

Mr. Emanuel Rosenberg

Interviewed by
Miss Betty Turnell

for the
Decatur Public Library

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Emanuel Rosenberg Interview

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This is Betty Turnell speaking for the Decatur Public Library. Our guest today is Mr. Emanuel Rosenberg, better known as "Manny" to his friends. Well, Mr. Rosenberg, were you born in Decatur? Have you always lived here?

A. Yes, I was born in Decatur, on North Clinton Street, in 1898, and last September, of course, I passed my 80th birthday. I lived on the South-east side of Decatur and went to school first at Jackson School. Jackson School was located at the end of Jackson Street. It's a street that runs from Decatur south to Marian Street. I think the Decatur Public Schools have their maintenance department there now. I went to the grade schools there, and then I went to what they called the "Departmental School" at the corner of North and Broadway.

Q. What kind of school was that?

A. It's like the schools that have the 7th, 8th, 9th, and 10th grades. I remember the principal there was a man by the name of ~~Harold~~ ^{HARELL}. Then I went to the Stephen Decatur High School, and I remember that our class that graduated in 1915 was the first class that completed the entire four years in the high school.

Q. Then when they tore the building down that was quite an event for you?

A. Yes, and I could see ^{the demolition} from my office on the 12th floor of the Citizens Building. I could look down and see the big ball demolishing some very pleasant memories.

While I was in high school I participated in a great many activities. I was on the debating team with some of my friends, and I remember an occasion when we went to Bloomington to debate the Bloomington High School on the question, "Resolved: That the telephone and telegraph lines be nationalized." We had prepared for the affirmative side of the question but when we got to Bloomington, we found that we were to debate the negative.

Q. And you could do that equally well!

A. We did that, and miraculously, we won. Well, I can remember that on that team - I noticed in the paper just the other day that Mrs. Davenport had died who was the widow of the police chief, Omar Davenport. He was a member of that debating team.

After going through high school, I wasn't certain just what I should do, but I decided through the urging of my parents and a lawyer friend in Chicago that I should go to law school in Chicago at Northwestern University.

Northwestern University Law School at that time was on the corner of Dearborn and Lake Streets in downtown Chicago, and it was the site of the old Fremont Hotel, where Abraham Lincoln had stayed when he was alive.

I started in 1918 and enlisted in the Student Army Training Corps. I was in the army for 77 days. Our barracks were at the school, and our dining room, mess hall, was at the school.

We used to go out at 5 o'clock in the morning in formation to Grant Park, where the locomotives used to go up and down belching out their smoke.

This was in 1918. Then we'd march back to the school.

I remember that I weighed 165 pounds when I started school and after my army stint, I had gained 25 pounds because after we ate, we used to lie down on our cots, I remember.

Well, then of course, the war ended, and I was discharged from the army 77 days after I had started.

Then I completed my education in 1920, and I came back here to start practicing law. I started out by myself in an office over what was then the Parlor Market on Lincoln Square. I think that Radio Shack is there now on the west side of what was known as Lincoln Square in those days, when the interurbans went around the square and the street cars, etc.

I stayed in the office a few months, and then I became an assistant state's attorney under Mr. Charles Evans, and I remained there about five years until I got married in 1925. I married Hannah ^{GEVIRTZ} ~~Geberot~~, who was the physical education supervisor in the public schools. She had come here from her home in Whiting, Indiana.

We celebrated our 50th anniversary in 1975, and we're now in our 53rd year. When I started this law practice, of course, I was an assistant. The justice of the peace system was in vogue at that time, and it was nothing unusual to go over to the justice of the peace and try a case for one or two days. One of the most interesting cases, I remember, that we tried there involved the sect we called the "Holy Rollers." They used to disturb the peace and quiet of the neighborhoods, but we were very skeptical in the office about issuing a warrant for complaints coming in from people who couldn't sleep because they were disturbing the neighborhood. Finally the complaints were so vociferous that we couldn't sidestep it, and we issued a warrant and arrested the pastor of the church for disturbing the peace.

Q. You were afraid of "freedom of religion?"

A. "Freedom of religion," "Freedom of speech." In those days they could request a jury for misdemeanor, which they can't do now, and they used to pick up a jury in Central Park - people who were there sitting on the benches. We tried that case for two ^{days} ~~years~~ (2) At the close of the case I said my first piece. The person who prosecutes has the burden of proof and gets the right to open and close. The reverend when he got up to talk in defense of his position of having his church there, quoted from the New Testament. When I got up to reply, I quoted from the Old Testament - and the jury convicted him! That stopped at least the obstreperous noises that they had, and they calmed down a little bit.

Then, when I got out of practice, in the state's attorney's office, I opened up an office for myself in the Millikin Building and I was there

for four years. Then I joined forces with Edward Hayes and Point Downing. Edward Hayes later became the national commander of the Legion, and Point Downing became the head of the Building and Loan Department of the state of Illinois.

