

Oral History of: Charles Rubiner

Interviewed by: Mary Baroff

Date of Interview: April 1975

Location of Interview: Unknown

Mary Baroff: [00:00:01](#) This is an interview with Charles Rubiner, a prominent leader in the metropolitan Detroit community in connection with the 75th Anniversary of the United Jewish Charities and 50th Anniversary of the Jewish Welfare Federation. These organizations have undertaken to record the memories and experiences of a number of community leaders, which highlight developments in the organized Jewish community. This interview with Mr. Rubiner is being taped in April of 1975. The interviewer is Mary Baroff.

Mary Baroff: [00:00:45](#) Judge Rubiner, before we start our discussion of your involvement with the organized Jewish community, could you tell me just a little bit about your background?

Charles Rubiner: [00:00:58](#) Well, I was born in Traverse City, Michigan on July 10, 1898 at a time when some Jews who had first arrived in the bigger cities like Detroit looked for smaller communities elsewhere. And at the time, that lumbering industry was at its height and Traverse City was a thriving community. Also, one that was looking for a man of my father's attainments. That is, a combination of a cantor, a [inaudible 00:01:50], Hebrew teacher, and so forth.

Charles Rubiner: [00:01:56](#) I lived in Traverse City, however, for just five or six years, because just at that age, we learned that the lumbering industry was just about petering out, and it was back to the big city again. In Detroit, I received my holy education in the Detroit Public Schools. And then on to the University of Detroit Law School, from which I received my degree in 1919.

Charles Rubiner: [00:02:44](#) After practicing general law for a few years, I received and appointment as an assistant attorney general of the State of Michigan, with my office in Lansing. Toward the close of my term there, a vacancy developed on the Common Pleas Bench in Detroit and I was appointed to fill it by the then Governor Brucker. I served on the bench until about 1939 or 1940. For a brief period, I was a special prosecuting attorney for Wayne

County inquiring into certain political corruption that was going on.

- Charles Rubiner: [00:03:47](#) Then I also served as the chairmen of the Mayor's Committee on the Youth, which was about four years, after which I continued the general practice of law until this day. In the meantime, I interspersed my professional work with communal activities, such as being one of the founders and member of the board of directors of the Detroit Round Table of Catholics, Jews and Protestants, which was a local branch of the National Conference of Christians and Jews. I was later elected to their national board, and served for a number of years.
- Charles Rubiner: [00:04:55](#) In 1931, I was elected to the Board of Governors of the Jewish Welfare Federation. I became president of the Jewish Community Center of Detroit and served also on the board and as a vice president of the United Hebrew Schools. Later, I went on the board of the Congregation Shaarey Zedek and was elected to all of its offices, finally serving as its president for the proscribed three one-year terms.
- Charles Rubiner: [00:05:49](#) Presently, I am an honorary member of that board. Somewhere along the line, I also became active in the Masonic Lodge, working my way up through the chairs to become the head of the lodge, which is the Worshipful Master.
- Mary Baroff: [00:06:15](#) How did you first become interested in Jewish communal affairs?
- Charles Rubiner: [00:06:20](#) Well, I might say that I became interested in Jewish communal affairs almost from the earliest time that I have any recollections whatever. It started simply with the fact that I was a Jew, and it was start by general curiosity about the place of the Jewish people in history and in the world of today. I observed that, given a people which had its origin in Biblical history and which had suffered the fate of many ancient countries and nations, but which still persisted in living as a people in dispersion and building up just as historical an image here in the diaspora. Bearing all these things in mind, I was moved to try to learn how the Jewish people could exist in a hostile world.
- Charles Rubiner: [00:07:46](#) I learned first that there was no path definition of the journey or of the Jewish people. Throughout my life, I've been hearing the interminable debates as to whether we constitute a nation, a race, religion, a culture, a people, or what have you. I found that

there were few viewpoints that could really be termed objective or representing definitive answers to these questions, and these usually resolves themselves into a statement that Jews are all of these things, and yet more.

