

Dr. Moses Barron
Narrator

Joan Sharp
Interviewer

January 1970
Los Angeles, California

Moses Barron -MB

Joan Sharp -JS

JS: This is Joan Sharp, formerly of Minneapolis. I am honored and privileged to be able to conduct this interview with the eminent Dr. Moses Barron, now residing in Beverly Hills. Dr. and Mrs. Barron have been residents of Beverly Hills for the past five years. Mrs. Barron, the former Leah Fligelman, was born and lived in Minneapolis for seventy-eight years. Dr. Barron was born in the state of Kovno Gubernia, Russia, [which is now part of modern-day Lithuania] in a little town called Skud. He came to Minneapolis at the age of five in 1888. Dr. Barron, would you begin by first telling us about your childhood and your parents? And then, as the interview continues, you can tell us of your years in Minneapolis, your great achievements in medicine, and of the eminent personages that were guests in your home.

MB: [speaking softly, away from the microphone] What do I say? This is Moses Barron?

[Speaking into the microphone] This is Moses Barron, physician, living now in Beverly Hills, California. I was born in Russia in 1883. My father left for America in 1884. He, of course, was a *yeshiva bocher*, that is, a Hebrew scholar and student. And came to America in eighteen hundred and eighty . . .

JS: Four.

MB: 1884. He came here, of course, without language, without money, and without friends. But at that time the Jewish people had arranged to take care of these immigrants so that he was soon fitted out with some material to go out peddling. First it was tin ware. And he started in New York and moved westward through Harrisburg, Pennsylvania and on and on until Minneapolis. He sent for us in eighteen hundred . . .

[Pause]

. . . poor type of residing on a farm, where none of us knew anything about farming. And my father, of course, was just a scholar. And he practically stepped out of the Seminary, the Hebrew Seminary, and took a boat to come to America. He called it that he was going to the golden land. Then, five years later, he had accumulated so much wealth that he could send steamship tickets for us; and for us means for my mother and my brother. We remained in Minneapolis only a

short time, and then he had gone westward on into Stevens County, and then bought a farm where he moved us out there very shortly. It was a dreary place. There was a one-room house with just a little attachment of a . . .

[Pause]

. . . of a small room like a woodshed, and in that we settled down to live our, at that time, experience. In 1894, after threshing on the farm, our neighbor south of us started a fire to produce a firebreak around the haystack. It was a windy day, and the fire jumped the fire break. And since the wind was south and fire around the farm was south of us, the fire spread very rapidly across the prairies, a distance of two miles, and got onto our farm, and especially on the yard where we had our buildings, and burnt everything down to the ground. Since our buildings were not very elaborate, they all burned down. And the wheat and oats and the other grains were thrown into the bedroom and partly in the living room because we had no granary.

This left us quite clear, without worldly goods. Father and Mother went to the town where we traded, and while there they were very pleasantly treated by our grocer and the other merchants. And when they came, they brought back a lot of secondhand furniture and things, and made it possible to start living again. The farmer who burnt us down had moved an old house of two rooms on the farm, and there we started our new life.

We went along as best we could with our ignorance of farming and the general situation for two years, until 1896. And then, unfortunately, an identical experience as in 1894. That same farmer started a fire in a . . . to make a fire break, and it jumped the fire break and the fire moved across the prairie and burnt us down complete, exactly the same as before, with all the grains that we had threshed, which had been again stored in the bedroom and in the living room, and all went down into the cellar. It was not a pleasant experience. But we adjusted ourselves and we kept going.

Then the question of schooling comes up. Our schoolhouse was three and three-quarters miles southeast of us. Of course, when winter came with the deep snow and the blizzards, it was not pleasant to walk that distance. You see, walking it was, because we had the few plow horses, but one or two had died and we had to replace them with oxen. Oxen were cheaper and they seemed to last longer without dying on us. So we had to work with oxen and we had to walk to the school, three and three-quarters miles away. And that is the way we made our education. That is about forty to forty-five or fifty days a year that we were able to go to school. And that's the way we went for a number of years.

