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**Jewish Historical Society Oral Histories  
Victor Walcoff & Norman Wishnow (5 Dec. 2001)**

**By Ellen Callahan  
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**Link to audio files:**

<https://archive.org/details/JHS26SideA/JHS+26-+side+A.mp3>

<https://archive.org/details/JHS26SideA/JHS+26-+side+B.mp3>

**Summary Information:**

Tape Number: JHS 26  
Length: Side 1: 31:36 (Victor Walcoff)  
Side 2: 19:56 (Victor Walcoff); 11:35 (Norman Wishnow)  
Interviewer: O. [Orvil "Ozzie"]<sup>1</sup> Zuckerman  
Interviewee: Victor Walcoff (1927 - )  
Norman Wishnow (1924-2016)<sup>2</sup>  
Date of Interview: Victor Walcoff: 12/5/2001  
Norman Wishnow: ca. 12/5/2001  
Place of Interview: Victor Walcoff: Green Acres Country Club  
Norman Wishnow: probably Greenwood House

This tape records two interviews conducted by Ozzie Zuckerman focusing on the Metropole Clothing Factory. Metropole was founded in Trenton by Abe and Soll Walcoff in 1932. Metropole manufactured clothes for sale to retailers and also had its own retail location in Trenton. At its height, the company sold clothing throughout the country. Metropole was liquidated in 1955.

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

<sup>2</sup> On side 2 at 20 minutes the interview of an unnamed male begins. The discussion leads the indexer to conclude that this man is Norman Wishnow, brother of Ellis Wishnow. He was mentioned as a good source (see time stamp side 2, 15:32) and was often seen by Ollie Zuckerman at Greenwood House.

The first interviewee is Victor Walcoff who was the son of Solomon Walcoff (1898-1944) and Elise Bernstein (1899-1963). Victor as well as his brother Harry (ca. 1924 - ) worked for Metropole when they were teenagers and young men.

The second interviewee is believed to be Norman Wishnow whose father worked for Metropole as a cutter, and brother Ellis worked as the company's west coast representative. Norman worked at Metropole as a teenager and then as a salesman.

This interview provides insight into the manufacturing and selling of clothing in the 1930s and 1940s. Interviewees discuss how clothes were manufactured, selling strategies and the life of salesmen on the road. It also provides information about clothing manufacturing and selling in Trenton and offers the names of some stores and local families that were involved in this business.

<b>Key Word, Concept, Person</b>	<b>Side</b>	<b>Time Stamp</b>
Introduction - plan to discuss the Metropole Clothing Factory	1	:05
Metropole Clothing Factory - located at the corner of Hanover and Warren Street	1	:21
Victor Walcoff's grandfather died in the 1918 Flu Epidemic	1	:55
Double Built Clothes - Boy's clothes manufacturer in New York; Walcoff's grandfather was a partner	1	:56
Walcoff Brothers - falling out among the three brothers - Sol (Victor's father) and Abe went into business together, third brother Daniel went into fruit business	1	1:11
Great Depression - in 1932, Sol and Abe decided to move out of NYC because of the economic problems and chose Trenton over Wilkes-Barre or Allentown, PA	1	1:41
Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America (ACWA) - had to move to city where the union was located	1	2:01
Atlantic Products Building, Johnson Ave, Trenton - in 1932, the brothers moved their factory to this location	1	2:11
Metropole - this was the retail side of the business which was opened up because they needed to make payroll	1	2:22
Walbrooke Clothes - this was the wholesale part of the business	1	2:29

Arcade Building, 15 West State Street - moved the business to this location in 1935-1936	1	2:58
Mart Moss's Business	1	3:15
Reed's Jewelry Store - Leo Kahn's Business	1	3:17
Bowling Alley - on 2nd floor of the Arcade and Pool Hall	1	3:25
"Old Trentonians" worked at business - Barnetts, Wishnows	1	3:47
Clothes Manufacturing -techniques - cut, make and trim	1	3:58
Cutters - many of the cutters came from New York where they had worked for Vic's father and grandfather	1	4:06
Contractors - once the pieces were cut out - they were sent to contractors - Rigger (Jean/Gene Rigger's father); 3 or 4 other local contractors who would assemble the pieces	1	4:15
Woodbine - sent vests to Woodbine to be made	1	4:33
Assembled garments came back to 15 West State Street and would be shipped out from there	1	4:38
Walcoff, Sol - ran the factory	1	4:49
Walcoff, Chip – Victor's cousin - ran the office	1	4:51
Dude Shop - Warren Street - store later owned by Chip in the 1940s	1	4:58
Walcoff, Victor and his brother worked in the retail store selling products	1	5:05
Office of Price Administration (O.P.A.) - before the OPA, sales people would charge whatever they could get a customer to agree to	1	5:12
Metropole - Business moved to North Warren Street in 1939. Large retail store on the first floor and also bought the apartment building next door	1	5:37
Bushel shop [tailor shop] in back which did repairs, cleaning and tailoring	1	6:01
Zeisman, Jack - Holocaust survivor joined them as a bushelman [tailor]	1	6:10
Wasserman - also a bushelman who became a buyer for Sam Goody record <sup>3</sup> stores	1	6:16
Pennerman, George - salesman (Dr. Pennerman's father)	1	6:28
Aaronson, Bill - another salesman	1	6:32

