

A TEI Project

Interview of Louis Epstein

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1. Transcript

1.1. TAPE NUMBER: I, Side One (May 13, 1974)

GARDNER

To begin with, where were you born? What was the date? And tell me something about your family.

EPSTEIN

Well, I was born, as near as we can tell between the Jewish calendar and the Gregorian calendar, on December 8, 1901, in a tiny hamlet--I don't know if it's big enough to even to be called a hamlet--called Kasheritz. Now, spell it any way you like, because unless you spell it in Russian, you can't spell it any other way. I can't spell it in Russian. There were probably about ten, twelve Jewish families in the hamlet and maybe about twenty-five, thirty-five non-Jewish families.

GARDNER

Where is that?

EPSTEIN

That's in west central Russia, or the central part of west Russia. It's in White Russia, as they call it--Belorussia. The village, as I recollect, was on the River Berezina, and I remember seeing logs floating down every spring (or whenever they float logs) . People had a little hut on top of the raft of logs. Great, tremendous things, three or four of them, tied one to another, and one or two people guiding them down the river. That's one of my earlier childhood memories. In this tiny village, like most Russian villages or hamlets or whatever you want to call them, they had one person who owned most of the land around there, and he was called the porets . A porets is less than a prince. It's a landholder--the kind of thing you read about. Just one step above serfdom is actually what it was at the time. And the Jews there, they made their living mostly off of each other, sewing for each other and occasionally for the local people. My people were smiths, blacksmiths. That was what they had practiced for generations, and that's what they did then. And my early recollections of the village are . . . well, I left there when I was seven and a half years old, so going to the river, occasionally getting a ride when the wagons when they're going to pick the potato crop. That was one of the thrills. They let me hold the reins. I remember that distinctly. I don't have an excellent memory for the childhood affairs. You see, I was a year old when my father

left the old country to make his fortune. He went to Holland and to England and then landed in New York, of course. He used to send very little back, because it took him six years to save up enough money to send for his family. So I don't remember my father in my early childhood, because he wasn't there.

GARDNER

What was your father's name?

EPSTEIN

Reuben.

GARDNER

Reuben Epstein.

EPSTEIN

Yes. He was in business here for many years.

GARDNER

So you were raised by your mother, then.

EPSTEIN

Well, my mother, and I had. ... I was the youngest of five children that he left when he went away. My oldest sister, Rose, who is now well in her eighties--lives here--occasionally we get to talking, and I asked her one day, "Well, how did you make a living if Father had nothing to send you?" She said, "Well, I used to take care of the children and my mother would go to sew. "

GARDNER

It's like Fiddler on the Roof.

EPSTEIN

Well, in one of the ways, except there they had a milkman father. [laughter] She was a good needlewoman, and she had a very fine relationship with the wife of a local priest. They established what my sister said was a very nice relationship, and she was very often helped by this woman. She would be given clothing that she no longer needed. But at no time do I remember ever

having been hungry, or unclothed, or unfed, or uncared for. We lived in a thatched-roof house. You know, people say, "Well, a log cabin. Lincoln was born in a log cabin." So was I. [laughter] And I doubt whether I had very more amenities than Lincoln had. No plumbing. But I don't remember any discomforts. We lived, we played, and we played with other children. The only time we were scared was when the Cossacks were coming through, or any other strangers .

GARDNER

Did that happen often?

EPSTEIN

Well, periodically they would pass through the village and Jews just took to hiding. We didn't want to be around, especially the girls. We hid them as best we could. I remember that. And then going to the cheder — which you will have to translate . . . [laughter]

GARDNER

. . . for our transcriber.

EPSTEIN

I remember the first time, I recollect back in my memory that I was carried there by my older brother or somebody. And whenever we passed a non-Jew-- there were no sidewalks--we just kept our distance, knowing that it was nothing for a non-Jew for no reason at all to either strike you, or insult you, or spit at you. It's hard to believe.

GARDNER

It is, and yet it isn't, of course.

EPSTEIN

Yes. From reading, you know that that has happened, but from actual experience you think, "Well, how could people do that?" Well, they did it. And a lot of them I don't think meant real harm by it. It was just one of the things that they had to do. I had a — if you'll allow me to digress a bit . . .

GARDNER

Yes, go ahead.

EPSTEIN

... I had a woman working for me here at the Hollywood store in the office, and she is of Rumanian background, non-Jewish. And she went from Rumania to Canada and from Canada she came to Los Angeles. And one day we got to talking about these things in front of two or three people in the office, reminiscing--well, they were asking me questions about the same type of thing we're talking about now, my background. And this woman spoke up. She said, "You know, I know exactly what Mr. E is talking about. My mother told me to do the things that he said were done to them. " Her mother told her, and I suspect that it was ingrained in the populace to do these things. To them, they didn't think they were committing a sin or a crime or causing any commotion. But when you're on the receiving end of it. . . . And it was a most remarkable thing that in spite of all that, we kept face between ourselves and our own Jewish community. We were forced upon each other. People would say sometimes, "Well, didn't they mix more with the others? Why didn't they get a more general education than just going to cheder ?" Number one, there was no other school. And number two, even if you're the smartest person in town, you couldn't go away to a high school, a gymnasium, some city which had [one] — I don't know how far away the city was. The closest gymnasium was probably Bobruysk, which was maybe a hundred and some-odd miles in a horse and wagon. and a hundred and some-odd miles was quite a bit when you had no trains. I never saw a train till the day I got on a train when we left Bobruysk. From our little village, when we left, we went by wagon to Bobruysk, and it was quite a journey. That is the background, the sociological background. Sometimes I wonder how we lived through it. But my older sister says, "Well, we pitched in; we got along on very little." We had a cow, I remember, and one time we had a fire. The cow came to our windows. We didn't have a fire in our own home, but the village half-burned away.

GARDNER

What's curious is that in such a small community, with the Jews and the non-Jews really comprising such small populations, that they were still incapable of mixing.

EPSTEIN

Well, in some ways they mixed well. In other ways — if they were a little drunk, all these things came out; they just hung right out there.

GARDNER

What about stores and businesses and things like that?

EPSTEIN

Stores? There were no stores and businesses.

GARDNER

Well, little shops, general shops?

EPSTEIN

They had one tiny — what they called a kretschma (it translates: it's a meeting place, it's a store), where all the business was transacted. It was mostly barter business. You went to the city and bought a piece of cloth. and you found somebody who would sew it up for you, to make a suit or a dress or whatever. And for that you did some- thing for them. Because there was no money. There was some money, but we had to buy grains and food, from which we baked and so forth, from the non-Jews. But it was a very small, very poor community, as most of those places were. The people whom we met, they didn't own any land. They rented or they were given pieces of land to operate. I don't know whether they were operating for the poretz, as I call him, the landowner. I'm positive that none of the peasants we knew owned land in the sense that they could transfer it. They might have been given a right to do certain things and perhaps give half the crop to the landowner. But there were vast pieces of land which I know they farmed for the poretz .

GARDNER

And your family had been there for quite some time, I assume.

EPSTEIN

Most of those families may have been there for hundreds of years. I really don't know. We never thought about it. We were there, and nobody knows when we weren't there. We didn't keep any records.

GARDNER

You said that your father's family--or your family — had been smiths and so forth. What about your mother's side?

EPSTEIN

My mother's family came from Parets, some twenty miles away, which was a little bit larger. She had a brother who would be compared to a plasterer now. He made ovens. ... We lived in a one-and-a-half -room log cabin. The half-room was used for storage. The oven was built in one corner--brick, plaster, mortar, whatever it was made of, very thick walls. And above that some of the family used to sleep, because it was warm. Then, of course, there were other places to sleep in other parts of the house. So you had to have somebody come and build an oven. He used to build ovens. Sometimes in his village or town they had--some of them had--what we could call "people of means"--which probably wouldn't mean too much today. He used to make tile ovens for some people; he would decorate them with tile and things like that. Those were something terrific. And then they would have a cooking oven separate from the general oven.

GARDNER

What was your mother's name?

EPSTEIN

Her Jewish name was Sprishe. No one can say it. I don't know how she and my father met, but, you know, people move around and meet people. I don't know too much about the background of her family. She would talk generally about her brothers, and then they all came out here, too. They lived in the Bayonne, New Jersey, area when they came here and later moved to the New York area. When we came, we arrived in Cleveland.

GARDNER

What were the rest of your family? Can you go through your brothers and sisters and so forth?

EPSTEIN

Yes. As I mentioned, my oldest sister is Rose. She's well in her eighties. She lives here on Harper Avenue with a daughter, Cornelia August. There were three brothers. Then there was one sister who came over who is now gone.

She died in 1929 of TB . Then there was one sister who was born here. After the parents got together in America, they had to have one Amerikanische child, so my younger sister was born here. There were three brothers.

GARDNER

Tell what the names were, too.

EPSTEIN

All right. My older sister is Rose, and my younger sister is Cema. Her last name is Ehrlich. She's recently become married and lives out here. My brothers are Morris, the oldest one; and Ben, the middle one, who was in the book business; and myself. That was the family. The five came here when we left Russia.

GARDNER

I guess the next story would be the story of your trip leaving and what the circumstances were there.

EPSTEIN

In my childhood it was an exciting time. Of course, we knew it was very exciting; getting ready, packing things, and what we packed. And going by wagon from one place, from the tiny hamlet we were in, to a little town called Glussk. I never found the village or hamlet I was in on a map, but I did find Glussk. (The "G" in Russian has a sort of "H" sound. They use a Greek- type alphabet.) I remember spending the night at Glussk, and from there we went again by wagon to Bobruysk. That was a real city. And curiously, to show you what a benighted place we came from, I had never seen a bicycle until I left. I was seven and a half years old, and this was the year 1909, and I'd never seen a bicycle. When I got to this little city of Glussk, I saw a bicycle. There I was, a child, looking at that thing as if the man was riding by magic. And I'd never seen a train. And I didn't see a train until we were ready to get on one at Bobruysk that took us to Riga, where we got on a boat.

GARDNER

Had any of the family been out of the hamlet at all at that point, other than your mother?

EPSTEIN

They went to Glusk, and maybe one or two may have been to Bobruysk; I don't know. But they never talked about a bicycle or a train, so apparently they didn't see it, either. [laughter] I remember fishing in the river and being taken there, fishing through the ice in the wintertime. That was the general childhood.

GARDNER

Where did you stay when the family went from hamlet to town to city? Where would you have stayed overnight?

EPSTEIN

Well, I don't recollect where we spent the nights. In Bobruysk we had some relatives. My mother had some relatives in Bobruysk. I don't remember any of my grandparents except that I remember one thing: when we got on the train in Bobruysk, there was a little red-headed old man who got on with us, and he was my mother's father. I'd never seen him before, and I've never seen him since. And I don't remember ever seeing my mother's mother-- whether she was still alive at the time, I don't know. But my father's parents were all gone. My father had a number of brothers living there, and gradually they all came over. My father was one of the first to leave. He left with another brother. Where we stayed in Bobruysk--I knew we stayed with these people. It was very strange having to go up a stairway. [laughter] We'd never had a stairway.

GARDNER

Bicycles and stairways all at once.

EPSTEIN

It was all these things to a young child. I was frightened. I'd go out and see people--I would almost hide because they wore different clothes and did different things than we did. So we must have probably looked pretty primitive to them, too.

GARDNER

Could you tell at all, even though it was such a short time, how the Jewish families seemed to interact in the cities? Was it any different, or was it more or less the same?

EPSTEIN

Well, we didn't stay there long enough. I have no idea how they would interact. They looked, I suppose, like anyone else. A cityfied person — how you would react to a country bumpkin. It was literally true. We had no manners, in the sense that we had ordinary graces but, I mean, city manners — I wouldn't know what they were. We were a civilized race in the sense of what we learned every day in our cheder, and we went to the synagogue. A Jew has to have certain ethics. You don't do this, and you don't do that. You live up to them. You can't help but acquire some of those ethics: what to do and what not to do in our own family and between our own relatives. You had to have a certain amount of decorum. But for manners as where to eat in a restaurant, how to eat; I'm sure that we had good table manners, but maybe not the restaurant type of good table manners. I suppose in a restaurant—if we did go to a restaurant, and I don't think we did--the manners we probably would have seen were probably not the same kind that you would see in Chasen's. [laughter]

GARDNER

Next you could describe the trip. We've gotten you to Riga, I suppose. Then you went from there in a roundabout way to Cleveland.

EPSTEIN

Yeah, then we went to Hull. Then we crossed England to Liverpool.

GARDNER

What are your recollections of that trip?

EPSTEIN

Stench, the first portion of it. I guess probably you've heard about steerage. You just can't imagine it. You go on a boat today, and you get a cabin. It may not be a very nice cabin; but here they take a boat, and in the hold of it they build [shelves] like [you would in a] warehouse. But these weren't shelves for things; they were shelves for people. And each one would be allotted about

3X3 feet of space. You had to live there. You'd crawl in there and carry your food with you for the length of your trip. I don't know how many hundreds of people were in that hold. I don't know how many decks they had. I was too young. I was the only one in the family that didn't get sick, that could eat. The rest of them were sick.

GARDNER

Do you think that was because you were the youngest?

EPSTEIN

Probably, you know, the happy-go-lucky child. I used to run as much as possible, probably ran all over the place. And probably the exercise and getting in and out of the stench, because they couldn't do that. At any rate, if you asked me the primary thing about it, I would say that. But when we left England and got onto a larger boat, the Cedric, it was much better. We were in the steerage, but we had a place to sleep, like a little cot or something. And the food — we didn't carry food across the ocean — was good. At least, I thought it was good. My sisters and brothers admitted it was good food, but they couldn't eat very much of it. Number one, it wasn't kosher food, so they had to pick out the food that they could eat and not hurt their conscience too much. And I didn't have any qualms; they didn't restrict me in any way. But that boat I really enjoyed, because I remember running all over the place, up and down the decks, and nobody bothered me. There were always barrels of apples you could eat. I must have eaten everywhere on the ship, because I don't remember the food too much. You know, a seven-year-old kid just runs all over and has a good time. I always used to go to the back of the boat and watch the wake. They had a long line stretched out, and I think it measured the speed. I've always wanted to find out, so I mentioned that to somebody and I think they said that it measured the speed of the boat. Whether that's true or not, I don't know, but I sat there for hours and watched that thing. As I recollect, we had no storms going across. From the fact that I was out there so much, we must have had excellent weather. That was the middle of June.

GARDNER

Where did you come in, to New York?

EPSTEIN

We came into New York. My father was going to various places in this country. Finally, when he sent for us, he was at Cleveland, working there in a men's clothing factory where he was a presser. We landed in New York and took a train to Cleveland. He didn't come to New York to greet us. So we got off in New York, went through the, as they called it, Castle Garden (Ellis Island) .

GARDNER

Do you have any recollections of that?

EPSTEIN

Some, yes, the fact that they put a big tag on you and put us from one room to the other. We had to be examined for delousing and whatnot. [laughter] We were given a cursory examination by doctors, and then we were classified out, and somebody had to direct us to where we got the train, to take us to the train when we got the. ... We must have gone across the river to get to the railroad station.

GARDNER

Grand Central, I suppose it would have been.

EPSTEIN

I don't know where it was; I have no idea.

GARDNER

It's interesting that with speaking no English whatsoever among your family, and having nobody to meet you, and yet you were able to find your way there.

EPSTEIN

Well, at the immigration office, they had Yiddish-speaking people there. To your generation, you have no idea what organizations they had. By that time, the Jewish communities in New York and the United States had already set up societies to help immigrants, especially new arrivals. You may have heard of HIAS. Well, HIAS stands for Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society. And they had people there who looked out for people like us. They would look at the address where we were going, and they would direct us. I'm sure they fed us, too. Being that young, I don't have those recollections, but in reading later and in joining those organizations and contributing money to them in later years. .

. . Our contributions were relatively fair according to our income; we contributed money. We do those things. And from there on, I think the path was made easier for us, because I don't know exactly what happened. I know that we went as a family group to this place where somebody directed us. We didn't know where to go, so there must have been somebody directing us. I'm positive it was an HIAS person who did it. For that we're quite thankful. They put us on a train, and I remember going up the ramp to get on the train. And [I remember] the stuff we carried with us: a featherbed, a samovar, a mortar and pestle like you see in antique shops. My sister has the samovar and mortar and pestle. I have a little thing here that I brought over. Nobody knows what the hell it is, but it's something that was created for keeping water warm in the oven over the Sabbath weekend. Let me show it to you. [tape recorder turned off] I carried it. It's apparently a homemade thing. You put water in that thing on Friday and put it in the oven, and you kept the oven warm over Friday night so you would have warm water for the Sabbath.

GARDNER

That's fabulous.

EPSTEIN

I suppose one of my relatives probably made it. They worked with metal. I've never seen one like it. I've shown it to people who've been collecting, and I've said, "Well, tell me, what is this?" They've never seen it. Some of the things, of course--the family silverware, whatever that was. Imagine, carrying a great big featherbed across here.

GARDNER

And especially having carried it all the way from your little hamlet.

EPSTEIN

All the way, oh, yes. And also a bottle of brandy which my mother made special for her husband, my father. It was almost as big as a five-gallon water bottle. And my brother Ben carried that. We got that all the way from the wagon trip, railroad trip, the two ship trips, crossing England trip, and all the way from New York. And on the way up the ramp to the train he was carrying that thing, and somebody came running down, hit his arm, and he dropped it.

And that was the tragedy of tragedies. We all sat down and cried. And my story to this day is that he got an inferiority complex from that. [laughter] Finally we got off at Cleveland. It was in the evening. And Father rushes to Mother and Mother rushes to Father. And here I am with this strange man whom I've never seen before, watching all this. It was sort of a peculiar reaction.

GARDNER

You were about eight at this time?

EPSTEIN

I was seven and a half years old. It was an emotional thing. I never saw my mother with him before. We always heard of Father, but I'd never seen Father. I didn't know how a father reacts. At any rate, we were all greeted and so forth and so forth. Then we were taken to stay with a relative in Cleveland for about a week, and then we got our own place.

GARDNER

Where was it, do you recall? Do you remember anything about where you lived and so forth?

EPSTEIN

The events in this country, I remember much more vividly.

GARDNER

I guess because it's a vivid time of your life.

EPSTEIN

Much more vividly. Number one, nothing could be more vivid to a greenhorn boy like myself than living directly across the street from a fire station in Cleveland [laughter] and hearing the bells ring and [seeing] the horses running to their stations and the firemen sliding down the pole half-dressed — unhitching three hooks in the harness; the harness falls down to the horses and the horses are latched in three or four places; and boom! out they go, the hook and ladder and the firehoses and the engine. The way they started--how quickly they got to the fire. And the Dalmatian dogs, the kind Aaron has. Did you go to Aaron's house?

GARDNER

No.

EPSTEIN

Well, they have a Dalmatian. I used to sit up nights waiting for the bell to ring. We didn't live in that area too long, but I'll never forget that. The first time I saw that, my eyes popped. And I became acquainted with the firemen directly across the street. The firemen were very nice to me, a poor kid from over there. They'd let me look around. Years and years later, after I was married and the children were, oh, I think they were five and six or six and seven, we took a trip east to Washington, my wife Ann's hometown, and on the way back we stopped at Cleveland. We just went down there to look at it, to look at that fire station. I wanted the children to see it.

GARDNER

Where was it? Do you remember the address?

EPSTEIN

East Thirty-seventh Street, near Central. It would probably be about the 2300 block of East Thirty-seventh.

GARDNER

And it's still there.

EPSTEIN

Well, it was. Probably still there. And one time, years before we came, it apparently was a nice part of town, because the people at the fire station when we came back later — this trip when I showed the children-- said that the Halles used to live right next door to where the fire station was, and Halle was one of the early Jewish merchant families in the area. There's still a Halle's store there. I don't know how many stores they have there now. Well, we went to this fire station to see where the stalls for the horses were, and the same house, the same poles. I talked with a fireman. "Oh," he says, "that's a long time ago." I asked, "Is there anybody here who might have been there at that period of time?" He says, "No, they're all gone. "

GARDNER

What was the housing like and so forth? What were the buildings like? Were they houses or apartment houses?

EPSTEIN

No, they were not apartment houses. My father had been staying with some relatives. When we arrived, they cleared out one room for us. So we had the one, maybe two rooms at that house I'm telling about, a two-story house. We were upstairs. So that was the housing we first came to. My earliest recollection of housing of our own family was a flat at 2410 East Thirty-eighth Street. That I remember.

GARDNER

Was that the Jewish neighborhood at the time?

EPSTEIN

Yes. That was the Jewish area. And at 2410 East Thirty-eighth Street, there was Pacht's grocery store on the corner — we were about two houses from the corner — and the synagogue was on Scovill Avenue; it was right near Scovill. If you'll allow me to digress and bring time forward, when I became president of the American Booksellers Association — this happened in Washington at a convention--there were a number of newspaper people, book people, who came to cover the convention. The New York Times had a person, the Tribune had a person, the Washington Post, and the Cleveland Plain Dealer each had a person. Well, the man from the Plain Dealer, Wes Lawrence was his name. He's now retired. He was a columnist and a book reviewer for for them. So he interviewed me. He told me, "I'm Wes Lawrence from the Plain Dealer. " "Oh," I said, "I used to work for your paper." He said, "You did?" "Yes," I said, "I used to deliver the paper and then sell it, the bulldog edition." (I don't know if you know what a bulldog edition is: the edition that comes out on Saturday night that's sold as a Sunday paper — it's a Sunday edition.) And I told him what I did, and he was interested. He said, "Where did you live?" I told him I lived at 2410 East Thirty-eighth Street. He said, "Oh, that's a slum now." I said, "Wes, I've got news for you. It was a slum then." [laughter] And you know, he quoted me in his column — he sent me a copy of it--and we still have a lot of relatives in Cleveland who read it and

made some comments. [laughter] [They said that] I should not have said that, because they didn't consider it a slum; it was a respectable neighborhood.

GARDNER

Well, was it, in reality?

EPSTEIN

Well, by living standards today it would be called a slum area, because I'm sure the plumbing and electricity was not up to standard. It wasn't too far above. Look, a person who's supporting five children, and a sixth child on the way, making twelve dollars a week, could not have lived anywhere else but something damned near a slum. And that was what my father's salary was. So when the first child came, he was given a one-dollar-a-week raise. My early memories are quite pleasant. Of course, I was a youngster, and there was a hell of a lot of stuff that I was scared about. You know, everything was scary to me: to walk into a big building--I'd never been in a big building before--and see a person going up an elevator. Can you imagine? Just walk in and the thing goes up! I mean, our children, my grandchildren, probably if they'd find a building without an elevator they'd have the same reaction. [laughter] And then having to go to school — we got in in June, and by September 1 was already being enrolled in school.

GARDNER

That was going to be my next question. What was it like going into the school?

EPSTEIN

Well, by that time I had three months to become acquainted with the neighbors' children and the neighborhood we were in, and I began to feel a little bit at home in the community, especially amongst the children. I learned to play a little bit of ball. You know, children adapt very quickly. I found out that marbles were to play with (I'd never seen marbles before). I didn't have any difficulties .

GARDNER

How about with the language?

EPSTEIN

The language, I seem to have picked up pretty well. Unlike some communities such as New York, where you don't hear any English, there was enough English there. The children all spoke English outside. It seems that we all picked up the language fairly well, and we had no difficulties in school. My brother Ben, who is six years older than I, got through grammar school in two years. And I got through in seven.

GARDNER

Grammar school was up to eighth grade, wasn't it at that time?

EPSTEIN

Yes. I remember being put into this class, and little by little I acquired it. But apparently I was not a bad student. I must have had native intelligence [laughter] or been born with something. After the first few months, I don't recollect having problems. [tape recorder turned off] I had no difficulties in school except that as I became older, I was a bad boy. I don't know what. . . .

GARDNER

At what point was this?

EPSTEIN

In the higher grades.

GARDNER

Oh, in the higher grades.

EPSTEIN

Yeah. Well, most of us kids — we were a rough-and-tumble crowd. You learned to play football; you learned to fight; you learned to play baseball. And being tough was one of the things you did, I think. [laughter] I can understand where some kids want to be tough simply as a self-expression. They have no other way to express themselves except maybe rebellion against authority. But what I don't approve of is becoming violent and carrying guns and throwing bombs and blowing up buildings.

GARDNER

You never did that when you were growing up.

EPSTEIN

No, I never did that. [laughter] Unless we got in an argument with the teacher and got slapped around. [laughter]

GARDNER

What was the school you went to?

EPSTEIN

Case. Case School. Fortieth and Central.

GARDNER

Was it associated with the college?

EPSTEIN

No. I know, you're thinking Case was the college. Now it's Case Western Reserve.

GARDNER

It was just named after the same fellow.

EPSTEIN

It was named after the same person, apparently a wealthy person who gave land for a school, helped establish the college there. The school was called Case. I think Fortieth Street was Case Avenue. We had a mixed population with some Italian, some black. In that particular school I suppose it was probably half-Jewish, and the rest were non-Jewish. So we had a good mixture to mix with, to learn. We could learn from each other. (The trouble with some schools in some areas is that they're 100 percent one kind.) So to an immigrant boy that was a great thing. And I acquired reading and writing with no problems.

GARDNER

What about religious education? Did you keep going to cheder?

EPSTEIN

Religious education — my father was, of course, very much preoccupied. He neglected our religious education, in a sense. It wasn't till a number of years later when we moved to another area--several years later, maybe; I don't know how many years--that we got a rabbi to come to our home to teach me. The others were too old to do it. They'd had their religious education in the old country.

GARDNER

And they'd already been Bar Mitzvahed over there.

EPSTEIN

Yes. So it was up to me. So we got through that.

GARDNER

But you never went to Hebrew school.

EPSTEIN

No, I never went to a Hebrew school or cheder in this country. I had this rabbi. I can read the Hebrew. I don't understand it hardly at all. For that reason, probably, we joined a Reform synagogue, although I still keep a membership in the Orthodox synagogue in Boyle Heights, Breed Street Shul, if you happen to know that. My father was a good member there. He did a lot in the community in Boyle Heights, the Jewish community there. And when he died, the rabbi, Zilberstein, whom I knew, who died a couple of years ago, he said to both my brother Ben and myself, "Look, your father was a pillar of this community and a pillar of this synagogue, and we want to maintain his membership"--which we did gladly. And I still maintain it.

GARDNER

Was your father Orthodox, then?

EPSTEIN

Yes.

GARDNER

But he was too busy to keep the family Orthodox?

EPSTEIN

Well, he observed all the holidays and all that, and he went to shul — he didn't go all the time — but primarily in those days he was just too busy to take care of those things.

GARDNER

And he didn't drag you to shul with him.

EPSTEIN

No. He didn't drag us to it, and to be honest with you, I don't think he went too often himself. But that's another chapter we might be talking about. He later stopped working in the factory and opened up a little store. And then he had to just work there day and night, seven days a week, to make a go of it. Which he eventually did.

GARDNER

I think we have a little more tape on this side. How long did you live in that house?

EPSTEIN

We lived in that house for about three years, I suspect, at 2410. Then we moved to another house further up on Thirty-eighth Street towards Woodland Avenue. I think that's going towards the south, if I'm not mistaken. We lived there a relatively short time. Then we moved to Central Avenue, and my dad opened a little store, his first little store. He opened on Central Avenue. And we lived there for a number of years. All told, I lived in Cleveland from 1909 to 1923.

1.2. TAPE NUMBER: I, Side Two (May 13, 1974)

GARDNER

Okay, we've got you into high school.

EPSTEIN

I got through high school pretty well. I was on the second team of the basketball squad, and later I was a substitute on the first team. I never

became a star. [laughter] I'll come back a little more to the earlier days. Again, we never suffered for want, that I can recollect. We always wore decent clothes, clean, always had ample food on the table, and my father sweated it out. He provided it. My older sister went to work, and my older brother went to work. Ben and I, the younger boys, went on to school. Yetta went to school. Yetta's the one who passed away later.

GARDNER

What sort of work did your brother do at that time?

EPSTEIN

They went to work in clothing shops, clothing manufacturers. The needle trades were the Jewish trades. Later on he tried his hand at carpentry. Some of the other relatives who came later, they all became carpenters and construction people, and they did extremely well in later years. I remember when my sister Cema was born, and I was eight years old, and the doctor came to the house. I remember he came out of the room and asked me to roll up his sleeves for him. [laughter] I remember heating the water and all that. We had sickness in the family. I had typhoid; we had mumps. Typhoid almost wrecked me. That's where I lost most of my hearing. My ears became infected, and nobody took care of them.

GARDNER

How old were you then?

EPSTEIN

Well, it was shortly after my sister was born. I must have been nine or ten years old. My ears became infected, and I never remember going to the doctor. In later years, when I went to the doctor here, he examined my ears and he said, "You know, you had a mastoid. I don't know how you survived." At the time, when I told him what had happened, he said, "Well, it's evident. I can tell from your ears now." The eardrums were practically eaten away, and my hearing gradually became worse and worse. I got typhoid — there was a Jewish settlement house in the area, and I used to go there occasionally with some of the other children. And they had a camp one summer. I went to sign up to go to the camp, and I remember going with the group. They had the big

Red Cars in those days, too, in Cleveland, like they had here; they'd go out into the country. But after I was there, I remember, oh, I enjoyed it for the first couple of days. And then I got a headache. a very severe headache, which was something I'd never had before. So I told one of the kids about it; and you know, I was suffering. So they took me to the leader, the group leader or whatever, and he took me to what was supposed to have been a nurse. She examined me. I don't know whether she took my temperature or not, but she immediately got somebody to put me in a car to take me back home, [she] sent me home. When I got home I must have had a temperature of about 106. So they called a doctor. And the doctor immediately put me to bed. And I remember for weeks just lying there with this horrible — I still remember it. The fever was fantastic — the heat in my head. Thank goodness I survived it. But the doctor to this day doesn't know how it was. My sister tells me, "Probably because you were so sick when you were an infant, you established immunities then." On two occasions I was on a deathbed, in my infancy. She said at one time that I was gone and she ran to the house of an uncle [Berril Hirsch] to ask him to come help. He said, "Never mind, he'll live," and he never came. He lived to be 108, so it must be because he never took anything seriously, [telephone rings, tape stopped] Did I leave off about the . . . ?

GARDNER

Well, we were talking pretty much about how you were afflicted with the typhoid and the effects of it later.

EPSTEIN

The medical facilities we had available to us at the time--the doctors of that day didn't have antibiotics. By the time I came out here, my hearing from time to time used to become distorted; so I would go to the doctor. My ear doctor when I was out here was the one that told me that normally a person in those days succumbed to that because they had no antibiotics. Anyway, here I am. I survived. [laughter] One of the curious things, speaking of that period of education: turtleneck sweaters were the rage a couple of years ago and a lot of people still wear them now. We used to wear them, but one day the principal and the teachers got together, and they took a neck examination. And every one of the kids had a dirty neck. And they wore these sweaters to

hide them. So they were forbidden. We had to stop wearing the turtleneck sweaters to school. [laughter] To this day, I haven't had a turtleneck sweater.

GARDNER

That's an interesting sidelight. [laughter] Well, anyway, you went to high school, you mentioned, at East Tech. What were your educational interests at that time?

EPSTEIN

Well, I had many curiosities but no direction. One of the things in our family, I regret to say that there wasn't too much direction of the younger children in the sense that the parents themselves didn't know how to direct us. And in my own particular case, I was still not my father's son in the sense that I grew up with a father. It took me many, many years, and not till I was a full-grown man with a family of my own, that my father and I had a rapport, a full-blown rapport. But in those days, I sometimes resented him. He would want to discipline me-- and often did, of course, which was his right and his duty — but I always had a resistance towards what he wanted to do with me. I don't know whether it was because we hadn't been together for so long, or whether it was just a normal thing between a youngster and his father in other areas. And so I was left, as far as my educational trends were, to follow any lead that I thought I would like. With all due respect to my father, it was not a matter of hate or anything like that. We got along in that respect. He didn't have time to give me, number one, and he probably was timid towards me himself because I was new to him in that sense.

GARDNER

What were his relations like with your older brothers?

EPSTEIN

We were not in that sense a close-knit family when we were younger. There were education differences. Ben and I and Yetta went to school. (Helen, she would call herself, or Yetta.) The others went to work. There were different interests in their lives. I don't know if you're aware of this: if a person comes to a country, if he's past teenage, he will never lose his accent completely.

GARDNER

That's interesting.

EPSTEIN

Whereas if you come as a young child, such as I did, and my brother Ben and sister Yetta [did], we lost our accent. Our interests were different. We were the educated. We went to school, and we had different interests; and they, of course, went with the older crowd and with the immigrants, and they stayed immigrants in that sense. By no means did we look down on them, but they didn't have the opportunity to go to school-- they had to go to work. But Ben and myself were six years apart, and he was just a little too far away from me. Yetta and I got along very well. I got along with Ben, too, but there wasn't that close attachment where we learned from one another or where one guided the other. There just wasn't that. So I went to a technical high school, and I thought I wanted to be an engineer. In those days engineers were considered--that was a prime profession. I went to a technical high school, and then I went on to college. And I entered Ohio State University, and I thought I'd start in engineering school. You had to take two hours of drawing, three, four days a week, and I said, "This is no life for Louis." So I changed to accounting. And that was even worse. So then I changed to prelaw. I took my general courses very well. I did relatively well. My mathematics was good, and English was all right, and history. Then when I got to law school, I did very well.

GARDNER

What was Ohio State like at that time?

EPSTEIN

Ohio State was, of course, nowhere near as big as it is today. It had about 8,000 students. Having gone to no other school, I have no way to measure it. But it was considered a good school.

GARDNER

What was the social atmosphere like?

EPSTEIN

Well, it all depends where you came from.

GARDNER

Considering where you came from, what was the social atmosphere like?

EPSTEIN

The social atmosphere was fine for a guy who joined a fraternity and had the money to join a fraternity. They were a lot of fun. I lived in a boarding house, and I worked part time. I still had a lot of fun, but there was definite cleavage of social life.

GARDNER

Was there much Jewish participation?

EPSTEIN

Yes, they had a Menorah Society at that time; and now they have a Hillel. In those days they had a Menorah Society, and we had regular meetings with fairly good attendance. We had affairs, parties. And the local people- one of the local people was a man by the name of Lazarus, who started the Lazarus Department Stores, which later became Federated [Federated Department Stores], [telephone rings; tape stopped] He took a great interest in Jewish students, and once a year he'd invite them to his home, I think around Passover time or something, for those who didn't leave for the holidays. And he supported the Menorah group, furnished them, I suppose, with funds to have a little party every time they had a meeting--refreshments and one thing and another. And that's the way half of the students lived. I had a roommate. A lot of us had gone to the same high school or came from the same neighborhood of Cleveland, and we met others from Akron, Canton, wherever. So the Jewish group formed friendships there. Then we became friendly with a lot of non- Jewish students, very fine boys and girls.

GARDNER

Had Ben gone to Ohio State, too?

EPSTEIN

No, he went to Western Reserve, which is now Case Western Reserve. He only went one year. Ben was an undisciplined person in that he didn't want the regimentation of a school or university. And Ben, about that time, was becoming a sick boy. You see, Ben has had TB ever since he's been a teenager. No one ever expected him to live to the age that he is now. He's seventy-nine.

And curiously enough, his wife was the same thing. She was a young TB. They met in a sanatorium. "Why should I marry a woman who's sick?" I said, "What have you got to lose?" [laughter] Sometimes when I think back about it, it's a little bit lack of direction, lack of knowledge by our parents, really, of what to do, how to guide their children--lack of time. See, my father was a very intense worker, and when he worked, nothing could interfere with him. And he had a lot to do. He had to provide enough money to support his six children.

GARDNER

Was he still working at the factory at this time?

EPSTEIN

No. By the time I'm talking about, he had long ceased [that] . I think he started about three or four years after we arrived, which would be about 1913--' 12 or '13 when he started going into business for himself.

GARDNER

Maybe you ought to tell that story again that we went through at lunch, about how he happened into that.

EPSTEIN

Oh, how he got into business for himself. Well, he was working as a presser in a men's clothing factory. I think the name was Korach. It was a clothing manufacturer by the name of Korach in Chicago, and also one branch of the family was in Cleveland. He was a presser. He would see garments that were a little bit damaged, maybe with a spot of oil from the machine or whatever, or a garment that wasn't made right for whatever reason. So one day he asked his boss if he would sell him some damaged garments, and he would try to sell them to some of the neighbors in the area at a very low price. His boss agreed to do that, and he bought about a hundred dollars' worth. He had the knowledge to have some flyers imprinted, and we children passed them around the neighborhood. And one Sunday they brought in enough people to sell out the whole batch of merchandise that he'd bought. So he probably did very well with it. So he continued to buy those things from his boss and then later on he figured out that if his manufacturing outfit had some damaged merchandise, that some of the others would have, too--which, of course, they

did. And he made arrangements to buy them, and gradually he built up enough business so he felt that he could afford to take the risk to give up his job. One doesn't give up a living for eight people, six children [and his wife] and himself. Finally he did and started a little store. He did all right in the sense that he still was able to support his family, perhaps even a little better than when he was working. Then he started buying other merchandise. He used to go down to a market over in one section of Cleveland--I think Thirteenth and Orange Street. He used to push a pushcart there, full of this kind of merchandise to spread about on the sidewalk, and I used to help him push that pushcart and take care of the merchandise, help him operate that little piece of square that he was allowed to use. They would allot so many feet to each person, enough to park your pushcart and give you maybe 5X5 feet or 6 X 6 feet or more display space on the sidewalk. And Cleveland at that time still--though now second- and third-generation — had a large foreign population--Russians, a lot of Polish, a lot of Hungarians, a lot of "Bohemians," as they used to call them, now Czechoslovaks. They used to come down to that market. Of course, I being very young, my job was to watch. And if my father found my attention straying somewhere else, I'd get a whack across the--"Why aren't you watching?"

GARDNER

He was actually training you very young for the rigors of business.

EPSTEIN

Well, I learned a lot of merchandising from him. In later years I had a theory of display which I called the "pushcart theory." And everybody at the Pickwick knows the pushcart theory. You put your merchandise out so that it can be best seen and easily touched, and use up all your space to the best advantage — which is the theory of all retail business. I used that to dramatize that theory; I call it the pushcart theory. I told them that I lived through it--which I suppose I did. [laughter] And then he prospered at it, started taking in other types of merchandise; and later on he traveled to other cities to buy from knitting mills where he bought sweaters. In those days they used to wear this very heavy underwear, and he'd go to mills of that type that made that woolen underwear and buy that. One time he, with another man, went in on a deal where they bought two carloads, two carloads, of corsets. [laughter] Two

carloads of corsets. They rented an empty store in downtown Cleveland and ran a sale for I don't know how many months, and they did very well with it. So he got to the point where he was making a very decent living. He was able to pay part of my expenses in college and all that.

GARDNER

Well, that takes us back then to law school, which you had just started to mention.

EPSTEIN

Well, that's a hard thing. To go on from there, I was in law school, and I was a good student in law school. And then, as I told you, Ben was a TB, and Yetta had TB ; Ben survived and Yetta didn't. Ben shipped out to Arizona and California. He worked some of the time, and some of the time he had to be supported. But then when Yetta became sick with TB and had to leave Cleveland, she was sent out to California, and she lived in a room--whatnot . She sent letters back home: she was feeling well, sometimes she wasn't feeling well. And it was sort of a heartbreaking thing for the family — you know, the mother and father sending out the daughter. The theory was that boys could get along better and much easier than girls. So the family decided to pull up stakes and move to California. My father said, "Well, if I can do this kind of business here, I'll be able to do it in California." So he sold off everything. By that time he owned his own home. And I was to remain in Columbus. The whole family moved and I was to remain in Columbus. And I had a very guilty feeling about it. I felt that I should be with the family and maybe help them. Of course, the feeling was all right, but the amount of help I thought I could furnish him was all wrong. So I pulled up stakes and dropped out of law school.

GARDNER

How far along were you?

EPSTEIN

I was practically through my second year. I was two- thirds through my second year, or one year and one quarter to go. And the dean of the law school, Judge [John Jay] Adams, said, "Epstein, don't drop out"-- (he "used to call me

Epstein; they used to always call [you] by the last name) — "Epstein, don't drop out." He said, "They don't come back." "Oh," I said, "I'll be back, Judge. I'll be maybe out a year." "Well," he said, "I hate to lose you. You're a darned good student. You know, you're headed for the [Order of the] Coif." (You know what the Coif is? Similar to Phi Beta Kappa. The honor law society.) "Well," he said, "in case you can't come right back here. ..." He wrote me a letter, dictated a letter to his secretary: "To whom it may concern," what he thought my capabilities as a law student were. He said, "You'll be able to get into any law school. But you go back to school even if you can't come back here." I fully intended to, of course, but I never did. Well, that's the end of my law career. Then I came out here, and I had to get readjusted to everything. The family was nervous about the two ill people, and my father had to start all over again. But he opened a store, and he started going around to the shops here, the dress factories, and he made his contacts. He had a good personality; he was a very trustworthy person. In later years I found people who'd dealt with him, long after he was gone and I had matured into my own business. There are some very interesting stories, one in particular. He made a go of it and did quite well, even during the Depression. He came here in '23, and the period of adjustment took several months. He started a new business, and then a few years later the Depression came along. But he made his contacts, and he would buy from these people. But he stopped traveling around looking for other kinds of things. He was well known in Boyle Heights. Every woman who ever lived in Boyle Heights at the time that he operated the store knew him, because all the women used to come in to buy remnants and dresses and whatever he had. He became a member of the synagogue, and he used to contribute to everything that came along.

GARDNER

What synagogue was that?

EPSTEIN

The Breed Street Shul, what they called the Breed Street Shul. Congregation Talmud Torah is the actual name. It still exists on Breed Street, and I still maintain a membership there.

GARDNER

Where was the shop?

EPSTEIN

His shop was on Brooklyn Avenue. He had one shop first on Brooklyn, just about four doors from Soto Street, and then later on he bought a building, a bank building--a bank that had gone broke, one of the Hellman banks. It was called the United States Bank, I think, at that time. It was owned by the Hellman people. They went broke during the Depression, and after a few years the building came up for sale. And my father wanted a little bit larger place. If he could have his own building, he wanted to. He was able to buy it, in those days, relatively cheap, because all buildings were cheap but money was scarce. Anyway, he bought it; he moved his business there, the corner of Brooklyn and Cornwell. There is now a Mexican bakery there. He was there for quite a number of years.

GARDNER

Where did you live when you first moved out here?

EPSTEIN

My first place of residence was off of Santa Barbara [Avenue] west of Normandie Street, Dalton Avenue.

GARDNER

This was a long way from Boyle Heights.

EPSTEIN

Well, he didn't move to Boyle Heights till after he was there for a while, then he built a house. He had a house built in Boyle Heights. He didn't go back and forth. First, for a few months he was dealing with another man who had a place on Central Avenue. He didn't get along with this man. Well, he was a better operator than this man was, so there was no point for him to stay with him. I'm trying to think of the name of the street.

GARDNER

Was that a Jewish neighborhood then, on Santa Barbara?

EPSTEIN

In those days a lot of Jews lived near Western Avenue. This was not too far from Western. It wasn't totally a Jewish neighborhood; it was a mixed neighborhood at the time. Western Avenue was supposed to have become a big street, but it never did. For one reason or another, business did not go that way. There was a Jewish community in the Western Avenue area. They had a small synagogue there, but we never joined that. Then he built this home in Boyle Heights on Britannia Street. By that time, he opened the store. As I say, he did quite well. He took care of everything that he had to take care of — all of the doctor bills; they were fantastic. So I was out here, and I was at a loss for what to do. I was of absolutely no help to my parents. I would have been better off to have followed Judge Adams's advice and stayed where I was. But I had a guilt feeling, and that's the way it was.

GARDNER

Did you look for work?

EPSTEIN

I looked for work, but I had no training for any work. My brother had worked for a produce company when he was well, so he knew produce. So somebody suggested that he and I go into the produce business, and we found a place for sale, or somebody found it for us, told us about it, on 111th and Main Street, which was way out, in those days--this was 1924, now. We sold produce at a produce stand and a few staple groceries. It was like we used to call a "roadside stand." And we'd sell soft drinks and whatever else could be kept: a minimal amount of staple groceries, coffee, sugar--pick-up stuff. But one of us had to sleep there all the time. We had to have somebody sleeping there.

GARDNER

Why was that?

EPSTEIN

Well, because otherwise they would carry the whole damned store away. [laughter] It was a little bit of a shack; you could break in.

GARDNER

What was that neighborhood like at the time?

EPSTEIN

It was beginning to build up. There was some community beginning to build up. It was still considered semirural, but it was building up very rapidly. The new subdivisions had gone even beyond that, and that was sort of a little oasis in between. We had that for a few months, and then we decided to give it up. It was too uncomfortable, and the people there were non-educated people. So we sold it to someone else. Then again my brother went to work at a produce plant, and then he got sick again. At any rate, it was up to me to find something else to do. A friend of ours knew some people who had market experience. And they said, well, they needed someone to help them. They wanted to buy a grocery department in a market. But they needed more help than they could afford to give it, and would I be a partner. Which sounded all right, sounded interesting, sounded like a challenge. The amount of money was something like \$1100, \$1200. My dad loaned it to me, and I went in with those people. And I became very ambitious and I liked to do business.

GARDNER

Where was this one?

EPSTEIN

It was on Whittier Boulevard not too far from Kaspere Cohn Hospital. Kaspere Cohn was about three blocks east of that. So we went in business. There was a small apartment in back of that store where my partner lived with his wife and child. He was an easygoing guy. I got overly ambitious, and I was doing the buying and selling and delivering. I learned business very rapidly. But I found out that they were taking merchandise from the store and, number one, not only supporting their own family with it but giving it to other members of their family; number two, that every time his wife came into the store to help, our register was always short around twenty dollars; number three, I was working too hard. See, my family was still living near Western Avenue, and I was commuting back and forth, early in the morning, late at night. And I got a very bad cold and I couldn't get rid of it. It started getting worse, and I could feel myself slipping. I knew that I was going to crack. I just knew it. And I was becoming very unhappy with the treatment I was getting from this couple. So I told them, "Either you buy me out or I'll buy you out. This partnership can't go on." Well, they didn't want to sell out, because they had a good thing. It was

not a bad business, and it was showing a profit. I said, "I don't want any more of this partnership. I'm not happy. I'm afraid these things are happening. I can't prove it, and I don't want to prove it." So they offered me \$500 less than I'd put in. I said, "I'll give you that deal." Well, they didn't want to give it up. I said, "Well, then, why do you want me to take a deal like that?" So I gave them an ultimatum. "If you don't make up your mind within three days, over the weekend, I will call the agent who sold us this and I will sign a paper which will bind us all to sell it, whatever price. Now it's up to you." So they decided to pay me off, and I got a couple of hundred dollars in addition. I insisted that I wanted that, because it was a good deal for them. So they bought me out. And you know, within a week I just--pffft — right out like a light. I cracked. And what with two TBs in the family, everybody in the family thought that I had TB also, and there was great consternation. The doctor who attended the others, Dr. [Francis M.] Pottenger--a very famous man; he had a sanatorium in Monrovia--became my doctor. He never told me that I had TB, and he never told me that I didn't have TB. We just all assumed that. I had a spot on my lung. What I had was a very bad case of pleurisy. And to this day I have a spot on my lung like that. Every time I go for an examination where they take X rays of my chest I tell them beforehand, "Now, look, don't be alarmed. There's a spot on my left lung, very large; it's been there for over forty years. " An incident happened in Palo Alto. We went there for a checkup, and they took an X ray, and we went about our business, my wife and I. And I got back to the hospital for the final checkup, and they said, "Where have you been? We've looked all over for you, spent a whole day trying to chase you down." "What's wrong?" "Well, we want some more X rays of your chest." I said, "Uh-oh. I know what that is." So I told the doctor. Well, he was greatly relieved. He said, "Well, let me take another picture anyway." That's an aside. Well, from that step, the next step is the book business, where this all starts.

GARDNER

And at this point your family is living in Boyle Heights?

EPSTEIN

At that point they were not yet in Boyle Heights, [tape stopped] We were just north of Santa Barbara. I don't recollect the number; I think it's something like 3900.

GARDNER

What was your father doing at this time, then?

EPSTEIN

Well, as I said, he was just looking around, getting the lay of the land. He met this man who was running a business not quite like the kind he ran, so he made a few deals with him. They were going to stay partners, but the man wasn't good enough for my father. He wasn't as good a businessman, and he didn't know his merchandise as well. And he wasn't liked by the people he'd deal with. The one thing I will say about my father: the people who dealt with him always liked him. His business depended on source and supply, the same as the old-book business, in a sense. If you get the merchandise at the right price, you can sell it. Now, if you'll allow me to digress, to jump about forty years from the time I'm speaking of, if that's all right with you, I'll tell the story.

GARDNER

That's fine, go ahead.

EPSTEIN

When we moved to Hollywood, when we opened the Pickwick, we were still in the old-book business. Pickwick was supposed to be an old-book store. It was. But pocket books had just come out. And one of the salesmen whom we knew came in and wanted to sell me a bunch of new pocket books. And the chief title was Dale Carnegie's *How to Win Friends and Influence People* — which really started off the pocket book business. If that had failed, pocket books would have failed. I'm sure the idea would have been started again, but the company would have failed. I didn't want them. Well, anyway, he finally persuaded me, "You're on Hollywood Boulevard; you're no longer on Eighth Street downtown; it's a different area. And you'll sell them." And there were a few other titles. So he said, "In order to get 40 percent, you've got to buy 1,000 books." "What do I want with 1,000 books?" "You'll sell them, believe me.. If you don't sell them, I'll take them back." Well, against my will, I decided, "Okay, I'll try it." So we had a rack made. But he said, "You'll have to establish credit with the company that sells these books." "Who are they?" "The Sunset News Company." Still in business. They sold out to ARA [American

Retailers Association] a few years ago. "And you'll talk to Mr. [Johiel] Katzev. " The name Katzev. I said, "Katzev, Katzev." I asked the salesman, "Was he ever in the dress manufacturing business?" He said, "Yes." I said, "My father must know him, because I've heard my father mention that name." So I called Mr. Katzev at Sunset News. And I said, "Harry Smith here sold me 1,000 books and he says I have to establish credit with you. I have no credit because I'm in the old-book business and everything we buy is for cash. I can give you the name of the bank we deal with, and so forth." He said, "What is your name?" I repeated my name. He said, "What's your name again?" I repeated my name, "Louis Epstein." He said, "Are you related to R. Epstein of the Ohio Jobbing Company?" I said, "That's my father." He said, "You can have any amount of credit you want. I don't have to ask you any more questions." And I thought that was a very, very touching thing. And I repeated that story many years later to Mr. Katzev's son, who now calls himself [Arthur] Kates. And I've seen, Mr. Katzev any number of times since. I did a lot of business with Sunset News in later years. It was always a very touching story. He said, "If you are his son, have anything you want. Come, take anything you want. Don't worry about it." I'm R. Epstein's son; I don't worry about it. [laughter] That's the relationship he established with people he dealt with. He had many competitors in that type of business who would go around to shops looking. But most of the people he dealt with, he dealt with the bigger ones and the better ones who handled a better type of merchandise. And once he got started with them, they wouldn't see to anybody else. He was a pleasure to do business with, and they trusted him. Mr. Katzev tells a story: He would never measure a bolt of merchandise. He would take it like this and feel it. And he would say, "You've got thirty yards in that." And he said, "We tested him out, and he never missed by one or two yards up or down." and he said, "If he gave us a price, we knew it was a fair price. We might get a little more maybe sometime from somebody else. Maybe he wasn't always highest, and maybe he wasn't always lowest, but he always gave us a decent price for what it was worth." So they would either call him again and again, or they'd save stuff for him. But this is in relation to later, when I got in the book business, how it's interrelated. The reputation he made helped me.

GARDNER

Well, as the side runs out, I guess we can start with the story of how you became a bookman, since that's the crucial part of the oral history.

EPSTEIN

Yes. That stems back from the grocery business, where I told you I had collapsed. For weeks and weeks and weeks I was flat on my back, everybody assuming I had TB, although the doctor never said that. And he never told me. Then I began to feel better. My strength started coming back, and I began to move around and go downtown. I'd go into bookstores, look around. I had nothing else to do; I wasn't capable of working yet. So I started browsing in a few stores, buying a book occasionally.

GARDNER

Which stores?

EPSTEIN

Well, there was Holmes; there was Powner. I sneaked into Parker's once. Parker was the leading new-book seller, a very austere person. I went to Fowler's--well, all of them who were in existence at that time. I went to Dawson's on Grand Avenue. There were a few others on Sixth Street, Lofland and Russell; and Powner's was on Spring Street. And there were a few others. I have them all jotted down here somewhere. I'd always liked books, but in the general sort of way, like the average person who was a customer of mine in later years. He's not too bookish, but he wants to read a book once in a while, good or bad, whatever it happens to be, if he likes it, he likes it. Then constantly my strength kept coming back, and there came a period of time when I said, "Look, what am I going to do now?" I didn't want to go back to school, and I didn't have any business, didn't have any trade. So one day I was reading — and I kept watching the want ads, the business for sale — I saw an ad in the Times, "Bookstore for sale. Long Beach." It gave the address on Pine Avenue, six hundred and something. Well, I had nothing else to do that day; I went down there. I had never been to Long Beach in all the time I'd been here. So I got a Red Car and went down to Long Beach, all the way down to the end of the line, and took a walk along the Long Beach Pike, as we used to call it then. Then I walked back up Pine Avenue to the address of the store, and I went in there. It was a smallish store. Half of it was the little bookstore and

half of it was a gunsmith-and-locksmith's shop. The place had mostly secondhand magazines, a few Western stories. But it was a bookstore. Today probably if anybody would call me and offer to give it to me, I probably wouldn't take it. But I didn't know any better. And I got to talking with the man, a German chap.

1.3. TAPE NUMBER: II, Side One (May 13, 1974)

GARDNER

Okay, to conclude the story of your purchase.

EPSTEIN

I talked to the man, and he told me how I couldn't possibly fail. If he could do it with no education to speak of, and he was German and all that. ... He gave me all the difficulties he had and still made a living; with all the things that I knew, I could do nothing but become a wealthy man. So he found out I could raise \$700, and that was the price of the store. It was interesting — it sounded interesting--so I bought it. By that time, the folks had already moved to Boyle Heights. I was still living with the family, and I could stall off my board and room for a while. So I bought it, and he told me how to run the business, what to do; but this is still a peculiar setup. "And who watches when you have to go out? Mr. Schuberg?" He was named [Bill] Shuman; the other was Schuberg. "So Schuberg'll watch the store. He introduced Mr. Schuberg. "Oh, we'll have no problem." And then he said, "If anybody wants to buy something, he probably knew the value of something, and most of the stuff is marked." A lot of magazines — National Geographics and whatnot. Anyway, I bought it and moved into a room in Long Beach, and had my meals at dirty little restaurants. And I enjoyed it. I enjoyed this sense: the buying and the running around chasing the books--which I did little of, because, number one, I didn't know where. He told me where he went. But one thing he told me: he said, "You'll get calls to buy books. Don't ever pay more than ten cents for a book." And you know, I lost an awful lot of good books because I wouldn't offer over ten cents. [laughter] It took me a little while to find out that that formula was wrong. A lot of the stuff came from the Salvation Army, Goodwill; we'd buy magazines. The turnover in magazines made a living. The business was as good as he told me it was, and it was worth the money I paid. But after five or six

months, I became awfully tired of the community. Number one, my living conditions were far from ideal. I lived in a room, and I'd eat all my meals out.

GARDNER

It was a rooming house sort of setup?

EPSTEIN

A rooming house a couple blocks away, and all my meals out; I got awfully tired of that. And then commuting weekends: Saturday evening I would take the Red Car and then come back Monday morning.

GARDNER

What was Long Beach like in those days?

EPSTEIN

Long Beach was a well-established community in those days. But it had the reputation [as] --and it was-- a community of retired farmers from the Middle West, mostly Iowa and Indiana. Their main interest was the price of hogs on any given day. Their reading habits were--I'll tell you, they were not very good. And to show you the type of community (I was very fortunate I made up my mind to leave there, because if I'd stayed there, I never would have made a decent bookman): I was there for six months, and even the person who sold out to me didn't know, and nobody in the community indicated to me, that there was such a thing as a Publisher's Weekly, or any other kind of trade paper. That's how ignorant I was, and that's how ignorant the community was. Usually here in Hollywood, the customers tell you that there is such a thing, or a librarian walks in to discuss something. But there it was sort of an arid place. And Long Beach still is not a good book town, although I think it's ripe for a good bookstore. I think I told you the time after we sold the Pickwick, I mentioned to them that Long Beach should be watched. Well, Pickwick does have a store at Lakewood, which is just outside, that does very well. At any rate, to get back to that, after six months I sold out to a Scotchman named A.D. Castle who was very happy with it; kept it for years, till he finally got sick and had to give it up. But he was very happy to get it; it was just the thing he was looking for. But he moved a year after. Our store was right across the street from the Long Beach Press-Telegram, if you happen to know where it is.

The site is now occupied by a Thrifty [Drug] Store. of course, the old building we were in was an old shack of a building. There was a row of about ten little tiny stores, and ours was the third from the corner. They tore them all down.

GARDNER

Were there any other bookstores in Long Beach at the time?

EPSTEIN

Yes, there was. There was Hewitt's. Hewitt's Bookstore was the new-book store there; they sold stationery and books. There was one other chap who was just as ignorant as I who was selling secondhand books and magazines. In those days, novels used to sell because there were no pocket books. But paperbacks have killed the market for old novels. If you ran across a few good novels--and I must have run across some good things. You couldn't possibly not have run across them. A dealer would occasionally drift in from Los Angeles and go through my shelves and pick up a few things. I always used to listen to them, but they worked very quickly, and I never got really acquainted with them. I later became acquainted with them when I opened in town. I sold out, and then by that time the spirit of the chase had developed. I started going around looking at bookstores with a different sort of an eye. And I found out there was such a thing as a Publisher's Weekly when I moved back to Los Angeles. And I saw a copy one day, on one of the dealers' desks, of Publisher's Weekly. I looked at it, and then I asked him, "Can anyone subscribe to that?" He says, "Well, I don't see why not." Then I told him I had a little bookstore in Long Beach. "Oh," he said, "Long Beach. That's no place for a bookstore." He was right. And I kept going around, and I picked up the things that I knew. I picked up Western stories and mystery stories and the better magazines. Pretty soon I had quite a few in the garage, and why not open a store in Los Angeles? I didn't do badly in the way of business. I did as much as I expected to do and made as much profit as I expected to, so it wasn't a failure in that sense. It was a failure in the essentials of living, you might say, somebody to talk to and then someone to relate to in the community. There was nobody there, no point to staying there. Gradually I started looking around; I gradually became acquainted with a few of the booksellers--not too well. I finally decided I would open a store. I had to borrow a few bucks. So I rented a store, 10 feet X 40, on West Sixth Street, right around the corner from the Biola

Institute, right around the corner from the [L.A. Public] Library. The building is now torn down, that big narrow building they built. It had a wide expanse on Sixth Street but no depth. The lot was 50 feet deep and [had a] 10-foot little space in the back of the store which we couldn't use; so it was 10 feet X 40 feet. I rented that in 1926, the spring of '26. My brother-in-law was a carpenter; he helped me build a few shelves. For part of the shelves we used apple boxes. And then I later became acquainted with somebody who lived at the Biola; and I gave him a few bucks, and he built me some more shelves and got rid of the apple boxes. I gave him some books. And I really began to learn the book business. Dawson's was a block away; Powner's was on Spring Street; Lofland and Russell was across the street on the next block. Directly across the street was Rogers, who was a brother-in-law of Dawson's. Book people started coming in. I just got my foot into the book world. And they would discuss things. I found out what a first edition was supposed to be. [N.C.] Holmes had his main store on Sixth Street near Figueroa in those days. Well, Holmes at that time had about six, seven stores operating in the city. He used to come in. He used to go to lunch on Hill Street and walk by; and I learned from him because he would stop and look at my stock every day. And anytime Holmes bought a book, I knew I had it marked too cheap--or any other dealer, for that matter. But I made no complaints. I mean, I bought it cheap enough, so I made my profit. But you learn, you talk, and you listen; and then I started going around looking at their shelves. Mr. [Ernest] Dawson, God bless his memory, came over during the first week I was there. I had a little narrow rack I put on the sidewalk against the wall, and I had books marked ten cents, fifteen cents, twenty-five cents, thirty-five cents, whatever I felt it was worth. He came to me and introduced himself. (Now, there's a man who was the bookman in the city in those days, rare-book man. But he was nice enough to come and introduce himself, offer me help.) He said, "If you don't mind, young man" — I was all of twenty-four; in '26 I was twenty-four years old--"if you don't mind me telling you something, that rack of books you have out there, if you would make them all one price and put a little sign on them at that price, you would sell more." As simple a thing as that. Of course, it was true. And I did it, and it came out true. And he said, "If they don't sell at that price, reduce them." That's the way he operated. He gave me that advice. And I always remembered that. Holmes was a different kind of character--he wouldn't help you. But occasionally he let an idea slip through. I said to Mr.