- Charles Rubiner: [00:08:43](#) Along with the advent of that State of Israel, the issue became even more confused and finally found its way to the Supreme Court of the State of Israel, who were themselves divided on what the appropriate answer was to be.
- Mary Baroff: [00:09:08](#) How did you feel the Jewish community related itself to the overall community?
- Charles Rubiner: [00:09:14](#) The first observation that I made about the Jewish community everywhere was that we were always convenient targets of the anti-Semites. We were the scapegoats of the Pharaohs, the Hamans, the Torquemadas, the czars, the Hitlers, and their innumerable imitators, right down to the present time. Throughout all of these historical repressions, and down to the present day, I learned that we have live constantly on the defensive in a seemingly endless struggle to justify our existence and our very right to life.
- Charles Rubiner: [00:10:20](#) Our persecutors seem to suffer from their greatest frustration, which was their inability to once and for all destroy and make us suffer once and for all the fate of the Assyrians, the Babylonians, and other ancient empires and cultures that flourished for a time and finally ceased to exist and became only footnotes in history.
- Mary Baroff: [00:10:56](#) At some point, you began to translate your intellectual concern with the Jewish community into organizational involvements. When and how did this happen?
- Charles Rubiner: [00:11:06](#) This came about, that is, my involvement with Jewish problems and the year was around 1915. I saw as the strongest single force for Jewish survival the Zionist movement. And I needed to be a paying and enrolled member of the provisional Zionist Organization of America. As you may recall, the agenda of the Zionist movement as established by the first World Zionist Congress in Basel, Switzerland in 1898 was the establishment of a publicly recognized, legally secure home for that Jews in Palestine.
- Charles Rubiner: [00:12:18](#) At the time I became an enrolled member, the organization had not completed its organizing procedures and it was still a

provisional one. I believe that my membership card was signed by Dr. Harold Friedenwald of Baltimore, an early American Zionist, and Louis Lipsky, who later became the head of the movement.

- Charles Rubiner: [00:12:55](#) While undoubtedly many persons influenced the direction of my Jewish interest, I could say that it was principally a spontaneous action on my part as an intellectual and emotional matter. I could not read of religious repressions, programs, and discriminations throughout the world, and indeed in our own country as well without reacting defensively and to the extent possible aggressively.
- Charles Rubiner: [00:13:41](#) I began attending mass meetings, which in the absence of radio and television, was the most frequent manner by which leaders met the masses of the Jewish people in the community. Parenthetically, I recall that none of the synagogues were large enough to accommodate masses of the people and most of the time, the Light Guard Armory located down town was used, as was the Arcadia Ballroom, and later the Graystone Ballroom. Such speakers universally known and beloved by Jews as Dr. Shmaryahu Levine and Manaka Musishkin (ph) were the speakers, and later, Louis Lipsky and Dr. Chaim Weizmann himself.
- Charles Rubiner: [00:15:16](#) Zionism was the subject of the day in debating clubs and oratorical societies to which I belonged, and my frequent subject and the subject of others as well was Zionism. Sometimes pro and sometimes con because not everybody was sold on the idea of a Jewish state, or even a Jewish homeland.
- Mary Baroff: [00:15:58](#) Were there a number of Zionist groups that arose rather spontaneously, and were there philosophic differences between them?
- Charles Rubiner: [00:16:09](#) Oh, yes. Then, as now, as in all ages past, there were great divisions of opinion among Jews on every subject. So naturally, there would be in the subject of Zionism. There was first the general Zionist organization, which I joined and to which I now belong. There was a Mizrachi organization, which attracted the more religious Zionists. A labor Zionist branch which was more or less the socialists and the other spindle groups. At that time, there were even those who believed that a Jewish homeland could be established outside of the Palestine. The territorialists, for instance, favored the Uganda in Africa.

- Charles Rubiner: [00:17:33](#) There was considerable opposition on the part of most of the reform rabbis because anti-Zionism was a principle plank in the reform platform, which happily was later deleted from its principles. Not all reform rabbis, however, were opposed to the movement. Two of the most eloquent reform rabbis, Dr. Stephen S. Wise, and Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver bucked the tide of anti-Zionism and have considerable influence on the Jewish community.
- Charles Rubiner: [00:18:36](#) A group of reform rabbis even went before a committee of the United States Senate to protest against United States approval of the Balfour Declaration back in 1917 or 1918. But I was committed to the principle of Zionism, and when the Keren Hayesod, that is the Palestine Reconstruction Fund, was established, that was long before its affiliation with the United Palestine Appeal and so forth, when they started their fundraising campaign, I was out making speeches and soliciting funds for them.
- Charles Rubiner: [00:19:26](#) One of my earliest recollections is taking David Ben-Gurion around to some of the meetings where, at some of them, he was received enthusiastically and at others, dubiously.
- Mary Baroff: [00:19:47](#) Because of the differences in philosophy, right?
- Charles Rubiner: [00:19:50](#) Yes, because of differences in philosophy, and because he was looked upon as a sort of a dreamer.
- Mary Baroff: [00:19:59](#) But with all of this, you've been fortunate to see a dream realized in the establishment of Israel, right?
- Charles Rubiner: [00:20:04](#) Yes, I was fortunate, and I feel sorry for many of those who put their time and their energy and their means who didn't live to see that.
- Mary Baroff: [00:20:19](#) That's right. I'd like to talk with you a little about what the Jewish community was like when you first became involved. Could you tell me a little about what were the centers of residence and activity?
- Charles Rubiner: [00:20:32](#) Well, when you speak of the Jewish community of Detroit, there was an overall Jewish community consisting of a number of pockets, or ghettos of Jews. For instance, perhaps the predominant one was the Hastings Street ghetto. This extended from Gratiot Avenue going north, and probably had the greatest density of Jewish population, the greatest number of

