were 3 cooperatives, and at this time I became the head of the Consumers Cooperative.

M. And we had another cooperative that received a great deal of publicity.

There was a continual parade from people all over the country to see this cooperative work. And everybody who came in and walked through the factory wanted to buy a coat. So we set up a shop and sold coats. <sup>in Britton House</sup> Bob Mueller's house was the store. And we set up the store and we sold a lot of coats. But primarily, the basic fault of this thing is something that I just discovered and wasn't aware of until now., reading Irving Howe. As he said - a homogenous group of people, all Jews and all labor union men - it sounds good doesn't it? A homogenous group. But the fact is they hated each other. You want to know why? I'll tell you. In addition to our 4 cooperatives which all had meetings, we had fraternal organizations.

I told you, the first question I was asked when I came here was, "What fraternal organization do you belong to?" It seemed to me there was nothing to the question, why ask it? The largest group was the Workman's Circle - a workers' socialist group that contained people like the old Russian revolutionaries - Bundists, who ranged from left-wing socialists to Communists. When they came here they set up their own Yiddish School. Then we had the Farband. They were Socialist Zionists. Now the one concept about the first group, among them were a great many who wanted to discard their Jewishness - primarily their religion. The second group were the Zionists and the third group was the IWO. They were Communists who hated everybody else. I didn't join any of those groups, but I did help organize the Jewish War Veterans.

G. Because we were more American than anything else.

M. We had an initial turnout at our first meeting of about 800 people. Now I mentioned the three, and then there was the religious group. And all of them - as he describes it here - they hated each other. Not only were they fighting about ideological problems, but they fought among themselves within their own Unions. It took me four years to find this out. I knew they disliked each other, but I didn't know to what degree. This book may not be about us, but it is about us, he is talking about the same people.

Q. At the time you were at these meetings, you could tell that there were some factional differences, but what about other people, were they disillusioned with this?

M. No. I'll tell you a story. After our first season, we lost \$56,000. Came a Mr. Muncies from Washington. Carl Muncies, a nice gentleman, and he says to the Board of Directors at a meeting, "You won't have any money for your next season.

Whatever money you have left is tied up in piece goods, or coats, which immediately lose their value." When you have a winter coat to sell, the day after Thanksgiving, it's lost most of its value, Because if you haven't got a winter coat the day after Thanksgiving, you ain't going to buy one. He says, "The government has money for you. We'll lend each of you \$500 on your own personal note." So we each signed a note to the U.S. Government for \$500, and he gave us \$50,000 to run the second season. At the end of that season (which was a disaster again), we wound up without any money, came a Mr. Sam Lubin, who was the chief statistician for the Department of Labor in Washington. a nationally known man, and he was very much interested in us. He said he had read about our troubles and he was here with a solution. "I have a contract for you if you want to accept it from Sears Roebuck, who will guarantee your entire factory and all of your personnel, 52 weeks work every year. We will take over its management, and you can run any type of cooperative you want. With this guarantee, if you will accept it, you'll be done with your troubles and your problems - your money, your capital, - anything." This was said at a meeting held in the factory. I was there and I got up and I spoke. I said, "Let's accept this offer. We'll accept it and stay with it for a couple of years; we'll get settled; we'll get organized; we'll get over our hunger, and then we'll see what we want to do with our cooperatives." Benjamin Brown was at the meeting and he got up and told them that we didn't want this. "If you want to accept this," he told them, "you accept this, but there is no room left for me here. I will leave." And he was their Messiah. He had them bulldozed. I saw that none of these guys, with Benjamin Brown there, would dare to hold up their hands and say, "No. You leave. We'll take Sears Roebuck." But I called for a closed ballot. The only other man that spoke was

Phil Goldstein, our first Mayor. Phil Goldstein was a cutter. When Phil Goldstein got up and said, "Let's go with Sears Roebuck" Benjamin Brown took him across the coals, he called him everything under the sun. Anyway, we came to a vote. The vote was 66 to 6, in favor of Benjamin Brown. I'll never forget that one,

Q. Was everyone involved in all of the Coops, all the time?

M. If I was a member of the Worker's Aim, I could buy a share of stock in the Agricultural Cooperative for \$1.00. I could buy a share of stock in the Consumers Cooperative for \$5.00, and I could buy a share in the Clothing Distributors for \$1.00, and with all these cooperatives, the meetings made the final decision.

