INTERVIEW BEGINS

Marvin: This is Marvin Weintraub interviewing Irving Adair. Today is June 10, 1994. It’s for the Jewish Oral History Project of Atlanta which is co-sponsored by the American Jewish Committee, the Atlanta Jewish Federation and the National Council of Jewish Women. The interview today is taking place in Irving’s office and this is side, tape one. Why don’t we start with looking at your background. I know you were born in Atlanta. Just a moment ago you were talking about where you were born. Do you mind repeating the story?

Irving: I was born on Hunter Street diagonally across the street from the Shearith Israel Congregation. As I was telling you earlier, there was about a three or four block area there that comprised of most of the Jewish community that attended Shearith Israel.

Marvin: Were your parents members of Shearith Israel?

Irving: Yes, they were members there.

Marvin: What year were you born?

Irving: I was born October 3, 1921.

Marvin: Tell me a little bit about your parents before we go any further.

Irving: My parents both died when I was quite young. My father died when I was two. My

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1 Founded in 1904, Shearith Israel began as a congregation that met in the homes of congregants until 1906 when they began using a Methodist church on Hunter Street. After World War II, Rabbi Tobias Geffen moved the congregation to University Drive, where it became the first synagogue in DeKalb County. In the 1960s, they removed the barrier between the men’s and women’s sections in the sanctuary, and officially became affiliated with the Conservative movement in 2002.

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mother died when I was six or seven. I’m sort of limited as far as family history is concerned. I think they both came over here from Poland and settled in Atlanta. We had some relatives here at the time.

**Marvin:** Who were your relatives?

**Irving:** The Finkelsteins. Bloomie Finkelstein is a relative. I have a feeling that her mother was here at the time my parents immigrated here to Atlanta. I estimate it was between 1900 and 1904.

**Marvin:** What brought the Finkelsteins here?

**Irving:** To be perfectly frank with you, I really don’t know.

**Marvin:** Who raised you after the death of your parents?

**Irving:** My brother, Abe Adair. I moved in with a cousin of mine who ran a boarding house on Washington Street. Her name was Rose Fleshner...F-L-E-S-H-N-E-R. We lived there with her until he was married. Then I went to live with him on Virginia Avenue in Atlanta.

**Marvin:** What year was that?

**Irving:** I’m estimating about 1934.

**Marvin:** When was your brother Abe born?

**Irving:** Abe is between 85 and 86 years old. He was born here in Atlanta. I have two older sisters who came over with my parents from Poland. I also have a sister here in Atlanta whose name is Edith. When my parents died, she went to live with my sister who lived in Long Island, New York.

**Marvin:** Abe, I know, is still living. How about your sisters?

**Irving:** My oldest sister has died. My older sister, Rose, is still living in New York. Praise G-d, on her next birthday she’ll be 90 years old.

**Marvin:** What year was Abe born?

**Irving:** I’m not sure of the year. As I said, he’s between 85 and 86 years old right now.

**Marvin:** We’ll come back to Abe in a moment. You moved from Washington Street, or that area, which essentially was a large Jewish community through the 1950’s.\(^2\) You moved to the

\(^2\) Washington–Rawson was a neighborhood of Atlanta that was a center of Jewish community in the city. By the mid-1870’s, Washington Street was becoming one of the city’s finest residential streets. The neighborhood was wealthy at the turn of the twentieth century: *Encyclopedia Britannica* of 1910 listed Washington Street as one of the finest residential areas of the city. The neighborhood included the area that is now the large parking lot north of Turner Field, until 1996 the site of Atlanta–Fulton County Stadium. It also included the intersection of the two
Virginia [Avenue] area in 1934. That was well in advance of the normal migration of the Jewish community. How did end up in the Virginia area?

Irving: There was an apartment that he and his new wife rented. He was married to Pearlie [Pearle] Eplan. She lived above the Fleshners. That’s how he met her. It was a six unit apartment on Washington Street called the ‘Princess.’

Marvin: That building no longer exists, I assume.

Irving: No, that has been torn down now. It doesn’t exist now.

Marvin: Do you know what’s there now?

Irving: If I’m not mistaken, it’s a parking lot adjacent to the Atlanta stadium.\(^3\)

Marvin: Yes, that whole area looks like that now.

Irving: I went to James L. Key grammar school on Crew Street.

Marvin: Let’s talk about the James L. Key grammar school. What percentage of the pupils at that time at James L. Key School in Atlanta was Jewish?

Irving: I would estimate it was around 25 or 30 percent. There was quite a sizable population of Jews living in that area at the time.

Marvin: Were all of your friends Jewish?

Irving: Yes.

Marvin: Did you have any relationship as a youngster at this time with the non-Jewish 75 percent?

Irving: I had a limited relationship at the time with some non-Jews.

Marvin: You say limited?

Irving: Yes. Most of my activities outside the school were with my Jewish friends.

Marvin: Give me some idea of the activities.

Irving: We used to play baseball and basketball behind the [Hebrew] Orphans’ Home.\(^4\)

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\(^3\) Atlanta–Fulton County Stadium, often referred to as Fulton County Stadium and originally named Atlanta Stadium, was built to attract a Major League Baseball team. In 1966 it succeeded when the Milwaukee Braves relocated from to Atlanta. The stadium was built on the site of the cleared Washington–Rawson neighborhood, which had been a wealthy area and home to much of Atlanta’s Jewish community. The Braves continued to play at Fulton County Stadium until the end of the 1996 season, when they moved into Turner Field, the converted Centennial Olympic Stadium originally built for the 1996 Summer Olympics. The stadium was demolished in 1997. A parking lot for Turner Field now stands on the site.

\(^4\) The Hebrew Orphans’ Home was located at 478 Washington Street in Atlanta. The residence facility was open from 1876 to 1930. It was originally called the Hebrew Orphans’ Asylum. In 1901, the name was changed to the Hebrew Orphans’ Home.

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That’s where our main play area was.

Marvin: Tell me about the Orphans’ Home.

Irving: The only knowledge I have is that we were allowed to play in the back where they had some tennis courts and a baseball field. For most of the Jewish kids, that was the central gathering area for all the sporting activities.

Marvin: Do you remember the name of the Orphans’ Home?

Irving: It was the Hebrew Orphans’ Home. It’s now, if I’m not mistaken, Our Lady of Perpetual Help.5

Marvin: Do you know what their major help is?

Irving: I think it’s for terminally ill people.

Marvin: That’s my understanding, too. You mentioned tennis courts back there and a few other courts.

Irving: Tennis court and a baseball field. We used to play everything back there

Marvin: How about tennis?

Irving: I played a limited amount of tennis as a kid. I played a lot of football and baseball in their backyard. I have a feeling that they encouraged us at the time to come there and use their facilities. That’s a little bit of a gray area.

Marvin: Would that be so you could interact with the children in the . . . to come there and use their facilities at the time . . .

Irving: . . . exactly.

Marvin: That makes sense. From James L. Key, where did you go to school next?

Irving: When I moved to Virginia Avenue, I went to Bass Junior High School6 in the Little Five Points7 area back through Briarcliff and North Decatur Road.

Marvin: Briarcliff, North Decatur and Little Five Points . . . the northeast section of the city.

Irving: Right. People who lived further north went to O’Keefe [Junior High School]. There’s

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5 Our Lady of Perpetual Help Home accepts patients with a diagnosis of incurable or terminal cancer who are unable to pay for adequate nursing care elsewhere. It is located near Turner Field south of downtown Atlanta.

6 Bass Junior High School was built in 1923 and served Atlanta’s Little Five Points. By 1948 it was a high school. The school was closed in 1990 and later converted to into loft apartments.

7 Little Five Points is a neighborhood on the east side of Atlanta, Georgia that earned its name from an intersection where five streets came together. Little Five Points is now known around Atlanta as a center for bars, restaurants, shops, and alternative culture.
a little bit of a side. My wife went to O’Keefe with John Portman.\(^8\)

**Marvin:** Was there a rivalry between junior high schools, O’Keefe and Bass, at this time?

**Irving:** No, I don’t think so. We didn’t have much of an athletic program at the time other than intramural sports.

**Marvin:** Did you play any intramural sports?

**Irving:** Yes. I loved sports, I was into all sports, everything.

**Marvin:** You’ve gone back to the death of your parents and to junior high school. What is your very earliest memory here in Atlanta?

**Irving:** My earliest memory was . . . school-wise, I went to Fair Street School which was just a block away. The street right in back of our street was Fair Street. I went to the second grade there. From there I went to live with my brother at the Fleshners. Then I transferred to James L. Key School. From James L. Key School, my brother got married and moved to the north side. That’s when I went to Bass. From Bass I went to Boys’ High School.\(^9\) I graduated from Boys’ in 1940 and went to Emory [University—Atlanta, Georgia].\(^10\)

**Marvin:** You graduated from Boys’ High School . . .

**Irving:** . . . right.

**Marvin:** . . . and then went to Emory. What area were you studying at Emory?

**Irving:** I was in Business Administration. I was a member of the AEPi\(^11\) fraternity.

**Marvin:** Which is still on campus?

**Irving:** Yes, it’s still there.

**Marvin:** Do you keep up with the AEPi fraternity?

**Irving:** Yes. Not as much as I would like, but I get letters and magazines from the national office. I keep up with them that way.