synagogues, Hebrew schools and other Jewish agencies. When I that it started from Gratiot going north, it left behind a very small Jewish ghetto south of Gratiot Avenue between Gratiot and the river, because there was Mullet Street, which is just south of Gratiot Avenue.

Charles Rubiner: [00:21:45](#) Already, what we knew as the Mullet Street Synagogue, I don't remember the exact Hebrew name, but I do know that as a very young boy, I distributed circulars around the community advertising a concert to be given by visiting cantors on the weekend there. My own father officiated there a number of times, but eventually that ghetto leapfrogged Gratiot Avenue and started northward.

Charles Rubiner: [00:22:33](#) My old synagogue was the one I attended when I was about 7 or 8 years old, was the Beth-David Synagogue. I believe today it's the B'nai David Synagogue. It was then located on Adelaide Street, midway between Hastings Street and Renard Street. Just beyond Renard, the Italian community was started. On the same Adelaide Street was located the Bishop School, which was a public school that had probably the largest Jewish student population.

Charles Rubiner: [00:23:21](#) There were other pockets of Jewish population. One that was a rather active one in the early days of Michigan Avenue, in the neighborhood of 30th Street, where Jewish merchants catered to the Polish residents because they're familiar with the language. I believe that they also had a little synagogue out there.

Charles Rubiner: [00:23:55](#) There was also the Delray community, which attracted many Hungarian Jews, who also had a synagogue there, and later moved to a new edifice on Dexter Boulevard called B'nai Moshe. Then there was another small settlement on the east side in what we knew as the Fairview area, but I don't think that ghetto exists any longer.

Mary Baroff: [00:24:43](#) So that there was some spread throughout, in different parts of the City of Detroit in this very early period.

Charles Rubiner: [00:24:52](#) Yes. As soon as a neighborhood became too congested, more and more congestion could be tolerated, but then it got to be too congested. Too many dry good stores in one locality, and too many kosher butcher shops, they scattered out through other areas and started new ghettos.

Mary Baroff: [00:25:17](#) In other words, the businessmen kind of were the ones that initiated the moves.

Charles Rubiner: [00:25:23](#) Yes. Sometimes they follow them, and sometimes they initiate it. They're leaders.

Mary Baroff: [00:25:32](#) What were some of the institutions and groups that represented the different elements in the community?

Charles Rubiner: [00:25:41](#) Well, I would say that the synagogue was the pivotal center of any other communal gathering places. And they were often designated, that is the synagogues were, by the European nationality or area which formed their backgrounds. For instance, the Beth David Synagogue, before I knew it was Beth-David, I knew it as the Russische shul. I still don't know the name of the shul that was known as the Galiciana shul, nor the Hebrew name of the Romanian shul. I already pointed out the Hungarian shul was B'nai Moshe.

Charles Rubiner: [00:26:51](#) There was also the Hasidic shul, which must have had a Hebrew name, but they were more familiarly named, as I say, by the ethnic character of the people who attended there. Some of these synagogues are still known by mention by these names, especially by the old timers.

Charles Rubiner: [00:27:19](#) Then, the same division occurred among the Landsmanschaften, which were composed almost entirely of immigrant Jews, and which flourished in large numbers, attracting the immigrants with whom they had most in common, either by way of ancestral background or language, or cultural desires. And these Landsmanschaften ... what do you call Landsmnschaften in English? Another word is the Farein.

Mary Baroff: [00:28:14](#) Farein, that's right.

Charles Rubiner: [00:28:15](#) Yeah. Sometimes they just call themselves societies by the name of the place that they came from. That is when they needed an English name.

Mary Baroff: [00:28:28](#) Yes. My father was the first president of his Landsmanschaft. It was from a small community in Russia, the Mazyr.

Charles Rubiner: [00:28:37](#) Ah, Mazyr, yes.

Mary Baroff: [00:28:39](#) Uh huh, yeah.

