

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY
ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Rabbi Sidney Berkowitz

Personal Experience

O.H. 1518

MARY C. HAMMOND

Interviewed

by

Matthew T. Butts

on

June 24, 1992

MARY CARLTON HAMMOND

Mrs. Mary Carlton Hammond was born on September 25, 1914, in the city of Youngstown, Ohio, the daughter of Calvin and Mary Allison Wright. Growing up near the North Side of the city, Hammond attended secondary school at the Rayen High School, graduating in 1932.

Following high school, Hammond entered college at Westminster College, achieving her Bachelor of Arts Degree in 1935. Mrs. Hammond then gained employment with the Youngstown Public Schools, teaching at Rayen High School. She also furthered her education by pursuing her masters degree at Western Reserve University, earning it in 1941. In the following years, Mrs. Hammond continued to teach, working at Youngstown University from 1956 thru 1961 and Boardman High School from 1962 thru 1977. Presently, Mrs. Hammond enjoys retired life. She resides with her husband, Attorney Robert Hammond, at 2008 Volney Road, Youngstown, Ohio. She continues to be an active member of the congregation of First Christian Church, and local area studying and gardening clubs. Mrs. Hammond spends much of her free time traveling, reading, walking, and visiting with her many grandchildren.

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INTERVIEWEE: MARY C. HAMMOND
INTERVIEWER: Matthew T. Butts
SUBJECT: Jewish community, Rabbi Berkowitz, religion,
Youngstown community
DATE: June 24, 1992

B: This is an interview with Mary Carlton Hammond for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, on the Rabbi Berkowitz project, including the Youngstown Community and the Youngstown Jewish Community, by Matthew Butts, at her residence, 2008 Volney Road, Youngstown, Ohio, on Wednesday, June 24, 1992, at 10:10 a.m.

Okay. There we go. We need to hear more about, back when your family started, sorry.

H: Okay. No. It's just that I managed to get through college on very little money and [was] one of the few, obviously, who paid back a student loan, after I started to teach.

B: Did you have any brothers and sisters?

H: I have one sister who is now deceased.

B: What was her name?

H: Margaret Allison Wright McCurdy.

B: What struck you about Youngstown when you came here?

H: The struggle, I guess, because as I say, these were very hard times. He, Robert Hammond, said his family was very little affected by the Depression. I would say that ours was very badly affected.

B: What did Youngstown look like then, in comparison to its present shape and form?

H: Well, of course, West Federal Street was a thriving street. All the buildings were occupied, then.

(Mary's husband, Robert, comes into the interview here.)

RH: [There were] 15 theaters downtown.

MH: Yes. It was a thriving town. I had come from what was--I would have to say--a pretty dead little town. What was it? The Radiator Works was THE industry, and other than that, I guess there wasn't anything. We really didn't have any connection with that, but I just know that it was there. So, Youngstown seemed like quite a big city to me.

B: When did you guys first meet?

MH: Well, we first met in about 1940, didn't we? We were introduced by a friend, but Bob went off to the service, went back. There were no sparks, obviously. He went to the service, and I was teaching at the Rayen School. Then, when he came home in November of 1945, we ran into each other downtown, just by chance. Then, later that day, why, the phone rang at my house and he asked me out. And by then, the sparks were bursting into flames, and we were married [on] July 1 of 1946.

B: Did you go to the Rayen School also, for your high school education?

MH: Yes.

B: What was it like going to school there?

MH: It was good! It was a very good school, then.

RH: She started teaching there in 1940.

MH: Yes.

RH: How old were you then?

MH: Well, I was 25.

RH: She started teaching high school when she was 25, so she was just a few years older than the students.

MH: Well, I had taught before that, though.

RH: You started teaching when you were 20. She finished college and started teaching when she was 20.

B: What was the Rayen School like?

MH: It was a very good school. It had a marvelous reputation, really.

RH: You didn't take college boards if you graduated from the Rayen School. They just admitted, [like] ivy league and the rest of them.

MH: A lot of the faculty had come there immediately after World War I, so it was a very, kind of, stable, reliable situation with people teaching what they were best qualified to teach. You know, the situation develops many times where they need a biology teacher, so you had a couple courses in biology, and so you're it. That's not what your--your major is history, but [they] also need a biology teacher. I don't think there was any of that going on at the time that I was a student there. Everybody was teaching what he was best qualified to teach.

B: Did Mrs. Berkowitz teach at the Rayen School?

