

Ben Brochin
Narrator

Rhoda Lewin
Interviewer

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Ben Brochin **-BB**
Rhoda Lewin **-RL**

BB: All ready? Ok, my name is Ben Brochin. I'm being interviewed by Rhoda Lewin. Today is June 17, 1979.

Ready?

RL: Yeah.

BB: Rhoda has asked me to try and recollect some of my earliest memories of the North Side, which was the main area of the Jewish population in the city of Minneapolis. It probably housed seventy-five percent of the Jewish population. The South Side probably housed about fifteen percent of the Jewish population, comprising mostly of Romanian and Russian Jews, and there was a smaller area around Lake and Hennepin that had the rest of the Jewish population, which comprised mostly of Deutsche Yehudim [German Jews], or the "Temple [Israel] crowd."

It's strange that in those days the hub of the Jewish area was Sixth Avenue North and Lyndale, which is today Olson Highway and Lyndale. Within a stone's throw of this hub there must have been eight or nine synagogues. There were also various Jewish organizations or clubs, such as the Atlas Athletic Club which was on Sixth and Lyndale, which was a forerunner of the Gymal Daled Club, which was a forerunner of the Standard Club. There was also in the same block the Paole Zion organization, which was on the second floor opposite of the Harris Photography Studio. A few blocks down there was the Labor Lyceum, a meeting place for the Jewish people. But the main meeting place for the Jewish community was the Kenesseth Israel Synagogue, which was right off of Sixth and Lyndale. It was an imposing structure, a beautiful structure.

Also within a stone's throw was the "gruene shul," which was on Bryant and Eighth Avenue, kitty-corner from Sumner Field, which was the meeting place for the younger elements as far as athletics and recreation were concerned. There was also the old Talmud Torah, which was the forerunner of the Fremont and Eighth Avenue Talmud Torah; this was on Aldrich and about Eighth Avenue.

RL: Where did the Atlas Club room?

BB: The Atlas Club was on the third floor of the Kistler Building. The Kistler was an imposing four-story building. It housed business places on the first floor and apartments on the second floor, and the Atlas Athletic Club was on the third floor and they had a gymnasium on the fourth floor, as I recall, where I spent many, many hours. There were also meeting rooms and billiard rooms and a small kitchen. I can still remember some of the members of the Atlas Athletic Club . . . John and Meyer Gellman, and there was an insurance man . . . I just can't recall his name . . .

RL: That was Fischbein?

BB: Yes, but I can't think of his first name. And Jim Noodleman.

RL: How big would you say that building was? Half a block long?

BB: Yes. It was the biggest structure, as far as I recall, outside of the loop. There was a bank on the corner, and it had space on the Lyndale side which some people rented as offices. I remember Charlie and Henry Bank, when they got out of law school, had their offices on the Lyndale side. Sixth and Lyndale was a very interesting corner. One corner was my father's store, Brochin's, and the southwest corner was the Kistler Building and the northeast corner was Rosoff's Drugstore. And then the other corner was Volkert's Confectionery store. He was one of the few non-Jewish businessmen on the avenue; he was a theology student who wore a yarmulke! So there were two people on the avenue who wore yarmulkes in those days while conducting their business; my father was the other one. And it seemed like every other business seemed to be a Jewish butcher shop. There were so many Jewish butcher shops in a three-square block area. They were on Lyndale, and on Sixth Avenue. And it was a teeming avenue. There were very few cars. Most of the vehicles were wagons drawn by horses, or carriages, and there were a number of electric cars. People would ride or walk up and down the avenue; it was teeming from seven o'clock in the morning 'til way past midnight! Of course, this was the days before radio and TV. Also, there wasn't any air conditioning in those days, so people had to get out of the houses. But people were so friendly. Everybody knew their own neighbors, not their immediate neighbors but for blocks and blocks around. And every corner had a group discussing topics of the day. In those days, to get the news, there were three newspapers in town, the Daily News, the Minneapolis Journal and the Minneapolis Tribune. Later on the Star came in and absorbed all of them. I recall, like the Jewish expression "alle Montag and Donishteg" [almost every day] there seemed to be an "extra" issued by the various newspapers. There were "extras" during World War I constantly . . . fake armistices, for instance. It was like a town crier. Newsboys would holler, "Extra!" And everybody flocked out of the houses and converged on this newsboy, and one- or two-cent newspapers sold for a nickel! And if the newsie was lucky, he'd get a dime now and then, which was an awful lot of money. And this was a means of earning a lot of money for a lot of the Jewish youngsters of the North side, including myself.

RL: You sold newspapers?

BB: Sure. We had jitney buses in those days—which was a Ford flivver, a little touring car—which started on Humboldt and Sixth Avenue and went to Fifth Street and Hennepin, the West Hotel. They just went back and forth, picking up about six or seven passengers, or as many as the flivver would hold, for five cents.

RL: Were these private businesses?