- Charles Rubiner: [00:28:40](#) That's how the names of some Russian and Polish communities were perpetuated. Names of the Landsmanschaften.
- Mary Baroff: [00:28:49](#) And some of these people still keep contacts with one another.
- Charles Rubiner: [00:28:52](#) Yes. Their disappearing, so they hang on to those with whom they have the most contact. While they flourished, they were quite a force in the community because they developed programs of mutual assistance, burial societies, financial loans like today's credit unions. And of course social activities on a wide scale. And when Jewish fundraising campaigns began seeking large amounts of money, the Landsmanschaften frequently vied with each other with their contributions and their activities for the particular campaign.
- Mary Baroff: [00:29:48](#) The Landsmanschaften no longer play an important role in Jewish life. Why is that?
- Charles Rubiner: [00:29:53](#) Well, just the process of deterioration of old country Jewish community, occasioned by the stoppage of immigration, and there were none to succeed the people who just died off. They were largely Yiddish speaking among themselves but not with their children, who grew up in the American culture, and there was no source from which the Yiddishists could renew their strain. This same disintegration happened at the same time as the decline of the Yiddish language generally, the Yiddish press, the Yiddish stage, and so forth.
- Charles Rubiner: [00:31:00](#) American born children found nothing to attract them to their parents' Yiddish speaking organizations or newspapers, or Yiddish stage. It's regrettable because a large part of our culture and something that will just go down in history as once having been an influential part of Jewish life, and which no longer can contribute anything.
- Mary Baroff: [00:31:45](#) Probably my generation, the group that was born in the '20s and so on is the last group that had some real tie with the language and with the culture of the ... actually the Yiddish parts of the culture. Wouldn't you say that's true?
- Charles Rubiner: [00:32:08](#) That is true. And that generation that you're speaking of is the first native American generation which already started the process of cultural assimilation. The gap in between those parents and children is a tremendous one. The late Rabbi Adler once said, "My father is 2000 years older than I am." And this is true. The children who took up with baseball and football and

English speaking activities were in a world apart from the parents who were following a lifestyle that they brought over from the old country, and very few of the children could follow in that lifestyle.

Mary Baroff: [00:33:14](#) Yes. What about the organized Jewish community? How did this evolve?

Mary Baroff: [00:33:22](#) Okay.

Charles Rubiner: [00:33:22](#) In my day, Jewish movements, whether they were philanthropic, intellectual, cultural, or what not, were largely fragmented and unorganized, or rather, ununified. Each organization prized its independence and the mergers which subsequently were brought about from sheer necessity were not without sharp birth pains, or frictions among different religious philosophies and outlooks. There were sharp differences of opinion in philanthropic fundraising activities and the attitudes of the "right crowd" groups had to be overcome before many would surrender their sovereignties and independence.

Charles Rubiner: [00:34:37](#) The United Jewish Charities, which was formed in 1899, was one organization, and I believe the first on the Detroit scene, which was able to successfully surmount these apparently insurmountable difficulties, and which has thrived in harmony and unity to this day. Later, in 1925, the Jewish Welfare Federation combined a large host of fundraising communal agencies with a perspective intended to embrace all major fundraising movements in the community, both the international, the national and the local movements, and eliminated most of the street corner coin box appeals.

Charles Rubiner: [00:35:45](#) These isolated appeals were very annoying to the community and I consider that the concentration of them into a unified federation is the most constructive, the most important and the best communal service organization that we have.

Mary Baroff: [00:36:20](#) What elements in the Jewish community took the initiative of leadership in the early years, and what changes have occurred in this area?

Charles Rubiner: [00:36:29](#) Well, in the beginnings, the movement ... that is before the influx of masses of orthodox Jews, they were in the hands of Jews who had migrated to this country from central Europe. The German Jews, largely affiliated with the only reform synagogue

in the city, Temple Beth El, although as if a forerunner of the unity which was to be achieved, the first president of the United Jewish Charities was a devout orthodox Jew, David W. Simons, who was for a number of years the president of Congregation Shaarey Zedek. Along the way, the German Jewish influence declined and the mass immigration from eastern Europe produced new communal leaders who succeeded to the highest offices in the Jewish community.