**Marvin:** How long were you at Emory University [Atlanta, Georgia]?

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\(^8\) John Calvin Portman, Jr., is an American architect famous for buildings, especially hotels, with multi-storied interior atria. He grew up in Atlanta and had a very large impact on the city, specifically the Peachtree Center complex downtown. His buildings in Atlanta include the Hyatt Regency Atlanta, 230 Peachtree Building (formerly Peachtree Center Tower), AmericasMart (formerly Atlanta Market Center) and the Atlanta Decorative Arts Center.

\(^9\) Boys’ High School was founded in 1924 and is now known as Henry W. Grady High School. It is part of the Atlanta Public School System. It has had many notable alumni, including S. Truett Cathy, the founder of Chick-fil-A. It is located in Midtown Atlanta.

\(^10\) Emory University is a private university in Atlanta. It was founded in 1836 by a small group of Methodists and named in honor of Methodist bishop John Emory. Today it has nearly 3,000 faculty members and is ranked 20th among national universities in *U.S. News & World Report’s* 2014 rankings.

\(^11\) Alpha Epsilon Pi (AEII or AEPi) is college fraternity founded at New York University, New York, New York in 1913. Although the fraternity is based upon Jewish principles, it is non-discriminatory.

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Irving: I was there three-and-a-half years. I left because of World War II. I volunteered, because I was going to be drafted into the Marine Corps. I was overseas for approximately two years in the South Pacific on a little island called Peleliu. The reason it was taken was because it had a very good air security. They used it for planes bombing the Philippines.

Marvin: You took part in a number of island hopping?
Irving: No, that was the only island. I was fortunate. I was put in Island Command. I stayed there the whole time.

Marvin: With our relationship with D-Day, you only had one . . .
Irving: . . . that’s right.
Marvin: . . . which is fortunate. With Emory, we’re going back, then to 1940?
Irving: Right.
Marvin: What was the Jewish population at Emory at that time, approximately?
Irving: Just a pure guess, I’d say, around five percent.
Marvin: Was AEPI the only fraternity?
Irving: No, AEPI and TEP were on campus.
Marvin: Tell me about your experiences at Emory, please.
Irving: They were quite enjoyable. As I said, I was going into Business Administration. It was quite a large local Jewish population going to Emory at the time. We became quite close as fraternity brothers. We also had intramural sports there which I enjoyed, and social gatherings which allowed me to meet boys and girls who, otherwise, I wouldn’t have been able to come in contact with. I’m just sorry that I didn’t have the inclination to go back and get my diploma.

Having gotten out of the service, I just didn’t have my mind on college. I was married ten days after I got back home.

Marvin: Two things come to mind with that. One, where did the girls come from? Emory, at that time, was all . . .

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12 Peleliu (or Beliliou) is an island in the South Pacific island nation of Palau. The island is noted as the location of the Battle of Peleliu in World War II.
13 A sovereign island country in Southeast Asia in the western Pacific Ocean. It consists of 7,107 islands that are categorized in three separate groups: Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao. Its capital city is Manila.
14 The Normandy landings (codenamed Operation Neptune) were the landing operations on June 6, 1944 (termed D-Day) of the Allied invasion of Normandy in Operation Overlord during World War II.
15 Tau Epsilon Phi (TEΦ, commonly pronounced TEP) is a fraternity founded by ten Jewish men at Columbia University in New York in 1910 as a response to the existence of similar organizations which would not admit Jewish members.

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Irving: . . . practically all of the girls came from the main area of Atlanta. I would imagine a lot of the boys contacted girls and wanted to know if they had any friends. That’s how we all gathered at the time.

Marvin: Where did you gather?

Irving: At the fraternity house.

Marvin: Is the same fraternity house still there?

Irving: Believe it or not, it was home that had been turned into a fraternity house on North Decatur Road. Today, they have a fraternity house on Fraternity Row on the campus.

Marvin: Is it through this association that you met your future wife?

Irving: No. I had known her for quite a while. We did get a little bit serious. I saw her at the fraternity house and, all of a sudden, found out that she had bloomed into a nice looking young lady. We became quite close. We remained that way until I left for the service. We were married shortly after I got back home.

Marvin: Married here in Atlanta?

Irving: Yes, by Rabbi [Harry] Epstein.16

Marvin: Let’s go back then to your earlier days. You were a member of Shearith Israel early.

Irving: Yes. My family was quite active at the time. It was almost across the street from where we were living.

Marvin: Did you go to their religious school?

Irving: No, I wasn’t really old enough at the time. As I said, my father died when I was two and my mother died when I was six. I did go to start at the religious school. I went to the home of Rabbi [Tobias] Geffen17 whose son, Sam,18 was teaching Hebrew at the time. I went to Hebrew school upstairs in one of their bedrooms where the Hebrew classes were held.

Marvin: That’s in Dr. Epstein’s home?

Irving: No, that was in Rabbi Geffen’s home. Then, a few years later, I transferred to the AA

16 Rabbi Harry Epstein (1903 – 2003) served as rabbi of Ahavath Achim Synagogue in Atlanta, Georgia from 1928 to 1982, when he became rabbi emeritus. Under Rabbi Harry Epstein, the congregation began to shift to Conservatism, which they joined in 1952.

17 Rabbi Tobias Geffen (1870-1970) was an Orthodox rabbi and leader of Congregation Shearith Israel in Atlanta from 1910-1970. He is widely known for his 1935 decision that certified Coca-Cola as kosher. He also organized the first Hebrew school in Atlanta, and standardized regulation of kosher supervision in the Atlanta area.

18 Rabbi Samuel Geffen (1907 - 2002) grew up in Atlanta, the son of Sara and Rabbi Tobias Geffen. He attended Boys’ High and Emory University. He was a concert violinist and lawyer before becoming a Rabbi. Then he received two degrees, Rabbi and Master of Hebrew Literature from the Jewish Institute of Religion in New York City. He was the spiritual leader for over 40 years of the Jewish Center of Forest Hills West in New York.
Ahavath Achim Hebrew school. That was held in the basement of the congregation on the corner of Washington and Woodward Avenue.

**Marvin:** That was not too far from where you were brought up.

**Irving:** Exactly. It was about seven or eight blocks from the Princess Apartments.

**Marvin:** A pleasant walk there:

**Irving:** Yes.

**Marvin:** Describe the neighborhood.

**Irving:** It was typical neighborhood for that period of time... nice big homes. Most of the homes there were quite large. As you were walking along, you knew everybody. I would say friendships were closer in that period, because you ran into most of the people every day. The Jewish community is much more widely spread out today than it was then. We were so close together at the time that we were really close. I was real close friends with everybody in the area, especially the kids.

**Marvin:** Would you say you knew almost 100 percent of the Jewish community at that time?

**Irving:** Yes, just about.

**Marvin:** You grew up with them.

**Irving:** Yes.

**Marvin:** Even when you moved to the north side?

**Irving:** Yes, I still remained friends. I used to come back on the south side quite often to be with my friends.

**Marvin:** How large was the Jewish community around Virginia Avenue?

**Irving:** A very small area there at that time. I could see that the Jewish population was commencing the movement northward and being spread out at the time. I would say it started between 1935 and 1940 that the Jews began to spread out all over the city.

**Marvin:** That was a place to start before World War II, during the war, and after the war.

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19 Ahavath Achim was founded in 1887 in a small room on Gilmer Street. In 1920 they moved to a permanent building at the corner of Piedmont and Gilmer Street. Rabbi Abraham Hirnes was the first rabbi of the then Orthodox congregation. In 1928 Rabbi Harry Epstein became the rabbi and the congregation began to shift to Conservatism, which they joined in 1952. The synagogue moved to its current location on Peachtree Battle Avenue in 1958. Cantor Isaac Goodfriend, a Holocaust survivor, joined the congregation in 1966 and remained until his retirement. Rabbi Epstein retired in 1982, becoming Rabbi Emeritus and Rabbi Arnold Goodman assumed the rabbinic post. He retired in 2002. Rabbi Neil Sandler is now the rabbi. (2015)

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Irving: I know an interesting point I read. I think it was the *Southern Israelite*\(^\text{20}\) at the time. Prior to 1943 there were less than 10,000 Jews in Atlanta.

Marvin: Right.

Irving: Now there are between 75,000 and 80,000, I understand.

Marvin: You don’t know all 75,000?

Irving: No, sir. I don’t know that many people.

Marvin: Have you kept up with your old neighborhood friends from the south side?

