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**Jewish Historical Society Oral Histories
Jeanne Swern Levitt & Doris Swern Berger (13 July 1999)**

**By Ellen Callahan
April 2020**

Link to audio file:

<https://archive.org/details/JHS50SideA>

Summary Information

Tape Number: JHS 50
Length: 46:19
Interviewer: O. [Orvil "Ozzie"]¹ Zuckerman
Interviewee: Jeanne Swern Levitt
Doris Swern Berger
Date of Interview: 7/13/1999
Place of Interview: Office of the Jewish Historical Society of Greater Trenton
Major Topic: Samuel Swern (April 23, 1890 – August 25, 1971), Trenton business man

Throughout this interview, the Swern sisters, Jeanne Swern Levitt and Doris Swern Berger, discuss their family, their father's business career including his first purchase of a candy store at age 10, his department store (Herzog and Swern, later to become Swern and Company), the founding of Stacy's Savings and Loan, and his activities during both World Wars. In addition, they discuss their grandparents' help in settling Jewish families in Trenton and their parents' activities in founding leading Jewish organizations including Adath Israel, the Young Men's Hebrew Association (YMHA) and the Young Women's Hebrew Association (YWHA).

Samuel Swern was born on April 23, 1890 in a small village or shtetl of Vercala [the sisters were unclear as to if it was in Poland or a Russian-ruled part of Poland; further research was unable to find this village, however, census records list Swern's birthplace as Russia]. In 1893, he was brought to Trenton by his parents, Abraham (ca. 1865 – 1933) and Lilian Swern (1867-1941). Abraham (a shoemaker) and his wife bought a large home on Mulberry Street where they raised their family and also provided shelter and aid to other Jews coming to Trenton in the 1890s and early 1900s. In

addition to Samuel, the Swerns had Nathan (1897-1958), Maurice (1898-1983) and Sarah (1900-1975) all of whom remained in Trenton.

According to his daughters, Samuel Swern's earliest business venture was the purchase of a candy store for 5 dollars when he was 10 years old which he sold for 10 dollars the next year. Sometime in the early 1900s, he bought the Battle Monument Grocery Store on North Broad Street from Manny Newman. In about 1916, he bought a coal company with Joe Gladstone. He sold his part of the business to Gladstone before entering the Army in WWI.

During the war, Swern rose from a Private to a Battalion Sergeant Major serving under J. Woodall Rogers who later became mayor of Dallas, Texas. All of his service was in the United States at Camp Dix in New Jersey and then Camp Jackson, South Carolina.

Upon his return to civilian life, Samuel Swern became formally engaged to Sarah [Sadie] Goodstein. Sarah Goodstein was born in Trenton to Solomon and Anna Epstein Goodstein in 1890. According to the family, the Goodsteins' original surname was Tobosch, but there had been a mix-up at Ellis Island and they were assigned the name Goodstein. Samuel and Sarah were married in Philadelphia on June 15th, 1919. They had 3 children: Jeanne Swern Levitt, Doris Swern Berger and Marvin Swern.

In about 1920, Samuel Swern and Harry Goodstein (and possibly other family members) purchased a department store from Solomon Kaufman which would become Hoenig-Swern Department Store and then eventually Swern and Co. Swerns was a family business that included brothers-in-law Harry and Ben Goodstein, Hyman Green and Arthur Honig. Samuel Swern continued to own the store until about 1947 when he sold it to Lit Brothers. Samuel Swern also founded the Stacy Savings and Loan with which he was also affiliated with until about 1954.

Samuel Swern died on August 25th, 1971. His wife Sarah died 20 years later on October 22nd, 1991.

¹ <https://njewishnews.timesofisrael.com/ozzie-zuckerman-chronicler-of-jewish-trenton>

Key Word, Concept, Person	Time Stamp
Swern, Samuel - family background	00:31
Goodstein, Solomon and Anna Epstein (Swern in-laws) - Aid to Jewish settlers in Trenton	01:35
Jewish Immigrants in Trenton, Aid to	01:35
Levin, John (Swern relative - participation in California gold rush)	02:45
Swern, Sarah "Sadie" Goodstein - family background	03:16
Swern, Sarah "Sadie" Goodstein - change of name from Tibosch to Goodstein at Ellis Island	03:36
Swern, Samuel - early business ventures	04:36
Newman, Manny (owner of Battle Monument Grocery Store)	05:07
Battle Monument Grocery Store	05:36
Herman Levin Candy Company	05:55
Jewish Community, Trenton - lack of "frum" synagogues	06:20

Leventhal, Rav (Philadelphia Rabbi) - possibly Rabbi Dov Aryeh (Bernard) Leventhal	06:37
Swern, Morrice - Samuel Swern sibling	07:52
Swern, Nathan - Samuel Swern sibling	07:52
Swern, Sarah - Samuel Swern sibling	07:52
Honig- Swern (later Swern & Co.) Store - purchase	08:24
Kaufmann, Solomon (owner of Kaufman's Department Store)	08:37
Goodstein, Ben (Swern in-law and business partner)	09:56
Goodstein, Harry (Swern in-law and business partner)	09:56
Green, Hyman (Swern in-law and business partner)	09:56
Honig- Swern (later Swern & Co.) Store - partners	09:56
Honig, Arthur (Swern in-law and business partner)	09:56
Honig, Dora Goodstein (Swern in-law)	10:24
Stacy Savings & Loan founded	10:38

Zuckerman, Orvil - loan from Stacy Savings & Loan	11:14
Adath Israel, Trenton - Tree of Life plaque rescued from trash	12:14
Zuckerman, Orvil - Adath Israel Tree of Life plaque	12:14
Nusbaum, Sandy (friend of interviewer, O)	13:33
WTM - Swern & Co. Commercials	15:36
Swern & Co. - move	16:43
Swern, Samuel - WWI service	17:51
Gladstone, Joe (briefly Swern business partner)	19:57
Swern, Samuel - buying inventory from closed stores for inventory	20:10
Lissner Furs, Trenton - Purchase by Swern & Co.	23:34
Swern & Co. - purchase of Lissner Furs, Trenton	23:34
Swern & Co - growth of business	24:37
Roth, Peter - men's cloth buyer	25:06
Assunpink Creek - flooding	25:38

Pneumatic Tubes	26:38
WAAAB - "First Radio Station in New Jersey" plaque in Swern & Co. freight elevator	27:08
Washington Inaugural Arch on what became a Swern & Co. building	27:35
Swern, Samuel - WWII – chairman of Trenton Draft Board	29:03
WWII (various topics including Samuel's Swern activities)	29:03
Swern, Marvin - WWII "flak" from neighbors regarding college deferment and eventual enlistment	29:30
Stacy Savings and Loan - WWII	30:52
Stacy Savings and Loan - robberies	31:19
Jewish Federation of Trenton	32:33
Young Men's Hebrew Association of Trenton (YMHA)	32:38
Young Women's Hebrew Association of Trenton (YWHA)	32:44
Zuckerman, Orvil - wedding photographer	32:45
Adath Israel, Trenton	32:50

Young Men's Hebrew Association of Trenton (YMHA) Sunday School	33:14
Butzen, Fannie (YMHA Sunday School Teacher)	33:24
Stacy Trent Hotel	35:00
Frank, Hy (musician)	35:08
Fisher, Mrs. (Violet or Vivian?; represented Tienken Caterers)	35:23
Tienken (Caterers in Trenton) – [name is an approximation since unclear on recording]	35:27
Swern & Co. - employee Relations	40:48
Union Activity at Swern & Co.	41:23
Lit Brothers, Trenton	42:19