<sup>3</sup> round plastic disk on which music was recorded

Walcoff, Victor - traveled with his uncle on selling trips from Trenton to California selling goods. They would stop at various cities (Chicago, Boise etc.) as they made their way across the country and set up showrooms to show their wares.	1	6:40
Brand Names: Walbrooke Clothes when selling to retailers; Stacy Park Clothes when selling to jobbers [wholesalers]; Metropole was only used in Trenton	1	8:40
Walcoff, Sol - died in July 1942	1	9:10
WWII - Walcoff, Victor - Joined the navy when he was 17. Returned after the war was over and went back into the business	1	9:42
WWII - Walbrooke Clothes did not do any government work during the war.	1	9:56
WWII - Pescoe's (Walbrooke contractor) did do some work for the government as Mercer Clothing did work for "the 3 Cs" [possibly the Civilian Conservation Corps]	1	10:05
Mercer Clothing - Financial trouble after the war	1	10:19
Baxter Clothing - clothing store on Olden Ave.	1	10:57
Kramer Complex on Olden Ave - businesses included Walbrooke, Aberdeen Sports, the Giddlemans, Mercer Clothing, Rieger	1	11:22
Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America (ACWA) - Trenton had a large concentration of ACWA workers	1	11:57
Aberdeen Sports - only clothing manufacturer left in Trenton [at the time of this recording]	1	12:05
Lichstein, Max - owner of Aberdeen	1	12:13
Hiltonia - trouble with termites because the builder buried trees rather than clearing them off.	1	12:44
WWII - supplied a lot of clothes to local retailers	1	13:03
Local retailers: Marty Robinson, Bill Spesel,	1	13:11
WWII - Metropole did a million dollars in sales during the war	1	13:44
1930's - Did good business making boys' suites for holidays, confirmation, Easter \$3.99 for a suite of clothes	1	13:50
Zuckerman, Ozzie - reminisces about going into the store to buy a jacket	1	14:26
Los Angeles after the war - Victor recalls fighting between sailors and men wearing Zoot Suits	1	15:23

Walcoff, Abe - Victor took sales trips with his uncle Abe Walcoff and also Norman Wishnow across the country ending up in California where they would work with Norman's brother Ellis Wishnow and his wife Honey [Hanna] Barnet Wishnow, who were the West coast representatives of the company.	1	16:00
Metropole - first "factory to you" manufacturer	1	16:47
Robert Hall - similar cloth retailer	1	16:51
United Merchants and Manufacturers (UMM) - large clothing company which bought Robert Hall	1	16:55
Udell family - cousins of Victor Walcoff - owned Robert Hall until they sold it to UMM	1	16:59
Clothing quality scale - 0 to 66	1	17:40
Metropole - how it ended	1	18:11
Walcoff family dispute - Victor and his brother were fired by their Uncle Abe in 1951	1	18:46
Walcoff, Victor - education - went back to school and became a CPA, Tax Lawyer and went to the Wharton School	1	19:43
Metropole's demise	1	20:49
Union - Metropole was having "union trouble"	1	20:49
Metropole liquidated in 1955	1	21:10
Roebing, Mary - purchased Metropole building and adjacent buildings on block which were then demolished and replaced by a parking garage	1	21:19
Ledo Gardens- Chinese Restaurant on Hanover Street	1	22:18
Trenton Businesses - Discussion of various businesses and restaurants on Hanover, Front Street, State Street, and Broad Street	1	22:21
Saderweigt's Farm Supply and Hardware - original location of the True American <sup>4</sup>	1	25:18
Walcoff, Chick - career before and after war and after he had a heart attack	1	25:49
Photographs - discussion of photographs of area around Metropole building	1	26:29
Trenton Business - Discussion of various businesses in vicinity of Metropole	1	27:18

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<sup>4</sup> Trenton newspaper published from 1849 to 1908