Irving: Yes. Not as close as I was, but I keep up with most of them.

Marvin: There’s no association of old boys to keep up with that.

Irving: No. My wife had some girls that she grew up with. We currently have, I would say seven or eight couples who are quite close. Most of them were all born in Atlanta.

Marvin: How did you acquire friends outside of Atlanta?

Irving: If they moved into Atlanta, that’s the way I really came to know them.

Marvin: Atlanta does not have a reputation for excluding ‘foreigners’ so to speak?

Irving: No. I think once Jews or non-Jew moves to Atlanta and they get into the swing and stay here a while, it’s very difficult to get them to move.

Marvin: Let’s go back to the migration of the Jewish population. You said you were somewhat tutored by Sam Geffen.

Irving: Right.

Marvin: This took place in Rabbi Geffen’s home?

Irving: Right.

Marvin: Where was his home at this point?

Irving: It was on Washington Street which was about a block-and-a-half from where the Shearith Israel Congregation was at that time.

Marvin: What do you remember about Rabbi Geffen?

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\(^\text{20}\) The *Southern Israelite* was a publication that covered news of the southern Jewry and issues that involved Jewish populations throughout the nation and world. Rabbi H. Cerf Straus originally established the *Southern Israelite* as a temple bulletin in Augusta in 1925. It became so popular he expanded it into a monthly newspaper. Straus eventually sold the paper to Herman Dessauer and Sara B. Simmons, who moved it to Atlanta, where it began circulating state-wide and eventually throughout the South. In 1930, M. Stephen Schiffer took over as sole owner of the *Southern Israelite*. Ownership of the paper was turned over to a corporation headed by editor Adolph Rosenberg in 1951. In 1964 Vida Goldgar joined the staff and was an important contributor to the *Southern Israelite* for the next 40 years. In 1979, she purchased the paper. In 1987, its name changed from *Southern Israelite* to the *Atlanta Jewish Times*. Today the paper is owned by Jewish Renaissance Media and continues as a weekly publication with a readership of over 25,000. (2015)
Irving: I held him in awe. He was a very awe inspiring man. He had a gray head of hair and a long gray beard. Naturally, anytime I got around him I was . . . I looked up to him as being on a pedestal. I knew that he was a man of G-d. He was the essence of the Jewish religion, as far as I was concerned as a kid.

Marvin: Tell me about his son, Sam.

Irving: Sam was quite knowledgeable in the Jewish religion, like all of Rabbi Geffen’s children. I got quite a good start in Hebrew as far as study and interpretation from Mr. Sam.

Marvin: You had a bar mitzvah?21

Irving: Yes. I was bar mitzvahed at the Shearith Israel Congregation.

Marvin: In what year?

Irving: I was 13, so that would have been about 1934.

Marvin: The congregation is still there on Washington Street during your bar mitzvah?

Irving: Yes, it was still on Washington Street at that time.

Marvin: When did it leave that area?

Irving: I’m really not sure. I think it was between 1940 and 1945 that it moved to its present location on University Avenue.

Marvin: Shortly thereafter, as an adult I would say, you became a member of AA and Rabbi Epstein?

Irving: Right, who also I think is just a fantastic man and a great rabbi.

Marvin: Let’s go back just before your marriage and explore your wife’s family. Were they native Atlantans? Where did they come from?

Irving: From what I understand, my wife’s family has been in Atlanta for over 100 years as far as roots. I’m not exactly sure. I would really have to find out, but I’m not exactly sure where her grandparents came from. They were married in Atlanta.

Marvin: They’re one of the real . . .

Irving: They are real ‘old timers.’ They go back, as I say, well over 100 years. My family goes back over 90 years. I feel like we are well-rooted here.

Marvin: Your marriage to your wife was ten days after you got out of the service?

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21 Hebrew for ‘son of commandment.’ A rite of passage for Jewish boys aged 13 years and one day. At that time, a Jewish boy is considered a responsible adult for most religious purposes. He is now duty bound to keep the commandments, he puts on tefillin, and may be counted to the minyan quorum for public worship. He celebrates the bar mitzvah by being called up to the reading of the Torah in the synagogue, usually on the next available Sabbath after his Hebrew birthday.

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Irving: Right.
Marvin: You were unemployed?
Irving: I wasn’t really unemployed. I had a talk with my brother and went to work with him immediately after our honeymoon. He had a wholesale hosiery place on Pryor Street.
Marvin: We’ll return to that in a little bit. Let’s look at your marriage for a moment. Where did you live when you were first married?
Irving: When we were first married we lived in the Virginia Court Apartments.
Marvin: Still there?
Irving: Still there.
Marvin: Describe the neighborhood then.
Irving: That also was largely Jewish. There were quite a few Jewish tenants at Virginia Court at that time. In fact, that area had quite a large Jewish population at the time I was married.
Marvin: How long did you stay in that area?
Irving: We stayed there, I’d say, about five years.
Marvin: Describe the change in that area from 1945 until today.
Irving: The Jewish population mainly has moved away from there. It’s strictly Christians today. My next move, I was very fortunate. We built a house on Wildwood Road. We were the first house built on the right hand side of the street.
Marvin: You’re only talking approximately a mile or a mile-and-a-half from Virginia Court.
Irving: I think it’s a little bit further than that. It’s not that far, but I would say its two to four miles. I’m not sure what the distance would be. It’s not too far.
Marvin: What I’m doing is tracing the Jewish population moving north. We went to Virginia [Avenue]. We’re a little further north, now, about two miles. Still, further north.
Irving: We’re progressively going north, exactly. At that time, we did have our oldest son. Jeff was born in the Virginia Court Apartment.
Marvin: What year was that?
Irving: I’m really not sure. He’s 45 years old now.
Marvin: We’ll go back and trace that out. Your second son was born on Wildwood?
Irving: My second son was born while we were in our home on Wildwood Road.
Marvin: How old is he now?
Irving: He’s 41. His name is Craig.
Marvin: We’ll get back to them, too. Tell me about your relationship, after marriage, with the synagogue and Rabbi Epstein.

Irving: It was a limited relationship. We had a nodding acquaintance. I never was active in the congregation. I knew Rabbi Epstein. Every time I saw him we would always stop and talk . . . just in general terms.

Marvin: Where was AA located at this time?

Irving: I forgot to tell you. My marriage was at the Mayfair Club here in Atlanta. Rabbi Epstein conducted the service.

Marvin: Let’s stay with that a little bit. You mentioned the Mayfair Club. Were you a member of the Mayfair Club?

Irving: Yes, I was a member of the Mayfair Club.

Marvin: What type of club was that?

Irving: That was a really close-knit Jewish club. I’m sorry we don’t have one like it today. It was families that were really close to each other. We had a lot of friends. It was a homey atmosphere there. That’s pretty hard to find today. I’m real sorry it’s no longer in existence.

Marvin: Let me digress with you a minute. What other Jewish clubs were available at this point?

Irving: At that time, they had the [Jewish] Progressive Club and the Standard Club.

Marvin: Which of these are now in existence?

Irving: The only one left is the Standard Club.

Marvin: Do you care to speculate on why the other two are not in existence?

Irving: I really don’t know. The Mayfair Club had a big fire. It burned the clubhouse . . . practically destroyed. From what I understand, I think the Progressive Club’s membership

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22 The Mayfair Club opened in 1938 at 1456 Spring Street in Midtown Atlanta and was a focal point of Jewish life in the city for more than 25 years. The club was founded in 1930 and first met at the Biltmore Hotel. The club was visited by Eleanor Roosevelt, Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir, mayors Ivan Allen and William Berry Hartsfield, senators Herman Talmadge and Richard Russell, and Governor Carl Sanders. Fire destroyed the Mayfair Club on December 4, 1964.

23 The Progressive Club was a Jewish social organization that was established in 1913 by Russian Jews who felt unwelcome at the Standard Club, where German Jews were predominant.

24 The Standard Club is a private, country club, with a Jewish heritage dating back to 1867. The club originated as Concordia Association in Downtown Atlanta. In 1905 it was reorganized as the Standard Club and moved into the former mansion of William C. Sanders near where Turner Field is now located. In the late 1920’s the club moved to Ponce de Leon Avenue in Midtown Atlanta. The club later moved to the Brookhaven area and opened in what is now the Lenox Park business park. It was located there until 1983 when the club moved to its present location in Johns Creek in Atlanta’s northern suburbs.
slowly but surely diminished to the point that financially it could no longer remain in existence.

**Marvin:** How many different buildings did the Mayfair Club own?

**Irving:** One. It had tennis courts and a swimming pool at the time. We were really close to each other. It was really like a family there.

**Marvin:** What was the location of the Mayfair Club?

**Irving:** The Mayfair Club was on Spring Street. There is a motel\(^{25}\) there now. It was not too far off Peachtree on Spring Street.

