

Interviewee: Leon Menin

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Interviewer: Daniel Bargman

Leon Menin was born in 1900, in Pochaiov, Ukraine, in the province of Volin, now in Russia(?) In that little town there were about 1,200 families, all of them Jewish. The Ukrainians lived around the "shtetl". Kremenetz and Hrodna were the largest cities around. His father was a harness-maker. There were 8 children: 4 boys and 4 girls. In 1909, the father went to Argentina to make some money and bring the family to him. In 1911, he brought there his older daughter. The father worked in a furniture store, (belonging to Gertzenstein) and saved his money in a bank that consequently declared bankruptcy. Recovering some of his savings, he decided to go back to Europe. He was very religious and the country did not impress him well to raise a Jewish family there. The father and the oldest daughter left the country in 1914, 8 days before the outbreak of WWI. Leon was not in Pochaiev when the father returned. Leon went to a "heder" where many religious families sent the children to. At the age of 13 he left for Odessa, to work in a relatives' vineyard. 6 months into the war, the father made him return or else he would disown him. He did. The family went toward the border, but the Austrians came in. Leon was wounded. He escaped the hospital where he was tended to, and went back to his parents. From the moment the Austrians came in, the family became refugees. They were taken to Galitzia and then to Czechoslovakia. Some of the children went to a state school there. Leon worked there in a flour mill to help support the family. When the war was over, the family returned to Pochaiev until 1920, when the Poles came in. Leon was taken to the Polish army. There was only another Jew in the Pilsutsky army. Leon spent 3 months in Warsaw, in his personal guard. After that, he was sent to Krakow, where he worked in an arms and clothing depot. He was an officer at the age of 19! After 19 months, Leon returned home where he became economically independent, purchasing forests, exploiting trees, working in the fields. He lost then most of his money. He married in 1926. Then, he decided to move his entire family (including parents and siblings) to Argentina. HIAS helped the family to emigrate. He was able to get a visa as a farmer, because of his previous work.

He arrived in Argentina in February 21, 1930. Leon had three children and has 5 grandchildren. (About his family. His father died in 1960, when he was 100 years old)

Leon was a peddler first and then a merchant since he arrived in Argentina, and always lived in the same area of Great Buenos Aires. He is vice-president of the community

organization (Bet-Am) of his city, Avellaneda, and is active in the AMIA. He is also a member of the Labor party. Leon was very active in the life of his synagogue. When he saw that the youth was taken over by the modernized conservative services that Rabbi Marshall Meyer had brought from the US, he decided to implement the same kind of Friday night services in his synagogue. It was a very successful step, and hundreds would attend services.

The different institutions in 1930 in Argentina, and the foundation of two Jewish schools: the Bialik and the Zalman Raizen Shules. Leon's activism in the latter, between 1930-1960. The politics of the schools. The disturbances of 1946-47 when the communists wanted to take over the school. Rabbi Blum's contacted Peron, who appointed an auditor to remove the Communists from the Board of Directors of the school. The unification of the two Jewish schools in 1982, ordered by the AMIA.

Many guests from the US visited the shule: Leivik, Zalman Raizen, Zerubabel. How Argentinean politics impacted the economy of the Jews in the years of Uriburu, Ortiz, Castillo and Justo. The revolution (Peron's) of 1943. Leon was appointed treasurer in charge of the erection of the monument to Argentina's liberator, General Jose de San Martin. It was finished after Peron was deposed. Leon succeeded in never affiliating with the Peronist movement or with Evita's Foundation.

Building the OJA (Youth Organization of Avellaneda) for the benefit of the youth, with fields, swimming pools and other means of recreation. Buying the lots and building on them.

Leon work with the Israeli Labor party MAPAI, since 1938. He was also very involved with the United Jewish Appeal for the Great Buenos Aires, heading the campaign for over 44 cities.

Leon was involved with the cemeteries through the AMIA. The question asked was: what happened to the cemetery of the "impure"? Apparently, Citi Hall wanted to move the bodies and give them to the community, along with the head stones but the community decided it would be too onerous and nothing was done about it. The cemetery still exists in Dominico, and apparently, there are more burials there presently.

The 75-year old cooperative in Avellaneda. Its demise in 1986.

Most of the 1,200 families still living in Avellaneda are merchants. There is no organized immigration to Israel although many families have gone.

The period of the anti-Semitic mayor Herminio Iglesias

Leon's work and activity as vice-president of the Nursing Home, Hogar Israelita, between 1955-1974.

Bringing refugees to Argentina after WWII.