Holmes — I still referred to him as Mr. Holmes (well, he was so much older than I; they were all older than I) — "How do you develop a good trade? How could my business grow?" He said, "Do exactly what you're doing; buy the best books you can to your best knowledge." I said, "What kind of books shall I buy?" He said, "Good books on any subject. One day you'll sell one off of here, another one off of there, another one off of there," pointing, "At the end of the day, you'll have a few dollars in the till." You know, that's exactly the way it was. He said, "It's not what you yourself like. The man on the street comes in. . . . And I began to make friends. The younger generation of booksellers would stop in and talk to me. Some of them would ridicule me because I was so totally ignorant. One of them told me the year after I'd been established — John Friend; he was working for Dawson. After I'd been open for a year, he came in one day--on his lunch hour, he used to come in — and he said, "Louis, I don't know how you made it. You started with nothing, you didn't know a damned thing, and you had no stock. And here you are a year later. You have a little bit of stock, and you apparently made a living. I don't know how you did it." I told him I was just as amazed as he was, knowing now how ignorant I was then . So that was the reaction. Charlie Yale, who used to be Dawson's manager — a very fine man who later owned his own bookstore. He lived in Pasadena, so when he retired from Dawson's he started up his own store. And I watched the Dawson boys grow up. Then I became, gradually, a member of their community, and I began to go out looking for books and competing with them. After a few years I feel that when we were competing for somebody's library, that I got my share of them as well as they did.

GARDNER

These were almost all secondhand stores.

EPSTEIN

Oh, yes, these were all secondhand-book stores.

GARDNER

What was the situation like in new books?

EPSTEIN

In new books? The new-book stores downtown at that time were Fowler's-- they were on Broadway near Eighth Street; and I told you about Parker, on Sixth Street. Jones was on the way out. There, was another outfit that was on the way out, Stratford and Greene. [tape stopped] One of them was actually being auctioned off, and Jones a year later went out. Stratford and Greene was being sold out on Hill Street. As a matter of fact, the first book I ever went out looking for, for anybody, I had a chap come in the store, and he said, "Have you got a copy of Ades and Jasapovicha?" Those were the two authors; they were Arabs. Now, this I remember because it's important to me. The name of the book was Goha the Fool. I said, "No, I don't have it, but I think I can get it for you. Can you wait till tomorrow?" He said, "Yes. No hurry." The customer's name was Verne Fiske. He was an interior decorator--later had his own business. It's a long story. So I remembered I'd been in Stratford and Greene, and they had two copies of that book on the shelf. And they'd been reduced to something like thirty-five cents. So due to the fact that he wanted one, I rushed over the next morning and bought both of them. That was the first specific request that I went to search out. And I'll never forget it. So I bought it for him. The man came in the next day, and he said, "Gee, how did you find it so soon." Well, I told him I happened to know where I'd seen it. He said, "You've got a good memory." Well, that was all I needed, something like that. And that man, Verne Fiske, remained a customer of mine when I moved to Eighth Street, when I moved to Hollywood, and he died just about three years ago. He had an account with me. He was an interior decorator. But I'll never forget it. And I often told him about it after we came to Hollywood. By that time we'd become friends, not only customers. I got a big kick out of that. Oh, I rushed over, and I found it. So to get back to the new-book sellers that were there then--there weren't very many downtown. Those were the two active ones and the two dying ones. One was already in the process of being buried, and the other I think the following year--Jones went the following year. All the department stores had good book departments then.

GARDNER

It's interesting that there was so much trade in secondhand books that made it possible for so many shops to exist.

EPSTEIN

Well, they were all concentrated on Sixth Street. There were some on Spring Street. As I mentioned. Holmes had about six or seven stores at the time, scattered. He had one on Main Street, and I think two on Spring Street-- or maybe three on Spring Street. He used to rent a store that was empty and run it until the landlord leased it out to someone. And he'd auction books, too. They had an auctioneer, Charles Nash, and they would buy remainder sets and other kinds of remainders and auction them off. But Jake Zeitlin hadn't started yet. Mel Royer at that time was a customer of mine, and Max Hunley was a customer of mine before he started in the book business. Jake, at that time, was working at Bullock's in the book department. They all used to come in, and I was young, and I guess they picked up a bargain every so often because of my ignorance--which was all right. But the book talk I heard and the things that I . . . I learned that there were books about books and reference catalogs and everything else, which was a whole new world to me. I think the book trade was very good to me, very friendly to me. They weren't to each other, often. There were some that would never talk to each other. And the most unfriendly one of all was Holmes. He was a very jealous man. When you would compete with him on a library--you know, someone would call us, several dealers--Holmes would pull every kind of trick you could imagine. He would come in and say, "I'll give you ten dollars more than anybody else gave you, regardless." Or he would go out and make a bid, and then send another one of his employees to the same place and say he's from another store and bid ten dollars higher. That's the kind of stuff he did. Oh, he was vicious. But he got no happiness out of it. He finally had a great deal of trouble. He was very distant from his family. He actually went off his rocker at the end. And he's a brother to Harold Holmes up in San Francisco, the Holmes Book Company there.

GARDNER

Did any of these dealers specialize?

EPSTEIN

They were beginning to become specialists. The specialization hadn't come up to the extent that it came up later.

GARDNER

Was there any specific area that you, for example, began to specialize in?

EPSTEIN

Anything I could get hold of. Mine always was a general-book store. I didn't specialize in one specific thing. If I could find a decent book on any subject, I don't care what it was. And that's the same policy we pursued in Pickwick after we grew up. Ours was not a specialty store. We sold every kind of book that we thought the community would buy. Some people later went into first editions and all that sort of thing, but when I was in the old-book business I sold first editions and I sold every other kind of an edition. I sold sets and whatever else. Later we sold lots and lots of books to libraries, which is another area of sales which would be interesting. We had libraries around here; we sold to the city library. But the booksellers were between Eighth Street and Sixth Street. There were some on Hill Street up north of Fifth, and Walker was way up on Main Street. There were a couple of smaller ones on Main Street, a few left over.

GARDNER

Was the shop just called Louis Epstein?

EPSTEIN

The first one on Sixth Street, I thought I'd be very, very clever. Everyone has read Longfellow's Hiawatha, and everyone would know about Acadia. So I named my shop the Acadia Bookshop. Well, it was a disaster as far as the name was concerned. Nobody said "Acadia"; everybody said "acacia." Number one, there was a Hotel Acacia across the street. And especially people who were Masons--acacia is some name of a degree. But nobody seemed to know Acadia. Here I thought I'd picked a beautiful name. But that didn't particularly bother me. The main thing, though, was the response I got from the other people, what they taught me and what I learned from them by looking through their stocks, by looking through their shelves, and the kind of books they bought from me, and the kinds of books that I got calls for. And by that time all the collectors, if they'd go to one shop, they would come to the others. You never know where you'll find a book. A man would come in and pick up a sleeper from me or whatever, and we sold religious books and occult books and all kinds of things. And being right around the corner from the Biola College, I had no fewer than a dozen Biola students a day walking in and wanting to save my soul. [laughter] Really funny. They used to come in, "Have

you been saved, brother?" I'd say, "Well, I feel I'm safe. Saved and safe." They'd say, "Well, have you taken up Christ?" I'd say, "No, I haven't. I don't think I'm going to." I told them I was Jewish, there was no reason--well, you know, they gave you the pitch. But every time they got a new group of students they started right out going around the area to save us . But they were nice boys. A couple of them I had do work for me. One of them I employed part time for a while, but I said, "Now, look, one thing you've got to do. I'll employ you only on one condition. While you're here in the store, you talk religion to nobody. And you proselyte nobody. And leave me alone, too. And we'll get along beautifully. I'll try to help you, but I want you to help me in my business." He was a nice boy. I don't think he stayed with it too long.

GARDNER

Were there any special merchandising techniques that anyone used at that point?

EPSTEIN

I had no merchandising techniques, except just put out what you're got and stack them up.

GARDNER

So really, in the purest sense, all of the bookstores were strictly bookstores. There was nothing but the books to show.

EPSTEIN

Well, there were bookstores that sold gifts.

GARDNER

No, I mean in that little group that you were in there.

EPSTEIN

On, no, the old-book people? No, they would sell magazines, art magazines you run across once in a while — International Studio (I don't know if you remember that magazine) and whatever art magazines. Of course, there were better magazines and lesser magazines. Mysteries and Western stories always. . . . They provided the base of income. Not that you wanted to sell magazines particularly; but, number one, I didn't know any better but it provided me a

base of income until I built up the business to the point where I found that, well, why bother with magazines when I can use this space for books? And I was getting enough income in books where I was able to find enough books. You could always go to the Goodwill Store and buy magazines. Books were a little harder to find. But until I got to the point where I had enough books coming in--or until I learned how to get books and what books to get-- the magazines were certainly a lot easier to learn about. And they were easy to sell. And the investment was very small. You got along with very little money. You could make \$10 a day some days, just out of your magazines. In those days \$10 was \$300 a month. That's a hell of a lot of dough. It was a while before I made that kind of money. If I had had a family, I'm not sure that I would have made it. But my expenses were nil.

GARDNER

This is now 1926, -7, -8 — that period in there, right?

EPSTEIN

It was '26, -7, and -8, that's about that period. Within a year I had a fairly decent stock made up. It was amazing. And it was amazing, too, that people would come to sell me books. Now, why would they come to me? Why would they come to me when there's Dawson's, there was Lofland, these guys. I've often wondered why they did that. Maybe because they thought, "Well, the poor guy needs it more." [laughter] But then I would get calls — of course, I started running a little ad for buying books.

GARDNER

Where did you run the ads?

EPSTEIN

In the Times, a little ad in the Times. Not in the display — in the want ad section. And I used to get calls. I used to go around to furniture dealers, auctioneers, and storage houses. Oh, I learned a lot from auctioneers and storage people. My brother and I used to go to auctions. Ben used to hang around the store when he was well and he wasn't away. First I went to the auctions. I was the first one an auctioneer learned from that a book was worth more than a nickel. The first few times I ever went to auctions where they sold

books, the minute you bid a nickel, "Sold." Later on, I guess, one of them started, "Well, if this guy bids a nickel all the time, maybe he'll bid six cents." So he pulled a bid out of the air, "Six," and I said, "Seven." I never bought a book for a nickel again. [laughter]

GARDNER

Where were some of these auctions held?

EPSTEIN

Well, the auctioneers were pretty well scattered. They were on Western Avenue, Sixth Street, Adams Boulevard. The fancier ones—there was one on Wilshire Boulevard. Oh, those auctioneers were a great lot. You ought to go to some auctioneer and do a study like this.

GARDNER

Who are some of the ones who are still around who were auctioneering then?

EPSTEIN

There aren't any still around.

GARDNER

All switched, huh?

EPSTEIN

The only one is Abell. The old man is much older than I am, and I'm seventy-three. I'll have to stop and visit him. He still comes to work. We used to get along. I used to buy a lot of books from him. Very clever operator. And then with him was O'Connor. An old-timer here would now the O'Connor name. There was the father, C.H., and then there was Bill and Frank. They're all gone now. I don't know, Frank may still be alive, but he's been out of the auction business for years. There was [Albert] Weil; there was Feldman. I'm talking about the very early ones. Colonel Jenkins is still around, but I never dealt much with Colonel Jenkins. My brother used to when he was in business. I don't know; they came and went. But those were the principal ones. Ames, Goldenberg. . . .

GARDNER

Ames is still around, I think.

EPSTEIN

Ames, yes, but this is about the third generation. But he was a latecomer. They came out from Duluth, Minnesota. They had been in the merchandising business, and they came out with a good deal of money. Some auctioneer or furniture buyer ran across a beautiful home of furniture and didn't have the money. So he went to Ames to back him, and Ames backed him. And he did that a couple of times, and he decided to open an auction house. The way they operated is that they didn't buy all the furniture themselves, and a lot of it was put up for auction by the people who owned the furniture. But more than half of it was furniture that was bought by dealers who had put it up for auction, and they would split the profit. The auctioneer would furnish the finances. In other words, if you were the auctioneer and I was a furniture dealer, and I would come across a beautiful home with about \$50,000 worth of furniture--I didn't have \$50,000, but you did. Okay, you give me the money, I buy it, we put it into your auction house, and we split the profit. Abell still does that. Curtis was the auctioneer, Paul Curtis. I did a great deal of business with him. Oh, I could tell you a lot of tricks those auctioneers used to play. They would buy a home and maybe have a minimal amount of furniture. They would furnish the home, put furniture into it. The shelves were empty; they'd put books into to them. They'd say, "Louis, we need 100 feet of sets," or maybe 500 miscellaneous books, and maybe 100 feet of sets, various kinds of sets, 500 or 1,000 miscellaneous books, for a very fine home. Okay. So I would get it and bill it to them, and they'd put it on the shelf and sell it as part of the contents of the house. So people would think that these were the furniture and the things that the owner of that house had lived with. Well, maybe a little bit of it was. But I would always bill them the stuff. And if they didn't sell everything I sent out to them, they'd call me up, and I'd credit it back to them, and they'd pay me the difference, I don't know whether my conscience should bother me for that or not, but I always billed them. That was what they used to call "stuffing." It was generally done. Somewhat it may still be done. They buy a name. They bought C.C. Julian's home. C.C. Julian, I don't think you would remember. He was a promoter of oil and things like that. Anyway, like a good many other people, during the Depression he went broke. He had a house up here in the Beachwood area, a beautiful big home. And they took

that house, the C.C. Julian house, and whatever there was left of C.C. Julian's estate, and they furnished it almost completely. They ran great big ads, "C.C. Julian's house," and so forth and so forth. And I don't think one-tenth of the material there had ever been seen by C.C. Julian, including the books. But it was one of the ways you had to make a living. Then by that time I was doing fairly well. It was during the Depression. And compared to a lot of the other people, we were doing relatively well. I helped support parts of my family and my friends.

GARDNER

Let's get the family part more or less up to date. You got married in 1929, right? So previous to that, what was Ben doing at this point?

EPSTEIN

Ben was in and out of sanatoria. By the time Ben got interested in books, in the book business. . . . In native intelligence, Ben is the most intelligent in the family. But he didn't use it. He was undisciplined in the sense that he didn't want to follow a course. But he fell in love with the book business. He got out of the sanatorium- it must have been around 1929. It was after I was on Eighth street. He used to come in on Sixth Street once in a while. But on Eighth Street it must have been around 1931 or -2. He got out of the sanatorium, and he had to watch his energy. He had no job, so he used to come and hang around the Eighth Street store. And he used to watch me buy and sell. Sometimes we'd go out, and when I'd have to go see a library I'd take him along for the ride. He'd go in with me and help me or whatever he could. He became enamored with it. See, Ben's a gambler, and this was enough of a gambling thing, with the chase in it, that it intrigued him immensely. So one day we got a call, and he said, "Let me go make that call myself." So I said, "Well, how are you going to carry the books out if you buy?" He said, "If it's a lot, I'll call you, or I'll get somebody to help me." Well, he went out, and for about ninety-five dollars he brought in one of the best buys that you could possibly bring--sets of various kinds and independent volumes. And to this day he boasts about that buy, the best buy, the first buy. And you know, from that time on he was so hooked on the book business. Later on I opened a store that he himself ran — which I owned, but he ran completely.

GARDNER

That was the Argonaut [Book Store] .

EPSTEIN

The Argonaut. So that's how he got interested in the book business. But our family life, to go back to that period: well, I spent most of my time either working at the bookstore or sometimes in the evening I would go out looking at books. I'd go out socially from time to time. And family affairs and whatnot and whatnot. There was not a great social life. But I met a lot of people during the course of the day, and very often I would go out with them weekends or Sundays.

GARDNER

Were you involved at all in Jewish life in Los Angeles?

EPSTEIN

At that time, not particularly.

GARDNER

Were you conscious of what it was like?

EPSTEIN

Oh, I was always aware; oh, yes, I kept up with what was going on. But I wasn't particularly religious then, nor am I overly religious now. In the sense that I support Jewish things. I support the Jewish religion.

GARDNER

What was the community like in those days?

EPSTEIN

Well, they had a very highly organized Jewish community. There were the old-timers who had, of course, the Federation as far as organizations. You read the Newmark books and some of the others, and you'll find that they had a very--especially the early Jewish settlers were just one great big close-knit clan. And then the Russian Jews came in later. They weren't accepted too well at first; but they made their way and they made their mark, and they were later accepted. There wasn't as much mixture then between the two groups as there is now. Now the lines are almost broken. There was the Sephardic

group, which didn't mix with either. The Sephardi always stayed to themselves. I think the Sephardi are still the most clannish. They still mix hardly at all with the others. They don't want their daughters marrying a non-Sephardi . They still arrange, as best they can, marriages where they can. They had a Jewish Home for the Aged at that time; they had Kaspare Cohn Hospital, which later became Cedars of Lebanon Hospital and later on became Cedars-Sinai. The City of Hope was then called the Jewish Consumptive Relief Association of Los Angeles. That was getting on its feet already. They had that piece of land where they, are now, or a good bit of it. They had a Jewish newspaper, the B'Nai B'Rith Messenger . There was organized community life. There were the synagogues--all kinds of them. The Temple Sinai was over at Fourth and New Hampshire, not where it is now. I remember Temple Sinai. Near Fourth, in that area. And the Breed Street Shul, of course. And Adams Street was a Jewish community. And before Adams, of course, I forgot about Olive Street and Temple Street — the Olive Street Synagogue. As a matter of fact, my parents are buried in the cemetery that was owned by the Olive Street Shul. Downey Road, near Olympic, just west of where the Home of Peace cemetery is. My parents are buried there. That particular cemetery, there are about four Jewish cemeteries together. Each synagogue had a different one. Now, of course, Temple Israel has the one called Hillside Park near Westchester, near Sepulveda [Boulevard] and Centinela [Avenue] . So the community was organized, and the second generation was coining up. Of course, for the old-timers it was the third or fourth generation, like the Newmarks and the Cohns and the Lewises. They were bringing up the third and fourth California generation. But by that time the second generation of the later immigrants came in. And they began to go into the professions. They built up businesses, which are now very large, big businesses. The Berg brothers. Berg Metals. They were a group of brothers who went into the junk business. They're smart, they're nice people, and they did extremely well. They'll all foreign-born. Oh, I don't know; if I put my mind to it I can run you off a list.

GARDNER

But you didn't participate in this community in any way.

EPSTEIN

Not especially in those days. It was later on that I became involved in. . . . I was always a contributor, a minor one, even when we had nothing. But as an actual participant in joining organizations and going to meetings-- I never cared for that a great deal. And the only time I did it a great deal was during the time when the Jewish question became worldwide in Hitler's era; and when I was able to do something with money and with time, then I really gave a tremendous amount of time to the Welfare Fund drives.

GARDNER

Well, we'll come up to that later. How did you meet your wife?

EPSTEIN

Well, she met me. We had a mutual friend who told her [about me]. She met him here, and then she met him again in Chicago, and he said, "Well, when you go to Los Angeles again, you stop in and see Louis Epstein. He has a bookstore." I had that little tiny bookstore, and she came in. She introduced herself and told me that Sid Diamond said to come in and say hello. She was a nice girl. She came in again and bought a book. I don't know whether she needed a book or not. [laughter] Then things went on, we began going out, and from there on the romance developed. We didn't marry till 1929, October.

GARDNER

When had you first met?

EPSTEIN

Not too long after I opened my first shop. I think it was the latter part of '26.

GARDNER

When did you move to Eighth Street?

EPSTEIN

I was going along nicely on Sixth Street, and I was there about a year and a half. And a chap by the name of Ralph Howey, who'd just graduated college — some eastern school — came in with his brother, I remember that, and looked around. He had been in a couple of times before, looking around. He said, "Would you like to sell your store?" I said, "I hadn't thought of it, but I might."

I was still single. It was a year and a half or something, running it all by myself. So he said, "How much would you want for it if you did sell it?" I said, "I think it's worth at least \$2,500." So they came back the next day and said, "We'll give you \$2,250." And I took it, just like that. I was a wealthy man — paid off my debts, I had money jingling in my pocket. But I didn't know what I was going to do. I thought, "Well, I'll get into something. After all, I've got dough." [laughter] He was very happy with what he got, a very nice man. But he changed the business completely from a real secondhand bookstore. He specialized in pamphlet material. He might just as well have been anywhere else instead of the bookstore. But I think he needed a transition period. And he later on moved to Philadelphia and he became a specialist in pamphlets. He did very well. I recently heard from him. He is doing very well.

GARDNER

What sort of pamphlets?

EPSTEIN

Early pamphlets on early religion, early politics — British pamphlets. His main business was with libraries. There's a big market for it, you know; it's all source material. This is an example of how specialized the old-book business can become.

1.4. TAPE NUMBER: II, Side Two (May 13, 1974)

GARDNER

You had just sold the store to Mr. Howey.

EPSTEIN

Yes. And there I had \$2,250 in good money and paid off the \$200 that I owed my dad--I'm not even sure that I even owed him any more money at that time. But at any rate, I bummed around for a number of months. I went up to San Francisco. I drove up there in a little old car I had, and all along the way I would stop and look for books. I found a few. In San Francisco, of course, I visited all the bookstores, the name stores like Paul Elder. I visited department stores, which had good book departments in those days. And John Newbegin's store. I talked to all of them, introduced myself, and they were very cordial.

And they were all big names in my mind. And meeting them was like, gee, meeting a very senior person in my industry or, if you want to call it, profession. And I'd always heard of them and the things they had done. That was one of the enjoyments of the trip, and I picked up quite a few books. I would continue to do that wherever I went. On the way back, I went to San Jose and Sacramento, where I'd never been, stopped at Bakersfield, and had myself a decent time. When I got back to Los Angeles, I started looking around for books, went to the auction houses and storage houses and became more acquainted with them, made some nice contacts and picked up some books from them. First thing I knew, I had a nucleus of a few hundred books, good books, to put on the shelf if I wanted to start in business again. Of course, I immediately began thinking of starting in business. In the meantime, Jake Zeitlin was opening his first shop. I kept seeing Jake over the interim. We'd meet in the bookstore or wherever. We'd talk. I told him I had these books. He said, "Look, I'm starting my shop, and I need some books to help fill my shelves." "Well," I said, "I will let you put my books on your shelf, but I am going to open a bookstore of my own before too many months, and I will want my books back, those that you haven't sold." "Okay, it's a deal." So we listed all the things, and he put them on the shelf. He had a little tiny store on Hope Street, just around the corner from Sixth. It was hardly bigger than the entrance to this house. So this went on, and he sold a few. But about five months after I let him have these books, I rented a store on West Eighth Street. I got tired of just floating. I found a chap who'd been a customer of mine, Dick Shelton. He was older than I was, and he had been a buyer from me. I never thought that he wanted to work, but he said, well, he would like to work. He was living off a fixed income, and I didn't think he ever had to work. Well, I don't think he had to; but he wanted to, at any rate, so I hired him. Well, I went to Jake and I said, "Jake, I want my books back." Well, Jake says, "You can't do this. You'll take half my stock out of my store." I said, "Jake, remember the agreement."

GARDNER

How old was he at this point?

EPSTEIN

Jake is a year younger than I.

GARDNER

So you were the two enfants terribles.

EPSTEIN

It was '28, and I was twenty-six. He was about twenty-five. So he complained bitterly about it. I said, "Come on, Jake, I'm opening my own store." So there we were; we just opened Louis Epstein's Book Shop. I gave up the idea of Acadia. [laughter] And there it was, waiting for all to see. It was not a fancy shop. I never had a fancy shop. This was quite primitive. I was fortunate; I was able to get hold of a lot of good books, not rarities in the sense that they were worth hundreds of dollars, but good material that libraries would buy, students would need — a good literary student who was really interested. Like Larry Powell, for instance, started coming in there. He used to come to Sixth Street, and then when I moved to Eighth he used to come with a Professor [Carlyle P.] MacIntyre, He was a wild guy. He used to bring his students with him, and amongst them was the chap who's now a book salesman for several publishers, Bill Webb. He said, "I remember coming in there with MacIntyre." And other people who are now politicians — a lot of young lawyers. At that time the Garfield Building had been opened, Eighth and Hill Street, and all the very young lawyers were there, especially the Jewish lawyers. They used to park their cars on Grand Avenue and walk from Hill Street to Grand and pass right by my door. A lot of people who went to the May Company or the offices downtown — they didn't have garages underneath like they have today, so they would have to park on Grand or Hope or Olive. Well, those who parked on Grand and beyond had to walk by my door, and I made some beautiful friendships and customers of people who just dropped in. And the business just grew. It was doing rather nicely from the start. Our expenses were almost nil. Rent was relatively cheap, and we weren't paying too much wages. Up until the time I was married, I could reinvest almost all that I earned back into the business. And as I say, I made contacts with these people — auctioneers and warehouse people, storage-house people. And I got some beautiful libraries out of storage houses. You know, people would put their stuff away, come out here from the East and send their stuff out here, hoping to have a big home someday and never getting around to buying a big home. Or something would happen: a person in the family would die and the stuff would be put in storage, be there for ten, fifteen years sometimes. And the

library was sold off by the heirs. They didn't want the books. And a lot of those books were excellent books. I was very fortunate in getting some of those libraries. I used to go up to Santa Barbara, browse through the furniture stores there. I picked up a lot of books in Santa Barbara. Santa Barbara was a good place for me to pick up books in those days.

GARDNER

Were other dealers treading the same trails?

EPSTEIN

Other dealers would do some of it, but apparently they didn't do it as regularly or assiduously or as energetically as I did. But for some reason or other, I was able to make the contact and keep it. That was the big thing. There was a man by the name of Orth who ran a storage house in Pasadena, Orth Storage. (Now it's called Yellow Van and Storage or something like that. You see it on Colorado Boulevard when you come off the bridge. Now all the storage houses are consolidated like national chains.) Anyway, I went in to him one day, and I asked to see Mr. Orth. I said, "I've been coming here now for a year asking if you have any books to sell me, and everybody tells me you don't have. Now, I buy books at the Lyon's Storage, I buy books at Bekins Storage, at every storage house in the area, and I don't believe that there are never any books here." He says, "Nobody ever told you there were never any books here." "Well," I said, "nobody has ever offered to show them to me." He said, "That's right, too." So I said, "Well, I'd like to make the contact. I can give you references from storage houses, other kinds, auctioneers, furniture dealers, that I buy books from them, they're happy with me" — I really made a case for myself. I said, "Look, all I want is an opportunity to bid on them." "Oh," he said, "we've got one fellow here" — and he gave me the name—"who's been buying our books for years." I said, "Well, that's good enough. I know who he is. I know him well. Give me an opportunity to bid." And you know, apparently I so impressed him with my earnestness, he said, "All right. Next time I have a library, I'll let you bid." He told me he expected one to come up. In six weeks I got a call from him, this Mr. Orth himself. He said, "Mr. Epstein?" I said, "Look, my name is Louis" — I was so much younger than he — "so if you want to call me Louis it would be all right." So he said, "All right, Louis. I have a batch of books; I want you to come and make me a bid. I'm going to take your bid and

the other man's bid." I said, "Fine. It couldn't be any more fair." So I went out and I left the bid. It was a very nice library, very nice — good general material, and a minimum of sets, but good basic items that would fit into libraries, personal libraries, especially public libraries and college libraries. He said, "I'll let you know in a couple days." In a couple days he called me, and he said, "Louis, you won the bid." "Oh," I said, "I'm very happy to hear that." It was a hell of a big lot of books. He said, "Do you want to come and pick them up?" I said, "No. You've got all kinds of trucks there. I want you to deliver them and bill me." Gee, that was great. I said, "I'll be out there. I'll pay you off, and you just put them on one of your trucks and deliver them. There's no special hurry; if you're busy, I'll wait a couple days." You know, I'd make it as easy as I could for him. He said, "No, we've got plenty of available trucks." Then he said to me, "You want to know how you stood?" "No," I said, "I would never ask it, because I wouldn't want to embarrass you. It might be embarrassing. But I sure am interested how I came out; I know I won." He said, "You were better than twice what the other guy offered." "Well," I said, "I can understand that. He's a different kind of a dealer than I am, to begin with." He had a store near First and Main. And he was not a person who was very well liked in the trade. He was a very backward sort of a bookseller. He didn't belong in the book business. And I said, "I can understand that. He was paying according to the values he thought they were, and I was paying according to the values I have for them. This is one of the things that I tried to tell you and one of the reasons why I keep going back to all these other places that I mentioned." "Now you can get all our books." And that was a source of supply for years. I developed that with a number of dealers. I would go to used-furniture people, and occasionally in buying a home of furniture they would buy a lot of books. And I told them — left my card — "Give me a ring, and I'll come right out." And several of them did that. Some of them never got hold of decent books. If the books were good, I paid them a relatively decent price for them, because I wanted to build up a regular source of supply. And I had another deal with them. I said, "If it's something you don't know how to buy, you call me. I'll buy it, and I will always give you a commission. You'll always get a commission." And I'd go in with the new-book dealers who didn't handle old books, even Mr. Parker. I once told him, "If you ever see a library, Mr. Parker, if one of your customers wants to get rid of something, call me, here's my card." He knew where to get me if he needed me. But the fact that I gave him

a card and told him to call me--he referred a number of people to me. And his customers always had good books. One of the most interesting things that happened: there was a chap in Santa Barbara who ran the Tecolote Bookshop. There's still a Tecolote Bookshop, but it's not owned by the same people. His name was [Roger] Boutell. He had been in the State Department service. Foreign Service. And he set up in Santa Barbara, had a little money, settled in Santa Barbara, was acquainted with all the fine people there, and he opened this Tecolote Bookshop. They would handle only very nice books. And what he recommended, his customers bought, because he was acquainted with them socially, knew their tastes, knew their capacities — those who wanted mystery stories, those who wanted Westerns. And I first became acquainted with him when I went in there — in the De La Guerra Court, the place was there. There was a rack of books outside of his store, and they were mysteries and Westerns marked fifteen cents each. They were from the circulating library. Some had circulated once or twice, and some three, four times. But to me they were well worth fifteen cents, so I told him, "Sell them all to me." He said, "Look, you want them all, take them for ten cents a piece." It was great. So I became acquainted with him, and I said, "Look, do any of your people ever sell a library?" He said, "They do sometimes." I said, "Would you do me the favor and give me a ring or drop me a card or call me collect, and I'll bid on them." Well, okay, so once or twice he gave me some names, and I went out there — minor pieces of library. And I offered him five dollars, but he wouldn't take it. He said, "I'll do it for you." So one Saturday morning I get a phone call from him. He said, "The sons of Mr. . . ." Who was the guy that started Castoria? You wouldn't know, but anyways, I'll think of the name. Lord? So he says, this man he referred to, very extremely wealthy man. In the last ten years of his life he was blind. He had a library. So he employed a librarian or a reader, and they would go through the London Times book supplement and would mark off the books that he would like to have read to him. And they would mark off far more than they ever possibly could read to him. And he would send away and get them. So this library was that kind of a library. This Boutell called me, and he said, "You call so-and-so; the sons are here." The sons were living in London. And they want to sell what they don't want. I said, "Fine." He said, "Here's the number; call them up; they're there right now." So I immediately got on the phone, called them up. I said, "Mr. Boutell just called me." He said, "Yes?" I said, "I would like to come out and see your books."

"When?" "How about Monday morning?" "Fine." "How many books do you have?" "Well," he says, "about 200." So I took my wife and my sister for a ride. Two hundred books you could throw in the back of the car, no problem. So we went there and drove up to a beautiful estate. We ring the door, walk in. The servant shows us, "Mr. So-and-so's in there; he's expecting you. This is where the books are." We walk in there, and there's shelves this high all around the room. Above the shelves were prints, paintings, pictures of all kinds. A lot of the paintings were already missing and all that. So I said, "Which are the books you want to sell?" Because I can see there's 1,000 books here, and he said 200." "Oh, all of them." I didn't say anything, but there it was. If I buy them, how am I going to get them all in the car, plus three people? So I looked around. I have a habit that if I'm buying from someone, I never say, "I will give you so much money." "How much do you want for them?" "Well," he said, "oh, I don't know. Are they worth \$250?" So instead of giving myself away and saying, "Great, I'll take them," being too eager, I said, "Well, it's a long drive from Los Angeles." [laughter] So he said, "Well, what would you like to pay?" I said, "Two hundred dollars." He said, "Okay." If I'd said \$100, he would have said okay. And probably if I'd given him a story that I was very poor and didn't have any money, he'd probably have said, "Take them." But at any rate, that was one of the nicest libraries I ever bought. There were no great rarities in them. But every one was a solid book in perfect condition. In those days the British books, as far as bookmaking, were so far superior to the American that each book just stood out on the shelf. Well, we had a time getting them home; that's another story. But we finally got them into the store, and I put them to one side. I didn't mark them. Shortly before that time, a year or two, the Beverly Hills Public Library broke away from the county library system and started their own library. I went to solicit the librarian for business. And Mary Boynton first fought me off, and I had to convince her that she ought to give me a trial. "Let me bring out 100 books. I'll choose them. A hundred books. And I'll bring them up into your office, put them on the table. Then keep them as long as you like. And make up your mind. If my books are not worthwhile, you tell me and I'll never come here again. But if they are something you can use, I assure you my price will be fair." Well, I put it on a basis that she would have to be a pretty horrible person not to. You know who she was buying books from? Wright Howes in Chicago. Well, Wright Howes is an excellent bookseller. But he's not cheap. (I think he's gone now.) I knew him. He used to

come into my store to pick up things. And I sold him books by mail. I said, "I know Wright Howes; he's a very fine bookseller. But we are here. And I get a lot of fine books. And I want an opportunity. Just give me one try, and it won't cost you one penny. I'll bring them here, I'll take them away, and I'll take up a minimum of your time. I'm not going to give you a sales pitch. My books are going to do the talking for me. They're a miscellaneous lot of 100 books that I think belong in the library. Now, you may have some of them already, but I'm sure you won't have all of them." She said, "No, our selection is still pretty thin." Okay, we agreed on that. I took the books there, and she bought more than half of them. And that convinced her that I was in earnest. And I said, "If you will allow me to do this with every library that I buy--and I buy a lot of good books--to pick out those things that I think you can use and bring them to you, take back those you don't want. You can buy all of them or none of them." So we made this arrangement. She became very happy with it; and I was, too, of course, and we got along beautifully. She was an exceptionally good librarian, and she was a good businesswoman. I told her, "I will not always be the cheapest and I will not always be the highest. I will try my best always to be fair. And if you ever find something that I overcharge you for, you tell me about it and I'll rebate you." Sometimes you have a book, and you don't know what it's worth. You put a price on it, and you're not positive of it yourself. We worked on that basis. Well, when I got this library from Santa Barbara, I said in my own mind that was something that she had to see before anyone else. So I called her and told her about it, and I said, "I want you to be the first one to see it." She said, "But I have no means of getting by; I have no time." I said, "This is one time I'm going to ask you to give me some of your own personal time." I said, "I will pick you up Sunday morning; I will bring you down to the shop. I will have an assistant there; the books will be all lined up so you can see them as quickly as possible. And all you've got to do is pick out what you want, and you will buy them at 50 percent of their published price. And they're all in perfect mint condition." And I explained to her that they were all British books and so forth. Well, she balked a little about giving up her time, but finally I convinced her and she came down. You know, she picked out \$800 worth of books--at our price. That's probably \$1,600 retail. And they were brand new, fine books, some of which weren't even published in this country. She had good taste for books, and she knew that she was buying for a superior community. But in those days that was one hell of a lot of dough. She

was very happy with them, and from there on, for years, we just sold her books--as long as I was in the used-book business. And you will see a great many books in the Beverly Hills Library today--they used to mark in the books when they'd get them in, the source, the provenance of where they came from—and you'll find after the title page and the copyright page, at the bottom there you will see a line where they came from. You'll see a lot of them with the name "Epstein" on them.

GARDNER

I'm going to have to go look.

EPSTEIN

They have a set of Racinet's costume book [History of Costume] , a beautiful set that I sold them. I have to go in there and take a look at some of my old treasures.

GARDNER

Or you could buy them back now. Were there any other libraries that you had that sort of arrangement with?

EPSTEIN

Yes. Only one. And that was Burbank. That is a corollary story to the Beverly Hills story. We were in our shop in Eighth Street on a dull day in summer, and two women came in. And I remember the names--Mrs. [Virginia Cole] Pritchard is one, and the other one, Mrs. [Elizabeth] Ripley. They said, "We are from the Burbank Public Library. We just are breaking away. We're starting a new library. We're breaking away from the county, and the city's going to have its own library system." That was Mrs. Pritchard talking. And she said they came here because Mary Boynton of the Beverly Hills Library said that they've got to come to me, that I will sell them a lot of good books and save them a lot of money. And you know, nobody could have said anything nicer to me right at that moment. Because coming from Mary Boynton—I consider her one of the smartest librarians that I ever had contact with. Very businesslike--she was one of these nervously energetic characters, but not fluttery as to thinking. She was always on the move. And she'd sit down and come directly to the point, very businesslike. It was such a compliment to me that I said,

"Well, if I sell you a book or not, you've done me a great favor. You've brought me the nicest compliment I can think of pertaining to books, because I consider Mary Boynton probably the smartest librarian I ever met. And I'm not knocking any other librarian. She knows her business; she's a good librarian. She knows her books, and she's very businesslike." "Well," she says, "we consider her that. We were recommended to her for that reason"--so apparently she was recognized. "Well, how do you go about it?" "Well, what do you need?" "Well, we don't know what we need, but we have" (what they call in the library business) "a first-purchase list"—the books you should purchase first: certain reference books, certain standard things. I said, "Fine. I've worked with that list off and on now. It contains I don't know how many—a couple thousand books." She said, "Well, we have the list." I took a quick glance at the list. I said, "Well, some of the things I can see I have, but I will want the opportunity to work on it, and I will go scout around and see how many I can find. How long can I keep this list?" "Well," she said, "how long do you need it?" "Well," I said, "give me three weeks." So we had this list. And then also I said, "And I may submit additions to it, what I think you will want a little later." "Well," she said, "we'll consider them." So I had the list, and the first thing I did was scout all the other bookstores in the area. There's a lot of staple library things that libraries will buy, but in the bookstore they may sit on the shelf until a library wants them, which may be who knows when. So I went all through all the other bookstores, and scouted around, and bought several hundred books from other dealers. There's a little story connected with that, pertaining to Holmes, which will come up a little later, maybe. After three weeks I got all these books together, and I listed them--priced and listed them. So I called them up. I said, "Well, Mrs. Pritchard, I have quite a few books for you." She said, "How many do you have?" "Oh," I said, "I've got 12-1500." "Oh," she said, "that's great." I said, "When do you want them?" She said, "Anytime you can bring them." I said, "Well, I've got them all listed and all priced and all billed out. And any you don't want, for whatever reason, after you've seen them, you call me back and I'll take them back." There was a set of [Encyclopedia] Britannica, some sets of standard authors, various foreign language dictionaries. I got a truck and delivered them to her on the day appointed and left them there. And they examined them. You know, they returned about half a dozen books. That's all they returned. I forget whatever

reason [they returned them] . And within a month I got a check for \$3,500 and some-odd dollars. Can you imagine getting that much money in those days?

GARDNER

All at once.

EPSTEIN

All at once. Oh, my, that was a great day for rejoicing. Just because of this Mary Boynton. And the follow-up to that: we kept selling them books till after we moved to Hollywood. They gave me an order, and I kept a list of all the things--almost a wide-open order that any books that I think they ought to have, proper price, send them out and they will consider them. And do you know, they kept 80 percent of what I sent out to them. I made it a point not to overload them with a lot of junk that they might not need. I would rather be on the safe side and give them sure things that I was almost positive they would need. Some of the things they sent back, they had maybe gotten somewhere else. Of course, they were still buying books from book distributors and book wholesalers. But it was a great thing. That's how we prospered a little better maybe than the other guys in the trade. I never priced my books too high. Everybody in those days used to complain and bargain; it was the Depression. Some days we would sit there all day and not take in a dime, and a guy comes in and offers you a dollar, you grab it, just for the sake of something. But we had enough deals like that: other libraries, some of the private schools discovered that we had good books. They used to come by. And we developed a pretty good trade of book collectors. We didn't have the rarities. We'd get rarities once in a while, but usually the rarities we sold to a specialist, like Dawson or somebody else. We knew that Mrs. Doheny was buying a lot of books, but I couldn't get to Mrs. Doheny. I would have to go through somebody else.

GARDNER

How would you know?

EPSTEIN

I knew the type of thing she was collecting, and I knew she was buying. That was the stuff that she would buy. There weren't too many prospects for that

particular type of thing. And some of the people would tell me. It was no secret,

GARDNER

What about personnel? When did you first start having somebody to help you around the shop?

EPSTEIN

Well, my first helper on Sixth Street was my younger sister. She was going to high school, and she used to come down once or twice a week after school. Otherwise, I had no helper. I would go see my books after hours or early in the morning before I opened up. She used to come down. One day I had to go to an auction, the first auction I ever went to. I saw a C.H. O'Connor advertisement in the paper selling furniture and other things, and they had a line of books. So when Cema came down, I rushed out there--it wasn't too far from downtown--and the man (C.H. O'Connor) said he'd sell his books at three o'clock. Well, he was a man of his word, I supposed. So I waited till three o'clock, and there he was selling furniture and rugs and one thing and another. So I tapped him on the elbow. I said, "Look, you said three o'clock." He didn't look at me, even; he kept right on operating. So about fifteen or twenty minutes later, I tapped him again. He said, "Young man, I'll sell the books when I get around to them." He cut me off. Well, I had so much time invested in it already, but I was worried about my sister being all by herself that long. Anyway, I was there till four-thirty or five, till everything's sold. And he puts up a bookcase full of books. "How much am I offered for these books?" "Five dollars." "Sold." I said five dollars, and he sold them to me. So he takes me aside. He says, "You're a new young man, aren't you?" "Well," I said, "I just started in the book business." He said, "Well, let me tell you something, young man." (He was much older than I.) He said, "When I am selling furniture, rugs, and I've got my crowd in my hand bidding, I'm not going to stop for a handful of books because they don't mean anything to me. That's why I'm knocking them down to five dollars." And he said, "If you attend my sale and you're a dealer, and I have things that you deal in, sometime during the sale you're going to get a bargain." In other words, he's going to knock something down cheap so you will not have wasted the time. In that way, he says, "I want you to come to my sales, but if I'm working and I've got the

crowd bidding well on these expensive things, I can't afford to stop." He established that rapport to me; he was very frank with me. And I said, "Well, I've got my younger sister down there all by herself." He said, "I realize that; I'm sorry I made you wait so long; but remember that you plan your time if you come to my sale. If I advertise books and you come to one of my sales and I know you're a dealer, sometime during that sale I'm going to knock something down to you very cheap so that you'll at least make a little bit for your time. " And he did that; he lived up to his word. He never sold any books without calling me. Anytime he had a sale--where he didn't even advertise books. And sometimes if he had too much to sell, he figured out his time, how many items, he would call me in and sell me the books without a sale, before the sale, because he knew his time would be so precious--handling very expensive material, and these are medium-price books. He can't be bothered. He'd rather sell them to me before the sale. He always saw to it that I got a deal. Sometimes I'd go to a sale, and Ann would be left at home, and I'd wait till three o'clock in the morning. One time there was a whole roomful of books, and Ann waited till three o'clock in the morning. He knocked them down to me for ninety-five dollars. There was a little bit of competition; it got to ninety-five--"Sold to Epstein."

GARDNER

What did your competition say when something like that happened?

EPSTEIN

Well, they bid, and then he sold them at the next bid. He saw to it that even if I didn't bid ninety-five dollars, he would say, "Sold to Epstein." And later on, you know, he would use that. A lot of auctioneers do that. It's a trick of the trade. There would be bidding, and the bidding would lag, so he would call out a few bids--out of nowhere. And he wouldn't get a further bid; so he'd say, "Sold to Epstein." And after the sale, I'd go over to get my bill: "What do you want me to put down for these?" He'd ask me what I wanted to pay for them. Most of the time if he'd knock, and I'd say, "Well, I can use these for X number of dollars" — "Okay, bill them at that. Tell the bookkeeper to bill them at that." Oh, I could tell you a lot of stories. [laughter]

GARDNER

Well, back to help, then.

EPSTEIN

Yes. I had my sister come down, and this went on for a little while. I never did have full-time help in that Sixth Street store.

GARDNER

Oh, you never did. I would have thought that with the volume you were building up, you would have needed it.

EPSTEIN

Well, it wasn't a large volume. I never had full-time help. I did have that Biola boy for a little while, and every once in a while I'd leave a customer there and I'd ask him, "Are you going to be here for long?" He'd say, "Why? You want to go somewhere? Go ahead. You want to go to lunch?" "I want to go away for an hour." "Okay, go ahead; I'll be around." There were a lot of people whom I could trust. I never found anybody that would rob me. They knew I was struggling along. One afternoon when my sister was there and I went out, a man came in to buy something, and he bought something, and he gave her a fifty-dollar bill. Fifty-dollar bills today are common, but up to that time she had never seen one. She didn't know what to do with it. She didn't have change for it in her register--we wouldn't have fifty dollars' worth of change. So the man who gave it to her said, "Go ahead, open your register. You'll find my name in it." Well, that really threw her. She didn't know what the hell the guy was trying to do. So she said, "Well, I haven't got change." He said, "Go ahead, open the register. I'll show you my name is in it." And his name was in it. His name was C.U. Whiffin, and he had the agency, the western territory, California territory, Los Angeles, for National Cash Registers. One of their salesmen sold us a cheap cash register for about twenty-five, thirty dollars, and I guess he must have told Mr. Whiffin to go about the store, and if he's around, go in there and buy something. So I came back, and that girl was really frantic. Well, finally he went out and changed the fifty-dollar bill. But when he told her to open the register because his name was in it, she didn't know what to make of that. [laughter] But as far as help, we didn't have any help. It was only after I started on Eighth Street I started with part-time help. But the Sixth

Street store was a little tiny store, 400 square feet, less area than this living room.

GARDNER

Even on Eighth Street you never built up to full time?

EPSTEIN

Well, we eventually built up to full time there, yes.

GARDNER

How late would that have been?

EPSTEIN

Well, it was after I'd been open about a year. You see, there we were open evenings, too. I would work three evenings a week, and the helper would work three evenings. Later on we even got another part-timer.

GARDNER

So it was part time.

EPSTEIN

Yeah, I never had more than one and a half help — in the sense, one part time, one full time. Oh, occasionally when we had a raft of books coming in, I might employ somebody for half a day.

GARDNER

Who were some of the people who you had working for you? Anyone who went on in the business at all?

EPSTEIN

Well, both [Robert] Bennett and [Richard] Marshall they each worked for me.

GARDNER

On Eighth Street?

EPSTEIN

No, Marshall worked on Eighth Street and Bennet worked in Hollywood. H. Richard Archer, who is now a college librarian, I think, in some library in Kentucky — he worked for me for a while part time. They were all going to school at the time. They were too bright to work for me for any length of time. They were very eager to learn more than I could teach them. And in some things they knew more than I knew. They knew the literature far better than I did. Their ambitions were too high to remain a clerk in a second-hand bookstore. The pay was next to nothing. So eventually Bennett and Marshall worked for Dawson for a while, and then they opened their own store. Oh, there are others around here who at one time or another worked for me.

1.5. TAPE NUMBER: III, Side One (May 20, 1974)

GARDNER

The first item of evidence is the card from the Acadia Bookshop that you have here. Do you want to tell something about that--about the address, the circumstances getting the card and so forth?

EPSTEIN

Well, I found this little store after a number of weeks of looking. It was owned by people by the name of McCarty Brothers. They owned about half a block on West Sixth Street — one-story, oh, pretty run-down property. The McCartys owned a hell of a lot of property around the city. But they were nice people and we got along nicely. They leased me the location; I think I paid \$125 a month. I told them what I wanted to do. Of course, I was still quite young, and they were probably a little suspicious whether I'd make it or not, with all the competition right there on Sixth Street — which was Book Row at that time. We managed. But curiously enough, in 1933 we opened the Argonaut at 623 West Sixth Street; and at the time the Argonaut opened at 623, by that time my old location — 625 — had become a little grocery shop selling small items of groceries for the people who lived in rooming houses all around. And forever after, whoever was writing up my history in the book business always got confused which was the first and which was the second. They will find in some of the publications that have written something about my career that that's a little bit garbled. There was the Acadia and the Argonaut; they got those mixed up. But it did no one any harm.

GARDNER

Well, there was also Louis Epstein's, and you showed me this catalog that's from July 1931. Is this the only catalog you ever produced?

EPSTEIN

That was the only catalog we ever produced. It had a few very good items in it. And it was done by Thomas Perry Strieker, who was a typographer. (And UCLA has a collection of his work. I have quite a few of his things, and I gave UCLA quite a few items that they didn't have.) I'll speak more about Thomas Perry Strieker than the catalog because he was quite an interesting person, a very hardworking young man who was at the right place at the wrong time. There wasn't too much demand for fine typographical work in those years. If you notice the date, that was a pretty rough year. He designed it and he helped me plan it. Incidentally, he later helped us to make the layout for the stationery for the Pickwick Bookshop when we decided to move. He worked with me on designing the Mr. Pickwick. As you know, we got the name Pickwick after much search for a name. We probably went over hundreds of names in our minds. We always came back to Pickwick. It sounded well, and he approved of that decision. I respected his judgment in literature; he was quite a literary fellow. But he was a starving typographer. We probably fed him as often as we saw him. He died at a young age. All the people in the trade knew him. Jake knew him, and the Dawsons, of course, knew him. He was a bookish person besides being a typographer. He designed a little booklet for the Hollywood Bowl, I recollect. I may have a copy of that somewhere in the house. So that gets you to the very, very beginnings of the idea of Pickwick. It was the catalog you wanted me to talk about.

GARDNER

Well, just a little bit. How did you know him originally? Had he come into your shop a lot?

EPSTEIN

You know, the book business is almost a business, you might say, similar to a bar. I mean, one is drunk on books and the other is drunk on whiskey; and in each place they hang around, if you know what I mean. They browse, [laughter] one from the stool at the bar and the other through his books. One,

of course, concentrates on one thing, and the other goes around from shelf to shelf. If a person is the least bit friendly--and which apparently I must have been; maybe I still am--you sort of draw people. They're sort of drawn to you and you to them, and friendships form. And some of them are very lasting and very fine friendships. I'm proud of a great many of them, and I'm very happy with a great many of the friendships that I've made, right through that kind of thing. A book buyer keeps coming back all the time, because he's hoping to find the book tomorrow that he didn't find today; or that first edition that got away last week, maybe I'll get another one this week; or they'll find something else. You could write a whole book about that. At any rate, that's how I met Thomas Perry Strieker.

GARDNER

What made you decide to put out a catalog?

EPSTEIN

Ego primarily, I suppose. Dawson was putting out catalogs; Jake had a few catalogs. I was always reading somebody else's catalog. We had a few nice books that weren't selling too rapidly, so we thought we'd try it. It was not a financial success. Very few catalogs at that time were, frankly.

GARDNER

I saw that the first item was a Tom Sawyer that I think would have paid the entire expense of the catalog.

EPSTEIN

Well, it would have if we had sold it at the time. We later sold it, but not from the catalog. And we did not get \$450 for it. It was rough go. People just didn't shell out that kind of money like they do today. And another thing that I lacked: you see, I had never really had big items in the sense of the \$1,000 items, the \$100 items. I had relatively few of those. And I had not built up a trade for that yet. As a matter of fact, my particular kind of old-book business did not really go after that. These were findings of books and libraries that we bought, but our primary interest was in good books on all subjects, not necessarily the real rare things that collectors collect. We were buying things that I could sell to the Los Angeles Public Library, to the Beverly Hills Public

Library, more of what you might call staple stock books, and good things that the general reader might want who didn't want first editions necessarily. We had a lot of first-edition people come and look, and we sold a lot of first editions, but that was not our primary interest. Rare books was not the primary interest. It was the general, good secondhand book stock. With that we were very successful. We were able to dig out the books. I can't even to this day tell you how. It's probably a matter of luck and maybe energy. You just keep moving around looking for things. My wife could probably tell you more about how much time I spent doing that than I would care to tell you.

GARDNER

You know, this brings to mind the question: since most dealers around would have been more in the rare and first editions, and then there would have been a mass of people doing the same thing that you did, what made yours more successful than some of the others that were doing the same thing?

EPSTEIN

Well, maybe I put more effort into it. Maybe I was much more single-minded about it. When I decide on a thing, I become a one-track mind. And maybe that's necessary. And we were hungry. In July 1931, when we already had this catalog, Aaron was less than two years old. We were just getting started. Our first place after we moved out of a furnished place was in Boyle Heights, because my family lived there. We lived on Cincinnati Street. We moved there because it was closer to our family, and we thought that perhaps the family might be more helpful to Ann and the baby. We moved into a flat which had a little table and four chairs in the dining-room area of the kitchen. We bought a bed and a stove and a mattress and the dresser and, I think, one small chair at an auction of C.H. O'Connor's for forty-eight dollars. [tape stopped] In the living room we had nothing. In the bedrooms we had just what we described. We had three rooms. We had two bedrooms. We had to have some help, because Mrs. E just didn't have the energy. We had to have a maid. Of course, you could get people in those days for twenty-five, thirty dollars a month. You had to feed them and provide living quarters for them. So that gets back to maybe why I had to be perhaps more active than the next person. But basically, if I start on something, I'm either totally interested or not interested at all. The spirit of the chase was always with me. I would run down any clue

to where I might find a library. And as I mentioned, I think in our other interview, in the incident with the storage house, I persisted and finally broke through and got him to sell me things. That all took time, took effort, and maybe a certain type of persistence.

GARDNER

Were there any merchandising or selling devices that you used that were any different from what other people were doing in those days?

EPSTEIN

No. I was probably not as progressive in selling as some of them were. We didn't make up lists for libraries; we didn't use any special methods of display; our shop was far, far from elegant. As a matter of fact, I dislike elegant bookshops. Maybe after you get to be an institution where you sell real rare books, you have to keep them in cases and whatnot. But we encouraged browsing, unlimited browsing; and unless they severely misbehaved, anyone could come in the morning and stay all day if they wanted to, and some people did, especially on cold days. I'm talking about those very difficult times in the thirties.

GARDNER

All your income was derived from the shop at that time, wasn't it?

EPSTEIN

Oh, you can say that a thousand times over. There was no inherent income. Mrs. E had eight dollars in her purse when we were married, and I had a lot of secondhand books. We were very fortunate: my father gave us a car as a wedding present. That helped out a great deal.

GARDNER

What kind of car?

EPSTEIN

It was a Ford, brand-new. I think he paid about \$850 for it. A nice car--we had it for years.

GARDNER

What eventually happened to Strieker, by the way?

EPSTEIN

He died in New York of pneumonia in the early forties. Carl Haverlin, a friend of his, told me.

GARDNER

I just wondered if you had kept up with him.

EPSTEIN

I saw very little of him after we moved to Hollywood because he left for the East.

GARDNER

Now, the other item is one that you wanted to read in before we start on any other substantive discussion.

EPSTEIN

Yes. Well, correct the information about leaving Kasheritz to the following: We left by wagon from Kasheritz to Glusk to Bobruysk. From there, from Bobruysk, we went by train, as I told you. Instead of what I thought--Riga-- it was Libava. I think the name has been changed now to something else [Liepaja]. From there we went by boat, that stinking boat I told you about, [laughter] to Hull, England, and by train to Liverpool, across England. And then to New York, Castle Garden--or Ellis Island, as it was called later. That was it.

GARDNER

Okay. Now I think you've compiled this very thorough list of the bookstores, the different ones that were around. Perhaps you'd like to go through it.

EPSTEIN

Well, it's not that thorough, but for the record they should be mentioned, and someday I'll actually type it up and maybe make a pamphlet out of it just for the sake of recording things. I'll describe to you the method that I used, and if anyone in the future wants to know how it was done and where corrections could be made, I think a much more complete list could be compiled maybe by using the Los Angeles city directories that they used to have. I don't mean the

telephone directories. They used to have a business directory and also a city directory.

GARDNER

I haven't seen those in years.

EPSTEIN

No, I haven't either. I don't think they make them anymore. But in those days they had a directory that listed every resident, their occupation and their address. It was a commercial thing. But I guess the value of it must have lessened, and people maybe didn't buy them. I think for the record we should mention the bookstores that I knew either personally or knew about or had heard about, because they were an imposing lot. You know, in those days Los Angeles--I think W.M. Garland on his building downtown was still shooting for 750,000 people. When I came in '23 he had a sign on his building, "500,000 by 1925" as the goal for the population. Well, they exceeded that. Then he raised it for the next five years to 750,000. They made it, and then he raised it to 1,000,000. So at any rate, in 1925 they were shooting for 500,000 people. They had 500-, maybe 600,000 at the time. The busiest traffic corner, to my knowledge, was Adams and Figueroa. That's before they had signals. And boy, how that traffic used to mess around!

GARDNER

That's where the Auto Club is, isn't it?

EPSTEIN

That's where the Auto Club is today, and the church.

GARDNER

What sort of things were there then?

EPSTEIN

Well, at that corner, you know, Adams Avenue was the Fifth Avenue of homes. There were some beautiful homes. The Dohenys lived right near the church, and all the early families, the rich early families. And along Figueroa Street there were some beautiful homes and wealthy people lived along there. I

remember there was still a zanja there along Figueroa Street. Do you know what a zanja is? How long have you lived in California?

GARDNER

Seventeen years, eighteen years.

EPSTEIN

Well, a zanja is where the irrigating water used to go along the street. It was part of the irrigation system. At that time, as I recollect, there was a trough-like canal about a foot wide and maybe three feet deep.

GARDNER

It ran along the side of the street?

EPSTEIN

Yes. It was very interesting. Well, to get back to the booksellers: Fowler's was at 747 Broadway. Dawson's was at 627 South Grand. They hadn't been there too long. I don't know how many years before they'd moved from Hill Street. Campbell's Bookstore was at 858 North Vermont. After they moved the UCLA campus, he followed UCLA. He started in the book business a year before I did, he says. And I'm sure he did. Bob wouldn't tell me anything that isn't so. But he was in the textbook business. We kept arguing and arguing. The textbook business doesn't count, [laughter] for the honor of who's the oldest guy around. The California Book Company was 218 West First Street. That was run by Max Walker. Max was a very curious guy. He came into my shop (after I opened on Eighth Street) out of curiosity and just to say hello. He saw that I had a cash register. I'd picked one up for about fifteen, twenty dollars, a real old-fashioned one with a handle on it. "Oh," he says, "Louis, I wouldn't have a cash register. You're just inviting somebody to hold you up." [laughter]

GARDNER

What happened with him?

EPSTEIN

Well, he stayed in business, I don't know how many years after that. It was a secondhand-book business. He got sick, and he sold out his business. And shortly after he sold out, he died. But he ran a very poorly lighted shop. He put

the emphasis on saving the dollar rather than spending it to improve his business. You could hardly see what he had. He had no bookish background whatever. But I assume that he made enough money to support his family and own a home. But he was not considered a real bookman.

GARDNER

What did his shop become when it was sold? What became of it? California Book Company was not around?

EPSTEIN

Oh, I think the store ran for a year or two after that under that name. I don't recollect who bought it. It was dispersed. The name was dispersed, and so were the books. No one took up the name. I think someone else is using it, but not for used books. It's a good name; I don't know why somebody doesn't advertise it. The new-book stores, of course, I said Fowler, and Jones was still operating at 426 West Eighth Street. [tape stopped] Parker and Fowler were the new-book stores in downtown. Fowler had a more general trade, and Parker had what you might call the carriage trade of the city. And you bought what he told you to buy. And if you didn't, he didn't want your business. But he had excellent taste in books, and he built up some fine libraries. Later his place went bankrupt during the Depression. I think he might have saved himself had he been willing to compromise some of his ideas of bookselling. But he would not sell dollar books. (In a way it's similar to the mass-market business of paperbacks. They were reprints of popular books, mostly nonfiction, and they sold for a dollar.) They were excellent values, and they were great things for the booksellers of that day. But he wouldn't break his rule, or whatever you might call it. He wouldn't condescend to sell a reprint of a book for a dollar. Whereas everyone else had to do it and did do it, he had to do it and didn't do it. Fowler's suffered through the Depression and made it. Jones' Bookstores, as I mentioned, was still operating. They were on Sixth Street, I think at 418 or 426. I have two numbers for them. It may be they had both numbers. No, they couldn't have had. I think they moved over from one to the other. They later went out of business .

GARDNER

Who ran that shop?

EPSTEIN

Mr. Andrews. When Jones closed up, he later became buyer and operator for the Biola Institute, their bookshop, which was a religious bookshop.

GARDNER

We can check that up and find out.