Zuckerman, Ozzie - mother had a small photo studio in Trenton before WWII	1	29:23
Chiacchio family -owned several restaurants in area but family had a falling out and businesses fell apart	1	29:52
Zuckerman, Ozzie - bought liquor from Tommy [Chiacchio] at the Marrow Inn	2	:02
Walcoff Family - current business	2	:38
Jewish Historical Society of Trenton - Collecting Interest - Hangers of Trenton Clothing Stores	2	1:16
Trentoniana - Transfer of Jewish Historical Society's collection	2	1:56
Metropole - memorabilia - red white and blue pencils	2	2:15
Baxter Clothing Store	2	3:08
Holland, Arthur - Trenton Mayor - Gave Victor pencils from the store	2	2:20
Baxter Clothing - run by Jerry Levy	2	3:07
Trenton Businesses - Discussing various businesses in town	2	3:46
Hat Stores - J&L on South Clinton - Last hat store in Trenton	2	5:24
Adam's Hats - State Street	2	5:33
Harry Harold Hatter - corner of State and Broad Street	2	5:38
Brodskie Brothers	2	5:44
Trenton Businesses - Discussing Business on Warren Street	2	7:15
Jewish Population in Trenton	2	9:25
Jewish neighborhood - Greenwood Ave	2	10:34
Calhoun Street - west of Calhoun was the wealthy area	2	11:01
Jewish population - divisions among areas of Trenton along socio-economic lines	2	11:19
Hermitage Deli - chain of owners	2	1:42

Kushner & Fox	2	12:12
Goodsteen	2	12:17
Rosenthal	2	12:29
Lehman's	2	12:32
Goldberg's Pharmacy - eventually sold to an African American beautician who came from New York and would have clients come to her from New York	2	13:18
Trenton Businesses - continue discussing various businesses	2	14:11
Deli on Hermitage - at the time of the recording, it was still a deli and was the oldest functioning business in Trenton (it began in 1922)	2	15:02
Wishnow, Norman - future interviewee re: Metropole	2	15:32
Break in interview	2	16:03
Begins again	2	16:04
Quality of clothing in various stores	2	16:04
Salesman's tricks to boost sales	2	16:28
Boyd's Clothing Store [Philadelphia]	2	17:18
South Street Philadelphia clothing stores	2	17:36
Zuckerman, Ozzie - work after he sold the Hermitage Deli	2	18:11
Chinese Philosophy of sales - first person in the store must buy something	2	18:48
Wishnow, Norman - interview begins	2	20:00

Wishnow, Norman - father [Albert] was a cutter for Metropole	2	20:08
Wishnow, Norman - ran the elevator at the building	2	20:33
Wishnow, Norman - when he was 17, went on sales trip across the country to California with one of Vic's uncles [probably Abe Walcoff] in about 1939 or 1940	2	20:55
Sales trip - Trenton to Los Angeles - description of how the sales trips proceeded, where they went, what they carried with them, how they sold material	2	21:46
Sales trip - down time - description of what they did in the evenings	2	24:46
Wishnow, Ellis - Norman's brother worked for Metropole	2	26:02
Barnett Family - daughter Honey married Ellis Wishnow, her father was also a cutter for Metropole	2	26:18
Jackson Street Neighborhood - reminisce about business in the Jackson Street area including Van Skivers on Broad Street, Mrs. G, Sam Cohen's, New Jersey Plumbing Supply, The Palace Theatre, Kruger's Pawn Shop	2	26:46
Sales Trip - continued discussion of sales trips	2	28:18
Wishnow, Norman career with Metropole after WWII	2	28:42
Ziesman, Jack - Holocaust survivor who worked for Metropole as cutter and became a tailor on Prospect Street	2	28:51
Kramer Refrigeration Complex - discuss the various clothing manufacturer in the Kramer Complex during WWII: Pesco Brothers, Aberdeen, Giddleman	2	29:40
Wishnow, Norman - worked at clothing manufacturer in the Kramer Complex after WWII	2	30:17
Metropole - nature of the business - wholesale and retail	2	30:39



## References

Walcoff, Elise B. Bernstein: Find a Grave, database and images (<https://www.findagrave.com> : accessed 2 June 2020), memorial page for Elise B. Bernstein Walcoff (10 Jun 1899–5 Jun 1963), Find a Grave Memorial no. [65930199](#), citing Acacia Cemetery, Ozone Park, Queens County, New York, USA; Maintained by Olive Branch Cemetery Restoration (contributor [47396130](#))

Walcoff Family: 1940 Federal Census; Trenton, Mercer, New Jersey; Roll: m-t0627-02437; Page: 10A; Enumeration District: 27-140

Walcoff, Solomon: Find a Grave, database and images (<https://www.findagrave.com> : accessed 2 June 2020), memorial page for Solomon Walcoff (17 Jan 1898–21 Jul 1942), Find a Grave Memorial no. [205808498](#), citing Acacia Cemetery, Ozone Park, Queens County, New York, USA; Maintained by Olive Branch Cemetery Restoration (contributor [47396130](#)) .

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Wishnow, Norman – Obituary, "The Times, Trenton," on Mar. 20, 2016