BB: Private, yes. There weren't streetcars in those days, but if you could afford a flivver you found yourself a livelihood. And so we would take this flivver, but most of the time we walked or ran, to the Tribune and Journal alley. There wasn't much home delivery in those days. The newsies would hawk the newspapers. And there were probably at least four or five issues a day; especially with the baseball scores later in the evening, there was a "green sheet" and a "pink sheet." The Jewish kids of the North Side had the best stands in the Loop, and those were business places. And when you stop and think that a paper sold at one and two cents and they brought home ten and twelve dollars, that was an awful lot of money. It was unbelievable, the stack of papers that were piled up next to the newsstand in bundles.

RL: What were they doing with the money?

BB: They were contributing to the support of the family. They were just as much breadwinners as the head of the family. In those days the second income and third and fourth were from the children, not from the wife. The wife was the homemaker and the cook and the laundress and did the rearing of the children.

RL: You were saying that the names of places have changed.

BB: Yes. A popular place for the people of the North Side to spend their recreation hours was Keegan's Lake, which was later known as Glenwood Park, which is now known as Theodore Wirth Park. And every Sunday afternoon everybody would pack a picnic basket... early in the morning they would run over to Brochin's and get their fifteen and twenty cents worth of salami . . . which reminds me, I have some order books that my father had from 1908, all written in long-hand in Jewish, and I just noticed that some people really splurged. They bought two pounds of corned beef for seventy cents and they bought a couple of pounds of wieners for thirty-five cents! It's amazing, but of course in those days, every family must have had at least five kids. Our family had seven, and I know of families who had twelve and thirteen children. And some of those twelve and thirteen children, believe it or not, from the time that they were ten and twelve years old were out earning a few pennies and contributing to the family income. Another means of income for a lot of the young Jewish men, they were boxers. They were both amateur and professional. If you were an amateur you got five dollars for a four-round bout. A lot of times these boxers would box their friends to earn the money, so naturally they wouldn't

bloody themselves up, like if they were boxing a stranger. One time one would win and the other time the next guy would win! But these same amateur boxers later turned professional and they were very good; some of them went a long way. In those days a fifty dollar purse was an awful lot of money. They fought in the old Kenwood Armory. Most of the kids had older brothers who were boxers, and if we couldn't get any passes we used to sneak in to watch the fights.

RL: How old were you when you were sneaking in?

BB: Oh, I would say I was all the way from ten to fourteen years old. And an interesting sight on Sixth Avenue in those days was at dusk to see the man come with his long stick—it was a “punk” at the end of a stick—to light the gaslights. And another interesting thing was to see the sprinkler wagon coming along to sprinkle the streets—the streets were made out of blocks in those days—but before the sprinkler came the man who pushed the broom to clean up the streets, the manure from the horses. You always had to watch your step while crossing the streets, so you wouldn't have to go home and clean your shoes!

RL: How often did the sprinkler wagon come by?

BB: Every night. And in those days the city would open up the hydrants so the kids could cool themselves off during the day. The sprinkler man would do that for us, too. This was on the main highways. They would sprinkle the side streets, too, but you didn't dare sprinkle them too much because the streets weren't paved. They were dirt streets and after a heavy rain if you walked through them you'd be ankle-deep in mud. Fortunately, in those days we all wore high button shoes, and that was one way of keeping our shoes clean. Not voluntarily clean . . . it was a necessity. Otherwise you had mud all over! So we had to clean them and polish them; that's the way we took care of our shoes. And there were playgrounds. Sumner Field was the meeting place. They must have had at least four or five baseball diamonds. They had five or six tennis courts, and they had sandboxes and regular playground equipment like slides and swings and teeter-totters. It was located on Bryant and Eighth Avenue kitty-corner from the old Orthodox shul known as the “gruene shul,” also known as the Bryant Shul or Shaare Tzedek. At the original Shaare Tzedek, I remember Rabbi Seltzer was the Rabbi. He was an imposing man, tall, carried himself straight as an arrow, and he reminded me of Theodore Herzl because he had a black beard and piercing eyes. I'd never seen Theodore Herzl but there were pictures in every home of Theodore Herzl in those days and my father had a real big one in his store. Another meeting place was the Sumner Branch Library on Bryant and Sixth Avenue; it later moved over to Emerson and Sixth Avenue when the city built a new building which was also a meeting place. But the biggest meeting place of them all was the Keneseth Israel Synagogue right off Sixth and Lyndale. It seemed like there were mass meetings going on all the time, during World War I and right after World War I when the Ukrainian pogroms were taking place. My father had a little room—I shouldn't say little, because it was good-sized—and he used that as his Pesach store during the Passover season, so he wouldn't mix the chometz and the pesadiche items. It was on the