In 1896, two years later, we had a similar fire, which again burnt us down. And again, the grain fell into the cellar, and we had to start all over again. It was quite depressing. But it was remarkable how Father and Mother were able to keep up their spirits. And Father, I think, with his studies of the Talmud and the other Hebrew literature, was able to make it a little better than Mother. But Mother also was very fine adjusted. And I think, as I think back onto it, it was remarkable how they were able to go through all these sad experiences, which we had to go through in the first years of our life of the farm.

After we got started again with planting and harvesting and haying and all the things that go with work on the farm, we got accustomed, and we made some . . . I think a fairly good class of farmers. It was hard work, but as I look back on life there, I felt that I took it very well. And in fact, the whole family took it very well. I was surprised at the way Mother could carry on. Of course, I suppose, just like everybody else's parents, Mother and Father were really remarkable people for adaptation. I think they were real Jews, because Jews had to adapt themselves wherever they went as they had to go in and out of countries continuously throughout their experiences. And the way they did it on the farm explained to me why the Jews were able to carry on so well and come out so remarkably on the plus side in every phase of life.

JS: Now I should go . . .

MB: So . . . so . . .

JS: Okay.

MB: So that's the way we went from day to day, and month to month, and year to year. We had several years of fires that burned us out, that kept us down all the time in regard to finances. But we got along. And sometimes we almost enjoyed the experiences. Haying time was a good time to enjoy. The weather was good. And the aromas of the hay always pleased us.

Now then, we had other experiences. One time there was a very peculiar experience. We heard singing in the evening from people that had come from the direction of Herman, Minnesota. And we thought that they were probably peddlers that were coming along, because we had quite a few peddlers that would stop off at our place to stay overnight. Then once we had some peddlers come who were not too pleasant. And they were some that had come from Arabia, that were peddling here, and from other Oriental countries. And some of them did not act quite as friendly as the usual peddlers. One night we heard men singing along the road and coming towards our home. The main road from Herman, Minnesota, going to Graceville, a distance of about twenty-five miles; it cut through the corner of our land, of our quarter section. And when they came onto our farm, we were at first scared just as they were driving in on our yard. And we went out on the field and laid down in the sloughs so they wouldn't see us. But it was just a scare for nothing because it was a very friendly people who were doing the peddling.

Then we went along this way, and we always wanted to get more education. So we went to Fargo, North Dakota. Fargo was about eighty-five miles northwest of us, and it was of course in the wintertime that we'd go to school. I was there just one month when I developed typhoid fever, and I ran quite a severe course. But I came out, and of course I didn't write any letters home, so I had to take a picture of myself to show Mother that I was still alive.

JS: [Chuckles]

MB: And the picture was very good. It showed me as a little shrunken individual with a small neck and . . . that suit that I wore was rented from a secondhand store, a relative of where we were staying. And it was hanging loose like a gunny sack on me. But anyway, it . . . worked

through. And I went there for the eighth grade, in order that I should be able to go to high school to go to the university later on.

So we had our little . . . I would have little pieces to recite and one of them went like this: "When I am a man, a man, a doctor I'll be, if I can, and I can. My powders and pills shall be nice and sweet, and you shall have just what you like to eat. I'll prescribe for you riding and sailing and such, and above all things, you must *never* study too much. When I am a man." Well, this thing hung on to me, and it always went with the idea that as soon as I was able, I'd go to the university to medical school and in order to become a doctor. And I carried it through as I planned, went to the University [of Minnesota], taking the six-years medical course: two years of pre-medic work and four years of the medical course. I graduated in 1911 from medicine.