EPSTEIN

His son later became sales manager for a publishing house. I just can't think of what the son's name is now. It may come back to me before we're through. Now, in Hollywood at that time there was the Hollywood Bookstore, which was west of Highland near the theater. It was 6812 Hollywood Boulevard, and it was operated by a chap name of [Odo] Staude, a German — a very fine person and a very fine bookman. They later on moved. The Depression finally got them, too. For a good number of years some wealthy woman was subsidizing it, really. But I think she became tired of that. There was a place called Leonard's on Hollywood Boulevard just a few doors away from the Hollywood Bookstore. The Hollywood Bookstore was 6812 and Leonard's was 6804. It was not a bad shop, but they couldn't stand the competition of the other Hollywood bookstore. Unity Pegue--that's a very unusual name — was operating at that time at 6417 Hollywood Boulevard. She dropped out, according to here, around 1931. As a matter of fact, I bought her catalogs, all her reference material. And curiously enough, Paul Jordan-Smith worked with her for a while. Paul Jordan-Smith, whom you probably wouldn't know, at one time was the book reviewer and critic of books for the Times, and his son . . .

GARDNER

Wilbur Smith.

EPSTEIN

. . . Wilbur, of course, later went with the University Library, the UCLA Library, and became head of Special Collections. Wilbur was one of my early customers, and he used to hang around for hours and hours over at the Pickwick and all other bookshops. He used to come in with some of his buddies or alone. We knew each other quite well. His father was a very nice person. But for a while he was with Unity Pegue . It was sort of an exclusive

shop, and they handled some rare books, too, in addition to new books. And she knew all the big people in Hollywood. But for one reason or another the Depression got them, I think. They ran an elegant shop. It wasn't exactly forbidding, but a person who didn't have much money knew damned well not to go in there, because there was nothing cheap about that shop. For those days, they were very high priced for the things they had.

GARDNER

What was she like?

EPSTEIN

It's a long time for me to remember. As I recollect, she was still quite young in 1926. To me she appeared middle-aged, maybe thirty-five or forty-five--I don't know. [laughter] To a young person, a thirty-five-year-old is middle-aged. A very beautiful woman, and active. She knew her graces. But she was pleasant and nice. We did business together. I used to sell her something once in a while when I thought she needed it, or she would call up and ask if I had it. When they went out I bought all her cumulative indexes. In those days they didn't have, like they have today, the Bowker Books in Print, published new each year. If we wanted to know about a book, if the book was in print, number one, we had to go way back and find out when it was published and who published it, and then from that refer to the publisher's catalog. And it wasn't brought up current every day. We might have had to look through four or five years of catalogs, sometimes even more, because if the customer was uncertain, you started with the 1912 one and worked on up until you found it. Nowadays the new bookseller doesn't have to do a damned thing. He just goes to the catalog, and it tells him whether the book's in print or not. Well, it's not an accurate system, and very often they tell a customer the book is not in print when it actually is, because the Bowker catalog lists only those books of publishers who send him the catalog for inclusion. But there are many small publishers who never bother to send them a catalog, or publishers of a single book. A person will publish one book for himself--or of his own or whatever--and they'll never get into Bowker's catalogs. But to go back to the booksellers. She was one of the characters of the period. If you met her once, you wouldn't forget her. The public library was still in the Metropolitan Building downtown. They didn't move until sometime in the middle of June '26. A very famous

character in the old-book business at that time was Soldier Joe. He was a veteran of the Spanish- American War. He had a lot of old magazines he used to sell, and odds and ends of things. He still wore a uniform and he wore these leather puttees. At that time he was at 117 North Main Street. This was the farthest north of anyone in the book business. Later on he moved to West Seventh Street. The last I remember of him, he was on West Seventh Street.

GARDNER

Was he an authentically good bookman?

EPSTEIN

No. He knew about the lower end of books, magazines and things like that, and a few technical things [that] when he was down on Main Street, he probably had a use for them. When he got to Seventh Street, I don't know what he would do with old technical books. But he was a character, always chewing tobacco. He had a brother, whom I'll come to later, at the Curio Bookshop, His brother had been a hooper at one time. He never, never forgot it. He always reminded you of it with a little jig he did. The Curio was [owned by] Dave Kohn. Soldier Joe was Joe Kohn. The two brothers weren't very close and they handled different types of business; but as long as I'm on the Curio, Dave Kohn' s shop, I'll tell you about it, because of the character of the person rather than his standing in the book business. Because the most interesting part of anything are people, and the people- aside from their quality as entrepreneurs--had other qualities. Dave, as I said, was an ex-hooper. He went into the book business; he strayed out of the "hoopering" business, as you might call it. [laughter] He was into it before my time, really. He would buy anything. Anything no other dealer in town would want, they took it to Dave Kohn and he bought it. He just couldn't refuse anything. It was a large shop, far bigger than mine, even the one I had on Eighth Street, which wasn't too small of a shop. But he had it so loaded with books that neither he nor anyone else could find anything. And his business suffered because of it. And he was becoming old, and his wife was becoming older, and he had a habit of belching. [laughter] He was always taking pills. But he was very pleasant, if you didn't mind a few belches here and there and not too clean of a shop. But his heart was in the right place, to characterize him that way. He was willing to help if he was asked for help. He would be willing to share knowledge, and in

some things he had knowledge, simply from experience. We often exchanged knowledge about it. He would call me--he'd picked up something--"Louis, this looks like a good item. You know it?" If I knew it, I would tell him and he would do likewise. So one day — this was years after '26 — he came to me and he said. ... [I say] "years after"; [it was] maybe five years, six years. We became friends, and he respected me and my knowledge and what I was doing because he could see I was progressing and he was just standing still, perhaps going backward. He came to me one day and said, "Louis, how come you're prospering"--in the measure of those days--"and here my business is horrible? What shall I do?" I said, "Dave, the first thing you do is call a moratorium on buying. I don't care how cheap"--I didn't say how good — "no matter how cheap you can buy." And then I put another, "Even if it's real good. But the main thing is, don't buy because it's cheap. And even call a moratorium on buying anything. Close your shop for a week. Close your eyes, go through the shelves, pick out two books and throw them away and keep the third. And then what you have left, classify and arrange." And I said, "You have a lot of good books, but because of all the junk that you have stacked up in the aisles, nobody can go through your aisles. Nobody can see what you've got." I said, "I go in there. I go into a lot of bookstores, and if I see books, I buy them. I can't possibly buy a book from you, and neither can anybody else. I say that not only from my own knowledge, but from anyone who comes in here and talks about the bookstores." "Oh," he says, "Louis, I couldn't do that. I couldn't throw a book away." "Well," I said, "look, it's your choice. You asked me for a suggestion and I gave it to you." And his business died because of that. He sold it to a chap who moved it down somewhere on South Broadway, and he kept it for a while. But he was one of the characters, and any one of the old-timers--I don't know how many left would remember old Dave. Larry Powell, I think, has him mentioned in one of his articles on Sixth Street. The other people in the trade — of course, Dawson, everyone knows about. I don't have to inform anyone about the history of Dawson's.

GARDNER

Well, you could throw in a couple of phrases about where it started.

EPSTEIN

Well, Dawson's, for me, was my college education in the way of books. And it probably was to any other bookseller who wanted to make it that, to all of us, the younger bookmen--maybe to Jake, maybe to Bennett and Marshall (of course, they are both dead now; I think I mentioned [that] at one time they both had worked for me). That's where all the booksellers used to go to buy, to sell. If we had something that we felt Dawson could use, we took it over there and got ready cash. Whereas it might take us weeks and years to sell something, Dawson had the type of customers [who would buy]. And he issued catalogs. He sold by correspondence, which I didn't do. So he had a market for a lot of things which we didn't have a market for, which were good books. And we could always get a reasonable price from Dawson's--not the highest, perhaps, but on the other hand, it wasn't the lowest. You might differ with him, but it was within hailing distance, you might say. I used to go there religiously. Well, for one reason, I used to have to pass by there to go to the bank, so I would stop in two or three times a week. That was from Eighth Street. But from Sixth Street -- the Dawson people were very nice to me when I opened on Sixth Street. I think I mentioned that Mr. Dawson came over, introduced himself, made a few suggestions. Charlie Yale came over; John Friend came over. Practically the entire staff, from time to time, came in and introduced themselves. They were helpful; they would offer meaningful suggestions. When you walked into Dawson's and wanted to buy something, there was that 10 percent discount they allowed the dealers, and you knew the price exactly, and you picked out what you wanted. If you found an unusual lot -- sometimes they bought a big library, needed space, so they would sell you a whole truckful of books: "What'll you give me?" You know, I would have to make an offer. That's how we operated with Dawson's.

GARDNER

When did they start the business?

EPSTEIN

Dawson's? I think Mr. Dawson started his first shop somewhere around 1905 or -6, way back. That's pretty well documented.

GARDNER

Yes, we could check that. I was just wondering, was he really the first?

EPSTEIN

I think I have something; we could check it right now, if you like.

GARDNER

We'll wait until we turn the tape. Was he the first?

EPSTEIN

No, there were other booksellers. In his little autobiography, which I have, he mentions the chap he went to work for before he went in for himself. There were booksellers — maybe not old-book sellers. There were new-book sellers way back in the early [eighteen-] fifties . As a matter of fact, one of the things that the Hellman family, in their store, used to advertise was books. They were far from a bookstore, of course, but they probably had books. One of the pictures shows that one of the things that they were selling was books. Oh, there were a number of bookstores in the early days of Los Angeles. I'm only confining myself to those that I personally knew or knew about.

GARDNER

I was just filling in an information gap of my own.

EPSTEIN

Well, I think that's documented. Then, of course. Holmes. Now, Holmes was, you might say, the mass distributor of books, the mass buyer and distributor of secondhand books in the city. There's no question about it. Of course, he sold a lot of new books, too--technical things, the more common technical things, basic things, dictionaries and things like that. He had, at the time [about which] I gathered this information--I don't know how accurate it is-- one, two, three, four, five, six stores. And at one time I think he had as many as eight. A lot of them were temporary. Some of them were permanent locations in the sense that they were on regular lease. But if a location became unrented somewhere in town, he would lease it on a temporary basis, month to month, probably very cheaply, and put a lot of books in there. He was a very peculiar man. There are notes on Mr. Holmes, but I don't know of anyone that knows enough about him now. I don't know whether his widow's still living; I know that there is a daughter still living. But he was a brother of the Holmes Bookstore up in San Francisco--Harold. This one was Norman.

GARDNER

Where were some of his other shops?

EPSTEIN

Well, the main one, of course, was 814 West Sixth, near Figueroa. Then a real old shop that he had was at 333 South Main. That he had for years and years. Then he had another one for a long time at 128 South Spring Street.

GARDNER

So they were all in downtown, then?

EPSTEIN

They were all downtown. Oh, yes. And he had another one at 620 South Spring Street. But the main one was the one on West Sixth and the 333.

1.6. TAPE NUMBER: III, Side Two (May 20, 1974)

GARDNER

Do you want to pick up with Mr. Holmes?

EPSTEIN

Yes. He bought perhaps 75 percent of all the old books that were sold in the city. He had been here--oh, I think he was a contemporary of Mr. Dawson, almost, in years of service. I think Dawson was here first. But Holmes learned his business--he and his brother — in San Francisco, and he came down here. As I mentioned, he reacted sometimes like he was a mean man, and in some ways he was. His career ended unfortunately, simply because he couldn't trust people. He wouldn't trust people. He ran all these businesses, and he tried to keep them up all by himself. He had one assistant whom he did depend on but who left him a number of years later. And I think from there on he went downhill. He survived the Depression not too badly. There were a lot of books, and he used to supply to libraries. Instead of going out to sell libraries, his stock was so vast that libraries would come to him to buy. He just had an accumulation. They were reasonably well put on shelves where people could see them. He avoided the mistakes of some of the others. And he would run auction sales. There was an auctioneer here, Charles Nash, who used to run

sales for him. He would buy remainders and take an empty store on, say. West Sixth Street or Hill Street or Broadway and run an auction for five, six months. He would buy cheap sets and cheap dictionaries. It did well for a while, then like all things of that type, people catch on that it's really no bargain, that they can get the same thing somewhere else. They would start the auction figure, pull a figure out of the air, of the real retail price, and then move on up from that. His business methods as far as getting along with his contemporaries were horrible. He would go in to buy a lot of books, and if he didn't get them and the person selling them happened to mention, "Well, I'll go and get another bid, " he would send one of his men out there immediately to say, "Well, I'm the other bidder," and try to pull tactics such as that. Or if he walked into a home and found another bookseller already there bidding on it, he would tell the person the minute he walked in, "I'll give ten dollars more than he will"--no matter what you would bid, tactics such as that. He would say that he was an official of a bank, an official appraiser or something like that. There was no limit to what he wouldn't do to do the other person out of a library--which was pretty small; and he was recognized as a small man in many ways by his employees, none of whom ever gave him any loyalty, and by all his competitors; and even a lot of his customers refused to continue to do business with him because he would treat customers meanly from time to time, too.

GARDNER

How strange.

EPSTEIN

Gradually he was circumscribed in his own circle of lack of character. And it affected his mind. I don't know what affected his mind.

GARDNER

This is all very Dickensian.

EPSTEIN

Later on, before he died, he lost his mind. One of the curious things is [that] about a year before he closed out his business, he called me up. And he said, "Louis, how would you like to buy my stock?" So Ed Stackhouse — and I'll have

to bring in a lot about Ed Stackhouse — and I went to see him. (Ed Stackhouse used to work for him before he came to work for me. Of course, he never liked that. But he and I always got along fairly well. I'll tell you a little personal story about that.) Stack and I went out, and we looked over the things he had in his basement and upstairs. We thought, well, the mass of it was worth perhaps about \$18- to \$20,000 to us. But before we spoke our figure, we asked him what he wanted. He said, "\$27,000." Well, we wouldn't pay \$27,000 because it wasn't that good of a buy. And a lot of the stuff he had was duplication of stuff we had--at the time we had the old bookshop still-- and then it would be a problem where in the heck to put all that mass. Well, then we told him no and came out with the biggest offer we would pay, and we got up to \$20,000. And then our negotiations broke off. Three months later, he sold the whole thing for \$8,000. He was ashamed to call Stack and myself back to renegotiate. It was beneath his pride. He would rather give it away to someone else. And then he gave other concessions. He gave him the right to run a sale there.

GARDNER

Who was it? Do you recall?

EPSTEIN

Dale. Harry Dale, And Harry Dale picked up the best deal he ever made in his life. He ran the sale right there; he didn't move it. We probably would have run a sale, too. And he got rid of about \$30-40,000 worth of books in one or two months. And he ran a sale properly. First he called in the dealers, 50 percent off. Of course, he said he called in the dealers, but anybody who wanted to walk in had the same deal--which was all right. But he had himself a windfall. What I'm telling you about is the character of Holmes. His pride wouldn't let him call Louis Epstein and Stackhouse back because he at one time was the peer and I was the smallest bookman in the area. And he used to come by my store in the very early days when I was on Sixth Street--as long as I was on Sixth Street — and he'd stop almost every day. I think I mentioned he used to go to lunch at a certain cafeteria on Hill Street where he ate. And on the way back he would come by picking his teeth, and stop in and say hello to me, and look around, and buy a book here and there. Of course, I realized that any dealer who bought a book from me was probably getting it as a bargain. It was buying it at a wholesale price, because he had to sell it. Observing,

listening, I learned gradually that those books the dealers bought usually were worth more than what I had them priced. Which was all right- I marked them up at a profit so there was no hard feeling about it. One time I asked him, "Mr. Holmes, how do you develop a big book business? How do you bring up sales?" You know, some days there on Sixth Street, if we took in two dollars, why, that was a day's business. And don't laugh at that. That happened. So Mr. Holmes replied, "Well, Louis, I'll tell you. You buy the best books you can find, on any subject. Mark them reasonably and put them on your shelf. And during the day you'll sell one of this subject and one of another subject and one of another subject, and you'll never know which one you're going to sell in advance. And at the end of the day you'll have a few bucks in your pocket." This is literally true. Of course, you learn the refinements. You know that some books will definitely sell, and other books, [it's] always problematical whether they'll ever sell in a hundred years on your shelf. Certain staple things, people call for on various subjects. But I mentioned a little personal thing. I mentioned the other day about the librarian — I talked about getting a list from the Burbank Public Library, and working on that list in my own stock, and then going around to the various other bookstores. And one of the bookstores I went to was Holmes. Now, one of the things he would never do was allow another bookseller to browse through his shelves. There was that extreme jealousy. Whereas any other bookseller, you were welcome; and if you paid the price, fine. And if you got a sleeper once in a while, well, that was your good luck. [tape stopped] I was telling you, I was working the list of the stores at Holmes, and I came there one Sunday morning hoping that he wouldn't be there because I knew the assistant, and I'm sure he would have let me work the list. But Holmes was there, and I saw him. I said, "Mr. Holmes"--everyone called him Mr. Holmes (well, he was so much older than we, it was a matter of respect, respect for a person that you really didn't respect too much) --and I told him that I had this list from a library who had been buying back East. And I convinced her to let me have her list, give us a try. I said, "I know that you've got a lot of these books on your shelf. Every bookstore has some. And I would like your permission to go through the shelves." (Aaron was with me. Aaron was six or seven years old at the time, just about. It was Sunday, so I took him along; I told Ann, Mrs. E, that I wouldn't be more than a few hours. I purposely went down to work his shop because he was open on Sunday. None of the others were.) "Well," he said, "you know I don't like to have dealers go

through my stock." I said, "I understand your policy. You've broken it for me a couple of times before." "Well," he said, "I did it for you." I impressed on him that some other city was going to sell these books if I didn't sell them. Why not let us sell the books and keep this customer, tie her back in Los Angeles where she belongs. So he finally agreed. Then I looked around. I went through his essay list, quickly through his fiction list--primarily the essay list which I was looking at, some fiction, some basic things — and I gathered them all together, a truckful of books. And we got together. He would come by and put in a word here and there. And something about the whole deal softened him up a little bit towards me. When we got all finished, I let him know if he had time I'd go over it with him. Number one, he gave me 20 percent off, which was extremely unusual. If he would sell me a book ever, it was always at his list price. He didn't want to give any dealer discount. Well, there were a lot of them — perhaps 100 or maybe 125 books. But something softened him up. He had seen me so often up and down the street that we really became friends, in a sense. Then he started talking with me. He saw Aaron with me, and started talking about his family relations. He said, "You know, I never had a family relationship, I made the mistake of working seven days a week all day long and never took one daughter anywhere or spent any time with my family. And I lost all my family relationship," he said. "I don't have any anymore." He was still living with the family, but he saw this. He saw Aaron following me around; I told him I had to run home and so forth. He made that remark. And he was a very unhappy man. I'm sure his own conduct made him that way. He was so small in so many ways. When we were opening up the Argonaut in January 1933--January 1, 1933. . . . This is an aside. I'll have to divert way back. That's a story I'll have to tell you apart from this. But at any rate, when I tell you that we moved the stock of books from Long Beach to Sixth Street to open the Argonaut on January 1, 1933--New Year's Day--don't ask me where the books come from. Ask me that later. That's another story entirely. My father happened to be there. A truck brought the stuff in from Long Beach. And my father was outside--I don't know why he was there that particular day. Well, it was New Year's Day; it was a holiday. He even closed the store in Boyle Heights that day. So Mr. Holmes walked by. And his store was open--on New Year's Day. Mind you, he wouldn't take a day off for anything. He didn't take his family anywhere — not he. He walked by, and I introduced him to my father. He said to my father, "You know, Mr. Epstein, you've got a wonderful

son there. He's doing very well." And I thought that was a very nice compliment. The way he said it was very friendly. I respected certain things about him, and I'm sure he respected my industry or whatever it was and my progress, because he was probably more friendly to me than he was to most people. So that's the story of Mr. Holmes in a nutshell, you might say. But for years he distributed a lot of books. And if you measure it on that basis, he probably sold more books in Los Angeles than anybody.

GARDNER

That's fascinating.

EPSTEIN

And aside from his character, aside from his way of doing business, he did sell books, just in masses. Then there was another store operating at that time called Powner's. Powner's Bookstore. Now Powner had a store in Chicago. He opened a store here. He had a daughter who married one of his people named Mac Gordon. Mac Gordon, I will come to later--the Satyr Bookshop in Hollywood. That will relate. Mac Gordon ran Powner's for him here in Los Angeles. They had a very large used-book store. And Powner's used to publish a few Masonic things and a few pamphlets and things like that. They were progressive, and they'd been here for quite a few years before I started. That was one of the big stores I used to go into. As a matter of fact, when I first came here, I think Powner's was the first bookstore in Los Angeles I walked into, simply because I happened to be going by Spring Street. At that time, they were at 542 South Spring. Later they opened a store on Olive Street--several years later-- but it didn't last long on Olive Street. But there was dissension in the staff. They didn't give Mac Gordon enough authority to really run the place. The authority was diffuse. When that's done, as often happens, it will wreck a business. They were 90 percent in the old-book business. [telephone rings; tape stopped] I want to get Powner's on record. Mac Gordon--"Mac" is the name he was always called by. I forget what his real first name was; there's a record of it somewhere. (Nicholas McDowell Gordon) He later started the Satyr Bookshops. And the Satyr Bookshops will bring on another story. See, this business is like an ever-growing plant. You kill a root somewhere here, and it springs up somewhere else-- which is a great thing. The book business has a unity that goes all through it. And then, to leave the

Mac Gordon till a while later, there was Olen W. Smith, who ran a law-book store. The business is still running. I think they're on Second near Broadway — or a block away, because the Los Angeles Times bought that whole block and they had to move. He, too, had worked for Powner at one time. He and Mac Gordon used to run the place. Now, these are the actual people in 1925. I myself didn't start till '26.

GARDNER

So this is the setting into which you came.

EPSTEIN

Right. There was a place on West Seventh Street called A.E. Little. West Seventh Street at that time was one of the exclusive shopping streets. Robinson's was the beautiful store at that time, and there were a few fine shops along West Seventh and a few on Flower. At one time that area was destined to be the fine shopping center of Los Angeles, but things didn't work out that way. But Little also had a store on South Broadway. They specialized in fine stationery. And the reason I mention them is that they carried a very good children's-book department. They specialized in children's books. They had gifts, stationery, and I suppose as part of the gifts they had the best children's-book lines--not necessarily the biggest department, but very fine children's books. But they had one woman there who was a very good book person.

GARDNER

Who was that? Do you remember her name?

EPSTEIN

I have it somewhere jotted down. I may have to fill in. . . . (Miss Jessie Thomas)

GARDNER

We can fill that in later.

EPSTEIN

She later went to work for Vroman's in Pasadena. She was a contemporary--I guess she was a little older than I. Now deceased. After Little's closed up, like so many fine places closed up during the Depression, I was on Eighth Street

and I bought a lot of books from them. In addition to fine children's books, they carried a small line of fine bindings and specialized things. One of the things I bought from them was a special edition of *Candide* signed by Rockwell Kent. At any rate, that would be history, because they traded with all the fine people in the area. The other old-book sellers of consequence was Lofland and Russell. They were on Sixth Street in the 700 block. That was between Hope and Flower. And they had a pretty good used-book store. But off the record--leave it in the tape--in those days it was off the record, [laughter] that they handled erotica, which of course was extremely scarce in those days. They had a little bit of an underground business in that. But Lofland was a pretty good bookseller. Russell was, too, for that matter. But you see, they were all experienced by the time I started. But the two partners split up. About ten years after I first met them, they split up.

GARDNER

And what happened to them?

EPSTEIN

Lofland's business kept on going. Apparently Lofland kept the business. Russell started the bookstore for a while and then dropped out. He was not a very good businessman, whereas Lofland was. But Lofland sold out his stock of books later to someone else, and Harry Wepplo ran it for the new buyer — because Harry was telling people that he had bought it out, but everyone knowing Harry knew that Harry would never have five dollars to his name to buy anything, because whatever money he got a hold of he always spent. And Harry Wepplo later had a little shop in the Farmer's Market. Harry Wepplo will come into the history of the Pickwick, too, a little later. I'm trying to keep these . . .

GARDNER

Keep the threads alive.

EPSTEIN

. . . little tickets on these things. Let's see, we mentioned Jones was selling out at the time, and we mentioned the Hollywood Bookstore, and we mentioned Campbell's, and we mentioned California Book Company. For the sake of just

mentioning a store for the record, Neville Book Company was a curious mixture of cheap new books and odds and ends of secondhand books at 356 South Spring Street. Stratford and Green I mentioned to you was being auctioned off. The Natick Bookstore, or Natick — however, people pronounce it both ways—at 104 West First, was in the Natick block, a very famous old building in the city. And they had gifts and a few books. But they later went out. I mentioned Fowler's and I mentioned Campbell's. Oh, yes. A brother-in-law of Mr. Dawson was a chap by the name of [Warren] Rogers. And he had a bookstore, I should say, at 622 West Sixth Street — at that time I'm speaking of, in 1925 — which happens to be immediately across the street from where I started in 1926. I could look into his door and count the number of customers he had. He later moved to 711 West Sixth Street in 1931. There's a story about Mr. Rogers. I spoke to him, incidentally, just a little while ago. He went out of the book business and had a hard time finding something, so he went to work for the post office. And he's now retired. He's in the real estate business. As I said, when I opened across the street from him, I had a little tiny shop, and his had a narrow front—not much wider than mine, but in the back it opened out. It was a six-, seven-, eight-story building, so the front was narrowed because of the elevators, and he was part of the front entrance to the building. And after the elevator shaft, his store angled back of the store, so he had quite a large store in back. He used to put out sets of books. And they would sell like anything. I couldn't sell sets. He had a chap there by the name of Ingraham. He was really a crackerjack salesman. But one thing about Mr. Rogers. He used to come in occasionally, buy something from me; I'd stop in and say hello, look around. And we'd exchange knowledge. (I was always picking up little bits and pieces of knowledge and somebody else's experience.) But he had a register which he said could tell him at the end of the day exactly how much his net worth was, how much his inventory was worth, how much profit he made that day. Of course, it's a very simple system. What he did was put a cost on every book that he bought, the secondhand books. And he did it this way: he paid X number of dollars for the lot of books. He would go through his books and mark off the better books. When he came to the x number of dollars he paid for it, he put a cost on each of his better books. And when the cost on the better books equaled the total amount of what he paid for them, then he would put down the value of all the rest of his buy as zero. He would attribute the cost to his better books—which is not a bad system. But he spent so much

time with his bookkeeping that he neglected other kinds of business that he might do. And it was my idea, it was my thought, that that would ruin him. He would spend a half a morning or a morning going over all his tapes and what each book cost. In the end, it really didn't make much difference if he sold it, no matter what it cost. If he didn't sell, he had to reduce it. So he would have to distribute his cost. At any rate, it was my idea that Warren Rogers failed not because he couldn't do business, [but] because he didn't allow himself enough time to pursue other areas of business that he might have had, because he spent so much time knowing how good his profits were at any one day. In my book, in those days, the profits were what I had left at the end of the month. The inventory I had meant nothing to me, because I knew if I ever had to break it up and sell it, it would bring very little. I mean, theoretically, that's the basis. So on that basis we never worried too much about our inventory. We marked our books what we thought we could get for them. And curiously enough, Dawson's used the same system. And I think the Dawson boys still use it.

GARDNER

As what, as Rogers [used]?

EPSTEIN

Rogers. Rogers learned it from Dawson. But Rogers adapted it to a different kind of business, whereas Dawson's used to deal in high-priced things. And Dawson had a bookkeeper, a staff of bookkeepers to do that. Mr. Dawson would never sit down and do it. His time and energy was worth more than that. Well, anyway, Mr. Rogers was a very fine person. I learned a lot from him. But I merely tell that story — that's my idea. Now, someone may disagree with me over that. But this all happened in the Depression, and stores were going out anyway. But a lot of stores weathered the Depression, and maybe Mr. Rogers would have, too, if he were more an aggressive businessman. But as a person, he was a very fine person, [and is] to this day. I talked to him just a few weeks ago because the widow of an employee of mine, a black person living in a black neighborhood, wants to sell her house. And I told her a number of years ago she should never sign anything without consulting me or my son. She just doesn't know what to sign and what not to sign. Well, someone, an agent, came to her house and wanted to sign her up to sell her

house, and she called me. I said, "Don't sign. If they press you to sign, you just press that much harder back, because anyone urging you has an ulterior motive. They don't give you time to think." I asked her if she knew anything about this person, and she said no, she didn't. Well, in the meantime, Mr. Rogers had come into the shop on Hollywood Boulevard just a few months ago and asked about me. He knew I was out, but he wanted to know how I was getting along, wanted to know if I stopped in there once in a while, and of course they told him I did. So he left his card. So when I went down to the shop, they gave me the card, and I called him up and told him I was pleased to hear from him, I'm glad he asked about me. And he told me he was in the real estate business. And he operates in the Crenshaw area. So I got Mr. Rogers to give a listing to that woman.

GARDNER

And it all worked out happily ever after for everyone, right?

EPSTEIN

Well, the house did not get sold; this just happened. But I mean, the thing winds around. Thirty-five, forty-five years ago, and here you come back — we're recommending him as a real estate man. Let me see if I covered the names of the Hollywood people. I mentioned Leonard's; I told you about the Hollywood Bookstore; we went through Unity Pegue. There was another person there by the name of Esme — well, Esme Ward I think came to Hollywood a little later, in 1927. It's noon. You want to knock off? [tape recorder turned off]

GARDNER

Well, we're back after lunch, and if you'd like to sum up the list, continue.

EPSTEIN

Practically all the previous names I mentioned were active in the business in what you might call a predawn-Louis Epstein era. I came in the spring of '26 into this situation. And obviously there were many more smaller shops, both new and old, which I did not mention.

GARDNER

But you got most of the important ones, I think.

EPSTEIN

I'm quite sure I got all of the important ones of that period, no question about that. Now, here comes the early part of 1926, probably around May. We rent this store from the McCarty brothers--or McCarty Company; they were brothers, which I mentioned before--at 625 West Sixth. My first ad appears in the September issue of the 1926 phone book. And it reads like: "Acadia Bookshop," the address, "wanted: rare and standard books, single volumes, sets. Complete libraries purchased. Open evenings." And the number was VAndike 5917. Curiously enough, if somebody had called me and offered me rare books or anything like that, I probably would not have known what they were. I copied what the others were advertising for. But I learned fairly rapidly. The calls did start coming in; people did start bringing in things. Knowledgeable book people started coming in. As you may recollect, I mentioned that in Long Beach I never even discovered there was such a thing as a Publisher's Weekly, which is the trade paper, and which at that time carried all the books about old books, also, and all the news about old books. To me that was a great education — to have articles appear about old books, bibliographies of certain authors, occasionally prices brought at auction sales. It opened an entirely new world to me which I didn't know existed, really. You have no idea how ignorant I was of the book world — not only the book business, but the book world. It's an assumption which I verified later: that a person just getting out of college is a very ignorant person. And I was one of them. Now when I meet them, when I was hiring for the shop, I was often struck by how little they knew. What I should have done was to think back how little I knew when I was in that position. I don't think colleges and universities do enough for their students in the practical sense. There should be one course of at least half a year on how to get a job, what a job means, what an employee owes to an employer, what he should expect, what he should demand, and the minimum what he should give, plus the unlimited maximum — but at least what the employer's entitled to, not only what they are entitled to. I don't intend that to be as a very conservative attitude, but I think it would be a great thing for the person himself. They just don't know — nobody ever told them — what work is. And people used to come and tell me they want a job in a bookstore because they think it's fun. I said, "If it's fun you want, don't come here. I make my people work very hard. " And most of the time they really saw that I meant it and moved on. But they think that a job

must be fun. No job is fun. I think some jobs are more enjoyable than others. But a job is a job; and you may like what you're doing, but it's still a job. And very often it interferes with what you would like to do. And it's not all fun. It can't be. Well, so much for that. At any rate, then I moved into this world of books all around me. I must say that I think I learned fairly rapidly and went about my business, started building up a little store. The shelves were built. A lot of them weren't shelves at all, but apple boxes. I picked up a bookcase here and there. My brother-in-law came down and built a few shelves. And as business began to develop, I found a young man who lived at the Biola Institute. They had a hotel with the school. Although he was not with the school, he lived at the hotel. A young man by the name of [Harry] Gardiner, incidentally, only he spelled it the German way, G-a-r-d-i-n-e-r. A very fine young man. He was handy, and he did all my carpenter work for several years while he was still around. He replaced all my apple boxes with shelves and made the store look a little bit respectable. The things I handled as I mentioned to you, were, oh, magazines, magazines you hardly ever see anymore. They were short-story magazines. Western magazines, love-story magazines. There were a few literary magazines, but mostly the popular magazines-- [National] Geographics and things of that nature — which we sold for five and ten cents and which I bought for two and three cents from the Goodwill, Salvation Army, and places such as that or people would bring them in. And there would be a regular trade in that. They would bring in books, and I would pick up books from the Goodwill or furniture stores wherever I went; and then later I became more sophisticated and went to better places and got better books and actual libraries. And from time to time I would get a call. A person had a library to sell, and I'd go out and I'd buy them. Very often I would bump into other dealers at the sale, and it became a question of bidding. As I mentioned to you, some of the competitors weren't totally honest about it. After they were turned down once, they would send somebody else in their shop and say, "Well, I'm the other bookstore," and work on that, say. I mentioned to you about Mr. Holmes: he would pop in and say, "I'll give you ten dollars more than anybody else, no matter what the bid is"--which was, of course, ridiculous. On one occasion, a woman threw Mr. Holmes out. She said, "I don't like those tactics." And she was smart enough to see that it was an unfair tactic. Many times: "Well, this man is offering ten dollars more"; so what do you do? You offer ten dollars more, then he offers

ten dollars more. You never know when he's liable to drop it off, so you can't go ahead and fight him on that. But, looking back, it wasn't all that bad. I was still a single man. In the first few months I made very little, if anything, but later on it got so that I could pay my room and board at home. I was still living with my parents in Boyle Heights on Britannia Street and beginning to build up the stock, which was actual build-up of money--net worth, you might say; money was always scarce. The competitors, as I mentioned before, I think were very nice to me. They taught me a lot. They taught me a lot. I think one of the reasons was probably because I listened a lot. Unlike now. [laughter]

GARDNER

Well, maybe you could continue now — because I think we've talked about much, of the time you spent in this first store, the Acadia--and get the years up to date with some of the new bookstores added.

EPSTEIN

Yes, we'll do that. That was the year that Stratford and Green finally went out. Stratford and Green was in business for a long, long time, the early pioneers. And that was the year also that I think Jones finally closed up their store.

GARDNER

Could you talk about Stratford and Green? What sort of shop was that?

EPSTEIN

Well, see, if you recollect, I didn't come to the city until 1923. So when I had been to Stratford and Green, they had a large store, mostly new books, and they also had stationery supplies. And they were gradually drifting more into stationery. Their management interests had become stationery rather than books. Well, I don't know much background about the firm, but they apparently didn't do well, and they were going out of business. They ran a big sale, and finally they auctioned off whatever was left. I bought quite a few books from them when they were running the sale. I'd go down there almost every other day in the morning and find out what they had marked down. Even in my ignorance I recognized some things that I could sell for more than they were offering it at. It was a good education for me. I got familiar with the new books that were being offered. I used to go to the May Company sales.

They used to have remainder sales in those days. They were quite a lot different from what they are today. I used to buy books there. They used to have some beautiful sales; they would have remainders. And I learned that remainders don't last forever, so although a book may remainder today...

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GARDNER

You mentioned also that Jones went out of business in that year. Was that the same sort of operation?

EPSTEIN

Jones was one of the oldest bookstores in the city. Oh, I think they started before the century. They were the place where everybody bought schoolbooks, and they also had a lot of trade books. They had a very unfortunate experience which cost them a lot of money, I think, [and] which induced them to dissolve the business. A school-teacher was accused of stealing. And they made a terrible mistake; she had not stolen anything. And she sued them and got quite a verdict. But then other things began to happen to them. The original owners turned over management to other people. There were a group of three or four people in the store who were getting fantastically high salaries for those days, and the business just didn't warrant it. None of those getting the highest salaries would give up their salaries or leave, even when they saw that the business was going on the rocks. Maybe instead of three or four people getting \$10- to \$20,000, \$15,000 a year in those days, if they had had one or two, they might have salvaged themselves. But their credit got so with the publishers that no one would ship them anymore; so they went out. It was an ongoing business for--Lord knows, it must have been forty or fifty years. It was way before the turn of the century. I don't know whether they were older than Fowler or not. Fowler might have been older. But Fowler's dates back to the late eighties — the original Fowler firm. Up to a few years after I started, while I was still on Eighth Street, I used to come into Fowler's and still see an old man coming in once or twice a week for a while--one of the original founders. There was a chap by the name of John Q. Burch who had a business in one of the buildings. He sold nothing but books about shells and nature books. And nobody every heard of him. I didn't

know about him till later. At the time I went in business, I didn't know him. I later became acquainted with him because he used to sell a lot of antiquarian shell and nature books, plus a lot of new ones. Later he moved to somewhere around the Leimert Park area. I think he ran his business from his home. There was a chap by the name of Dellquest who had a store a little further away from downtown on West Seventh Street around the 1800 block. He was a pretty good bookman. But he never mixed with the other bookstores. As I recollect, he also dealt with, stamps and coins and things like that. He later wrote a book on collecting stamps. But he never mixed much with the general trade. I recollect that once or twice I found books about the South in his place. I think his origin was the South, and his interest was there. There was a chap on South Olive Street by the name of R.C. Lord. He had a very small store. He used to do a lot of freelancing plus running the store. He used to sell a lot of books to other dealers. He didn't have much in the way of a trade or a following of his own. He was a nice person, but a limited businessman, you might say. (I don't know how else to express it.) Then the Satyr Bookshop, about that time, opened on Vine Street. Now, the Satyr Bookshop is quite a story. No, they were not on Vine Street. At that time, 1926, Mac Gordon started the Satyr Bookshop on Hudson Avenue. It wasn't until several years later that he moved to Vine Street. Then he got into partnership with Stanley Rose--for the moment I'll just pass that story by and get him down to starting about that time. This is more or less chronological. Then we move into 1927. About the only new name that I could recognize of any note was Esme Ward. It's not too far from the block of the Pickwick, at 6627, 6600 block. She had a circulating library and retail bookstore. But it was a very nice library. In those days, circulating libraries were very important. The circulating libraries in Hollywood used to loan books on a circulating library basis to studios for for reading. Some of the studios, instead of buying a book, would rent them — for the readers to read. It was mostly novels. There were several places in the area that were doing that. We'll skip to early 1928. The Bible Institute Bookroom was around the corner from me on Hope Street, 558 South Hope, which was at Sixth. And then there was a chap by the name of I.E. Chadwick who called himself the Connoisseur Bookshop. I.E. Chadwick was a movie producer of sorts. And he later was very much involved with the studios in some ways. He had a piece of property on Sunset Boulevard which he rented out to studio people. His widow's still living, and she belongs to our temple.

We see her quite often. His name was Isaac E. Chadwick. She always called him Chaddy. And she always tells me, "You know, Chaddy always used to tell me how proud he was" of me, the way I built up my business and so forth. This is nice to hear, very nice. And he had a sort of a specialized first-edition business. I don't think he was a great bookman, but at least he showed an interest for fine books and nice books.

GARDNER

Where was he?

EPSTEIN

He was at 6080 Sunset, which was just east of Gower right around the corner from Columbia. He owned the building there. He had several good rentals. And of course now that Columbia's shut down, I don't know what his rentals are. But he left his widow well provided for; she doesn't seem to worry. I note this just for the record. There was a Jewish bookstore on North Soto Street operated by Reverend E. Mirsky. E. Mirsky was quite a scholarly man. He didn't do much practicing of being a rabbi at the time, but at least it was a start towards Jewish books in the area. Mostly there were a great many Yiddish books, and of course prayer books and things of that nature, and some authors of Hebrew literature and Yiddish literature, and dictionaries of one kind or another. It wasn't till some years later that another Jewish bookstore opened up, which I would like to put down. I think I have a note to come to it. We're getting into 1928 now. And as you know, in 1928 I sold the Acadia and opened the Louis Epstein Bookshop West Eighth Street. There were a lot of things happening at that time. The new-book business was burgeoning out. The department stores were doing the big business. Every department store, four department stores, you might say: Bullock's, Broadway, May Company, and Robinson's. Robinson's, as I mentioned before, was the high-class store in the area. They had a beautiful book department. And it was being run by a chap named Phil Kubel. He was a good bookman. He used to go to Europe every year to buy fine bindings — some rare first editions, but mostly bindings of individual titles, special books of poetry, the standard poets-- and occasionally bring home limited editions. And he had a very fine selection of rare books of that type--limited editions and fine bindings, but not rare books in the sense that he would have an early Mark Twain or anything like that, not

in the sense that Dawson had rare books. There was the May Company, which had a good book department on one of the upper floors. They didn't move the department downstairs until a couple of years later. That was run by a woman whose name I don't remember now. But it was not in the class of Robinson's. But they did have a lot of good remainders on sale. Then there was Bullock's, which had a very fine book department also, very extensive stock; and that was run by a woman by the name of June Cleveland. And Pearl Goldwater worked for her. I don't know if you know Pearl Goldwater. Well, Pearl Goldwater ran that department at Bullock's for many years after June Cleveland. Then she left, and she went to work for Hunter's when they opened up the store in Beverly Hills. Then there was the Broadway. I knew who ran that store later, but I don't recollect who ran it at the time. Jake Zeitlin worked for Bullock's at the time. But with the exception of the May Company, they were all ground-floor departments, with extensive stocks, far different than they are today. They controlled the new- book business then, in the sense that they did the major portion of it. Fowler and Parker were still doing good business and the Hollywood people were doing business, but nowhere near the volume that the department stores did, especially Robinson's. That, of course, would take days of telling by someone who knew the people then. Also, skipping back to 1926, that was the year the library moved to its present quarters. And I remember watching, from my little store on Sixth Street, the trucks, Bekins trucks, just loaded with boxes, boxes of books backing up to the library on the Hope Street side and delivering the books there. It was an amazement to me how many trucks there were--of equipment, of course, and the books.

GARDNER

Did they buy more books to stock the library?

EPSTEIN

Their budget grew and they bought--oh, yes, they increased their assortment of books tremendously after they got in there.

GARDNER

Well, I know that, but I mean immediately afterwards, did they go out to the bookmen of the area and say, "We have all this extra room now"?

EPSTEIN

Not in that sense, but the bookmen used to bring books to them. For instance, if I felt there was something special in a library I bought, I would make a note of it or take the book up there and offer it to them. Also, they had a box of wants, cards of books they needed, and I would go up there. I didn't do it when I was on Sixth Street, but I did do it when I moved to Eighth Street after a year or two. I was a little too timid or too new, number one, to know about it, and thinking that, well, I wouldn't have anything they wanted. But later on as my stock increased, I used to go and watch their want list. And very often I'd see things appear on the want list that we had picked up, and we would offer it to them. We established a nice relationship with the people running it. Sometimes I would offer them things by the phone as they came in. Maybe some things I bought very new: somebody would bring me in review copies; I would call them up; if they didn't have it, they would buy it. And the library, of course, brought more book people into the area: the people who used the library for reference, professional people, and also the casual reading public. And people who belonged to a library at the same time would be buying books. We never considered the library as a danger to our business because they loaned books for free. The axiom in the book trade is that a good book town will have a good library; and vice-versa, a good library will have good bookstores in the same town. They sort of supplement each other. They both promote the reading of books. Well, where do we go from here?

GARDNER

Well, you're up to 1928. What I'd like to do is cover the years between 1928 and 1933 and then tell the story of Argonaut and how that started. So if you'd like to continue with the atmosphere. In 1928 you're opened up at Louis Epstein's.

EPSTEIN

Well, in 1928, as I mentioned to you, Ralph Howey came along and bought my store, the Acadia. I took the opportunity of taking the money and traveling around a little bit. I went to Phoenix and San Francisco and the towns along the coast--Santa Barbara. Wherever I went, I made a looking tour and a book-looking tour. I'd never been to San Francisco. I'd never been up the coast and never been in the [Imperial] Valley. So it was a lark. I went by myself. I found a

few books here and there. And as I say, I was still living with my parents in Boyle Heights. And I'd ship the books in or bring them in the car and loaded up a room with maybe 1,000 books or so, maybe a little more. And then I got a hankering to go back into the business. I fully intended to go back into the business because I liked it. I'd really established a fondness for it. There was a lot to attract you to the business once you went in. It needs a certain type of character--the love of the search. It's sort of a gamble — you buy, you might sell at a big price — and you're playing with people, buying and selling. There's a mechanics of wits with one another. People try to get the most they can, and you try to buy at the least you can. And some people want to take advantage of you, and other people want to give you something for free. It's all happening. And then the constant rubbing of elbows with the competition of a sort, with all your contemporaries in the trade. Although we were constantly competing, there was for the most part a friendly type of competition, with the exception of persons I mentioned.

GARDNER

At this time there would be no organizations of any kind.

EPSTEIN

There was none at that time.

GARDNER

So whatever contact there was was really contact that you had to go out of your way for, or just incidental contact going for the libraries.

EPSTEIN

Amongst the secondhand-book dealers, they were always searching each others' stocks. They always had want lists to fill, or they'd come in and try to find something. I had a customer for one kind of a book, and I went out looking for that kind of book for him. Or they wanted a book on duck hunting. If I got a new customer and he wanted a book on duck hunting, I'd run through all the other stores and try to find out what they had in duck hunting. I would either buy it or make a note and quote it to the person. Or whatever subject you might name. There are just millennia of subject classifications in the book business: books on needlework, books on — well, it's like one man on shells.

One man was collecting books on scrimshaw. Now scrimshaw's popular. In those days scrimshaw was collected but not to the extent that it is today. And seafaring books and forest books. I mean, any subject you pull out of the air, there were some collectors for it--besides the regular book reader who wanted to keep up with current reading. We moved and played with each other, in the sense that there was always a communication. It was all very, very good. We would sometimes see a book on another man's shelf marked ten dollars. I had a man who would give me ten dollars for it, but I said, "Look, if I pay you, I can't get more than ten dollars. I'll give you seven and a half," or "I'll give you five," or "I'll give you six." And sometimes he'd take it and sometimes not. If we could buy that and maybe make a quick couple of dollars, we would do that. It was an ongoing thing, to--not bargain with each other but let's use the word "trade" with each other. Or sometimes we would offer, "Look, I'll give you ten dollars. You want ten dollars in cash? I'll give you fifteen dollars in trade out of my stock. I don't have any cash." He would come in and pick out fifteen dollars' worth of books. And very often that kind of a barter would go, especially with people like myself or some of the other smaller dealers who didn't have cash but had a customer who might want it. We'd always take the risk, and sometimes I'd get it and the customer wouldn't want it. And there I was, with that book on the shelf instead of the other. But it was a normal thing to do, and you were supposed to be smart enough to know what you were doing. As far as any organization at that time, there was none. I think I told you about the story that just about that time, Jake left working in the department store and opened his own little shop. I used to go downtown, browse through the stores, and I'd meet the people, my former customers, browsers in my store. We'd stop and talk. One day Jake said to me that he was opening a shop, and we got to talking. I said, "Well, I've been picking up some books." So we arranged that he came over to my home to see the books. And there were a few things, most of which he said he'd like to put in his stock because he didn't have hardly any stock. He was on Hope Street; he was across the street from Biola. He wasn't on Sixth Street. The entrance was through a building that was on the corner of Hope and Sixth. And his whole shop consisted of what was formerly an opening to this hotel and a little lobby. Now, what happened to the other portion of the hotel, I don't recollect now — whether they abandoned the upstairs or not. Or maybe they made a narrower entrance to it and rented out that little lobby portion. So I

loaned Jake the books, and we made a list of them. And when he sold them, I was supposed to get two-thirds and he would keep one-third. Occasionally we'd get together, and he'd give me a few bucks. Then in the late summer of '28 I opened up my store. I went to Jake, and I said, "I'm opening a store on Eighth Street, and I need my stock." Well, Jake was a little put out about it. He said, "I can't give you my stock; I won't have anything on my shelves!" I said, "Now, wait a minute, Jake. I told you at the time that I would need it when I opened my store." "Well," he says, "I didn't anticipate that you'd need it that soon." Well, of course he eventually gave them to me with no hard feelings, but he was a little disturbed about it and pleaded with me could I leave it if I had a lot of other books. I said, "I don't have a lot of other books, and I need something as an opening stock to attract customers." So we opened there, but that store had been occupied as a bookstore, and stationery store by one of the relatives, a younger relative, of someone who was connected with Stratford and Green. He had mostly some stationery. So I heard he was moving out, and so I went to him and confirmed it. And then I went to his landlord and I said that I would like to take the store when he moved out. So when he moved out I bought some of his shelving and a few tables and other things. I picked up an old cash register. The other register I had left to Ralph Howey. From there on, from the time I opened the Eighth Street store, I was never out of the book business again up until the time I retired. It was slow going to start with, but gradually my shelves filled up and people discovered the shop. You see, when I moved into Sixth Street, I moved right into the thick of the book area, whereas Eighth Street was two blocks away. At that time I was the only bookseller on Eighth Street. My closest bookseller was Mr. Lord, right around the corner on Olive Street. And this was between Olive and Grand, on the south side of the street. The location now is occupied, I believe, by Henry's [Camera] photographic equipment company. And for many years I used to drive by, and my little sign was still on the wall — "Louis Epstein's Bookshop." It was eventful in the sense that I was learning more and more rapidly, my stock was building up, and I was doing a little bit better business. And by the time 1929 came around, getting ready to get married, I'd established a business that I felt would support us. I might have gotten married a little bit sooner, but I was really fearful to take a bride and not be able to support her. Not that Ann would have minded going to work, but I didn't want any of that. I saw in my own family, where my father and mother

always worked — and my mother always worked. She always worked. She helped in the store, and we lived upstairs or lived in the back; and she would cook and sew and clean and bake and wash and still had to work hours in the store when my dad was out. My thinking at that time was, well, look, I don't want to start that, because once you have a wife coming into the business, you become dependent on her. No one else can do it, and it's hard to make a decision to substitute her with an employee: number one, the expense; and number two, you don't think the employee will do as well. I've seen it happen too often. Well, at any rate, I did not do it. Ann never worked in the store until we moved our business to Hollywood, and then the children were pretty well able to take care of themselves. She would come in maybe around lunchtime to help out, and then she got to liking it so well that she came of her own volition to help out whether we asked for her or not or needed her or not. I had one part-time assistant by the name of Dickson L. Shelton, who had been a customer of mine on Sixth Street, I met him on the street one day between stores, and I told him I was thinking of opening up a store. And he asked me if I needed any help. He having been a customer, buying first editions and living off an income, I figured, well, I can't offer him anything that might be attractive to him; and so I told him that. And he said, "Well, I need something to do. I'm just tired of having twenty-four hours a day just going around looking through bookstores." And he said, "I don't have as much income as you think." I said, "Well, I'll tell you what I'll pay, and if you're willing to do it." So I told him, and he said, "That's fine." He stayed with me for quite a number of years. There were no great new developments in the number of people who came in at that time, with the exception of people who anyone might remember. Of course, Jake came in in that period, and Pat Hunt. Now, Pat Hunt had worked around in the department stores, and then she opened a little shop of her own. She later bought the Hollywood Bookstore and ran that for years. And then she sold it and then again opened up another little shop. And her last shop was not too far away from where the Pickwick is, where the Pickwick moved in later. She was at 6731, in that little building that Aaron owns now, that little arcade. Aaron, of course, made it into a much better-looking thing. But she had a little shop in that arcade. She was an excellent bookwoman. She was well known in the trade. And in the Hollywood trade, she sold a lot of books to a lot of movie stars, studios, and everyone else of that era. In addition to that, in 1929 the Satyr Bookshop moved from Hudson

to Vine Street. At that time Stanley Rose and Mac Gordon were partners, and they moved the store to Vine Street. They did exceptionally, exceptionally well. You'll have to remind me to come back to give you the story of that story, or shall I tell it to you now?

GARDNER

Tell it now.

EPSTEIN

Well, Stanley Rose and Mac Gordon were two quite different people. Stanley was a roistering type of guy, loved his liquor. Mac was a more solid businessman, feet on the ground. They got along fairly well at the start, but something happened between them. Stanley Rose republished a little book-- or they republished it together, pirated an edition, of Chic Sale's, The Specialist --a very good-selling piece of curiosa (still in print) . It was a little tiny book, sold for a dollar. It was about outhouses. And they were picked up on it and sued. Then something happened, and Stanley took all the rap for it. Actually, to pirate something is against the law. Stanley took the whole rap for all the proceedings; then they published something else. There was no criminality into this other, but then they published something else, a pirated thing, which was called obscene. So he had to actually spend a month or so in jail. When Stanley came out, he felt that he was not given the proper backing or proper treatment by Mac Gordon, that Mac didn't back him up for one reason or another. Well, anyway, they parted company. But Stanley was an exceptional book salesman. He had entree to any studio. He'd pack up a bag of books or a carful of books, go around from office to office of the writers, to the directors, to the business end — he would actually peddle books. But he had a personality which was attractive; [he was] a nice talker, good drinking companion. When he broke up with Mac, he immediately started his own business, the Stanley Rose Bookshop. The other was the Satyr Bookshop. In a little while--he had a hard time getting backing, but somehow he got some backing--he opened a little store across the street from the Satyr, Stanley Rose's Bookshop. He was always short of funds. Well, he wound up owing the creditors, and the creditors took over and sold it to Mike Weisz. Mike Weisz at that time was the chap who bought any kind of a store and then ran it and made a sale out of it. He is the father of David Weisz, who runs these

tremendous auctions. You see his ads in the paper — machinery, he'll buy fantastic plants. And the young David became an exceptionally wealthy person, very wealthy now. He will walk in and buy a plant for millions of dollars and then run these auctions and sell them off. He'll buy a steel company. There's nothing that he won't buy. He becomes knowledgeable and has experts handling them, and he built up a tremendous national business on that. His father, Mike — and this goes back to a personal story of the family — was a small-time jobber of things. And very often he would buy things that my father was interested in. My father would buy from him, and they got to be friends. Mike was a gambler. (I'm saying this almost publicly, but it was no secret; his family admits it, and everyone who knew Mike knows it.) I mentioned to his daughter-in-law, David's wife—one time we were sitting around together, and I was telling her the story about Mike and my father — that every time Mike would get in a hot spot, he'd come running around to my father for a couple of hundred dollars because he saw a lot of merchandise that he could buy but he didn't have the money. My father would loan it to him, and he'd pay him back. But he was always in trouble because he couldn't resist the gambling. And his daughter-in-law, I whispered to her, "You know, your father-in-law was a little bit of a gambler." She said to me, "A little bit of a gambler? You don't have to whisper to me. We know what kind of a gambler he was." But this goes around and around, one family meeting the other. Mike Weisz, I imagine, would be a great story on his own—or David Weisz now; Mike is gone. So Stanley Rose's first shop went down the drain in that manner. But he kept on peddling books as an independent, you might say, freelance. What he would do, he'd go down to the Los Angeles News Company, which was a wholesale house, and in one day he would take out fifty books or whatever of a new book, and he would take them out and peddle them. But the next morning he had to produce the money for it, because he had no credit. And he did that for quite a while, and then he would hear of somebody who was looking for a rare book or a set of books. And he used to buy a lot of books from us in that way when we were still downtown. So he and I became quite friendly. On occasion he would be stone broke, and I would loan him eating money. But he always paid me back. Sometimes it took a long time. But if it wasn't in money, it would be in books. Somehow he took care of me. And he sent a lot of business my way. He sent people to come to browse through the store. Sometimes he would bring people. And if I made a

good sale, I would slip him a few dollars, sort of as a commission--because he was entitled to it--like a finder's fee or whatever you want to call it. So he and I became quite friendly. Not socially--I could never stand his kind of social life. He would wind up every night either at his home or somebody else's home just drinking for a lot of the time. Of course, in those days, I didn't hardly touch liquor. Finally he got some backing and opened another little shop, and that went down the drain because nobody could work with Stanley, because he didn't know when he'd go on liquor and he didn't know what he'd promised somebody. He was a great guy to say, "Okay, I'll get it for you," or "I'll give it to you," this, that, and the other. He would get himself into trouble that way, and he never could keep up a credit rating. If he had money in his pocket, that was spending money, regardless of what he owed or who he owed it to. But he was not dishonest in the sense that he would — in a way, some people, I imagine, would call it dishonest because he was using somebody else's money. But that wasn't the way I felt it was. It was an unfortunate habit, similar to the other guy's gambling. So he would get into hot water and lose his credit, and then I would stake him for a few things. I would have a few fine sets. He'd come in; he'd say, "Louis, I think I can sell those sets for you." And I'd say, "Well, go ahead and sell them. But bring me the money." Well, ninety-nine times out of a hundred he did bring me the money. But every once in a while he needed the money for something else. Finally he opened a store, Stanley Rose's Bookshop, on Hollywood Boulevard, right next to Musso's [Musso and Frank Restaurant], attached to Musso's. And he got some backing, and the wholesale house backed him up. They watched his credit; they furnished the books. He built up quite a business. And all the movie people traded with him. God bless his soul, if he were around, he could tell you some beautiful stories about their good habits and their bad habits and a lot of other things. But there again, he didn't know how to run a business. Whatever was in the till was spendable money. And Musso's had an excellent bar, and half the time he was at the bar. He needed money, he would just go to the register and take it. Nobody knew whatever he took in. All of his customers became personal friends. They'd grab a book and say, "Stanley, put this on my account." And you know, a lot of times he didn't even know their names. Of course, a lot of people took advantage of that; they were never billed for it, time and time again. He liked to tell stories about some of his famous customers. One story in particular he told me, which I got

a big kick out of: Edward G. Robinson was a customer of his, used to buy art books and other kinds of books. (He used to come to our place, but he and Stanley got friendly.) So Robinson would pick up a group of books and ask for a discount. In order to embarrass Robinson, when the clerk would come to Stanley and say, "Mr. Robinson wants a discount," Stanley would yell out in a loud voice — the shop had quite a few people in it — "If Mr. Robinson can't afford to pay the full price for these, you tell him that I will give them to him." [laughter] He sold a tremendous number of fine books. He was a discoverer of authors. He was not a literary person, but he could get a feel of a book. [William] Saroyan was one of his friends, Budd Schulberg, and all the younger writers of the period. He brought Thomas Wolfe in to meet me one time. And they all used to pass here. Stanley Rose's was one of the places they had to stop at. And towards the end, I had already--part of the story overlaps Eighth Street and Pickwick, because this goes on into the time after Pickwick had opened. The poor guy finally had to go under. And he owed me about \$300 in books. By that time we were at Pickwick, more or less his neighbors. And he would come and take books that he needed from us, and we would keep a running account. And he owed us about \$300--in trade or whatever. So he called me one day and said, "Louis, come down here." So I came down and he told me very confidentially, he said, "Look. The [Sunset] News Company's on my neck--I can't pay them — and I know they're going to close me up within a week. You'd better pick out what I owe you. " This was very thoughtful of him. He said, "You've been damned nice to me all the time. I don't want you to wind up a loser on this deal." He said, "I have no money." Which happened exactly as he said. We picked out a lot of regular trade stuff--dictionaries, you know, the staple things that would always sell — and got our account settled that way. But he always settled his account with me. But then, after he closed that, very hard times set in on him. He was an agent for a while and had a couple of strokes of luck, but then--you know, one stroke of luck will keep you alive for six months, but the strokes of luck diminished. He got to drinking more and more, and finally he got to the point where his friends didn't want to have anything to do with him. And in the meantime he had married, had a son, and he couldn't support them. His wife had to go to work and support them. His wife had to go to work and support the child. And he didn't know how to treat his son.

1.8. TAPE NUMBER: IV, Side Two (May 20, 1974)

EPSTEIN

Continuing on with Stanley Rose: his wife left him. He had a nice little boy by that time. (The boy must be close to twenty years old by this time.) And he just kept going from bad to worse, bad to worse. And he would drop in from time to time: "Loan me a fin; loan me ten bucks"; and I never told him no. In the first place, I would be embarrassed to tell him no, and I knew that he needed it, although I was positive that most of it went for liquor rather than food. Finally he moved into a little hotel on McCadden, which was right in back of the Pickwick, across the street from [Don] the Beachcomber [Restaurant]. At that time it was a hotel; it hasn't been torn down too many years now. And Stanley moved into there, sort of a fleabag outfit. He would be in the shop every day, and every other day was a request for money. All his friends dropped him. One day he came in and went towards the back of the store, and he asked me for five dollars. And I must have been in a bad mood or had a bad streak of business or something, and I turned him down. And he walked out. And when I saw that man walking out, I could have bitten my tongue off. I felt so bad. Where are all his friends? Well, as it happened, a few days later I bumped into him on the street and I apologized to him. I said, "Stanley, I feel awfully bad turning you down the other day. I'm sorry I did it." And he said, "Louis, you don't have to be sorry. You're the only guy that's been helping me, and I'm the one that should be sorry and embarrassed." I said, "Stanley, why don't you stop drinking?" He said, "Louis, the bottle is the only friend I have left. All my other friends dropped me. That's all I've got left." Well, of course, with an attitude like that, you know that eventually the whiskey's going to kill him or he's going to kill himself. I'm not intimating that he killed himself; he did not. Oh, yes, one other incident: Some friends of his came in and said, "Why don't you give Stanley a job?" I said, "Look. How would Stanley feel trying to work here — the way we operate and the way he operates?" "Try it." "Okay, I'll try it. With Stanley I'll do almost anything." I really had a great emotion for the guy. He was almost like a member of the family who was drifting off. So he came to work, and he was just no workman at all. By that time he was pretty gone on liquor, and his hands were unsteady. And he tried it for about five days, and then he came to me and said, "Louis, thanks very much, but I just can't do it." And he was embarrassed. People

would come in and see him climbing up the ladder, and they would talk to him. And you could tell he was embarrassed--and really sick. He was a sick person by that time. So when this thing came up, the incident I told you about, he explained to me that the bottle is the only friend he has left.