**Marvin:** With the Mayfair Club and your marriage, you continued an association with both the AA and the Mayfair Club?

**Irving:** Yes.

**Marvin:** After marriage, you say you moved to Virginia Courts and subsequently to Wildwood Road. Describe the life on Wildwood Road.

**Irving:** Wildwood Road was really enjoyable. It was mostly a Jewish area. We knew everybody. We were there for 28½ years. My mother-in-law, Jayne’s mother, lived with us there. She had a unit at the Virginia Court at the same time that we lived there. Both of my sons were married and moved out. My mother-in-law, subsequently, died. I might be getting a little bit ahead of the story, but we decided that the house was too big for us. We went looking for a condominium. We decided that that was what we wanted to do. We moved to the Mooregate Square Condominiums on Moores Mill Road. That’s where we are today.

**Marvin:** Large Jewish population there too?

**Irving:** No, there’s not. Not in the complex itself. There is a large Jewish population in that area which is Moores Mill Road. There’s quite a large Jewish population on Sequoyah [Drive] and Northridge. I think that’s the name. There’s a lot of Jewish population in that area. We also have a lot of friends living in that area.

**Marvin:** That’s not a real north in this case. It’s more a migration to the west.

**Irving:** Exactly.

**Marvin:** Just to keep us with how the Jewish population has moved, would you say most or a good part of the Jewish population is now in that area?

**Irving:** Yes. Not a tremendous amount, but there’s a large percentage of Jewish people living

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\(^{25}\) Actually it was a hotel: The Fairmont Inn. The Fairmont Inn was sold to SCADS, the Savannah College of Art and Design, which turned it into a dormitory for their students.

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there today.

**Marvin:** In a moment, we’ll look at some business activities. Just to stay on this a few more minutes, you talked about AEPi and the mixing of the boys and girls at this point. Would you say that most of it took place there? Or would a good bit of the social activity take place at the Mayfair Club you mentioned a moment ago?

**Irving:** I’d say the younger contingent, at that particular time, took place at the fraternity house.

**Marvin:** From your perspective, most of the coupling, so to speak, went on at the college environment, rather than the social environment?

**Irving:** Right.

**Marvin:** How about religious? Any of them through the associations with any of the religious activities such as religious fraternities, B’nai B’rith26 fraternities or through, at that time the [Atlanta Jewish] Community Center?27

**Irving:** Personally, I was not active at that time. I spent most of my time at school and fraternity activities. I really didn’t get started at the Community Center until a little bit later in life. I found it to be, as far as I was concerned, the finest organization as far as Jewish activity as in Atlanta, starting with infants to older seniors. I find it to be activity-wise, just a great place for most of our Jewish population.

**Marvin:** Let me return to your comments at the beginning of the tape for just a moment. You indicated the primary place where youngsters played was behind the Orphans’ Home. There was no community center at this point?

**Irving:** No. There was the Jewish Educational Alliance.28 I have forgotten that. I’m glad you

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26 B’nai B’rith International (from Hebrew: ‘Children of the Covenant’) is the oldest Jewish service organization in the world. B’nai B’rith states that it is committed to the security and continuity of the Jewish people and the State of Israel and combating antisemitism and bigotry. Its mission is to unite persons of the Jewish faith and to enhance Jewish identity through strengthening Jewish family life, to provide broad-based services for the benefit of senior citizens, and to facilitate advocacy and action on behalf of Jews throughout the world.

27 The Marcus Jewish Community Center of Atlanta is the primary Jewish community center in Atlanta. It is located in Dunwoody, north of the city, and offers family-centric programs and events with programs, events, and classes that enrich the quality of family life. Their programs include preschool, camping, fitness and sports, Jewish life and learning, arts and culture and social and educational programs. It was named in honor of Bernard Marcus, one of the co-founders of Home Depot, who gave a major gift to the capital campaign. It was preceded by the Atlanta Jewish Community Center (AJCC) on Peachtree Road Midtown.

28 The Jewish Educational Alliance operated from 1910 to 1948 on the site where the Atlanta Fulton County Stadium was located. The JEA was once the hub of Jewish life in Atlanta. Families congregated there for social, educational, sports and cultural programs. The JEA ran camps and held classes to help some new residents learn to read and write English. For newcomers, it became a refuge, with programs to help them acclimate to a new home.
brought that point up. I belonged to a club there called the ‘ABC Club.’ We played basketball back in the back there.

**Marvin:** Where was the Alliance located?

**Irving:** The Alliance was located on Capitol Avenue near Fair Street. That was the name at the time. We did have a limited amount of social activity there, also. I was just a kid at that time.

**Marvin:** Primarily you went there for basketball?

**Irving:** Basketball and club meetings.

**Marvin:** What did ‘ABC’ stand for?

**Irving:** Alliance Boys’ Club.

**Marvin:** Was that the only boys club at that time?

**Irving:** No. They had the Six Point Club. That was really one of our bitter rivals.

**Marvin:** Were there more than two clubs then?

**Irving:** At the time, I don’t remember any more clubs in our age bracket.

**Marvin:** What age are we talking about?

**Irving:** I would say we were between 13 to about 15 at the time.

**Marvin:** Why would you elect to use the Alliance rather than the orphanage?

**Irving:** The Orphans’ Home really didn’t have the facility for basketball.

**Marvin:** Depending on the activity . . .

**Irving:** . . . right.

**Marvin:** I’m going to cut the tape right now. We’ll turn the tape over and pick it up.

<End Tape 1, Side 1>
<Begin Tape 1, Side 2>

**Marvin:** I’m Marvin Weintraub with Irving Adair. Today is June 10, 1994. Let’s pick up slightly differently now, Irving. Let’s go back to when you returned from the military and got married ten days later. You said you went to work for your brother. What was your brother doing at that point?

**Irving:** My brother had a wholesale hosiery operation on Pryor Street, as I said before. He and I got together and I decided that I would like to go to work for him. He was very nice to me.

The JEA stayed at that site until the late 1940s, when it evolved into the Atlanta Jewish Community Center and moved to Peachtree Street. It stayed there until 1998, when the building was sold and the center moved to Dunwoody. In 2000, it was renamed the Marcus Jewish Community Center of Atlanta.

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He took me in. I was taught most of the business through his ethics. I was real fortunate to have him. He sort of was my father figure. I am deeply indebted to my brother, Abe. It was through his efforts that I not only had sustenance as a child, but in my adult life he even helped me. In that respect, I really want to give him all the credit in the world.

**Marvin:** Describe the business.

**Irving:** Our business at that particular time was wholesale hosiery and socks. I was amazed when I walked in. The first day back, I walked in the place and place was empty. I asked my brother at the time, “What in the world happped here?” He said, “To be perfectly frank with you, you just have to pick customers out. You don’t have to . . . send anything you want to them and they’ll be glad to accept it.

**Marvin:** This was 1945?

**Irving:** Nineteen forty-five. It was absolutely unbelievable to me. I got right in on the tail end of when business, as a result of the war, was just unbelievably good.

**Marvin:** Where did he get his supplies from?

**Irving:** From various hosiery mills throughout the south.

**Marvin:** Your job was to represent the firm?

**Irving:** Exactly. I did everything. I swept the floor, turned the lights off and on, sold and bought. After a while, I performed all the functions that were needed at the time.

**Marvin:** Abe started the business?

**Irving:** He started the business in 1932, which means we’ve been in business for 62 years.

**Marvin:** Has it changed over the years?

**Irving:** It has changed slightly.

**Marvin:** Let’s stick to the 1932 to 1945 time period a little bit. How did he get into the hosiery business?

**Irving:** I’m not sure. I think he was introduced to a man who ran a hosiery mill. He decided after meeting this man that possibly he would like to go into the hosiery business. The man was awfully nice to him. In addition, he was adopted by a banker that supplied him money. At the time, I think he was a very fortunate. Money at the time was quite hard to obtain.

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29 Mr. Adair was released from the Marine Corps on January 10, 1946.

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Marvin: We’re in the middle of the [Great] Depression in 1932.\(^{30}\)
Irving: Yes. He started selling socks out of his car.
Marvin: Was that in Atlanta, or throughout the southeast?
Irving: No, that was just in the Atlanta area.
Marvin: He was working for himself at the time?
Irving: Yes, strictly for himself. He opened up a store right across the street from where the courthouse was at the time. From there he moved further down Pryor Street to a little larger place. Then he moved from there to another larger place on Pryor Street. That’s when I actually came into the business. Fortunate enough, they moved around to another larger place on Trinity Avenue. From Trinity Avenue we moved out to the Atlanta Trade Center off of Fulton Industrial Boulevard.
Marvin: Just for the tape, we’re talking about an area right now really within three quarters of a mile of the central business district. Just south of what’s termed the Five Points\(^{31}\) area where all the banks were.
Irving: Right.
Marvin: The business interests, at that time, were really right downtown.
Irving: They had a whole couple of blocks of practically nothing but Jewish merchants.
Marvin: Describe the area.
Irving: The area was situated between . . . the two blocks were from Hunter Street . . . it actually was three blocks. Practically the whole wholesale district was owned by Jews. The biggest one there, at that particular time, was H. Mendel [& Co.]. They were what we called a generalized wholesaler. They sold practically everything. At the time, we specialized in hosiery and socks.
Marvin: What other Jewish businesses? You mentioned H. Mendel. Any other large business, or were they all small businesses?
Irving: They were all smaller businesses.
Marvin: How big would you say your business was in 1945?

