

## **SUMMARY OF ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW OF ROSE KAPLOVITZ, 8-23-1984**

Rose Kaplovitz (née Rozia Zaks), born in Sosnowiec, Poland, on September 6, 1930, describes her childhood and life with her parents and five siblings in the Jewish community in Sosnowiec; the rise of anti-Semitism before the Nazis invaded Poland on September 1, 1939, including an incident when two Poles picketed her father's grocery store with posters saying "This is a Jewish store, do not support it"; the arrival of German Jews who had been expelled from Germany; how her family tried to evacuate to Kielce, Poland, by train but were forced to return because the war started and their train was overtaken by the German army; people were thrown by German soldiers over a bridge if their papers were not in order while they tried to walk back to their homes; the Nazis occupied Sosnowiec and collected Jewish males, including her brother, uncle and nephew, who were then marched out of town and executed and buried in mass graves they had been forced to dig; the adoption of anti-Semitic ordinances; the roles of the Nazi government, the Jewish Judenrat [Jewish Community Council] and its leader, Moses [Moshe or Mojzesz] Merin, and the Jewish Militia; orders for Jews to report for labor; she was caught and then released by the Gestapo while trying to help one of her sisters escape from being sent to the Ober Altstadt labor concentration camp in Czechoslovakia [annexed Sudetenland]; she witnessed the Nazis hang three Jews in 1941; she went to work in a nearby factory that manufactured dominos, checkers and dice for the Germany army; in 1942 the Jews were ordered to report to a sports field that was designated as an Umschlagplatz [collection point] where they were surrounded by Nazis who processed some for deportation to labor camps and others were designated for deportation to another city because they were told that Sosnowiec was overcrowded; she and her mother, father and one sister were able to escape from the buildings where they were being held pending transport; soon after they returned to their homes all Jews were ordered to report to live in a ghetto; the congestion, misery and hunger and fear that characterized life in the ghetto; the building of bunkers and hiding places to try to avoid the Nazis when they conducted raids in the ghetto; in 1943 her father told her he saw an announcement on the Judenrat building asking for 20 volunteers to go to work at Ober Altstadt and he suggested that she volunteer; she obeyed her father and later learned that he did that to save her from the imminent deportation of the remaining Jews of Sosnowiec to Auschwitz because the ghetto was declared Judenrein [to be cleansed of Jews]; she was reunited with two of her sisters, Manya and Tola, at Ober Altstadt which was adjacent to a textile factory that manufactured uniforms for the German army; she learned how to work a spinning machine and worked 12-hour shifts; life in the camp and the daily punishments and humiliations; the hierarchy of the overseers, including the Lagerführerin [Kommandoführerin] Irmgard [Irma] Hoffman; the liberation of the camp on May 9, 1945 by the Russian army; the Russians gave Irma Hoffman to the liberated prisoners to be executed, the prisoners took her to Ober Altstadt and placed her in a chair in the Appellplatz [assembly area] where she was surrounded by 2000 female survivors but they could not bring themselves to harm her, they only cut her hair; her return to Sosnowiec with her sisters Manya and Tola where they learned that their family perished in Auschwitz; she lived in an orphanage in Germany for 2 years before she immigrated to the United States on September 21, 1947 and went to live with family in Cleveland where she went to school, got married and raised her family.