Lyndale side of the store area -- the main store faced Sixth Avenue—and it had an entrance, and also an entrance into the store. Before the mass meeting to iron out any problem that confronted the Jewish community the various leaders of the Jewish community would meet in our store: Dr. George Gordon; Rabbi Matt, who was at Adath Jeshurun; Dr. Deinard, who was the Rabbi at the Temple; and Rabbi Silver, an imposing figure of a man who stood six feet tall and must have weighed about 270 pounds, with a long white beard—which reminds me of the picture I have of him on the High Holidays. He wore a tall silk topper and, naturally, a Prince Albert, as did a lot of the shul balabutum [the wealthier Jews]. They either wore tall silk hats or derbies or bowlers. My father always wore a bowler or a derby and also a Prince Albert when he went to shul on both Saturday and on the yontivim (holidays). That was really a sight when shul let out and everybody would walk to their respective homes. Nobody drove in those days. The only time they drove to shul was before Yom Kippur started. They left the cars there all night long, those who had cars, and they were usually parked on Royalston and Highland and Lyndale Avenue. Incidentally, Royalston and Highland were two of the most beautiful avenues. They were the Homewood area of the North Side in those days. All the balabutum lived on Highland and Royalston. It was a winding avenue lined by trees, and the lawns were kept up. A kid I went to school with, one of the few non-Jewish kids, who was a very good friend of all the Jewish boys, was Harrison Salisbury. He lived on Royalston, and he and I were very close friends. We started kindergarten together, but he was so bright that by the time I became a freshman in high school he was already a junior! I recall that later he became editor of the North High Polaris when he was a sophomore, which was unheard of; usually that honor was bestowed on a senior. He was such a nice guy. Recently he spoke in Minneapolis and recalled how he used to walk by our store on the way to Sumner School. Incidentally, some of our most famous professional people got their elementary schooling at Sumner School on Aldrich and Sixth Avenue. The frontage of the school was a full block from Aldrich to Bryant Avenue. I'm sort of regressing, hopping around, as these memories come back to me . . .

RL: Can we go back to the five cent corned beef sandwich?

BB: Oh, yes! [Laughing]

I recall us kids would play in the gym at the Atlas Athletic Club and all of a sudden the fellows would say, "Time to eat!" And they would send two or three of us kids down to Brochin's, which was across the street, to order a few dozen five cent corned beef sandwiches, which included a slice of pickle, and also some bottles of pop, which were two or three cents. The Manhattan Bottling Company, which was owned by the Meshbesh family, their original place was on Bradford and Oak Lake or in that area, right next to their house, but later they moved on Lyndale, right next to the Lyndale shul. They had the first Seven-Up franchise in the city of Minneapolis, and strange as it may sound, they couldn't do much with it. They had their own pop, which was called Manhattan Bottling Pop. And talking about the Lyndale shul, they had a beautiful courtyard and a beautiful lawn, and as kids we used to play Prisoner's Base on that courtyard. And I also remember all the Ice Cream Socials that the shuls sponsored; for

five cents you could get a nice big dish of ice cream. There was a tree on the lawn that had a cement base around it, and when we'd want to take a picture, a snapshot, we would use that tree as a background. It was such a lovely tree. I remember before the shul was built—I think it was built in 1914—there was a big hill where the shul was and we used to take our sleds in the winter-time and slide down that hill, all the way across Lyndale Avenue into a vacant lot! It wasn't really a vacant lot—there was a box factory there owned by Goldman and Karlins—but we would slide all the way down. It must have been a block-long slide. We didn't have to worry about automobiles, but we did have to worry about running into a wagon and a horse, and one kid would act as a lookout to make sure that the coast—the avenue—was clear. That was a lot of fun in those days. Next to the box factory there were sheds which housed supplies for Connors Plumbing, which had a storefront as their office there on Sixth Avenue. And I remember two young doctors who worked their way through medical school working for Connors in those days—Dr. Dan and Thomas Ziskin—which brings me back to recalling all the businesses there on Sixth Avenue. On the west side, beginning with Lyndale going north, was my father's store, and right next door was a haberdashery, Sam Shure, and then there was a shoe store whose name I don't recall, and then there was the Steinmetz Hardware Store. He was an old German who could speak "Jewish" well! And then there was Connors Plumbing and then there was another grocery store, Belzer's. Then there was Greenberg's Haberdashery and then there was the Katz Shoe Store. I think it was called S. L. Katz—Sam Katz—and he sold practically all of the Jewish families on the North Side shoes. Of course there were other Jewish haberdasheries. And then on the corner of Aldrich and Sixth Avenue was Sam Rosenfield -- he started his drugstore with his brother-in-law, Gottlieb—and then, of course, the next block on Sixth Avenue was Bryant, and on Bryant and Sixth was the Sumner Branch Library. It was in the same building that housed the Minneapolis Shade Cloth Company, and then farther down was Goldman's Variety Store. He had moved from Lyndale Avenue, where he started originally. Goldman was one of the families who lived on Highland Avenue. He was the father of Sam Goldman, the social worker, and we used to call him "Mr. American Legion." And so it went. Farther down was Eisenstadt Grocery, and there was a drugstore. On the other side of the street, maybe from Lyndale to Fremont, there might have been just a half dozen non-Jewish businesses, and I can recall them very vividly. There was Perlich, the harness man, who had a big white horse in front of his establishment, a life-sized horse. He had all kinds of sporting equipment, but his main thing was saddles; he repaired saddles for the horses.

RL: What kind of sporting equipment did he have?

BB: Fishing gear, and baseballs and bats . . .

RL: That was bamboo poles, in those days, for fishing?