After that, I took a year's residency at the University Hospital. I had quite an exciting time as a resident. There were four of us to go into the hospital to be interns. Three of them went out into practice during the summer and didn't come in, so I remained to run the whole hospital. So I had to divide my time. In the forenoon, I made rounds with my medical man. In the afternoon, I made rounds with my surgeons. And at night, I delivered the babies. In that way, I got a very good rounded type of residency.

One night, while preparing a lecture for my students, it was about eleven or eleven thirty p.m., I heard the distant call from the newsboys. And they were yelling out, "Extra! Extra! War is declared with Germany!" Well, that was quite a shock. And it explained as to what was going to be in the future. So then afterwards I went to France in nineteen . . .

JS: Seventeen.

MB: 1917. And I remained there for a year. I came home in 1919.

JS: And you married July . . . ?

MB: At that time, I met a most wonderful girl, by name of Leah Fliegelman. She was a brilliant girl, and her mental capacity was far in excess of mine. So we got married on June the 26th, 1919. And in 1920 we had our first child, Louis, our oldest boy. And then we had two more boys, two years apart. And then, six years later, our final child was a girl. And she was such a wonderful little baby. I had always hoped for little girls. I was partial to little girls. And I got just what I had hoped for. A marvelous child, smiling, and her . . . we named her Toni. All the children were named as follows: Louis was the oldest, David was next, Jesse was the youngest boy, and then six years later was Toni, our little girl.

We went to Vienna on May the 26th, nineteen hundred . . .

[Unclear background noise]

JS: Alright. [Unclear] right now. 1926.

MB: 1926. I was there eight months. I was very glad that I went because I got an opportunity to meet some of the very fine learned medical men and scientists. And I got extra training in pathology, and that was very good for me.

Unknown Female Voice – Mrs. Barron?: [Unclear] already teaching for five years there.

MB: I had been teaching about five years before I went to Vienna. And then I continued studies and I continued with my teaching, especially in pathology. And at the same time, I did part time practice.

[Pause]

MB: [Speaking away from the microphone] Alright?

[Speaking into the microphone] In my work in pathology, I happened to run across a case that was very interesting, and has proved of great value to mankind. It was a case in which there were certain pathological changes in the pancreas and the pancreatic ducts. And from that, I was able to show that there were two kinds of hormone secretions from the pancreas; those from the general cells, and those from the islets of Langerhans. And that paper has resulted in a better understanding of the secretions from the pancreas, and how it brings about both the digestive processes of carbohydrates and the changes in the sugar metabolism by a certain substance that had not been known before.

In fact, Dr. [John] Macleod, one of the best trained men in the physiology of the organs, and especially of the pancreas, was not quite sure that my conclusions were correct. And he was telling one of the doctors who wanted to do some research work on my suggestions; he told him that, "What are you going to do? You think you'll get results in a field where hundreds of the great scientists have been working on? And they've never been able even to show that there is a hormone secreted by the islets of Langerhans." But anyway, it has brought out good results, because this work created . . . helped to create insulin.

And insulin was studied and began to be manufactured and used all over the world, and has relieved illness and caused a great improvement in the health of many people who had changes in the pancreas. That was one of the great contributions that I feel that my work has done, in making it possible to study a field that had not been known much before. In calling attention to the types of secretions by the pancreas, Dr. [Frederick G.] Banting of Toronto, Canada, came across my paper and became very much interested in it. And he went to work studying the secretions, and he was able to elaborate. And it started the manufacturers, especially Eli Lilly and Company, to take up the work that I had suggested. And insulin was created and distributed; the knowledge of its preparation and use throughout the world.

There was an interesting episode connected with the development of work which followed the study and continuing . . .

[Rustling paper noises]

JS: Work.

MB: Continuing work in the discovery and use of insulin from the secretions of the pancreas. It was found that two students, graduate students were necessary to follow up the work as suggested by Dr. Macleod of Toronto. In choosing those students, a coin was flipped, and it fell first . . . it was for four weeks by our students each. No. Four weeks by each graduate, two in a series. When the first man who was chosen by the flip of a coin was Dr. [Charles] Best, and the second one was . . .