Q. An illustrious firm!

A. Yes, a very illustrious firm. They weren't in the office ^{too long} and then I really carried on ^{myself} under the firm name for several years, but in 1942 my brother Joseph had come to town, and we joined forces then. We ^{have been} ~~were~~ together for many years. Then later Wayne Bickes, and David Johnson ^{joined us} We have two other associates here. I'm in my 58th year of the practice of the law, and I've enjoyed every minute of it.

Of course, the practice of law has changed over the years. For instance, when I started to practice law, if you wanted to get a divorce, you came to a lawyer's office and were told that you would have to pay \$50 lawyer's fees and \$15 costs. Now that would only begin to pay the cost of ^a divorce today because it has gone to very high figures now.

Q. Is it easier?

A. Well, the divorce laws of the early 20's were predicated on the fact that you had to be guilty of fault before you could get a divorce. We still retain ^{fault} in our system even though we have a new divorce law passed October 1, 1977, ~~the concept of fault~~. We are only one of two states in the United States, in the union today that retains the ^{concept} ~~question~~ of fault in divorce matters. Most of them have a "no fault" procedure. Anyway, I was about to say, if you were the person who brought the suit and you got the decree and were divorced, you couldn't get married for a year after the divorce. But if you were the defendant in that suit, and you had committed adultery, you couldn't get married for two years. And ~~the~~

of course ^{it} has got to the point now of divorces in the community where it's a matter of no social stigma involved, and about in half the number of marriages, about that number of divorces occur. With the adoption of a new fault ~~back about~~ ^{ago as a cause of} six or seven years of extreme mental cruelty, most divorces are almost "consent divorces"; if there is no opposition or no question about the custody of children or property, it goes through as a matter of course. Of course, there is expertise in that as there is in all fields. I think there is no more important branch of the law than in taking care of human relations, making it possible for people to live together - either together or separately - in order to eliminate bitter conflict but it's best I think that the law has indicated and finally come around to the point that if people can't live together, they should be separated.

And, then, of course, when I came here to start practice for myself in 1925 and again in 1929 practice of law has changed a great deal - there have been changes in the manner in which you file cases, the terms of court. We have a system now which is much more flexible and which makes it possible for people to get quicker justice. They are able to get to court quicker, without delays. We used to have a system that you could only go to three terms of court, that would be in January, May, and October. Now all we do is file a case and you have to appear thirty days afterward. That makes for a speedier administration of justice. When I started to practice in 1925, in June, July, and August in the summer with very little court, you could almost shut up shop. Now it's a continual process the whole year long.

I have found that we have a very splendid corps of lawyers in Decatur, and I've enjoyed practicing law with them. Of course, there are a few "bad apples in the barrel," but you get to know them and you accommodate yourself.

I have, of course, been very active in community affairs. Very early I was a member of the Boys' Opportunity Home in 1922, and I've been a member of that board ever since then. When it merged with Webster-Cantrell I continued.

Q. Could you tell us what it is?

A. The Boys' Opportunity Home was originally founded by a group of women in the community. It always had eleven women members and ten men members. Its purpose was to provide a home for neglected children - not bad boys but boys who for one reason or another didn't have a proper home and needed temporary care until they could be put back into the mainstream of life. Over the years the conception of what our institution is doing has changed. The "good boys" and the "good girls" (they merged and now are together under one roof) are no longer to be found in these institutions. They are all problem children now, involving special care and special skills and programs. Recreational facilities have to be provided for them and so on. Its a different conception of what you should do with young children. The state department has changed its mind. At one time they insisted that we should have a - not a correctional institution but this kind of institution. Then they wanted to put them in foster homes, and they've alternated, depending on who is in power and what their philosophy is. Today I think the emphasis is to try to get them into foster homes, but there is a place for a home like Webster-Cantrell Hall if it's efficiently run. I'd say right now that with the direction of Mr. ^{Outcall} ~~Alison~~ (?) out there, they're doing a splendid job.

Q. Is this still private or is it public?

A. They are private, not for profit corporations with voluntary boards of directors, but of course they have staff of experts - a social worker at the head of it together with a large staff. It has grown from five people

at the home to twenty-five to thirty people on the staff now. The budgets vary from the time when I first came on the board of the boys' home there was no community United fund at all. We had ~~chickens~~^{chickens} ~~checkers~~ out there; we had a cow, and we really had to beg for food for the boys. It was a very difficult time until the Community Chest, which was the forerunner of the United Way. When the community chest started, we had a fixed budget. But over the years, we have been able to attract a great many bequests, which have been made in wills and land so the home now owns 375 acres of farm lands and has a tremendous endowment fund. They get donations from people, and the state and county now give the major portion of the funds. ~~As I said, I was connected with that.~~

Then I was president of Decatur Community concerts. That was an organization that brought musical artists and attractions to the city. That was based on an assumption that one week during the year we had a campaign. We had 35 to 50 people, who were workers, go out to get memberships. Memberships used to be \$10.00 - \$12.00 per person. We used to hold the concerts in the Masonic Temple. We figured out how many memberships we had sold, and that would determine our budget. Our talent budget used to be around \$8,000 a year. Out of that we had to get four artists to come there a year. We could get a symphony orchestra. In those days the highest figure we paid was \$3500. Today the cheapest symphony orchestra is \$9,000 and the cost goes up to \$26,000. With the advent of the Illinois Arts Council and the National Arts and Humanities Council, ~~I was connected~~^{and help of the} with the Decatur Arts Council, we brought to Decatur the Chicago Symphony Orchestra for a week's residence. It cost us \$62,000. The Illinois Arts Council contributed \$50,000 and we raised the \$12,000.