MH: No. No. No. No. We met through the Millstones. I met them (Mr. and Mrs. Berkowitz) through Fran and Phil Millstone.

RH: I think we ought to finish up on you, that you then went to Western Reserve in the summer, and got your Masters in French.

MH: Right. I was teaching part-time. It was then Youngstown University. It wasn't YSU, you know. Fran Millstone knew that I was teaching French part-time at Youngstown University, and it was Jane Alfred, I think, that sparked the whole thing. She and her husband, at that time, owned Livingston's, which was a ladies apparel store, and she was gung-ho on learning French. She wanted a little French conversation group. So, Fran got me interested in it, and Pauline--she was going to college then. She had not finished college before she and Dr. Berkowitz were married. So, we were this little group with occasional other people who came in. Then, when Pauline was nearing the completion of her course at Youngstown State--I guess it was by then--she asked me if I would accept her as a student teacher with me. By then, I was at Boardman. No, I was at Liberty. I forgot to put that down. I was at Liberty, in Trumbull County. I said, "Fine." She

said, "Of course, they usually don't give you your first choice. When you say you'd like to student teach at Liberty, then they'll probably give you some other school. But they did assign her to do her student teaching with me, and that was really the beginning of our good friendship, when she did her student teaching with me. And interestingly enough, she graduated from Youngstown State the same year that their older son, Roger, graduated from Rayen. They had a kind of a joint graduation party.

B: So, it was through Mrs. Berkowitz that you met the rabbi?

MH: Yes. I didn't know him. Bob's connection was through Rotary, but I didn't know him until after Pauline and I became friends.

B: What struck you about the Rabbi Berkowitz when you first met him?

MH: [He was] pleasant, genial, [and] funny. A delightful guest in your home. An easy person to be around.

B: Do you remember any funny occurrences with him, anything that he did? They often mention the Ten Commandments.

MH: That's the one that we both think of always was so funny. I mean, everybody standing and applauding this movie. I really can't think of anything else except [that] I just enjoyed his company. I can't think of any specifics.

B: How did you perceive Dr. Berkowitz's role within the Youngstown community?

MH: Hyperactive. No. I think he was associated with so many boards and causes and groups and so on, and I always had the feeling that he was more than just a member. He was always a very active participant. As Bob said, "He generally chaired whatever meeting it was." I really never could understand how he could spread himself so thin, and obviously, it took its toll.

B: Was Mrs. Berkowitz also as involved [along] with him?

MH: No, no. I think she did her own thing. I think, if I recall, she started to college as an escape route from the things that she thought were expected of her at the temple. She was not about to be the first mate of that ship, you know, with her husband captain. So that, she decided that she would definitely do her own thing, which she then did. [She] went to college, got her

degree, started to teach, and continued to teach until, I think, about two years ago, when she retired from the Kent State-Warren Branch.

B: Were you familiar with any of Rabbi Berkowitz's activities within the community, the Civil Rights Movement, the Vietnam War?

MH: No.

B: Did he ever come to the public schools within the area to give talks and anything like that?

MH: Not to my knowledge. It wasn't anything that I was involved in.

B: Along with your husband, attending the weddings and bar mitzvahs, how did you perceive how Rabbi Berkowitz ran a service within the temple?

MH: Well, let's see. Efficiently. Of course, naturally, even though it was a Reform temple, much of what they did was not anything that we understood, because they--like, their responsive reading was in Hebrew, so at bar mitzvahs, these children have to. . . . I know that several of the--somebody said that they have to learn all of that. I think the children read most of it, but Hebrew seems to be a very difficult language to pronounce, and the fact that they could read it acceptably was impressive to me. He always said that, you know, rabbi gave them a charge of what this meant to be bar mitzvahed and so on, very impressive.

B: This charge that he gave, was it similar to all of his public speaking? Was he a great orator, public speaker?

MH: Oh, I think so, yes. Although, I don't know that I ever heard him, but I would assume that that carried over in whatever he did.

B: How do you think Rabbi Berkowitz impacted on the Youngstown Jewish Community?

MH: Well, I remember one time, a friend of mine describing a young man who was half-Jewish and whose mother was gentile. His father was Jewish, and he had decided to be Jewish. Her description of him was, "I don't want you to like me in spite of the fact that I'm Jewish. I want you to like me because I'm Jewish," and that maybe is sort of a description of. . . . Because I'm Jewish, not in spite of it. It was always there, I think.

RH: Yes. Don't forgive my Jewishness.

MH: Yes. It was always there. "I know that you're different from me and. . . ."

