

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

YSU Rabbi Berkowitz Project

Rabbi Berkowitz

O.H. 1537

LUCILLE RUDICK

Interviewed

by

Matthew Butts

on

June 29, 1992

Lucille Rudick

Mrs. Lucille R. Rudick was born on August 23, 1914 on the North Side of Youngstown, Ohio and was the daughter of Louis and Nettye Rosenbaum. Growing up on the North Side of the city, Rudick attended school at Hayes Junior High School and the Rayen High School, graduating in 1932.

Following high school, Mrs. Rudick both worked and helped to take care of her family after her aunt's death. She married Mr. Harry Rudick in 1938. Over the next seventeen years, Mrs. Rudick stayed at home to raise her child, Dr. Richard Rudick. In 1955, she took a job at the nursery school of the Youngstown Jewish Community Center located on Gypsy Lane. She continued to work there until her retirement in 1983.

Presently, Mrs. Rudick enjoys retired life. She resides at 991 Powers Avenue, Youngstown. She continues to be an active member of the congregation of the Temple Rodef Sholom. She dedicates herself to a number of charitable organizations, including the American Red Cross and Heritage Manor Nursing Home. She spends much of her free time taking part in the activities of the Sisterhood of Temple Rodef Sholom and playing the piano.

---Matthew Butts

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INTERVIEWEE: LUCILLE RUDICK

INTERVIEWER: Matthew Butts

SUBJECT: Rabbi Berkowitz

DATE: June 29, 1992

B: This is an interview with Lucille R. Rudick for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, on the Rabbi Berkowitz project, including the Youngstown Community and the Youngstown Jewish community, at 991 Powers Avenue #4, Youngstown, Ohio, on June 29, 1992, at 2:20 p.m.

Okay. These questions will be similar to the biographical background. Could you tell me a little bit about yourself, [such as] your childhood [and] your education?

R: My mother died when I was eight years old, and an aunt and a grandmother came from Richmond, Virginia, to take care of us. My grandmother died when I was twelve. My aunt stayed on with us until I was 21. My father lived with us. I believe I had a happy childhood. My aunt was from the South, and she believed in southern hospitality. We had open house all the time. All the children in the neighborhood were always at our house. Even though we went through Depression years, there was always some kind of food on hand for the children, and entertaining. As I grew older and went to junior high, I played basketball. I was always a fairly good pianist. I

studied piano from the time I was ten until I was fourteen. I was always in demand to play for the school orchestra and for school musical pageants and all that type of activity. I always had very nice friends. We lived near Fairgreen Avenue and Ohio Avenue, and there were a group of people that I went to school with that lived around Fairgreen; and we always referred to them as the "Fairgreen Army." They were very close friends. Mary Ann Renner was one of them. Mary Margaret McKelvey was another. She was also a Renner later through marriage. Vance Freed, his father, was a principal at Hayes Junior High at the time. Those were some of the people--Jane Farrell, Janie Wick, they all lived around that area, which at that time was a very beautiful area. We all went to school together, and we had good times. I remember having a fairly nice childhood, considering that our mother had passed away. But, my father was always a very placid type of a man. Nothing seemed to phase him, and he always saw to it that we had what we needed. He had a keen sense of humor and a very "up beat" attitude.

There was a family that he became friendly with through dealing with his store by the name of Waddell, and they lived in Niles. As children, he used to take us out to where they lived in the country on a farm. They had a creek running through their farm. We caught fish, and we always had picnics out there. They were a very, very nice family. The only one that I know of the descendants that are left would be Paul, and he was the son who moved in California. We saw him once, and I don't know whatever became of him. I think he was the last one of that family. The Waddells' were quite prominent in Niles at the time.

As I got into high school, I worked very hard and was salutatorian of the class. Dr. Dan Brody, who was a cardiac specialist later, was our valedictorian at Rayen High. I understand he's since died, but he was the inventor of some type of a heart and lung machine. There were a lot of people in our class that went on to do very great things.

B: What was going to school at Rayen like? What was your education like?