BB: No, he had a few of the sophisticated rods and reels, too, which in those days were really sophisticated! And he was a real nice guy. He would let me buy a ball for fifty cents and pay him out a nickel at a time. And then there was of course Mr. Barnett, the barber, who was the father of Jack Barnett, who later moved over to First Avenue and Sixth

Street, who probably gave haircuts to more Jewish heads than any man in town. And of course there was Shimon, the barber—he got his start on Sixth Avenue. There was Goldman's Kosher restaurant and believe it or not, with all the Jewish butcher shops, and there must have been at least a dozen in the area, there was also one non-kosher butcher shop. It was a gentile butcher called Eisenkramer, whose son later became a cheerleader at North High School back in the twenties. And of course, to name some of the Jewish butcher shops, there was Silverman, and there were at least three butcher shops by the name of Gordon, and there was Fidelman, who was the father of the Fidelman who was later on Plymouth Avenue. There was Greenstein the butcher and Davis the butcher, and on Lyndale there was Marcus the butcher, and I'm sure there were also a lot of live fish stores in conjunction with the butcher shops. And there was also Heck, the butcher on Lyndale and Eighth... and did I mention Levitan, the butcher, and Silesky, the fish man? Boy, we just used to love to watch the live fish practically jumping out of their ice-filled bins! And what a selection! That was before frozen fish was ever dreamed of. And there were a few specialty fruit stores. And when you stop to think of it, there wasn't any refrigeration! Everything was in big walk-in coolers where they placed two hundred-pound blocks of ice in the top to keep the things refrigerated. It's remarkable; everything was on display in the open, with ice around it.

RL: How did they handle those two hundred-pound blocks of ice?

BB: Oh, these icemen, they were unbelievable. They were giants of people! They weighed two hundred pounds and they really were powerful people, and they delivered by horse and wagon, by the way, in those days. My father probably had one of the biggest walk-in coolers of them all. There weren't refrigerators in those days, there were ice boxes. There weren't buses, there were streetcars. There weren't fire engines, there were fire wagons. And I remember when Sixth Avenue had wooden sidewalks, and that was when they had the gas lamps. And naturally, the fire engines were horse-drawn steam engines and the paddy wagon was also horse-drawn. There were four Jewish policemen that I recall -- there was Sgt. Ginsberg, and there was Levine, and Bliss, and then there was Benjamin, but he worked indoors at the Courthouse. And another thing -- news. I recall, as a youngster, Colonel Frank Sloane and his brother, who were young kids, maybe teenagers, would hop on the streetcar for five cents and go over to the Milwaukee Depot, next to the post office on Washington and Third Avenue South, and pick up all the Jewish papers and bring them to the store. And believe it or not, I can still recall the papers. There was Der Tag, and the Forward, and Morning Journal, and the Tageblat and the Courier and the Freiheit and the Barheit, and there were two weekly magazines. One was a satire magazine, the Kundes, and then there was the Americaner. Later my brother and I inherited that job from the Sloane brothers, and I must have been ten or eleven years old when I first started to ride the streetcars and pick up the papers. In those days the trains were never on time. The 4:20 would come in out of Chicago with the newspapers and it took an hour for them to unload, but the people in the post office and the people in the Milwaukee Depot knew me, and I would hop right into the boxcar and find our bundles and throw them off! There was at least two of us went down to get the papers, and they weighed more than we did at the time! But fortunately, the streetcar stopped in

front of the Milwaukee Depot. There was both a motorman and a conductor. The conductor would collect the fare—that was before they had the boxes where you dropped the tokens or the nickels in—and he would put it into a little receptacle and pull the chain to register the fare... sort of a meter. And whenever they were going back towards downtown—the streetcar ran all the way up to Keenan’s Lake—it would stop at our store, with passengers and all, and the motorman and the conductor would both run out to grab a drink of water or pick up a five-cent sandwich. Well, when I started to pick up the papers, the sandwiches were on the house. My father would treat them, and they, in turn, when they saw the papers at the Milwaukee Depot, they would send a passenger out—and there was usually somebody who knew me—to help me out with the papers. And when they got back to our store the streetcar would stop kitty-corner, at the drugstore. We wouldn’t take them off—everybody threw them off—and the customers who were waiting for the papers would carry them across the street, and boy, they went like hot cakes, one-two-three! People could hardly wait, not only for the political news and happenings of the day, but also for the features called the “Romanzas”(?), which was romances in serial form. We sold more Jewish newspapers than we did English newspapers—probably twenty-five to one. That’s how many Jewish newspapers we sold, and they were only two cents.

RL: And these were all in Yiddish?

BB: All in Yiddish—right. And did you know that they had a YMHA on Sixth Avenue in those days? A Young Men’s Hebrew Association? And I mentioned, of course, the Paole Zion Club—which was Zionists.

RL: Was the YMHA just a store front?