- Charles Rubiner: [00:37:59](#) While at times this too occasioned some friction, it can nevertheless can be safely asserted that the Detroit Jewish community today is a harmonious community with few of the divisive influences and factors that have marked other Jewish communities in large cities. In fact, it can also be safely said that these differences in background are now rarely noted or have any effect upon the community.
- Mary Baroff: [00:38:47](#) What role did Jews play in the economy of Detroit in the early period?
- Charles Rubiner: [00:38:55](#) It's my recollection that the economic involvement of the Jewish community were largely in the area of small merchants who ran small stores of all kinds, consisting mostly of dry goods and clothing supplied by wholesalers who were largely Jewish. Incidentally, these wholesalers were made ghetto by themselves. They occupied warehouses on Jefferson Avenue somewhere between Brush Street and perhaps Cass Avenue or First Street.
- Charles Rubiner: [00:40:11](#) There was also a significant number of peddlers among that immigrants who lacked the finances and the knowledge of English and the familiarity with American ways of doing business, so that they weren't equipped financially and by reason of language difficulties to own stores of their own. But they too gradually became business people on a larger scale. And as is the history of the Jewish peddlers in many United States communities, they moved up from the pack on the back. To perhaps a wagon. And then a store, and then a chain of stores. But originally the stores were largely in the ghettos with a few Jewish downtown stores being owned by earlier arrivals who had already begun the process of assimilation and could cater to the general community.
- Charles Rubiner: [00:41:43](#) A few were involved in manufacture, although not too many. And then their children started to lean toward the professions. Law, education, medicine, dentistry, and so forth. The tradition

was a familiar one of the father, the peddler, working 18 hours a day and the mother scrubbing floors to provide for their children the education that was denied to them in the old country.

- Mary Baroff: [00:42:32](#) The whole characterization of the Jewish people that the father wants his children to surpass him, isn't this one of the traditions?
- Charles Rubiner: [00:42:41](#) Yes. That's one of the traditions, coupled with the fact that education was always a keystone in Jewish life, wherever it was permitted. In the old country, they were rarely able to say, "My son the doctor." "My son the lawyer," and so forth. Here, that was their life's ambition.
- Charles Rubiner: [00:43:11](#) Then, with affluence came the desire for improved business establishments and residences, and the Jews of the earlier ghettos, such as Hastings Street, burst their bonds and moved to newer and finer pastures, which in turn became new ghettos. Oakland Avenue and Dexter Boulevard are examples of these. And then later, a general northwest trend over the county line into Oakland County.
- Mary Baroff: [00:43:54](#) We've been a moving people.
- Charles Rubiner: [00:43:55](#) The wandering Jews.
- Mary Baroff: [00:43:58](#) The wandering Jew. That's right.
- Mary Baroff: [00:44:06](#) Okay. When did you become actively involved with the Jewish Welfare Federation?
- Charles Rubiner: [00:44:12](#) I became a member of the board of the Jewish Welfare Federation in 1931, at the age of 33. And I was then wholly committed to the principle of central fundraising, having participated in the campaigns that started after the formation of that Federation in 1925. The multitudinous independent fundraising activities by a great variety of organizations had become a community nuisance, which turned off many otherwise charitably inclined people, and I concluded that on the whole, the various agencies stood to gain more than they lost by giving up their independent fundraising campaigns. Moreover, I viewed it as a strong unifying force in the Detroit Jewish community, bringing together members of the community of divergent opinions in other areas, and who found that harmony could exist even among differences.

Charles Rubiner: [00:45:55](#) I consider that the Federation has more than justified its established ...

Charles Rubiner: [00:46:04](#) (silence)

Speaker 1: [00:46:11](#) This is the second side of tape number one in the interview with Charles Rubiner.

Mary Baroff: [00:46:28](#) Let's see. Okay.

Charles Rubiner: [00:46:31](#) In the beginning, the campaigns were conducted on a sort of a flamboyant and highly publicized manner, attracting a lot of public attention from the non-Jewish community, especially with the announcements of the large amounts of money that were raised, and the daily report luncheons with theatrical entertainment and so forth, all of which proved rather offensive, especially since the large contributions as reported were wholly out of proportion to the smaller contributions that the Jews made to the general community and frequently, it lent credence to the prevalent gentile impression that the Jews have all the money.

Charles Rubiner: [00:47:56](#) Later, the campaigns assumed a more dignified procedure and were toned down so that they could confine it within the Jewish community.

Mary Baroff: [00:48:19](#) What were some of the problem areas that were dealt with during your period of service with the Federation, Judge Rubiner?

Charles Rubiner: [00:48:32](#) Well, my recollection isn't too detailed, but generally I would say that the thinking and the activities of the Federation during all of the '30s were dominated by the economic depression that we were in. And along with the rest of the community and the rest of the country, in fact, we had to cope mostly with the depression created problems.