R: As I mentioned before, some of the first families in Youngstown, very prominent families in Youngstown--the Smutts family--as I recall, their children went to Rayen. They lived on the North Side and that area, Fairgreen and on Fifth Avenue. They all went to Rayen. We had wonderful teachers, first class teachers, and one got an excellent education. In fact, I was awarded a scholarship, which I was never able to use because of the Depression. I graduated in 1932, and of course, the Crash had come in 1929. My father lose everything, and I went to work. I just couldn't use this scholarship. I went to work. I got a job at Fish Dry cleaning as a checker to help my father with expenses. So, I never did go to college. I pursued my music, and that was always a good outlet, which I still do to this day. I'm called on to play for all kinds of entertainments and amateur performances. I still do that as a volunteer.

B: What did Youngstown look like when you were growing up?

R: Youngstown was beautiful, I always thought, we didn't go out to the South Side too much. We were mostly on the North Side in those days. The North Side was beautiful. We had Wick Park. We had Crandall Park. Everybody kept up their homes. It was a beautiful area at that time, and the downtown--everybody went downtown. Saturday night was a big downtown night because we had movie theaters. We had Clark's Restaurant and some other restaurants, but I remember Clark's because we always used to go there after the movies. Then, we had an ice cream place downtown called Burt's. That was a place where all the kids loved to go because it was an old fashioned soda and ice cream parlor. They had the old fashioned, glass topped tables with the steel chairs that you see in the movies. It was a very pleasant place. My biggest treat when we were children was when my father would let us go to Burt's afterwards for a treat.

B: What street was Burt's on? Do you remember?

R: I think it was on Phelps Street.

B: Speaking about the Jewish community growing up, what was Rodef Sholom like under Rabbi Philo?

R: If I remember, under Rabbi Philo--of course, I remember going through a depression, during which time, no one could pay dues. We went through a period of austerity where things were really tough in the synagogue. Of course, as time went on and things improved financially, it was a very strong congregation. People like Clarence Strauss supported the congregation a great deal, and Harry Myer. Men like that saw us through the tough times when many of the other members couldn't pay dues. They saw the congregation through. As I remember growing up in the congregation under Rabbi Philo, we had a very good religious school. He was a firm believer in education. In fact, our class even went on after confirmation to a high school department. We went two years to a post-confirmation class and received an education mostly in comparative religion, which was very good. We visited churches as a part of the program. We were actually studying other religions, which I think was good. It created better understanding.

B: Was this something Rabbi Berkowitz continued when he came on?

R: I think after our class, the post-confirmation fell by the wayside. I think our class may have been the only one to have the formal education afterward. However, under Rabbi Berkowitz, when he came to town, I was teaching in the religious school. His was a more relaxed type of a congregation. Rabbi Philo was very stern with the children. Many of them were afraid of him. They got a good education, but it was a little bit through fear; whereas when Rabbi Berkowitz came in, it was a more

relaxed type of education. He was a firm believer in standards and discipline, but somehow, he related a little better to the children.

Of course, at that time, we first had a cantor. Cantor Erlich came in. He was the director of the religious school. I worked in the religious school probably from the time my son was five years old--and he's 41 now--until about 1985, when I finally decided to retire. They had me doing everything. I taught kindergarten. I taught sixth grade. I became the music director, teaching the children songs and playing for them. I even played the organ one Friday night when Genevieve Bauman was sick and couldn't come. I was scared to death, but I did it. I also directed assembly programs and holiday programs.

B: What do you recall about Rabbi Berkowitz the first time you met him?

R: Well, the first time I met him, I thought he was just full of energy. He was just a bouncy kind of a person. Of course, he was very young then. I imagine he was probably 36, 37 [years old] when he first came, maybe a little younger. I felt that he had a very warm personality, very easy to talk to. He was a little too conservative for some of the older members who were very staunch Reform Jews. I had cousins who were probably fifteen, twenty years older than I was. That was from my father's oldest brother. They thought it was terrible when Rabbi Berkowitz began leaning a little bit more toward Conservative Judaism, bringing in a cantor and having some of the traditions of the Conservative type Jews. I remember an incident when an uncle of mine had an 80th birthday during Passover. In other words, if you're familiar without, no bread and now wheat products. She was very careful to have everything in accordance with the holiday that she served on the table. This cousin of mine, Rabbi Berkowitz went up to her and knew that she was one of these people who hated the new traditions that he introduced that were really old traditions, but new to her. So, he asked her, "Do you have hormets in your house" Hormets is the Hebrew that means anything that is not permitted on Passover according to tradition. She said, "Oh yes. Peggy puts them in the soup." She thought he meant the matzaballs that we make for the holiday that are put in the soup. I'll never forget what a laugh we all had over that. (Peggy was her cook.)