Q. Were you undertaking any agricultural activity at this time?

M. When we first came and got into this house, there was a garden in the back. We had 7 rows of turnips. These were cooperative gardens. They would machine this thing all the way down to the end, and lay out the same rows. Everyone here had to have that kind of a garden. They planted it for us and we had to take care of it. We never knew anything about gardens, so they planted it. But we all learned eventually how to take care of a garden. And we enjoyed it very much.

G. We had so much food out there that when we had guests from New York, we filled them up. We gave them bushels of tomatoes, of turnips, of everything we had growing. And the next year, we begged them not to plant us any turnips. After that, they let us plant whatever we wanted on our own.

M. Well, remember that the original concept was that this would be subsistence homestead farming. But it didn't work out, and I don't know whether they asked questions or not, but none of this produce was supposed to be sold on the open market.



Q. What happened at this meeting when they discovered the divisiveness of other people, did anybody quit? Did anybody say, "Well, that's it<sup>6</sup>?"

M. There were some that left immediately. There were some that never came out. They were strictly a gamble, that by paying \$500 and becoming a member, maybe they could become - as they say in Yiddish - "a macher<sup>6</sup>", meaning a doer, not a worker. Some of them never came out.

G. But a few left; they were disgusted and they left. They were mainly disgusted with the work, with the arguing. They wanted to go back to New York and work in a factory and never have anything to do with this place again.

M. There were a great many of these guys who hadn't worked in a factory in years. They were small business men. They had tailor stores. There is this letter that was sent to the federal government from a Miss Redding, who was a daughter of a Mr. Redding, who was one of our mayors, and the letter asks, "When are we ever going to get out to Jersey Homesteads<sup>7</sup>? My father sold his business; he is sitting on his butt and he's got no way to make a living, waiting for you to call us."

There were a lot of these guys. They were really businessmen and each one came out here looking for a home. There weren't enough young people. These guys had nothing to give, no matter where they worked.

Q. What were some of the other things you reacted to that you felt shouldn't be going on here<sup>7</sup>? I understand you stood up at a meeting and - what was it you said?

M. Well, this was the business of the Agricultural Cooperative. When I came out the Agricultural Cooperative had only one real farmer. His name was Leo Libove. The rest of them would say, "If you tell me, I'll do it. If you'll show me, I'll do it<sup>6</sup>". Only one farmer. And the foreman was part of Benjamin Brown's Cooperative. I don't know if he was elected or not. When I got here, he was there.

The farmer was a man by the name of Louis Cohen - we called him cockeye Cohen - who in Russia was an actor. He didn't know anything about farming. But he was a friend of Finkler, who was the senior selection specialist. And there he was. Eventually, the Senior Selection Specialist, who had been working for the government up to that time, got fired. They no longer needed him. There were no more members to select, so he came to the Agricultural Board of Directors, of which I was a member, and asked for a job. He wanted to be the Manager. And I said, "fine, if you want to work for us, you have to work at the same pay that we're getting. You'll work for \$25 a week". He said, "the hell with you. You think I'm going to give you my 8 years of education for \$25 a week?" I got to have at least \$35." I told him for \$35, we didn't need him. We argued half the night. The outcome was that he was hired for \$35. I lost again.