RH: "But don't think you have to forgive me."

MH: Yes.

B: When he visited your church, Reverend Beach's church, your Sunday school, from what you remember, what was it like when he came in, his talk and things?

MH: Well, [there were] these huge, big meetings. This was not during a Sunday service. This would be a, you know, a group meeting where he was going to be the speaker. He was certainly very well received. Everybody who had come was looking forward to hearing him, and--you say how he impacted on the group? It was a whole hearted, welcome reception.

B: Were Reverend Beach and Rabbi Berkowitz close personal friends, also?

MH: I suppose as much as two very busy men can be. Reverend Beach was equally active in the community, and I'm sure he was on as many boards and chaired as many meetings as Dr. Berkowitz. So, how much people like that have time to be personal friends? I don't know. They probably met each other with great frequency at the meetings that they went to.

B: How do you think Rabbi Berkowitz impacted the various churches within the area, religions within the area?

MH: I never heard of his being invited to other Protestant churches. We always felt that the connection was pretty much Rodef Sholom and First Christian, that it wasn't a general thing that he went to other Protestant churches.

B: If you had to describe some attributes of Rabbi Berkowitz's personality, what would they be?

MH: [He was] forceful, motivated, [and] very sure of his opinions or his judgment.

B: Knowing Rabbi Berkowitz was involved in so many things, social causes and things, would you describe him as a Utilitarian individual? That he was actually concerned--he used to provide a name for concerns, things concerned with the civil rights movements. Was he very focused with his convictions?

MH: I think so.

B: Where would he fall--I hate to use the terms liberal or conservative. Would he be interested in civil liberties, things like that, social causes? Do you remember anything to that extent?

MH: Well, if that makes you liberal, then I guess so, except that liberal within my particular views.

RH: I recall Sid, quite liberal.

B: Is there any one event or one time you met Rabbi Berkowitz some place that stands out in your mind?

MH: They were always a couple when I met them, you know that? I had no occasion to meet him apart from Pauline, because I wasn't at the meetings where he--or involved in the causes he was. So they were a couple, rather than Sidney as an individual.

B: What struck you about their relationship?

MH: He was very proud of her. She was very proud of him.

B: Is there anything else you think that we should add or. . . ?

MH: Well, as far as their family is concerned, I know that he had very high goals for both of their sons, to which they lived up totally. I mean, they're both excellent students of Rayen and on into college. They're both achievers, and in the real world, their older son, Roger, is a curator of--what is it--18th century silver. It's his specialty. He has a doctorate in museology, and he's at the Toledo Fine Arts Museum. Larry is a super qualified, plastic surgeon.

RH: He's been practicing in California and teaching at the University of California.

MH: Now, he hadn't made as much of a success of his personal life. He's, as I understand it, married and divorced three times. That's kind of a disaster in your personal life. Roger, on the other hand, has had a very, very stable marriage with a very brilliant, talented woman, who is an attorney and teaches at the University of Toledo.

B: Do you still see Mrs. Berkowitz?

MH: No. Not with any great frequency.

B: I was speaking to her and speaking of her younger son, who is the plastic surgeon. I guess she has been going to South America.

MH: Yes.

B: Has she talked to you at all about him doing that?

MH: Yes. I guess it was more for a fun trip to her. The first time he suggested it--but, he does this volunteer work in some of the less developed countries, where they wouldn't have access to such fine medical skill under other circumstances. He took her along as an interpreter.

B: Okay.

(Inaudible. All three parties are talking at once.)

RH: She got her Masters [Degree] in French at Middlebury, and then, she got her degree in Spanish. And she got, I think, a Masters Degree at the University of Salamanca, Spain. Sid gave her time to go there and get that degree, so she is fluent in both Spanish and French.

MH: As a matter of fact, yes. They needed her more for Spanish than for French, apparently, at Kent State. That's what she has taught, principally.

RH: When Sidney died, very suddenly--oh, it was very traumatic. One of the great things that Larry did, Larry took her to South America with him. The surgeons, like Dick Murray, Larry, and the others who go, you know, they have no expense, whatever. More importantly, they have no malpractice liability in any of the foreign countries, so they can go ahead and experiment. They can do things that can bring 20th century medicine, or even 19th century medicine, to these backwards communities. He took Pauline down to South America, and that was a wonderful thing for her, because it helped her get over Sidney's death.

B: He wasn't ill or anything?

MH: No. He died very suddenly.

B: Was it a heart attack or. . . ?

MH: Yes.