So that part of the family didn't take too kindly. . . There were a great many of the older generation that didn't take too kindly to Rabbi Berkowitz when he first came. But, they grew to care a great deal about him. They got used to the traditions that he introduced. He made it warm. It used to be a very cold type of service. But as she came in, he gradually worked into some of the old traditions and made it a great deal warmer and more, in my opinion.

B: How would you say that Rabbi Berkowitz operated the temple?

R: Rabbi Berkowitz was a master at running a congregation. He really knew how to talk to people. He knew how to get people to finance and go along with projects that

he wanted. Her really was a man for all seasons. He knew how to be a rabbi and inspire people, and he also knew how to run a congregation. He ran the office himself. He was there everyday. HE didn't take any time off. If he wasn't there, it was because he was at a church of funeral meeting, or visiting the sic. His secretary always knew exactly where he was. He was a phenomenal worker, without a doubt.

His family probably suffered as a result of it, because he was on call day and night. We had an experience where we had a baby that lived for a month at St. Elizabeth's, a "blue" baby. He told us, "The minute that you get work from St. E's that baby has expired, I want you to call me, day or night." It happened on a Sunday that the hospital called us, so my husband called him and he was having dinner. He sad, "Give me five minutes to wash my face." Then, he went right with him to the hospital. He was all things to everyone.

B: Tell me a little bit about the things or actions that Rabbi Berkowitz did that were special, that set him apart form everybody else.

R: I think his warmth and individual rapport with each person of the congregation. He knew everybody. He knew our frailties and our strengths. He just mad himself a part and parcel of every family in the congregation. He was different, I think because he took a personal interest. Nothing was too much for him to do.

B: What are some personal attributes of his personality?

R: I think he could be sarcastic upon occasion. I don't thin he intended to hurt anyone, but things just sometimes came out. But in general, he was an easy person to talk to and to be with. He was there for you if you needed him. I think he was a hard man to follow, with the congregation. He also had a very special relationship with the non-Jewish community. He was very highly respected, and I think, as was mentioned, Bishop Malone was a personal friend of his.

B: Was he the catalyst for the development of the ecumenical relationship within Youngstown?

R: I believe that he did a great deal. I think that Rabbi Philo was respected by the community, but I don't think that Rabbi Philo had quite the warmth that Dr. Berkowitz did; so I would say yes, he was the catalyst.

B: Are you familiar with any of Rabbi Berkowitz's activities within the Youngstown community, say like, the Civil Rights movement?

R: I know that he used to go to Rotary and was very active in Rotary, because i remember that my doctor sat next to him, Dr. McDonough sat next to him at a Rotary Club meeting. He came back to me and said, "Well, I sat at Rotary with you doctor.

.. Very good carpenter." [Laughter] That's the way he termed him. That was typical of what he would say.

B: Did you find him having a lot of humor?

R: Yes. I though he had a very humorous way of presenting things. That was one of the little instances in which I thought he was humorous.

B: Do you recall any others?

R: Not off hand, but I could tell you something that was not humorous, but it showed the measure of the man. He came to--of course, he presided at my father's funeral. Someone said, "Isn't it a shame a man lives his whole life and left nothing." Of course, he was speaking about material wealth, which was true. My father did not leave anything, but everything he had he shared with us while he was alive. But, I recall Rabbi Berkowitz saying, "This is a man that was so rich you can't really measure his wealth, because he had his children and his grandchildren around him, and he lived like a king." This is, I think, typical of the way Rabbi Berkowitz looked at life and measured people.