BB: Yes, also a store front, between Dupont and Emerson. By the way, the Jewish bakeries were all on Lyndale Avenue in those days, but there was one on Sixth Avenue. He was an old-timer—Sachs the Baker, they called him—and then there was also Cohen the baker, on Sixth Avenue. Mr. Sachs was a little tiny fellow, and after he retired he helped my father on Passover in his “Passover store.” And talk about Passover, in those days it was really something. There were only maybe twenty-five or thirty items at the most, compared with the hundred fifty to two hundred items today. The matzohe came not in cartons, they came in five- and ten-pound packages wrapped with glazed wax paper and a string, and the matzoh meal and the farfel came in two-pound and five-pound cheesecloth sacks. The cookies—the macaroons—came in bulk, and we weighed them up. Sugar came in bars and in cones, just like cones of salt. My father had a special Passover hatchet which I chopped the sugar with, and then weighed them up into one-pound and two-pound boxes. They came, I believe, in ten-pound boxes.

And incidentally, I have some Passover invoices that date back as far as 1912 and I have some Passover orders that my father took that date back to 1907, 1908, 1909, all written in Jewish longhand! I’ll never forget that my father was one of the few merchants that handled Passover goods. The others were dealers, you might say, who had other vocations

or businesses, but when Passover came they had a clientele, and among those were Mirviss on the South Side and Meshbesh and old man Swiler on the North side. Meshbesh had the bottling company, Swiler had the transfer company, and Mirviss was the shammas at the Adath Jeshurun, and they sort of divided up the town to get their customers. My father also wholesaled to the smaller grocery stores in those days.

RL: Tell me about your father's store. You said he had a picture of Theodore Herzl hanging in his store. He must have been a very unusual man.

BB: My father was a very ardent Zionist and someplace I've got a picture of him with a group of Zionists gathered from all over Europe. It's a very interesting picture because it must have been taken in early 1900. It had to be before he came to America; it was taken in Europe. My father studied for the Rabbinate and had his smichas, but he was at heart a businessman and he never practiced in the Rabbinate. His father was in the cloth business in Europe.

RL: Where was this?

BB: In Lithuania, in Gomel. Incidentally, there are a few of his landsmen who migrated to Minneapolis. Among them was Marty Lebedoff's father, and the Kunians. They all came from the same town, and it's a coincidence that they all migrated to North Minneapolis.

RL: Was it a coincidence, though? Your father sold steamship tickets, didn't he?

BB: Yes. My father had a unique store. Not only was it a specialty food store in those days, because he imported a lot of food such as dried mushrooms on strings, from Czechoslovakia, which hung in the window. I can still taste those mushrooms! When people talk about mushrooms today, fresh mushrooms, mushrooms that come in a can, or pickled mushrooms, they just don't hold a candle to just a tiny piece of that mushroom. I put it under my tongue and it would have a flavor that is undescrivable! They were dried, and would you believe it, in those days, back in the 1920s and before, they sold for \$7 and \$8 a pound? But you got an awful lot in a pound. He used to import dried fish—they were called kachunkas, karonkes, rebas—and they were smoked, and they would keep. As a matter of fact, they all came on a string and you hung them up in the window to dry even more. They were dried smoked fish, salty. And I remember egra, the caviar of the kachunka, which was in my eyes a gourmet delight. Wow! What a flavor! And he had certain types of fish—these are all Russian names—balaribetza, lakerda. In those days, people didn't see it here. In New York you could see it. We had white lox; that was a real delicacy. We also handled sturgeon in those days, and a fish called stremlach, and sardelle, which was salty, and which was an anchovy, actually, before it was skinned and boned and packed in olive oil. It was packed in rock salt. And in those days my father had caviar in two-and-a-half pound cans, and may have sold it for about \$5 or \$6 a can, Today that stuff would be worth about \$300 a can, if it is still available! I used to order it for special people, and then slow but sure they either moved out of the city or they passed on,

and when I closed the store on Plymouth Avenue back in 1967, I wound up with one can of that caviar and I tried to sell it. I was asking about \$30 for it—a piece of Romanoff caviar—and believe it or not I didn't have any takers! It was too much money. So I took it, and I kept it in the refrigerator, and I used some myself and gave some of it to my friends, eventually. I wish I had that can today! [Laughing]