Q. Well, in the Cooperative that you were the head of, did you win anything there?

M. I lost again. I'll tell you a story about that. I loved here and the store was on this corner. Particularly on Sunday morning, there was a parade of people in there complaining about the clerk in the store. He insulted them; he had a nasty mouth. So it came to a head one day - I really don't remember the details - but I came in and I fired him. He walked out. And it didn't take 10 minutes, his three daughters and he himself were out there, and they started to picket the store. One of the daughters had a car, and she was inviting people that she would take them to Hightstown to shop so that they shouldn't have to shop there. That was Helen Kleinman and it was her father that had been fired. The next thing you know there was a meeting that night in the school. Everybody turned out. Everybody. And I detailed the reason why, the continual complaints, and the same guy who came here Sunday morning to complain about him got up on a

chair and said, "What the hell right do you have to fire him?" Before he got up on the chair, he explained who he was. At that time he said, "I am a friend of the working man<sup>u</sup>," I called him a son-of-a-bitch and told how he would pull a chair out from under a guy when he was in the factory because he didn't want him to sit down. And I told him further that he was the guy who had been complaining about Kleinman and now he was defending him. They knocked hell out of me that night.

Q. Well, what was it that made you two persevere?

M. Why? ~~We~~ We had the best time of our lives, the most exciting.

G. We had a great time. We made friends with everybody. Everybody was so friendly with each other. It was a wonderful social life. You were never lonely. We would just drop into people's houses. Everybody would drop in and everybody knew where to drop in, and in those days we didn't have money for cake or anything. We had bread and jelly; especially apple jelly, because they sold apples at the orchard; so we would make jelly apple and bread and tea, because with tea you didn't have to give milk. For tea, apple jelly and bread, everybody was welcome. The social life was great; we would stay up all night and sing songs, and I learned so much Jewish that I didn't know before because they sang so many Jewish songs and they were so beautiful. It was just a great life. In Mueller's house, which was then called the Britton House, we used to have our meetings there, and when we first got started, the women would get together and we would introduce ourselves, and I would say, ~~My~~ my name is Augusta Chasan and my husband's name is Morris Chasan ; I have one son, 11 years old; his name is Howard Chasan<sup>u</sup>, then the next one would get up and tell about herself and then you would know where you fit in. Your child and my child were about the same

age and it was just a wonderful life. And then the government used to send people over to show us how to can. They were people from the Department of Agriculture; they would teach us how to cook fish so that it wouldn't smell, how to make our money go a little further, and it was very interesting. But most of all, our social life with tea and bread was just marvelous. We were all friendly with each other and all of us got along beautifully.

Q. So basically, then, the political issues didn't follow people into their homes?

A. That's right. But, of course, eventually you grouped off. But when the lights were on in the Chasan house, everybody came.

M. But business decisions were made based upon who proposed them and who was in favor of them, and they voted their organizations rather than their cooperatives. It split according to fraternal lodge. Always. I remember the night ~~of~~ the meeting of the Consumers Cooperative was preparing to sign a contract for all delivery; one contract for the entire community, at a low rate, 5 3/4¢ That was it. We had 2 bidders - Trenton Oil, a subsidiary of Standard Oil of Indiana, and the other one from a guy by the name of Conco from Perrineville who had one 500-gallon truck. The thing was obvious. At that time, my friend who lived on the corner, Hershel Katzenellenbogen, was a truck driver, and he was driving for Trenton Oil, and it was before the heating season, and I told them that the thing was very simple. This man lived here, he was the president of the IWO, and he said "Herschel, Nothing doing <sup>7</sup> You can't buy no oil from him." He said he was going with Conco. I asked him if he thought this guy with <sup>2</sup>500-gallon truck is going to be able to serve this community and we're going to sit here and freeze because you don't like his "kulture"? I went on to tell him that if he gives this

contract to Conco, comes December I'm going to hang you off a pole out there. But this was how they acted. They voted their organization. They voted it right here in the store. The same guy who was a member of the Board of Directors of the Consumers Cooperative. He said, "I don't know. Am I a Union man or am I a member of the Cooperative?" That was true of a lot of the people. If you look into the matter you'll see. The Socialists had no belief for nor any use for cooperatives right from the beginning. They wanted to conquer the world. They didn't want to work within this system. They said they didn't want to work within the capitalist system. They wanted to prepare for the revolution.