GARDNER

What happened to all the young writers who he helped out all that time, gave books to?

EPSTEIN

They all dropped him. You know, people--look, they undoubtedly helped him some, but probably he was constantly coming to them for handouts. So look, people aren't that soft. He got to look very seedy. He had no clothes; occasionally somebody would give him some clothes. He had family here, but they were in no position to help him. And I guess in some ways they were embarrassed of him. But a few weeks after that, or maybe a couple months, a very peculiar, almost psychic incident happened to me. At that time, I rarely dreamt. And if I did dream, I rarely remembered what the dream was about. But this guy must have been on my conscience or my mind. And I had a dream, and this was it. It's a very curious thing. (And I told that dream the next day to Stackhouse and two others who were at lunch with me the following day, and Stackhouse could verify that I told him about this dream. The others are both dead now. One of the chaps, Herman Mann, used to work for me.) I found myself sitting with a couple of others at one end of the mortuary on a bench, semidark, very cheap. And there was a pine coffin on a trestle over at the further end. Stanley was in the coffin. He had died and was in the coffin, and there we were at the mortuary. There were maybe two, three, four other people. They were all non- Jews, and I was the only Jew. I recollect that I was the only Jew amongst them. Why that should occur to me, I don't know. except perhaps for what I have to say that follows. And we sit there and we sit there. And nothing happens--no preacher, no services; we're just sitting there. Finally I became impatient, and I walked over to the coffin, and I recited a Kaddish in Hebrew. Of course, you don't recite the Kaddish until after one is buried in the ground. But I didn't know what else to do, and I wanted to leave. So I did that. Still no one shows up, and I go back, and one of these chaps says to me, "Why did you say a Hebrew prayer for him? He's not a Jew." And I said,

"I know he's not a Jew, but it's the only prayer for the dead that I know." And with that it fades out. And within a month, Stanley was dead. And you should have seen all the friends at his funeral. Everybody was at the funeral. People who might have kept him alive for years at no — well, it's hard to say that; maybe I shouldn't say that. But at any rate, people who he couldn't reach anymore. Wealthy people die of liquor, too, so I can't say that they would have saved him or helped him. It's a story-- oh, there are many other stories; one can sit for hours and talk about Stanley. There are people around town who know more stories about him than anything. But it was a dream that affected me very, very much. And I remember telling it the next day to Stackhouse, and I was really frightened by it because I knew it was ominous. And within just weeks, the thing actually happened.

GARDNER

He was Jewish, though, wasn't he?

EPSTEIN

No, he was not. He was a Texan. He had family, as I say, and they all showed up. One of his brothers came in one day and thanked me for helping out at the end and so forth, for being nice to him. But there was no money there- at least, there wasn't at the time. I've never seen or talked to any of his family since.

GARDNER

I noticed one thing in going through your papers: that you sent a letter to Publisher' s Weekly ?

EPSTEIN

Yes. Regarding his death.

GARDNER

With an obituary. Had they made no notice of it at all? Or did you just take it upon yourself?

EPSTEIN

They ran a little squib. I thought I clipped it at the time. Then I wrote a little obituary which appeared in the Daily News — what was then the News. I think

it may have been mentioned in one of the columns. Oh, yes, I did write an obituary for the News. One author, Lillian Ross, who had been an actress, too, and was a friend of Stanley's, wrote me a very nice note; and on reading that, she sent a check to his widow for a hundred dollars or so, for his son.

1.9. SECOND PART **June 11, 1974)**

GARDNER

We'll pick up the narrative where we left off, then, around 1931, is it, '32?
[tape recorder turned off]

EPSTEIN

You asked me about the Argonaut, and I mentioned that there's a story behind the actual opening of the Argonaut. It winds up in a tragic thing, pertaining to one person who was connected with it. When I opened my first shop in Los Angeles on Sixth Street--which was, as I said before, a tiny shop — the old-book business being what it is with young people [who] like to gather, there was one chap who came in one day, looked around, introduced himself. A very serious young man. We got to talking, and he said he was living at the YMCA, just came down from San Francisco. He had driven a laundry truck up there and whatever to make a living. This must have been in late '26 or early '27. And we became acquainted, and occasionally when I'd have to go out for a few minutes to go to the bank, I would leave him in charge of whatever there was, and he would take good care of things. He proved to be quite trustworthy. So we became quite good friends.

GARDNER

What was his name?

EPSTEIN

His name was Sam Reiser. I used to call him Sammy. But he had a very serious and dour personality. He had a complex about things, that things were never going to be right. And he was really suffering from a mental illness — which at the time, being as young as I was and inexperienced, I didn't quite recognize at first, but which later became quite apparent. One day he brought to the shop a very small [satchel], almost like a lady's handbag, (They used to have these

little satchels,) And he said, "Keep these for me. If I don't come back in a week or two, why, whatever is the contents. ..." He indicated it was nothing of any worth and might not be worth sending wherever he was. Well, it turned out that this Sam Reiser went to San Diego and attempted to commit suicide. He swallowed some caustic material. But fortunately, he was found in time, and his stomach was pumped, and whatever was necessary to be done was done, and he recovered. He told me later that the women of the Jewish community in San Diego were very nice to him. I specifically mention that because I think it's a good historic point to be known--that there was a Jewish community that was involved in helping Jewish patients, probably helped other patients. And then after he was released from the hospital, they took care of him, seeing that he was fed and had a place to stay. But this I didn't know until a number of weeks later, when out of the blue I got a note from him from San Diego that said he'd probably be back in a week or two. He didn't tell me what had transpired. The actualities, he didn't tell me until maybe several years later. And I'm repeating it as if he had told me then, which he didn't. So he did come back. And he showed a very deep interest in the book business. So I let him play around more. I didn't give him an actual job; I couldn't afford to give him a job. And then he decided he wanted to go back to San Francisco, and he left. He left the city. But he kept up a correspondence with me, and he got to know my family because at the time I was still living with my family in Boyle Heights. He got to know my brothers and sisters. Actually, when he came back from San Diego, as I recollect now, he lived at our house for a period of time because he was really not fully recovered from what had happened to him. [He was] thin as a rail and in a run-down condition, he had nowhere else to go; so I took him up to our house and we shared a room. And my sisters fed him, my mother fed him, as they would anyone of their own family who was sick. This is one thing about the Jewish mother: You've got to fatten him up before you can send him back to the world. Which they did, and he later mentioned to me [these] were probably some of the happiest days of his life, because apparently his family background — whether because of him or neglect of the others, or because of his own nature not to cooperate — there was no communication there; although later I found they were very willing to help him but that he was just bent on a certain thing. Well, then he left and went to San Francisco, and then we got a note from him from New York. Then there came a letter from somewhere in Ohio, where his brothers, who were fairly

well-to-do shirt manufacturers in New York, had bought a small department store in some town in Ohio; and they sent Sam there to work and learn the business and run it and perhaps someday later it would become his own — which he tried. But later I found he just couldn't stand the pressures of running the business. He didn't have the philosophy which makes a successful businessman. His own psychology interfered with that. Not that he was especially wrong, but the type of personality wasn't the type of philosophy that succeeds in business. Then we stopped hearing from him. Now, by this time, you know, I was on Sixth Street. During the intervening period about which I'm talking, there is a lapse of considerable time. By that time I was already on Eighth Street, and I'd already married. I'm leading to the next episode of the story. I was already married, and as a matter of fact, I think Aaron was just born — which brings it up to 1930-some-odd. One day I went to Pasadena to see a library of books. And I was always in the habit that when I left a certain area, I would call back in to the shop to find out, well, maybe there was another call in that area which I would make before I came in-- instead of coming in and going right back again. So I phoned in — I had an assistant there by the name of Shelton. And by that time my brother Ben had begun appearing on the scene on Eighth Street. He'd gotten out of his problems, and he was spending a great deal of his spare time at Eighth Street because he was still unable to work. He was beginning to learn the business a little bit. So when I phoned in that afternoon, Ben got on the line and said, "There's a friend of yours here." I said, "Who might that be?" "Well," he said, "you'll never guess." I said, "Well, okay, I'll never guess, so you might as well tell me." He said, "Sam Reiser is here." "Oh, my goodness! How is he?" "Well," he said, "he just got off the rails, and he looks like it. What are you going to do with him" I said, "Well, send him out, get him some clothes, and give him a few bucks to go get cleaned up, and I'll take him home to dinner, for one thing. And then we'll find a spot for him to sleep, and then we'll see what we can do with him." So that's exactly what we did. If you ever saw a man who'd just come off the rails from across country, about as grimy as anybody could possibly be. . . . His clothes were all in tatters. He looked like the real bum, a hobo. I imagine an experienced hobo probably would know how to take better care of himself than he did. At any rate, we took care of him for a few days. We didn't have room for him at the house, but we fed him at my house. By that time, of course, we were living away from my parents. Then we had to

put him up-- I think we put him up again at the YMCA--and he began hanging around Louis Epstein's Bookshop on Eighth Street. And the problem was, well, we had to feed him, we had to clothe him. I was under no obligation, but he was a friend, and you had to do that in those days. The Depression was at its depth. So: "Sam, what are we going to do with you?" "Well," he said, "I don't know." I said, "I don't need you in the store; I don't need the help; there isn't enough business here." We decided on this; I made this suggestion: "I have a lot of books. And if I get rid of 5-, 8- or 10,000 I'll still have a lot of books. So go out and find yourself a store. We'll put in the books, and you'll eke out an existence. And if you're fortunate, we'll make a buck or two out of it." "Well, that sounds like a good idea." And you know, many bookstores are started on that premise.

GARDNER

Is that so?

EPSTEIN

There was nothing else one could do, so they did that. So we did that. But he found a store in Long Beach. Okay, that's the store he found. I went down there, looked it over, saw it. I liked the store, but not Long Beach; but that was what he chose, and he thought he could make a go of it. Long Beach was, again, where I originally started; this is about six or seven years later.

GARDNER

Where in Long Beach was it?

EPSTEIN

It was the same block where I originally was, between Sixth and Seventh on Long Beach. By that time, they'd rebuilt a few of the old buildings there, and it was a nice store — nicer than mine was. It wasn't still anything like the shopping area it later became. They're now deteriorating again. (I'm speaking of 1974). That portion of Long Beach is deteriorating again.) So he opened a store there, later found himself a wife — much older than he, but she took excellent care of him--and they opened the business. They ran it, and they paid their bills, and they paid their expenses. But there wasn't any profit for me in it. It was no great big worry to me. At least it provided him with a living,

because apparently I had undertaken to support him. You do something for someone for so long, it becomes a right. That's a legal thing, you know.

GARDNER

Is that so? I didn't know that.

EPSTEIN

If you do something for someone for a great many years, it becomes practically a legal right. If you let the public trespass on your property for a number of years without doing anything about it, it becomes their legal right afterward to do that; it becomes a public path. That's from my studies of law. [laughter] So they ran that for a while, and they became unhappy with Long Beach. And I wasn't too happy, because whenever I wanted to go see the shop, I would have to run down to Long Beach. I forget what they called the shop, as a matter of fact, whether it was Long Beach Bookshop or whatever. Or was it Louis Epstein's Bookshop of Long Beach? No, it wasn't that. At any rate, whatever they called it, we decided to move it to Los Angeles. So I looked around, and I found a location immediately next door to where I'd been originally on Sixth Street, 623 West Sixth. It was a store twice the size of the one I had, a little more than twice the size, because it was deeper. My original store was forty feet, and this was about fifty-five, sixty feet, and it had more than double the frontage. They had about twenty-five feet frontage where I had only ten. So it was quite a larger store by comparison. And on January 1, 1933, we moved the merchandise from Long Beach to there, and we called that the Argonaut Bookshop. Sam was involved, and by that time my brother's health was a good deal better, so he worked with Sam. Sam's wife, who had worked originally and started for him as an assistant in Long Beach, she worked for a while, then she stopped working in the store as an employee. This went on for a number of years. It was a nice store, but the Depression was still on. It provided me with a few hundred dollars a year separate income from what I earned on Eighth Street, and there was an interchange of merchandise, which was helpful at times. This went on for quite a number of years. " And then one day I came there, and I found Sam in quite a dither. He was worried about something. He accused me of having my brother Ben in the shop, [that] I put him there to spy upon him, which was totally ridiculous, and I told him so. I said, "If I didn't trust you with everything in Long Beach, if I

trusted you that far and provided for you, why would I want to spy on you? I have no reason to spy on you. I never found anything wrong here. I've no suspicion of anybody taking anything or stealing anything, or any wrongdoing at all. Why do you imagine that?" Well, it went strongly with imagination, and I said, "If you are using that excuse, if you want to leave me, you're under no obligation to stay whatever." I said, "I helped you when I thought you needed help, and I'm not in the habit of having a person pay for help or favors that I do him. You're perfectly free to leave at any time you want if you're unhappy." Well, he was a little embarrassed over that, and he stayed a few weeks later. But he was quite unhappy, and Ben told me he had made some remarks to him about it; so he eventually left and said he was going to open a store for himself. I said, "Fine. Why the hell didn't you tell me instead of beating around the bush about it? Everybody else opens bookstores. You're free to open a bookstore. You don't have to worry about me. You're not going to drive me out of business. If you do, then I'm a dope. If you're the better man, fine. I mean, that's the way the competition is . " So it was amicable, but not as amicable as it had been in the past. There was sort of a strain put on it by his suspicions of me. And I was quite hurt over the incident, incidentally, because I'd tried my best to provide for him; and frankly, the fact that he wanted to start a bookstore was always a great idea, I thought. Under ordinary circumstances, I might have helped him to get some stock to start with. He made the circumstances such that he couldn't. Well, this is the story of Sam Reiser, and then the story of the Argonaut. So he started a bookstore on Cahuenga Boulevard in Hollywood. He was a good bookman, very smart and very shrewd. They weren't in the habit of spending a lot of money. He and his wife lived very quietly and plainly. Whatever was coming in, they put back into good books and so forth. For the times, I would say that he prospered. Now, this continues the story of Sam--I'll come back to the Argonaut--that is incidental to the story of the Argonaut. It sounds a little complicated, I know.) But Sam ran that bookstore for a number of years and then sold out to Larry Edmunds [1939] . Now, Larry Edmunds had been working for Stanley Rose. (This takes over quite a few years.) And he became unhappy working for Stanley Rose. I don't know who provided the money for it, because I'm sure that Larry didn't have that much money--maybe a girlfriend of his; he had a series of varying girlfriends. And Sam went out of the picture for a few years, about two years, and then he started a store on Hollywood Boulevard near

Western called Sam Reiser's Bookstore. He ran that for a while. I stopped to visit him a few times. We maintained a little bit of a strained friendship, you might say, whereas they used to be at our house every Sunday or other; we'd feed them and so forth. Well, ours was always an open house when we lived on Curson or wherever we lived. But it became strained. I stopped to visit him occasionally. Finally, after about two or three years on Hollywood Boulevard, I received a phone call from his wife, Marie, that Sam had died. The way she said it, I knew that he had taken his own life. Then the story folds back, talking to her later. She later got a job with the county and is now retired and living up here off of Beachwood somewhere. Later, in talking to Marie, she told me when he first left Los Angeles after his San Diego trip — when he stayed with me for a while, then he went back to New York--while in New York he had made an attempt at suicide, and then they thought if they would get him away from his family connections or whatever, a new kind of a start, new atmosphere, that might have helped him. But that didn't work for long, and he again made an attempt to commit suicide. He had tried everything. He had gone to psychiatrists, but after a few weeks, they would drop him because he would always argue with them; and in some cases, I think he knew more about the subject than they did because he read up about everything on the subject he could lay his hands on. He was a very bright person. But he had that complex, a suicidal complex. And he finally succeeded. One other thing that Marie told me in later years, after he'd gone: I said to her one day — apparently in my own mind it still rankled me why he ever accused me of spying and finding some anger against me when (not to appear self- righteous, I actually tried to help the boy stay on his feet and helped him to earn a living. "Well," she said, "you know, Louis, Sam was always tremendously jealous of you. He was jealous of your success. When you bought the Hollywood building and brought him over to see it, he came back. . . ." (At that time he still owned that shop on — that was in 1938. Time had passed by.) She asked me, "You remember the day when you stopped by on Cahuenga Boulevard, and you took Sammy with you and showed him the building that you bought on Hollywood Boulevard? When he came back, it just rankled him. He was so jealous that he was fit to be tied." That was a streak in him which did not conform to his philosophy. She said, "He was extremely jealous, and that was the cause of all the tension between you." She told me, "I appreciate a great deal what you did for us. And although you don't want exceptional thanks for

it, I do appreciate it. But although he did appreciate it, he still was very jealous of it." That's the story of Sam Reiser. As I said, he made several attempts at suicide, but he had that complex. And she said every day of their marriage she expected anything to happen. And she said, "Many things did happen — of which you know nothing about and which I'm not going to tell you about — which led up to the situation." The reason I bring that in is that I think it's a very human story — the fact of our relationship and my not knowing enough of it. Then, to come back to the Argonaut: well, that went on for years, as you know. We didn't close it up till maybe twelve years ago. My brother ran it. My brother Ben, as I told you, was not a well man, and he had to run it with help. Some of the help was not always reliable. But I was determined never to interfere with what he was doing, except in a very general way, or when he would specifically ask me about something, or when I heard that there was something specifically wrong that needed immediate help. So every time he became ill, which was, I'd say, almost at least once a year, the help would have to run the store; and he said some of the help took great advantage of it. My philosophy about it was that if he was able to maintain himself and the store without me adding too much to it each year, it was a good investment, because it gave him an opportunity to express his own self in it — that he was running something, he had responsibilities, manly responsibilities. And on the whole he took good care of it. He was lax about a great many things. He was not the striver that I was, for whatever reason. It may be because he was sick, or maybe his philosophy was different. Some people, when they get into something, they push; and other people, they get into something and they wait for somebody to push them. This went on. He made a lot of friends, and the shop had a good reputation. He developed a sense for good books. But he was not the merchant that he should have been. His displays weren't as good as they should be; his windows weren't as good as they should be. Well, he wasn't cut out for it, and he wasn't anxious to be a big businessman; so he let things run. But considering everything, I think he was fortunate in having that, and I was fortunate in having that to give him, to maintain his interest, because Ben was not employable in those days, and still isn't. And surprisingly, you know, he's five and a half years older than I, and he's presently still getting around. As a matter of fact, the other day we went somewhere to look at a bunch of books — someone called me and they wanted me to look at them-- and we bought quite a few of them. And he helped me pick them out. So Ben

and I maintain a good relationship, probably better now than it might have been years ago.

GARDNER

Was there a specific kind of philosophy about the store, or was it a general shop also? Did the Argonaut have any specific collecting area?

EPSTEIN

No. They pursued the same policy as I did. As long as I was in the book business, I would buy the best books I could on any subject — not necessarily the rarest, but mine, as I mentioned before, was not a rare-book business. We did run across a great many rarities in our time. But we didn't find any Gutenbergs or first editions of the Constitution.

GARDNER

Manuscripts of The Canterbury Tales. [laughter]

EPSTEIN

No. But Ben developed a good sense for good books. As a matter of fact, he was, I would say, too selective. Sometimes he would pass by lesser things which were much more salable than the better things that he bought, which were less salable. The term "better" you can use in two ways, whether you're looking at it as a better seller or a better basic book--which might not be as quick a seller as something less worthy literary-wise, which would sell for more money, maybe, but would stay on the shelf for two, three, five years. Whereas you bought something of a lesser quality, there are more people who appreciate the specious than there are who appreciate the finer literature. But at any rate, whatever it was, that's the way it turned out. Later it became more difficult for him to run the shop, as he became older. And let's face it: he was in his sixties, and with all his ill health he was never going to be any stronger. So he ran a sale, then moved a lot of his stock upstairs to the Pickwick department. But unfortunately, there it became a physical thing for him. He had to climb two sets of stairs to get to his place of work, and every time he needed something he had to climb down again. It was just too much for him. So he decided to give up the old-book business altogether at the Pickwick because we were becoming involved with remainders, and

remainders were taking up more and more space and the dollars were quicker. So we gave up the old-book department. We donated the balance of our stock. When the last day came, we donated all the books to UCLA. Bob Vosper was tickled pink to get it; he had a certain use for that kind of a collection at that time, I think, as a teaching project or whatever.

GARDNER

I think they were restocking the undergraduate library.

EPSTEIN

Or something like that, yes. But at any rate, they were very happy to get it, and it made me feel good that they were happy to get it. Well, that is the story of two people, Sam Reiser and Ben Epstein. I don't know how Ben'll feel about it. I don't think any of the Reiser family ever--I never met any of them. One time I got a letter from one of his sisters thanking me for taking care of him after he had gone through one of his--well, after the San Diego incident. Apparently he had written home and told them that I had helped him.

GARDNER

Was Ben ever married?

EPSTEIN

Oh, yes, Ben is married and has a wife [Lillian]. As a matter of fact, she just had a fall and is in the hospital. There's an interesting story about Ben, which you could go way into another side track, [laughter] which is interesting in itself. When I tell you about Ben, you'll maybe want to follow it up someday with somebody else. He met his wife at what is now called City of Hope. It used to be called the Los Angeles Jewish Consumptive Association, out at Duarte. They were both patients there at the time. They met, and they became friends. They used to play bridge together and so forth. He used to take her out, go out with her, when they could go out; and they became quite well acquainted. And then later Ben came out of there. That was during the interim when he started getting his health back and he used to spend a lot of time at the Eighth Street store. I learned this later: friends used to come to him, "Why don't you two get married? What have you got to lose?" He said, "Well, I'm sick, she's sick." That was an excuse for not getting married. "Okay, so you're both sick.

So what have you got to lose? You know each other, and you know what's wrong with each other." Finally they decided and did get married. So Ben was getting a small amount of pay from me; he wasn't working full time. So he came to me one day and said, "I'll have to have a raise." I said, "Oh, yeah, what for?" He said, "I'm getting married." "You're marrying Lillian?" He says, "Yes." "Well," I said, "God bless you," and I gave him a raise. You can go back to a different kind of life when you talk about these people who have to spend tremendous amounts of time in sanatoria, how they adjust to that kind of life and how they find sometimes a little happiness in all their misery. And they're not always miserable.

GARDNER

Well, it seems as though he's had a very full life

EPSTEIN

Not a very full life, but they develop certain philosophies and they develop certain interests which are totally different. TBs as a rule have very active minds. Whether the disease irritates a mind into more action or whether--I'm sure that TB doesn't necessarily pick on brighter people. But I've read about that and I've heard talk about that: that their minds are very active and their desires to do things are quite high. I noticed it with my sister--who passed away when she was about twenty- nine--that her mind was keen, and she always wanted to do things, but far more than she was capable of doing. And that's one of the problems with TBs: the minute they start feeling a little bit better, they want to do things.

1.10. TAPE NUMBER: V, Side One (June 11, 1974)

GARDNER

The question that I posed that you said I should come back to is the fact that in a sense you were creating your own competition, both with Sam Reiser and with your brother, by setting up shops that were covering the same field rather than something that would specialize in something else.

EPSTEIN

Well, it really wasn't. Of course, every store that opens, theoretically--and that "theoretically" is very important because in actuality it's not always true--theoretically, every shop that opens in the same kind of business is a competition to other things. But if you'll allow me to talk before I answer your questions directly (and if I forget to answer it, bring me back to it; you know, I like to wander a little bit), what you say about competition is true probably in every other line, with the exception of, I would say, aesthetical kinds of merchandise. How many art galleries can the city support? Or how many bookstores can the city support? How many museums can the city support? And what other fields are there like it? Dance groups--of course, where you have to charge admission to them, that's one thing. Maybe those aren't competition to each other. But here's what I found out about books, and this I have proven time and again. I didn't start out to prove it. Where there were more bookstores, each store did better. I vow that had I started on some off-street instead of right downtown on Sixth Street in Los Angeles, I would never have prospered as well as I did, because I moved into the marketplace where books are bought and sold. Had I been somewhere else where there was no marketplace, no one would search me out, and I would not have learned my business at all--which is exemplified by what happened to me before I moved to Sixth Street, in Long Beach. There was no one to learn from. So a beginner is really stymied; he has no teacher. And if he does succeed, it will take him far more years and far more time and maybe send him off in the wrong direction altogether. But because of the competition where I started on Sixth Street, I learned so much more rapidly. Of course, I was very eager to learn. I began reading catalogs, and I began reading Publisher's Weekly. In those days there was no Antiquarian Bookman; it was part of the Publisher's Weekly. It became the weekly bible almost. As a matter of fact, two years ago Publisher's Weekly had their 100th anniversary. They were getting pages of advertising, and there was nothing from any bookseller. And it bothered me. So I sat down and wrote a long three-page or two-page letter to them thanking them for what the Publisher's Weekly was to me. And I call it my weekly portion. I've got the letter in my files, and I got a beautiful thank-you note from them for it. They were thrilled to get it, and they published it, the whole page of it. That was my learning process. But I was eager to learn. I'm no brighter than the next guy. Maybe my IQ is better than 92, but it isn't 148, I don't think. To get back to my philosophy about competition, I proved it time and time again:

that if you go in and run a good shop, I don't care what the competition is. And I'm talking about the book business. I'm not talking about the shirt business or the hardware business. There's a limited amount of business in those kind of things, I think. Of course, if other people bought hardware like I do, that would be a business that my philosophy would apply to. Showing more books to more people. I go in a hardware store and "Gee, this is a good tool, someday I'll need it." And I'll buy it. I'll never use it. And I know at the time I'll never use it, because I'm not a handy person in that respect. But I love to see people work with tools, and I think, "Well, if I had a tool, I might work." It never gets around to that. [laughter] But to get back to what I'm talking about, again, to prove my theory: we moved to Hollywood Boulevard. At that time there was Satyr; the Hollywood Bookstore was across the street; Miller's was also across the street. I mentioned to you before all the bookstores that were in Hollywood. Hollywood is a great book community. And we moved into there, moved our store there in 1938, closed up Eighth Street in 1940, got all our marbles together. We left the Argonaut to run as it is because I consider the Argonaut a separate entity altogether. It was there for a certain reason, for a certain purpose, and I excluded it from our plans for Hollywood. We offered people a lot of books, and we sold a lot of books. Our competitors: Hollywood went out; Stanley Rose went out; two or three others went out. Now they are replaced by a whole — Hollywood Boulevard is full of other kinds of bookshops. Not new-book shops. They're all old-book shops. A lot of the customers are brought to them by Pickwick, of course.

GARDNER

And Westwood is now where the new-book shops are.

EPSTEIN

Yes. Westwood is where the new-book shops are — Westwood and Beverly Hills.

GARDNER

Yes.

EPSTEIN

But I never felt that if I helped a person, a competitor of mine, that I was hurting myself. And it never turned out that way. The fact that I did help him in some cases turned out to be a great advantage to me, because there was that established relationship of helping each other. In this Los Angeles community — I want this for the record — the booksellers are more friendly to each other than in any other community in the United States that I know of. Now, lately, the last few years, a book community in the country has gotten together. They have regional groups, and they've become more friendly. But it wasn't until very recent times that they had these local chapters of booksellers in almost every larger area. At one time booksellers in San Francisco--Paul Elder wouldn't talk to John Newbegin. There were always feuds. And the department store people locally wouldn't talk to each other because they were always afraid of stealing each other's customers. There used to be a rule by the publishers that a book was to be published on a certain day--it was called publication date. And even to this day, publishers have publication date, but nobody pays any attention to the date as far as actually putting the book on sale. They have to have, for legal reasons, a date on which the book officially goes on sale. Somebody breaks it, well, apparently they're closing their eyes to that. But that created so much controversy amongst the different booksellers. Pearl Goldwater at Bullock's would get a shipment of books. She couldn't bother to store them till publication date; she would put them out and sell them. May Company hadn't gotten their shipment yet, so they didn't have them. Well, they accused Bullock's of breaking publication date and selling the books before the time. Well, rarely did it make a difference of five copies in sales to one store or another. But they were always arguing about it. Each one was watching each other's windows. And if a customer should come in and say, "I just bought this new book at Bullock's and come into Parker's with it, then Parker would send telegrams to the publishers and call the president of Bullock's and complain about breaking the law. But when it happened to him--he would put it out--then he wasn't breaking the law. Well, there were a few who tried to be honest about it. But that created many controversies. Now, when we went into the new-book business, I wasn't about to put all the new books that came in before publication date and hold them. Number one, I had to have the money because the bills were payable. They'd ship you the books ahead of time. The publishers used the booksellers, and the booksellers were too damned stupid to realize it for many, many

years. Of course, they weren't all that. They complained about that. But they weren't smart enough to really get together and do something about it- So the publisher had a habit--if a book was published in June, he'd ship it at the end of April and bill you for it at the end of April. And you're supposed to keep it till June: pay your bills a month ahead of time, keep it till June, and then put it on sale on June 12 or June 15, whatever. It was ridiculous, on the face of it. And that was the reason booksellers couldn't — in those days, very few of them made any money. It was in bad times, besides. And they were supporting the publisher's warehouse. The publisher would send the book from the printers and the bookbinders, the book manufacturer's warehouse. As they were finished, they would ship them right out, which saved the publisher the cost of warehousing them. My theory was that if they wanted me to hold the book till publication, not to put it on before the publication date, they hold the book and ship it ten days before publication date. Otherwise I can't afford it. Well, we followed that policy, and finally the arguments got so bad that we had a meeting downtown of the new- book people. And we thrashed the whole subject out, and we decided that nobody's going to pay any attention to publication date. One day you'll win one, one day I'll win one, But in the end it won't make one hell of a bit of difference. It'll save us all money, and we will then have money to pay the publisher for the book-- because otherwise, we're tying up cash money. The publishers were very eager for their money. They were having hard times, too. And from that nucleus, once we settled that question (we were the first to do that out here), and the fact that we sat down and talked to each other at a luncheon (and I was very instrumental in pushing that through), from that we started the Southern California Booksellers Association. I feel quite pleased that I was part of it. That's a theory, bringing it back to competition: if you do something right about the book business, generally speaking, it's going to help everybody in the book business. not only you particularly. If you get the publisher to change his policy for the better to you, he's changing his policy for everyone, and that betters the lot of every bookseller. And I'm very happy to say that I always fought with the publishers, but I gained their respect. No publisher would ever refuse to send me anything I wanted at any time. My credit is good; they respected my methods of bookselling; I sold a lot of their books. What could they ask more? And my competitors respected me. They elected me as president and offered me the presidency another time. I never considered

them as competitors. If Stanley Rose needed books: "Stanley, go ahead and take them. You'll pay me, or you'll give me something else in trade." If Satyr needed books. . . . And because of that, I could go to them and get books. And the same way with Hollywood, right across the street. And Miller's, which is now totally a stationery store, was a bookstore at that time when I started. They [later] gave up books. Now, whether they gave it up because of my competition or not, I don't know. Maybe they did. Maybe we did a better job. Or maybe because we were exclusively a bookstore and carried a much greater variety, people would come to us and not to a half-stationery and half-book store. And Hollywood Bookstore went out because it wasn't properly run. Stanley Rose went out because it was underfinanced and wasn't properly run. The Satyr went out of the new- book business because--well, for other reasons, I think. For lack of leadership. When Mac Gordon died, his wife didn't allow Eddie Gilbert (who was then manager for her and who now has Eddie Gilbert's Bookstore, formerly the Satyr, on Hollywood Boulevard just east of Vine), didn't allow him to use the assets of the store properly. See, she was a sister of the Powners, who I mentioned much earlier. So getting back to competition: it isn't competition. It's getting books out before people. And we proved that again, as I mentioned in the incident about the opening of a store in San Bernardino which illustrates the difference between dress shops and shoe shops and hardware stores and books. There's no limit to the number of books a person can read, theoretically--except the amount of time he puts in — or even the desire for owning books. Many people buy books [who] like to have the book around. And like I mentioned of myself, buying tools, they like to have books around. They have an intention of someday reading them. And God help the bookseller if every person stopped buying books until they finished all the books they had. [laughter]

GARDNER

I'll agree with that.

EPSTEIN

So the theory holds good about books: that if you put more books before more people, you're going to sell more books. And the better books they are, the more salable. . . . Maybe I should use the phrase "more salable" books they are, the more desirable looking they are--a book has to be dressed up, as

well as the store has to be dressed up, to attract the person to come in and touch. I've always maintained that policy--to touch. We had a fantastic battle with one of our councilmen, Paul Lamport. I think you may recall when he was councilman. Well, he was an overambitious guy. I know Paul; I still see him. He lives here on La Brea. He had his offices in the Medical Building across the street — you know, he owned the Medical Building, he and his partners. He's out of that now.* He always used to complain because our store wasn't dressy enough. He had a knack for design, and he was in some respects right. But we never paid attention to dressing it up. The Pickwick today, they're now replacing some of their shelves. They've replaced a good many of them. But if you look on the east wall, the shelves have been there since 1938 — real, common, unpainted pine, which my brother-in-law, who has long since passed away, helped put up. And we had, if you'll remember — I don't know how far you remember the Pickwick — a table right in the center of the entrance in the foyer. And that bothered Paul Lamport, bothered him no end. [*He is back in now.--L.E.]

GARDNER

Why?

EPSTEIN

"It ruins Hollywood Boulevard. We're trying to make Hollywood Boulevard a beautiful street again" — and so forth. I used to tell him, "Paul, if I wanted a location on Fifth Avenue, I would go on Fifth Avenue, and I'd run a store like a Fifth Avenue store. Or in Beverly Hills on Wilshire Boulevard. But I don't want that kind of a store. I wouldn't know how to run that kind of a store. This is the kind of a store I want, and that table has stopped more people and brought me more customers than anything else I know of. " Because once a person stops and starts looking at that table, he may not find something today. . . They were bargain books--you know, forty-nine cents, sometimes ninety-five cents, sometimes three for a dollar, two for a dollar, whatever--but that was the stopping point. That was the first entrance to the Pickwick to thousands and thousands of people. That's how they first became acquainted: they were walking by and saw a table of books, and something about them urged them to stop. And once they started looking there, the next step was much easier. The doors were wide open; they could see all these books inside, And a certain

percentage of them would walk in. And once they got in, there was a whole world of books for them to look at. And that's the way we established an open, inviting front. It was not elegant. Elegance was never part of my policy of bookselling. (I dislike elegant stores of any kind. I wouldn't walk into a boutique. If I walk by Beverly Hills and I see the most beautiful pants in men's clothing shops, I would never go in there. Never. If it was an art gallery, yes. But I don't believe in fancy clothes per se. I was never a clotheshorse. My older brother, he loves fine clothes, and he knows how to wear them. I wouldn't know how to wear them. [laughter] I would get the colors mixed.) Anyway, to get back to merchandising of books, there's no question that if I have helped some competitors, it didn't hurt me at any time; and if it redounded to their benefit, then it helped me. I believe having healthy competitors is better than having unhealthy ones. I think it's healthier for the book business as a whole. Even some of the things that we did helped our competitors--not because we went out of our way to help them. As I told you, my son Aaron, when he came into the business after serving his apprenticeship, learning all about it, he was eager for promotions. And he developed ideas, and a great measure of the success of the Pickwick is due to his ideas — the expansion of the Pickwick and their advertising policies. A lot of people don't give Aaron the credit for that. I do. When we started cooperative advertising — do you know what I mean by cooperative advertising?

GARDNER

Well, describe it for the tape.

EPSTEIN

Most publishers have an advertising policy where if you run an ad on a specific book for them — and they choose which books that policy applies to--they will pay part of the cost of the ad. Well, the better results you get for them, the greater proportion of the ad they will pay for. And this came about by constant infighting between publisher and Pickwick. We have changed a lot of the publishers' policies for the nation pertaining to cooperative advertising--to the advantage of the publishers and to the advantage of the booksellers. We felt--and we told the publisher this--if we run an ad, we have our name under it, and we have a coupon under it. That ad appears in the Los Angeles Times.

The Times covers all of Southern California. If a Vroman customer in Pasadena sees that ad, he's not going to call Pickwick. Any bookbuyer knows that if one store has a book, the other store has the book. There is no exclusive policy on books. The publisher wouldn't be allowed to, and I think it would be very foolish if he were allowed to and adopted such a policy, and it would be hurtful to the author. So we told them that if we run an ad, that ad will pull for Vroman's. And if a customer lives in Westwood and he's been Bob Campbell's customer for all the years, he's not going to call Louis Epstein at the Pickwick and say, "Send me this book." He's not my customer. He'll go first to Campbell. And I'm sure Campbell will have it if it's a best-seller. "True?" I mean, they all agreed to that. "Well, why don't you give us the ad and not charge only us for what we buy." (The amount of money was based on a proportion of the books you buy.) "You should think of it as based on the number of books this ad will sell in Southern California because we run it. We provide the work; we provide the layout; we can make the contracts with the newspaper; we give you the local rate. Think of it that way: that we are performing a service for you which not only benefits the Pickwick but every store in the area. " And we proved it to them time and time again. I'll give you one example, a shining example. I'm trying to think of the house we ran the ad for. I'll think of it in a minute. Well, this house--and the salesman is Ron Smith, their local representative. And Ron agreed with me. So I said to Ron, "Look, why don't you get your publisher to try this once." (Arco. Arco Publishers. They made a tremendous amount of money during the war with an army manual for the person getting army tests, practice for the army tests or whatever it was. They'd been a very struggling, poor house, and that came along, and they had that book just at the right time, and they made a tremendous amount of money out of it--which is all right, because they're nice people.) So I said, "Look. Here is the telephone. Call [Milton] Gladstone"--I knew him — "and we'll have a discussion here. If you don't mind," I said. "I don't want to go over your head." (That's something else that we never did, and we gained the salesman's respect for it. We never went over a salesman's head. If we had a problem, we took it to the salesman, and the salesman settled it for us. If we couldn't agree, we'd ask his permission to call New York, because I never wanted to jeopardize a salesman's standing. I respected them, and they learned to respect me because of that.) Anyway, to come back to Arco . So we talked with Gladstone. I said, "Ron is here, and we have a basic idea. And Ron thinks that it'll work. I don't want to put Ron on the

spot. I'll take the responsibility. If the ad doesn't work out the way we think it will, I will give you back half of the money that you paid for the ad. If you don't sell enough books in Southern California--enough extra copies of what you normally would sell — due to this ad, I will pay for half of the cost of the ad. What I'm asking you is, gamble with me. You take a 50 percent shot, and I'll take a 50 percent shot." So he said, "Well, Louis, look, you're a nice guy. You pay your bills" — and it's extremely important that this is the reputation I established. Not being "nice" in that I'm a backslapper, which I'm not-- I'll criticize the hell out of them--but we did pay our bills on time, and we were very honest with our publishers at all times. And they knew that. And that was what he was referring to. Because I quarreled with them all the time but never to the extent that we were insulting each other. I mean, if I quarreled with a publisher, we left with a handshake. It was a matter of arguing policy. At any rate, we ran the ad; it ran on a Sunday. Ron Smith called me up Monday noon. He said, "You know, I've been having calls at my house from every bookseller in Southern California:'Where can I get these books?'" People who had never stocked the Arco books. He said, "People are calling all the stores and asking. And the wholesaler, Raymar, has sold out completely. And he just phoned in another order." It was a smashing success. And Ron Smith was very happy over it because he had something to do with it. Gladstone was extremely happy. He'd run an ad with us every year, sometimes two or three times a year--the same new policy--and everyone was a successful run. Now that again proves a point. If you have a useful book or useful line of books — most of the Arco books were how-to-books — you can sell them to people in large quantities if you let them know that they exist. The fact that they're in the library, the fact that we had them in the Pickwick Bookshop, doesn't mean anything. So few people out of all the people that exist in the United States, so few people visit bookstores regularly. I would say that no more than 3 percent visit a bookstore once a year, considering the population.

GARDNER

Is that so?

EPSTEIN

Maybe I'm wrong. Maybe it's five. Suppose it is five.

GARDNER

That's still remarkably low.

EPSTEIN

Still remarkably low, for various reasons: number one, some areas don't have any bookstores; and number two, they're located, maybe, in places where people never see them, or they don't advertise, they don't publicize. Let's face it, a lot of people are not accustomed to reading until they need something to fill a want. Now, this man had books that filled certain wants: how to take a civil service examination, or how to apply for a job. Well, gee, people never knew those books existed. Follow your policy, show a lot of books to a lot of people, and you're going to sell a lot of books. And you know, publisher by publisher, where we used to have to tear ourselves apart, sometimes, trying to get an ad, they learned that we could run ads for them, we could publicize for them, and if our ad ran, if that book was going to sell, it sold all over--not only at the Pickwick stores but at every store. It got to the point where the publisher would call us: "Would you please run an ad for us?" We turned down some books, not because we didn't want to run the ad per se because the book was bad. The book wasn't salable enough to warrant putting \$1,800 in the Times, or \$1,200, whatever, \$900, whatever the size of the ad. And we pursued that policy honestly. If we didn't think the ad would sell enough books to pay for itself, we would try to talk them out of it. Well, a good many publishers want to satisfy a local author, so they'd say, "Well, you run it anyway. We're not worried about that. This is an exception." And that's the way we put a lot of books in front of a lot of people. Our competitors at first resented the fact that we ran the ads and got the coupons. They blamed the publishers for favoring us. But later they got so that they appreciated us running the ad, because every time we ran an ad, the sales of that book would go up at Hunter's, at Martindale's. Sometimes we'd run out and we'd buy our books from them, or vice versa. This was a great deal of Aaron's doing.

GARDNER

Well, now that's a generally accepted practice, isn't it?

EPSTEIN

Yes, it is, but it was a hell of a fight. It's still not an accepted practice in a lot of other parts of the country. The publishers don't feel that there's the market

that there is in Southern California. You know, we have in Southern California perhaps the best book market in the country, person for person. There are more books sold in the New York area, but a lot of it in the wholesale trade, from which it goes to other areas. But without question we are the second-best market--far superior to Boston, far superior to San Francisco. Number one, we're larger now, our area, than San Francisco. San Francisco used to be the book place. I mean, they thought they were the thing — like everything else about San Francisco. I love San Francisco, but their attitude towards Los Angeles is well known. They are the culture of the West, the Athens of the West. [laughter] So when you talk about me helping other dealers, if I were doing it over again, I would do exactly the same thing. I think a trade needs a nice relationship, especially a trade like the book business. Oh, little snide things happen, of course. I never tried to steal a customer from another bookseller. If I could provide one of his customers with better service and the customer proved it for himself, great. I'm not conscience-stricken. But I would never cold call up a customer — I heard that so-and-so is a customer — and say, "Why don't you buy books from me?" I never did that. Number one, I'm not that forward in a personal way, and number two, I think it's unethical. If a person finds our store, likes it, and decides to shop with us, great.

GARDNER

You mentioned that these things do happen, though. Are there any instances?

EPSTEIN

Yes, there have been instances where underground a person would find out that so-and-so's a good customer of the Pickwick; they would make special efforts to get his business. They would cut the price. A very, very, very prominent art man used to buy a lot of art books from us. All of a sudden. . . .

GARDNER

Don't want to mention names?

EPSTEIN

Well, he's still living. [laughter] Well, why not? I mean, maybe it wasn't his fault at all. It was [Norton] Simon. He used to buy a lot of art books from us; [Lloyd] Harkema used to wait on him. All of a sudden his secretary called up

and said, "You're going to have to give us a discount." Well, we had a strict policy--no discounts. "Why?" "Well," she says, "Mr. Simon found out"-- or I don't know what she said — "that so-and-so would give us a discount. "

GARDNER

Who is "so-and-so"?

EPSTEIN

Mel Royer. Well, we stuck to our policy, and we lost him. Oh, occasionally, he'd give us an order. I hated to lose the account. It ran a few hundred dollars every month, and that's a hell of a good book customer. When you consider the average book buyer, even our charge account customer, might average twenty-five dollars a year or thirty dollars a year, when you lose someone who's buying several hundred dollars a month, that's losing a good customer. But I had to do it, because once you give a discount, it becomes no secret. Everybody and his brother would want one--and rightfully. Why not? So we lost him, but thank God we prospered without him. He did, too. Whether it was the secretary's doing or not--in all justice to Mr. Simon, it came through his secretary. Now, whether he directed her to do that, I have no idea.

GARDNER

I had one other question about Argonaut that's a very short question; then we can go on to something else. How did you come up with the name? You'd been burned with Acadia, and you'd switched to your own personal name.

EPSTEIN

Well, the Acadia name was a total disaster, because I think I mentioned somewhere that Acadia was so close to the Acacia, and everybody in the Masonic order — I didn't know that at the time — it had something to do with Acacia. I still don't know what it is, but everybody started calling it Acacia. I don't know if it was Sam's idea or Ben's idea. I think it might have been Sam's idea. It wasn't Ben's, for sure; it must have been Sam's idea. It's a journey; it's a seeking out. It was a good name. There are several Argonaut bookstores over the country.

GARDNER

On Ben, Aaron mentioned when I talked to him that one of Ben's favorite pastimes in the late forties and so on was stumping the people on Information, Please, the old radio show. Can you tell something about that, about his intellectual pastimes and so on?

EPSTEIN

Yes. Ben has an extremely keen mind. We call him the scholar in the family. I made up a joke one time, and I used to tell it in Yiddish. If ever anybody listens to this tape and understands Yiddish, I'll say it in Yiddish first. "Drei Epstein Brieder. Einer's a shoener, einer's a kluger, and einer's a teuber." "There are three Epstein brothers. One is a handsome guy, one is a brilliant guy, and the third is a somewhat deaf guy." [laughter] And I always made that crack. I referred to Ben as the-- he had a brilliant mind. Whatever the reason, he didn't discipline himself. He was not that self-disciplined. It may have been because of--there you go back to origins and backgrounds. There was, I think, nobody forceful enough to discipline him and guide him. It happened to all of us. Father was gone for five and a half years, and the mother was busy. The same thing's happening everywhere. Why we didn't come out to be a group of murderers, I don't know, because we have all the backgrounds from which they say criminals come. Our home wasn't broken, by any means. There was a lot of love but not a great deal of attention. And, frankly, how do you direct a person, a twelve-and-a-half year-old — let's see, Ben was fourteen and a half years old, or thirteen years old, when he [Father] came to this country. Or thirteen, I think. Well, you haven't seen him for five years. You don't really know what he is. In the meantime, you yourself — I'm speaking of my father — are so busy struggling to bring in the bread, food, and clothing that you really didn't have time. I don't criticize my father at all for lack of attention. Whenever he could, he gave us attention. But the man had no time to give us attention. I think in many ways I have some of his characteristics as far as drive to produce things. My older sister said that I'm a great deal like my father in that respect. Once he got on the trail of something, if he was doing something, he'd stay till he finished it, no matter if it took till two o'clock at night. If he was started on the course, he would almost disregard anything else. I suppose you can carry that on to a fault. I did in many, many instances, I know, and I'm sure that he did. But I was supposed to have been more educated than he and more worldly than he. Of course, he probably was more worldly than I,

because he went through the school of hard knocks, a much harder one than I did. You know, leaving Russia with nothing and trying to make his way from one place to another with nothing, and getting to this country when times were bad. How he ever got to San Francisco in 1906 I still don't know, but he was there at the time of the earthquake. So that is it. Getting back to Ben, there wasn't that direction that perhaps nowadays--like sitting down and talking to Aaron and Eugene. Eugene wanted to be an astronomer; okay, we sat down, we talked about it, he knew what he was going into. Once he made up his mind, we gave him every encouragement. He had the ability to study for it, he had the drive to work at it, and he's an astronomer. Aaron didn't want to go any further than his bachelor's. We sat and we talked about it. I told both boys, "Look. As long as you're interested in studying, real serious studying, I will support you as far as you want to go, as long as I'm able to." Fortunately, I was able to. If Aaron wanted to go for a doctorate in any field, I would certainly have supported him gladly, because I respect education per se and I respected him doing what he wants to do. I said, "I would like to have you in the business"--I said that to both — "but I don't want you to feel that you're obligated to go into the business." Eugene's mind was much more definite in what he wanted to do. Aaron wanted to go into business in some way. So he did. The business turned out pretty good. But we didn't have that. We didn't have time to sit around the table to talk. They didn't have the understanding of those things. Unfortunately, we didn't have the friends who could guide us. So we practically grew. There must have been something basically good about us, that we didn't get into trouble or troublesome occupations--which I had an opportunity to get into before I went to college. If you remember, when I was sixteen, that was 1918, the Prohibition era. Many times I was offered a fine to deliver — I was driving the family car when I could get it, when there was no problem — a case of something somewhere. It was very tempting. Five dollars was one hell of a lot of dough. And a lot of my friends, the boys I went to school with and the boys in my neighborhood, half of them went into the rackets. I could name you names, which I won't.

GARDNER

No. [laughter] No, those you can leave out of the oral history.

EPSTEIN

They're well written up already, so I don't have to publicize them. [laughter] One of them was actually murdered because he got out of line. And that was the first step: you were an errand boy. Fortunately, I got out of that atmosphere and went away to Columbus to school. I don't know what would have happened if I had stayed. It was that touch and go. And the boys that went off to college all came out very nicely. A lot of them that didn't go to college came out very, very badly. Some of them spent a great deal of time in the penitentiary, and some of them actually were leaders of gangs who escaped. Their names are well known. There's as much gangsterism in Cleveland- in Cleveland, unlike in New York, maybe, it was a Jewish group that held the reins. In New York and in Chicago I suppose it was an Italian group.

1.11. TAPE NUMBER: V, Side Two (June 11, 1974)

GARDNER

Now that we've covered Argonaut and brought your brother Ben into the drama, I think next we'll get back to the list and start analyzing some more bookstores.

EPSTEIN

We covered to a degree--you'll never cover completely Stanley Rose, but we covered it to a degree. A lot of these I mention only for the purpose of going on record that they existed. It's by no means all-inclusive, but at least they were the principal ones in existence at that time . There was a small shop on West Sixth Street called Woodruff Bookstore. It didn't last long under Woodruff. It later was bought out by a downeaster from Maine by the name of Jenkins. He used to love to tell stories about lobster fishing, and how they used to have plates of cold lobster available at all times, and that they used to call it lobscouse. Now, don't ask me where the name originated; that's what he told me. It sounded very interesting at the time, and I'm sure it was. Later it became the Abbey Bookstore. And the Abbey Bookstore had a continuous life under several owners. Mr. Holmes bought it. I think he bought it from Jenkins, or he may have bought it from Woodruff. Then he had a nephew by the name of Bunster Creeley; he's an ex-prizefighter. He ran it for quite a while for Mr. Holmes, and then he bought it from Mr. Holmes. He ran it for quite a number of years. Then he sold it to a firm that was Karl Zamboni and Phil Brown. Now,

Phil Brown was the husband of Helen Brown. Helen Brown later became quite famous as an author of cookbooks. After a while Zamboni and Brown sold it out to a chap by the name of Gideon Berman. And he ran it for quite a few years and he sold it to somebody else, a chap by the name of Weiss. Mr. Holmes's nephew was Bunster Greeley. He was a very pugnacious sort of a guy, but not a bad egg. He almost always figuratively had his fists up, like the fighter that he had been. He was very proud of the fact. One leg was shorter than the other, and that made him even more proud. He had probably reached the rank of a preliminary fighter, professional fighter. He's now living somewhere down around Costa Mesa, in that area. Later it went the way of most bookstores, and the last chap, name of Weiss, I think, moved. Moved it, and then he went out of business, and that was the end of that, although the name, I think, is still going on. Gideon Berman is using that name now in the mail-order business. Then there was The Bookseller at 821 1/2 South Hope Street, run by a curious chap by the name of White, I remember. No, originally it was run by Paul Kuttner. Paul Kuttner came down from San Francisco. He worked for Dawson's for a year or so, and then he started his own shop, later on sold it to White. Now, Paul Kuttner's brother, by the name of Henry, achieved a little bit of fame as a science fiction writer. But unfortunately, before he reached his full commitment, he died. He was a very nice boy. It was sort of a curious family. Then in 1932, Arthur H. Clark moved to 1214 South Brand in Glendale, where they still are. He is a well-known dealer in Americana--not necessarily fine in printing, but exceptionally good books. He would either print originals, manuscripts, or reprints of some rare books that had gone out of print which were essential to the Western Americana field. He has an excellent reputation. The thing's run now by his son. And they still issue catalogs. I think you saw some on my table here, Clark catalogs. They're very authoritative. They do a nationwide business. They'd been in Cleveland, I don't know how many years, at least twenty years before they moved to the Los Angeles area in 1932. I see some of their publications from time to time. Then there was a store called the House of Whites. It was run by a Miss White who at one time worked for Dawson's, and she decided to go into business for herself. I don't know who furnished the money. I'm sure somebody else did. I forget her first name. Miss White I don't think ever had any money. They were dealing in rare books and manuscripts. They were having a hard time at that at that time, but it didn't last very long. In Beverly Hills, there was a store called

the Penguin Bookshop, 9675 Wilshire. It was owned by Louis Samuels, who had been an agent for one of the movie people and later decided he wanted a bookshop. He had a very fancy, small shop, but it didn't last too long. Louis Samuels is now an appraiser. He works with some large appraising company. At that time--we're still in 1932--there was a firm called Wheeler Publishing Company, run by the son of the original Mr. Wheeler. Their business was selling what we call subscription sets. Now, I don't know if you know what that term means. [tape stopped] Now, subscription sets were sets of books that never were sold through bookstores. There were several publishers at that time publishing them. There were some very expensive ones published by Scribner and Houghton-Mifflin. They would take an author and publish his complete works. They would publish on fine paper, sometimes autographed if the author was still alive; or if he wasn't, they would use a page of manuscript in an author's hand or whatever to make the set more attractive. They would come in either cloth bindings or fancy leather bindings. (You don't see those anymore, because fancy leather bindings are very hard to get. The art of leather binding has almost disappeared for lack of artisans. It's a trade that took time to learn. You had to serve an apprenticeship and like all things that require apprenticeship, it disappeared.) But they went under during the Depression. I know when they sold out; I bought a lot of their sets from them. Not a lot — maybe several hundred dollars' worth, which was all I could afford at the time. It was a totally different type of bookselling than what we're accustomed to. It was house to house or office to office. They would call on successful businessmen and convince them that their library should have books. It was a lucrative business for a great many years. Just a quick look-back to Long Beach. Long Beach at that time — no, I'm getting ahead of myself. Let's skip that for the moment. This pertains to the original Long Beach of Louis Epstein. Now, if you want to hear about it now, or when I come back to it?

GARDNER

The original Long Beach?

EPSTEIN

Some facts about Long Beach which I uncovered.

GARDNER

Go ahead. Let's go through that.

EPSTEIN

All right. What stores were in existence about the time that I was there.

GARDNER

In 1924.

EPSTEIN

The main bookstore there at the time I started there was called Hewitt's Bookstore, and they had books and stationery. It was not a great bookstore by any means--probably all that Long Beach could support--and they were not too aggressive, which may be the reason why. Later they were sold to people by the name of Brown, who had made a lot of money in Alaska, mining. But they weren't successful, either, for one reason and another, and the store later went out of business. The chap that bought me out in 1925 was A.B. Castle. The address at the time--which I didn't have when you first talked to me--of my first Long Beach venture was 603 Pine Avenue, for the record. Later I visited Long Beach during the interim when I was out of business, and there was a woman by the name of [Marie L.] Bass. She called it Ye Olde Book Shoppe, at 140 East Third Street. She had secondhand books. She didn't know too much. None of us in Long Beach knew anything, so I guess you can't criticize her. Incidentally, I have a book on my shelf today which--when I went back to browse through her shop in the interim after I'd learned a little thing about books in Los Angeles--I picked up from her for about thirty-five cents which is now worth several hundred dollars. And I have the book; I'll tell you the name of it. Just one second. [tape stopped] I still have it, and it's called Frontier and Indian Life by Taylor. It has the inscription of the author, Joseph H. Taylor: "Joseph H. Taylor's compliments to his early school chum"--or something. James Patterson Gibson was the man's name. An unautographed copy brought \$300 at the Streeter sale not too long ago in New York. It's a very rare book. It was printed in Pottstown, Pennsylvania, in 1889. And there weren't too many books printed in Pottstown in those days. But it's very authentic and highly regarded biographical sketches of his early days on the upper Missouri and the Great Plains. You hardly ever see it in

catalogs anymore. It's a very fine copy. All book people like to boast about their finds.

GARDNER

Okay, you can go ahead while I look through it.

EPSTEIN

I think I gave you the wrong address. It was 619 Pine Avenue where my first bookshop was. My records of 1932: as I mentioned, Abbey Bookshop was bought out by Phil Brown and Karl Zamboni. I think Bob Campbell opened on LeConte in Westwood in that year. There was another bookshop in Beverly Hills on Wilshire Boulevard called the Hall of Fame Bookshop. I know the shop, but I forget the people who ran it. I think a person by the name of Fillmore Phipps, if I'm not mistaken, was connected with it. He later went into some business connected with the motion picture business--not in acting, but in production. That's the year Dick and Bill Martindale, brothers of Walter, opened a bookstore at 5310 1/2 Wilshire Boulevard, old books, and then they went into new books and magazines. There was a place called the Old Bookshop on 206 South Broadway. The Satyr Bookshop at one time had a store on Wilshire Boulevard, but they closed that up, and the only store they had left in 1932 was on Vine Street. In 1932 Jones' Bookshop finally closed. It had been in the process of going down, down, down from the time I first opened in Los Angeles. All these years they kept the name going, but they finally ran a sale and closed out. Sammy Reiser opened the Argonaut in 1933. Yes. The Hollywood Bookstore at that time was at 6716 1/2. They had a Catholic bookstore called C.F. Horan, at 120 West Second Street. (And of course there's the big church on Second and Main — what is it, St. Vivian's? St. Vivian's, I think it's called.) [St. Vibiana's] There was another store, the Open Bookshop at 8834 1/2 Sunset, which didn't last too long. There was a firm called Barbierri and Price which had a short run.

GARDNER

It seems that there was quite a turnover at this point, wasn't there?