JS: Well, you don't have to name him.

MB: [Unclear].

JS: [Unclear] because this was a . . .

MB: The flip of the coin was to suggest who was to be the first assistant and who was to follow, being the second assistant. Well, it fell to Dr. Best to be the first assistant in the work on the dogs for the . . .

JS: Experiment. Experiments.

MB: Experiments. The [unclear].

JS: Dr. Best worked for . . .

MB: Dr. Best was first chosen according to the flip of the coin to do the first four weeks, and then the second one was to follow him, but it seemed that he was already occupied and couldn't come. So that Best continued with the work on this pancreatic secretion. Now one sees how little it takes to change the course of events in many cases. Dr. Best was just a student like the others, a keen student, but just about the same as the one that followed him. But by having . . . but became the assistant, when it came for the second man to come, he was . . .

JS: I think it's . . .

MB: The flip of the coin determined that Dr. Best was chosen for the second four weeks as well as the first four weeks. And, in that way, it determined his whole future course and made him famous throughout the world by carrying out the experiments that led to the discovery and use of insulin throughout the world.

During the period from the time that I stopped active practice and the time that I went out of the teaching in the medical field, I wrote about thirty-five papers, and many of them seemed to prove quite valuable in medical science. During the entire time that I was carrying on my work, from the time that I graduated from school and the time that I gave up the practice of medicine, I wrote about thirty-five papers. And I continued writing until I left Minneapolis and moved to Los Angeles, California.

Mrs. Barron?: In 1964.

MB: In 1964.

JS: And also say that you continued your practice....

[Recording interruption]

[Tape 1 Side B]

MB: During the entire period that I was interested in this type of work, and that Mrs. Barron also was working with the women a good deal, and the two of us worked together most of the time. We had opportunity to have a number of prominent people come to our home. The list was rather large. I'm going to name a few of them. There was a Dr. Swadron, Robert Swadron [sp?] from Europe. Dr. Abrahami [sp?], Max Easterman [sp?] from England, Dr. Perlsweig [s?] who was from Europe. I.F. Stone [a well-known American journalist], who had come to our home a number of times, and was interested in the Jewish problem. Then we had Golda Meir, who was a visitor here just recently, and she always was a valuable visitor to our home.

One outstanding man was Hugo Bergmann, a professor that had a lot of interesting experiences to relate. And then Abe Frankel, from Israel, and a Dr. Bodenheimer, who was a student of microbiology. He was quite a learned and trained individual, and gave some very interesting talks. Walter Fisher, Edward Jackson, Itimar Ben-Avi, a very delightful young man who was greatly absorbed in the Jewish affairs, Jewish life. And also his father, Eliezar Ben-Yehuda. This man was very well versed in Jewish history and in Hebrew, and made a very fine visitor. A man by the name of Abe Tuvim visited us and he was traveling around and was trying to organize large groups for the raising of funds for Israel. He did it especially amongst the wealthier classes. A very interesting visitor was Lord Lester . . .

[Long Pause]

MB: . . . for the American Israel Cultural Fund occupied a number of these people and tried to raise funds for carrying on this work of unifying the Jewish people, especially the leaders who could do so much for the building up of Israel.

I mentioned that we had organized the Jewish Literary Society in my early attendance to the University [of Minnesota], and this was very well attended and it grew because it took in more fields. And following this organization, we had formed more extensive organizations for meeting problems. Then we organized the Hillel, our society, which was quite more extensive, went more deeply into the Jewish history, and it turned out to be quite a cultural group.

In the Hillel organization, we were able to bring in a number of important speakers who gave us historical, literary, and cultural talks that helped us to keep us well informed on things Jewish amongst the university students. In this work that we did outside of our specific work in the medical fields, we made contacts with the non-Jewish groups. And in that way we were able to

convey many of the characteristics of the Jewish people in their historical development to the non-Jews. And we had a number of comments of the worthwhileness of such work.