Charles Rubiner: [00:49:24](#) There was first creation of the Jewish unemployment emergency council, which was later liquidated when the Department of Public Welfare took over most of the relief problems in the general community. This involved the transfer to the Department of Public Welfare the portion of our Jewish Social Service Bureau staff and a commitment to try to maintain a minimum \$20 a week stipend for workers at the JSSB.

Mary Baroff: [00:50:16](#) That's hard to believe.

- Charles Rubiner: [00:50:17](#) Yes. It's hard to believe that the Community Chest during this period was in some cases paying \$7 a week subsistence allowance to employees, and even that was charged against their salaries. There's a record of a loan from the Reconstruction Finance Corporation to the Community Chest in the amount of \$60,000 to keep that operation going before the Department of Public Welfare stepped in. Then this was followed by the bank holiday where whatever funds anyone had were frozen, and it can be imagined what the effect this had on the collections on campaign pledges.
- Charles Rubiner: [00:51:29](#) I recall that the work of the Jewish Child Placement Bureau and the Jewish Children's Home, which is now no longer in existence was coordinated through the creation of a joint committee on child care. All of our agencies that owned their own buildings had mortgages and mortgage payments to corporate, and all in all, those were not happy days from the standpoint of community finances.
- Mary Baroff: [00:52:28](#) You really served during a time of great community problems. You also served with the Jewish Community Center. Did you not? Could you tell me about this?
- Charles Rubiner: [00:52:38](#) Yes, I'll be glad to, but in line with your comment on the problems, I just hope that at this time in April of 1975, we are not again on the verge of similar economic problems.
- Charles Rubiner: [00:53:03](#) In answer to your question about the Jewish Community Center, during the course of my service on the Federation board, I was invited to fill a vacancy in the presidency of the Jewish Community Center. This was in 1936, and the vacancy occurred because of some internal friction in the center. I was informed that several factions still existed which disagreed on a number of basic issues. The center had but recently been formed as a merger of the Jewish Centers Association and the Young Women's Hebrew Association, and not all differences in philosophy had as yet been ironed out.
- Charles Rubiner: [00:54:05](#) I am happy to say that during the period of three years that I served as president, and these were probably three of the worst years of the depression, and all was paid by charging to funds, I was at least able to bring some harmony into the situation so that the Jewish Community Center of today is free from the internal frictions that I have mentioned.

- Mary Baroff: [00:54:51](#) In other words, you were really in on the very beginning of the Jewish Center Organization as it is today.
- Charles Rubiner: [00:54:58](#) That's right. I wasn't the first president, but the first president resigned because he could not work in harmony with both factions. And at that time, I was a judge and they figured that perhaps I could please both of them. I tried, and I think we had a good result.
- Mary Baroff: [00:55:30](#) Okay, good. You've also had some involvement with Jewish educational resources, have you not?
- Charles Rubiner: [00:55:34](#) Well, my contact with the Talmud Torahs, which represented the educational institutions of the community ... my contacts with them were rather minimal. There were only a few of them. They were poorly staffed, and usually by teachers who spoke poor English and knew nothing of the principles of pedagogy. Later, the teachers for the most part, became people who were also teachers in the public schools so that a better system of Jewish education could be established. However, I quickly changed to private tutoring.
- Charles Rubiner: [00:56:33](#) Eventually, the principle Talmud Torahs were merged into what is now the United Hebrew Schools, which the community can well be proud of as an efficient, well organized system of Hebrew elementary and high schools, and a midrasha. While I served as vice president of the United Hebrew Schools, and on its board for several years, I found that I was spreading my communal activities too thinly and had to curtail them, so I never went on to the presidency.
- Mary Baroff: [00:57:26](#) Another organization in which you served actively is the Jewish Community Council. Could you tell me something about this?
- Charles Rubiner: [00:57:34](#) Well, I am rather proud of the part that I played in the formation of the Jewish Community Council and I'm glad that among the activities which I elected to continue was the formation of that organization. It came about in this way. Following the period in which the notorious Dearborn Independent, published by Henry Ford, printed its scurrilous antisemitic libel against the Jews, and then later following Father Coughlin's antisemitic tirades there was a grave threat that a seat in the United States could be won by a certain notorious anti-Semite. At the moment, his name eludes me, but it was either William Dudley Pelley or Gerald K. Smith.

Charles Rubiner: [00:59:00](#) In any event, it was a candidate who seemed to be able to attract an antisemitic following and it's my recollection that he was going to run against a very fine incumbent of the senate seat at that time. The danger was so great that representatives of several Jewish organizations, a number of them in fact, met to decide on a common course of action to stave off this formidable threat. He was eventually defeated, but we recognized a necessity for similar united action to meet future threats.