\(^{30}\) The Great Depression was a severe worldwide economic depression in the decade preceding World War II. The time of the Great Depression varied across nations, but in most countries it started in about 1929 and lasted until the late 1930’s or early 1940’s. It was the longest, most widespread, and deepest depression of the twentieth century.

\(^{31}\) Five Points refers to the downtown area of Atlanta, considered by many to be the center of town. It was the central hub of Atlanta until the 1960’s, when the economic and demographic center shifted north toward the suburbs. It was recently revitalized, mostly due to Georgia State University having a large presence in the area.
Irving: In 1945 we just had a very small operation. I think, at the time it was my brother and myself. We did have a part-time person to help us pack and unload trucks.

Marvin: Did the business have a name at this point?

Irving: The name of the business was Riada Mills Company, which is my last name spelled backwards. I still don’t know how my brother got this brainstorm. It’s very difficult to spell and pronounce. It’s amazing how many ways. We get letters addressed to ‘Radio,’ ‘Ryder,’ just about any spelling you can think of. We’ve been successful, so I’m really not that disturbed by it.

Marvin: How large is the firm today?

Irving: Today we have three warehouses and employ over 20 people. That doesn’t include the salesmen that we have all over the country.

Marvin: Just in the country. All sales are in the country?

Irving: Yes.

Marvin: No universal? All of the warehouses are in Atlanta?

Irving: All of the warehouses are in Atlanta.

Marvin: But not on Pryor Street anymore?

Irving: No, we’re all situated near the Fulton Industrial area.

Marvin: Now we’re talking west of town?

Irving: This is northwest of town.

Marvin: Yes, northwest of town. We’re about 15 or 20 miles from where you originally started?

Irving: Just about.

Marvin: Just so people can keep up with where you’ve been, let’s go back to the Pryor Street area in 1945. You mentioned that that area was primarily a Jewish wholesale district.

Irving: Exactly.

Marvin: How many wholesalers would you think were in the area at the time?

Irving: Just off the top of my head, I’d say between 15 and 18.

Marvin: All in similar type businesses?

Irving: Not necessarily similar type businesses. There were wholesale dresses, wholesale shoes, generalized wholesale, work clothing and hosiery and socks. Stuff such as that.
Marvin: Primarily, what would be called the ‘needle trade,’ except for the shoes.
Irving: Exactly.
Marvin: Tell me about general wholesaling.
Irving: General wholesaling, which the largest was H. Mendel. They sold practically everything. They sold sheets and pillow cases, towels, socks and hosiery, and all kinds of items such as that. They occupied a four-story building at the time.
Marvin: On Pryor Street.
Irving: At that particular time, that was quite large.
Marvin: No manufacturing though?
Irving: The only manufacturing that I know of that went on down there was Lovable Brassiere. They started there on the second floor of a building situated near the intersection of Pryor and Trinity Avenue.
Marvin: This is in 1945?
Irving: 1945. There also were a couple of dress manufacturers.
Marvin: Remember those?
Irving: I don’t remember those. As I say, most of that whole area was nothing but wholesalers.
Marvin: That whole area no longer exists.
Irving: No, that quickly cleaned out.
Marvin: Were most of those businesses as successful as yours, or are they out of business?
Irving: Most of them, unfortunately, are out of business.
Marvin: The Jewish influence in that area is essentially gone?
Irving: It is definitely gone.
Marvin: You’re among the last of them.
Irving: That’s right. I’m thankful for that.
Marvin: We’re looking at approximately 52 or 53 years. The Jewish community has changed its occupations.
Irving: Yes.

32 Any of the various businesses involved in the manufacture and sale of clothing.
33 The Lovable Company manufactured lingerie and brassieres. It was founded in 1926 by Frank and Gussie Garson. During decades the company was in business, it employed over 3,000 workers around the world. The company was dissolved in 1998.
Marvin: How do you see the change?
Irving: You mean, how do I see it now?
Marvin: Over the 50 years, better or worse for the Jewish community?
Irving: I wouldn’t say it was either better or worse. I do think that there’s been a big change in wholesaling. I do know that we’ve been very fortunate. We saw the handwriting on the wall a number of years ago that we should specialize. It’s proven successful. Hopefully, it will continue to be that way.
Marvin: What do you specialize in?
Irving: We specialize in fleece wear.
Marvin: You’ll have to explain what fleece wear is.
Irving: Fleece wear is sweatshirts, sweatpants, t-shirts, tank shirts and shorts. Stuff such as that . . . strictly casual clothing today. I’m very happy to say that most of the country today is going casual. Hopefully it will continue.
Marvin: When did you get out of the sock business?
Irving: We got out of the sock business when we moved to this new building. We saw that we could make more money in the fleece area than we could in the sock business. We closed out all the limited amount of socks we had at that time. We’re strictly into the casual wear.
Marvin: How many different manufacturers do you represent?
Irving: Mainly just two. We are very close to these people.
Marvin: Do you care to tell me who they are?
Irving: We have stock in both companies: Bassett Walker Knitting Company and Pluma, Inc.
Marvin: What lines do they have that I’d be familiar with?
Irving: They’re mainly fleece and t-shirts.
Marvin: Any trademarks that I’d be familiar with?
Irving: Lee is one of their trademarks. They [unintelligible].
Marvin: As you can tell, I’m not familiar with the industry.
Irving: I can understand that. We’ve been quite fortunate over the years. I was very fortunate to have gotten connected with this outfit in 1948. That changed our business completely.
Marvin: This outfit being?
Irving: Bassett Walker Knitting Company.
Marvin: Where are they located?
Irving: They’re located in Virginia and North Carolina.
Marvin: How large an operation are they?
Irving: They’re the largest manufacturers of fleece wear in the world.
Marvin: They export things?
Irving: They have an export division, yes.
Marvin: Do you represent them exclusively in the southeast, or in the United States?
Irving: No, just mainly here in Atlanta.
Marvin: Just Atlanta?
Irving: We do sell their goods all over the country though.
Marvin: You mentioned sales people all over, but you’re the Atlanta representative?
Irving: Right.
Marvin: How large is the sales force?
Irving: We have ten sales people throughout the country. They don’t carry our lines exclusively, but they do represent us. We have them in California, Montana, Colorado, New York . . . probably missed some . . . Chicago [Illinois].
Marvin: Do you maintain a showroom some place?
Irving: The only showroom that we maintain is here. We do go to tradeshows.
Marvin: Here being right in this building?
Irving: Yes, we have a showroom here.
Marvin: You don’t maintain one downtown?
Irving: No, just strictly here. We have been quite successful at trade shows.
Marvin: Who represents you at trade shows?
Irving: We send our people to the trade shows, except one in Las Vegas [Nevada]. We have a salesman in Salt Lake City, Utah who has a booth there. We normally go out there and help him. We have for many years.
Marvin: Do you gamble while you’re out there?
Irving: I try not to but I’m always drawn to the crap tables. I’d work on a budget.
Marvin: That’s fine. I’ve not been there.
Irving: Never been to [Las] Vegas?
Marvin: Never been there. I’m working my way towards there.
Irving: Hopefully you’ll make it one day.
Marvin: You mentioned your relationship with the [Jewish] Community Center. Let’s discuss that for a moment.

Irving: I have been a member of the board there. I’m no longer a board member, but I do support practically every activity that they have there, financially. I do contribute. I did work on the book fair this year.

Marvin: You mentioned as a youngster, you were at the [Jewish] Educational Alliance which was on Capitol Avenue. The Community Center is now on Peachtree Street.

Irving: Right.

Marvin: How about comparing the two?

Irving: There’s no comparison. At the time, the Jewish Educational Alliance had two floors. The good part about the Alliance at that time was that everybody, as I said before, was real close. You knew everybody. That’s not the case today. Naturally, the Community Center on Peachtree is much larger and has a lot more activities being offered. You certainly don’t know everybody that comes in and out of there, because the population of Atlanta has increased so tremendously over the years. But at that time, it was a gathering place for most of the Jewish kids in the city. Most of the Jews lived in that particular area. Not all of them, but most of them. As I said, I appreciated being real close friends with practically every one of them.

Marvin: Most everyone walked to the Educational Alliance?

Irving: Yes. You practically walked or you caught a street car everywhere you went. I did a lot of walking, believe me. I didn’t have unlimited funds to catch a street car or anything else. I got there the best way I could.