I was on the board of the Decatur Area Arts Council for nine years, and I'm now a retired honorary member. I was also engaged as a member of the board of the Decatur Mental Health Center, and I was president there for several years. I relinquished that a few years ago.

There have been other organizations that I've been connected with.

For many years, starting away back in 1924 with a friend of mine who is now long gone - Horace Garman - we organized a lecture course at the YMCA on Sunday afternoons. Then I took part in the Community Lectures when that was organized in the late 30's and 40's. We brought people like Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt. We brought many speakers to the Masonic Temple.

I have enjoyed living here in Decatur. I had a chance when I got out of law school to go to Chicago, but my father was very ill. He died eleven days after I became a lawyer. So I stayed here, and I believe the rewards of practicing in a small community are greater than those of Chicago. There isn't the "rat race" here that there is there.

- Q. I'm sure you have contributed a great deal to the life of Decatur, too.
- A. It's been my philosophy, being Jewish, that one of the cardinal elements of our faith is that we have to have compassion for those who are not in a position to help themselves. We have to help other people. Then if you have money or wealth, you are somewhat of a steward for those who have not. I've been active in the United Fund - years ago - and in Jewish causes. I was president of our local synagogue for over twenty years. I'm an honorary president of the Temple B'Nai Abraham. I've been active in the United Jewish Appeal. It's the organization that has helped the suffering Jews overseas. I was honored a few years ago for twenty-five years of activity in that endeavor.

I have two daughters. One daughter is living in Israel, with three grandsons.

Q. Have you visited her?

A. We have been in Israel ten times - my wife and I. My daughter is married to a doctor who is a professor of genetics. He has written several books on genetics and is now writing a book on Jewish diseases, which will come out in June. The three boys are all in the Israeli army - one is a paratrooper, another is in the infantry, and the other in the artillery.

Q. You must have a very great interest then in recent developments.

A. Yes, I have, of course, but I don't have a euphoria. Many people think the signing of the peace treaty is an end in itself. It's only the beginning of a long, hard struggle. If you travel in Israel, and they point out to you the small area in which Israel lives, you understand what they mean by "security." ; It's a nation of three and a half million surrounded by one hundred million Arabs. What they have done in Israel has been truly remarkable. When we travel in Israel, we have all the comforts of modern living. My daughter lives in a home with four bedrooms with all the appliances.

Q. It does seem unfortunate that other countries can't see that they could do the same with their help.

A. That's correct. Agriculturally, they have done miracles - made water run uphill. They've eliminated some of the diseases endemic to tropical countries, like trachoma. That's been eliminated. Their infant mortality rate is probably the lowest in the Middle East. The average annual income in Israel is probably ten or twelve times that of the Arabic countries. All modern homes, buildings, etc.

All I say to people who want to travel in the Middle East is - if they want the travel experience of a life time - to go to Israel, the Switzerland of Asia, and see the contrast of going to an Arabic country and then stepping into Israel.

I've done a lot of travel. As I said, I've made ten trips to Israel. We've gone to Europe about four times and in 1959 I toured some of the music capitals of Europe, like Zurich, Edinburgh, and so on, and Bayreuth in Germany. I've always had a desire to hear Wagner at the Festspielhaus there in Bayreuth, Germany. Although I knew that Wagner was one of the greatest anti-semites who ever lived, I still wanted to hear an opera or two there. We did go there in 1959 and enjoyed it very much.

Q. Music then is one of your interests?

A. Yes - one of my interests - and reading, of course. I've been connected with the Fortnightly Club. It's a book club that meets every two weeks. My wife and I have been members since 1931. It's a good little commentary on the change in social habits. When we went there, the refreshments were coke and popcorn. Now they have wine and beer.

Q. Mr. Rosenberg, you mentioned your daughter who lives in Israel, but you also said you have another daughter.

A. Yes. I have a daughter who lives in Glenview, Illinois. She is married to an insurance man. They have two sons, the oldest of which is graduating from medical school this year. Her younger son is graduating from college. In addition, my daughter, Elaine, has been very active in the women's division of Brandeis University. She will be installed as president of the National Brandeis Women's Organization in Boston in June of this year, and we're going to be there.

Q. Congratulations! That will be a great event.

A. Yes - we're looking forward to it. Then we'll come back to my grandson's medical graduation. It will be quite a year for us.

Q. It not only has been quite a year for you, but it has been quite a life. I thank you very much for sharing it with the people of Decatur. We certainly appreciate all that you have done. Listening to these reminiscences has been a real pleasure. Thank you very much.

A. You're very welcome.

Q. You have been listening to the reminiscences of Mr. Emanuel Rosenberg. This is Betty Turnall speaking for the Decatur Public Library.