Q. You said that everybody wanted to be a Chief, nobody wanted to be an Indian. How did that work and what were some of the problems and how did that work out in practice?

M. In the factory it worked out that the man on the floor would inspect the garment when it was finished. Now, if he is a Workman's Circle man, that's what he is. It doesn't matter if it's your coat, or your shoe or whatever. I saw that in the store. I discovered one day that the butcher - I pored over records, and I discovered that one month, like in September of 1937, the Butcher Department made something like \$300 after selling \$1600 worth of meat. A year later, in the month of September, we lost \$100 and we bought the same \$1600 worth of meat and I wondered what happened to the \$300. So I called up Edie to get me my records and I accused the butcher of stealing. But before we started the meeting I fired him. Either we are paying for meat that we never received - and Klein and he had a practice where they used to take all the cash on one day and the next morning go to the market and fill it up again. They'd go to Trenton and pick up meat or whatever we needed. I told him, either you're paying for meat that you never get, or you're giving it away, and I was sure he was giving it away. And he was a member

of a butchers' union. He came with his delegate and I said to the delegate, "You tell me where the money is. He can't go in that store no more<sup>u</sup>". That stuck. That was the one I won. There were all kinds of incidents<sup>the</sup> here. There is the story about a woman who moved in and said publicly, "You know this is a wonderful place. I can push my kids out in the morning and not worry about them, and if I don't get to them for lunch, I'm certain somebody will feed them<sup>u</sup>".

Originally these were 8-potato~~e~~ farms, all in Millstone Township. In 1938, Millstone Township and Hightstown and the whole area was scared to death of all these communists, and they went to the State Legislature and they asked for help. They wondered what they were ~~do~~ing with all these people and the federal government. The State said that the 1296 acres that the government owns is now the Borough of Jersey Homesteads, a separate political entity, and they sent a letter to the head of the program, Simon, and he should see to it that they sent them the names of a Mayor and 6 Councilman. That was in 1938 and Phil Goldstein became the first Mayor and I was one of the first Councilman and the head of the Police Department and Gus was the firelady. And that's how we became the Borough. Now that we became a Borough, we had a Mayor and Councilmen and a Board of Education. By that time the Government had built us a school,

G. Before that we had held school in one of the houses that was opposite the old Borough Hall. They used to bring bridge tables to the school and we would set it up and they had a teacher there and that was the school for a year. Then they built the school. And my son was one of the first graduates of that school.

Q. How did the Governing Council get along with the Cooperative members?

A. Our cooperatives had only one trouble. The enemy of the cooperatives was the federal government. And this was due to the early conflict between Benjamin

Brown and the government. Because they wouldn't let him build this himself. There were some federal officials in town at this time. There was Walter Simon, who was the Head, and his assistant, Harry Glantz, both of whom are very good friends of ours to this day. They had a degree of power because at that time we were all renters. We rented these houses from the government. We didn't get to own these until 1948. So, we were all paying rent and he was the boss. In 1938, I was the head of the Police Committee. One morning Simon called me to tell me there was trouble. He said that last night we had received a truckload of lathe, whole truckload of 1 x 2s, and he went on to say this morning they were all gone, and we got to go find them. So Walter Simon and I walked from house to house, picked up the garage doors, took the lathe out and put it back on the truck. One woman had five bundles and I asked her what she was going to do with it. She said, "I don't know. Everybody was taking, so I took too<sup>o</sup>." There was no end to this. Old man Leefer had 5 wheelbarrows and God knows how many shovels. In the years 1937/8/9, when the factory ran out of work, between seasons, two or three months of no work, Walter Simon used to run WPA projects. We put in curbs; I worked with a crew for months when we put drainage tile around every house into a dry well. Around every house, you'll find 4" tile; starts from this corner and it slopes down, down, down to the far corner, and then to a dry well. I still tell people about my neighbor Jack Goldstein, who could dig a dry well all by himself, all day long. Harry Glantz told me one day that this project had the highest incidence of hernias than any one of the other 160 projects that the Federal Government had.