B: Was there a sense of awe within the Jewish community that was sort of, like, rocked by his passing?

MH: Oh, I'm sure they were. If you have your pastor one day, and the next day he's gone. . . .

RH: And you've had him for 30 years. . . .

MH: Yes. And, you know, he hasn't issued a notice: "I'm going to retire at the end of June," or something like that, you know. And then, all of a sudden, you don't have him. Sure, that was traumatic!

B: Do you feel that a vacuum immediately opened with his passing within the Jewish communities, or leadership, or even within the Youngstown Community, since he's such a vocal member of the Youngstown Community?

MH: Oh, I would presume so. And I don't know whether we just don't have occasion to hear about it because we did have, like, a social connection with the Berkowitz's, but I don't remember that Rabbi Powers jumped in with both feet into all of the things that Sidney had associated with. He's gone now, of course.

RH: I think a great price that a community pays for the short-term that these leaders are with us is the long term leadership. Bishop Malone has given that to the community because he's been here a long time, but you look around. You look at the churches here, and they do not have long-term pastors, and the companies do not have long--the presidencies in here. You don't have a company that was here for 15 or 20 years, and it takes that kind of time to make an impression and give leadership to a community. Now, it may be great to have these people come and go every four years, but its tough on a community, because you don't get attached. It's like changing fathers every five years.

B: Did either of you attend his funeral?

MH: Oh, yes.

RH: Yes.

B: What struck you about that? I imagine it was jam-packed. What struck you about that, Bishop Malone's eulogy?

MH: Well, my recollection of it is somewhat vague, but he was right on the money on all the things that he cited as the--contributing to a selfless, worthwhile life.

RH: I think the thing that struck you most was that a Catholic bishop was doing the eulogy for a Jewish rabbi. Now, that is news. That's a "man bites dog" story.

B: Would it be fair to say that Rabbi Berkowitz and Bishop Malone were life brothers?

RH: I wouldn't know.

MH: Well, they were both very defiantly leaders in their individual fields.

B: Are you familiar with them cooperating on anything, or was that quite frequently in numerous things?

RH: There's a kind of a creation of when you're in a leadership position in your community for a period of years, they keep piling more things on because they know you do these things.

MH: Yes. That's it.

RH: And when you're only there four or five years, you're gone before people know that, and they finally get to a position where they're almost only contributing their name and not their presence, but the association with it is important. One of the first things you do when you get a list requesting money is you look down the list and see the people who are on the board. And when you see names like Sister Jerome Corcoran or Bishop Malone or someone else that you know has a long stable relationship that enhances them. . . .

MH: Sister Susan.

RH: Sister Susan was stable. You lose that when you keep changing people.

MH: If you can't gather together, if you have too much to do to be a working member, then you get them to be honorary chairman.

B: Is there anything else that you'd like to add about Rabbi Berkowitz or Mrs. Berkowitz and your relationship with them?

MH: Well, I think they're both delightful people. We're very pleased to have had him as a friend and pleased that Pauline is still our friend, even though we see each other infrequently.

RH: Since Roger was mentioned, I want to mention this about Roger. Roger went to Washington and started law school, and [after] two or three months, he hated it, hated it! Just hated it! Then, he was smart enough to sit down and think, "Well, where do I like to be? Where am I happy? Well, I'm happiest in the museum." So, he went to the University of Michigan and got a degree in museology, and he brought the, I think, the Chesterdale International Prize to the University of Michigan. He was the first student or graduate who had ever brought that--the University of Michigan was my school. That was a prize, that was a year's fellowship, I think. He went anyplace in the world he wanted

to go at their expense, but it was a great prize for the school. I must say, that maybe Roger is Sidney's brilliance coupled by Pauline's gentleness.

MH: He's a lovely man. He's just the nicest person you can imagine and, you know, in a position of considerable responsibility and importance. We went to a special exhibit at the Toledo Museum, oh, about a year and a half ago, and I had written and said we'd be there on such and such a day. He followed us through one gallery after another until he finally caught up with us, and we had a nice little visit. We know him much better than we know Larry, but we admire both of them.

B: Is there anything you'd like to add at this time?

MH: I don't know how much I contributed, but I was impressed by your interview. I guess I'd have to say that we feel honored that we're suggested by Pauline to contribute whatever we could. I was surprised, but I think it was nice.

B: Well, it was a good interview. Thank you very much. Thank you very much, both of you, for your time.

MH: You're welcome.

RH: Yes. You're welcome.

END OF INTERVIEW