Charles Rubiner: [01:00:14](#) I was privileged to be one of the committee charged with drafting the constitution for a new representative body to be known as the Jewish Community Council, to which every Jewish organization in the city was to be permitted to send one or more delegates depending on the size of their membership.

Mary Baroff: [01:00:45](#) Was this in the '30s? The time that the Community Council was formed?

Charles Rubiner: [01:00:55](#) I think it was either in the late '30s or the early '40s.

Mary Baroff: [01:01:01](#) I was just trying to get some idea of the time.

Charles Rubiner: [01:01:06](#) Uh huh. Well, the task wasn't an easy one as you can imagine, because there were so many divergent viewpoints as to what should be the nature of such a council. Should all communal activities be lodged in that organization, including civil defense work and fundraising? Or should it be an overall body with a separate division charged with the fundraising? As you can imagine, there were opinions every which way. But the task was finally completed, and the Council organized under the leadership of its first president, Simon Shetzer, a dedicated young man who devoted an enormous amount of effort and time toward the fruition of our efforts.

Charles Rubiner: [01:02:30](#) Then, practically every organization of any consequence was permitted to send delegates to the Council, and example of what a perspective it developed can be gained from the fact that Yiddish as well as English was to be recognized as one of the official languages of the Council. And many of the delegates who rose to speak did so in Yiddish, although some other delegates couldn't understand them, and I suspect that some of the Yiddish-speaking delegates couldn't understand the English. But they made themselves understood to each other, and the Council has proven itself as a vital factor in many areas of the Jewish activities besides the defense of Jewish rights.

- Mary Baroff: [01:03:49](#) Could you tell me about the development of your religious thinking and your involvements in the religious community?
- Charles Rubiner: [01:03:57](#) Well, if you're asking me about my own, I would to acknowledge that the object of my most devoted service and closest interest was and is Congregation Shaarey Zedek. Although raised in a stricter orthodox household, my father having been, as I mentioned before, a hazan, a [inaudible 01:04:25], and although my earliest years of worship were as above mentioned at Beth David Synagogue, and then later at Beth Jacob, which was at the corner of Montcalm and Hastings Streets, and strictly orthodox, I recognized at an early age that the new American generation of Jews would not wholly accept the orthodox ritual and the strict literal interpretation of orthodoxy.
- Charles Rubiner: [01:05:04](#) I saw in conservative Judaism a vehicle for preserving traditional Judaism without the strict and severe disciplines of inflexible orthodoxy. On the other hand, I could not accept reform, which to me seemed to eliminate all of the emotional aspects of the Jewish ritual, leaving a cold, formal worship mostly in English. And this had no appeal for me.
- Charles Rubiner: [01:05:46](#) Accordingly, at a very early age, I began attending Sunday School at Shaarey Zedek which was then located on Winder Street, between St. Antoine and Beaubien streets and attended Sabbath services there. When the synagogue moved to its new structure at the Willis and Brush streets, following the trend of the population, which was northward, I was present at the dedication of the new building and was shortly after elected president of the Young People's Society.
- Charles Rubiner: [01:06:36](#) During the first World War, we promoted many social activities like dances and other parties, attracting many of the servicemen who were stationed in the area. While the ritual of worship was curtailed, to some extent at this location, there was still separate seating of men and women, the men in the main auditorium and the women in the balconies. In fact, mixed seating at Shaarey Zedek did not commence until a later building was erected at Chicago Boulevard and Lawton, where there was only a small balcony intended for overflow attendance, but not necessarily limited to women.
- Charles Rubiner: [01:07:39](#) Later, as time went along, I served as secretary of the synagogue for three terms, as vice president for three terms, and as president for three terms, each term being of one year's duration. Because of the unlimited tenure that previous officers

had enjoyed without indicating any willingness to give up their offices at any particular time, the constitution was amended to limit the terms of all officers to three consecutive one-year terms, after which, no matter how efficient the incumbent might be, he had to relinquish the office to a newcomer.