Q. Was there any clash between the government ruling and the council ruling in town or did they work together pretty well?

G. They worked together pretty well. The government knew more about running this town than these tailors. Not only did they know more, but they did more. So they listened to the Government.

M. After all, the government had the money and could do more. The Council was poor. The Government was the only taxpayer at that time. Our house cost \$16 a month to rent and some were \$14. But it was hard to get. I made \$25 a week steady, but the others only made it when they were working and I made it all the time. And furthermore, the reason why the others wouldn't go to work on a farm, besides the fact that they weren't really able to do physical labor, was that the rate of pay at that time in the factory, was \$1.55 an hour when they worked, but, of course, their yearly pay was nowhere near that.

G. But they only worked a few months and they used to be so jealous of me when I went to cash my \$25 check. Their jealousy was always evident. They used to talk out loud in front of me, and tell me that we were reaping their harvest

M. There is something very peculiar about these people. Each one of these men, no matter how little they had, felt superior to anyone who worked with his hands and got them dirty. A truck driver was way down on the bottom. They used to call me a "BALAGOLLA", that's a Russian word for a guy who runs a horse and wagon, and that's lower on the scale than a tailor. The reason I was elected to the Council was because I wasn't afraid to speak up, and furthermore, I could read and write English and they liked and admired what I said, and they knew I was fair. Now I'll tell you about fairness. The first year they came out, there were about 100 families, and they had amongst them, a school for the Workman's Circle, a school for the Farband, a school for the IWO, and the Religious group had a school. At the end of the year they approached me and asked me if I would like to be the Chairman of a Committee represented by these 4 organizations, to seek out a method to make one school instead of the 4 because they discovered they couldn't really pay for these. And while I'm on the subject, the guy from the Workman's Circle



came knocking on my door one day looking for money, and when I told him I had no money for him, he threatened me with the remark that I would one day pay for this school whether I liked it or not. Anyway, we had a meeting and they came to the conclusion, 3 of the organizations, the Farband, The Workmen's Circle, and the IWO, that they would set up a school under the name of Sholom Aleichem Shule, (that was the name of a noted Jewish writer) and that was the way it was set up, and I was chosen Chairman because I was unaffiliated. This had no relation to our regular school. This was extracurricular. In this school they taught Yiddish, Yiddish history, Hebrew, and this school was taught after the regular school day. Our regular school was a pretty good school, but we did have our troubles with our High School, which was then in Allentown. Allentown at that time, and 42 years later, still has the same problem. The Board of Education members are all farmers and the curriculum is all farming. But this school here was always good. When the school was completed, it was dedicated as a school and as a Community Center. And it was used a lot for that, for meetings, for weddings and other social activities; in fact my son was married there.

G. I didn't particularly want it there; we had planned a garden wedding, but I thought just in case it rains (I was having over 200 guests) what would I do? So I met with the Board of Education and asked if I could move the wedding to the school in case of rain, and they said "yes" which was a good thing because it did indeed rain. It was the first wedding in the school and it was beautiful. After that there were other weddings there.

Q. Besides political organizations, were there other organizations in town?

G. Yes, there were social clubs. There were different groups; there was the Young People's group, and some Citizens Group, and I belonged to a group of 12 women; we were the Younger Set. We called ourselves the Sinners, and we would meet once a week, and we would gossip. A farmer's wife would tell us about what

was happening on the farm, and I would tell them what happened on his trips, and we would exchange information and it was very interesting. Sometimes we would decide to get dressed up and we would dress up and wear hats and gloves and go to the meeting. We had the stuff from the city and of course never wore it here, so we would decide to get dressed up and we would wait on the corner for our lift. And we made it a secret organization, and everybody wished they could belong, and they would whisper to each other, wondering what we talked about and what we did. "They call themselves the sinners, what do you think they do", was what was being whispered. Mr. Simon's wife was also one of the Sinners, and we had the greatest time, and we just sort of grew up together, and we are still friends. It was a wonderful life; I loved it; and I still love it. And Fay and I are just like sisters; she's family.