B: Speaking of, not just funerals, but other religious activities, how did Rabbi Berkowitz run a service at the temple?

R: Well, his services--first of all when he gave a sermon, it never went longer than twenty minutes. But his sermons were so dynamic that he got his point across in twenty minutes without repeating like some religious leaders do. He was noted for being concise and moving and to the point. He never did what Rabbi Philo did. He didn't lecture the people that were there about how they never came to services. Rabbi Philo used to fight with the people that were there, because of the people who didn't come.

B: Do you have any stories that strike out in your memory?

R: Well, I remember one New Year's on Rosh Hashana, where he gave such a moving service that most people cried. It was a very, very moving service. I can't repeat it verbatim, but I do know that it was very touching.

B: Do you remember the subject matter that he dealt with?

R: Well, I think it was along the lines of being a good person and what it takes to be a good person year round, not just once a year.

B: Were his sermons more within the mainstream. . .?

- R: Many of his sermons were not as much philosophical as they were concerned with what was going on. That's true. They were pertinent to what was going on at the time.
- B: He confirmed your children?
- R: Oh, yes. I was confirmed and married from the temple, and my son and my sister's son had the first double bar mitzvah at the temple. That had been unheard of. Because their birthday's were five weeks apart and because we lived together, they were permitted to have a double bar mitzvah. It was a phenomenon because no one had ever done it before. First of all, we didn't have bar mitzvahs or bat mitzvahs until Rabbi Berkowitz came. Prior to that time, there had never been such a ceremony. That was one of the things which some of the "old guard" had to get used to. Of course, my son was confirmed there, and he won the bronze medal. They had medals for the essays that they wrote: gold, silver, and bronze.
- B: I had a question and it slipped my mind again. Describe the way Rabbi Berkowitz would give a speech. Would he interject humor in it or what the occasion demanded?
- R: Yes. He always had humor in it. as I said, he really would present a subject and then he would definitely hit the mark. Some people, when they're giving a talk, forget what the original point of it was. His sermons were very, very well planned. You always knew that when you came away, whatever he had chosen as the subject would hit the mark. You could depend on it. Very well organized, and he was a dynamic speaker.
- B: Describe what you think Rabbi Berkowitz's impact on the Youngstown Jewish community was.
- R: I think his impact was very great. I think that there was a great deal more--I hate to use the word tolerance, but in a way it really fits. I recall some of my friends who belonged to other congregations before he came, used to refer to our temple as St. Rodef Sholom. That was because they felt that we really weren't that Jewish. They felt that we were very far away from real Judaism. Of course, it used to irk me a little that they would say this, but I feel that Rabbi Berkowitz, when he came, by interjecting more of the traditions and making it a warmer, more Jewish congregation, was very well respected by all. They realized that he was bringing us back more to a traditional type of worship. I think it was good. I believe he promoted cooperation among all the synagogues.
- B: Again, a little bit about the growth of Rodef Sholom. Did Rabbi Berkowitz's personality have anything to do with the growth in membership, or was it just the Jewish population, the Reform temple fit the ways the population was going?

R: I think it was some of each. I think that there were people that liked him. My own father-in-law had never belonged to a synagogue because the Rudicks' were Socialists. They didn't believe in synagogues. They were in the contracting business, and while my father-in-law was working of the temple building, Rabbi Berkowitz was there every day talking to him. Because of Rabbi Berkowitz, they joined the congregation. My father-in-law was what was know as the very stubborn man, but he joined the congregation. They joined, and they were very fond of him. So, I believe that he did draw in a number of people.

I also feel it's also partially due to the growth in population at the time. But, there were members that resigned from other temples and joined our temple on account of him. I don't know how many, but i do know of a few.

B: Would he be the leader of the Youngstown community throughout his tenure?

R: Yes, definitely.

B: Was there any animosity from the other rabbis from the other temples because of his leadership?

R: I don't believe so. I believe he worked well with the rabbit from the other congregations. No, I don't believe there was any animosity.

B: How about his role within the Youngstown community? Would he be characterized as one of the leaders of the Youngstown community?