EPSTEIN

Book businesses always had quite a turnover because people would start in without knowledge and without capital. They were visionaries, and they thought all they had to do was start in. They didn't want to start in with the type of bookstore that their capital could carry, start in carrying little things. They wanted to start in the rare-book business. That was the case of Barbierri and Price. They might have had a few wealthy friends who might have added a few thousand dollars apiece into it until they found out that they couldn't carry on that type of business with just a little bit of money and not too much experience and not enough willingness to put out a great deal of physical elbow grease. A number of these went that way. Miller's was already established [in 1933] at 6740 Hollywood Boulevard. Now it's turned into a stationery store opposite the Pickwick. The old man [Jesse Ray] Miller was quite a character. He had a store near USC. And when use started expanding, they wanted his property, and he wouldn't sell it to them. And this went on for years and years, and USC owned all the property around him. But he was an individualistic character, and as long as he didn't want to sell it, any amount of money they offered him didn't make any difference because he didn't need money. He had made a lot of money in the college textbook business near USC. In those days, college textbook people made a lot of money. I don't know how they finally worked it out, but they built a building for him on Hollywood Boulevard, in which the Miller Stationery Store is now, a two-and-a-half-story building. And they finally got him to move out. He ran the business just exactly the way he wanted, didn't care what anybody else did, what his competition did, what times were, whatever. And he maintained a room up in the second story of the building--where he lived. He had been married at one time and I suppose because of his oddness his marriage apparently didn't do too well, so he was batching it up in the second-story room. And one of the stories is--this is actually true, because he repeated it to me--he heard someone trying to break in downstairs at the back; so he looked out from a window from the second story and saw these people, and he started throwing canned goods at them. [laughter] He scared them away that way. Another very interesting story about him is that one Christmastime--in later years, after we'd been fairly well established on Hollywood Boulevard — there were so many people coming in to buy things (he had books and stationery and greeting cards and whatnot) that he became unhappy. There were just too many people in the store. So in the middle of the afternoon he just told everybody to get out, and

he shut up for the day. And he didn't open till after Christmas. He didn't want to be bothered with so many people. And all the people would come into the Pickwick and say, "What's the matter with Miller's? They're closed today." This was during the height of the Christmas season. But he was that independent of things going on. He later died, and his brother [Paul Burt Miller] inherited the property and the business. And he tried to run it for a while. In his own way, he was almost as eccentric as his brother. Of course, the business was not at all to his liking. He was a rancher. So he finally gave it [in 1951] to Ron Maxton, a nephew, who presently owns it--building, business, and all, which is a nice way to get started. [laughter] A girl by the name of Tone Price got into the book business with Barbierrri and Price. She was a very interesting character in the sense that she was, again, an odd personality. She started losing her mind. She was one of the first people I knew who had a lobotomy. It helped her for a while, but then she regressed. Of course, she had to give up the business in a number of years, and she finally died. As long as her mind was good, she was a good bookwoman — not a businesswoman, but a good bookwoman. She knew her books. In 1935 there was a place which started out, the A-1 Bookshop, at 711 West Sixth Street. It was owned by Manny Borden. Manny Borden married a daughter of Morris Markowitz of the New York Bookstore, which opened up some time in '34, I believe. There's a story there that should be told. Morris Markowitz was a very interesting character. He started a little junky bookshop in the Bowery, in New York, and apparently did quite well. He used to handle old magazines and remainders and any kind of cheap books and so forth. And apparently he did quite well because he moved his whole family out here--his son and a daughter and, of course, his wife--and they opened a store, the New York Bookstore, originally on South Main Street. Then they moved to West Sixth Street later on. And he brought a lot of his New York ideas of how to run a bookstore. It was a junky shop with every kind of thing imaginable in it. He was the first man I knew that really dealt any way knowledgeably with remainders. Remainders at that time weren't the things that they are now. He had a daughter, Sarah, and a son, David. David got a doctorate from UCLA in Romance languages. But instead of pursuing a profession in teaching or whatever--with a doctorate in languages, probably the only thing it could lead to is teaching or writing--he stayed in the old-book business. And he opened a shop of his own later. He was a peculiar character with a very funny voice. He knew his books thoroughly, but he was a

very messy bookman. He wasn't messy about his person, but he would buy everything and just dump it in the cellar. He had a lot of valuable things. But unfortunately, he died of cancer at a very early age. He was a very nice boy, but he had a lot of peculiarities. It was unfortunate that he died, because I think eventually he might have turned out to be a good bookman. A very fine mind, but undisciplined in the ways of business. The old gentleman, Mr. Morris Markowitz, died before his son died. But to come back to Manny Borden and Sarah. He opened his own shop, as I said, and he later became acquainted — it might be by arrangement or whatever--and married Sarah Borden. They gave up their retail store, and they went into the publishing business and made quite a success of it. I talk to him quite often. They have a very talented daughter and several grandchildren. The daughter is a dancer and a dance teacher. She is pursuing that career in addition to raising a family.

GARDNER

Their company's in Alhambra, isn't it?

EPSTEIN

Yes, it's in Alhambra. It used to be on Wabash Avenue in City Terrace. I'm telling you these things as I run through them and, if anything, try to point up the characteristics of some of them. The Manny Borden and Sarah Markowitz story is very interesting. They had a lot of the New York ways of doing business. I used to buy things from them from time to time. There was a little bit of jealousy there, because every time I would buy a book for two dollars or one dollar, whatever it is — books were very cheap in those days--they would accuse me of, "Well, you're going to sell it for five dollars." They thought I was a miracle worker, which of course wasn't true. In one instance I did buy a county history from them. At that time, the Los Angeles library was building up a good genealogical department, and any county history that they didn't have, they would buy. And I saw a county history at the Markowitz store, and I bought it on speculation, I thought, for about two, two and a half dollars. Well, I sold it to the public library, and I delivered it to the order department, acquisitions department. And there it was on their table or wherever I left it for them, and Sarah Markowitz came about some business there-- we all used to sell to the library — and she saw that book there, "Five dollars." Well, I got a phone call. Was I berated! "You knew all the time. Why didn't you tell us to

sell it?" "Look, Sarah, I'm in business for myself. You made your profit and I made my profit." "Yes, but you made two and a half dollars and we made maybe a dollar." For years she wouldn't talk to me, but we're very good friends now.

GARDNER

You mentioned the New York-style bookseller. What do you mean by that?

EPSTEIN

Well, by "New York-style bookseller," I meant — I should have said maybe Bowery-type New York bookseller, which of course are different from Scribner's and Brentano's in New York. They have had them here, too. They don't run a clean shop; they don't treat their customers with respect-- because in the Bowery, they looked upon anyone who walked in with suspicion because they were used to Bowery characters who would steal. And they would assume that all people were alike, which of course wasn't so. Not that people in Los Angeles were more honest, but that's a feeling you got. They treated you with not too much respect. In other words — let's put it this way--they were very crude in their manners. But they learned, and they mellowed out. Then there was also the College Book Company on 721 West Sixth Street. West Sixth Street had maybe a dozen different bookstores there — from Holmes near Figueroa Street to the last secondhand one on Sixth Street till you got to Spring Street. The last one was, I think, Rogers' Bookstore. I don't know how I passed up Rogers, because he was — I didn't mention Rogers.

GARDNER

Oh, I think so. Didn't you?

EPSTEIN

Yes, I must have mentioned Rogers earlier, yes. Rogers' Bookstore. Rogers' was between Grand and Hope, opposite where I was. Dawson's, of course, was, as I mentioned, already on Grand Avenue. Then you had to skip all the way to Spring Street before you found the other second- hand bookstores. I mentioned the College Book Company, which is run by David Lawyer. He also had a store in Pasadena. And he would deal a great deal in textbooks. He was

a very difficult character in many ways. There are probably stories I could tell about him, but I could go on for the next twenty years. We don't have that much time.

GARDNER

How about just one, as a sampler?

EPSTEIN

Well, again, you see, I used to buy many books from other book dealers. I used to make it my habit, say, once a month to go to Pasadena, once a month or once a week run down through the stores on Sixth Street. If they had something, we'd buy it from them and so forth. Well, again he took me to task one time for buying books from him for two dollars and selling them for five or six. And I said, "Would it make any difference to you if Joe Jones came in here and paid you two dollars for this book and took it home, and I paid you two dollars for this book and found a customer for it for three dollars and made a dollar? What the hell difference is it to you?" But he could never see that. He was very jealous. And he passed a rumor around--we had a meeting at our house. He wasn't even at that meeting. We were living at 1914 North Curson. There was a meeting for some reason or other of used booksellers. The group was forming, and one of the meetings was at my house. And somebody must have told him, "Louis Epstein lives in a mansion on North Curson." He probably lived in, maybe, a small flat. And he said, "Well, you live in a great big mansion. Why don't you tell me where I can sell that book" — which was totally insignificant. For that reason he became angry with me. He had an employee working for him who came to me asking for a job. The chap's name was H. Richard Archer. Now, Dick Archer is now a librarian, a famous librarian. I'm trying to think what library. [Williams College] He's pretty well known. Richard Archer came to me asking for a job. He was working for David Lawyer. David Lawyer didn't make any friends. And they became personal friends, and for one reason or another they had a separation of friendship. So Dick came to me one day asking for a job, and I said, "Okay, I can give you part-time work" — he was still going to school--"for a few weeks, and hoping maybe that business will get better, and maybe give you full time, or if you make up catalogs for me." He was an extremely active person, and he had a great love for books, and he had a bibliographical sense--which pushed him into the

library field. So before he came to work for me, he brought me a long questionnaire. Instead of me giving him a questionnaire asking for references, everything about him, he brought one about me--the hours, the pay, the overtime, vacations, exactly what his work was to be. And so I said, "What are you asking me all these questions for? You know what you have to do in a bookstore. For me, if you come in the morning, you have to help sweep the store, you have to answer the phone, books come in, you have to help me take them out of the car." He said, "I don't mean all that. I know all that." I said, "Well, why?" He said, "Well, if you had ever worked for David Lawyer, you'd know why." Because he had him doing all kinds of menial things, even taking things to his home and helping him clean up his house. That's the kind of person he was — a character. He later moved to Montana, and if I'm not mistaken, he's still running a business out of some barn there, mostly in old fiction. He started specializing in that. That was a peculiar thing with Archer, the way he presented me with that. It was a most unusual thing. [laughter] There was another Catholic bookstore, run by John J. Bodkin on 206 South Main Street. Fowler Brothers in 1935 moved from South Broadway to West Sixth Street, at the address where they still are, 414.* And I remember Ward Fowler used to come into my place on Eighth Street. Ward Fowler was the second generation of Fowlers. He was at one time a sportswriter for the Times. Then the World War [I] came along, and he enlisted in the Lafayette Escadrille. He was one of the members of that. He had no special interest in the book business. And when they were on Broadway, they had a chap by the name of Charlie Hixon who used to run the place for him. There are a lot of stories told about him. The travelers who used to sell new books used to say that when you made a date with Charlie Hixon, you never saw him at his store. You had to call him or call on him at the store, and you had to make a date for dinner and the theater. And he used that to full advantage. He'd order the finest dinner with the finest wine and the finest drinks, go to the best theater, all at the expense of the publisher. He used to use them quite a bit. But apparently he was a good bookman. I knew him, but by the time I was getting started in new books he was on the way out--as a matter of fact, was out. The Fowler Brothers later let him go because I think they might have found something irregular in what he was doing in the shop. I wouldn't swear to that. So Ward Fowler used to come into my store on Eighth Street. He used to park his car west of me, so he used to walk by my door. They were

forced to give up their location on Broadway. Well, he was deathly afraid that would be the death of the Fowler Brothers, because they had been on Broadway for so many years and now they were moving to Sixth Street, which didn't have anywhere near the traffic' that Broadway had. But Broadway had changed its face. It had become a women's shopping area--for shoes, dresses, and whatnot. They were about a half a block from the May Company. But he was very fearful. And I tried to tell him, "Well, Broadway isn't what it was ten years ago, even in my experience." Cheaper stores were coming in. At any rate, it was quite a move to make, after being so long in one location. So they took that location on Sixth Street, and you know, about three or four months after they had opened, I stopped in the store on Sixth Street and I talked to Ward. I said, "How's it working?" And he said, "Louis, you have no idea how much better things are here. We get a different kind of person altogether." He said, "You get the professional man, the lawyer, the doctor, the businessman, the accountant, and whatnot." And he said, "They buy better books and more books." So they were happy with their change. [* They've recently moved to West Seventh Street. — L.E.]

GARDNER

Well, that's what you found in that area, too, didn't you?

EPSTEIN

Yes.

GARDNER

That sort of clientele.

EPSTEIN

Yes. While we were getting the young lawyers and the smaller businessman, very few of the real big businessmen would come to a secondhand bookstore. Occasionally, if it was a real book lover, they would go to Dawson's or come to us and pick up a lot of books. I really shouldn't say that, because we had a lot of professional men, doctors and lawyers, buying from us. And some of them were quite wealthy. One doctor in particular — he was a New Englander and he had that New England accent. He must have been a downeaster from Maine, because I think he spoke that nasal Maine talk that's supposed to be

common up there. I don't remember his name now. I could, with a little research, find out his name. (Lovejoy) But he taught me a lot. He taught me that the New England Yankee is the stiffest bargainer of any person I ever met in the world. The Greeks and the Jews and the Armenians can't stand up to him. But with all that, I liked him. He used to buy books about the sea, anything connected with the sea, especially pertaining to the New England coast: whaling, books about whaling and whalers and whaling ships and the artifacts that the whalers made--scrimshaw, books about scrimshaw. You know, there are so many different kinds of books that no one can fathom [it]. If you're interested in a subject, you can start collecting and spend your life collecting in any small area of a certain subject. Well, his was that subject. The way he made it was quite broad, but still within a certain framework--which is an art to do, and he did it well. And he told me that his library had already been willed to the Essex Institute, I think it's in Massachusetts, an institute pertaining to New England sailing in the early days, the whaling ships and people like that. But he was a customer I will never forget. Unlike the customer I mentioned to you in our other interview who really took advantage of me, this man, although he would bargain with me--in those days you had to bargain; you had to get that dollar somehow or other — if he thought that I was hungry, he would give me money. That wasn't the point. But the other man was just a mean man. This person was not a mean person, but he liked to get a New England bargain. So there was a difference between the two. We had doctors, dentists, and whatnot who used to come in. We had a crossroads of everybody.

GARDNER

What was his name?

EPSTEIN

I can't think of his name. If I would look in the phone book--I'm pretty sure he was a dermatologist. If I could find a phone book of that period.

GARDNER

We can get that later on.

EPSTEIN

I don't know anybody in the book business now who would remember his name. Maybe Jake might. How far was I? How did I get started? We were talking about Lawyer.

GARDNER

It was Fowler's, I guess.

EPSTEIN

Fowler's. We got to Fowler's, then we got to him. And then I used to buy a lot of books at Fowler's. You would be wondering why I say that I used to buy books Fowler's. They used to go through their stock each year and pull out the things that weren't selling, and they'd put them down in the basement of their Sixth Street store. Well, I was working with old books and getting library lists from time to time and would need books of that type. Or somebody would ask me for a book eight, ten, twelve years old. So they allowed me to go down to their basement and pick out what I want. We had a set price. I would pay him 20 percent of the original published price. In other words, if a book was \$2.50 originally, I would pay him fifty cents. Well, I found many, many books there over the years that libraries wanted; and if I'd find a \$2.50 book, I'd buy it for fifty cents and then sell it to the library for \$1.00, \$1.25. In those days you could work with that kind of margin; now you wouldn't cross the street to earn seventy-five cents. And of course I didn't do it book by book. I would buy fifteen, twenty, twenty-five books. And every once in a while I would find a book that had in a relatively short period of time become quite rare. Some book in which an author zoomed up — like some of the modern authors. Who's that poet from Big Sur?

GARDNER

Jeffers?

EPSTEIN

Robinson Jeffers. I found one or two early Jeffers books of poetry in first edition. Well, when they first put them on the shelf, nobody knew Jeffers. I found a copy of *The Californian* by him, a first edition. It was a review copy, with a review stamp on the title page, which made it all the better instead of worse. As a rule, it made it better because it definitely fixed it as an early

issue. I found a copy of the same book with the same thing at a store in Santa Barbara once--Osborne's. That was the fun, that I used to go like to look for things. I not only made an extra profit out of that, but it was fun discovering things. No store was out of my metier. I would always go — even any kind of junk store, if there was any chance of looking at a book, I would do so.

1.12. TAPE NUMBER: VI, Side One (June 11, 1974)

GARDNER

You were about to talk about Mr. Ruick.

EPSTEIN

Yes, in connection with Fowler Brothers. I'm glad I reminded myself of it, because somewhere I have a note about him but I don't know where it is at the moment. Virgil Ruick, spelled like Buick except with an "R." When anybody asked how to spell his name, that's how he expressed himself. Virgil was a buyer, one of the last buyers for the Fowlers. A very nice chap. He was a very good churchman. I think he belonged to the Presbyterian church on Wilshire Boulevard, on the south side of Wilshire Boulevard, just west of Vermont. I remember going to that church for his funeral. I think it was a Presbyterian church. Not being of the faith, it's hard for me to keep one separate from the other. He was an excellent bookman and a very nice person. Over the years we became acquainted with him, and as I went into the new-book business, he was one of the people we called when we were talking about the publication dates. He attended that meeting. And he was one of those who was complaining because others were breaking the date, and he was one of those who you had to convince that this whole thing was totally foolish, that it could be controlled by the publishers if they wanted to — but they didn't want to, for reasons that I explained, because they got their money six months earlier. [phone rings] So it was my task one time to invite Virgil to accept the presidency of the Southern California Booksellers Association. He was very reluctant to, and as a member of the board. . . . [tape stopped] Excuse me for the interruption. So I called to ask him to become president of the association. And he was very reluctant to become president. "Oh," he said, "Louis, I'm not big enough for the job," and all that. I said, "Virgil, you've been in the book business all these many years. You represent a

very fine name in the book community. You're very well liked by everybody. You must take the job. Number one, it's recognition that you should have; and number two, it's recognition for your firm. I mean, how are we going to honor anyone in the book business except his contemporaries choose him to be their leader? True, it's no great organization, but we do something, and we maintain a relationship. We sit down and talk out a problem, we settle arguments, and we have been effective in many ways." With all that reluctance, I finally got him to accept it. He made an excellent president. Excellent. He had a very good sense of humor. And he had another distinction: he was an exact replica of President Eisenhower. [laughter] His head was balding, and he wasn't quite as tall. But he was a good person. By "good," I mean regardless of how good a bookman. When I say "a good person," it has nothing to do with his success or nonsuccess in the business. But he was a thoughtful person and he had a regard for people. And as I say, he was a very good churchman, which I respect in a person who believes. I'm glad I thought to mention Virgil because no history of the book business, in relation to the book business, would be complete without him.

GARDNER

He finally accepted to be president.

EPSTEIN

Oh, yes. As I say, he accepted it and became a very good president. He was elected for a second term; we usually elected for a second term. And, you know, in later years he thanked me for pressing him. I had the same experience with Dave Jamison of Pasadena, of Vroman's. Vroman's, of course, belongs in here. They predated everybody here except Fowler's. That's a Pasadena history, but then, Vroman's had a lot of Los Angeles customers, [was] well known in the area, and later went into the wholesale book business. But that is a story that's been written up on several occasions. As a matter of fact, I ran across an item just the other day where they were opening a wholesale warehouse and they had some sort of a celebration. And Doubleday printed up an article by Larry Powell. And I have it right here; I'll show it to you. That was in that lot of books I picked up Saturday. [tape stopped] I had the same experience with David Jamison, who'd been a buyer for Vroman's for many, many years--an excellent bookman, an excellent

bookman. And he belonged to the association; Vroman's was represented. They would take a board membership, a board of directors membership. But they'd say, "Well, we don't have time"--this and that. I said, "Look, you've got just as much time as I have. I was president, and I gave a lot of time." And I too had to convince him that he could consider it almost a duty to himself and a duty to his firm to accept the recognition of his contemporaries. As far as I'm concerned, perhaps the most satisfactory thing outside maybe of making a good living out of it and making a sizable sum of dollars out of it, the next best thing I could think of — the others are practical, but as far as a personal thing — I consider the personal satisfaction of having been recognized by my contemporaries as a man they want to be their leader at some time or other. And I think a man who is in such a position owes it to take that kind of a job, instead of saying, "Well, I'm too busy." Everybody's busy in the book business. The book business is a very jealous mistress of time. True. For the record, there's the chap by the name of Kovach, Nick Kovach, who had a bookstore at 727 West Sixth Street some time in 1935. He later went into the periodicals business, out-of-print periodicals, and established a very good business. Recently he's been cutting down on his activities. He's a contemporary of mine, about my age, born in Hungary. He has a son who's become quite a geologist, a PhD in geology, and did a lot of work for the government in analyzing the stuff they brought back from the moon. He himself is a brilliant guy. Erratic in some ways but, nevertheless, a knowledgeable book person. That's the way I have to judge him, from what we're doing. As far as what we're doing, I have to judge them on the basis of how good bookmen they were. Moby Dick Bookshop started at 641 South Grand in September 1935. The story behind Moby Dick, as far as my relations are concerned--the name was adopted by Bill Shuman. Shuman, if you will remember, is the man who sold me my first bookstore in Long Beach. After he sold out to me, he played around with whatever number of things, and he got married to a woman who later became a disciple of Aimee Semple McPherson, and who took all his money away from him and gave it to Aimee. That was one of the things that bothered him. Bill Shuman opened a store after he sold out to me — a year, two, three years after, I forget the exact date — in San Diego, on Broadway and Eighth, I think. And there he built up a very nice business — not a rare-book business, because he didn't have the knowledge or the background to acquire the knowledge of becoming a rare-book man. And he wasn't in a

community where he could learn, because in those days in San Diego they didn't have the market, nor the people, nor the collectors that they had in Los Angeles whom he could learn from. Magazines, a few books, some books, he used to pick up, but he became the largest of the few secondhand booksellers in San Diego. I would say--to use the term--the "kingpin" of that particular type of business in San Diego. And I used to visit him from time to time. We'd drive down to San Diego, stay a couple days, and we used to visit the bookstores. And I would find a lot of good books in his store, and I would buy from him. We kept exchanging letters over a time; he used to write me. One day I received a letter from him saying that he had an opportunity to sell his store, and he would like to come to Los Angeles and open a store. He thought he could do very well here. He had built up a business in San Diego; he could just as easily build up a business in Los Angeles. The minute I read the letter, I thought he would be making a mistake if he did, because if he came back to Los Angeles, he would have all the other well-established, experienced book people to work against. He would not have the field to himself as he had in San Diego, where he was doing very well. Well, that very afternoon, a couple, a young couple — very young--came into my store, introduced themselves. Bill Wahrenbrock, or whatever, and his wife. He had graduated I think from Occidental or Pomona or whatever. And they wanted to go in the book business. And they said they were looking around; they found a place in San Diego. I said, "I know. You're talking about this shop," and I mentioned Bill Shuman's shop. They said, "Yes, how did you know?" "Well," I said, "this is a perfect coincidence. I have a letter, just received this morning, from Mr. Shuman, asking my advice, whether he should sell his shop. And I'm going to give you advice, and I'm going to write him advice. And this is what the advice is going to be: I will tell him he is a fool if he sells it, and I will tell you you would be a fool if you did not buy it." [laughter] And you know, they worked out a deal, and he sold it. And it was the most regrettable thing that he ever did. He tried to make off that he wasn't sorry later, and he did later move to Los Angeles and open the Moby Dick Bookshop, first on Grand Avenue; then within a year he had to move out. He had temporary leases because Wilshire Boulevard came through right there, if you remember. Wilshire didn't come through to Grand then. When they cut Wilshire through to Grand, a certain number of buildings had to come down. His was one of them. It was a small hotel building. Then he moved to West Seventh Street, and he was forced out

of that--West Seventh, east of Figueroa. Then he moved across Figueroa, where there had been an old Buick agency, Hoffman Buick. You wouldn't remember; that was before your time. He was in business there for quite some time. And he kept up a correspondence with Wahrenbrock, the man who bought him out, and Wahrenbrock kept telling him how well he was doing. And this poor man was doing very poorly. He was too proud to tell me, but I could recognize it. To this day, I can walk into a bookstore and almost sense whether they were prosperous or not prosperous and their whole attitude towards books and also their stock. Well, Shuman did not make the success he had hoped he would make in Los Angeles--which I had told him would be very difficult if he did come because there were a lot of very strong booksellers in the area at that time. Holmes, myself — it was my most active period in the used-book business. And Lofland and Russell and this, that, and the other — who were well known. People would think of selling a book, they would call Holmes or call Louis Epstein or call Dawson. So he didn't get the cream of everything that was offered like he did in San Diego, where he was probably the only one who even ran an ad. I watched him. He became more and more erratic. He later told me that [it was] because his wife insisted that he had to come to Los Angeles. There may be some truth to it, because there was a peculiar relationship between them. And, you know, he went off his rocker. And I think that was the main cause. He was getting letters how well [Wahrenbrock] was doing. He showed me the letters. And then he would write back, and I'm sure he didn't tell them he wasn't doing well. But he tried to keep up appearances that he was doing well. But one day his widow called me up and said, "Bill had to go to the hospital"; then she later told me why. But he didn't last very long after that. I didn't like her one bit, because she was a shrew in the sense that she forced him to do things that he wouldn't normally want to do. She used to take large sums of money-- for those days from that kind of a person--to take out of his capital, which he might have reinvested in his business and maybe have done better. He later told me how unhappy he was. So the combination of both, I imagine, drove him off his normal mind. I tell you that story because it's a bit of humanity pertaining to the book business. But the Wahrenbrocks prospered very, very well, and it wasn't till a few days ago that he sold out--at a very good price. And the store still exists under that name.

GARDNER

Is it still used books?

EPSTEIN

Yeah, but it's the funniest thing: that I had to tell one of them, "You would be a fool to sell," and the other one, "You would be a fool not to buy." I was honest with both of them. And I wrote Bill Shuman. I told him this couple was in. And I told him exactly what I told them. I said, "I told them that you would be a fool to sell, and I told them also that if they had the opportunity, if you insisted on selling, that they would be foolish not to buy the store." That's the beginning and the ending of poor Moby Dick. Nineteen thirty-five was the year that Stanley Rose moved to 6661 1/2 Hollywood Boulevard. Jake Zeitlin--I could spend as much time on Jake as I did heretofore on the whole interview. There are so many things one could talk about Jake. But I'm sure you will talk to Jake and undoubtedly get his [story]. I think Jake's archives have already been given to UCLA. But there was a relationship between myself and Jake. I told you about how he started. When he started, he needed my stock; and when I started, I wanted it back. [laughter]

GARDNER

You took it back, right.

EPSTEIN

But there was a relationship with myself and Jake which was quite close. We were friendly enough so that when he got into trouble, which he did from time to time. . . . And by "trouble," I don't mean evil things. He had an unfortunate marriage with his first wife and also with his second. I'm not telling you any secrets about Jake's life. I'm sure that anyone that knows Jake knows about it. He needed help many times. And he started with no capital, and the Depression came along. With all his problems, he had to have help from time to time. Well, he had moved from the Hope Street, then he moved to Sixth Street west of Hope, and finally he moved to Sixth Street at 614. No, 614 is west of Hope. Later he moved to five hundred and something, when he had a real fancy shop. But at each turn Jake was in with people--and I'm not blaming any people — he was, I think, doing things for which he was not financially prepared to do. He was ahead of his time in planning something for his financial status. So he always had to rely on someone else for capital--

which is a very dangerous thing. If one puts in capital, one wants a part of running the establishment. And Jake was a smart bookman; he never had anyone with him who knew the business as he did. And Jake is a brilliant person. The longer I know him, the more I realize how brilliant he is. And he's proven it by the pinnacle of success he's attained. Jake is getting up in years, and he's tiring a little bit; but his mind is extremely active, and he's still doing big things. He's doing bigger things now than he ever did in his life, which I'm very happy and very proud for him. But in those days he used to run into many problems where a fifty-dollar bill saved his life. And I'm not ashamed to say it, and I don't think Jake would be ashamed to hear me say it because we've talked about this many times, (Not that I want to broadcast this for all the world to see; if I published a book, I would never put it in a book. But as a portion of my life related to him, it was one of the things.) I helped him on a number of occasions, a number of very severe emergencies, and I'm not sure there were others that did the same thing. I'm not meaning to tell you that I'm the guy that saved his life. He had many friends. But sometimes the friend at hand is the guy that has to do something. And I was very happy that I was able to do it. And to this day, we sometimes get together and talk about old days, how really rugged it was, what a dollar meant to us.

GARDNER

What was his background?

EPSTEIN

Jake had come from Texas. He was an unsettled young man. He was very much interested in poetry. There was a chap in Chicago called Ben Abramson, who later ran the Argus Bookshop. How Jake met Ben Abramson, I don't know, but Ben Abramson sort of influenced him into the area of poetry and books. Jake apparently wasn't too well, so he came to California. And he was having one hell of a time. He had this wife; she was a little mixed-up. They had a daughter. And his Texas background, I know so little about that I shouldn't even be talking about it because I'm not sure of my facts. But he was interested in books, so he came here and they got him a job at Holmes's secondhand bookstore. (And I told you what a peculiar character Mr. Holmes was. I still refer to him as "Mr. Holmes," the only guy I referred to [that way] in the business. Or I would refer to "Mr. Parker," instead of "Joe" or "Jake.") And,

of course, with Holmes, he couldn't get along. Jake's type of character couldn't possibly get along with Holmes, so he didn't last but a few weeks there. Then he went to work for Bullock's. He was there for quite some time. That's where he was working when I first opened my shop. During the lunch hour from Bullock's, all these bookish people would swarm down Sixth Street, or from all other areas, and browse through the bookstores during their lunch hour. And that's why there I first met Jake, before he had his store. As I said, I could go on; the stories we had with Jake could last for days.

GARDNER

How did he get involved in the history of science, which became his specialty, really?

EPSTEIN

I guess because the opportunity knocked at his door and he was quick enough to see it. Jake is an excellent scholar; he has a phenomenal memory. He'll hear something or see something once, and he will remember it forever after. He surprised me with something just the other day, a few weeks ago. I was in his shop for something or other — we had a meeting or whatever — and he showed me a print by George Bellows. (His most famous prints were about prizefighters. They have a lot of vitality to them, a lot of action.) He showed me a print that he had just bought. I don't know whether he went to the home [of] the person who sold him the print or brought it to the shop; it doesn't matter. He said, "I saw that print and I remembered reading a magazine article which had that print reproduced." And he said, "I remember what magazine it was, and I remember the year." He found the issue of the magazine, and he went back, got the print — which was going to help him sell it. And this goes back maybe thirty years, when he read that article. Unlike mine, I don't think his memory's slipping even a little. I don't think it's slipping yet. Let's hope it never does. Not every older man loses part of his memory. Not everyone has hardening of the arteries of the head. (That's what it is, you know, to a great deal. That's what I'm told.) So Jake's story I'm sure will come out. [tape stopped] As I said, Stanley Rose moved to his location next to Musso's at that time. There was a bookstore on Sixth Street called the Golden Bough. It was a nice bookstore for a while. And then Sammy Reiser, as I said, in 1936-- he probably opened the store in 1935 at 1603 North Cahuenga, Then there was a

Thor's Book and Magazine Shop at 112 West Ninth Street. And the New York Bookstore, which moved to 310 South Main. I have a note: in 1937 Bunster Creeley bought the Abbey. I have a note on here. There was a shop called Pioneer Bookshop, which was an outgrowth of Paul Kuttner's store. There was a bookshop in Hollywood called Verne's Hollywood Bookshop, on North Cahuenga. As of 1937, Dillon Bookshop at 628 West Eighth Street: it was John Dillon and his wife. He was an Indian, and his wife was American. But they were both very much interested in occult books. And they ran a nice small shop, never very big, never amounted to a great deal. Then somebody opened a bookshop on Figueroa Street called Figueroa Bookshop. Then there was a shop called Hollander and Davidson Fine Books, at 602 West Sixth Street. Davidson bought in. Hollander, I think, had been a partner of Jake's when they had that location on Sixth Street. Jake had a location on Sixth Street before he had that one west of Hope. Why I don't have it, I don't know. But it was just west of Grand. Jake and Hollander, I think it was, had opened this very fine little bookstore designed by Frank Lloyd Wright. They put a lot of nice pictures, and of course, Hollander was the money man. They did a pretty fine business. But if they had to answer you if they had a book or not, instead of writing out a postcard, they sat down, dictated a letter, and the secretary would type it up on fine stationery and so forth. It was fine, but it didn't prove profitable. I suppose the usual differences of salary draw and whatnot — whatever happens to a partnership. Partnerships are very dangerous things at best, and the few that succeed are far exceeded by those that don't succeed because of clash of personality--especially in such a personalized business as the book business is, where your own taste and direction lead you on. And if you have a conflict of taste and direction, you're dead. So I think the chap by the name of Davidson came out from the East and bought Jake's share. Now, this goes back a long time. I'm pretty positive that's the way it was. They went on for a number of years--oh, I wouldn't say even a number of years, maybe two years or somewhere in that span of time--when they closed out. Davidson, as I recollect, put in, in those days, a very big sum of money, something like \$7- or \$8,000 into the business. That's the way they measured money in those days. They didn't prosper. It was started from the wrong angle. It had no base. And they were building on something neither one of them had the experience. When Jake walked out of there, all the experience walked out of there, all the knowledge. Then the store became vacant. There was a place on Hollywood

Boulevard called the Research Magazine and Book Shop, which was run by a chap by the name of Nielson, at 7064 Hollywood Boulevard. There was a Technical Book Company at 808 South Spring Street at that time. They later moved to further up around Third and Spring, and now moved — it was John Ruby's place. Do you know Ruby in Westwood?

GARDNER

I know who he is, yes.

EPSTEIN

Yeah. It's an outgrowth of that. Different owners, I think. People by the name of Woodward or Woodruff owned it. They had a place in San Francisco and another place on Spring Street. Then things became bad for them, so they sold out. I might mention that during my span of time, there were two or three Jewish bookshops. There was Cans' Bookstore at 24 27 Brooklyn Avenue. Later it moved to Fairfax. Nice old man, name of Cans. He used to buy English books from me from time to time if he needed them, something he needed. I always recommended him to others. Then in the Jewish-book field there was another chap. There was a Mrs. [Bertha G.] Blatt. I'll come to that in a little while. Of course, in that area, Pickwick had moved to Hollywood in the early part of '38. Moby Dick moved over, as I said, west of Figueroa Street. Jake started a store at 624 South Carondelet Street. You know where the Otis Art Institute is?

GARDNER

Yeah.

EPSTEIN

Originally it had been the Otis mansion, and 624 South Carondelet was the carriage house of the Otis mansion, which was right behind the Otis Art Institute. And Jake had this great big barn, and they created living quarters overhead.

GARDNER

Did he have the other shop at the same time?

EPSTEIN

No, he gave up the other shop and opened that. By that time, he was already married to Ver Brugge, Josephine. And if I may put it in here, I credit Josephine with being the leveling instrument that gave rise to Jake's progress from then on--little by little, but on solid ground.

GARDNER

In what sense?

EPSTEIN

She helped him; she worked with him. None of his wives had helped him before in actual work. She did all the secretarial work and actually helped build up the business. She's very capable and a very level-headed woman, and she didn't mind working very hard with him. I have the utmost respect for her, I really do. I think without her, Jake might not have succeeded as well. He might have been a good bookman, but he wouldn't have attained the heights of success that he has today, I'm positive. He never could have achieved it without Josephine. I think Josephine kept him from flying before he could run. Jake always liked to do that. And I'm not criticizing it as a fault, because, look, if you don't think of those things, you don't do those things. But before that, he was doing things beyond his capabilities financially — not necessarily beyond his capabilities of planning and thinking and actual doing, but he didn't have the tools to do them with. And she wouldn't let him do things without having first a firm base from which to do it. So I credit her. I credit Josephine — whom I like very, very much — for a great deal of Jake's later success. There was a Braun and Reinhold Bookroom at 6731 1/2 Hollywood Boulevard--I mention that particularly because Mr. Braun was a German refugee. We're in '39, now, you know. He got out before the real bad time. He had a small bookshop in the arcade of stores Aaron owns now.

GARDNER

It must have been very small.

EPSTEIN

It was. But he was a fine old man. I used to visit with him because we were just a few doors away. Whenever he needed an English book, he'd come and buy it from us. We'd give him a discount or tell him where he could get it if we

didn't have it. At 1608 North Vine Street there was a chap by the name of Salop. Salop came out here from New York. His brother was the first big operator in remainder books in New York, and he was with his brother for a while, for a number of years. This man's name was Morris. His brother's name was Max. (Now that I think of it, I'd better put it down.) Morris Salop was a man who, for whatever the reason, I didn't like. And there were very few book people that I didn't like. He would get remainders from his brother at a very low price, far below the price that I could buy from his brother, because his brother ran a wholesale house--and we did buy some books from his brother. He would sell them below anything we could sell them for. His brother used to call on us, and we'd constantly tell him about it and write to him about it. And he said, well, he always promised his brother he would never cut the price. And he never kept his promise. He was a peculiar man. I'm sure he had his good points. He had a son who became a very fine music critic and I think teaches music history at some big university in the Michigan area--I forget, Indiana or Michigan or Michigan State. But the son never worked with him. Morris sometimes acted as if he was a mean man; I'm not positive, really, that he was. I will bring in something here that maybe belongs here, maybe doesn't; I don't know. There was always a Jewish organization in the community. Well, I was integrated in the Jewish community in various ways. During the bad times in the thirties, there was considerable pressure for relief money for overseas. That was long before the tremendous drives for tremendous sums of money that was needed later. If we knew then what we learned later, we would have probably tried to raise those kinds of sums of money. But we didn't know to what point Hitler was going to go. At any rate, things were beginning to develop where there was a lot of relief money needed all over the world. People were running. Jews were running. So it became a very personal thing with me and all of the people in the community --what we owe to our brothers. So I would contribute sums of money, which for those days were small sums, but they were measurable, comparable to what was needed from a man of my circumstances in those days. In other words, nobody asked me for a thousand dollars, and I never gave a thousand dollars in those days. But I would give whatever sum I felt I could afford to give for the causes as needed in those days. And it was for local relief and other things, too. I received a phone call one day from one of the members of the board of the Jewish community, and he said, "Louis, are you the only Jewish

bookseller in the city?" I said, "No. There's Jake, there's Walker, there's Dave Kohn, there's so-and-so, Salop." He says, "Well, look. You are appointed the head of a committee of booksellers. We'll give you cards. We in the community want you to go and solicit the Jewish booksellers for these various things." So I said, "Look. They're all poor people." "Whatever they give." So, all right, my duty was pointed out to me, so I pursued it. And I think I went out and spent about three afternoons at it. I went down to Walker; he gave me, I think, a dollar. I went to Dave Kohn — a very fine soul, but a poor man. And by the time I got through, I think I gave him a dollar. But everybody was cooperative to the thinking of it. They apologized they couldn't give more. Mr. Markowitz, a very generous man in every respect. He was a fine person, but he didn't have the knowledge of proper relationship to proper people because he was always in that Bowery area. So when I said he didn't treat his customers properly, it's the only thing he ever learned. But he himself personally was a very fine and generous man. Anyway, I finally went out to Hollywood to see this Mr. Salop. (And if I shouldn't tell this story, I hope I'm forgiven.) And he may have had a philosophy against certain things; I don't know. But I sat down, and I talked to him. I said, "Morris, they are after Jews. And we've got to get them out. You yourself were born on the other side. What would happen if you hadn't gotten out?" "Well," he said, "I've been here a long time. I was in the navy." "What difference does that make? We need money." You know, I was never so incensed about anything — and I've solicited a lot of people, and I've had the door slammed in my face when I asked for money and got nothing, and I was angry with some people. But in this case, I was truly incensed. After long argument and after his wife--she was working in the back; she always worked with him--heard all this talk, she came out and said, "Morris, make a donation." And you know what he did? He pulled out fifty cents. And I blew my top, I just blew my top. I said, "Morris, am I a waiter? Am I a cabdriver? Did I shine your shoes? I've been talking to you, and you have no idea what I've been talking about. I've been talking about keeping people alive, hundreds of them. If you can't give me anything, tell me. And if you need help, tell me, and I'll get you some help. I'll help you myself, if I can. Why do you offer me fifty cents?" Fifty cents. And in those days he was considered well-to-do, because he sold half his business to his brother, and his brother was operating a profitable business. His brother, I think, forced him out of the business because he irritated people. And that was one of the most

disagreeable things that ever happened to me. I'll never forget it. He took out fifty cents.

1.13. TAPE NUMBER: VI, Side Two (June 17, 1974)

GARDNER

To begin with, I thought perhaps we could recapitulate some of your family life, then maybe some more about Louis Epstein's bookstore. When we left off, really, with your personal life, you were recently married and Aaron had just been born; and you were, I think, still living over with your parents in Boyle Heights.

EPSTEIN

Well, no, we weren't living with my parents after our marriage. We never lived with my parents after we were married. Our first abode after we were married was an apartment at Fifth and Catalina, then an apartment in the 700 block of South Carondelet, then to a flat on Cincinnati Street in Boyle Heights (where Aaron was born) in the heart of the Jewish community. Then we moved to an apartment in the Hancock Park area near Fifth Street just west of Vermont a few blocks. Aaron came in the first nine months after we were married. He was a right-on-time baby. [laughter] We were anticipating Aaron's coming; we moved to Boyle Heights just before Aaron was born because our family was there and my sisters might help my wife with Aaron after he came. Actually, my wife claimed she'd never held a baby in her arms before, so she needed some help. However, after a few months we moved out of Boyle Heights. We moved temporarily to the beach [Rose Avenue in Ocean Park] Then we got a place in Beverly Hills. In those days it wasn't as expensive as it is today, even proportionately. It was just a block east of La Cienega on Hamilton Drive, 112 North Hamilton, right next to Wilshire Boulevard. A curious thing about that (nothing in relation to the life of the bookstore or myself): it was a two-story house, and the people renting upstairs had a dog. And the dog had the privileges of the yard, so we couldn't put Aaron in the yard. We had to take Aaron outside the yard and put him in his crib in the driveway. Well, we soon got tired of that and bought our own house in Hollywood. We lived in Hollywood ever since 1934.

GARDNER

Where was that first house that was on Curson?

EPSTEIN

At 1914 North Curson, which is adjoining the Wattles estate--which is now the Wattles Park. The children grew up there. Eugene came, of course, four years after Aaron. Their birthdays are ten days apart. And Eugene hadn't had any other address until we moved to Hollywood, which was a period of twenty-three years. And of course he wasn't twenty-three; but all his life, until he was in his twenties, the only address he had was Curson. When we were moving, at the time he was at Harvard--he'd already finished Caltech and was at Harvard--he wrote back, "You can't do that. I won't know my way home!" But they enjoyed living up there. Living on a hill with children, of course, has its problems, and Ann had her problems. She had to drive them everywhere, although they walked to school after they were old enough to take care of themselves--which helped to strengthen their legs, certainly. And they enjoyed climbing up and down the hills. They knew that territory backward and forward. As a matter of fact, one time there had been an accident up on the little road above us which was like a fire road. And of course we knew that road and where it went to and how to get up and down it because we used to hike up there. The firemen's equipment couldn't get up there — the hook-and-ladder--and so Eugene and Andy [Aaron] showed them shortcuts how to climb up the hill from just about where our house is. They had to wind up the hill by foot. They helped the firemen that day quite a bit.

GARDNER

Were you all the way at the top of Curson?

EPSTEIN

No, no. We were at 1914. The last house up the hill was at that time the number 2000, twenty hundred. And that is the house [in which] the chaps [who own] where we have our lunch, the Levine boys [Henry and Phil] lived. They now own the Lee Drugstore on the corner of Hollywood and Highland. Philip Levine used to walk down to our house, wait for me, and then I would take him to school when I took our kids — because at that time I was still in business downtown. I would drop off Eugene at Gardner [Avenue School], Aaron at Bancroft [Junior High School], and Phil at Hollywood High [School],

besides a couple of other kids I'd pick up. One of the little girls we used to pick up came in several years ago with her children, who were older than she was at the time I used to pick her up--a girl by the name of Barbara Bein. A very nice girl of very nice family. I think she is still a customer of Pickwick. Most of the dealing was by telephone, but occasionally she'd come in with her children. I'd always get a great deal of bang out of seeing them.

GARDNER

Who were some of the other neighbors in the area?

EPSTEIN

Phil Goldstone lived a few houses north across the street. Now, Phil Goldstone was an uncle of the Levine boys. The Levine boys' mother and Phil were brother and sister. The Levine boys' father [Abe] was connected with the movies. Of course, he was always with Phil. Phil was a producer; he was a backer of films.

GARDNER

Is he the one whom you were telling the stories about a couple weeks ago?

EPSTEIN

Yes. He lived about three houses north on the opposite side of the street, on the odd-numbered side of the street. When we first moved up there, he had three Rolls-Royces in the garage. And he had a man taking care of them; they were polished spic and span. Whenever he'd go, he'd take one of those cars. After about a year up on the hill, one day Andy was playing in the lot next door and saw Phil go by, and as children would, he threw a small stone at him and hit the car. And Phil was very incensed over that— probably rightly. The boy shouldn't have thrown rocks. But it wasn't much of a rock, and I don't know if it even made a dent in the car particularly. But he watched over those cars. Well, they were beautiful cars. My understanding was that— well, it was a fact that Phil had money all through the Depression, that he was a broker in the sense that when a picture would get into problems, he would take it over--at a price, of course--and he would come out pretty well with it, whereas the other people who had started the picture probably would have lost what they had in it. But he was a very shrewd man. At that time he was still single. He didn't

marry till late in life. He's since dead. He died about four or five years ago. He was one of our neighbors. He kept his house beautifully. Across the street of us was the Foy family, one of Eddie Foy's sons. They were nice people. King Charney lived opposite us. King Charney was connected with the distribution of film, I think. He had the Agfa agency. Of course, when the war came along, that ruined him, because Agfa films were no longer [used]. It was a very nice, quiet neighborhood. The neighbors were always very friendly. To the immediate south of us was the Mack family, very quiet older people. And south of them was the Klein family. The Kleins were in the real estate business—Mr. [Robert] Klein was. They had three boys. [Robert, Jr., Lloyd, and Keith], and they played with Aaron. Eugene, of course, was too young to play with them, until he grew up later. Unfortunately, one of the Klein children (the oldest, Robert, Jr.) turned out very badly. He was always a difficult child. I remember one time, for three days in a row when I'd go down to get my car I had a flat tire. The third time, I became suspicious, and I saw the car. I looked around and I found a nail had been placed into my tire so [that] the minute I backed down it would puncture the tire. So I asked Andy--Aaron — about that. First he denied knowing anything about it, then he admitted that it was he and Bobby and the others. But Bobby was the ringleader, because he had always caused trouble around. Later, he got in bad with the navy — AWOL. He turned out very badly and I think was confined to some institution because his mind seemed to be affected. He claimed his father was not his real father and so forth. There were a few other movie people then — of course, that was the big industry in Hollywood--who lived on the street. Sam Goiter later on moved up there. Sam Goiter's wife's name was Rose (she's now a widow). They had a daughter, Irma. Sam Goiter was the man who was chief executive of the City of Hope when it was quite a small institution and built it into the big progressive institution it is today. He was largely responsible for broadening their philosophy and their outlook for what they wanted to do to become a national research center. The Sinaikos, a family by the name of [Isaac (Ike) and Ruth] Sinaiko [and daughter Joan (now Mrs. Irwin Field)], later moved into the house that the Levines had lived in. They were a very fine family, now live in Beverly Hills. They were from the Middle West, and they were in soybean processing. They would press oil out of beans and out of flaxseed, and became quite wealthy. They are fine people — very charitable, very charitable. We

visit them quite often. They are members of our synagogue. An extremely fine family.

GARDNER

Were you active at this point in the Jewish community?

EPSTEIN

When we first moved up there in '34, I would say no. [interruption; tape stopped] I was active in the Jewish community. Let's put it this way: I was never inactive in it. In some small way, we did things. At that time, we did things for the City of Hope — gave luncheons and dinners and contributed money. But I was not active in the sense that I became later for the United Jewish Welfare Fund. Before the Hitler business came along, the community rolled along and pretty well took care of its own, and there were various Jewish institutions- like the City of Hope, which was called the Jewish Consumptive Relief Association of Los Angeles. And we raised money. For the old home [Jewish Home for the Aged] we raised money, and for the orphanage [Vista Del Mar] we were always involved in raising money; certain people were involved. They had this group that would come around, and they'd write a letter. We contributed money. But actively, as far as myself going out collecting money or organizing anything--no, I had not been active in that sense. Of course, I maintained a membership in the Breed Street Shul. That's the Congregation Talmud Torah. It's still situated on Breed Street, but unfortunately the membership has dropped off because the community is Mexican, some black, and some Japanese. But my father was still very active in the area. But my involvement with the United Jewish Welfare Fund didn't come till the Hitler area.

GARDNER

I see. What about as far as Temple Israel, the Hollywood temple?

EPSTEIN

Well, we became involved in that rather late. Aaron had his Bar Mitzvah through Temple Beth El, which was at that time on Wilton Place just north of Sunset. It wasn't until after we started thinking about where to send Eugene that we actively joined Temple Israel of Hollywood Boulevard — because it

was a chore to drive Aaron. But most of the time--the Red Car was running in those days on Hollywood Boulevard, and he would take the Red Car and get off at Wilton and walk down. But for Eugene we thought we should be somewhere closer to home. And for Ann, she she understood the Reform service far better than she understood the older services. So we decided to join Temple Israel. I forget the year--'44 or something like that, somewhere around '45. We've been very active in the temple. I was on the board for a good many years. I resigned when I became seventy years old. It's got to be--not a physical chore but a mental chore. I was on the board for almost eighteen, twenty years. And you fight those problems constantly year after year after year, and I guess I became disillusioned with a number of things that had been done which turned out to be wrong, and which I suggested would be wrong, and the fact that they were very costly and later turned out to be worthless programs which involved a lot of money and out of which no one received any good. But then, that happens in all temples, and I'm sure it happens in churches and lodges and whatnot. By nature, I'm not that type of a mixer, but somehow or other when I did get into something, I worked at it. Of course, the United Jewish Welfare Fund came along. There had been a Federation Council, as everyone knows, in Los Angeles, which was active. It took care of things in normal times without too much trouble, and the community provided the money. Maybe not as much as it should. No social worker is ever satisfied with the amount of money they raise for something. But we thought we were doing pretty well. But then the time came when we had to move thousands of people from one part of Europe to another, from one continent to another--to move them anywhere, just to get them safe. Then, of course, the big campaigns for tremendous amounts of money came along. I felt it was my obligation, the same as I feel it is every Jew's obligation — not necessarily religious Jews. I think in that sense nonreligious Jews are, in my opinion, taking a copout. I think it's just as much their problem as it is of the religious Jews. It has nothing to do with religion. When the Hitler Gestapo came along, they didn't ask, "Are you religious or not religious?" They took you if you were one-sixteenth Jew. And that goes back to an awful lot of Germans with one-sixteenth blood who had never been Jewish. And a lot of the German intelligentsia, the assimilated German Jew, had nothing to do with religions. And if they did, it was only in a nominal sense. And they were taken. So I feel that there were many people who felt, "Well, I'm not religious," and

they'd take that and use it as an excuse for not giving as much as they should. They will give something. And by all means, if this is for the record, I would not say that all of the nonbelieving Jews are that way. I know many who gave considerable amounts of money. But a good many of them used that as an excuse: "Well, I'm not really that Jewish." How Jewish can you be? You're either Jewish or you're not Jewish. But you're Jewish culturally, you might say; you're Jewish by inheritance, although you don't practice the religion. And Judaism is a race as well as a religion. So if and when--let's hope it never will, but if and when--another Hitler comes along, the same nondistinction of whether you're religious or not religious can be applied. At any rate, seeing that I was willing to give money, I was soon asked to participate in collecting money from others, and I felt duty-bound to go as far as I possibly could. I put in tremendous numbers of hours working with committees and chairing the Hollywood division. We had meetings at our house four, five, six, eight times a year during the campaign months, and the planning months. We raised a lot of money in Hollywood in those days.

GARDNER

Who were some of the leaders of the community at that time?

EPSTEIN

Well, of course, there was Max Firestein--son-in-law of Max Factor, who was really running Max Factor. At that time he was extremely active. I saw him just the other night at a community affair. His age is beginning to show, of course, but he's still I think one of the finest men who ever lived in this community. In the local community, I'll have to refresh my memory on some of those names, because this goes back in my memory. Of course, I mentioned Phil Goldstone. He was a very charitable man. He contributed monies to various things, and he contributed fairly well to the United Jewish Welfare Fund, and he contributed very generously to the City of Hope. Sol Handle, who died just a little over a year ago--he and I worked together a great many years. He was not a wealthy man but a contributor according to his status. That's a goal we tried to reach with every person we contacted: Make your contribution according to your ability. He was that type of person. He wasn't a wealthy man, but he contributed well for his net worth, because he believed. Curiously enough, he was married to a non-Jew. His wife was very sympathetic to our cause and

never objected to his working with us. Max Strassberg, who is gone many years, was a jeweler on the Boulevard. He was the first one in Hollywood to call on me for a contribution, because I was rather new to Hollywood. You see, I didn't move to Hollywood till '38, the forties. The demands for money were all through the thirties for the European Jews, but they didn't come till they really had to get them out of wherever they were or they would get into the camps — which of course so many did. Our rabbi, [Max] Nussbaum, was one of the last men to get out of Berlin. He tells the story. He lost everyone in his family. He himself and his wife got out. But getting back to the local community for the period in which I was working, Charlie Rossen, who had a clothing and shoe store on Hollywood Boulevard, was active. He is * now assistant to Councilman Stevenson.* Oh, there were any number of people. My memory isn't working fast enough for your machine. [*Stevenson has since died. His wife, Peggy, was elected in his place. --L.E.]

GARDNER

How about the overall Jewish community? Who were the dominant forces in those days?

EPSTEIN

Well, at that time, in the beginning era, there were--of course, the Cramer boys, Leslie and Nate, were very active. The Chudikoff family was very active. The Mitchell family — Ed Mitchell. Of course, this goes back twenty-five, twenty-six years. Now the younger generation is taking over. For instance, in the Mitchell family, Ed Mitchell, the father, was extremely active. He was head of the drive one time. And now his son Joe is extremely active, and his daughter- in-law.

GARDNER

Who was he? What was his affiliation aside from that?

EPSTEIN

The Mitchell family's Beneficial Life. And they come from Canada. The old gentleman came from Canada. He had some insurance business there, and he came to Southern California, started an insurance business. I'm trying to think, over the years, who were the chairmen of the drive. The last chairman,

incidentally, is the son-in-law of the Sinaikos, Irwin Field. A very fine — he's a very young man, the youngest man that has ever been chairman. They're over \$40 million now in the 1974) campaign of city of Los Angeles raised for the United Jewish Welfare Fund. It's the largest sum they've raised.

GARDNER

What does that compare to from your time?

EPSTEIN

Well, when we raised \$4-5 million in the very early days, we were doing very well. And then we went up to [\$]6 million, [\$]7 million. In one emergency year we raised [\$]11 million, and we thought we were doing pretty good. Well, there's several things you have to consider. We could do more with \$11 million in those days than you can do with \$22 million today. I'm not downgrading the \$40 million; it's a fantastic amount of money to raise. But there were other things you must consider relative to the amounts of money raised: number one, the Jewish community was not as large; number two, it was it was not quite as prosperous; and number three, people had to be educated to give. You'd be amazed at the number of people you would call on the first time, and they weren't accustomed to giving money. I mean, if they were, they were accustomed to giving \$5 or \$10 because that is all that they used to be asked for in the old days; they didn't need any more. When we came around with the Welfare Fund and started asking for \$50 and \$100 and \$500, and some of the wealthier people into the thousands, it was a chore to educate them. I still have people I call on every year; I still call on a number of people every year. Unfortunately, so many of my old "customers"--as I call them, or clients--are dying out or moving away or moving to the desert. Over a period of time they disperse to one thing or another. I have so-called clients who started off with \$10 and are now giving thousands of dollars. One man, a very wealthy man, lived in upper Beachwood [Drive]. I assumed that he was wealthy, and I later found out that he was. And I came to his home--a beautiful home, and a very large home — and there he was living with no children and a wife. He offered me \$50. And that was during the time when \$50 was--well, we needed much more from people of his standing than \$50. And I refused to take it. And he became incensed at me. He said, "What right have you to refuse my contribution?" I said, "I have every right to refuse a

contribution from you if I don't think you're doing what you should be doing." We had quite a hassle over it. He said, "No, you do not have that right." I said, "Well, I will guarantee you that the community will not lose anything by my refusal to take your \$50. I'll put in an extra \$50 for myself. But I don't want you to have the satisfaction of saying that you helped people according to your means when you are not helping people according to your means." He became very angry with me, and I became angry with him. And I told him that if he's making a contribution, he had to make it according to his means. That's the law. If he talks Judaism to me, I'll talk Judaism. "If you make a contribution to a cause or a person, you have to make it according to your means. And I know that \$50 is nowhere near your possibility." Well, you know, he called me back the next day. He called me. And he apologized to me. And he said, would I please come back to see him. And I said, "Of course I will. I don't hold any grudges." But I felt very strongly that he wasn't doing the right thing. If he wanted to do something, he wasn't doing it properly. Maybe I overreached myself, and I apologized for being that strong. So I went back to him, and he gave me \$500. But the triumph of the whole thing is that he became a worker and went out soliciting other people.

GARDNER

Who was this?

EPSTEIN

Isadora Shafer. He later became a worker and went out to visit other people. And, you know, he used to tell that story about me and him having this battle. He got a great deal of satisfaction out of telling how he was impressed into the work by Louis Epstein, that "Louis turned me down." He said, "I was so ignorant of what my duty was." That's the way he expressed it. And I feel to this day it's every man's duty, whether he's Irish or whatever, if it's a racial thing and everyone is involved because of his race, his loyalty should be where his pocketbook is--or his pocketbook should be where his loyalty is. A lot of people wave flags, but they will not give money. I don't know if this fits into the area we're talking about. There's one incident which to me has been a very striking one. When I first became chairman of the Hollywood United Jewish Welfare Fund division, it was a more profitable division. In other words, more money was available to it then than there is now, because in those days

they had the industries in Hollywood involved. Now they have taken the industries out into another area, and the people who raise money in Hollywood are not involved with the industries and don't get the larger gifts. But at that time the industries were part of the Hollywood campaign. Our budget was set up as \$500,000 in the Hollywood area. Well, it was much too large a budget, and I don't think the people who set up the budget really meant that we could possibly raise it. But they set a goal which--"God help you if you raise it. Try for it, anyway." That type of thing. So I was in my little office on the mezzanine in the Pickwick, working away sorting out the cards of all my workers and assigning cards of prospects to them; and I must have been very intense about it because a salesman walked in and he almost had to shake me to get my attention. And he said to me, "Louis, you look worried." And I said, "Well, Ray, I am worried." His name is Ray Healy — very Irish, very Catholic, and quite religious. To this day we maintain a friendship. He now lives in Connecticut, but we write to him; we send him books; he does vice versa to us. So Ray Healy, this Irish Catholic--extremely fine person — said to me, "What are you so worried about?" I said, "Ray, I've got to raise \$500,000." He said, "Louis, are you out of your mind? What would you be needing \$500,000 for?" "Oh," I said, "Ray, it's not for myself." And then I told him the story. That was the year that the camps were being opened, and they had to get the people out of there, move them, and find a place to move them to. So Ray very innocently said to me, "Well, Louis, you know, Jews aren't the only ones in concentration camps." I said, "Ray, I'm very much aware of that, and I'm very sympathetic to any group that's helping any people in concentration camps. And I'd be willing to put a few bucks into their pot to help them. But there's one thing that you don't realize, Ray. An Irishman in a concentration camp goes back to Ireland and he's welcome. A Pole goes back to Poland and he's welcome. An Italian goes back to Italy and he's welcome. You name any country where any person who goes back to, he is very welcome. But only one, only one people is not welcome anywhere in the world." I said, "You name me a country which is willing to take any Jews, including our own country. And what are they doing to them when they get out? A handful of them walked from the concentration camp in Austria to Kielce in Poland — or whatever the name of the town was in Poland--and when they got there, every one of them was slaughtered by the Poles. Every one. Immediately the news got around, and all the Jews from Poland who started for Poland turned

back and went back to the concentration camps. Now, Ray, you name me any country who welcomes them, or where they will even be allowed to go into." And he used an expletive, the full expletive. He said, "I'll be an SOB. I never thought about it that way." And he was very incensed at himself that he hadn't thought of it that way. "Well," I said, "Ray, you're not the only one. We have a lot of Jews who don't see it that way, and we have to try to convince them to get a few bucks out of them." So he casually left the office, and in about five minutes he came back and he dropped a check for \$100 on my desk. I could have melted away and cried, I was so impressed with it. To this day, I have a feeling about it. And he contributed every year he lived out here. And whenever someone didn't call on him, he'd call me up and say, "What's the matter with you Jews? Don't you want my money?" [laughter] But this is the type of thing we were fighting against all the time with our own people. In those days we tried to solicit non-Jews. But we later changed that, although a lot of non-Jews, especially industries, continued to contribute to the Welfare Fund. We did not solicit non-Jews. I was not in favor of it myself. But of course some industries that had a large Jewish clientele did contribute voluntarily. A lot of the institutions around the city still do contribute.

GARDNER

Like which?

EPSTEIN

Some banks and insurance companies--not great amounts of money, but just so it could be felt that they were helping the cause. And I suppose from a business point of view, even if they're not totally altruistic from a business point of view, let's face it, there are over 500,000 Jews in this city. They can create a lot of goodwill even amongst their own people.

GARDNER

Why does your theory exist, that non-Jews should not be solicited? Why do you feel that way?

EPSTEIN

Well, the theory behind it is this: number one, I as a Jew have to go to Mr. So-and-so, a non-Jew, and ask him to help me help my people. And I don't feel

that I should impose myself upon him. If he hears the story, and if it's general in a sense, and if the emergency was so great as it was at the time when the camps were first opened and in getting them out of there, those emaciated people, we couldn't handle the problem ourselves--let's put it that way. We weren't well enough organized and well enough schooled in our own community, the Jewish community, to provide it; so we had to try to get some outside help. I personally am very thankful for the outside world who did help us. But at a later time, when we became better organized and more capable, and our community more educated in the idea of giving in proper proportion to their wealth (whether they were rich or poor, all we wanted was a proper proportion to their wealth), we felt that it was time for us to take care of our own. And we did, without really going out to solicit non-Jews. In some communities certain people would solicit certain people. Now, maybe they knew them well enough or they felt that for some particular reason they should help or whatever, but on the whole, we stopped soliciting non-Jews. I believe that was right. We were not open to criticism of, well, using a blackmail of not giving you business if you don't solicit — which we had every right to do. To this day, there are some storekeepers in our community of Hollywood that I will never buy a thing from.

GARDNER

Do you want to say which?