- Charles Rubiner: [01:08:33](#) The most recent move of the synagogue was of course to its present location in Southfield, where I remain as an honorary member of the Board of Directors.
- Mary Baroff: [01:08:46](#) That has been of interest of a great many years, and an involvement. Let's talk now about some of the early leadership in the Jewish community. Could you tell me, who were some of the leaders?
- Charles Rubiner: [01:09:04](#) Well, on the subject of leadership in general in the Detroit Jewish community, I would say that we have been singularly blessed with the quality and the dedication of our leadership. If I were to attempt to pinpoint a time when the most forward looking and efficient leadership was required, I would that it occurred at the time that representatives of many charitable and educational organizations, each being jealous of its independence and its sovereignty, were called together for a purpose of unifying them in the United Jewish Charities. This was well before my time, of course, in November of 1899.
- Charles Rubiner: [01:10:10](#) The concept of a united community in the field of Jewish philanthropy was projected by the Rabbi of the only reform temple in the city, Dr. Leo M. Franklin, but the first annual meeting was presided over by the Orthodox and very observant, David W. Simons, as president.
- Charles Rubiner: [01:10:39](#) As to personalities in the leadership, it would be most risky and very likely unfair to attempt to single out any particular individuals who have had the greatest impact on the Jewish community in the Detroit area. Certainly, however, the names of the two Butzel brothers, Henry M. and Fred. Henry M. later became chief Justice of the Supreme Court of the State of Michigan. And the names of David W. Simons, Abraham Srere, William Friedman, Julian H. Krolik, and Mr. and Mrs. Joseph H. Ehrlich would inevitably be placed at the head of any list so compiled. There were undoubtedly others and I mean no disrespect to them by the omission of their names.
- Charles Rubiner: [01:12:00](#) In the earlier history of the Detroit community, as I've pointed out, the leadership was nicely in the hands of German Jews and

naturally most of the funds that were raised came from them. They were incidentally the most affluent. Speaking of the influence of German Jews, I read recently that at one meeting in the early history of Temple Beth El, a resolution was unanimously adopted that the rabbi was to deliver his sermon in German.

Mary Baroff: [01:12:50](#)

Is that so?

Charles Rubiner: [01:12:56](#)

Mm-hmm (affirmative). However, as the East European Jews became more and more Americanized, they likewise assumed positions of leadership and responsibility, and with the principle of Tzedakah an integral part of their Jewish philosophy and lifestyle, they likewise assumed the duty of providing funds for Jewish philanthropy and many non-Jewish activities to the extent that their means would permit.

Mary Baroff: [01:13:37](#)

Judge Rubiner, before we end our taping, could you tell me what you're major concerns are for the Jewish community today?

Charles Rubiner: [01:13:56](#)

Well, I have confidence in the solidity and the unity of the Detroit Jewish community, but I am worried about the future continuity of interests on the part of future generations, interest in the welfare of Israel and other international agencies outside the United States, like the Joint Distribution Committee, ORT, and others that function on the international Jewish scene. There has always been the element of emotion on the part of the generations that I have lived through in connection with the fate and destiny of the Jews.

Charles Rubiner: [01:15:15](#)

We have always been moved in our giving by the distress that the Jews around the world were at the moment suffering, such as the Russian Pogroms and the Nazi extermination of a whole Jewish community, and I wonder whether future generations will be moved by the same emotions. I hope that the same causes will not exist. In the days of my parents, the Jewish community was moved to sackcloth and ashes type grief by that Russian Pogroms. Solicitation of relief funds was fairly easy.

Charles Rubiner: [01:16:40](#)

During the first World War when the Jewish communities were the victims of poverty and repressions, and then later during Hitlerism, our hearts were again torn by the history of persecution and excesses against the Jews overseas.

- Charles Rubiner: [01:17:11](#) Later, when Israel as a state struggled for a foothold and was constantly on a program of actual survival, it was again relatively easy to find respective emotions ... or I should say, responsive emotions among the people who were solicited for funds. However, the stories of Dachau, Buchenwald and Treblinka are now becoming merely pages in history to our young people and it is to be hoped never to be repeated in anybody's lifetime. Unlike us, our children and grandchildren will have no involvement with that portion of our history. And how long these events will be able to play on their heartstrings is problematical.
- Charles Rubiner: [01:18:25](#) Certainly, we must never let up in our repetition of the story of the Holocaust and its horrors, and we must always let them know the story of the struggle of a group of Russian and Polish under the inspiration of the immortal Theodor Herzl to acquire by peaceful means a homeland in Palestine, and the survival of the Jewish people and of the Jewish religion, and how the State of Israel must always be regarded as not one of the seven wonders of the world, or the eighth wonder of the world, but as the first and the never to be forgotten and irrefutable wonder.
- Mary Baroff: [01:19:30](#) And may this continue, always. I thank you so much for giving us this time so that we can tape some of your reminiscences and some of your thoughts that you had.
- Charles Rubiner: [01:19:44](#) I'm glad to be a part of your history recording program, which I hope will prove to be of interest, at least to some future Jews.
- Mary Baroff: [01:20:03](#) It will, I know.