

8 | ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW WITH HENRY HARRIS ISAACSON

Henry's father's family came to America from Riga. His grandfather, Isaac, told him that he and his grandmother, Hatti, came to America in 1896 to keep from being persecuted by the Czar. Soon after, the family moved to Greensboro because his grandfather's brother, Louis, lived there. Henry Isaacson was born in 1933 in Sternberger Hospital on Summit Avenue.

His first home was 1505 Madison Avenue with his parents Ida and Moses Isaacson along with his sister, Sally, who was born in 1928. After Madison Avenue the family moved to Florence Street, then Hendrix Street, then to 303 Victoria Street; all in the Fisher Park area. He celebrated his 5th birthday in Fisher Park. (see photo)

Henry went to Simpson Street School, where the Board of Education building is located now. It was 1st and 2nd grade only. Henry formed a lot of friendships with people in the Fisher Park area, like Charlie Hardin, Kit Ravel, Cammie Hunt, Dot Baxter, Betty Chambers, and Thurman Chandler (whom he has known all his life): but his best friend was Jerry Goldstein (Rita Guyes' brother). Jerry's grandfather, Jake Goldstein, and Henry's grandfather, Isaac Isaacson, were partners in several businesses. They owned property in High Point and they were good friends.

After Simpson Street School, Henry went to Aycock School then Greensboro Senior High School, now Grimsley High School. Henry's grandparents were *frum*; they and his parents kept Kosher. Henry remembers plenty of antisemitism while growing up in Greensboro. He remembers being challenged to fistfights at Aycock School all the time. People would yell out "Hey Jew boy" and things like that.

Henry's grandfather, Isaac Isaacson, started a men's haberdashery business and built two stores on South Elm Street, one in the 200 blocks and the other at 304, where Scuppernong Book Store is today. His father, Moses, eventually took over the stores. During World War II, when Greensboro had a large base known eventually as the ORD [Overseas Replacement Depot], Moses began selling military supplies. During the war, Henry helped in the stores. In 1948, when Henry was 15, his father passed away suddenly, and his mother sold the stores soon thereafter.

During his years at Greensboro Senior High School, Henry held numerous odd jobs, including delivering US mail, moving packages among rail cars for Railway Express, and bagging groceries at the A&P.

In 1946, after the war ended, there was a group of people in the Temple (then called The Greensboro Hebrew Congregation) who wanted to start a Conservative congregation. Up until that time, the Temple had dual services with the Reform service in the sanctuary and the Conservative/Orthodox service in the social hall (referred to as the assembly hall). Henry's grandfather and father, along with Mr. Kagan, Mr. Goss, and Mr. Gorfine were all part of the Orthodox group. Henry attended Orthodox services with his father while his sister, Sally, went with his mother to the Reform services in the sanctuary. To this day Henry can remember hearing the organ being played in the sanctuary while he attended Orthodox services in the social hall. The Temple had a wonderful choir and of course the organ.



5th birthday in Fisher Park: Henry Isaacson, 3rd from left & Jerry Goldstein (Rita Guyes's brother), 2nd from right



Chanukah, Victoria St.



1952 Bell Tower, Chapel Hill

Henry wanted to go to Princeton but his mother wanted him to go to UNC-Chapel Hill and join a Jewish fraternity. He followed her request and did both.

During his undergraduate years, he met Alice Feder, on a blind date. They were married just before his senior year in college. Henry attended UNC-Chapel Hill Law School during which time he and Alice had two of their three children, Marc and Gail. He then began his military commitment in the Judge Advocate General's Department of the US Air Force, and their third child, Carol, was born. After being stationed in Michigan for three years, the family moved back to Greensboro where Henry practiced law for 60 years.

Henry started his law practice with a job in the law firm, Block, Meyland, and Lloyd. Before long, he was made partner at Block, Meyland, Lloyd, and Isaacson. Henry stayed there until Sidney Stern called one day to say that David Clark (a partner in his firm - Stern, Rendleman, and Clark) wanted to run for the legislature and was leaving the practice. Henry moved to their firm and it became Stern, Rendleman, and Isaacson.

Henry Harris Isaacson has been active in various organizations in our community, including Temple Emanuel, where he served as President; the Jaycees; as well as the Airport Authority and managing Jim Melvin's city council and mayoral campaigns. He has been married to Alice Feder Isaacson for sixty-seven years and together they have raised three children, eight grandchildren, and are expecting their first great-grandchild in March 2022.

Thank you, Henry, for your commitment to family, friends, the Temple, and the community.