R: I believe he would be, yes.

B: Was he involved with various social--he looks like a man that delved into every area.

R: Yes. I think he was chairman of Red Cross. I don't recall specifically, but I do know that he was greatly involved in community activities, fun raisers for social service activities, etc. . .

B: How about--I 'm changing gears here a little bit--how about his stance with Israel? I know he was a strong supporter.

R: He was a very strong supporter of Israel.

B: Was there a problem within the Reform temple with some members not being. . .?

R: Well, there was a group when he first came in that resented is stance on Israel. Some of them he was able to win over, and other just went on not really supporting Israel that much. But, he lost no opportunity to have the congregation support Israel. He

made trips to Israel.

B: Was he a strong support of Israel when he arrived?

R: Oh, I'm sure he was. Yes, from the beginning.

B: Okay, Is there anything we haven't really touched on that you think we need to delve into? Another direction that we should move?

R: I don't know. Referring to something that went on during his term as rabbi?

B: Yes.

R: Socially, I think that some of the members of the congregation really were proud to have him and Pauline as their personal friends. I recall once that Nate Monus flew a group out to California, and I don't recall why, but I know that the Rabbi and Pauline were a part of that. They had very strong social ties with a number of people. They were friends as well as just his being the rabbi.

B: When he stepped down from being the rabbi at Rodef Sholom, was there a power vacuum? Was it similar to what had happened after Rabbi Philo stepped down?

R: What happened was, the job was getting to much for him. They got another rabbi to be his, more or less, assistant. When they were starting to talk about this and conduct interviews, he liked Rabbi Powers. Rabbi Powers was his protegee when he came here. They worked very well together. Rabbi Berkowitz did not want to be known as Rabbi Emeritus. He said he would be know as "Rabbi in Residence." I remember that most clearly. He liked Rabbi Powers, and he was grooming him to take over, more and more. But unfortunately, I think that any Rabbi who came in after Rabbi Berkowitz would have found it very difficult. Rabbi Powers could not fill his shoes. after seven years, because of various reasons and complaints, there was a parting of the ways, but I don't think it was any kind of power struggle. It was a graceful transition when Rabbi Berkowitz decided and the congregation decided he needed assistance. He was very pleased with Rabbi Powers when he came. Dr. Berkowitz' untimely death forced Rabbi Powers into a position that he could not completely handle.

B: I'm just looking at my notes here. Is there anything else that you think we need to interject at this time?

R: Well, my husband and I, and my sister and her husband, always had a very warm relationship with the Rabbi and Pauline. We knew them when they first came. we always felt they were our friends. I believe, when the congregation celebrated their

tenth anniversary, when we went through the receiving line, they said, "We will never forget the warm reception we got from your family when we came and all the nice things you did for us." So, I believe that they felt very warm toward our family. Then of course, I saw Rabbi Berkowitz for years, every Sunday as a teacher in the religious school.

B: What was his relationship with the children of the congregation? What was it like?

R: When the children got to the confirmation class, according to my son, I think by then he had become more or less not quite as patient. He was getting older. It's understandable. He was teaching the confirmation class, and I suppose some of them were "smart alecks", too. But, I don't think that in later years he had too much of a great rapport with the children in the confirmation class. Now, the little ones, I think, he always related to very well, the younger children. But, maybe it was because teenagers are hard to handle. I don't know. I only know that my son thought that he didn't feel too much of the rapport at that time.

B: Okay. This is a very good interview. Is there anything else you think needs added or something we didn't touch on?

R: I would like to say that I think that he was deep down, a very kind man, because I recall that when Cantor Erlich lost his wife, I think it would have been very easy for him to make arrangements for the body to be shipped to New York and all that, which was their home originally. But he said, "This is your home," and he made arrangements for the body to be in our local cemetery. He was very supportive of the cantor. The cantor lost his wife when their daughter was five years old. I think he and Pauline were very, very supportive of him. I think he was a good person.

B: I'm sure he was. Everybody's had such great positive things to say about him.

R: Yes.

B: Okay. Well, thank you very much.

R: Your welcome.

END OF INTERVIEW