Marvin: Let’s explore that for a moment. You got around on street cars?

Irving: Yes.

Marvin: The cost was . . .

Irving: . . . a dime.

Marvin: . . . a dime to ride the street car. How did you get to Emory?

Irving: I used to catch a ride with a neighbor of ours who has since died, Bernard Fishman. He had a car. I rode with him practically every morning.

Marvin: At this time, you were living in the Virginia [Highlands] area?

Irving: No, I wasn’t living in the Virginia [Highlands] area at that time. Maybe I

34 Virginia-Highlands is a neighborhood in Atlanta, near Emory University.
overlooked. We moved to Oakdale Road from Virginia Avenue. I lived with my brother, at that time, on Oakdale Road, not too far off of Ponce de Leon [Avenue].

Marvin: That’s almost within walking distance of Emory.
Irving: It’s not walking distance. You could walk. It would be a good walk.
Marvin: Tell me about Bernard Fishman.
Irving: He was a good friend of mine. He and his family own the Atlanta Broom Company, still in existence today. He was a fraternity brother of mine.
Marvin: He lived on Oakdale, too?
Irving: Yes, he lived on Oakdale. Just about three or four houses from where I lived.
Marvin: Does the family still own Atlanta Broom [Company]?
Irving: Yes, they still own it. His brothers are running it, or his brother is running it. I’m really not that familiar with it anymore.
Marvin: Let’s go back to the differences between the Educational Alliance where you knew everyone, and the Community Center where you sat on the board.
Irving: Like I said before, the size of the two buildings was quite different. The only thing that we had at the Alliance was we did have a social hall upstairs. We had a little basketball court out in the back. You knew everybody at that time. Now, versus the Peachtree facility . . . it’s quite large. It attracts Jewish families from all over the city. I’m not as active as I used to be. As I said before, the real thrill would be the activities offered there for the various segments of the Jewish population, from the day school up to the senior activities. I think it performs a vital, for want of a better word, a vital facility for all of these various segments of the Jewish population.
Marvin: Let’s look at the political or economic reality of it. Do you think the facility should remain there?
Irving: I thought it should, but now I have a feeling that possibly it should be sold . . . at least that’s my opinion . . . and built elsewhere.
Marvin: Two questions come to mind. Why should it be sold? Where would you build?
Irving: If the price was right, there’s a rumor going around that it has been up for sale. Whether that’s true or not, I really don’t know. I think it should be moved further north.
Marvin: You think it would serve the community still?
Irving: Yes. If a suitable lot could be found, I think it could serve the population a little
better. Although, if it remains there it still serves the population quite nicely.

**Marvin:** Obviously, what I’m discussing with you now is the comments that they’re looking to sell. I wonder where they would move?

**Irving:** I really don’t know where they would move to. They would have to find a suitable location. Where that would be, I’m not sure.

**Marvin:** This would go along with our earlier discussion about where the community has moved.

**Irving:** Exactly. Further north.

**Marvin:** You don’t think that the Jewish community should maintain a downtown presence, though?

**Irving:** I don’t think it’s necessary, although, it could remain there. I don’t really think it’s necessary. I think it should be moved further north. That is if a good deal comes along. I certainly wouldn’t sacrifice the building.

**Marvin:** Do you remember the first building that was on that site as the new Jewish Community Center?

**Irving:** I think it was somebody’s home there. I’m really not sure. I’m not that familiar with it.

**Marvin:** It was. As a matter of fact, [unintelligible].

**Irving:** I really don’t remember.

**Marvin:** Were you on the board at the Community Center when they build this new building?

**Irving:** No, I was not on the board at that time. I was on the board about five or six years ago. I was active in the building of the building at Zaban Park.35 I did solicit funds for that building.

**Marvin:** You were on the board at that point then?

**Irving:** I don’t think I was on the board at that time. I was just on the committee to raise funds.

**Marvin:** Why did the Jewish community think they needed a place at Zaban Park?

**Irving:** To reach the younger contingent of Jewish families that had moved in that area.

**Marvin:** Again, continuing this migration, now we’re into northern, I guess we’re fifteen to twenty miles north of the main Community Center on Peachtree.

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35 Zaban Park in Dunwoody is home to the Marcus Jewish Community Center of Atlanta. The area is named for philanthropist and community leader Erwin Zaban who gave and raised money for what was formerly undeveloped pastureland.

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Irving: Right. It was strictly a move, just like Shirley Blumenthal Park. They’re trying to reach the younger families and make it more convenient for them to partake of the activities.

Marvin: Has it reached that goal?

Irving: Yes, it has.

Marvin: Can you describe that facility to me?

Irving: Zaban? I think it’s got all kinds of activities out there. They’ve got meeting rooms, classrooms, and camping facilities. They’ve got a lake, baseball and softball fields. It’s just proving to be . . . from what I understand, although, I don’t go out there that often . . . it’s used extensively every day.

Marvin: More so than, you think, the downtown facility? Or differently?

Irving: I’m not sure about that. I don’t know which one is being used more extensively. I do think, from what I understand, Zaban is really used more extensively than the downtown facility.

Marvin: That’s interesting to follow the transition of the Jewish community. I don’t know if any Jewish families are currently living way south.

Irving: I doubt it seriously.

Marvin: Except south of the airport, maybe.

Irving: I doubt it seriously if they are.

Marvin: You mentioned where you used to play ball, now is a parking lot or something.

Irving: Right.

Marvin: That whole area has been destroyed, as far as the Jewish community?

Irving: Yes.

Marvin: Let’s chat about your sons for a little bit. Are they in business with you?

Irving: Yes, both of my sons are in the business here.

Marvin: What do they do?

Irving: Jeffrey, my oldest son, actually runs the business today. Craig is a general worker. He’s in the front and the back. They’ve been in the business well over 20 years with me.

Marvin: How about Abe?

Irving: Abe is no longer in the business. He had a stroke, unfortunately, a number of years ago. We have taken over the business.

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36 Shirley Blumenthal Park was a Jewish community center in in East Cobb County, and was part of the Marcus Jewish Community Center of Atlanta. However, it has been closed and is being sold to Mt. Bethel United Method Church.
Marvin: Does he have any children?
Irving: Yes. Abe has one son, Harold, who is an urologist, Dr. Harold Adair.
Marvin: He has no relationship with the business anymore?
Irving: No.
Marvin: It’s remained on solid ground in the family.
Irving: Yes, this is strictly a family business. Hopefully, it will remain a family business and be passed down.
Marvin: Grandchildren?
Irving: Yes. Craig has two daughters. Jeff has two sons. We have a good balance.
Marvin: With the anticipation of a third generation in the business?
Irving: Exactly.
Marvin: With the business changing, talk about change for a minute. Do you foresee going out of the fleece wear business into something else?
Irving: At the present time, no. We feel that we have a good footing in this area. We foresee casual clothing to be very popular, and will remain popular for the foreseeable future. We don’t see making any changes now. If it does come about, we certainly will investigate any change. As of right now, we’re going to remain what we call a specialized operation.
Marvin: Let’s leave at that now. We’ll pick it up in the future. At least it’s on a very positive note.
Irving: Alright.

Marvin: This is Marvin Weintraub interviewing Irving Adair, today is July 7, 1994, for the Jewish Oral History Project of Atlanta co-sponsored by the American Jewish committee, the Atlanta Jewish Federation and the National Council of Jewish Women. The interview is taking place at Irving’s office. This is side one, tape two of the interview.
Marvin: Good morning, Irving, nice to have you.
Irving: Good morning to you.
Marvin: I’d like to explore with you a few of the things that you had on the tape last time, and proceed just a little further. Last time you talked about being educated in Sam Geffen’s room, Rabbi Geffen’s son. Also, you talked about being the basement of the AA for some of your
religious education. I wonder if you’d do two things for me: one is expand upon what a typical room looked like and how the education was with Sam Geffen, and two, how did you get to the AA from Shearith Israel and where was their basement located?

**Irving:** My family were members of Shearith Israel. My brother enrolled me in the class. The classes were conducted in Rabbi Geffen’s home on Washington Street. He selected a room upstairs in Rabbi Geffen’s house and turned it into a classroom. It had desks and probably could accommodate between 20 and 25 students at one time. I studied under him for a couple of years, I think—this is a little blurry here—he either retired from teaching, or otherwise. Then I enrolled at the AA Hebrew School, which was in the Ahavath Achim synagogue, when it was on the corner of Washington and Woodward Avenue. Classes were conducted in the basement. There were classrooms in the basement of this building. I went through until most of the Jewish boys at that time became 13. I was *bar mitzvahed* at the Shearith Israel. Like most Jewish boys at the time, that was my last year of Hebrew school.

**Marvin:** Your education was both at Shearith Israel and AA, although, the *bar mitzvah* was at Shearith Israel?

**Irving:** Right.

**Marvin:** Which, at that time, was still . . .

**Irving:** . . . still on Washington Street, approximately about three or four blocks from where AA was located.

**Marvin:** Why did you bounce, so to speak, back and forth between Shearith Israel and AA? You seem to be between the two congregations.