EPSTEIN

No, I couldn't. But there is a clothier on Hollywood Boulevard. He has no idea how much business he lost because several people stopped buying from him who could have given him a great deal of business for the type of merchandise he sells. The reason for it was this: not that he didn't want to give — we can forgive a man if he is ignorant--but he would promise us, "Come back the next day, come back the next day." And we could never get to see him. And he wasn't that busy, we happened to know. I mean, he was not busier than I was, maybe less busy at that time because I had to run my business and for four months run a campaign in which I put in a great deal of time. And we never got a contribution from him. Every year we sent people out there. I went there. I walked seven blocks a dozen different times to keep an appointment with him which he made and he never kept. And news got around. I wouldn't

go into that man's store for anything. And curiously enough, I don't say it in the sense of a just retribution, but he's a very unhappy man. [laughter] God takes care of those things, maybe. But on the whole I think the community has taught itself to give according to its means. By no means do all Jews give according to their means, but we made tremendous progress. "According to means," I would like to give perhaps one example. In my very first year of solicitations, I was not a chairman; so I had a number of cards given to me and various addresses, and I'd walk up to the place, knock at the door. And one of the cards was of a couple [Sol and Mrs. Intro]. When I came in — a one-room apartment, sparsely furnished. They spoke with a very heavy accent. And I told them what I was there for. They said, "Well, we are just refugees ourselves. We just came. We don't have any money, really, to give away. We just came from New Orleans and have some relatives here." So I said, "Well, by no means. I'm sorry. I don't expect you to make a contribution. I was given a card, and there's no way we know who or what you were. If you tell me this is so, just excuse me for asking you." So as I was going to leave, he said, "Wait a minute." The man said to his wife, "The man came here to ask us to help other people. We can't let him go with nothing." And he gave me \$10. And I was so impressed with that, as I might have been with \$1,000 from some man who might have given \$10- or \$20,000 living somewhere in a mansion where I went and I would get \$2-, \$3-, \$4-, \$500--which was no gift at all, really. But here was a person with \$10; it probably meant less food for a week or even two weeks, because he said he just got himself a job. He later worked for B. Black [and Sons], the woolen merchant downtown.

1.14. TAPE NUMBER: VII, Side One (June 17, 1974)

GARDNER

What I thought we'd talk about, since we're having it [video tape] recorded for posterity, is Pickwick, the origins of Pickwick. The first question is, how did you happen to decide to move to Hollywood from the Eighth Street location?

EPSTEIN

Well, it was a practical question. I had been living in Hollywood for four years when I made the decision that it would be much nice to be closer to home. And going downtown every morning was quite a chore. It took about forty

minutes in those days and forty minutes back. And the store I was in on Eighth Street was a very poorly ventilated store. And at that time, they decided to run the buses along Eighth Street. Came four- thirty to seven, and the store just became full of gas. The proprietor of the building wouldn't let us puncture the walls or the roof to put in a fan, even though we offered to do it at our own expense. I became unhappy there because of those things and others, and I felt we could do quite well in Hollywood because a lot of the Hollywood trade would come down to Eighth Street. We felt we could pick up a lot of good book trade in Hollywood, because I knew there was a lot of good book trade in Hollywood. I enumerated all the bookstores that were there at the time. This particular store where the Pickwick is now-- the original Pickwick was only twenty-six feet; now it's expanded to sixty-six feet of frontage--we saw this building. People were moving out, moving in. It was still Depression time, you know-- '37, '38. So one day my wife and I, Ann and I, were walking down the Boulevard, and I said, "You know, that would make a nice place for a bookstore." And the idea sort of caught hold. So one day I became very ambitious, and I called a real estate man downtown whom I knew. And I said, "Find out about 6743, and see what can be done about it." It had become empty again. He did that, and he said, well, he could get me a lease, all right, with a reasonable rent, but it had a ninety-day clause in it. It was owned by the Bank of America, and they had acquired it as a foreclosure. And they passed a law at that time because the banks were accumulating all the property. And the law was that any bank or trust company or mortgage company must get rid of the property they had gotten by foreclosure within five years. Otherwise they would have accumulated all the real estate there was in the state. So the real estate man said, "Well, you'd have to have a ninety-day clause in it, which means that if a sale is made, the owner or buyer of that property would have the right to move you out." Well, I couldn't go for anything like that, because they may sell the building within a year and a half. I think the mortgage had a year and a half to go, or rather, they had owned it three and a half years and it had only a year and a half to go. So I turned it down, but the real estate man apparently was quite hungry and needed business, so he said, "Why don't you buy it?" I said, "Oh, yeah? It's a great idea, but what am I going to use for money?" "Well," he said, "let me work on it." Well, he did. He found that the price of the building was \$37,500 and that I would have to have \$7,500 cash down payment. Beyond that, it would

actually be cheaper than the rent I was willing to pay, which was a great deal. But how do you get \$7,500? Well, he worked on it and worked on it with me and kept bringing it back. Finally we started scheming in our own mind: well, if we ran a sale, we might pick up \$2,000, \$3,000. If we took the money that was provided for this, it might be another \$5-, \$6-, \$700. And then we figured up about \$5,300. And I remember I borrowed \$1,200 more from my father. And by scheming and running a sale and conserving every possible penny we could, we raised the additional \$1,000. However, this was in 1938. When we opened the Pickwick there, Edwin F. Stackhouse, who had been working for Holmes, came to work for us. He was put in charge of the Pickwick, and he was there from the day we opened for thirty-two years, from April '38 to whatever date it adds up to. However, we did not close up [the shop on] Eighth Street downtown till 1940. We didn't want to give up the living. That was the insurance. And Pickwick frankly didn't do very well. The first year I think we had to contribute money to it, and also the first half of the second year. By the end of the second year, it pretty near broke even. But breaking even isn't making money. So we decided, well, if we combine our resources and move a lot of stock from downtown into the Pickwick, it will give that a broader stock. I will be there — there'll be two management there--and we can go out and do bigger things. Which actually happened. So around the first of January, 1940, we had little notices printed that [the shop on] Eighth Street was going to close up in ninety days, and we were going to move the whole stock to Hollywood. So we moved a lot of stock, ran a sale downtown, cleaned out an awful lot of dregs — and we sold a lot of good books, too. I mean, you can't run a sale on just dregs. And we accumulated a couple thousand dollars in cash, which we sorely needed. And then we moved and combined the two stores, and that's how we moved Pickwick. But the original reason for it was that I became unhappy with the Eighth Street location. Not that we weren't doing pretty well--pretty well for the times. Then the Pickwick came in. When we started working together, a good deal of the business we had downtown followed us. Ed Stackhouse had more time to do the things he wanted to do. I did a lot of running around, picking up books, and he made a lot of outside calls. There was a conservation of energy. And I didn't have to worry about the two stores operating at the same time — although we still had the Argonaut. But as I explained to you before, the Argonaut ran with very little attention from me except in emergency times when Ben got sick.

GARDNER

How did you happen to select Stackhouse?

EPSTEIN

Well, the news got around--we spread the news that we were going to open that store--and a number of people working for other booksellers came and asked for a job. We talked to quite a few people. And Stackhouse was young; he was eager; he was capable. He'd been working for Holmes, and Holmes was not a very pleasant man to work for — he was quite unhappy. So he was one of the people we interviewed, and we selected him. He was a dedicated young man; he did fine work for us for a great many years. He did a good job. But he did a better job with me next to him. He didn't have all the resources at first that he should have had because we were in no position to provide him the resources. But when we moved the two stocks together, it became a better stock total than it was separate. And then, again, we were more assiduous in going out looking for the books, the kind of books that Hollywood wanted-- which was a little bit different in a way than those things that downtown wanted.

GARDNER

Would you explain that?

EPSTEIN

Yes, yes. In those days, the Hollywood studios, all the big studios, maintained their own research libraries, Now none of them have a research library. Well, there's hardly any studios left. For instance. Paramount: we were able to find things for their research library; we got to know the librarians. We could get to them very easily. When we found something in art or unusual books they could use for scenery. . . . They used to buy a lot of things for their art department; and then also when they were working on a particular story, they would need certain kinds of things. And we had good rapport with the librarians of the studios--who, incidentally, were very capable people — most of them women, all of them women. And they would call us and tell us, "Look, we need such and such type of material. What have you got?" Of course, we'd go through all our stock and take a load of stuff down to them, and they would pick and choose what they wanted. Or they would come in. But a good many

times they were just too busy to leave their work, so we would load a car full of books and take a load of stuff down to them, and they would pick and choose what they wanted. Or they would come in. But a good many times they were just too busy to leave their work, so we would load a car full of books and take it to them. It was very good business, very profitable. Our Paramount account for years ran anywhere from \$600 to \$1,000 a month. That was an awful lot of business in those days. Twentieth Century-Fox, we didn't do quite as well. Paramount was our best, let's say, or biggest studio account. MGM, we sold a lot of books to. But they had some kind of a connection with a bookseller in Beverly Hills who had the inside track, you might say.

GARDNER

Who was that?

EPSTEIN

Martindale. As I say, he had the inside track. No business should give any supplier an inside track. So if we had something that we thought MGM wanted, we had to sell it to them through him--which was an unhealthy relationship. What we had to do wasn't anything that we could be attacked for or criticized for. We were selling books to So-and-so, and he in turn would sell them to MGM. But our relationship with the studios at that time was very beneficial. Then the writers: there was a great market for books. They would do research on their own--material for stories. Movie writers--they would get a situation. They would develop the situation. Well, practically every situation has already been developed by some other author in some way--parallels, not exact, but the same thing in a different background. It happened in New York, so it happened in Hollywood. Or it happened in Dodge City, Kansas, and it could happen in Tombstone, Arizona, or in Tucson when they were filming Western epics. We had to find a lot of research material for them. And then the third factor were the technicians in the studios. They would need technical books on films or whatever functions they were doing. They would study their craft, amazingly. And we supplied a lot of things to them. Then people who worked in the art departments, they would form small collections of their own. And they would pick out things that they would tell the studio about, and the studio would order them. Those were the happy days in Hollywood,

when the studios were spending money, and a great deal of it, and making good pictures. And then the general public. Hollywood was a very literate community. You know, people say many bad things about Hollywood. But Hollywood has always been a literate and literary community. It was then, and it still is. Then we would get people from the areas of the universities, too. We had producers — they're a much maligned group. Many of them were excellent readers. We had one man who would read higher mathematics for pleasure. He was a studio producer, a man by the name of [J.G.] Bachman, who later retired from Paramount. The Depression got him, unfortunately. But his son, Lawrence Bachman, lives in England now. I remember him as a little boy; his father used to bring him in. He is now a writer living in England. He writes, amongst other things, mysteries. He's very popular in England. So there is our relationship with the studios. And the actors and actresses--some of them were excellent readers. And they all, at one time or another, came through our shop. You can name any of them, and they were there.

GARDNER

Perhaps we should insert a few of those names.

EPSTEIN

Well, I mentioned Marlene Dietrich; I mentioned [Charlie] Chaplin. And even [Clark] Gable, who was not a very literate person, used to come in occasionally and buy books from us. I remember *Gone with the Wind* was sitting in the studio for a long, long time before it was actually shown. And he came in one day, and I think he needed an atlas. And we sold him an atlas. We got to talking. I had met him once before on that picture where he played where they had about 20,000 of our books.

GARDNER

We'll get to that story next.

EPSTEIN

Yes. I met him then, so I had a nodding acquaintance with him. His ears were very prominent. He came in, and he said, "If they don't get to that picture, I'll be an old man going around trying to help them publicize it. "

GARDNER

Tell the story about the 20,000 books now, because it ties in to what you were saying about the studio rentals .

EPSTEIN

Well, one day — I think it was a Monday or Tuesday or Wednesday; I don't know — I got a call from Paramount that they needed 20,000 books for a picture. And I said, "I can't give you 20,000 books because that's an awful lot of books. You have no idea how much 20,000 books is." "Well," he said, "we've got to have 20,000." He made it very categorical. "If you can't give us 20,000, we're going to have to look somewhere else." And I didn't want him to look somewhere else because I needed that money. I was on Eighth Street. That was before the Pickwick deal.

GARDNER

Oh, this was still on Eighth Street?

EPSTEIN

Yes. So I said, "Well, I'll guarantee you 15,000 and as many more as I can pick up without totally ruining our business "--which was foolish of me. I think even if I had to close the shop, I think I would have made more money on that deal than I would by operating the shop. At any rate, we compromised. I gave him 15,000 plus whatever else I could. I said, "Okay, when do you want them?" He said, "Tomorrow morning." I said, "Look, I can't physically get those books ready. I don't have the help; I have only one part-time assistant. I'll keep him as long as I can, but the man is only human. He can't work more than twenty-four hours a day." He said, "Well, we've got to have them." I said, "Well, you'll have to give us some help." He didn't want that. Finally we compromised: he would send one person down. So he did send one person down who was almost a helpless person. At any rate, I worked, and we worked together, and we worked — my assistant and he--and we got all those books stacked up as close to the door as possible, and the front of the store was pretty much blocked off. And I went home around two o'clock, and at five o'clock or six o'clock I was back in the shop because they said they would be there at nine o'clock. I wanted to get as much more ready as I possibly could, stack them up for them. Well, nine o'clock came, and the studio truck was not there yet. Ten o'clock came, and they were not there yet. So just before eleven o'clock I

called them. I said, "Where is your truck? You said you'd be here at nine o'clock. I'm blocked up; I can't let anybody in or out; I can't do business. What's happening?" He said, "Oh, we don't need those till Tuesday of the following week." I said, "Oh, no, mister, you've got to get these out of here. I can't put these all back on the shelf and then put them back Tuesday." Well, he was reluctant to do that, but he could see the justice of my plea. I said, "You've got space there. I don't have space." So within an hour he had three great big ten-ton trucks there. Well, he didn't need three of them. One of them would have been sufficient. A ten-ton truck will hold a hell of a lot of books. They took them away, and they put them up. Then we went back into business. [tape interrupted]

GARDNER

You had told me a story during our first preliminary about Marlene Dietrich and her presence in your store.

EPSTEIN

Marlene, as I mentioned, was to me a very fine person, I thought. A person that much in the public life has a tendency to become aloof and fearful of the public itself. How she acted in other places I wouldn't know. But when she came to Pickwick, which was quite often when she lived at the Beverly Hills Hotel--sometimes twice a week and maybe sometimes more often--she loved to browse through the shop. She bought quite a few books, and her reading habits were, oh, I would say she read from good to fine, rather than from good to medium, rating on a literary scale. And she was always interested in other people's reading. She always watched what the other people bought. And she loved to browse through the shelves. And when she came, of course, Marlene was noted for wearing slacks in the days when women didn't wear slacks. And she would come in with her daughter and the daughter's au pair or whatever you might call her. This woman's name was Viola Rubber, and she later became an agent. Her daughter [Marie] was quite small. What was the daughter's name? I forget. My wife would remember. And Marlene would browse around. The youngster would be, maybe, with the children's books with Miss Rubber watching her. And one evening as Marlene was looking through the shelves in the fiction department, which was on the east side of the store with a counter in between that and the balance of the store--and

that was before the Pickwick was as large as it is; it was only twenty-six feet wide — a woman customer looking at fiction mistook Marlene as one of the people who worked there, a clerk, perhaps. So she asked Marlene where is a certain book she was looking for. Marlene, without batting an eye, or making any remarks at all, said, "I'll find it for you." And she went and got the lady her book. She handed it to her, and the lady went over to the cash counter and paid for it. One of the clerks who had observed all this--I was in the shop at the time and I watched it, too--remarked to the lady, "You know, you had one of the highest-priced book clerks in the world, probably the highest-priced book clerk in the world, waiting on you." She said, "What do you mean?" The woman was puzzled by the remark. He said, "Don't you know who that was who waited on you?" She said, "No. I thought it was someone who worked here." Well, we told her that it was Marlene Dietrich. Well, the woman was so excited that she bought her book, paid for it, and rushed back to Marlene to have Marlene autograph her book to her. Marlene very kindly, very nicely did put an inscription in it. The woman wanted her to put down, "Sold to me by Marlene Dietrich at the Pickwick Bookshop," at a certain time. This type of incident of a noted person being mistaken for a clerk has happened many times. Famous writers would come and be looking around and would be approached.

GARDNER

For example?

EPSTEIN

Well, a man at the time, a chap by the name of Scott. He looked like a book clerk. He was a writer. At that time he was one of the top writers in the studios. I think he was later forced out of the business by the blacklist.

GARDNER

Adrian Scott.

EPSTEIN

Right. He was later forced out of the business, I think, by the blacklist, I regret to say, which was a sad thing for a lot of the people whom I knew. I knew the whole [Hollywood] Ten. They had some things to be criticized for, I'm sure.

They did some things that certainly I didn't approve of, but to blacklist them in that way I think is totally unjust. They might have avoided the problem in some other way. At any rate, to get back to your story, he looked like a book clerk. He was always being mistaken. There was a lot of fun in that shop. That's the thing, I think, that makes bookshops fun--that the real book customer, the constant book customer, becomes part of your shop. He really does. He begins to fit into your whole atmosphere. And that, I imagine, helped make Pickwick - not that people consciously knew they were going to meet celebrities there. We never advertised anything like that. We never tried to build our business on a personality basis. Our business was built on the fact that we had the books that people wanted, and they came. They chose to come. They weren't asked by somebody to come. We were very proud of that fact. As you know, the Beachcomber's right around the corner from us, and the Beachcomber then, I think, was a much more popular place for the movie colony than it is today. And then a block up was Musso and Frank, that Hollywood restaurant. It's been there since 1919. It was a place to go, and the movie people went there. Between the Beachcomber and Musso- Frank and the Pickwick, sort of a rapport had been built around it. I think I mentioned to you what Chaplin said. One of the columnists wrote this--this is aside from what Chaplin said. One of the columnists once wrote later on, he said, "The only thing left of Hollywood on Hollywood Boulevard is the Beachcomber, Musso-Frank, and the Pickwick Bookshop." Well, Chaplin, in one of his books, mentioned pretty much the same thing — that the Pickwick Bookshop was one of the attractions. As a matter of fact, one of his friends who had visited him came back and told us about having this visit with him; and he particularly asked, "Is the Pickwick Bookshop still there?" He spent a lot of time at our store.

GARDNER

What were his reading habits?

EPSTEIN

Moderate, middling. He liked illustrated books-- not modern illustrations, Gustave Dore and the early illustrators of the mid-eighteenth century. And he would buy illustrated books. He would buy current material, too, from time to time, but not so much. His wife, Oona, Eugene O'Neill's daughter, was

something else again. She was a very literary reader. She was a very fine person. There's an incident where Oona came in around Christmas to do her Christmas shopping. She was giving a lot of books, and she picked up a large stack of books. She had them at the counter, and Mrs. Epstein was waiting on her. And another woman came rushing in and wanted to interfere, wanted to be waited on right then and there and so forth. My wife tried to explain to her that "this lady"--without mentioning Mrs. Chaplin--that "this lady was here ahead of you." Well, the woman started to make a row about it, so Oona said, "Look, wait on her. I'll wait." We thought that was a very thoughtful thing on her part to do. Instead of becoming indignant herself, she avoided an embarrassing situation with someone else. And she was that way all the way. She would ask for something, she would say please, and [she would] behave like a lady throughout. We were very fond of her. And she liked our shop and told us so. A very interesting thing, if I may bring it in at this time: This is maybe some years after. It doesn't fit in the context of the time I'm talking about. A lot of the TV writers — they came in afterwards, so it would be a later period — were moved back and forth from Hollywood to New York. And one youngster, one young lady with whom Aaron went to school at Hollywood High, later married one of the TV writers, and she had to move to New York with her husband. When she came back for a visit, she stopped in at the store, and we knew her. And she was telling us about the school of writers, a group of writers in New York that had all been from Hollywood now living there, and most of them were quite unhappy. And they measured New York as how many miles from the Pickwick. [laughter] They were always wanting to know, asking about the Pickwick, And, curiously, many of them would send us orders for books when they had plenty of bookstores in New York. We had several regular charge accounts who bought books from us by mail, and sometimes by telephone, rather than buy them in New York. Maybe the New York stores didn't have them on the shelf at the time. You know that we had probably the largest selection of titles of any store in the United States.

GARDNER

Is that so?

EPSTEIN

Oh, yes. That's what made Pickwick. I mean, we tried to give our people that great variety. The salesmen had to give me an excuse for not buying a book. They'd run through a catalog and they would say, "Louis, I don't think you need this." I'd say, "Why do you say I don't need that?" And I would look through the catalog, and if I thought there was one person in Hollywood who might buy it, I stocked that book. We took a great many losses on some books, but, by the same token, if they found a book they couldn't find anywhere else, we made a friend for the bookstore for life. And we worked at it.

GARDNER

Was Pickwick strictly used books when you first opened it up?

EPSTEIN

When we first opened, it was strictly used books, because that was the only business we knew; and it was our idea to have a large used-book store in Hollywood, which they didn't have on Hollywood Boulevard at that time: number one, because we felt it would fill a need for used books; and secondly, because there were already a lot of new-book stores there. It's a business we didn't know. But from the time we opened our doors, people started asking for new books. Well, we gradually added one of this or two of that of the later books. But it wasn't until the war that we really definitely decided we were going into the new-book business. We did it as rapidly as we could, considering the capital we had and space. To put a new-book stock into a store that was already crowded with old books took some doing. But we managed to do it somehow, and afterward, of course, we opened the second floor and the mezzanine, which we hadn't used in the old-book days.

GARDNER

How did that change your business problems? What new problems came on as a result of handling new books?

EPSTEIN

Well, I had to learn a different kind of buying entirely, buying for--well, at that time there were maybe 20,000 new books a year being issued, and I had to choose out of those, to pick what I thought Hollywood would need. But I think our used-book background gave us a whole different picture of the new-book

business, unlike that of someone who'd been in new books only all his book experience. We could recognize a book's worth, I think, perhaps better on an overall basis than maybe a person whose total background was new books, because in the old books, you are constantly dealing with the whole of the world's literature. Not that the new-book business is not concerned with it, but we had to know the books of yesterday, ten years from yesterday, fifty years preceding yesterday, or back to the beginning of book publishing. Not that anyone could ever accumulate all that knowledge. But by that time I'd been in business twenty- some-odd years, in the old-book business, and if you work at it, you accumulate a lot of knowledge about an awful lot of books. And it helped me a great deal with the studios in research. I was able to buy new books from that perspective to put into our stock because I felt this is the kind of book which relates to that kind of book which I'd had, the studios were buying old copies of or old books about; and I could relate it to the present, perhaps, more than had I not had that experience. To this day, I've always said that the best training for a new-book seller would be two years or three years in the old-book business, because he'd get a much broader scope of the total book world, certain things that a new-book seller never sees or hears of, really. You can be very erudite and know a great many subjects, but most booksellers--let' s put it that way--may be erudite, but they don't know the book world as it really is, the total book world of rare books, old books, medium old books, and so forth. I think my old-book experience helped me a great deal, because in the old-book business, you search out any good book on any subject, and you try to get it into your stock. And I followed that principle when I started buying new books. If a salesman had a book on a subject, although the subject wasn't popular, if it was a good book, I bought it, whereas it might be the only copy he sold in Southern California, which a lot of the salesmen would tell me. Well, they didn't even try to sell certain books, because they felt the new-book sellers wouldn't have any need for them. And I proved them wrong many times.

GARDNER

When you switched over to new books, did you continue to devote as much attention to the old books?

EPSTEIN

Well, obviously, I couldn't. Because I was the buyer, the seller, the executive of the business. That was before Aaron came into the business. No, I constantly turned more and more of it over to Stackhouse. And I concentrated more and more on the new books. But I still knew what was going on in the old books, and every lot that came in I took a glance at it to see what nice things there were, special things there were. And I kept up with the literature of old books--bibliographies and anything unusual that was happening in the old-book business, the auction records, the auction catalogs. I loved the business. To this day, I think there's more fun in old books than new books.

GARDNER

And I notice you've lost none of your interest and enthusiasm.

EPSTEIN

If you look around the house, you might gather that. [laughter]

GARDNER

How did you come to the name "Pickwick"?

EPSTEIN

We decided that if we were going to have a shop in Hollywood and a shop downtown — at first we thought we might be running both--that it might be confusing and it might cause us a great deal of work. People would say, "Well, get it from the other shop," or "Get it from this shop," and a lot of transferring of phone calls back and forth--which I anticipated might happen because word got around that we owned both of them. We thought this might be a good time for a change. So we started asking the family and friends who came into the shop. And amongst other names that were suggested — hundreds of them — was the name "Pickwick." And we put it aside in the back of the mind and kept coming back to it. And every time we'd go through the names, "Pickwick" would always come back. And it got so easy to say. And it had a nice literary connotation, easy to remember, easy to spell or misspell. Finally we decided that would be a good name, and we chose that. Now, there were a couple of Pickwicks over the country, and later on they caused us a little bit of distress because one of them never paid their bills — some shop near New York City. We were always getting threatening letters that if we didn't pay our bill, they

wouldn't send us any more books. But fortunately, or unfortunately, they went bankrupt, and Pickwick's name was almost exclusive all over the country. I'm very happy to say it was a name that was held in high esteem.

GARDNER

What were some of the other names that were suggested?

EPSTEIN

Oh, Vanity Fair. We tried to pick a literary name or the Hollywood this or California that. But we always kept edging back towards Pickwick. We thought of hundreds of different kinds of names--names of flowers and people, the Benjamin Franklin Bookstore, and things like that. I guess the only name we didn't consider was our rabbi's name.

GARDNER

To get back to some of your famous customers, just briefly, one person whose name popped up in a couple of articles that I read about you was Charles Laughton.

EPSTEIN

Well, Charles Laughton was, of course, a very nice person. Incidentally, he later moved up to Curson, where we lived, and bought a big house. Elsa Lanchester, his wife, still lives there. A nice big house. We got acquainted casually. As I mentioned, I never pushed myself forward with famous people. I wasn't forward in that way with anyone. It wasn't in my nature. But over the years, from constant contact--once when he called up and wanted a book in a hurry, it was the first time that I told him that he lived on our street. I say, "he lived on our street" because I was there before he was. [laughter] And I said, "I'll drop it off on my way up." Well, he was very surprised that I lived there and very happy to hear it. So from there on, I would drop off books two or three times a week. He was a great reader, a very literary guy. In addition to that, he had as one of his literary secretaries a young man by the name of Alfred Brush. Alfred Brush was a frustrated poet. Maybe I shouldn't use that word, because he had written a couple of books of poetry which were published by vanity publishing houses. I think I have one or two of his books which he autographed to me. Alfred was constantly in our shop. He would find

books, and he would suggest them to Charles Laughton. And Laughton would call up, or Brush had the authority to buy books for Laughton and sign for them and take them with no questions asked. If he said, "Charge these to Mr. Laughton," they were charged to Mr. Laughton. So I would deliver a lot of books to Mr. Laughton. Every time, he invited me in to have a drink. Once or twice I took advantage of his hospitality, but I was always in a hurry to get home because my dinner was waiting for me and my family was waiting. And I told him, I explained to him, "I can't stop because I'm late already." He understood. He was a very pleasant guy to do business with. When he walked in the store, he wasn't Charlie Laughton of the stage. He was a customer who was looking for books, and we tried to treat him that way, because I can imagine he wanted to get away from his profession. It's a relaxation to browse amongst books, and he didn't want to be constantly reminded and asked about it. And we tried to keep autograph seekers away from the people who came into our shop. We thought it was unfair. And the instructions to my people were always, "I don't care who he is or who they are, you treat them like you would treat anyone else." And I think they appreciated that on the whole. It's only one man whom I once stopped doing business with, a very famous actor. I told him I would just as soon not do business with him because he expected to be treated as a movie star and I don't treat people as movie stars. We treat them with respect. But he took advantage of his position, and I called it to his attention. He had us order some books from England--special order, books that we had no use for for our own people, for our own stock--and when they came a few weeks later, he said he no longer needed them. "Well," I said, "that's too bad. I'm sorry to hear that. But I think you're obliged to take them. You had me order them, and I think you're obliged to take them." Well, he didn't feel that he was. I said, "Well, we've already charged them to your account, and we will not take them back." His manager was with him. He said, "Oh, you can't do that to Mr. So-and-so." I said, "Look. Mr. So-and-so is just Mr. So-and-so to me. He ordered these books, and I would expect any customer to take care of them. He can afford to pay for them. He can more afford to pay for them and not use [them] than I can afford to pay for them and not use them. It's his obligation to take them." Well, he eventually paid for them, after our accounting department went after his manager. But he was one of the very few who ever put us on the spot like that. I can say truthfully for all the movie people that we had as customers

that they treated us certainly as people should be treated, and we tried to treat them with proper respect. A few of them, like other people, had trouble paying their accounts from time to time, but on the whole, contrary to the stories that go around, I don't think, percentagewise, we lost any more with our movie-associated people than we did with the ordinary run of our charge customers. I think on the whole we had nice dealings with them.

GARDNER

Who was this Mr. So-and-so?

EPSTEIN

That's off the record.

GARDNER

Okay. You've spoken several times of the émigré community, the German refugees and so on.

EPSTEIN

That was an experience--it's probably been touched on. I've seen little bits and pieces about that community in various magazine articles, occasionally in a book or an essay or a criticism of a book, a review of a book. There was a whole group of emigres from almost any country you can name, predominantly Jewish--there were a few political non-Jewish emigres--who settled in Hollywood. They were obviously writers, for the most part, and musicians, and they tried to create a new life for themselves here. Being people who loved books, they would come to the Pickwick, and they were learning the language. A number of them could speak English as foreigners. Their speech was thoroughly Germanic--I can recognize Germanic--and there were Spaniards, and there were many British who came to live here, as you well know, simply to get away from the war and its effects. (I don't know what they were running away from except the atmosphere of war. What their motivation was is not for me to say.) But there was this émigré colony of every language you could think of, and they were all customers of the Pickwick. And very often they would meet at the Pickwick; they would run into each other, having not seen each other for many, many years. And the relationship they had had apparently was very close from the way they greeted each other.

They threw their arms around each other, so happy to see each other. I guess in many cases they didn't know whether that person was even alive, either one, because there wasn't that total communication. Even if they had wanted to write to each other, they wouldn't know where they were. Some very poignant situations occurred there. If I were able to write and had picked them up at the time, it would have made a good story. [Arnold] Zweig, [Thomas] Mann, [Alma] Mahler — names of that sort. And [Franz] Werfel. You can go up and down the line. A lot of musicians — musicians' names I don't know so well, but I know there were a lot of them there. I think I mentioned the story of that one musician. I was waiting on a man in the back of the store. He was a Frenchman. He had been in the shop quite a number of times, and we got on a nice "hello" basis where he would ask me for things and I'd try to find them. We were somewhere in the back of the shop, which at that time had old books.

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EPSTEIN

As I was talking to him, we were standing so that we could both see the front of the store. And a person walked in, and I could watch his eyes. His eyes almost bulged. I could see he became very excited. And he said, "Excuse me," and he ran to this man. He threw his arms around him, kissed him, and the man in turn did the same thing. (He was a much older man. The one I was speaking to was a rather younger man.) There was this beautiful exchange of greetings and all that. Then he later told me that the older man was a Greek. But he had an office in Paris; he later lived in Paris. This man supplied all the musical talent and other types of talent for the better nightclubs all over Europe, and this man had given the younger man his first start as a musician in an orchestra that played in these places. He regarded him as almost a second father. He later told me this older man was a very fine person; he took care of everybody. When they got into trouble, he took care of them and supported them till they got their next job. The older man's name was Varousis. He and I conversed many times. Yes, he had taken care of a lot of the people who were here now. When things got bad he said he had to feed them, and things went bad for him, too. He said he fed them spaghetti when he could afford nothing else. It was that type of thing that was happening all the time. Women would

find each other. It was almost like a way station, where if you stand long enough, you're going to meet everybody. And that was the type of thing that transpired here. [tape interruption]

GARDNER

Since we're talking about the émigré community, I was wondering if you could tell the tape a story that you told me during our preliminary interview about Lion Feuchtwanger.

EPSTEIN

Poor Mr. Feuchtwanger. He was a very fine gentleman, and he stood about this high. A very, very small voice, and you had to lean down to him to hear him. But he was a great scholar, and I respected him and his scholarship very much. This was during the war or shortly after--probably during. The clerks we had were probably no better than the clerks at the Pickwick today. (You can interpret that any way you wish.) At any rate, we had one chap who had come to ask me for a job. He stood about six feet four or five. Well, you know how tall Aaron is. About two or three inches taller than Aaron, which would be around six foot five. A very nice boy, but he didn't know a thing about books, and when he came to ask for a job, I said, "Well, what do you know about books?" He said, "Not much, but I can learn" — which I thought was a very good remark. And we needed someone, so we thought he could at least wait on trade and take money, which was a great thing in itself in those days. Help was very hard to find. (Eldred Meyer is his name. I don't think he would mind my telling this story, because we've laughed over it many times since.) Mr. Feuchtwanger came in, and he was approached by Eldred Meyer. Usually Mr. Feuchtwanger looked for me, and we got along very nicely. He would tell me what he wanted. So by way of introduction, this nice old man says to Eldred, "I am Mr. Feuchtwanger." And he didn't hear exactly what he said. The sounds were foreign to him. And he spoke with a great deal of an accent. So he said, "I beg pardon?" So Mr. Feuchtwanger repeated that. He said, "I am Mr. Feuchtwanger." So Eldred was totally puzzled; he didn't know exactly what he was talking about. So Feuchtwanger repeated the same thing over again, and Eldred replied finally in desperation, "I'm sorry, we don't have any more of that." [laughter] That story got around, and poor Mr. Feuchtwanger finally asked somebody where I was. And wherever I happened to be they called me,

and they told me what had happened before. Eldred himself told me.
[laughter] And we think that's one of the funnier stories about the shop at the time.

GARDNER

Was Feuchtwanger one of your regular customers?

EPSTEIN

Oh, by all means. He had us search out books for him when he was writing on a subject. He would give us a list of books about the subject. He would usually prepare a bibliography of things he was looking for. He may have used the UCLA library. He had a very fine library, a very fine one. And I think Mrs. Feuchtwanger gave it to USC, if I'm not mistaken.

GARDNER

Oh, what a shame.

EPSTEIN

She had to do something with it.

GARDNER

She could have given it to UCLA.

EPSTEIN

Well. . . . UCLA may have had. . . . The library that has more books sometimes needs them less than the library that has fewer books. But whatever arrangements they may have made— I think they gave him a special room. They gave him a special name for his library. He had a great deal of historical material, some of it very rare.

GARDNER

You mentioned [Bertolt] Brecht was also one of your customers.

EPSTEIN

Well, Brecht— we didn't know him well. He wasn't here long. But while he was here, he used to drop in. And curiously, when he left--before he left— I was called in to buy the few books he had left. And I remember going up to some

small house above Sunset Boulevard. I don't know now exactly what street it was on, but he had a very small apartment there, and apparently he was very poor. And he sold me some of his books. As a stupid thing, I didn't keep them. A number of them had his name in it with notations and whatnot, which would be invaluable today. But I didn't know him very well except that he was and I did have his books.

GARDNER

Were there any of the others whom you did know well? You mentioned Stravinsky was one of your customers?

EPSTEIN

Stravinsky, Igor and Vera--they used to come in very often. We were acquainted, but of course, I'm not in the least bit musical. I knew nothing about his music. But they bought general books. They were both excellent readers, and we sold them books for a good many years. Very pleasant people--Vera was a sweet person, very pleasant to deal with. There, again, the true artist never was demanding of any special services. Sometimes if they needed something in a hurry, why, I could understand that they had to have it for a special reason, we made every effort to get it to them in a hurry. We would make a personal delivery if necessary. Very often we would use Red Arrow Service. Some of them would want Red Arrow Service, and we'd always charge them for that. They were very nice. And then, as I said, [Robert] Craft came into the picture, and he, too, was a customer for a long time. Then, of course, they lived in Europe for so much of the time. They would go away for months at a time, even when they were living here. But then they changed their home altogether.

GARDNER

Now, just before we started this tape, you started to tell a story about Anais Nin.

EPSTEIN

Anais Nin? Well, the story has an unpleasant incident in it, but I don't think it should be off the record, necessarily. It just only shows lack of judgment on her part. That was before she became very famous and very popular. She had

published a number of books herself or had other publishers publish here and also in England. We used to stock her books. They weren't great sellers, but we would sell a few and made a real effort to keep them in stock. Well, one day--well, to go back a little bit. She was a very forward person, a very pressing person. She would demand that we keep her books in the window. She would make friends with the clerks to induce them to put the books in the window. Which was all right — I mean, everyone wants to push their merchandise. But she was extremely aggressive that way. One day, out of the blue, we get quite a large package from a publisher in England. We looked at it; they called my attention to it because in those days we had to pay duty. So if the duty amounted to anything over several dollars, they would call me in and verify whether they should accept it or not. They did, and I looked the package over, and I said, "I didn't order any books from that firm." Well, we decided to take it anyway. We opened the package, and there was about ten to fifteen copies of almost every one of Anais Nin's books that that British publisher had. "Who ordered these?" I checked with the clerk who was friendly with her. "Did you give her. ..." "No," he said, "I wouldn't think of giving orders for books to a British publisher, or any orders. You know that, Mr. E," I said, "Well, I realize that, but how in the world did they get here?" So I wrote to the British publisher and told them that we had not ordered these books and that we were going to send them back unless he had some address in the United States where he wanted me to send them rather than send them back to him in England. So he wrote back and said, "Oh, yes, they were ordered. They were ordered by Miss Nin." I immediately wrote back to them and said, "Miss Nin is not our employee. I never gave her any orders to order any books from you. She did not tell us she was going to order any books or discuss it with us in any which way. I'm sending them back immediately." And he apparently wrote to her. She was back in Los Angeles by that time, [phone rings; tape stopped] By that time, she apparently had heard from the publisher. No, she had apparently not yet come back to Los Angeles, but she wrote me a letter — I forget where she was — accusing me of all sorts of things, of always having a policy of restraining the sale of her books, which was totally ridiculous. That's one area in which we never played favorites. Joe Doakes was as good to me as Dreiser. If it was a good book, I would represent it. And I wrote back to her, explaining to her that I think she was totally unfair and totally wrong: that we'd always sold her books, I intended to sell her

books, and we do not censor anyone's writing or refuse to sell anyone's book if it's salable. Our total position was that we sell books because they sell, and if we can't sell them, we can't buy them. Well, she was very upset. She finally came to town, and when she came to town, she called me on the telephone. And I had to explain over and over again that I run the Pickwick Bookshop, that I decide what quantities of books to buy--nobody orders books for me--that she had absolutely no business ordering those books without at least discussing them with me. Under the circumstances, I might have said, "Okay, send me two or three copies"--or whatever. We could have absorbed that. But to send the quantities. ... I wouldn't let anyone in the world do it. She just could not understand that. She accused me--she has a violent temper--of everything under the sun, being unfair to her. And I just couldn't convince her that she was the one who was totally wrong, taking the liberty of ordering all those books. From there on we were not friends. Curiously enough, sometime later, my son met her--my astronomer son [Eugene], not Aaron--and they hit it off pretty well. I said, "Well, fine, but don't ever tell her who your father is." [laughter] [tape stopped]

GARDNER

Aaron mentioned the story about Scott Fitzgerald coming in to the store.

EPSTEIN

I don't have any specific story about Scott Fitzgerald except that when he lived here he was a constant customer of the shop. A very pleasant man to do business with. As it happened, Mrs. Epstein waited on him a number of times, and she really liked him, because he was such a gentleman. He was. He wouldn't talk much. He was usually accompanied by another person, a man, who almost did the talking for him. Sheilah Graham — whether they ever came in together or not, I don't know; they probably did. He lived at the Garden of Allah. Every so often he'd call for a book, and someone would deliver it to him on the way home. I know I did once. But to us he was not a talkative person at all. He was very polite with what he wanted. At that time, the old books were upstairs; he loved to go upstairs and browse through the old books. Of course, he scanned the new books, too, because he was interested in what was going on in the literary world. He never appeared to be a very happy person. He was almost sad-looking. He didn't appear to have as

much life to him as I read about him in the press, or in the books I read about him, in some of his books. But I suppose he'd gone through so much by that time, and it wasn't too long before his death. He died during the time he used to visit us. But I don't know of any incidents or stories about him that would be material. As a matter of fact, we treated him as a person who wanted to buy books and no other way. No one, unless they knew him, would ever recognize him from the pictures you see of him in his youth. There was hardly any recognizability — at least, I wouldn't be able to recognize Scott Fitzgerald as shown in his heyday of writing.

GARDNER

What about Faulkner during the time that he was out here?

EPSTEIN

Faulkner used to come in fairly regularly. He lived around the corner on Highland Avenue, and he used to eat his meals at Musso's. So he would walk by the store, and he would stop in two, three times a week. He would buy books for himself, sometimes old books, oh, every other week or so he would pick out two, three books to send to his daughter at Oxford, Mississippi. I think I mentioned he was very particular to be sure that I spelled out Mississippi, because, he said, there were Oxfords in every state in the union and if you didn't spell out "Mississippi," it was liable to go to any one of the other forty-seven states — at that time. He was known to be a person who didn't indulge too much in conversation, which was definitely true. But he was polite. He knew his books, though. Start mentioning books for children, he knew every one of them. We would order books for him, sometimes for the thing he was working on in the studio or something he wanted to read for himself that we didn't have, we would get for him. He invariably came in alone. As is well known, he didn't have too many friends. He didn't make friends very easily. He lived sort of a lonely life. He did not like it here.

GARDNER

And his work reflected it. Any others, among the great literary lights? I know they're too numerous.

EPSTEIN

Theodore Dreiser was a constant customer.

GARDNER

Would you like to talk about him for a little while?

EPSTEIN

He was a big man. He always had a stern look on his face — I wouldn't say angry look, but more or less of a stern character. Not easily approachable. We never tried to approach any of our people in that respect. We were merchants to them, and if they wanted to talk, we listened. If they didn't want to talk, we made no effort to get them to talk, because there was no point to our discussing his literary values with him. And he used to come in with a woman friend. We later on bought a lot of his books from this lady, some of which were autographed by him, inscribed by him, and should have been part of a good collection, and eventually were sold to people who were collecting Dreiser. We had no specific, unusual incidents that I could tell you about him except his appearance and his gruff would almost scare some of the more timid people in the shop. Aldous Huxley was a constant customer of ours.

GARDNER

You were going to talk about him before.

EPSTEIN

Aldous Huxley was a customer of ours since the very early days — I should say the later days on Eighth Street. I'm referring to how long ago since Eighth Street, which was before '38. And I remember the first time he came into the shop. Strangely, what he asked me for was a Bible with pretty good type, a secondhand Bible with pretty good type. On Eighth Street we had nothing but secondhand books. Who brought him in, I don't recollect — whether he came in by himself or if he was with somebody. But he was a constant buyer of books. And his eyesight, as you know--he was almost blind. Later on, he would wear glasses, and on top of the glasses he would still need a glass. But sometimes he would read without a glass. And through those very thick lenses, he would read almost with one eye. His head would be thrown to the right side, I think, and he would have the book almost to his face. It was very sad to look at. But he was a very fine person, just a total first-class person. He

talked, and he expressed himself if he liked the book; or he'd pick up a book and you were around, he'd make some remark about it; and he knew the author and he'd make some personal remark about the author. He preferred to say good things about an author, that this man knew what he was talking about and this man might have done better. He was extremely widely read. With all the handicap he had in reading, he read an amazing number of books. And he retained everything he saw. Later on we moved to Hollywood, and of course he lived in Hollywood. He lived up the Beachwood area. Later on his house was totally destroyed--and with everything in it! They had a fire up there eight or ten years ago. So many houses were destroyed up there, his amongst them. He came in one day shortly after the fire, and of course we commiserated with him. He said, "Oh, it's a very strange feeling, to lose every possession that you have. You don't realize how many necessary possessions that you pay no mind to, don't think of from day to day." He said, "For instance, what do you do if you wake up in the morning and there isn't another pair of socks, or your toothbrush is gone, or your favorite pair of shoes is gone, or any pair of shoes is gone?" He always expressed himself clearly and beautifully. It was a great pleasure to talk to him. He and I got along very well. We always made it a point to find a few minutes to talk. I made it a point if he wanted to talk to take advantage of the opportunity. He was a very worried man in the sense that he had a total worldwide feeling for people. You understand what I'm driving at. He was fearful that the world was really going to be exterminated. And of course there are a lot of people who are following his thinking today. And he was very widely knowledgeable about the conditions in all parts of the world, parts of the world that the normal person never mentions or is not even aware of--the African countries, the poor Asiatic countries. And he'd say, "Well, what's going to happen to all these people? One of these days they're going to want what they're entitled to." And it's happening. Later on, he got into the metaphysical thing. In my mind--now, this is an unexpert's view — I thought that his mind was deteriorating. He tried these hallucinogenic drugs. His efforts were very sincere, a search for knowledge. He had an insatiable thirst for knowledge, knowledge per se. And he would try things that seemed reasonable to him. But I think from there on he deteriorated, rapidly. His writing — even the critics say it was not of the quality that it had been before, that he divorced himself from certain types of interests that he had and went too deeply into these extra sensual

perceptions. That was only one of his many things that he delved in, besides the drug scene that he tried. If he wanted to know something, he did it. His second wife, she helped him a great deal, but, unfortunately, he died and that was that. But I will say, he was a very fine person. He had a son by the name of Matthew who used to live here at one time. And he used to visit with me on occasion. He later went to work for the World Health Organization. I lost track of him. Where he is now, I have no idea. But being a Huxley, he's somewhere connected with knowledge, and with the search for knowledge, and research. That's a fantastically famous family. On almost every side of the family, they branch into the scientists, the authors, and they're so interconnected in the British literary and scientific scene. You know, his brother is Julian Huxley, who's a very famous scientist, world-renowned researcher. He was more a biologist. I've often wondered where Matthew is. I would love to meet up with him and sit down and talk for a while. [Christopher] Isherwood was a frequent customer of our shop. We go all the way up and down the line. Some of them I formed an acquaintance with. Ray Bradbury, of course, he's an inveterate book browser, an extremely bright person, extremely bright; and he's a great friend of the book per se, of knowledge per se. I've had him come to autograph some of his books, and he'll always very willingly do that. He once described the Pickwick--I don't know, I think I mentioned it to you before--in one of his articles, "How to Spend an Evening in Los Angeles," how few places anyone can go to without great expense, to go around, look, see, of an evening. And one of the places that he mentioned you could have a great deal of fun is the Pickwick. And he said you go in there on a Friday night, and it's "wall-to-wall people, floor-to-ceiling books." [laughter] He mentioned that in one of the articles. A very fine guy. I suppose, if I someday sat down and made a bibliography of all the authors. ... I should remember, but in a conversation like this I can't begin to remember the total number.

GARDNER

I just wondered, the ones who stood out in your mind. What about somebody like Raymond Chandler, who was so closely identified with Los Angeles?

EPSTEIN

Raymond Chandler, I never knew personally. He definitely did come in, but he was in and out and I never got to know him. He was a good friend of Stanley Rose's.

GARDNER

He was on that side of the street.

EPSTEIN

No, it wasn't a matter of Stanley Rose. We got quite a few of his customers. There are a great many technicians of the motion picture industry who are good customers of ours, people who have actually manufactured the picture, if you understand what I mean--the directors, assistant directors, cameramen. They were constant buyers of books. Madison Lacey, for instance, was a photographer for the movies for a great many years, and one of the experts. He's now retired. He was a great customer of ours, friend of the shop. He became a very good friend of Stackhouse. I think to this day they have lunch every week. My mind, unfortunately, doesn't work fast enough that I can name them offhand. They all come back to me over a period of time.

GARDNER

Was Pickwick ever used in a work of fiction?

EPSTEIN

It has been mentioned in quite a number of books. My wife picked up a book here not so long ago which was written about twenty years ago, I think one of the mystery stories. And he used Pickwick quite a bit as a background. We didn't know it at the time. It shows how this man rushed to his favorite bookstore, and he described where it was. Of course, he didn't name Pickwick, but we knew immediately what was happening. He described what was happening in the store, and we could recognize what he was talking about. Yes, very often. And there have been shots of the Pickwick for the studios, who used it from time to time for a shot of books. And the publicity men used to like to bring their stars and starlets in and take pictures at the Pickwick to show them browsing through the books. And we were always very happy to have them come in. We made no demands on them. They could come in and take any- thing they want. We had excellent relationships with all the studios

and with the people generally, the institutions around us. One of the nice things I don't think I told you that happened was that one day I received a thank-you note from one of the [nuns] — I don't know if she was the mother superior — of Immaculate Heart College. And I opened it, and it was addressed to me personally. I had no idea they even knew my name. It went on and thanked me for all the nice things that I had done for the students, teachers, and nuns over the years. And it was signed, "I shall pray for you every day. Sister Mary Faith." I treasure that. I still have that. It came right out of the blue. I never had personal contact with them. The relationship was of this type: the high school department would give a play, and they wanted a little bit of an ad for it; we always managed to give them a little bit of an ad. They were giving a bazaar of some kind, would I give them a few books? We always gave them a few books. That didn't apply only to Immaculate Heart. It was our policy that local institutions, we were obligated to help support. And we always found a way to do it, in almost every case. I don't recollect turning down any school or library or group who asked us for something. We would always manage to give them either exactly what they wanted, if it was a specific thing, or something for a prize or whatnot. They had a library school at Immaculate Heart for nuns. Catholic school librarians. And they would have a sort of book exhibition. And they would ask me, would I loan them some books for their exhibition. I always told them, "Come and take what you want, unless it's for too long of a time. However, you're responsible for every book that's missing." They always agreed to that, and very often they would sell to the other librarians half of what they took; so in lieu of all the books, they'd bring me half the books and half money. But in the meantime, we were helping them, and we were establishing, I thought, a good relationship for the shop. And it was very, very helpful, because we had a wide-ranging trade. And this happened to every kind of a school or library. Sometimes the city schools would want to have an exhibition of certain kinds of books for a special class or whatever--although we did not go in for book fairs and such because we felt for us it was too much trouble. But if they wanted some things for an exhibition, we always did that. The B'Nai B'Rith always had a Jewish Book Week, so we would supply them books for exhibition. This happened all the time with various kinds of schools and institutions. We had a policy, as far as people asking us for books as donations, that any organization that would send us their request on the letterhead of the organization would get a book.

And many times they would ask for ads. Of course, with ads we had to be more careful, more circumspect, because the advertising value of most of those things was negligible. But if they wanted a five- or ten-dollar ad, why, we usually took it. I was often criticized by our bookkeeping department for it. I thought, well, somebody took the trouble to think of Pickwick, to sit down and write us a letter about it, and if it's going to cost us five dollars or something like that, why, to me it's worth it. And over the year, of course, it would come up to several hundred dollars, but I still think it's a good idea--for a shop like ours. A smaller shop, of course, couldn't afford it. But I felt I could afford it, and I felt that it was my duty. And I think that's another little bit that helped make the name of Pickwick so important to everybody in the community. [tape stopped]

GARDNER

Bob Campbell mentioned that one of the real strengths of Pickwick, in Hollywood especially, was the remainder section, and that Stackhouse, to a large degree, was responsible for getting that going.

EPSTEIN

You're right. I think I mentioned that to you earlier. Bob is absolutely correct. We were faced with the choice of expanding our old-book department; we were faced with the necessity of making a choice. Remainder books were becoming a very important part of the retail book business. They always had been, but they were becoming more and more so. At one time, remainder books were sold only by department stores, special sales. Later on, some bookstores started to stock them, and we were one of them. And the remainder market broadened as the book business broadened. Where there were 10,000 titles twenty-five or thirty years ago, now there are 40,000 titles, which meant there were more titles remaindered. The remainder dealers were very sharp. They knew which ones to promote and which ones not to. And we were convinced that if we could buy them and display them, we could sell them. But they have to have absolute display. You couldn't have masses and masses of them on the shelf, because people wouldn't buy them. They would only buy them on tables — although you can sell almost anything from a shelf sometimes. But to run the remainder department properly, you had to have large stacks, excellent books, displayed on tables where they were easy

to see and easy to look at and easy to inspect. We went in for that, and Stackhouse became the specialist in it. He did an excellent job for many years with it. We had probably the largest batch of remainders of anybody — in the area, for certain-- with the exception of some specialized remainder houses in New York. Some stores would buy remainders as a sale thing once or twice a year, but we kept them year-round. Of course, at Christmastime we used to always have beautiful remainders. At Christmastime the remainder houses would put on the market something they'd been holding back because they would get a better price at Christmastime. We used to have some beautiful remainders. To this day, I walk into the shop and somebody will take me aside, "Louis, they don't have as good remainders as you and Stack used to have." "Well," I said, "unfortunately, I agree with you." But the new policy being operated from Minneapolis, they can't control it as well as we could from the store. We found out it was difficult to control when you had even two stores, because there wasn't enough space in the shopping center store. We were fortunate to have our upstairs department and our mezzanine, which gave us all that additional space for display. But Bob Campbell's absolutely right. It became a good portion of our business, and a profitable portion.

GARDNER

Did Stackhouse also travel to Europe and so on?

EPSTEIN

Yes. We started buying remainders from foreign houses. And then we said, well, if we're going to buy them, why don't we go there? So it was Stackhouse's job. We sent him to Europe; for a number of years, he went every year. He used to buy some beautiful stuff. But it's had its dangers, too: that you could overbuy. You had space only to display so many. And if you bought twice that many, they might have been excellent books, but unless you could display them, they weren't selling--we had to learn that the hard way. Very often we would sell remainders at less than cost, just because we needed the space, to get rid of them. But overall, I think we made money in remainders. And it created a whole new flow of traffic. The same people who would buy remainders would buy other books — which we found true, too, of the paperback books. People thought that the paperbacks would ruin the other business. Well, it did ruin the new-fiction market. It ruined it in the

sense that it narrowed the number of titles of fiction that were being sold. As the paperback market widened and paperback publishers became more sophisticated in the way they distributed their books, it hurt the fiction market. The best sellers would sell and only a few others. The rest went right back to the publisher to be remainders. We very seldom bought fiction remainders. It's a very big business now — the remainder business.

GARDNER

At the time, were you unique in having someone travel around the world, picking them up?

EPSTEIN

Yes.

GARDNER

No other bookstore did that?

EPSTEIN

I think we were unique. And later on, we would hear that somebody else was traveling. We did many things that were different, that we started a trend for. We were the first ones in our area, regular bookstore, that really started stocking paperbacks. I think we were the first account that Penguin books had, except for the college bookstores. We had a large stock of Penguins and Pelicans before the paperback market generally expanded. And we were one of the early ones to have regular paperbacks, also.

GARDNER

When would that have been?

EPSTEIN

Oh, this would go back fifteen, twenty years, before we really opened our regular paperback department. We opened a paperback department, one of the big ones here in the city--almost all the wall space in the new section, the section where the bar had been.

1.16. TAPE NUMBER: VIII, Side One (July 2, 1974)

GARDNER

I thought we'd start out this time talking about [Memoirs of] Hecate County and that whole story.

EPSTEIN

In 1947, the book by Edmund Wilson came out, as everyone knows. It was a fairly dull book for the people who ever read it through. But it had two or three pages in which he gave some fairly intimate descriptions of a sexual act. Things were not quite as open then as they are today. Considerable opposition to the sale of it came up from various organizations — not necessarily organizations, but individuals, powerful individuals, one of them, Randolph Hearst, who was at all times at odds with Edmund Wilson, the author, for some of the things Hearst claimed Wilson did and Wilson claimed Hearst said. So I personally believe, and I've had it verified by [someone] who knew some of the background of their controversy, that it was strictly a hatchet job by Mr. Hearst and his editors for the pleasure of Hearst. At any rate, the situation came to a head in several places in the United States — New York City and, I believe, somewhere in the Midwest and in Los Angeles. The book was in stock in every bookstore in the United States, and no one considered it a bad book. It got the usual literary credits, but it had no particular sale until it started being attacked. Then, of course, people wanted to read it, wanted to know what all the hullabaloo was about, and it was a tremendous disappointment to 99 percent of the people who bought the book. Edmund Wilson is not the easiest person to read — by no means . The book, as I said, was on sale in all bookstores. In this city it was in every department store and in every bookstore that carried new books. The wholesalers had it, and it was being openly offered by everyone. And we had no problems with it until this campaign started. Well, one day — I recollect it was about the middle of the summer — a troop of policemen walked in. They knew we had the book because one of their detectives had come and bought a copy the day before. Well, they followed it up the next day, and they grabbed all the copies of Hecate County, and they arrested one of our employees, Herman Mann — about as innocent a person as ever lived. (Poor Herman has since died. He left a fine record in the book business, having worked in Brooklyn at Abraham and Straus and also, locally, at Bullock's. And he used to meet customers from Abraham and Straus who now lived here or visited here; they'd recognize each

other. That is another story.) Well, they arrested Herman. They took him to jail, and we eventually bailed him out. At the time of the arrest I protested, "Well, why do you arrest him? He only works here." "Well," he says, "it's a corporation." They couldn't arrest me — I was president of the corporation — because the corporate thing, you cannot be arrested and put in jail. "I personally didn't sell the book," I said, "but I'm responsible for having it here." Well, that isn't the way the law worked. The trial, of course, came up some months later. We tried to get onto the stand witnesses to show that the book was a good piece of literary writing, and the prurient scene was incidental to the story and didn't go on and on offering scenes such as that throughout the book as straight, dull pornography does. But, no, the judge at the time wouldn't hear anything of it.

GARDNER

Do you recall who the judge was?

EPSTEIN

It may be in the story. [looks at newspaper] This is the appeal. At any rate. Judge [Mildred L.] Lillie heard the appeal. I don't recall the man's name. It'll probably come back to me a little later. He was an obstinate old fool, and I think he was playing to the grandstand of Hearst — who, of course, was watching every move and making comments at the time. We lost the case. [phone rings; tape stopped] The corporation was convicted, and Herman was convicted, but he was let off with a minor fine. The publisher of the book, Doubleday and Company, furnished our defense counsel. They were very, very nice about it.

GARDNER

Who were your attorneys?

EPSTEIN

Our attorney was — the judge's name was [Arthur S.] Guerin. (I work backwards.) Ray Stansberry was the attorney, and Guerin was the original judge. And then the case was appealed, and it later came before Judge Lillie, who is now, I think, in the superior court or appellate, I believe. But Guerin was a pompous sort of a guy, and he wouldn't listen to any defense at all. He

actually practically told the jury that we were guilty from the start. The attorney, Stansberry — the judge ordered that the whole book be read in front of the jury, and Mrs. Stansberry sat there for three days reading that darn thing. But because of the pressure of the Times and the pressure of the Examiner and the judge's conduct in court, we were lost from the beginning. And the law at that time was very unclear, anyway, that you could be arrested for almost anything if anyone wanted to complain that it was obscene. It was surprising to me that more books didn't come under that, except perhaps the prosecutors were too busy to do anything about those things except when somebody influential in the community raised an issue for whatever reason. Very often such issues were raised in communities for political purposes so somebody can get publicity out of it, that he is the savior of the youth of America. Of course, people like that are always suspect in my mind. It went up on appeal, and unfortunately Judge Lillie, because of the law as it stood, could do nothing about reversing the case. Judge Lillie and I have met on many occasions since, and we always have a laugh about it. She maintains that she always regretted that she had to rule against us, but there was no way she could possibly rule any other way at that time. The U.S. Supreme Court had never clarified that point. It wasn't until later that they had such a thing as "without any literary value" or "without any social import" as part of the definition. And I notice now they've even changed it again to make it even more uncertain as to what is and what isn't. They leave it to every community to decide for themselves, and so the poor bookseller--well, such as the Pickwick, who had thirty branches all the way from Bakersfield to Hollywood — which community is he going to put a book in? And how is he going to be protected from being arrested in Bakersfield and not arrested in San Diego and maybe arrested again in Fresno and not arrested in Hollywood?

GARDNER

And the ordering's all done from Minneapolis.

EPSTEIN

Right. And the ordering is done from Minneapolis, It's an impossible situation. I can't understand the thinking of supposedly nine wise men in the Supreme Court making a decision like that. Well, the wise men were against the decision. If I may go political, I think it's the Nixon appointees who are out to

save the world from pornography--well, I won't comment any further on Nixon.

GARDNER

Oh, feel free.

EPSTEIN

If his Supreme Court appointees are no more honest in their thinking than his other appointees in his own office, I fear for the United States. This is actually true, in my mind. It's such a great danger that the Supreme Court has all that power to declare things constitutional or unconstitutional. If they don't think straight, the country's in grave danger. If they're following their appointer because of his principles, then they're not lawyers for the United States; they're lawyers for him. At any rate, that's the story of Hecate County .

GARDNER

Well, what happened finally?

EPSTEIN

Well, finally the penalties were paid, and business went on as usual. The book was withdrawn from circulation. Of course, it's now on every paperback-book shelf. It's never been acclaimed as a literary success. It was quietly laying its own egg, and it should have been allowed to do so. If it wasn't for Mr. Hearst, it probably would have. It would have gone down in literary circles as a novel written by Edmund Wilson, appeared in bibliographies; and scholars would have said that he did it, and nobody would have understood what he was talking about anyway. But that is what happens very often when the cudgels are taken up for saving the human race.