But anyway, my father had such a diversified store. He was an agent for the Cunard Line and he brought over hundreds and hundreds of families from Europe before and after World War I. He was also an importer of Russian and Turkish tobaccos. He was probably the second or third man in the city of Minneapolis to sell tefillin and tallisim and tsitsis, that you used to wear under your shirt if you were an Orthodox Jew. And I'll never forget, when the Jewish New Year came, the beautiful New Year's cards. They were indescribable! They came from Austria and Czechoslovakia, folding New Year's cards. You have to see them to believe the craftsmanship that went into them! It was a store of seasons, actually. We had a whole wall lined up special for Russian-Turkish tobaccos and then for Jewish religious supplies. Mezuzahs, and all the tallisim and the tefillin and the Siddurim and the Machzorim and the Chomeshim, and all the Hagaddahs and the books by all the Jewish famous authors of the past, by Zangwill and Nordo(?) and Sholom Aleichim. And he even had eyeglasses, which were nothing but various frames and thicknesses of glass, and people would come in, and he would have them on the counter by thicknesses—#1, #2, #3, #4—and people would grab a Jewish newspaper, try on a pair, and if he could read the print he would buy the glasses for twenty-five cents! And in conjunction with the Turkish and Russian tobacco, he also had an item called gilden, which in English they would call tubes, and that was the forerunner of today's "stoker" cigarette. You had a little machine with a plunger, and half of the cigarette was like a filter with a little piece of cotton in it, and the other half was a tissue into which you injected the tobacco with this plunger. And these were Russian or Turkish tobaccos, and they came, as I recall, in various strengths—mild, medium, medium strong, strong, extra strong—and people would come, not only Jewish people, but Russians, Ukrainians, Poles, Americans came from all over the city to buy this Russian and Turkish tobacco! He also sold gas mantles. Did we sell gas mantles! They were bulky because they were very fragile and came in little boxes, as did the tubes, and my job was to find places to put all these things! He also used his Passover store for storage of these particular items, but we'd get them all down a few weeks before Pesach to make room for all the Passover merchandise that was coming in. I remember we'd get a solid carload in, in those days, and I would get about ten of my school chums and we'd form a human chain, and we'd get either Wolk Transfer or Swiler Transfer—with their horses, mind you—and we would toss these packages. We were all good ballplayers in those days, so woe unto the guy who dropped a package, because that meant five pounds of matzohs turned into five pounds of farfel! [Laughter] That's how they were packed. We would unload a boxcar of matzohs, and matzoh meal, and so forth, and then we would drive over to the store. Later on, we owned a corner and rented out to two or three other stores, and still later on, we would lease back the back room of some of these stores for storage space for all these matzohs, because we would sell to a lot of the dealers, also. Those were exciting times.

RL: What kind of hours did you keep in that store?

BB: I can't recall any two harder-working people than my father and mother. My dad would open the store at eight o'clock in the morning and was lucky to get out at twelve thirty at night, and the only thing I really believe that sustained him and my mother was the fact that he was shomer shabbat [an observant Jew]. He observed the Sabbath and all the holidays, and came sundown Friday he was out of the store, and it was closed until sundown Saturday, and that sustained him. And in the same way, thank goodness for so many Jewish holidays, which also gave him a break.

RL: And did your mother work?

BB: My mother worked right along side of him. She raised seven children and she probably worked in the store until about a day before she gave birth to each child. Of course, my mother had what today would be called a maid in the house, a helper who did the laundry and took care of the house. But still, my mother, I recall, prepared the meals and did a tremendous amount of baking, and every so often my father would have to take off for Chicago or New York by train, which was a day coming and a day going, practically, for Chicago, and three days for New York, and my mother would run the store. But fortunately I started to work in the store. My job was sitting on top of the cigar counter . . . and boy, talk about a cigar counter, they were a nickel apiece, some were two for a nickel, some were three for a dime, and a high priced cigar was a ten-cent cigar! We even had a few pinball machines—slot machines—in the store, where you inserted a penny, two pennies. A nickel was extravagant! It was also a store where people hung around, waiting for their Jewish neighbors, and visited, and in the wintertime there was that big glassine stove in the center. And incidentally, when the store was closed on Saturday, our shabbas goy was Floyd B. Olson, who later became county attorney and governor of the state. Governor Olson learned his Jewish in my father's store and he spoke a very fluent Jewish, as also did his friend, Judge William Larson. Floyd B. Olson tended the stove on Saturdays, and also would let the ice- man in to fill up the walk-in coolers. The iceman had a three-step stool, you might say, and he went up those steps, and he had to back the ice into the cooler. It must have been eight hundred pounds of ice because there were four two hundred-pound blocks.

RL: How old were you when you started working in the store?

BB: I must have been about eight years old. I had a big can and I would rake in those pennies for the Jewish newspapers, and nickels and dimes. We all, all the kids, worked in the store. I will never forget, I must have been about eleven years old, and one night Mr. Heilicher, my Talmud Torah teacher, walked into the store. He came in to get a herring. And he looks at me and he says, "What are you doing in the store at this hour of the night?" "Well, it's my shift." I alternated with my older brother, and my sister Ida also worked. And as we all grew up, and got into the 10, 11, 12, 13, 14th year, we all did our share. We all had duties. Some had to go down in the basement, where we had an earthen floor with big vats of pickles and sauerkraut and pickled watermelon and pickled crab

apples, and what not, and fill up the big pails. And naturally there were the various types of herring. There was schmaltz herring and pickled herring. And people still recall the famous smell when they walked into that store, how good it smelled from all the conglomeration of foods. But I'm digressing again. Where was I?

RL: You were going to tell me about after World War I, at the Glass Block.

BB: When it was really official that World War I had ended, everybody was running downtown to celebrate. People were absolutely going wild. And the Glass Block, which is Donaldson's today, had a completely different front to the store—because it was all glass, that is how it got the name Glass Block—and it was putting out flags of all the countries of the world right across the front of the building. I think it must have been about six stories at that time. And every time a flag came out, some ethnic group would really give out a yell! There was a flag for every country. And finally, my father is waiting there, and he is holding me by the hand, and there is no Jewish flag there. And in those days there were a lot of parades on Sixth Avenue North, and my father had a great big American flag and a great big Jewish flag, and to raise funds for Palestine, or whatever, they would have a parade, and marching bands and organizations all marching, and it took about eight people to handle the flag, and people would throw money into the flag along the parade route. They might raise \$50 to \$75, which was an awful lot of money in those days, and every time there was a parade they came to my father and borrowed the flag.