In my work in medicine, I had done some special work in pathology, so that I was a little better trained in pathology than most of the doctors were. And I could present talks and go to groups, get together for the purpose of studying the pathological or the disease side of the subject of medicine.

In the early stages, I was President of the Minnesota Pathological Society, which I conducted for a number of years. At one of the medical meetings that I attended in Dallas, Texas, which was the American Medical Organization. While I was gone, Mrs. Barron had an experience of having been shown a rather attractive home, and she thought that it was entirely out of our reach. When I came back, she very quickly took me to show me the house. And as I walked in I said, "Well, I don't know what you want of me here. This is altogether too big and too beautiful and certainly it's not a type of home that we could use." But in asking some of our relatives, they said, "That would be just the house for you, where you could have the meetings." And of course Mrs. Barron and I always planned on having various types of meetings dealing with problems that distinctly Jewish and some that are just humanitarian.

So, after talking it over, we decided that probably we ought to take the place. So we bought this home. It was a very beautiful home. And it was in this house that we were able to have meetings where several times Mrs. Barron fed groups at our home of over two hundred people, two hundred and twenty-five at one time. That gave us a chance to do exactly the type of work that we wanted to do. Come in contact with the people, and it gave us an opportunity to discuss the problems facing the Jewish people. It was a useful type of home, so that we lived there for nineteen years. And this was really quite an opportunity to do the type of work that we were so interested in. Contacts with the outside world.

I had enjoyed this home so much that I thought this was going to be our homestead for our great grandchildren. But that's not the way things work. In the block where we were, which happened to be just a few blocks from downtown, and yet it was a very beautiful location. As time went on, we made good use of the home, and we had some very wonderful meetings there, and groups for discussing our general problems. And then the changes that occur happened. That is, this location was a very fine residential district, and then gradually it was replaced by boarding rooms and boarding houses, until we were almost left alone. And we found that we had to move out so as to give the people who were interested in this type of work could take over. So we moved to . . . we moved out of this home and bought a home on Lake of the Isles, a very beautiful home there that we enjoyed very much, and that we occupied until . . .

[Pause]

[Speaking away from the microphone] Alright.

[Speaking into microphone] Until we decided to move to California. And so that in 1964 we left Minneapolis and came to Los Angeles. We had some very pleasant experiences at the time when we were leaving. We found that many of the neighbors and friends . . . gave us some special

treatment. And one of them that was very good, was an article in the *Minneapolis Star* about something that I've never seen before. It was an article written as an editorial on the editorial page. And it was headed, "The Barron's Depart." And it gave some very fine statements about our living in Minneapolis and what it meant, and that they were very happy with our living there. So it gave us a chance to see that sometimes you're appreciated for what you are trying to do and their treatment of us certainly showed it up very well.

[Pause]

The article as it occurred, when it said that the Barron's depart, said that we had added something to the life of the city. And that made us feel very good. Because Mrs. Barron and I had written many letters to the paper for the importance of Zionism in the life of the people and how it should be supported. And the paper was not too favorably impressed with these ideas about the importance of Zionism. But when it came and we were leaving, they were all so kindly in their comments, that we were moved by the friendship and good fellowship that was shown at that time. And with that type of a feeling, we came to Los Angeles. This was in September of 1964. In Los Angeles, we could not get in at once in the work for the Jewish causes, but we tried to affiliate as much as we were able to. And it is rather difficult to come into a large strange place with very few . . .

[Pause]

JS: Alright.

MB: . . . with close friends.

JS: Right.