GARDNER

Can you think of any reason in particular why Pickwick was chosen?

EPSTEIN

It was not only Pickwick. Actually, I should have mentioned--this has always rankled me--that in view of the fact that every department store had it and all the stores in the country, that two stores were picked out. Not only Pickwick--there was a little tiny store on West Sixth Street that was being operated by

Harry Wepplo. I think it's Lofland's old store. When Lofland retired, somebody bought him out. And then Harry Wepplo was helping him, and then they started taking in new books. It was originally an old-book store. But poor Harry was also tried, he and Herman Mann. Curiously, they're both very short, tiny people, both very mild-mannered. Herman was more mild-mannered. Harry later opened a bookstore in Farmer's Market. But those were the only two stores.

GARDNER

Any reason?

EPSTEIN

Department stores were not touched. Of course, the reason given was, well, the department stores at that time were very heavy advertisers in the Examiner. So if Hearst was behind it, he would protect them. But it was pointed out to the court that only two stores out of dozens [were affected]. Well, of course, the comment is that you don't have to arrest every criminal. There's no defense that other people committing the same crime have not been arrested. Very often it's impossible to arrest every one of them--which is perfectly legal; I can understand that. But nevertheless it's curious that the Pickwick, which of course was right in the heart of Hollywood, the city of Sin--so-called--and the other was downtown, a little secondhand bookstore. I don't know what they were trying to prove by arresting him. I can understand the psychology of arresting the Pickwick in the midst of the City of Sin, but I can't see the psychology of the law officers--unless they were going to arrest everybody in blanket fashion--that they would pick on poor Harry Wepplo.

GARDNER

Did he have to pay the same fine?

EPSTEIN

Oh, yes, the fine was nominal. As I say, the defense was provided by Doubleday and Company, the publishers of the book, so we were not out financially except the horror of going down to court for days and days and days at a time and living through the agony of being accused of selling a pornographic book which is no more pornographic than thousands and

millions of other things. Well, that's pretty much the story of Hecate County. We got a lot of good press from some of the more liberal papers, and of course the literary community in Los Angeles was all stirred up for two reasons: number one, why the arrest was made; and number two, why the defense was not allowed to testify that this book was not offensive to the public, that the public could read it and not be offended at all. Well, no such defense was to be allowed, only the reading of it, and the jury had to make up its own mind. It was a little bit of a stir at the time.

GARDNER

Did the [American] Civil Liberties Union come into it at any point?

EPSTEIN

No, they did not appear. They did not appear on the scene. None of the public organizations appeared. And I don't think it was absolutely necessary for them to do so at the time. We had sufficient legal counsel, and we were getting good publicity out of our side of the story — except, of course, from the Hearst papers, which continued the attack at all times.

GARDNER

What about other censorship cases in the course of your career?

EPSTEIN

Well, surprisingly, with the exception of hard-core pornography, which bookstores don't handle — it's handled by a different type of person; it never appears in regular bookstores. . . . (Well, I won't say "never"; I'm sure that there are some small booksellers who might have a few of those things under the counter or in a drawer of his desk. There's no question about that. But the regular bookseller never really bothered with that.) Most of those things are or were sold either by peddlers or by some newsstands in certain parts of the area. It's an underground thing. It was not part of the regular trade. I recollect in the old, old days when I was still early in the used-book business, early in my career, there were people who would come from the East and carry — in their cars or however--pornographic books, Fanny Hill and such as that. And they would come to offer them to the used-book sellers, and, I suppose, to the new-book sellers, too. And if a person had one or two people who were

very anxious to find a copy, very often we would buy one. There's no question about it. And we would sell a piece of pornography from time to time, but we were very, very careful and circumspect about it. We didn't believe in censorship even then. But we knew what would happen to us if we broke the rules. And curiously, the people who were buyers of erotica in those days were not little school kids . They were not tramps. They were substantial people in the community. We had one man who was a major officer in a major bank who was collecting pornography. And during the course of my career I sold him several pieces of pornography. He was a fine, substantial citizen. He raised a fine family and a very literary family. Not only did he buy pornography, but he bought other things, too. It wasn't a question of his mind being preoccupied with it. Women would buy--at least half of the customers for pornography were female.

GARDNER

Is that so?

EPSTEIN

Oh, yes. To this day the saying is that if it were not for the female public, most of the so-called erotic novels being circulated today probably wouldn't make the grade. I'm not a psychologist, and I won't go into the psychological reasons for it; but that's what they say, and from my own experience, women buy most of that type of novel. When you come back to this pornography business, it's been going on since time immemorial. I have reprints at home now--I ran across a number of the Bohn Library editions. I don't know if you're familiar with them, but they republished the early classics from Pliny's Natural History to Procopius and any number of the early Greek and Latin writers; and even in those days they had what they called erotic literature. Very well known. And they're still being reprinted today. But you see, when they reprint one of those, when they reprint Johannes Secundus, they reprint it as a literary classic. Of course, they use a different type of language, and they approach the problem in a different way, but the intent is there. Maybe they might have been a little bit more literary in their day. I ran across about a half a dozen of those classics. I have them right here in the next room.

GARDNER

We'll have to read from them.

EPSTEIN

Well, you'll have to do the reading from them. [laughter]

GARDNER

But there were no other major censorship cases that affected Los Angeles?

EPSTEIN

Those few cases that did appear when a person was arrested were not really, in a sense, a censorship case as Hecate County. There was really no defense for them at that time. Now they have defended Fanny Hill and found it innocent. Whether Fanny Hill being tried today under the new Supreme Court ruling would come off scot free or not, I don't know.

GARDNER

It's impossible to say.

EPSTEIN

It's possible that some community, if you apply strictly community standards — for instance, a copy was sold, say, in an Amish village in Pennsylvania and they had a jury of that type. Or we could name quite a few communities where a thing like that might happen. The book was sold everywhere in the country, and this particular county, because of the nature of the citizens and their beliefs, it might be found to be offensive to them. And that is apparently the only rule.

GARDNER

As a bookseller, what are your feelings about censorship?

EPSTEIN

My feelings about censorship is that they serve no purpose, never have, and never will. Censorship has never eliminated pornography. Censorship of conduct has never eliminated bad conduct. Censorship of almost anything has never eliminated the thing that it wanted to censor. I think history will bear that out. People were burned for witchcraft, and there's just as much so-called witchcraft today as there ever was. People were prosecuted for writing

pornography, and as long as there are men to write, pornography will be written. And as long as there are people living, they will want to read pornography. I had an instance. Well, when the new wave of the so-called pornographic novels came out, there was considerable criticism by some people, and a great many of our customers were very much upset because we sold that type of thing. Now, for instance, when everybody started selling the Fanny Hill --we'll use that as the classic example— we were severely criticized for selling it. And we had to defend ourselves to some of our customers who believed that because it had had such a bad reputation that it should continue to have it and not be sold except whichever way it had been circulated. One man wrote to me, a customer of many years' standing, and I answered him. He complained about this thing being offered to young people and so forth, that it would hurt their morals and all that. And I explained to him in my own way. What his reaction to my letter was after he got it, I'll never know, because I never heard from him again. Whether he continued to be a customer of the shop or not, I don't know either, because I didn't know him personally. But at any rate, I wrote and told him that in the history of censorship, censorship has never been effective, and in spite of censorship, people who want to read those things usually find them and can find them. They've never been unavailable in the total sense. He made some remark about children reading it; and I told him that I had read pornography, and I'm positive my children have read pornography, and I'm sure that their children are going to read pornography, and that we do not consider ourselves an unusual family in that sense, nor a family that lacks morals. It's just a natural curiosity. And I don't think it will affect any one of us in any particular way, morally--or psychologically, for that matter. I remarked to him what my children were doing, that one was a scientist with his doctorate and doing research work, and that the other son was in business with me doing very well at that. And we enjoy an excellent reputation in the community. Now, what effect that letter had on the person, I don't know. But I've always defended it. There are various kinds of censorship. There was the censorship of the McCarthy era and the censorship of the Birchers, the America Firsters; and there is the censorship attempted, many attempts at censorship, even by the extreme left in Hollywood during their heyday when they were very powerful. Here, again, I don't want to go into a discussion of politics, but these are facts that these things have happened, and they happened to me: that a Bircher

would come in and see two books, one alongside the other; and he would take the book he didn't like and he would throw it at me and say, "Why the hell do you carry that old book, that Communist book? Close my account." Well, okay. If he would listen to me, I would try to explain to him that a bookstore cannot censor the public's thinking. It cannot censor a writer's writing. A bookstore is a place where the community can find an exchange of ideas. If you've got a better idea, you write it. Publish it. We'll sell it. But you've got to give each a chance for the public to make up its own mind. That's my theory of what a bookstore of our type was. I can imagine a bookstore that's run as a little personal shoppe by a person who likes to sell the books he likes. I agree, He has a right--and a duty, perhaps in his own mind--to sell only the things he likes and the ideas he likes to propagate. But a general community bookstore such as the Pickwick stores have always been, I don't think has a right to do that. And I have been taken to task for selling anti-Semitic books by the same organization to which I have made contributions--and still do, over many, many years — for fighting anti-Semitism. And I have to explain to them that the book that they were complaining about was definitely anti-Semitic, that I got no pleasure out of selling that book, but as a community bookstore, I felt it was proper — not only proper, but almost necessary--for me to stock that book. It certainly wasn't for the fact that I might want to make a few extra dollars out of that particular book, because it never did sell that well. The amount of money involved was minimal.

GARDNER

What book?

EPSTEIN

There again, I can't flick it off my memory right like that. I'll think of it. [Iron Curtain Over America by John Beatty] And I explained to Mr. [Milton] Senn, who was at that time with the Anti-Defamation League — poor chap, he just recently died — that in my mind it would be better if a person who wants this particular book would come into a store like ours and buy it and see other books that might be more enlightening than to go to that character who had bookstores. Smith, that preacher . . .

GARDNER

Gerald L.K. Smith.

EPSTEIN

. . . Gerald L.K. Smith's store and find nothing but anti-Semitic literature in there. And that gave it a sense of proportion. Well, he didn't particularly follow my theory, but I convinced him that he had no right to complain about me selling that book because in my position I could not exercise a censorship of what I would think would be the community thinking. The surprising thing about censorship is that men who are very human in every other respect, and would complain about censorship no end, and fight to their death practically would come in and say, "Louis, why do you handle this fascist book?" And they'd take the book and literally throw it out, throw it either at me or at the counter. I mean, they wouldn't make any attempt to hurt me. And they were people that I knew, who had been customers of mine for many years. And I would say to them frankly, "Look, you SOB, if you want to be a censor, get the hell out of here." Some of them I knew well enough to talk to like that. I said, "You have no right to complain because I sell that book. I sell the books you like, too, don't I?" During the height of that type of thinking we had many cases. One particular case I may have mentioned is where a group of three youngsters came in. They were Birch Society supporters. And a certain paperback came out against the Birchers--I can't recollect its name now-- and they were incensed over the fact that various stores were handling it. And so a group of three youngsters came to me Oh, Birchers are fantastic letter writers. They're threateners. Most of the time they won't sign their name. Anyone who sent me a letter with their name signed to it, I personally answered it, explaining my position. Once in a while I got a nice letter back telling me, well, it's very clear thinking but they still didn't agree. Anyway, they were by no means fair about it. Well, this group of three youngsters came in, and they complained about that particular book. And they explained to me that they had already visited the wholesale house for paperbacks and that they were going to drop it because of the pressure of Birch. They had visited the May Company, and May Company was going to drop it. They visited another department store, and they were going to drop it. Department stores are extremely sensitive to any type of criticism. As regards that, they have no backbone whatsoever. I mean, if they want to sell something, there's no reason why they should be pushed into a corner by some group or this group

or that group. At any rate, the youngsters came in and explained all that to me, that they had succeeded in doing all this and would I do the same. I said, "No, I will not do the same." And then I proceeded to give the three of them a long lecture of why I would not do the same, why our store could not do the same, and why I personally thought that they were totally mistaken in asking me to do the same. I explained to them the principles of freedom of speech and that we were handling two or three books that came out at the time which were Birch books--very severely criticized by the other side for handling them--and that there's no reason that they should not take their chances in the marketplace of ideas, as any other idea. If you've got a better idea, then people will follow it. And I explained to them of the censorship cases that had happened in the early days of the formation of the country. I explained to them of the article about free speech. I think I left an impression with those youngsters. I could see the attitude on their face was not as antagonistic and aggressive and holy as it was when they walked in. And to their credit, they politely thanked me for listening to them, and I thanked them for listening to me . I said, "You boys are young, and you should study this issue to a degree greater, perhaps, than has been called to your attention. If the censorship could work both ways — if the extreme left were. ..." The fact that they themselves were able to publish their books in which they say there's a conspiracy against them; the conspiracy has never bothered to censor them. Why should they act in reverse? Anyway, I must have given a good talk, because I know that several of my clerks had gathered around to listen all through this. They said, "Mr. E, that was a damn good talk." I was very serious about the issue. I thought to express myself to youngsters. I gave them a good deal more time than I might have to an older person who might have wanted to give me an argument. But meet those three youngsters on the street, and you'd take them for just average, good American youngsters. They had been sold on the idea that the country was being run by Communists for Communists and nothing but Communists, all the way up to the top. At that particular stage, I don't think the liberal community was that strong.

GARDNER

We haven't talked about your political affiliations at all.

EPSTEIN

I don't have any political affiliations in the sense that I am a straight party man. I register as a Democrat, but I would just as often vote for a good Republican if I think he's a better person. I think the party labels are in many instances misleading. And I think a party label will very often push a good man into doing bad things really against his own good thinking because he feels he has a certain loyalty to a party. If our two-party system was that strong in this country, it would have to be subject to more criticism in Congress on a party basis. We would have to adopt the British type of rule. If they lost a vote of confidence, they were out. Under our system, which does not provide for that, in some ways it works at a disadvantage. Of course, no one can gainsay that our government has probably stood the test of time as well as any government in Europe. It doesn't always work out the best, but on the whole I guess it is the best. But I think too many people are befogged by party labels. I don't agree with that.

GARDNER

So you've never been active for one party or another?

EPSTEIN

I've never been active. I've sent money to candidates. I suppose you would call me a supporter of liberal candidates. By the same token, I can criticize a liberal candidate if he's a weak person. After he gets elected and doesn't get the job done, there's no reason to reelect him because he happens to have a liberal label. A lot of liberals, I think, are not self-critical about the representatives we send to certain elected institutions. The tendency of a label is to make everybody run as a bunch of sheep and to follow the label rather than their good sense. I take my liberality with a large grain of salt, knowing the liberals are just as human as nonliberals. Morally, I think [that] they're probably not any better. Their standards initially might be higher, but I think they're just as liable to temptation as anyone else. And I'm old enough to know that people are tempted at certain times in their lives, certain situations, either by actual money or by power or by glory or by the success syndrome. I totally believe that human nature being what it is, we will never have a perfect government. There's no such thing as a perfect government. I can't conceive of it, and I don't think anyone else can. It can't be achieved by party labels. It can only be achieved by individuals. And I think a good individual, no matter what his

party, in a powerful office can exert more good than the party can: a strong man who lives by principle, who knows what is good and then tries to attain that good. And I think about as close to a person as I can think of is— and I still call him Governor Warren — Chief Justice [Earl] Warren. Not that everything he did necessarily was of the best, but of a person with a party label, supposedly Republican, I think his theory of justice, his theory of government, is closest to my way of thinking than any other before or since. On the other hand, I think a [Franklin D.] Roosevelt served a purpose at the time, but I think he served too long. I think the country would have been far better off if he had not been elected the last time. I think a lot of politicians happened to get into situations, a lot of presidents got into situations over which they had no control, and suffered because the events were such that they overwhelmed the country and they overwhelmed the man--like the Depression. [Herbert] Hoover was a good man. I think he might have been an excellent president. But I think he just came in at an inopportune time for himself. No man at that time could have done well--let's put it that way. My politics are very simple. I have friends who get all excited about elections, and I sometimes get excited about elections. There are certain people I would hate to see in office, and there are some in office now who I hate to see there. But on the other hand, look, they were elected by the populace, and the populace will eventually become disillusioned with them. These are the risks we have to take in a popular form of government, in a democratic form of government, a republican form of government.

GARDNER

We have a little bit left on the tape, so I'll follow this line before we go into something else. What about local community politicians, people like city councilmen that you've had to deal with?

EPSTEIN

Well, we've had some good men, some very poor men. I think we have a good man in office right now [Mayor Tom Bradley] . His predecessor, I never did like. He was a snide person.

GARDNER

You're speaking of [Sam] Yorty.

EPSTEIN

Yes. He attempted to degrade everyone who was against him. He had a way of remarking about people which was devious in a sense that he would say something which was not of itself bad, but which you knew that he meant to say for a denigrating purpose. I think one of my pet peeves has been the Dodger Stadium affair. You know, for that reason I've never been to Dodger Stadium, even though I've been invited to go free. People have offered the tickets to go there, and I just won't go. Now, whether I'll continue to be that obstinate, I don't know. But I think that was a scandal that should have been dug out and dug up. In my own mind I'm convinced Norris Poulson probably might have been — I'm not sure that he was paid off, but he later admitted that there was quite a bit of hanky-panky going on. Those were the exact terms that he used. But he was determined to get a baseball team for Los Angeles at any cost. Well, the stupid person--in my mind he was stupid. I think the Dodger people were so anxious to get out of Brooklyn that they would have given anything to come here, that we did not have to give them a ball park and build roads for them and give them all that very valuable land. If it could be used for a ball park, the city could have used it for recreation for its own citizens, if not for other things. Now, they need land for this thing, they need land for that thing--for storage warehouses and one thing and another--and the city has to go out and pay millions of dollars for land. And here they gave them excellent land. Of course, it might have cost money for the city to grade it and that, but they did spend the money anyway. You know, when they say that the city spent X number of dollars, I estimate in my own mind that whatever figure they use as x, the total expense was probably 5x, because of all the necessary things they did for preparation--the boulevards they built to get to the ball park, the off ramps that they made. Well, fine, it's necessary. But if somebody comes in and wants to do it as a private enterprise, what is the city getting out of it? He has a very successful operation, but the city gets nothing out of it. They've got a little bit of playground, I think; and then one other piece of ground that was promised to the city, I don't know whether they ever gave it or not. My memory fails me on all the details. That's one of my pet peeves. [tape stopped]

GARDNER

What about local councilmen and so forth with whom you've had to work around Hollywood? Was any of them good, bad?

EPSTEIN

Well, actually, we've never had to work very much with our local councilmen. They don't affect our business in any particular way, except the only one who tried to actually get into the hair of our business was a man we knew very well, a neighbor of ours who had a building across the street--he had the medical building just on the opposite side of the street from where we were--whom we considered quite a good friend and whom we supported with money in his campaign--Paul Lamport. The first thing when he got in, he wanted to make a Park Avenue out of Hollywood Boulevard. And he wanted to get fine stores and fine hotels. So he immediately started a campaign against secondhand bookstores or bookstores or anything that didn't suit his conception.

1.17. TAPE NUMBER: VIII, Side Two (July 2, 1974)

EPSTEIN

Paul, whom I knew quite well and Aaron knew quite well (we worked together on various projects for the community, chamber of commerce and whatnot), turned out to be a very self-seeking person. He had this medical building; he wanted to advance his property — which we all do. We owned property on Hollywood Boulevard, too, at that time. But he, as I said, thought to make it a Park Avenue or Fifth Avenue, New York. He missed the boat by forty-five years. He immediately started a campaign against Pickwick Bookshop having their display on the outside of the shop, which had been there for thirty-some-odd years and nobody complained about it. And he picked out several shops that were — in the way of drawing people to Hollywood Boulevard--some of the leading shops that there are. The Wax Museum, which happened to be in the block where his building is, he attacked very much. And the building was owned by a Matt Silvers, who helped support Hollywood for many, many years before Paul came into the picture. Paul, I think, was an opportunist. Well, he was a crony of Yorty. Yorty put him up for council, and he was elected. And immediately on his election he started throwing his weight around. But fortunately he was defeated the first time around. He

antagonized everyone whom he had to work with, because he wanted to impose only his ideas. He antagonized a lot of property owners around there. He was going to tell them what was to be built on their street and what not. The people living on North Curson, which ends in a small canyon: he was all for opening up that little canyon for building. It was totally unsuited, the street. Curson is comparatively narrow, and he antagonized half of the Hollywood community. At any rate, there was an example of a man who had no business in politics. He never should have been elected. All he saw in politics was to gain ends that would be beneficial to him and to people around him. That is the kind of local politics that I will fight against. Most of the time, we take a moderate view of the man who is our councilperson.

GARDNER

And have very little dealings with him?

EPSTEIN

No, except as supporters of the chamber of commerce when we were in business and other community things that we were involved with then. I never directly, through the chamber of commerce's executive secretary, would have to approach them, and we became acquainted with them. As our business grew, we were considered major people in the community of business on Hollywood Boulevard, so they would come to visit us, just to be introduced and leave an idea that they thought might happen, sometimes to talk over something. We always stated our politics. I don't consider it politics: we stated our position clearly to them, and if we liked it, we backed it up with maybe a few dollars from time to time when it needed it. If it was a candidate that we thought was admirable, we helped with money--which is as I think every good citizen would and should, considering that costs of campaigns are so fantastically high now. Everybody seems to think that the more money they spend, the more successful they will be in their election. I can assume that some money is absolutely necessary now with the days of widespread communication.

GARDNER

You mentioned before a case having to do with embezzlement.

EPSTEIN

Well, that was a purely almost personal thing as to the Pickwick. We had a bookkeeper who just took advantage of our lack of following our own rules, a disregard of our own rules. The chap's name was Joe Herman. We hired him as a bookkeeper, and we thought he was an excellent bookkeeper. He was very willing to do whatever we asked of him, had figures ready for us whenever we wanted them. He was very pleasant, and we got very well acquainted. We'd eat together two or three times a week, eat our lunches together. But here again, if you don't know a person's background, you really can be seriously hurt. The people whom we inquired of when we hired him, where he worked before, gave him an excellent recommendation, But we learned later why. At any rate, one January fifth or sixth or seventh--I don't know the exact date; he used to come in early to open the store and go to the safe and count the money and so forth — he wasn't there. We looked where the money was supposed to be, and it wasn't there. And we started looking around for other things, and they weren't there. At any rate, we discovered that the man took off with a woman--although he had a wife and a number of children--and that by the best of our accounting he absconded with about \$35,000 in cash. And he did it this way: during the Christmas rush, we were all so eager to work hard and make sales, we neglected to watch our bank balances and bank deposits. He would deposit the checks, but not the cash. Well, between about the fifteenth or twentieth of December and fifth of January, a lot of actual cash comes through that cash drawer, and that's what he took. Then he destroyed all the cash records and things like that. The actual amount probably might have been higher except we had no other way to check the accounts absolutely. We had our cash register tapes, and we had our checks, and we took the difference between. But there are other areas which he could have gotten. Then we found that he had made entries in the books previously. He was a very clever guy — he did it very cleverly — but he was eventually caught. We had a hell of a time proving a case against him. It was only because I had kept a daily record that he gave me each day during the course of the Christmas business, comparing Christmas day by day to the year previous. And he would give it to me on little yellow slips the size of a three-by-five card, which at the end, when they got the final results for the year, I should have thrown away. But for some reason or other, I threw those daily slips into [a drawer] . I must have been changing clothes and I needed a new handkerchief; these might have been in my back pocket. I just threw them down, and they

got into that drawer. And I discovered those slips six months later during the time when our case looked very doubtful and the district attorney told us it was doubtful. He almost was on the point of dropping it.

GARDNER

Why was it doubtful?

EPSTEIN

Because bookkeeping cases are extremely hard to prove to a jury. We had no original records. He destroyed them. All we had was the cash-register tape and our bank deposits. He didn't think that the jury would go for that. But when I discovered those slips in his handwriting, in which he said, "This is what we took in," then it verified the cash-register tapes. They could say somebody could run a tape off, set the register to run a tape off, which he was trying to say. So when I found that, I called the prosecuting attorney and I told him what I found. He said, "Bring those down right away. [claps hands] This clinches our case." And sure enough, it did. Oh, they tried every which way. He tried to say that Stackhouse — our manager-- and I kept a duplicate set of books for tax purposes to cheat the income tax people, tried to say that Stack and I stole the money. There wasn't a thing that he wouldn't try to do, but of course, he was very evasive on the stand. Well, he was convicted. And he appealed the case, and he was in jail because he couldn't raise bond. Well, somebody furnished bond for him. And while he was out on appeal, he got another job and did the same damn thing. He's never been found since. He ran off. When he knew that his trail was getting warm, he ran off.

GARDNER

That's incredible.

EPSTEIN

That is incredible. They've never found him. A very smooth talker and a very likable guy. He'll do anything for you.

GARDNER

Were there any tidbits like this that happened with other bookshops around town?

EPSTEIN

Oh, we've had dishonest employees who've gotten away with \$1,000, \$1,200--branch managers. Yes, those things have happened to other shops. It happens in every type of business. Sometimes a good man, for some reason of pressure or something, will go sour all of a sudden, and he'll almost compel himself to do something--not because he wants to, but because he feels he needs the money to defend himself against something or whatever purposes. Human nature's a peculiar thing. Many good people are very often forced into situations in which they have no control over their actions. They really don't want to do it; they know it's wrong; they don't want to do it. But they feel compelled to do it. Maybe they get in a bad social circumstance in which money might buy them out or give them temporary relief. Sometimes they do something wrong and are blackmailed into various things. I think most crimes are committed — that type of crime--because the money's right there in front of them; and they just think, well, they'll outsmart the other person. And many of them just take the money and run — without a plan. This man had a plan, and we've had other bookkeepers who've gotten away with minor amounts of money. But when you meet them later and ask them, "Why do you do it?" (It just happened to me.) "Well, I needed some money." I said, "Well, what did you need it for? Why didn't you ask me for some money? You know my door's always been open for a hundred, two hundred sometimes, when one of my employees gets in a jam--or even more." But, well, he felt it wouldn't be the right thing or he didn't want to confide in me or whatever. That's the type of thing that happens.

GARDNER

Maybe this would be a good point to talk in a little detail about some of the Pickwick employees. Last time we talked about Stackhouse to some degree, and in talking about Hecate County we mentioned Herman Mann. Maybe you'd like to talk about him in more detail, describe his affiliation.

EPSTEIN

Well, I think I mentioned Herman Mann before. Herman was probably the nicest person whom we ever met, in the sense that he was very cooperative, very conscientious, very honest, very mild-mannered--almost saintly, in a sense — and extremely loyal. Now, he worked, as I mentioned, with Abraham

and Straus in Brooklyn. And he became a very good friend of the family, in every sense. We included him in almost every family affair that we've had. But he would not take responsibilities. He would not assume responsibilities. He was unable to tell anyone else to do something. Whether it was fear--I suppose it's a type of fear — of antagonizing anyone, but he would rather do some things himself. And for that reason he never was pushed up into higher ranks of the business. And he was satisfied. He knew it. He was satisfied to be in the position he was. He was one of our senior clerks. We gave him as much responsibility as we thought he could stand, or that he wanted. And he had the respect of everyone he ever came in contact with. He would go to great lengths to seek out a book for a customer. On his days off he would go around looking for books that his customers asked him for. And very often he'd run across some very hard-to-find things. The poor man developed a bad heart. Ann thinks that he must have had rheumatic fever when he was a youngster because he never was a person of great energy. And he died — about five years ago now. We had a number of other employees who were interesting in the sense that they were good book people or had other characteristics. Ben Latting, who has been with the company for a great many years, is an excellent bookman. He, too, for years fought off responsibility because of his temperament. It was a different type of temperament from Herman Mann, much more forceful and much stronger. But because of his belief that no man should govern another, for that reason he wouldn't take responsibilities to tell people what to do and see that they do it — and suffer the consequence if they didn't do it. Of course, responsibility gives you a certain authority to use it. But lately he has turned around a little bit. He's still with the company. He's a very fine person but hard to warm up to. He doesn't warm up to people. People think that he's aloof, and in some ways he is. But a very good bookman--he knows his books thoroughly. He's been a good employee to the Pickwick.

GARDNER

How long has he been there?

EPSTEIN

Oh, he worked downtown for the Argonaut with Ben for a great many years. Altogether, he's been with the Pickwick at least twenty-five years. Guy

Thompson has been with Pickwick a good many years and is now one of the managers of the store. Reliable and resourceful. He is of Greek origin. Good bookman, but has to work under a very restrictive system for a good bookman. Lloyd Harkema has just retired. We went to a dinner with him. All the group around the Pickwick wanted to give him quite a nice dinner or luncheon or whatever, but he wouldn't go for it. He insisted, no, he'd rather go individually to lunch with others from time to time. He was a very good employee in many ways. Lloyd is the kind of a guy who wants to be too good to too many people — or good to everybody, I should say, which is difficult to do, [and] which got him into a good many difficulties, not great difficulties but sometimes embarrassing situations because so many people whom you meet are out to take advantage of you. And a great many people did take advantage of Lloyd. He was almost naive about certain things. But he meant very well, and he was very loyal to the shop. He always tried hard to make as many good sales as he could, and he did. And he was able to handle situations sometimes, assuage a customer's anger or take over a situation that was turning bad with some clerk who was being obstinate or whatever. (The customer becomes angry, you know. It's a two-way deal. Sometimes the customer becomes obstinate, and if the clerk becomes obstinate at the same time, you're in trouble. The theory I used to try to propound to my people: "When this guy's hot, you stay cool" — which is a good theory, if you can control it to some extent.) But Lloyd on the whole was an excellent employee, and Pickwick, I think, is going to miss him, miss him in the sense that he lent a certain amount of personality to the store. He knew so many people individually. Now the only person left who's been there any length of time, who works on the floor, is Ben Latting. And Ben is not the outgoing type that Lloyd was. However, I'm sure Pickwick will survive.

GARDNER

What was Lloyd Harkema's background?

EPSTEIN

He came from New England. He came to us after army service. He had attained the rank of a captain. He tried selling insurance, and he tried working as a detail man for some large grocery company, I think, or Standard Brands or something like that. But he didn't like it, or for whatever reason he left them

and came to Hollywood, I think, with the idea of becoming an actor. Especially people just out of the army, they build up these things. But he always was a visionary of one kind or another. He came in and asked for a job, which we gave him. He liked the job. But then later on he studied acting, and later on he studied other things. But apparently he found out that he wasn't suited for it, and he was smart enough to maintain his job with us while he was trying other things. He tried being an agent for a while. But those things just weren't for him; he just didn't have the total background, the total personality for it. So he always came back to the book business. Then he decided, well, he'd better stay with it now. He got those other things out of his system. He became a good bookman. He had an excellent memory for people and faces and their backgrounds; and very often, with my horrible memory for names and faces, I would use him as my tool. We developed a code that if I'd give him a certain kind of a nudge, he knew to look up and tell me who was coming. [laughter] I would know the person, I would converse with him, but I would be darned if I could remember the name. I would remember what they bought, the kind of books they collected, but I couldn't remember the name. And I will think of it now. Oh, I could describe many other people who worked for us, but I don't know if they'd be of any special interest to anyone. There's a certain attraction about a bookstore that brings a type of person--sometimes the rebellious type who can get lost in books, who can't maintain a job anywhere else, in the sense that the discipline of a bookstore is different from the discipline of an office or the discipline of a factory. They can forget about discipline when they're thinking of the books they're selling, the ideas. We had people who were so in love with books that they couldn't do their work. There's a chap who now works for another bookstore [Tony Russo]--whom I happened to bump into, as a matter of fact; I went into the store he works at just purposely to see him. He's an excellent bookman. I'm speaking of the days when we had problems with him. He would never be available to do the work of a bookstore. He would always have his nose in a book or a periodical or a piece of paper. He could not resist the reading of type. He told me the other day--there was a third person there, and I mentioned to that third person that my biggest problem with so-and-so is that I couldn't get him to get his eyes off type, that it was an attraction he couldn't resist. It could be anything. This little piece of paper here, or any other. He told me, "You know, Mr. E, my wife complains about this very same thing. I'll be sitting at the breakfast table, and

I'll read all the things around the boxes of the breakfast food if there was nothing else to read." But he's an extremely intelligent guy, and I think he's overcoming that to quite a degree. I think he's disciplined himself. But can you imagine that that was the only thing I could find wrong with the man? But it was a terrible thing that he became, in a sense, almost useless to us because of that. And we tried to break him of that habit. He knew that he was wasting half his days. But we would give him a box of books to open, and he would have to find out exactly what each one was about--which was great if there wasn't other work to do. But he would never have an opportunity to use that knowledge in the store because he would never find time to wait on the customer. Then we had the usual number of failures and people who were this, that, or the other. We had some people whom we had trouble with because they were on drugs, which we didn't know for some time, [and] a number of Hollywood people who wanted to make Hollywood and couldn't, which is inherent to the community.

GARDNER

Well, when you had the secondhand shop, people like Bennett and Marshall and so on passed through. Were there any later during your new-book period who moved on to their own shops?

EPSTEIN

No, Bennett and Marshall, I think, were the last of those who came and later opened their own shops. Marshall worked for me when I was still on Eighth Street. We hired Bob Bennett when we first opened Pickwick on Hollywood Boulevard. They were much too high caliber for the jobs that we had to offer at that time. Had they come at their age after we'd established the Pickwick, where we could have used the qualities they had to a greater degree, I doubt whether we could have retained them, because I think their ambition was quite high and their capabilities were quite high. But this was during the Depression years, and they were capable people holding down very minor jobs. Of course, they were both much younger. They were both very young, as we all were at that time. When Dick Marshall worked for me, I think, well, I might have been a year or two older than he, because he was not. ... I don't recollect how old Dick was when he died. At any rate, Dick worked for us for a while, then left and went into buying and selling of books. Then he went to

work for Dawson. And later on Bob Bennett worked for Dawson. They came up at a very fast pace. They were very fortunate. They found one or two customers who were very wealthy, who took a great interest in their becoming a success. They backed them with either buying a lot of things from them from time to time, loaning them money to buy larger libraries than they could afford, and introduced them to other wealthy people. One of the women in particular, so the story was told to me, would hold a salon and have them bring their books, or other things, and have these wealthy women come in on that particular day. And they would do their selling act. They were good salesmen. They were nice personalities, in the sense they could explain to people how these things could be handled. Bob was a very fine person. Dick was a harder person and more aggressive in the sense that he wanted to make money much faster than he did, although they did extremely well towards their later years. But they had a struggle. My brother tells me--he was right across the street from them, and he knew them at a certain time much better than I did during that period--that they were having a hard time until this certain woman became very much interested in them and really gave them a terrific push up, which helped them a great deal. I suppose they were deserving of it, because Bob probably provided this woman with a lot of things she wanted and needed. To her, it was a thing. She was a maiden lady who had to have some kind of an interest, and books were her interest. She wanted to spread it. It's a give and take. She got something and they got something.

GARDNER

There was one name that I found when I was going through this list of the antiquarians who was affiliated with Pickwick, Robert Wettereau.

EPSTEIN

Oh, Bob Wettereau, oh, yes. Bob Wettereau — the poor man has since died. It's just horrible for me to have to tell you of all the people who died, and they died before their time. Bob was certainly not old enough to have died. He died while on a trip to Europe. Bob was a very fine young man. He came to work for us. His background I don't think too much about, except that he married this girl from Texas, a very fine girl, and they had their first child while he was working for us. He came to me as a clerk. He was far above average in

intelligence-- far above what the average clerk's intelligence was — and his interests were much higher and more literary. He was greatly interested in art, and he had a good knowledge of art. As a matter of fact, he later went to work for Flax in Westwood and built up a very fine business in art books for them simply because of his own knowledge. Now, what's happened, that department I hear has gone almost to pot. The last I heard, they hired a buyer who at one time had worked for us to do the buying; when I heard that she was going to be the buyer, I knew that she could not do the job, didn't have the background involved for it. At any rate. Bob stayed with us for quite a while. We tried to develop an art department which he could run, but we just didn't have the resources for it at the time. And he tried very hard, and he developed a lot. Then we gave that idea up and put him in charge of paperbacks; and he did very well with that--as far as he could at that time. Whatever he did, he did well. He was a good talker. The only complaint we might have had is that there were too many discussions going on when there might have been other work to do. But that's to be expected of that type of a person. However, our type of business didn't allow for a great deal of expenditures of time on individual customers. And he is the person whom Anais Nin became very close with. I think she took advantage of him in many instances by inducing him to give her much more space than she was entitled to at the time and getting him to do things which were more to her interest than to the shop's interest. In spite of the fact that she looks like an ethereal person, almost to be blown away, goodness, she was a hard person. At least, she proved herself in dealing with us. Very pushy. But that is her nature.

GARDNER

We went through that last time, right.

EPSTEIN

You have my account of what happened, her going out and taking the responsibility of buying books for us. That really tripped me up. But Bob left us and went to work for Flax. He did an excellent job there, and I was sorry to hear that he died at such an early age.

GARDNER

Any other Pickwick employees you'd like to run through?

EPSTEIN

There are a few I'd like to mention — for other reasons than their qualities. [laughter] For the most part, I've mentioned those that have done well for us now. Of course, Elliot Leonard, I gave you his background, and I've told you a good deal about Stackhouse and his service with the Pickwick. During the formative days of the Pickwick, Stackhouse was the keystone of the business. He carried on for a good many years, for which we're very thankful. Although he was rather proud of the Pickwick's progress later, I don't think he completely liked the expansion and the way it affected him, in the sense that his end of the business, the remainder business, was circumscribed somewhat. We got so large, we had to carry such a large inventory, that the company complained about it--rightfully. That was his style of doing business; it was the antithesis of the way a large company operates. Whereas we didn't pay strict attention to inventory figures and were still quite profitable — and I think the fact that we didn't pay strict attention to inventory figures in the sense that we would want to control our inventory and make it as small as possible. We worked almost the other way. We carried a tremendous inventory of books that no one else would carry. And we could rightly be accused of not being over businesslike because of that. It probably would have been more profitable if we had carried fewer copies of the books we did carry, and maybe fewer titles. But as long as the business was showing a good profit, why, I felt-- and he felt--that maybe that's the secret of our success, by not being too businesslike. And there is something to that--at least for a business of our type. If we were selling shirts and so forth, we would have accurate figures of exactly how many we sell of a certain size; we'd have to choose at the end. In my buying, I had to choose for almost 40,000 titles a year, plus all the books that had ever been published before that were still in print. I had a greed for titles, you might say. I don't know what other expression to use. I wanted to have as many titles as possible — if I thought they were good books, very often, if I knew there was a demand for them, even if I knew that they were not good books. They were not books that went out to make people bad, but they might have been badly written or maybe too amateurish. But if there were enough amateurs who wanted them and didn't want the better books, then we gave them the book that they wanted. It was not our province to tell them. We tried to tell them, "Put the two, one next to the other and show them. This is the better one." Like in the in- stance of selling

dictionaries: People ask me, "Which is the best dictionary?" Well, you really can't give them an answer. You can, perhaps, in telling them, "Well, the best one, of course, is the unabridged." But when they get into the collegiate size and the smaller ones, it's hard to tell a person which is the best. Each has some points about it that make it superior in that particular category to the other. Some people will buy a dictionary simply because the type is better; they can read it. Other people will want to know how many different kinds of entries, and what type of spelling or orthographies they have, or what hints they have on how to use words. How can one tell really which is the best book for the person? Very often we could, and we did, tell them. That is the reason we always carry such a variety of things. If I made up my mind that the World Publishing Company was the best dictionary, and my customer says no, he wants a Merriam, I'm not about to stop and argue with him and say, "Look, you're wrong." I walked out of a store the other day because I went in to buy something, went in to buy a filler for a fountain pen. Now, how can you think that two people can become involved in an argument about a filler for a fountain pen? Well, I have a Cross pen, and I want a certain color. And this girl showed me a color which was a blue-black instead of a black. And I wanted a black. I wouldn't mind if she had tried to explain to me that these are practically similar. She thought they were similar. But she used the term, "Are you trying to tell me that I don't know?" Which of course antagonized me. I said, "Look, lady, I'm not trying to tell you anything here. Goodbye." And I walked right out. But this is the kind of a thing: we try never to have a person argue with a customer. We tried to have a variety to show them. But if they chose the lesser one, well, maybe that's why the lesser one was published. We always tried to tell them, "Look, never argue with a customer, even if you know that the customer is wrong. Just say, 'Well, maybe. Maybe you're right,' if the person particular is adamant, because number one, you're not going to change his mind if they're that adamant, and number two, why argue with them? You have nothing to gain, absolutely nothing to gain, and you'll lose a customer. Don't make it a personal matter unless he insults you or something like that." We did tell our people that they should not argue, but by the same token, that they did not have to take insults from anyone; and if necessary, call me, and if I can't make peace and they're insulting to you, I will ask them to leave. And I have done that. I feel that is the least that I could do to maintain the morale of my people. They're entitled to that backing. But I said,

"By the same token, I want you to be extremely honest with the customer and tell them only things that you know. Don't tell them things that you don't know."

GARDNER

One thing that I don't think we've covered adequately is the expansion of Pickwick--not the later one, but just taking over the saloon.

EPSTEIN

Well, taking over the saloon is--the way we say that, "taking over the saloon," sounds very funny. I think the only reason it's ever mentioned is that some people have written that it's the only time in history where books have done better business than liquor. It's the same location. We were very proud that we could accomplish that trick. The original shop, as you know, was only twenty-six feet wide, and as we grew and started developing our stock of new books, we had to force our old books upstairs and our remainders upstairs. And the new-book business was growing. We were just totally running out of room. Well, next door, the forty-foot building to the west of us, the corner, was being operated as a saloon, as a bar, and a portion of it was a little tiny restaurant. And the landlord was having a hard time with the tenants, and the tenants were having a hard time because the bar was being constantly raided and had a very bad reputation for the type of clientele it handled. So the bar finally moved out. The landlord came to us and told us that we should buy it. Well, we would have loved to have had it, but there was a matter of money. Finally we worked out a deal where we could give him enough money to satisfy the down payment, and we broke through the thing and created the larger store. It was a two-story building, and above that were apartments. Later, we took over the apartments for offices. That allowed us to almost double our merchandise inventory and create a better mix. We then went into the paperback business in a real way. We built what was then the largest paperback department in the city. And we had to learn how to sell paperbacks. But the involvement was- it was a real estate transaction which turned out very fortuitously for us. It caused a great deal of trouble during the remodeling period. The city gave us a lot of trouble. It was an old building and, of course, not up to modern building standards. And if you recollect, several earthquakes have happened since that building was built. And after each

earthquake the building standards become more strict in certain areas of construction. Well, we had to have an entry between the two buildings. And we had a heck of a time trying to get the approval of the building department because the building was not concrete and steel. The foundation was concrete, but then it was brick up above that. Well, we finally worked out a deal with the city where [within] that opening between the two stores, which was much smaller than we wanted, we had to practically build a separate little construction piece, a separate little building, you might call it, in that shape. All around that is concrete and steel. [tape stopped] That is an archway built of concrete and steel which will support the building. It's much stronger than the original building. We tore out a cement foundation for that building which was about four feet deep, solid cement. We had to tear out two foundations of two buildings. And one of them, the older building--we had a devil of a time getting it out. Anyway, we had to tear out in some areas four feet deep of concrete, heavy concrete. The corner building wasn't as well constructed — about three feet. And put in a four- foot deep concrete and steel foundation. And I'll tell you, concrete and lots and lots of steel to help support the upper floor of the building. They explained to us the steel prevents lateral stress. Concrete does not resist lateral stress. Now, in case you ever build a building, you'll remember that. [laughter] It was an eventful occasion in the sense that it was something that had never been done — a bookstore pushing out a bar. And on the boulevard, of course, it meant that we would have a great big sign. And it was greeted with a great deal of delight by our customers when they found that they could have more room to look at books and more books to look at. You know, book people-- if you had a building three times that big, they would still look at most of the books in that store. Some people will go from one section to the other, and you'll be amazed what they'll come up with, and they sometimes are amazed.

1.18. TAPE NUMBER: IX, Side One (July 2, 1974)

GARDNER

Now, you have in front of you once again the list of the bookstores that you compiled from the telephone directory. If you'd like to run through a few and comment on them. . . .

EPSTEIN

As I told you, I made a rather sketchy rundown of the phone books at the phone company for that period in order to refresh my memory about some of the people whom I knew throughout the years. Now, we covered up through about 1940, and I see here in my notes for 1941 the Beverly Hills Book and Record Shop at 350 North Beverly Drive. I remember that shop very well because I used to drop in there, and I still know the people who used to run it. Bill Smith, who later on went into the book business in Carmel Valley up in California, had a nice store there--which was a curious store in that they sold books and cakes. His wife was an excellent baker; so she would bake special cakes for people, and he would sell the books. And his brother-in-law, Joe Mittenthal — Joe Mittenthal still sells books, but he's now a publisher's representative. He represents Crown and Scribner's and several other publishers in the areas outside of Los Angeles, practically in the six, seven, or eight western states. They were good book people, and they were very nice people. Curiously enough, Bill Smith's father was a very good customer of mine; he used to collect a lot of books. And I think the father made some money in the lumber business, as I recollect him telling me. He probably put up the money for the first venture, because it was immediately following the Depression, and they were both of them young, and I'm positive they never had any money. At any rate, they lasted there, oh, about two, three years, and they just didn't quite make it. And I believe that it was [Walter] Martindale who bought their store because he didn't want any competition too close to him. And then he gave up the store. And I believe it's the same store that later was taken over for a bookstore by Brentano's when they entered the territory. They had a store on Seventh Street and then one in Beverly Hills. They eventually gave it up because they couldn't transfer the image of Brentano's to the Los Angeles area. By that time, the image of Brentano's had been greatly tarnished, because during the Depression they lost a lot of their stores and it was not the store that people had been accustomed to seeing, a Brentano's store as of before the Depression, "all the world's books" and so forth. That's the history of that store. And I notice in my notes that I have Fredrick Dahlstrom on 710 West Sixth Street. Fredrick Dahlstrom later combined with someone else and became the Bookman's Shop. But I can't recollect the name of the man he combined with. At any rate, it was a store that didn't last very long. [bell rings; tape stopped] Then there was Everybody's Bookshop. It started about a block and a half from my West

Eighth Street store. The chap's name was [Saul] Elstein — I'm trying to think of what his first name was — a very nice old man. The name of Everybody's Bookshop is still going on, and the grandson [Steve] is now running it on West Sixth Street in downtown Los Angeles. A great deal of the business is secondhand magazines. I don't think the original Mr. Elstein's son [Herbert] developed it in the right direction. The young man who's running it now, I don't know how well he's doing, but from my point of view I don't think he's doing that well. And Martindale was already in business, of course, on Santa Monica Boulevard.

GARDNER

Which Martindale is that?

EPSTEIN

Walter. Of course, he was in business for many years before 1941. But he got into the book business in a curious way. I may have told you earlier that I had met the whole Martindale family, the three sons and the father. They were originally in the cigar and magazine business. They had cigar stands and magazines. They had a store on West Sixth Street when I opened my first shop in Los Angeles on West Sixth Street. I was two or three doors away from their cigar stand and magazine shop, and at that time I met them all. Walter broke away from his father's business, one of the first of the three. They eventually all broke away. Walter broke away and he started a place on Santa Monica Boulevard in Beverly Hills. But it was also cigars and magazines. Next door to him was an older woman who was running a circulating library. It was a tiny place, and she was getting tired of it and, I don't imagine, made very much money at it. She tried to sell it and couldn't find any buyers for it. So she told Walter to take it and pay her off whatever little he could afford out of the circulating library business as he made it. That's how he got it. And then he developed it from that. He gave up the circulating library and went into the regular book business. And gradually, along with his magazines, he established quite a big business. You're aware that Walter has already sold his business, his four stores now, to Doubleday.

GARDNER

Yes.

EPSTEIN

That just recently happened; it's been verified. I understand they're already beginning to tear out and replace.

GARDNER

I've heard that. I don't know. Before you go on to the next one, maybe you can give a little bit of the Martindale family history as it developed, because I understand it's a curious one — a Gothic one; put it that way.

EPSTEIN

I can't speak for it as really family history, only as they relate to the book business. I can't comment on their character. They were much rougher people than most booksellers were at the time. Bill Martindale, in Santa Monica, runs a store. He runs a pretty fair store. It's not a literary store in a sense. He himself never professed to be a bookman, but he has people whom he has confidence in and [who] run a pretty fair sort of business. There was another brother — let's see, was it Dick? — I think Dick. There was Bill, Dick, Walter. At any rate, there was another brother who later went into the book business. He had a bookstore on Wilshire Boulevard, not too far from La Brea, on the south side of the street. It was also magazines and books and circulating library. He tried to follow the pattern he knew. He knew magazines best because he was born and raised in it. Then they added books. But he sold out and moved up to a place called Paradise, California. He moved up to Paradise, California, and I understand he's still running a small bookstore there. This one that moved up north had an alcoholic problem. In that way he was an unfortunate person. The father was a rough sort of a person. The mother is still living [since dead], is very old, and I understand she just moved into a rest home or something such as that. But the family never got along well together. The brothers had quarrels with each other, and the wives of the brothers, for one reason or another, never got along. But Walter and his wife were the most successful ones. I think Virginia had an awful lot to do with it. I think she's a very level-headed woman, very practical, and has a good business head on her. Somewhere along the line Walter and Virginia made a lot of money. It could not have been in books. It may have to do with some fortunate investments, because Walter flies his own plane still. At one time he had two planes. He had a home in Malibu plus his home in Beverly Hills at a time when

most booksellers were barely making a decent living — including myself, who was supposed to be one of the kingpins; we were living very modestly. We had no money for airplanes--that' s for sure. And that's about the size of it. People working for Walter were always unhappy. And I'm not saying this in any derogatory sense to Walter. He always believed that if you came to work for him, you should work just as hard as he does. And of course some people just don't work as hard as others. Otherwise they might not be clerks in the bookstore — or a clerk anywhere else. Usually people who work very, very hard and intelligently wind up doing something different from just selling books for somebody else. Of course, I always had that tendency, too--I always had that belief, too--but perhaps I curbed my style a little more than his, although a great many of the people working for me told me that I was a driver, and I was. But perhaps I used a little bit more velvet on my glove. [laughter] But on the whole Walter's a very decent person. He has certain ideals, and he lives up to them 100 percent. If he thinks a thing is wrong, he just won't do it. If a thing is right, he insists on it being done. Maybe there's not enough leeway between white and black in his character. But Virginia's a much more practical person — she, too, very hardheaded. There were other family problems in the family — and most families have problems of which I'm aware--but I don't think it should appear in anything like this.

GARDNER

Okay. Then you can continue down the list.

EPSTEIN

There's a chap, just for the record, by the name of O.C. Nielsen, who had a magazine service at 7064 Hollywood Boulevard. He had mostly magazines and did some research work for libraries. He also had books. He and I, although we're theoretically competitors, got along beautifully. He sold out his business and retired to some part-time business and was very happy with it. He never had any great ambition to make a lot of money. Then of course we spoke about Bennett and Marshall, They appeared on the scene as proprietors in 1942, as a definite address. They had been working out of their home, I think, for a little while before that. They built a nice store — had a rough time, as most beginners did in that period, They gradually built up a very decent business. Then there was quite a famous shop in Pasadena, the Brown shop. It

was being run by Lloyd Severe. Of course, Pasadena's book business, you know, was dominated by Vroman's. Lloyd Severe at one time, I think, worked for Vroman's. Oh, no. Brown, Mr. [Herbert F.] Brown, at one time worked for Vroman's. And Mr. Vroman frankly told him that he ought to open a shop of his own. If he was going to have a competitor, he'd rather have a fellow like Brown than maybe some other upstart coming in who didn't know anything about the book business. So Brown opened a shop at 190 East Colorado Street. That's where I first knew them. They may have had another location of which I'm not aware. And Lloyd Severe--in 1942, Lloyd Severe was already running the book department of Brown's. Brown's went into the stationery business also and developed a pretty fair business in commercial stationery. But they never had the success that Vroman's did. Vroman's cover the area like a blanket. And, of course, Pasadena was a very social, "in" city. And if you were in, you were in; if you were out, you weren't quite in. And that's the position Brown's occupied to Vroman's. It wasn't till later years that the scene started changing, and the mixture of people in Pasadena changed so radically that I think if it was any other store besides Vroman's, they might not have been doing so well. But I think Vroman's still carries a great deal of weight, and they run an excellent shop. They're doing quite well. Now, Lloyd Severe, who was in the book business about fifty years, was recently honored by the Masquers. Unfortunately, we had another family affair that we just couldn't possibly skip on the same evening. I would have loved to have been there. We sent him a letter about it telling him. Later, we were in touch with him, and they said they appreciate the fact that we did send the letter and contributed something for him. He did a great deal of work for the Southern California Booksellers Association over the years. He was the kind of a guy that could tie a lot of ends together. And he also worked on the "Cavalcade of Books" TV program. He was an assistant to Jack Case. After he left the book business, he worked with Jack Case for a number of years, helping him to run that program, the "Cavalcade of Books." Thoroughly dedicated to books, and a very fine character. His wife, Gladys, too, was right there with him all the time. But he never owned any portion of the business, unfortunately, and I don't know that Mr. Brown ever gave him too much salary. He's far from destitute. He's living happily; there's no lack of a livelihood. But for all the years he spent in the business, he came out of it with not too much.

GARDNER

What was his background? Where was he before Brown' s?

EPSTEIN

Well, he came out of Iowa. He boasted about the fact. And I think Brown came out of Iowa. You know, Iowa provided a great deal of the immigrants in the early days for all of Southern California, especially Long Beach and that area there. There is one kind of a bookstore that I would like to mention as a kind of a thing a person with a will can do if they dedicate themselves to it, and that was the Jewish- American Bookshop. That appeared on the scene on South Fairfax in 1942. But the story of that bookshop goes back much further. I don't know if I mentioned it before.

GARDNER

You mentioned it in a different context, not as called the Jewish-American bookstores.

EPSTEIN

Yes, as Mrs. Blatt's. That to me was always a very fine example of a person's dedication to an idea of trying to fill a need of something that she felt was there. And she was absolutely right. She succeeded very well for a great many years in the Jewish-American Bookshop on Fairfax, was doing rather well; but of course later the mother became sick and the daughter was running it by herself. I understand now that it's been closed, I think since we started our talks. And Miss Lucille Blatt — the daughter never married — is now working for Harelick and Roth, which is a Jewish bookstore that's a very up-and-coming operation.

GARDNER

Where is that? Also on Fairfax?

EPSTEIN

That's on La Cienega opposite Temple Beth Am, just below Olympic. That shop is doing rather well. In 1942 Ver Brugge Books — not Zeitlin-Ver Brugge — Ver Brugge Books is listed as having an address at 1806 West Seventh Street. Now, that was a separate business temporarily from Zeitlin-Ver Brugge. You wouldn't recollect this because you're too young: 1806 West Seventh was the site of the Otis Art Institute. In back of the Otis Art Institute was a large old-

fashioned carriage house, stables or carriage house. Jake rented that and used the bottom for sales, and an upper balcony--I don't think Jake fixed up those rooms, but there were rooms. Now, whether they were originally constructed when the building was constructed or later, maybe those rooms were constructed originally for the people who worked the horses and the carriages. But at any rate, they had that place there, and they operated from there for many years. Now, I don't recollect exactly what Josephine Ver Brugge was doing which was separate from Jake. I think she was doing periodicals, maybe, because they later came into the periodicals business. But at any rate, that was that big barn back of the Otis Art Institute. I remember one time Jake and I--he had access to some duplicates from the UC Library at Berkeley. They had a tremendous number of books stored under the stadium at Berkeley. Jake had very little money. I had a trifle more than a little, so he came to me and said, "Why don't we go up there, buy the stuff?" He'll take the periodicals, and I'll take the books — which we did. And we got several loads, great big truckload of stuff. Then, of course, came the question of what is a periodical and what is a book. Is a book in series a periodical if it's an actual book coming out intermittently without any definite publication day? I mean, it's a serial if it comes in series. Some things are published independently--it's called a certain kind of a series, but it may be one book in five years, or there may be three books in one year. So we had to battle that out amongst ourselves. We finally came to a compromise on that. I advanced all the money, and Jake was supposed to pay me out as he sold out of the periodicals. Well, the thing dragged on for years. Finally I think I got all my money out of it. Jake thinks I got a little more than my money out of it. We still argue about it sometimes when we get together. But it was an excellent deal for both of us. There were a lot of things in there which I wish I had kept, because some of those paperbound things later became very scarce because the editions were small. But that was the way it was done in those days. Now, coming into '43, Holmes had now become a little less active. He still had several stores around, but I think his years were beginning to get to him. And not only his years--his personality was beginning to be affected, apparently. There was a little shop opened in the Farmer's Market at that period of time which was run by a woman by the name of Deighton, Lillian Deighton. Now, the one reason I mention her is not because she became a very successful bookwoman, although she ran a small bookshop, like all things in the Farmer's

Market, on a very small scale. She sold cards and little gifts and a smallish selection of books. But the reason I mention her is she is the woman who did all of the research for *Gone with the Wind*. She was working for a studio-- Selznick. She used to come into Eighth Street and bought a lot of books from me. I got an idea of the type of things she needed and wanted, and I made a special effort to get them for her. And it was a worthwhile thing because she had plenty of money to spend and we could get the things she needed. She bought them, and always paid a fair price, and never gave us any problems about offering us less than what we asked. And she was always very thankful that we did find things for her. Then when we moved to Hollywood, this relationship continued for many years. Finally Selznick gave up the studio, and she was out of a job. So she came and talked to me, and she said, "I'd like to open a little bookshop." So I said, "Well, you have more background and knowledge of books than most anybody in the book business at the time they started, and there's no reason, if you have a few hundred dollars, that you can't gradually build it up." She told me about the place in the Farmer's Market, and I said, "Well, you get a lot of traffic." And so she did, and she made a living at it for quite a while. And then she got tired and gave it up. But she was the one that did all the research for the *Gone with the Wind* picture — apparently did an excellent job. She had a feel for what she needed. She knew what she needed and apparently found a great many of the things she needed because the success of the picture was helped by all of the various sets and art work that went into it. And she was the one that had to provide all the books and background material for it. At that time, *Moby Dick* moved out of the downtown area. Strictly for the record, there was another bookstore that opened to fill a need, and that was in the Jewish section of Boyle Heights at 2212 Brooklyn Avenue — Solomon's Hebrew and English Bookstore. Now, to this day there's a Solomon's Bookstore on Fairfax. It's still in business. The old gentleman, Solomon, was a very good friend of my family when they were in business in Boyle Heights on Brooklyn Avenue. The older of the descendants still remember my parents. Once in a while when I'm around there shopping for delicatessen or need something, I'll drop in. Or around the holiday season I will need some special kind of candy or toys for the children, and I drop in and say hello. But they're still operating. They've got almost everything now, from the tallies, which means the prayer shawl, and the phylacteries, which you wear around your head and your arms. And they go in

more for Orthodox things, that the Orthodox use. They all speak Hebrew in there. The children were all well educated. I don't know how they live on that one store--two or maybe three families. I don't know. Maybe part of them have other jobs, too. But they always seem to be around. They've been in that business for all these many, many years. You can buy Passover wine there, and artifacts from Israel, and Jewish magazines. But they're gradually shifting over to things that are non-Orthodox. They had schoolbooks for the Orthodox and for the teachers. But now I think a lot of that business is going away because the children are being given books, and I suppose the teachers are given supplies. They probably buy direct from the publishers. But they seem to be doing a thriving business with other types of things. That's an outgrowth of something from Boyle Heights. I'm always trying to sell the story of Boyle Heights. [laughter] A great many interesting, capable, and very successful people came out of Boyle Heights around that period. I think I mentioned a few of them not too far back. Then in 1944, skipping very quickly — I have a note that Bertha G. Blatt was the name of the mother of the Jewish-American Bookstore, the mother who started it. Lucille was the daughter's name. She gave up the shop and now works for Harellick and Roth. There was an outfit called Bookazine started up on Spring Street run by a chap by the name of Harry Dale. He was a flamboyant type of person — big talker but his checks bounced. I'll say that he meant well, and he had a lot of family problems. His father was supposed to be in the business before him, and the father developed cancer and was a source of great expense for a number of years. He just clung onto life. Hospitalization and medication. He did take care of his father in that respect. It was touch and go. But his big break came eventually-- I think I told you, I mentioned earlier-- when Mr. Holmes sold him the balance of his stock, for something like \$8,000, after he turned down an offer from Pickwick; or rather he was asking Pickwick for something like close to \$30,000 and was too prideful to sell to the Pickwick because he was the kingpin and I was the young man just starting in. And another thing, Stackhouse had worked for him, and he just couldn't stand the idea of selling out to a store where his former employee was now manager. So he took a terrific loss to satisfy his pride. But by that time his mind was almost all gone. That made Harry Dale into a big operator. Then he started a bookstore on Hill Street. Then he went into the wholesale record business. And that was just his big thing, because he really went out and — sort of a rack jobber operation. He could really go out

in a big way. But eventually he went the way of all people who operate in that order. By the time he passed away, his wife inherited very little. There's a place called the Bookazine, and that was Harry Dale's. There's a place called the Argosy Bookshop on 5505 Hollywood Boulevard. That, too, didn't last very long. It was run by a musician. (I'm trying to think of his name. Somewhere in the back of my head the name exists-- Loos or Roos or something like that.) I believe he was a flutist with the Los Angeles Philharmonic. A very nice man. It was one of those things to run as a fun thing. He and I got along very well. We did quite a bit of business together over a period of years. He would buy from me; I'd buy from him. When I was in the old-book business, I bought a great deal from other dealers. I made it a point to visit them, because they would give me a discount. Sometimes we would trade for things they needed, for things that they had in stock, and they would come to us. That year, also, Brentano's opened at 611 West Seventh; 611, if you know your downtown numbers, is directly opposite Robinson's. They rented a store there. Karl Placht, who had at one time run a bookstore in New York, supposed to be a very fine bookman, came out here and tried to run a Brentano-type bookstore out here, and it failed dismally. In the first place, they didn't know the approach, the type of people they had to deal with, and they didn't know how to stock a store properly for a western market. And Brentano's had an idea-- and this is no criticism of Karl, because a lot of policies he had to work under were not his. They were given to him--directives. They just couldn't figure out the type of book which Los Angeles needs. They would send him all kinds of things that he didn't need, and overloaded him with merchandise that he couldn't use. In addition to that, he had to scramble on his own for the things he was getting called for. But Karl was a good bookman, and he later became a representative for several New York publishers. He became a publisher's representative. Let's see, who did he have? I think he had Dutton at one time and several others, with whom he had done a good job. Karl Placht had been a president of the American Booksellers Association when he was in retail in New York. We became quite friendly. He's now retired and lives in some retirement village near La Jolla or in that area. I told you Brentano's also had a store in Beverly Hills. Joe Chevalier appears on the scene with a lending library at 239 North Larchmont. Now, Joe is still operating. Of course, he no longer has a lending library. Joe's a very fine person, pleasant, not overly aggressive-- probably not aggressive at all in the sense that, well, he has a small business,

he's happy with it, he has no family to raise, he has a wife and they seem to get along very nicely with what they do. He, too, at one time was a president of the Southern California Booksellers Association. Incidentally, in speaking of Lloyd Severe, I hope I mentioned that he had been a president of the Southern California Booksellers Association. As a matter of fact, I think he had several terms.