RL: This was the blue and white flag?

BB: With the Magen David, the star of Israel.

RL: Where did your father get it?

BB: He sold flags, all kinds of flags, in different sizes, little tiny waving flags to great big flags! But getting back to the Glass Block, there's no Jewish flag. He's getting burned up about it, so he goes in and he asks to see who is in charge of putting up the flags, and he says, "How come you haven't got a Jewish flag hanging out there?" He says, "We don't have a Jewish flag. If you can get us one, I will hang it." So my dad hopped on a jitney bus—he knew all the drivers—and told the driver what his mission was, and in ten minutes he was back to the store. He got the flag, and in another fifteen minutes—it took longer to fight through the throngs from the West Hotel to Glass Block a block away than it did to go and get the flag—they finally got it, and they finally put it out. They shifted the flags around because the entire Nicollet side was full of flags, and then they put out the Jewish flag, and a great big shout went up from the throngs of people. It was unbelievable! You were asking about my Dad, and we talked about the mantles and the tubes and the food products and the cigarette tobacco, and the Jewish New Year cards and the Passover items and religious items, which reminds me, there's an article that appeared 30 years ago or so in various publications throughout the country about Alex Kanter, a young Minneapolis attorney, bringing Supreme Court Justice Brandeis to the Brochin

store. He wanted to see the “melting pot” of the Jewish community in Minneapolis, and Kanter says what better place to bring a person than to Brochin’s Delicatessen! And he brought him in, and Mr. Brandeis viewed the scene!

RL: Was there anything else about the store that you forgot to mention?

BB: Oh, yes. In the back of the store, my father had a few tables with wire chairs and he had a little ice cream parlor, also. He sold ice cream cones for a penny and sundaes “for two cents plain.” Plain was a penny in those days, but if you put in strawberry flavor, or cherry flavor, or pineapple flavor—but strawberry was the favorite Jewish flavor—and people would sit and eat. I will never forget the containers that made the sodas; they were metal containers, with glasses that fitted into this “holder” for the sodas. And just think of it—a nickel for a corned beef sandwich! And my father wouldn’t sell anybody any ice cream if he had served them a corned beef sandwich or a salami sandwich. (Note: Observant Jews cannot eat meat and dairy products at the same meal.)

Another thing, this was during the immigration period and all these people were coming over without jobs. The Jewish Family Welfare Service was finding jobs for them. Most of them would wind up in the garment district, and the salaries were maybe \$5, \$6 or \$8 per week, and my father would stake every immigrant right off the bat to a half a loaf of bread, and 10 or 15 cents worth of salami, which could be half a pound, with the understanding that they would pay him from their first paycheck. And this was an ongoing process, the salami and the loaf of bread, and of course later on naturally all were customers in the store. They were also charge customers, and he had a spindle of charges—30, 40 cents—and if the order was \$1.25, that was a fantastically big order! People used to tell me as I grew older how my father staked them to their first food when they came over as immigrants. There was another event that took place in our area, when Forest Court, which was the first multiple dwelling, opened up on either Seventh or Eighth Avenue with a lot of hoopla—brass bands, and state dignitaries came to dedicate it. It was like a showplace of the area.

RL: How many apartments were there?

BB: I don’t think it had over maybe twelve or sixteen, but it was new, and it was a different concept in architecture.

RL: How tall a building was it?

BB: I don’t think it was over three stories. I was very young at the time, so I have a vague recollection of it. And incidentally, there was more than one telephone company in those days. There was Northwest Telephone and the Tri-State Telephone, and we had both services, two different telephones.

RL: Could you call back and forth?

BB: I don't recall whether they were interchangeable or not.

RL: Probably they weren't, if you had both of them.

BB: And in those days they had a streetcar going out to Tonka Bay and Spring Lake Park at the Hotel Del Otero, which only the more affluent would go to. The main recreation area was Keegan's Lake, or they would go out to Lake Harriet.

RL: That was a streetcar ride?

BB: That was also a streetcar ride, to Lake Harriet. But if you really wanted to go way, way out, you went to Spring Park. Of course, there were a lot of more affluent Jews who had homes in the Minnetonka area.

RL: Summer cottages?