**Irving:** Yes. As I said in my first interview, my family were members of Shearith Israel when it was on Hunter Street. I felt an obligation. After I married Jayne, she came to Shearith Israel and we were members there. She said that she would prefer the AA. Naturally, I agreed with her. We became members of AA at that time. Shearith Israel was more of an Orthodox congregation where men and women were separated. She suggested we become members of

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37 Emory University is a private university in Atlanta. It was founded in 1836 by a small group of Methodists and named in honor of Methodist bishop John Emory. Today it has nearly 3,000 faculty members and is ranked 20th among national universities in *U.S. News & World Report’s* 2014 rankings.

38 In Orthodox synagogues men and women do not sit together and are separated by a *mechitza* (Hebrew: partition or division). Men and women are generally not separated in most Conservative synagogues, although it is a permissible option within Conservative Judaism. Reform and Reconstructionist Judaism, consistent with their view that traditional religious law is not mandatory in modern times, do not use *mechitzot* in their synagogues.

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At the time it became very Conservative. We were able to sit together.

**Marvin:** Let me ask you about Jayne’s family, since you brought her up. You indicated on the last tape they go back over 100 years in Atlanta. What did their family do? What was their background?

**Irving:** Her grandmother ran a boarding house on Capitol Avenue. At the time, by what I understand, it was quite well known. When times got real hard, all of the families moved into this boarding house. She ran the boarding house until she really got too old to conduct her duties. We were married in 1946. We lived in an apartment on Virginia Avenue. I went to work for my brother, Abe, who started Riada Mills Company in 1932. We had a domestic maid by the name of Lois Roberts [sp]. Interestingly enough, she worked for my wife’s grandmother. She worked for my wife’s mother. Then she came to work for us. She was in the family over 50 years.

**Marvin:** What was Jayne’s grandmother’s name?

**Irving:** I don’t remember.

**Marvin:** Jayne’s mother?

**Irving:** Jayne’s mother was Lizzie Smolen. Her name was Elizabeth, but everybody called her ‘Lizzie.’

**Marvin:** What did the Smolens do?

**Irving:** My father-in-law, for many years, had a men’s haberdashery store on Marietta Street.

**Marvin:** Name of the store?

**Irving:** Warner’s Mens Shop on Marietta Street. In fact, I rented tuxedos from him when I was in high school.

**Marvin:** When did that go out of business?

**Irving:** He died. I don’t recall the year. Then the store ceased operations. My mother-in-law conducted a going out of business sale.

**Marvin:** How many brothers and sisters did Jayne have?

**Irving:** Jayne has one sister who lives in Atlanta. Her name is Lillian Schwartz.

**Marvin:** You returned from the military in 1946?

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39 A form of Judaism that seeks to preserve Jewish tradition and ritual but has a more flexible approach to the interpretation of the law than Orthodox Judaism. It attempts to combine a positive attitude toward modern culture, while preserving a commitment to Jewish observance. They also observe gender equality (mixed seating, women rabbis and bat mitzvahs).
Irving: Right.

Marvin: You got married ten days later and immediately went to work with your brother . . .

Irving: . . . right . . .

Marvin: . . . which was essentially a Jewish neighborhood, where the business was located on Pryor Street.

Irving: Yes. They had a lot of Jewish wholesale merchants at this time.

Marvin: What was the relationship among all of these Jewish wholesalers?

Irving: We were quite friendly with each other. We were trying to help each other out, in fact, to do business. We always referred customers one to the other. I think it was a very nice relationship between competitors.

Marvin: Were you competing, or were you in different lines of business?

Irving: No, we had all different kinds of businesses there. We happened to be in the hosiery business at the time.

Marvin: What were the other businesses? You mentioned many the last time.

Irving: H. Mendel was the largest one. He was a general wholesaler. Then there was work clothing and shoes. There were either four or five shoe companies. We had a couple of competitors in the hosiery business down there at the time. I said before, we were quite friendly with each other.

Marvin: With your wife’s family, the relationship between them and their business partners, so to speak, what type of activities took place on Marietta Street?

Irving: I’m really not familiar because her father died shortly before we were married. I really do not know too much about his business.

Marvin: What do you know about the retail business, then, at that time? You were selling wholesale.

Irving: Right.

Marvin: Who were your retail customers?

Irving: We sold mom and pop stores. 40 We also sold to Rich’s 41 and Davison’s 42 at the time.

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40 Mom and pop stores are businesses that are privately owned and usually operated by members of a family, rather than being part of a national chain of stores.  
41 Rich’s was a department store retail chain, headquartered in Atlanta that operated in the southern U.S. from 1867 until 2005. The retailer began in Atlanta as M. Rich & Co. dry goods store and was run by Mauritius Reich (anglicized to Morris Rich), a Hungarian Jewish immigrant. It was renamed M. Rich & Bro. in 1877, when his brother Emanuel was admitted into the partnership, and was again renamed M. Rich & Bros. in 1884 when the third
Marvin: Were the mom and pop stores primarily Jewish?
Irving: Yes, we sold to quite a few, although we sold quite a few non-Jews also. During this period we used to see them quite often. On Wednesday afternoons they would close at noon and come in to the city to do their shopping at the wholesalers. Wednesday was a busy day because of the visits by the various merchants.

Marvin: You both went out and held a show room on Pryor Street?
Irving: No, everybody just came into our store. Especially, we catered to country merchants, at the time, as well as the larger stores.

Marvin: The country merchants came in?
Irving: Right.

Marvin: Primarily Jewish?
Irving: No. I wouldn’t say they were primarily Jewish, but there were quite a large number of Jewish merchants. They would come in from Barnesville, [Georgia] Cartersville [Georgia], Monroe [Georgia], and cities such as that.

Marvin: What was the relationship between you and the non-Jewish merchants?
Irving: We always were friendly. We tried to do as much business as we could. We catered to the Jewish merchants as well as the non-Jewish merchants.

Marvin: Do you keep up with any of these today? Are any of them about?
Irving: Believe it or not, the business has changed almost 100 percent. There are very few Jewish merchants left in country towns anymore. Our business, as such, has also changed. Our main business now is in larger cities. Our business is conducted with salesmen throughout the country. We have fax service all over the nation. We conduct quite a bit of business over the phone.

Marvin: How do you feel about the change of this person to person relationship to the telephone?
Irving: It’s not as good as it used to be when it was face to face. We had to change with the

brother Daniel was joined the partnership. In 1929, the company was reorganized and the retail portion of the business became simply, Rich's. Many of the former Rich's stores today form the core of Macy's Central, an Atlanta-based division of Macy's, Inc., which formerly operated as Federated Department Stores, Inc.

42 Davison's of Atlanta was a department store chain and an Atlanta shopping institution. It took the Macy's name in 1986.

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times. Naturally, when the phones came into vogue as far as 800 numbers, we went along with it. We conduct most of business over the phones and WATS lines.

**Marvin:** Your bother went into business in . . .

**Irving:** . . . he went into business in 1932. The business is 62 years old.

**Marvin:** In 62 years you went from this horse and buggy, essentially, people coming in from the country. As I walked in earlier you talked about faxes. How do you feel about this change from horse and buggy to fax?

**Irving:** You just go along with the times. Thank G-d, we’ve been quite fortunate. We have grown. We’ve gotten larger and larger and larger. I really thank G-d for allowing us to get to be this big. Hopefully, in the future, my sons will make the business even larger.

**Marvin:** We started today, and last time also, talking about your Jewish education. Has that had any impact on how you conduct your business?

**Irving:** I’m trying to think of a correlation. The only item I think of that might have some impact is I did get an idea of conducting my business in an upright and honest manner. I have instructed all of our people to treat customers as family. I think, over the years, we have accumulated a large list of satisfied customers because we have. I’m trying to put this in few words. We have tried to treat them as we would want ourselves to be treated when we go into stores. I think my Jewish training, as far as Hebrew school was concerned, had quite a bit of influence on me in this regard.

**Marvin:** Was it the training, or was it the two rabbis that you mentioned previously?

**Irving:** I think it was . . . I hold both of those rabbis in awe, still today. Although, my experience with the two rabbis was quite limited, I felt like they were next to G-d. That’s Rabbi Geffen and Rabbi Epstein.

**Marvin:** Let’s look at the business today. In the newspaper they’re talking about the Group of Seven meeting over in Naples, Italy. You deal with mills and hosiery and fleece wear. Does

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43 A phone call to an 800 number, or toll-free number, from a landline is free of charge to the caller. The owner of the 800 number pays a fee for arriving calls. 800 refers to the prefix of the phone number, similar to a geographic area code. The specific service access numbers vary by country.