MB: And in that way, it took much longer to come to the same station in the communal life as we had while we were in Minneapolis. We had lived there for so many years. But we found this a very unusually fine city. People are much . . . wealthier here. And the great difference that we found between the communal life of Minneapolis and the communal life here is that when they have their drives for funds, in Minneapolis . . . whereas in Minneapolis we'd have the drives where we'd be expected to give five, ten, fifteen, or twenty-five dollars. Here it is fifty, a hundred, or five hundred dollars, and some much higher than that. So that it is quite a different economic type of life in Los Angeles from what it is in Minneapolis. And of course we had our roots in Minneapolis, so that we were much more attentive to things that were going on, and we were able to mingle more in the various affairs that involved various groups.

[Pause]

MB: . . . this meeting was being held. And we had hoped to raise certain funds and this . . . some . . . one of the men came in. He said he had been going around seeing some people, and they're going to raise a fund to build a . . . going to organize an organization that would work for peace and for general welfare purposes. And they said that they're going around getting pledges of a hundred thousand dollars, nothing less than that. Each pledge is a hundred thousand dollars. And

within a short time, they had raised over two million dollars for that cause. Well, that's something that can happen only in a city like Los Angeles, never in towns like Minneapolis.

Well, reviewing the experiences during the past eighty-six years, the life here is quite good and comfortable. And we are getting along quite well. Of course, we have now reached the ages . . . we are reaching the ages that in some fields are getting somewhat uncomfortable. But all I know, it is quite bearable and quite good, in fact. So that I think that it probably was a very good choice when we changed the location from areas where we had our nice winter weather with twenty, thirty, and forty below zero at times, and snowdrifts that would go from two, five, to twenty-two feet in height, to a place like coming to Los Angeles. I found that I was right in not taking along the snow shovel.

JS: [Chuckles]

MB: And it makes it much more comfortable where you don't have to go out and feel as if you are going to freeze. And the heat is probably about the same in the summertime over there. It gets quite hot and it's quite hot here. And it . . . the temperatures are . . . oh, they are comfortable enough both ways. In the cold Minnesota and in the warm California.

Well, this has been a long conversation. And it tells fairly well the experiences that we've gone through for a long period of time. And the situation is good. We are quite contented here. And we hope that things will go on well for us, and for the community, and for the Jewish people throughout the world, and for the entire world, Jewish or non-Jewish, for every peoples, wherever they may be. And we hope that it will be convenient years ahead of us where we shall just keep going the way nature has planned for us.

I want to relate an interesting experience that I had with Itimar Ben-Avi's father Eliezar Ben-Yehuda. He had a peculiarity that he would talk nothing but Hebrew, so that he made his wife talk Hebrew to him all the time, never any other language. I happened to be with him one day, and as I was walking along on Nicollet Avenue, I started talking with him. In English, of course. Well, he paid no attention to me as if I didn't exist. So then it occurred to me that I am on the wrong track. So I thought, well, I'll talk to him in Yiddish.

JS: That was [unclear] wasn't it?

MB: Huh?

JS: That was [unclear].

MB: And so I changed to Yiddish, and I kept on talking with him. But he did the same thing, paid no attention as if I didn't exist. So then I realized that I was on the wrong road and I would be unable to converse with him, because the only way one could converse with him is in Hebrew, and I cannot speak Hebrew. So that my Yiddish was of no avail, my English was of no avail, and I had to let my conversation with this important man . . . I had to let him go.

JS: And [unclear].

MB: An interesting fact about Eliezar Ben-Yehuda that you know is that he's the one that has modernized Hebrew. And that made it a Hebrew language where people can talk with it and use it . . . not to use it only for prayers. So that he has a standing for this incident that kept on talking, even when he was going to get married to his wife. She could not speak Hebrew, but he refused to talk anything but Hebrew until she learned the language.

Mrs. Barron?: I don't know if was for sure that she couldn't speak Hebrew.

MB: And maybe that was to the insistence of Eliezar Ben-Yehuda to use Hebrew at all times that brought the language to be used now in Israel and in other lands as the language of . . .

JS: Language of . . . the people today.

MB: Of the people today in many lands.

[End of recording]

Jews in Minnesota Oral History Project
Minnesota Historical Society