BB: Summer cottages, yes. Only the Heffelfingers, the Pillsburys, the Washburns and the Crosbys had homes out in the Minnetonka area in those days. Another famous area was Minnehaha Falls, where the annual Talmud Torah picnics took place. And I will never forget how everybody, all the kids, would go, and so did the grownups, because there wasn't any radio, there wasn't any TV, and this was really an experience! And I recall that that Mrs. Farbstein took the children from the Jewish Sheltering Home to the picnic the same day they had the Talmud Torah picnic. And we all went by streetcar, naturally. And at that time, who had heard of Como Park? Minnehaha Falls had reindeer, fenced off, and bears, and right across the way was Longfellow Garden, and you'd walk right through. There were ponies, which I assumed were theirs, but the big treat was to get into Longfellow's Garden. It was my first exposure to a zoo! There were peacocks there, and naturally monkeys, and elephants, and lions, and it was really something! Later, I think, Longfellow's Zoo was incorporated with Como Park. And for the dare-devils of the Talmud Torah, the dare- devilish thing to do was to walk from one side to the other under the falls. And we did it, and to this day, when I look back, I can't imagine how nobody ever slipped down into the falls! We could see the falls and you just walked right across! It's amazing. This is long before the CCC built the beautiful walkway down to the falls. In those days there was a wooden structure that you walked down, and it was really rustic. I think the picnic was more of a highlight of Talmud Torah than graduation! Oh, I started to tell you before about when Heilicher walked into the store about 11:30 and was amazed to see me still working—I must have been ten or eleven years old, and I had to stand on a box to read the scale—and he had a perplexed look on his face, and then he finally said to me, "Now I know why you fall asleep in class all the time. Tomorrow I'm going to let you sleep." Those were appreciated words, because I used to work late in the store at night.

RL: Tell me about the Emanuel Cohen Center. You said they had a library. How big was it?

BB: Not as big as in the new building. Our house and the Emanuel Cohen Center were a block apart, and that was like the crossroads between the Talmud Torah and the people going up into the Homewood district. [The Homewood District is bounded by Oak Park Avenue and Plymouth Avenue on the north and south, and Penn Avenue and Theodore Wirth Park on the east and west.]

RL: You were going to tell me an interesting story about the Emanuel Cohen Center.

BB: Well, the fact was that the kids, say, from Emerson going north, went to the Emanuel Cohen Center for their athletic activities, and the kids from Emerson going south went in the opposite direction to the Wells Memorial Settlement House, and there was quite a rivalry between the two, even though we were all classmates in Lincoln Junior and at North High. In later years, the North High basketball team was comprised of the Jewish boys who went to Wells Memorial House and the kids who went to the Emanuel Cohen Center. As a matter of fact, one year, the team that I played on—and I never did make the North team, although I was on the squad—was practically the whole North High basketball team, and the rivalry was really intense between the Emanuel Cohen Center group, which was comprised of Bill Antonoff,

Max Chapman, Dr. Nathan Lifson, and our group. In those days, it was the old Emanuel Cohen house, and they didn't have as many facilities as the Wells Memorial offered. We also had a nice library, and the Emanuel Cohen Center used the old Talmud Torah gym. Did you know the old Talmud Torah on Eighth and Fremont actually had a swimming pool in the basement? I learned to swim in that pool. It was a small pool, but it did the job, and we spent a lot of nice evenings at the old Talmud Torah. It was an outstanding gym, and had much more facilities for kids to spend their time. In those days the Wells Memorial ran a camp, which I don't think the Emanuel Cohen Center did at that time. I never went to camp in my life. And some of the Jewish kids also played basketball and softball at the old South Side Neighborhood House.

RL: The Jewish kids from the North Side?

BB: No, no. There was a Romanian group who went to South High and lived around the Franklin and Fourteenth and Sixteenth Street area in those days. That's an interesting section. As a kid I used to go to that area and pass out Passover handbills. That was another one of my jobs as a youngster.

RL: Handbills for what?

BB: For Passover, the advertising for our Passover store, matzohs and things like that. And incidentally, talking about that, our store was the focus place for the politicians. In those days you didn't have radio or TV, so the politicians came out and met the people and they also got on soapboxes and gave their political speeches, on Sixth and Lyndale, and Aldrich and Lyndale, and Bryant and Lyndale. But where they would do their handshaking would be at our store, and my father numbered among his friends many old-

time judges like Judge Waite, Judge Fosseen, Judge William Larson, a friend of Floyd B. Olson—I mentioned him a while ago—and a very nice fellow. I would also pass out circulars for the politicians. And also, as kids, we would play a game called Election Cards. We would try to get as many different cards as we could from people running for office, and we would trade, to see who could have the biggest collection. The kids, as I said, they didn't have to spend time on radio and TV, although when we were in grade school we all built radio crystal sets with earphones, and we would get some local station, probably WDGY. I think it was Dr. Young, who had a station on Broadway in those days and later on he moved to the Oak Grove Hotel. But anyhow, as kids growing up, my father knew always where to find me when I wasn't in the store and he got busy. I would be at Sumner School playing baseball or football. He knew me, and said how could I go and play football when I knew he needed me so badly in the store, especially on Sunday afternoon, but I had to break away to get a little recreation! And we also played on the street; that is the one thing he worried about, though there weren't many cars.

RL: Did your brothers and sisters work in the store as much as you did?

BB: They all did. They all pitched in. But I think I worked the most. I was raised in the store.

RL: Where were you in the family? Oldest, youngest?

BB: I was the second from the oldest boy. There were two boys, and then three girls and then a boy, brother Joe, and then my youngest sister Gloria, who ran the store with my father when I was in the army during World War II.

[End of interview]

Interviewer's Note: When Brochin is talking about Jewish people who speak a language he calls "Jewish," he is really referring to the language that has become known as "Yiddish."