44 A WATS line, or ‘Wide Area Telephone Service,’ is a dedicated telephone line, usually used by a business, with fixed-rate long distance service for a fixed geographic area. WATS was first introduced by the Bell System in 1961.

45 The Group of Seven meeting, or the 20th G7 Summit, was held in Naples, Italy, on July 8–10, 1994. The forum brought together the heads of the richest industrialized countries: France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, and the President of the European Commission. Issues discussed included trade, jobs, economic growth, nuclear safety, and developing countries.
Irving: No, this doesn’t really have any influence on us. We do most of our business in the United States, the contiguous states. We do very, very little shipments overseas or into Mexico. That would not have any bearing on our business.

Marvin: The mills you’re doing business with, are they doing business overseas?

Irving: Possibly one of them does, but the other does not that I actually know of. I’m sure if an order was big enough, they would definitely want to grab hold and ship overseas. We have found that our niche is in this country.

Marvin: Not primarily in the southeast today, because you have representatives throughout the country.

Irving: No, we have salesmen all over the country and out watts lines reach all over the country, including Alaska and Puerto Rico.

Marvin: When I grew up . . . I’ll use the word ‘rag business’ they used then . . . the clothing business, was essentially Jewish. Is that still true today?

Irving: No, it’s not. Most of the Jewish merchants in these small towns have ceased operations. Most of their children have migrated to larger cities and become professional people. There are very few Jewish merchants left today in small towns. There are a few, but not many.

Marvin: How about in businesses like yours, the wholesale aspect of it. Are most of the Jewish merchants out?

Irving: Yes, most of the Jewish merchants are out of this business also. There are some left but not nearly as many as there were in the 1930’s, 1940’s, and 1950’s.

Marvin: What do you attribute this to?

Irving: I attribute it to the mills having a closer relationship with just the limited amount of wholesale customers. Thank the good Lord that we were fortunate enough to have a business relationship with one of the largest fleece, or sweat people, in the world. We have become very friendly over the years. It’s proven to be quite profitable for us.

Marvin: This is Riada Mills, but you never really produced anything here.

Irving: No, we strictly distribute wholesale from here. We do have interest in the mills that we do business with, though. We have bought stock in the mills that we do business with.

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46 The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) is an agreement signed by Canada, Mexico, and the U. S. The goal of NAFTA was to eliminate barriers to trade and investment between the three countries. The agreement came into force on January 1, 1994.
Marvin: Let’s then proceed one more generation. You indicated that your sons are in the business with you. You anticipate them remaining in the business?

Irving: Right.

Marvin: Let’s talk a few moments about Jeff and Craig. What is their Jewish educational background?

Irving: They both went to Hebrew school. Like me, at age 13 they ceased their Jewish education. As such, their outlook of the Jewish religion is a slight bit different. Jeff belongs to Temple Sinai47 now. Craig, his family, belongs to Etz Chaim.48 They’re going with younger rabbis. I can truthfully say I don’t blame them. Both of these rabbis, in my eyes, are very nice people and looked up to by the younger contingent.

Marvin: Their background, though, is with the AA.

Irving: Yes, originally they went to AA with my wife and me. Since they’ve been married, they decided that AA was not the place for them. They joined other congregations.

Marvin: What’s their school background, secular background?

Irving: Jeff went to the University of Georgia [Athens, Georgia] and graduated from Emory Law School. Craig went to DeKalb College [Clarkston, Georgia], but he never finished. He came into the business. Jeff came into the business after graduating law school. He passed the Bar on the first time, which I’m quite proud of.

Marvin: Their children are in the religious schools of their congregations?

Irving: Right, at their respective congregations. They both go to Hebrew school.

Marvin: Do you feel that their religious education is substantially different than yours?

Irving: No, I think it’s basically the same.

Marvin: That’s interesting, because we talked about our younger children not having the background that we had.

Irving: I don’t think their Jewishness is as thorough as mine was. As I stated previously, my parents died when I was quite young. I didn’t have the family to push me into Jewish education. I feel today that I do my best to push my kids and my grandchildren into a Jewish education as much as I can. Naturally, as they get older, it’s going to be up to them whether they want to pursue further or not.

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47 Temple Sinai was founded as a Reform congregation in 1968 and met in a variety of locations before establishing a synagogue on Dupree Drive in Sandy Springs, north of Atlanta.

48 Etz Chaim is a conservative congregation that was established in 1975 in Marietta, a suburb north of Atlanta.
Marvin: I know that you worked with the Community Center. You mentioned that the last time, you contributed somewhat to the [Jewish] Federation.49

Irving: Yes.

Marvin: I also know that you took a Federation trip last year.

Irving: Yes, to Israel.

Marvin: Why did you take the trip to Israel? Was that your first trip to Israel?

Irving: That was my first trip to Israel. We had anticipated going to Israel previously. We had a couple of plans to go. They had uprisings over there and we decided not to go at that particular time. Then we heard about a mission. Jayne and I and another couple of friends of ours decided that this would be a good time to go. This is the one we went on.

Marvin: Tell me about the mission.

Irving: It was a very great experience. We got into places that the normal tourist does not get to. We were lectured to every morning. We had buses to take us around. I wouldn’t give a million dollars for having gone, but it was a very exhausting trip. We were up and going every morning at 6:30. We felt like we had seen the most important aspects of Israel. We saw not only what the tourists see, but we went into places that, as I said, the normal tourists did not get to see.

Marvin: You mentioned that you went with friends. Last time we discussed the fact that you had a group of friends that you met with over the years. I think it was eight couples. Are these boyhood and girlhood friends of yours that came?

Irving: Yes.

Marvin: What’s kept a group together for 60 or 70 years?

Irving: Most of the people are natives of Atlanta. We just happened to stick together and just kept quite good friends after marriage.

Marvin: Could you tell me the names and what these people are doing today just to give me an idea of what this community is like?

Irving: Most of them are retired. There’s one who was a wholesale liquor dealer who’s retired. One was a dress manufacturer. He’s retired. Another one was a fur salesman. He only works a couple of days a week now. As I say, most of them are retired or semi-retired. I feel

49 The Jewish Federation of Greater Atlanta raises funds which are dispersed throughout the Jewish community. Services also include caring for Jews in need locally and around the world, community outreach, leadership development, educational opportunities. The Jewish Federation of Greater Atlanta is part of the Jewish Federation of North America (JFNA).
like as long as I’m able to go, I’m going to work as long as I possibly can. But, like I say, we were all born in Atlanta. We have stayed together for many years.

**Marvin:** What do you do as a group today?

**Irving:** We socialize quite often. We go to each other’s homes, we go out to restaurants, we go to lecture, or we go to movies. Stuff like that. Together, either two, three or four couples. In the last week, we had four couples go out together to eat. It just evolved over the years that we stuck together.

**Marvin:** These individuals are all Jewish?

**Irving:** All Jewish.

**Marvin:** No outside influence of non-Jewish friends?

**Irving:** No.

**Marvin:** They all grew up with you through Mayfair Club?

**Irving:** Yes.

**Marvin:** They’re really social business acquaintances, too.

**Irving:** Yes, right.

**Marvin:** How about Jayne? The same circle of friends?

**Irving:** Yes, she has the same circle of friends that I do.

**Marvin:** The changes over time have just kept up with you, so to speak.

**Irving:** Yes. I was friendly with a couple and she was friendly with a lot of girls and couples that many years ago got together. We’ve just been friends ever since.

**Marvin:** Are your children’s friends in this circle?

**Irving:** No, they have other circles of friends. They have moved in different areas. Some of the couple who have children they are friendly with. Most of their friends they’ve acquired over the years here.

**Marvin:** Is this circle of your friends, were they primarily individuals who grew up in that . . . when you first married in the first apartment house on Wildwood?

**Irving:** Yes.

**Marvin:** It had to do with the community as much as anything, rather than business associates?

**Irving:** Right, strictly friends.

**Marvin:** All of your generation, though, was in business?

**Irving:** Yes, they were all in business
Marvin: Are most of their children professionals today?
Irving: I wouldn’t say they’re professionals. There are quite a few that are professionals.
Marvin: Still many of them remain in a business?
Irving: Yes.
Marvin: What do you feel about your sons remaining in this business for the next 60 years?
Irving: I think I’m very fortunate to have them in this business. This has been a family business. My brother started this business in 1932. When he retired I took the business over. I have since taken in my sons. I feel like I’m very fortunate. Hopefully they will pass this business down to their children. I feel like, in that respect, I’m very fortunate to have them in here.
Marvin: Good. With this, I’d like to conclude. I appreciate your time, last time and now. You just clarified some items from the last tape and went a step further. We looked at your business from the horse and buggy days to the fax days and the continuation.
Marvin: That’s a good way to put it.
Marvin: Thank you for your time today and the last time.
Irving: I hope I haven’t left out anything.
Marvin: If I find anything, I’ll come back.
Irving: Alright, thank you.
<End of tape 2, Side 1>

INTERVIEW ENDS