M. And then there was a year in the factory; the second season, was a disaster. I remember I took a whole load of coats down to Klein's in New York, and he took them into the back room and examined them and didn't want to buy them. I told him he could have them for \$1.00 a piece, but he didn't want them at any price. We took them back home and the Board of Directors decided to buy a trailer, and 2 or 3 men took the trailer down to Georgia and sold the coats to the Blacks. That second year we didn't have any money, so Benjamin Brown and a friend of his invested \$38,000 for the third season. And again we had an offer from outside to help us and again they turned it down. He said they had invested this money to make coats and sell them through existing cooperative organizations. He said we would distribute them and work for the Cooperatives, and we were not to accept any other offer, and they all went along with him. When this was accepted, I got called down to Brown's house, - he lived in the big house around the bend, which was also run by the Hechalutz farm - and there in his house was Benjamin Brown and the whole Board of Directors of the Worker's Aim, and also Finkler. "Chasan", they said, "We got a new deal and we got only one problem and that problem is you." "Fine,

I said, "What's your problem?" "We are setting up a route of places where we are going to hold sales throughout all of New England. And we want you to go in the trucking business. And you'll truck them from place to place and then come back." I agreed that it was fine, but I told them I didn't want to go in the trucking business. If I had wanted to go in the trucking business, I would have stayed in New York. But I offered them a suggestion if they really wanted to make this thing work, "I'll go along with you. "All the Board of Directors were all cloak-makers, so I made this suggestion. 'If you guys will all work for a percentage of the wages, if you will work for 50% of the rate, you can make the same rate for me.'" At that time I belonged to the Union. If you truck cloaks you have to belong to Local 102 of the ILGWU. "You find out from the Union what my rate is (at that time I was making \$25 a week), and I'll do the same thing.'" "Oh, the hell with you," he says, "We don't want to do that".

Q. You talked about the attitude of the surrounding communities to Roosevelt. What kind of influence did this town have on them?

A. It scared them to death. We were all communists. They figured that a bunch of Jews coming from New York had to be communists.

G. In the stores in Hightstown, if somebody from Roosevelt (which was then Jersey Homesteads) would come in the store (and they were easily recognized), they would be ignored until there was nobody left in the store to take care of. Everybody here was aware of that.

M. You have to remember that in 1936 Hightstown was a segregated town. The blacks were sectioned off in the movies. They sat in the rear section on the left. And the KKK was also evident. But frankly, I was never bothered by any of that.

The hardware store man was Jewish and the Drug store man was Jewish, but outside of those two, the bank took your money without asking you for anything, and personally, I never had any of that problem, except one day Gus sat in the black section of the movies and was asked to move. But people here did say they had problems, and I can believe it. Incidentally, talking about problems, the Jewish kids had problems in Allentown High School. They always walked in groups, and when trouble started, they backed them into a corner and Howard said that Ernie Singer was the best kicker he ever met, and it is true they used to fight a lot. Every day. But fortunately it didn't discourage our boys. We were not discouraged either. There was a great difference. My son was a third generation fighter. And I say it honestly, when he was 5 years old, I bought him some boxing gloves and I taught him and I told him that in this world he was going to have to learn to protect himself. And it did him good because he had the same trouble in the Marines.

G. But he never complained. He made friends with everybody. He was stationed in the Pacific, and he jumped from Island to Island, and when he came back he said he wanted to live right here because all he thought of when he was away was of home right here. He got married about 6 months after he came home. He had left his girl here. And they bought a home here and settled here and <sup>is</sup> very glad he did.

Q. Did the war bring any other changes?

M. Well, by the time the war started, our cooperative had been closed down in 1939. What brought that about was the usual thing. We started to make clothes and I carried them all around. We would start here; our first stop was at a cooperative in Portchester, another one in Bronxville, another in Troy, another one in North Adams; there was a real big cooperative in Fitchberg, that served the whole community, and then there was a real big cooperative in Boston. The