GARDNER

What was Chevalier's background?

EPSTEIN

Well, I don't know too much about his background other than he appeared and there he was. A lot of the people, I know something about their background before books, but a lot of them I just don't. Now, I mentioned to you the Hollywood Bookstore, which was directly across the street from the Pickwick, or almost directly--slightly west. By that time it was owned by a person by the name of Allan Weatherby. Allan was a very educated guy — Harvard man, I think — and an awful businessman. And he was having a few psychological problems of one kind or another. He eventually had to sell the business or lost the business. And the name was bought out by someone else. But now the name of Hollywood Bookstore is almost meaningless, because there are about four or five stores with the first name — Hollywood Bookland and Hollywood Book Service and Hollywood this, that, and the other. But at that time there was only the one Hollywood Bookstore. In saying that the name is meaningless, I don't mean to deprecate the stores that are using the name similar to it, but it has no relation to the type of thing that the Hollywood Bookstore was. As a matter of fact, most of them are secondhand bookstores, whereas the Hollywood Bookstore at one time was the bookstore in Hollywood. Curiously — sometimes it surprises me no end, in looking back — with all these well-established stores, Pickwick was able to prosper, and they all went down. Some people say that my competition was too much for them. But I think in each case I can refute that by saying that almost in each case something happened to the management. They lost their will, or they lost their mind, [laughter] or they lost their incentive, or they inherited a lot of money, or they sold out to somebody who didn't know the business. And nobody's ever accused me of actually trying to put a competitor out of

business. We never even had the thought. But we worked very hard. We did work very hard, and I know we worked harder than a lot of our competitors. Allan Weatherby was hardly ever at his business. The only time he showed up was when he needed some money, and then he'd go and take it out of the cash register and not even tell anybody about it. Stanley Rose — I already told you the story of poor Stanley — he did almost the same. Those were our major competitors at the time. In each case, something happened to them. I don't think it was because we tried and forced them out of business. I don't think anybody's ever accused us of that. Our policy was strictly cooperation. Incidentally, I mentioned Allan Weatherby was having problems. Well, I understand he's since straightened out beautifully and now teaches at some college--Amherst or somewhere like that--and is getting along very nicely. But he was having rows with his wife, and they had a child. He was going through a period, I guess. Harry Wepplo Bookstore — I told you he was one of those who was arrested in the Hecate County case. Well, he bought out Lofland, which previously had been Lofland and Russell, a secondhand-book store at 32 West Sixth Street. He at one time worked for Miller's, across the street. And I told you the story of Mr. Miller, who had had a textbook store down near USC. Harry also worked for Pickwick at one time, which I think I mentioned. It came about in this way. He was working for Miller's, and we were just beginning to get started into new books. He was unhappy at Miller's. As I pointed out to you, I believe, he was a very odd person, and I don't think anyone would be too happy working for him for any length of time. He heard about us going into new books, and he came in and asked for the job. Stackhouse and I talked to him — of course, we knew him well because we used to exchange things — and we hired him. Well, Harry in many ways lacked stability. He wanted to do everything for everybody, no matter what the expense to him or to his employer. His motives were good, but his executions were a total loss. He wanted to satisfy everybody and give them the best end of everything out of the goodness of his heart. He was that kind of a guy. A person would come in, and he'd say, "Well, I can't afford this." And he'd say, "Well, take it." He didn't care if it belonged to him or belonged to his boss. [laughter] Well, you can stand a little bit of that, but you can't stand too much of it. And his buying was the same way. He would buy huge quantities. He started buying for us. We didn't know any better. We thought that if he bought ten, maybe that's a good buy. But [with] some things, ten is a huge amount; and other things, a

hundred is a small amount--depending on the title. At any rate, I took our whole family to Washington [D.C.] to visit Ann's people. (She's, of course, a native of Washington.) And when we got back, Stackhouse told me that Harry had bought all the remainder of the books of Houghton-Mifflin's warehouse in San Francisco. Houghton-Mifflin was giving up the San Francisco warehouse and consolidating all their things into the home place at Boston. And he told me the amount of money involved, and he showed me the list of what it was. Well, it was the worst batch of material you ever did see — broken sets, odd volumes of sets, two volumes, two and three, out of a five-volume set, and all the things that they couldn't possibly sell which they left in their warehouse and they had to dump it somewhere. The salesman--the sheriff of Petaluma, they called him. [phone rings; tape stopped] The Houghton-Mifflin salesman was Harrison Leusler, a very fine man. At any rate, I come back to this situation. It involved a huge sum, something like \$3,500. And actually, we did not have that much money. Any money coming in was immediately spent for more books. You can tie up an awful lot of money very quickly in the new-book business. And that's what we were doing, because our business was doing all right. Well, Harry had bought all these books. Knowing this, I immediately called Harrison Leusler and I said, "Look, Harrison, I can't accept those books. Don't ship them. If you ship them, I'll turn them away. I won't accept them." And then I told him, "You had no business selling those books without getting a confirmation. Harry is entitled to buy a line from you, a season's books, but he has no authority to buy a whole warehouse full of books. In the first place, that's Stackhouse's job because those are the remainders. They're not classified as new books." Well, at any rate, Harrison said, "Okay, Louis, don't. ...". Well, Harrison's a very hard salesman. He's a nice person, but he had a hard sell. He tried to convince me that it was a good buy, but I insisted that he not ship them. We finally compromised on a deal of about ten cents a book, and we came out all right on it. By that time we had had enough of Wepplo. How he got into the deal for Lofland's store I don't know, as Harry could never save a dime. He must have had a backer. Who it was I don't know. But that didn't last too long, and he opened the little shop in the Farmer's Market, which he ran for several years, and finally retired. I haven't seen him in years.

1.19. TAPE NUMBER: IX, Side Two (July 15, 1974)

GARDNER

We left off last time in the midst of your monumental list of the booksellers. I thought we'd try to finish that.

EPSTEIN

We were discussing some of the research I have done from memory and actually at the phone company. About the only way I could think of to run down some of the older booksellers and get some chronological order is by going through the yellow directories of the phone company, which I did on several occasions, until I got tired. At any rate, I've still got quite a number left. In 1945, Eugene Bechtold: he's still operating in the social sciences. At that time he was at 257 South Spring Street. He worked for Pickwick for a while, but he was over meticulous. He was a wonderful person--as a person he's great — but to run a profit-making business, we just couldn't give him enough time to do the work and classification the way he liked to do it. And if he was interested in something, he had to stop and read all about it; and if he found someone with the same interest as he, why, that was the end of the day because they would spend the rest of the day talking. This is by no means a criticism of the man but a criticism of how a good person can not fit into a certain type of business. But he's very knowledgeable and is doing a good job in the business he's in. He works for himself and devotes all the time he feels is necessary to classifying his own books of the particular product.

GARDNER

When I was looking through the notes on the antiquarians, at that point he was on his own.

EPSTEIN

Yes, 1945 he was on his own.

GARDNER

At that point he was doing mail order.

EPSTEIN

Right. He was doing a mail order business, sort of, by catalog or whatever. But he had worked for me at one time. And we're still good friends. Whenever we

meet, we have great respect for each other. There was a Lincoln Bookshop, which had several addresses. The last one they had, I think, was on Highland Avenue north of Hollywood. Now, exactly where they were in 1945 I don't remember. They may have been on Highland near Hollywood. It was a leftist bookstore, extreme left. They took, of course, a lot of punishment in those days from the rightist groups and the headhunters.

GARDNER

Who ran it? Do you recall?

EPSTEIN

I don't remember their names now, unfortunately. Mary Gordon, who at one time worked for us, worked there. She was a rabid leftist, one of the vociferous ones. But who actually ran the shop at the time, I don't know. They were not too far away from us, but we had no particular contact except that Mary would come in, having worked for us, to visit and tell us a few things and leave us some literature. [laughter] Harry Wepplo, I've mentioned before as being in the Hecate County case; he opened in the Farmer's Market. He had one of the small stores facing Fairfax Boulevard. He lasted until just a few years ago. I gave you a good background on him. There was a little tiny store called the Boulevard Book and Art Shop in the same block as Pickwick was, and it was run by a chap — well, it was run by a couple; the name is [Milton and Hazel B.] Goodhand. And they had been in vaudeville and involved in the theater, that type of background. They had a little circulating library still and handled a few other odds and ends. They're very nice people. Later, Mr. Goodhand went to work for Eddie Gilbert. They're both gone now. He was with Eddie for quite some time. The Abbey Bookshop, which I mentioned earlier, downtown on West Sixth Street, about this period of 1946 changed hands and was then owned by a chap by the name of William Weiss, who had been a musician. And he bought this store to run. He wanted to get out of the business of being a musician, but I don't think he ever quite made the change because the store never was that profitable for him to give up his musical career. He played with various studios and other orchestras. A nice man, but he didn't last long in the trade. I think he later sold it out to Gideon Berman. Remember, I tried to think of Gideon's name when I talked about the Abbey before? It's Gideon Berman, an Israeli. Then Larson came into the picture,

[John R.] Larson's Bookshop on Hollywood Boulevard just west of Western on the south side of the street. Very peculiar man, and he had a very peculiar wife. I guess one begets the other. [laughter] He was in magazines and then went into metaphysical books quite heavily, and then in addition, as I say, research magazines of various kinds, runs of magazines. And he built up a fairly substantial business in those things that he was interested in. But I would not consider him a true bookman in the sense that he had an overall picture of the book business. That has always been the measurement amongst true bookmen. He was accused of being anti-Semitic, but I have personally never noticed it. I visited the shop and I bought things from him, and I saw no signs of it. But I was told by others that he really was. He died at rather an early age, and his wife ran the business. They were both cat connoisseurs. They had no children, so their living was the bookstore and the cats. That was the total interest of their lives. She carried on after his death for quite a few years, and it wasn't until maybe two or three years before I sold out that she actually gave up the business. Or it may have been the year after I sold out, maybe 1967 or '68. (You see, without being in the business now, time is beginning to telescope. I never had a good memory for dates. I have an impressionistic mind, not an accurate one.) She used to visit us quite often. She paid me a great deal of respect. She always sought my advice on the things that she wanted to do. She always felt that I knew everything, which, of course, is an illusion which I try to dissuade people from. [laughter] But the fact that we were more or less successful, and having been in all the different ends of the book business, gave people the idea that we were knowledgeable of everything. I will admit, we had a lot of experiences in everything. There was--just for the record, not really an important bookshop in the sense that they were a major kind of bookstore--a chap by the name of Rabalette, in downtown on Spring Street. He handled back numbers of magazines and some popular books in downtown Spring Street. They were in business for quite a while, but they were out of the swim of the regular book business. They dealt with an entirely different clientele from what other bookstores dealt with — the Spring Street crowd and the horse-racing crowd and the gamblers downtown, also the skid row people. As I mentioned before, in 1946 Brentano's opened a store on Seventh Street, in the same block as Robinson's, on the north side of the street. And they tried their darnedest to project their name into this community. But they didn't have the tools, in the sense that

they never carried the kind of stock that California bookstores did. Now, we've talked about Pickwick, the tremendous stocks that we carried. But there were other stores in the city that carried major stocks of books--Martindale's and Fowler Brothers, then; in Pasadena, Vroman's. I think all of them exceeded in variety most of the main bookstores in New York. And of course, Brentano's had gone through the Depression, and they weren't the same people anymore. So they tried to chain out into California, but they were totally unsuccessful. They didn't last too long. Well, they lasted about three, four years, until they found that they just couldn't make it being managed from New York, competing with people who had managers on the spot.

GARDNER

Why is there that difference between the western and eastern stores?

EPSTEIN

In the New York area at that time, I think the prime store was Scribner's. I think Brentano's had gone down. Still, Scribner's would never carry the variety of stock that, say, Pickwick did. We carried technical books; we carried metaphysical books. Scribner's wouldn't touch either.

GARDNER

Why not?

EPSTEIN

There's no accounting for it, except that they created an image of themselves — or over the years an image was created for them. Scribner's was a very literary store, supposedly, and catered to the very highest income group, perhaps, in New York City. They tried to establish the image. The image was created for them, and they became exclusive to certain types of books. With the population they had in New York, they could well afford to do that, whereas I think in our community, especially the Pickwick — and here I go again, speaking about the Pickwick as distinct and different from other stores--we would handle everything worthwhile (and, of course, a lot of things that weren't worthwhile). But if it was a good metaphysical book, I would want to stock a good metaphysical book. And we built up a tremendous business in metaphysical books. Then when we decided to go into technical books, we

decided we'd have a good technical-book department. That, in conjunction with everything else we were handling — paperbacks and every other kind of book you could imagine, general trade books, of course. But we didn't want to become exclusive. We didn't want to become the elegant store. We definitely did not. It came up one time that the councilman of our district and a neighbor of ours — I spoke about Mr. Lamport — wanted to create the image of Hollywood, bring it back to very high class. I explained to him that you can't go home again. It's been there; you'll never bring it back. Besides, times are different. Those stores no longer exist. Those fancy dress shops that we had on Hollywood Boulevard, which later moved — well, you couldn't possibly bring them back to Hollywood Boulevard. To try to make a Fifth Avenue out of it was just futile. I said, "I don't want to be on Fifth Avenue. I don't want a Fifth Avenue store. I didn't start out with that idea in mind, and I'm convinced that my idea's still the best. No Fifth Avenue store does as well as we do. Nor do they provide the service to the community we do." That was the image that the New Yorkers had of themselves. They catered to certain groups. Brentano's, of course, at one time were very proud of their title, "Booksellers to the World," because they had a store in Paris. That to me was more or less ridiculous. But it made an excellent title. They didn't have the kind of competition in New York that they had here when they came out here. As I said, the store that came out here was no longer an image of the famous Brentano's store on Fifth Avenue in the twenties,

GARDNER

Could any store provide that sort of elegant atmosphere and get away with it? There's never been that kind of store here, has there?

EPSTEIN

I don't know. I honestly don't know. At these times, I don't think they could afford all that elegance, although, coming back to Brentano's on Wilshire in Beverly Hills, they are trying to do that. I have no way of knowing how successful they are. I hear one kind of a story and then I hear another. I have no figures and I have no certain knowledge that they are succeeding, or whether they are not succeeding. The parent company is not doing too well-- Macmillan Company, which owns Brentano's and which also owns Macmillan Publishing Company. The parent company's not doing too well. I have reason

to believe that they're having a difficult time. It's an extremely expensive location. The stock is limited to a few good books but not a great deal of variety of a general bookstore. Now we'll have a similar type of competition. Doubleday bought out Martindale--and incidentally they've already taken the name "Martindale's" off the thing. The Martindale sign is down, off the building, and they're tearing everything apart. The whole image of Martindale's-- they're getting rid of that as quickly as possible.

GARDNER

Well, we'll come back to that, too. But have you seen Walter Martindale since the transfer?

EPSTEIN

I haven't seen Walter or spoken to him. I didn't want to call him up because I didn't think it was proper for me to call him and ask him certain things. But there's a good deal of talk in the trade about how the deal was made. If the talk is relatively true, I think he made a good deal for himself. Of course, Walter is a very shrewd chap. He'll hold out until he gets what he wants. Then several smaller book operations opened in the forties; in the middle forties there seemed to be a great deal of activity. There was a rare-book store open in Beverly Hills on Santa Monica Boulevard called The Folio. They lasted for several years. The Paradise Book and Stationery Shop in Huntington Park is still in business, doing a fairly decent business in their own community. Spearman's on South Flower Street opened at that time. They were a Catholic-book store. They were there for several years, and then they retired. There was a chap [Diaz-Garcia], who opened the Hispano-American Bookshop, Spanish books, at 827 West Sixth. And later he moved to another location, I think on Carondelet Street, near Seventh and Carondelet, near the Otis Art Institute, in that area, near the park. The World News Company came into the picture on North Cahuenga Boulevard. They handled some books. Bill Steinberg: he handles newspapers along the walls, similar to the Universal News on Las Palmas, just south of Hollywood Boulevard, which is supposed to be the largest outdoor newsstand in the world. Harry Dale moved to West Sixth Street at that time. We spoke about Harry Dale. Two young men opened a place called Books in Review on Wilshire Boulevard. One of them has since died, but the remaining partner still operates it.* It's just as you approach

Wilshire Boulevard going north from Virgil. If Virgil ran through, you could go into their shops. They do a living sort of business, in the sense that they make a decent living. Now, the survivor, I suppose, is just carrying on at about the same rate. [* Harry Hill and Jack Brown. Hill died. The shop just changed hands (June 1975). — [L.E.]]

GARDNER

What sort of books do they handle?

EPSTEIN

A general stock of books, greeting cards, and a few other things. Coming into 1948, a chap opened up an office supplies, sports books, and magazines store on North Western Avenue. [phone rings; tape stopped] Adco--they were at 1120 North Western — 1120 3/4, to be exact. They later went into the business of sporting books, books about baseball, prizefighting, and all kinds of ephemera, historical items about that; he's been at it for quite a number of years now and is doing very nicely.

GARDNER

He still does that?

EPSTEIN

He still does that. I'm trying to think of the chap's name. I did know his name but I can't remember it now. [Goodwin Goldfaden]

GARDNER

Where is he located?

EPSTEIN

He's on Santa Monica Boulevard now somewhere. I don't know the exact address. I can look it up. There again is an example of a person becoming a specialist and doing well or medium; or like Eugene Bechtold, whom we spoke about, he creates a little niche in the whole spectrum, and from that he lives. There again, to digress a little bit, people ask me, "Are there opportunities in the book business?" Why, you can start in a hole in the wall or in a closet in the bedroom, if that's all you have, and begin to specialize and study your subject. If a person has the inquisitiveness and a little bit of gumption to make

a start and starve for a few months, maybe he can gradually, over a period of time, by constant study and constant research in any field imaginable, create a book business. And Eugene Bechtold is a living example of that, I don't think Eugene's ever made much more than a living. There's one man does that, and Adco does it on sports, Burch did it on nature books. I know people who buy nothing but fiction and sell to libraries. A chap named [Douglas] De Vorss, who had been on Grand Avenue. . . . What's the name of that hotel, and they also had an auditorium, near Grand and Ninth?

GARDNER

Embassy?

EPSTEIN

Embassy Auditorium, yeah. You've got a remarkable memory, because that was popular way before your time. He had a place of business in the back of one of the little sections of the Embassy, and then he moved to West Ninth Street. He built up a business of publishing metaphysical books. A lot of it was done for the author at the author's expense, and he would distribute them. If the author became popular, then he would become their publisher. And he built up a very good business of it. He became a widower, and he employed in his office several women. And the husband of one of the women shot him, killed him. There might have been an affair, but it was never proven that there actually was. Of course, those things are a little difficult to prove. The business is still being run now by a nephew of his, and it's moved to Santa Monica--De Vorss and Company. And they operate a pretty fair business, I think, a very profitable business. But that was the unfortunate ending of this man. There was another, more happy, incident that I would like to mention here about the old secondhand-book business. When he first moved to Grand Avenue, when he first started his business, he used to walk by my place. I was on Eighth Street at that time between Grand and Olive, and every time he had to go downtown, he had to pass by the store — if he was going towards the May Company or that area--to get to Broadway or Hill. One day, I went out to see some books. I wanted to buy the books, but the man insisted that I buy his bookcases also. He wouldn't sell me the books without his bookcases. And they were these Globe-Wernicke kind, which I understand now have become collectors' items — the ones that had a glass door that pulled up? The little

glass door pulled up and slid to the back. Well, I was in an antique shop the other day looking for some books, and I saw those. And I made the remark that I at one time had about 200 little sections of those and I didn't know what to do with them, so I sold them for a dollar apiece. He said, "Oh, God, we're getting. ..." He had a rack of five of them plus the top and the bottom, and he was asking \$100 for it. He explained to me that they had become very rare collectors' items. Well, to come back to Mr. De Vorss and the story about the man who insisted on me buying the bookcases, well, he had 100 or 125 sections of these bookcases. And I had no room for them. He had a very good library of books, and I just had to buy those bookcases. I think I paid him about twenty-five, fifty cents a section — which was cheap enough, I suppose, even for those days. But I had no room, and no way of getting them into the shop. Anyway, I had to buy them; I bought them; I got a truck to bring them in; and there they were on the sidewalk and me wondering how in the world I was going to get them into the store, where I was going to put them. And De Vorss walked by, and we said hello. He said, "Say, those are nice bookcases." I said, "Yes, they're very nice." He said, "How much do you want for them?" I said, "Can you use them all?" He said, "Yes, I can use them all" — because he had just started there and so forth. They looked very nice. I said, "Well, give me a dollar and a half apiece for them." He said, "Okay." So out of a disaster I made a handsome profit. One never knows. At the time I was so happy to get rid of them, if he had offered me seventy-five cents apiece, I'm sure I would have taken it. But that poor man came to an unfortunate end. The Hollywood Bookstore at that time was sold by the creditors. They had been there, the oldest bookstore in Hollywood. They were a little bit diagonal to the west, across the street from us, about five doors from where Miller's is now. The building has since been torn down for an auto park. Allan Weatherby owned it. I may have mentioned Allan before. He was a Harvard graduate, extremely knowledgeable in literature, but totally irresponsible. He had no idea where money came from. If he needed money, he would just go to the register and take whatever was there for whatever purpose—he wanted to go out and have a fine dinner or take a number of people drinking. At that time he had psychological problems of some kind or another. His wife was a very fine woman, and she suffered along with him. But they lost their business. A number of years later, he went back East, and we heard that he straightened himself out and now is a professor at some university on the East Coast and

living very happily, which I'm very happy to hear. Sammy Reiser was listed; he opened a store at 5638 Hollywood Boulevard. That was his final store, and while he was still proprietor of that, he, as I mentioned before, committed suicide. Larry Edmunds was operating at the old Reiser store. I think he had Ida Needham and Milton Luboviski working for him at the time. They were still on Cahuenga, I think .

GARDNER

They specialized in film, didn't they?

EPSTEIN

At that time, no. At that time, they had a general used-book store. The Satyr Bookshop had moved from Vine Street to Hollywood Boulevard just east of Vine. They were on Vine Street next to the Brown Derby. But the location became too expensive for them, and the Derby wanted it back, so they had to move. At that time I think Mac Gordon, the originator, had already died. I think I mentioned Solomon's before. The Jewish bookstore moved to Fairfax from Boyle Heights. That's an event, There was a little bookstore opened up called the Studio Bookstore at 1716 North Wilcox. They had both new and old books. We're coming now to '49. If you recollect, I spoke of a man by the name of Dave Kohn, who ran the Curio Bookshop — and the place was just stuffed with books, and neither he nor anyone else could find anything — and who had asked me how to improve his business. And I told him if he kept one and threw out two, in the proportion, he might be able to create a bookshop again, as it was purely a storage house. Well, he finally sold out to some people who renamed it The Book Center. It was later sold out to somebody else and moved to South Broadway, and it just petered out. There was one chap I'd like to mention. He did not have a bookstore. But he sold encyclopedias, which is a world apart from bookstores, usually a very hard sell from door to door. The chap I want to mention, his name was C.U. Branch. (Now, what the initials stand for, I don't know. I think the first name might have been Clarence.) But anyway, he had his offices at 416 West Eighth Street, [phone rings; tape stopped] C.U. Branch was a typical example of a kind of bookselling that doesn't exist anymore, I don't think. They still have door-to-door salesmen who sell encyclopedias — not from door to door, necessarily, but to wealthy people, fine sets of books. In those days, people were proud of

having a library, even those who were hardly literate. But if they had the money, they of course had to have a library full of books; and they'd buy these finely bound sets, and put them on the shelves, and enjoy them whichever way they could. Sometimes they would read one. But a finely bound book is a difficult book to read in the first place. I know people who have finely bound sets of an author, but if they want to read the author, they go out and buy a copy of that book because they're hard to handle.

GARDNER

You don't want to get them dirty.

EPSTEIN

Right, because they get soiled very easily. They're highly polished, as a rule. At any rate, he would buy books from me. If we would get fine sets, he would buy them from me. We had an arrangement: he wouldn't buy them outright. He would take a sample of a set of books that I had, or whatever number of sets he wanted to take out, and he would try to sell them. And if he sold them, he would buy them from me. If not, he brought me back the book — which was a nice arrangement, once you got to know that he was trustworthy. Occasionally we had to wait for our money because the person that he sold them to didn't give him a check on the spot, or whatever. But on the whole, we got along very well with a number of people who did that sort of thing. At that time, there was C.C. Leonard and Grady and one or two others who did that type of thing. However, the Depression came along, and the market for that type of book business dropped. People weren't buying those things, sets for \$4- or \$5- or \$600. All these chaps were having a very rough time. So they started selling to schools and libraries. Schools had a regular budget, no matter how small, and they were such tough salesmen. Then they switched to things like the World Book sets, and reference sets, encyclopedias, or sets of standard authors not in fine bindings--cloth bindings. So they went ahead and created a modest living out of that. And a modest living was what most people had in those days. Some of them didn't quite succeed, and they had to do something else. Then Branch later became a sales manager for an encyclopedia company. Not a major encyclopedia — it was, I think, the Collier, which was the third-rate encyclopedia. And all over the years we kept in contact. Whenever he'd find a batch of good used books somewhere, he

would call me and tell me about them. We became quite close friends. But he wound up, he got into a deal of some kind operating a school for GIs . After WWII, a tremendous number of GIs were either going to college or trade schools. And quite a few trade schools sprung up to teach these boys a craft — like watchmaking or the grinding of lenses or polishing stone. Any kind of a school they could think of, they started, and these chaps would come in with their GI Bill money and spend it with them. They became very successful at it until the thing petered out. But by that time, he had it made. He was a very shrewd guy. A nice person. Hard sell — I wouldn't want him to sell me. But with all that, that was his business; that was his way of doing business. Take that coat off, and he was a very fine person. We got along very well together for, oh, twenty-five, thirty years. But I mention that simply because the type of a business — again, a person begins to specialize in something. And you know, I don't know of any salesmen who are going around to schools and colleges the same way as they did. And I'll bet you that if a person started out today and did that same thing, he could probably do very well at it, because the libraries are more prosperous now than they were then — less prosperous than they were five years ago, but they still have quite sizable budgets compared to the budgets of those days. Brentano's on Seventh Street combined with Gateway of Music. You wouldn't remember that. A chap started an idea of selling records the way books are sold. And he came into the nice Brentano's store on West Seventh Street, and they started this thing. They also did that at the Beverly Hills address. But the partnership didn't last long, and Brentano's went out. Gateway stayed, but Gateway didn't last too long either. It was an idea that just didn't take hold. There was a chap who opened the Cambridge Bookshop, at 5600 Hollywood Boulevard, which again didn't last long. Peggy Christian opened at 1071 North Western, called Christian's Bookstore. I think she was married at the time, but she ran the store herself. I walked in there one day — I didn't know her — and I saw this young woman, very attractive, in this shop that had a lot of dark corners in it; and I said to myself, "Something might happen here." I looked around; I introduced myself. She had heard of me, but she didn't know me. We talked. And I said to her, "Aren't you afraid to stay here?" "Well," she said, "my husband comes and stays with me in the later hours." But apparently the marriage broke up. She ran it herself. Then she later moved to Santa Monica Boulevard, around the corner; and finally, as you know, she's now on La

Cienega. Mr. Harellick opened a Jewish-book store at 228 West Fourth Street. But he did not go into the same kind of Jewish-book store as Solomon's. A much different plane in the sense that all his books were in English. He had a broader knowledge of Jewish books, of Jewish content, rather than strictly as Solomon's were textbooks for Jewish schools and so forth--although Harellick later carried the textbook type of thing. It was mostly for the Reform and Conservatives, which use a lot of English, more English and less Hebrew. Solomon was the expert on the Hebrew. Harellick became quite expert, and quite a fine bookman for Jewish religious books. And he was a very fine person. He later combined with a man by the name of Jack Roth, and it's called Harellick and Roth. They're on La Cienega opposite Temple Beth Am, below Olympic. Mr. Harellick has since died, and Roth is operating the business using the same name and doing an excellent job. I think that people running specialized bookshops in some ways do a tremendous service to the community. Whereas Mr. Harellick one time called me and said that his problem was that he sold to religious groups and rabbis and teachers, and every one of them wanted a discount. And he was having a hard time making ends meet. I told him that as long as he gives a discount, he was going to starve and perhaps starve to death, in the sense that he wouldn't be able to carry on his business; that he must be adamant and explain to them that there isn't that much Jewish-book business in the city, and he is providing them with a service, and he cannot afford to give them a discount. And stick to that policy. And by God, he did that--with rare exceptions, where they bought a great big lot of books — and his business improved in the sense that he was making a profit. And I said, "You've got to teach the people to respect you, because you are providing them a service that they can't get anywhere else in the city — or hardly anywhere in the country unless they want to deal by mail with a few stores in New York, which is very inconvenient for them and where they will get no discount. They'll have to pay postage. And you explain that to them and stick to it." And I said, "You might lost some customers, but you will gain profit on the business you do to much more than offset the losses you take. And those same customers will find they can't get the book elsewhere, and they will come to you, and they will pay your price." He remembered that, and he thanked me for the advice many times. We had to learn the same thing when we moved into Hollywood and we started selling new books. See, during the Depression we got in the habit of giving discounts. Well, you had to. I

mean, people just came in, and maybe that's all they had. If you wanted a dollar and a half, and they offered you a dollar and a quarter or a dollar, you compromised to a dollar and a quarter. Well, he was short of money; I was short of business. We did it. But when we came into Hollywood, we decided we just couldn't do it anymore, because the more people you had working, the bigger the business got, everyone had to trade with the boss because he was the only one who could give a discount. So the first thing we knew, Stackhouse or I were doing all the selling, and we didn't have any time for anything else. So we decided we would mark up books reasonably, as reasonably as we could, give absolutely no discounts. We never gave a discount on a new book, except to other dealers and occasionally to a library when they bought new books. Well, the people who had been accustomed to getting a discount or bargaining with us, we had to teach them that this is a totally different business we're in now; we just couldn't do it, and we wouldn't do it. And I think that was one of the great reasons that Pickwick stayed on an even keel all the years. Oh, we had a time with people. "What, Louis? I don't get a discount?" You know, they had been getting a discount or bargaining. "No," I said, "we're running a different kind of a store now. I can't afford to give you a discount." Because if I gave them a 10 percent discount, that was all the profit that I would make on the transaction.

GARDNER

Let me just ask one quick question. Did Harelick handle all new books?

EPSTEIN

He had a few old books, as they showed up. No, primarily new.

1.20. TAPE NUMBER: X, Side One (July 15, 1974)

EPSTEIN

To back up a little bit to '49, I notice that I didn't mention Cambridge Bookshop, which opened on 5600 Hollywood Boulevard. That's about a block west of Western. The chap who started that, his name was [Charles] Salzman. He's still in business. I notice the following year he moved again. In the following year he moved somewhere else. I don't have the exact address. But he's still in business, and he's on Melrose Avenue, not far from La Cienega

[Canterbury Book Shop, 8344 Melrose] . He runs a small shop, mostly library business, specializing in English literature. The name of M.J. Royer comes up. In 1949 he opened a bookshop at 465 North Robertson. Later he went into art books in a big way, selling to libraries almost exclusively, and built up a very handsome business. The interesting thing about Mel Royer — to me, that is--is that he was one of my very earliest customers when I opened on Sixth Street. At that time he was an accountant. I forget the name of the firm. They used to get all the cans and metals from the city garbage collection department. In those days, you had to separate the metals from all the other waste. It was a very lucrative business for the company, and they fought the combination of metals and all other waste products that they collected from the residences. They fought the idea for a good many years, but they finally lost. Now, of course, everything is collected together. Curiously, now there's an agitation, because metals are becoming scarce and whatnot, to recycle all these things, go back to the old system of having two containers, one for paper waste and other garbage and whatnot, and another one for metals — which I think makes sense, except that, of course, it would cost the city so much money to do that. They'd probably have to have two separate pickups. How they'll work it out, I don't know. Mel was considered a pretty good collector at the time that I started. It was curious to find him going into the business many years later, almost twenty years later from the time I started till the time he went into business. He is a very nice person, and he made quite a nice success of it. But he recently sold out his entire stock, which was expensive and valuable stock, to a group of Japanese who packed it all up and shipped it to Japan. And what they'll do with it, I wouldn't know — it'll probably go into some libraries there. But the Japanese are beginning to buy, as you know, all art forms of any kind. I guess they needed some art books.

GARDNER

What kind of a guy was Mel Royer?

EPSTEIN

In what sense do you mean?

GARDNER

Oh, just generally.

EPSTEIN

Oh, a very nice person, very soft-spoken, a straight thinker, a square businessman. When you dealt with Mel, you were on solid ground. What he said, well, you could take as gospel. You didn't have to have signed contracts with him. He established a nice reputation amongst the libraries. I'm seventy-two, you know, and I always considered him a good bit older than I. I imagine he must have been all of five or six or seven years older than I, so he's probably either approaching eighty or in his eighties. But he became a little bit ill, and then he had a fall which laid him up for a number of months, and since that he's been doing very little. Finally, when an opportunity came, he sold his business. He'd been trying to sell his business; and he almost succeeded at another time, but the deal didn't go through. The people couldn't raise the money. But the Japanese came along with whatever he wanted, and they got the whole works. Cleaned the whole thing up; didn't bother sorting, just packed it. Another curious thing about it is that his principal assistant for so many years was a Japanese girl, [Nakuno Serisawa] . I don't know if that contributed to the sale or not. The Spanish Bookstore moved to 629--oh, no, they were at 629 West Sixth. They later moved. The Technical Bookshop opened at 726 South Spring Street. I think they'd been open before that, but they moved to 726 South Spring. They were there for a number of years, then they moved down to Third and Spring. Now they've closed that recently, and they're somewhere on Westwood Boulevard, I believe. They now sell, I think, medical books, too. There was a bookstore that opened at 628 West Sixth, which was across the street from my old location, 625, called the AAA Bookstore--whatever that meant.

GARDNER

That meant they wanted the first listing in the phone book.

EPSTEIN

That's exactly it. But apparently that didn't help them too much, because they didn't stay in business too long. In 1949, I noticed a new name in the phone book, John Q. Burch. Well, it wasn't new, but he'd moved to 1584 West Vernon. And I think I spoke to you about John Burch before as having become a specialist in books on conchology. He developed a worldwide business and did extremely well with it. He's a retired railroad man who went into the book

business. There, again, to prove a principle, if you have an interest, you can usually build a business around it.

GARDNER

That sounds like a funny address for a bookshop.

EPSTEIN

Well, at the time it was a much better neighborhood than it is now. I'm talking about 1949.

GARDNER

I see. Did he remain there? Did he move?

EPSTEIN

He remained there for quite a few years and then moved his business to his home, which was in the area to the west of that, the Leimert Park area. There's a peculiar lady, Miss F. Gertzweig, who had a shop at 6093 Sunset Boulevard. She sold cards and occasionally even dresses and one thing or another. But she had a circulating library and took orders for books for people. At the time of '49, she was located not too far from — that studio on Gower--Columbia. She got a little bit of overflow of business. She was a very loud, demanding person, but she was a character. She was an old maiden lady who made her living in her own way. But she used to torment us no end. She would expect us to mail books to her, mail them to her customers and all that, demanding discounts larger than she was entitled to. We used to give dealers 10 percent discount and she always complained, "Well, how can I make a living on 10 percent?" [laughter] "Well, it's either you making a living or me making a living." "Well, you're rich, you've got this great big store." [laughter] But she was a harmless person. Coming into 1950, Acres of Books — I think they moved at that time, sometime in 1950, from 140 Pacific Avenue, Long Beach, to Atlantic Boulevard. (They started in Long Beach long before 1950.) Acres of Books is sort of a legendary place. It was opened by Bertrand Smith. Bertrand Smith had a place called Acres of Books in Cincinnati, Ohio. A more or less successful bookseller, he was British by origin. He got a tremendous amount of space, and he would buy anything and everything and store it away on the shelves where you had to really dig out things. And they were all

reasonably priced. And eventually, if you held them long enough, some of those things that were extremely common and no account became a little bit more desirable, in the sense that somebody might always be looking for something of that nature. He built a big business on that basis. He later moved to a very, very large store on Atlantic Boulevard in Long Beach. If you've never been there, it's really a sight. It's a lot of little cubbyholes. You really have to seek and find whatever you think might be necessary. I've been there a couple of times, but it just is impossible for me to look through. Bertrand was a very nice person--very affable, nice to talk to. He really had a genuine love for books, any kind of book. It's almost like [John W.] Todd [Jr.] of Shorey's in Seattle. A book had to be preserved, no matter what, and it was a sacrilege to destroy a book, or not to treat it with great respect — which I agree with. Every book is entitled to respect. But if everybody held onto every book that was ever published, there wouldn't be enough room in the world to keep all the books. And there wouldn't be any scarce books because all the editions would be fully available and there would be no scarcity. But he passed on, oh, about ten years ago, and his two sons are running the business along the same lines that the father had, and they're doing quite well. Dale's Bookazine had moved to — Harry Dale had moved to 749 South Spring. He's the chap I told you about that bought out Holmes when the old man had to close up shop. Jack Blum opened the Cherokee Bookshop, at 1646 Cherokee. They're now on Hollywood Boulevard, a block west of Musso's. His sons [Gene and Burt] are now taking over the business. They do a fairly good business. Gene now does most of the running of the store. They specialize in film things. One of the sons [Burt] has gone into comic books. Another one has gone into fantasy books, science fiction. And each one knows his area pretty well. There is also Jack's brother, Harry, who has been there a long time. Then they have another chap who specializes in World War I and II books. He sort of parceled out specialties into his store. In addition to that, he has a very nice stock of sets, which are becoming very scarce. Of course, they're now very high priced. But it's not the kind of a store that I would appreciate myself. Nevertheless, it's a good store.

GARDNER

What do you mean by that?

EPSTEIN

Well, it's not arranged like I would arrange it. It's hard to browse in it. They have three levels. One is a half-basement, and the third level is sort of a half-mezzanine. It's a very difficult store to browse in. As a matter of fact, they don't encourage you too much to browse. In spite of what I say--that it isn't a kind of a store I would run--nevertheless it's still a good bookstore. Jack is a very nice person. He's on the verge of retiring now. He's just hanging on until his sons get a little bit better feel of it. They're probably waiting till he retires. [laughter] That's the usual battle between the ages. Harry Levinson appears on the scene around 1950. He has an address at 9527 Brighton Way, but I think he did business from his home for quite a while. He came in from New York, a very knowledgeable guy with an extremely fine collection of reference books pertaining to books--very scarce bibliographies. He's a very, very able bookman. I never did much business with Harry because by that time my biggest interest was in the new-book business. He used to come in and browse through our rare books and buy some things from us from time to time. He established himself as a major bookseller, a national bookseller in rare books. He used to make his regular buying trips to Europe, all over Europe, and he's considered one of the most knowledgeable booksellers — perhaps, I would say, next to Jake. But he's a different type of character from Jake — very close-mouthed. He did participate in the antiquarian bookseller's group. He just recently gave up that location on Brighton. Now he's doing business from a very big home he bought in Beverly Hills. He built a special section of his home for the books. Unfortunately, within a year or two after they moved into this very big home, his wife was killed in an automobile accident. And they had no children. I suspect that Harry's a fairly lonely person.* He was never a person to make friends, as Jake has and some of the others. He always stayed pretty much in the background — which is no criticism of him, by any means. Nevertheless, that's the type of personality he had. But he was an extremely able bookman, and in that context he left his mark on the book business. I find a note here on Jack E. Reynolds. At that time he was on Santa Monica Boulevard, at 4561. Jack is still in business, a specialist in Western Americana. He's somewhere, I think, in the West Valley — 16031 Sherman Way, Van Nuys. I've never been to his West Valley store. He's been there for many, many years. He still follows his specialty — very knowledgeable. He participates in various historical societies. He's written little squibs about this, that, and the other. He's active in the Westerners, Los Angeles Corral. The Westerners have

branches all over the United States; and even in London and Paris, they have corrals there. They organize a group of people whose interest is Western-book collecting — books about the West, Indians, etc., etc. Somebody got the idea of having these corrals, and there's been a very active one in Los Angeles for many years. The Los Angeles one publishes a yearbook, of which I have most copies; and I'm a member of it. I think eight times a year they issue a little bulletin, and with the bulletin usually comes a treatment of some special subject by somebody in the corral whose specialty it is. Some of them are very fine pieces of research. [* He has since remarried. -- [L. E.]]

GARDNER

It's a historical society, really.

EPSTEIN

Yes. They don't call themselves that, but in effect that's what it is — but slightly on a different plane. It's less public than, say, the Southern California Historical Society. Jack is still active in the business, and he has a good reputation. We'll go on to 1951. I checked over a few of the memberships of the antiquarian group members, and I find the name of Ernest E. Gottlieb. Gottlieb was a specialist in music. He died rather young, unfortunately. Max Hunley appears on Santa Monica Boulevard in Beverly Hills. He had previously been in a little arcade just south of Santa Monica Boulevard on Beverly Drive in Beverly Hills. I don't know if you're familiar with that. There's a small arcade; it's still there. He had a small store like that in these arcades, and later he moved to the location where he still is. Just the other day, cleaning out a bunch of old catalogs — I have catalogs kicking around here, some of them dated 1928, periods of that time — I ran across about a dozen of Max's catalogs. The earliest one was dated catalog number three, around '30, '31. So for a gag I called him. I said, "Max, I want to give you an order." He said, "Louis, that's great." So I told him, "From catalog three, give me item number seven." He said, "Louis, what are you talking about? Where did you find that?" I said, "Well, Max, I found a group of your old catalogs. How would you like to have them?" "Oh," he said, "I'd love to have them." So I said, "Okay, I'll send them on to you." He got a big kick out of that.

GARDNER

What was the item?

EPSTEIN

I have no idea. I just pulled an item out of it. Things that are now selling for fifty dollars were listed at two dollars. This is way back in the middle thirties; that was the time to buy rare books. But no one had money then. It's amazing. I think I mentioned Max before. However, Max is of the same era of my career as Mel Royer. He, too, was one of my earliest customers on Sixth Street. He, at that time, was working for a stock brokerage house. And of course the stock brokerage houses were having even a rougher time than they are now, and eventually he lost his job. He worked at something else for a while, but he was always a good book collector, and finally he went into the business. And we used to buy and sell to each other. His people had the Hunley Theatre, which was on Hollywood Boulevard not too far from Western. He was there a long, long time. Max was a very conservative person, and even in those days I think he would venture in and out of the stock market. I'm inclined to believe that Max is quite provided with the wherewithal that people call "rich." [laughter] But we always got along very nicely. The common gag was, after I opened up on Hollywood Boulevard and began to prosper a little bit, he always said, "Louis, what do you do with all your money?" — which is still a gag between us. The first one who gets a line out when we meet.

GARDNER

He's still there on Santa Monica Boulevard?

EPSTEIN

Yes, he's still there. The shop is closed half the time. He loves to go fishing. Every year he used to go to Europe. He's a great Anglophile. He used to go to Europe for about two months and go through the bookshops there, besides taking a walking tour or a bicycle tour, combining business with pleasure. He had a nice way of living, just the way he wanted, and he ran his business that way. It leads me to believe that he wasn't that hard-pressed for business, like the rest of us were at that time; that he could do the things he did at the time he did them. None of us could close up for two months and go traveling.

GARDNER

Did he have any specialization in particular?

EPSTEIN

He specialized in first editions. He went in the children' s-book market. Western books. Quite general, rare books .

GARDNER

I made a note — I think we looked through the same catalog, probably--in that first 1950 antiquarians' listing they mention that he attended Columbia and the University of Paris as well as UCLA.

EPSTEIN

That I didn't know, and I'm glad to learn that. He was a big cut above the average bookman as far as knowledge and background was concerned. That was apparent. I knew he was well educated, but I did not know that he went to those universities.

GARDNER

Well, that attests to his humility, anyway.

EPSTEIN

That verifies the fact that there must have been money in the family, because I don't know of any other bookseller who had that kind of background, who could have afforded to go to those schools. Most of us, like Jake and myself, had to dig in to scratch out a living, and the same way for our parents. Jake's parents in Texas, where he came from — from discussions with Jake — were about on a par with my parents. Our generation just didn't have the money to send their children to those kinds of schools — I mean, our parents' generation, not my generation. Sometimes I consider myself a first-generation American; and other times I'm an immigrant because I came here when I was seven, and it's hard to identify myself with my father's generation, which is the real immigrant generation. But I'm practically raised almost as an American-born. But still I am an immigrant.

GARDNER

My notes say — while we're vaguely on the subject Harry Levinson went to City College of New York, which would put him, I suppose, in the same category with you and Jake, since that was a public university.

EPSTEIN

Yes, probably. Well, of course, I went to a university, too, but they didn't have those multiple colleges, as you mentioned for Max. Max had real scholarship behind him. Getting a bachelor's degree was — sometimes we attained that. I mentioned Max, and I mentioned a few of the others. There was a chap by the name of Roman Novins who was in the book business for a short time. He had a little shop at 624 North Doheny. Then Kurt Schwarz appears on the scene at that time. Kurt Schwarz is still in business. He operates from his home now. I think Kurt always did. No, he had a shop at one time at 450 North Beverly Drive, Beverly Hills. Kurt came from Germany. He left Germany before the concentration camp era, but he had to really escape. They went east rather than coming west, so they went through China. He lived in Manchuria for a while, I believe, and they lived for quite a while in Shanghai. His parents were booksellers, and I think even their parents before them; so he had a thorough background in the rare-book business. Fortunately, once you have a rare-book background and get to a place like Shanghai, with that background you immediately begin to search for a way of getting into the rare-book business there. They found enough books, and then from Shanghai they could correspond to England. So they carried on, more or less, and finally came to this country. But it is apparent that they did not lose all their property. So he came here with some assets, and he didn't have to start from scratch and struggle like the case might have been with a refugee. Kurt had a stroke here a number of years ago, and he still walks with a limp, and one of his arms still bothers him. Nevertheless, he's still back conducting his business. He's training his son [Thomas F.], who, instead of having a classical education for the book business, studied psychology. I don't know how far his degree took him-- whether he ever took the PhD or not. But apparently his son may follow up in the trade.

GARDNER

What was his specialization?

EPSTEIN

Well, early books in all languages. A lot of the foreign rare books. His business was predominantly in very scarce books for libraries and for collectors. But he was a very fine gentleman. His wife [Martha M.] is very nice. I remember we were there one time for a meeting, and his wife baked a chocolate cake which Ann fell in love with. And Ann asked her for the recipe, and she gave her the recipe in ounces of everything, not pints. Everything was measured in ounces, including the eggs. Ann tried the recipe, and it came out pretty good but not quite as well as Mrs. Schwarz's. She was a Viennese cook. Everything was very rich, but excellent. Let's see. Borzon Books: it's a shop that opened at 1624 North Las Palmas. It didn't last very long. I mention it simply because it was there. Martin Bloch opened up a little bookstore at 1716 North Wilcox. He worked for years for the Hollywood Bookstore. A very good bookman, very erratic. He later was one of the publishers and the editor of a magazine called One, which was a magazine for the gay community. I doubt whether that magazine is still in existence or not. But at any rate, he's out of that. Where he is now, I have no idea. But he was a good bookman. You never knew which way he was going to jump when you met him. But he could sell books, and he knew his books. He really was much interested in that. Brentano's closed up their downtown store that year. California Book Company, which I mentioned to you was Max Walker, closed out. Harry Dale moved his Bookazine to 649 South Main. I think Harry used to move whenever a landlord of his couldn't wait any longer for his rent. Howard and Reese bought 719 West Sixth Street, which was, I think, the old Curio, and it became the Book Center. I think I mentioned that. It's a Miss Howard and a Mr. Reese. Miss Howard was a musician with the Los Angeles Philharmonic, and she was a customer of ours for many, many years. She lived with a friend of hers, a lady friend, and they were both good book buyers, both of them musicians. All of a sudden she announces to us that she had bought that store. And the partner, Reese, is a chap who used to work for us in the old-book department. I didn't think much of his ability. At any rate, they bought that store. Miss Howard always wanted to own a bookstore. And she had a few thousand dollars saved up, and she put it into that bookstore — which, of course, turned out to be a disaster. After two years, I guess, Reese had it all--not because he took it from her, but because she just didn't want it anymore .

GARDNER

Why was it a disaster?

EPSTEIN

Well, they just weren't doing any business. She didn't have any time to pay attention to it. It's the kind of store that they bought. If they'd bought, perhaps, a smaller store, they could have specialized—say, she in music, or he in something else—and they'd have built up a business. It might have had an opportunity to be successful. But as I mentioned to you, that Curio Bookshop, which became later the Book Center, was a junk heap. There were so many books in there that no one could find anything. And Reese, again, was the type of person who couldn't leave a thing alone. He had no way of measuring the worth of his time, in the sense that he would spend as much time classifying and looking up a book that was on face worthless; but no, he had to find out the exact price at which it was published and everything about it. And having been as long in the business as he had been, working for us, and seeing all the books priced, he should have been able to throw things out, worthless things, and able to price things right from his head, instead of having to catalog separately each and every book that came his way. If he tried to do that for the entire stock of Curio Bookshop, it would take him five of his lifetimes. He had the same kind of a fault as Bechtold. But Bechtold realized that, I suppose — and we explained it to him. He went into his own specialty in a small way, out of his own home, and did his thing — whereas this chap, I don't think was as smart as Bechtold. So poor Howard lost her money, and eventually Reese had to give the thing up, too. But these curious combinations that gathered together in the book business — simply because he had worked for the Pickwick, which gave him a little bit of status. He had worked in the old-book department there, and they had met there, in the old-book department. But Howard was a very nice woman. I was really sorry when she told me that she went into that deal. I told her, "Why didn't you consult with me?" No, she wanted to keep it private. She was a private person. But later on she told me that she wishes that she had. But I don't suppose anyone could have talked her out of it. She had almost a compulsion that she wanted to be [in business]. I haven't seen her in years. She's no longer with the Philharmonic. She may be retired and is living quietly somewhere. There was an outfit in South Pasadena, I believe it was, called P.D. and Lone Perkins. Oriental books. And that was their specialty: books about the Orient and Japanese books, mostly

Japanese books. I don't think they had any Chinese books. And P.D. Perkins had been a salesman for the Sparkletts water firm. What was the name? It had a different name. The Coca-Cola Company of Los Angeles bought them out. And he had been a sales manager for them. Very nice man. But he got this yen for Oriental books. I guess he started collecting Oriental things. He used to go back to Japan. He gave up his job with Sparkletts. They had another name. They had two kinds of water — Sparkletts and something else.

GARDNER

Arrowhead?

EPSTEIN

Arrowhead, right. Arrowhead, that's it. I don't know what happened to the name of Arrowhead.

GARDNER

They're still there. It's another company, isn't it?

EPSTEIN

Well, they bought out Sparkletts and Arrowhead combined, and then Coca-Cola of L.A. bought the combined outfit. They were both competing water companies.

GARDNER

There still are two. I wonder what the second one is?

EPSTEIN

They may use the two different trade names. I see Sparkletts, but I never see Arrowhead. Maybe in some other communities, they might use the name Arrowhead. I don't know. But they combined, and then a local Coca-Cola Company bought them both. I happen to know that because I own some stock in the local Coca-Cola Company--which might do better than it's doing. It was very good, but it isn't now. At any rate, he went to Japan and lived there for a while, then he came back and he adopted Japanese mannerisms. He used to bow to you three times when you met. But he was a nice person. What he did, he did well, and apparently he made out well. They sold the company to some other people, who are running it, I think, under the same name — not Perkins,

but something else. But I don't hear too much about them now. I have a note here that this period of '51, Jack Reynolds moved to 16031 Sherman Way. I told you I didn't know just where he moved to. I'm coming to 1952. The Technical Book Company moved to 353 South Spring — I mentioned to you that they later moved to Spring — and Gideon Herman became the owner of the Abbey Bookshop, which I mentioned previously in the history. Charlie Yale opened the shop at 985 East Green Street in Pasadena. I mentioned before that Charlie Yale had worked for Dawson's for many years. He was their second-in-command, a very fine bookman and a very fine person. I remember when I first opened on Sixth Street, he came over and introduced himself and offered his help to answer any questions I might have, which I thought was extremely nice. I think I mentioned Mr. Dawson did the same thing. The Dawson people were always very fine, very nice people, in that they were always helping the trade. To this day, I think Glen and Muir are always doing something for the booksellers' organizations. They participate in everything bookish. Glen is on the board of Los Angeles Library Association, of which I am a member at the present time. I have a meeting tomorrow. LALA. Coming back to Charlie Yale: he left Dawson's and opened a business of his own; and later on his son, Bud Yale, came in. Charlie Yale, unfortunately, died, oh, about five, six years after he opened the shop. And his son took over and ran it for about five, six, seven years, and then he died. It was very unfortunate, especially the son was a very young man when he died. But Charlie--I guess, I considered him about ten years older than I when I first met him at Dawson's, But he was one of the good bookish bookmen, and he knew his business, knew his Western Americana thoroughly. That was his specialty.

GARDNER

Had his son kept up the business?

EPSTEIN

The son kept up the business on Green Street until he died, when they sold off the stock. As a matter of fact, the other day, looking through the old catalogs, I found the last catalog that was put out after the son's death, to liquidate the stock. [There were] a lot of bibliographies that I would like to have now, now that I have time to read them, just for the sake of having the background knowledge .

GARDNER

An interesting point, when I was looking through the minutes of the antiquarian society. . . .

EPSTEIN

He was, I think, the first president.

GARDNER

He was the first president, and then also, I guess you succeeded him, I think.

EPSTEIN

Yes.

GARDNER

Because when he died, I think, during your term, you gave the eulogy at the funeral.

EPSTEIN

Yes. How about that? Where'd you get that information?

GARDNER

Out of those document boxes I told you were at UCLA.

EPSTEIN

Yes, I succeeded him. He and I and several others were the founding members.

GARDNER

Well, we can talk about that when we get through the list, perhaps, about how it happened to be founded.

EPSTEIN

And also '52 was the year that Dale bought out Holmes. Mr. Harellick moved to Melrose, which is simply entered here just for the record. There was a circulating library which did a very big business, called Guild Rental Library, at 7208 Hollywood Boulevard, which is just east of La Brea. And the man who ran

it — I forget his name — used to buy books from us, and from time to time we'd have some dealings of one kind or another. He used to rent a lot of books to studios for reading, for the readers, whereas we used to rent a lot of books to studios for background, for movie sets. They would lease them to the readers for reading purposes. When they got a story they were interested in, instead of buying the book, this man would loan it out to them. At that time there were a lot of people still going to circulating libraries. But it was a dying business, and eventually he had to sell it off or get rid of his stock. I notice that's the year that Milton Luboviski parted company with Ida Needham. Have I talked to you about the Needhams?

GARDNER

No.

EPSTEIN

Ida Needham's husband was Wilbur. Wilbur was totally deaf. She, of course, was his mouthpiece and his ears. Wilbur was a very literary person. He did some book reviewing for the Times when Paul Jordan-Smith was editor of the Times book page. They opened a store, for secondhand books, during the bad years. They had a struggle. They fought their way up and established a pretty fair business, which later was in Brentwood on San Vicente.

GARDNER

Was this after the association with Luboviski?

EPSTEIN

Yes.

GARDNER

I see.

EPSTEIN

Ida had worked around in various bookstores from time to time. She'd worked for Milton and some of the others. Ida was a very good bookwoman, and Wilbur knew his book-stores and he knew how to hunt out books. But they were never in the big time in the book business. Number one, they weren't too businesslike; and Wilbur, of course, had this horrible handicap of not

being able to hear. Wilbur was very social conscious. Of course, Ida was, too, but not to the degree that Wilbur was. I wouldn't be surprised that Wilbur at one time might have been a member of the [Communist] party. He used to come into my place. He was always going around looking for books for the shop or for others or for customers. And we'd sell him a lot of books. But he became angry with me, for this reason: there was a group started up in our store who were going to have a strike, which never got off its feet. And apparently he was familiar with the background of it. And the reason it never did get off its feet — it probably wouldn't have gotten off its feet for more reasons than the one that's given. And the reason for its immediate failure was that the attorney we hired to represent us against the union researched most everybody, and he discovered that their leader was a chap working for us for a time, but not for long, by the name of [Robert] Klonsky.

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GARDNER

I'm waiting with bated breath for the end of the sentence. [laughter]

EPSTEIN

Klonsky was a Communist from way back. His picture appeared in an early issue of Life magazine as a very young man. He would be the picture of a Communist, you might picture, of a Communist of the twenties — wild hair and wild eyes. I suppose they might have gotten the picture during wild circumstances, too. But at any rate, he was that. The attorney we had for us, of course, researched the leaders, the people for it, and he brought that information to the [Retail] Clerks' Union. "Here is your leader; here's his picture; here's the documentation on him." And the strike threat collapsed.* They couldn't have organized our place anyway because the people there didn't want to go to any union. (Remind me to get back to Wilbur, which was where the story started.) But while I'm on this strike business, this Klonsky had just been hired about two months before. He claimed that he had a little bookstore in Philadelphia, and anyone with a little bit of experience, we were very happy to have. Well, I never bothered to ask anybody what kind of a bookstore it was. It happened to be the same kind of a radical- book store as the Lincoln Bookstore, or whatever the--what is the one called here now, the

People's Bookstore? I don't think the People's Bookstore here now represents the Communist party the way that those bookstores were really arms of the party in those days because the party, of course, is not near as strong now as it was then. They don't have the money. At any rate, within three weeks, four weeks, we had a strike on our hands — or the threat of a strike. Well, at any rate, we blocked it. Apparently, there was a coterie, an association. Immediately, we lost the goodwill of a segment of dealers and a segment of our customers--for no reason at all except that there was the threat of a strike and that the strike did not succeed. I received a few nasty letters, and they were not from the people who I . . . One of them was from a person who'd been a customer for years. Apparently, they did have sort of an underground, which was connected, perhaps because of him — Klonsky. Word got around from directions which I never had heard of. And apparently Wilbur was involved in some way--not associated but knew these people well enough to come to me one day and cuss me out for being a capitalist. And he never came back to our shop. We were very good friends. I'd befriended him on many occasions. I loaned him money, and I actually gave him money when they were starving. But that cut no ice with him. I was a capitalist. I was a no-good capitalist. [* Strike threat occurred around the first week of December 1957. Our attorneys were Sheppard, Mullin, Richter, Balthis & Hampton. Working with them from their offices was a labor relations counselor by the name of Jack McDowell. He was the one we worked very closely with. The Retail Clerks International Association (affiliated with AFL-CIO) representative was Mel Rubin. Local 777. Curious comment can be made that local 777 was a good customer of Pickwick, and continued to buy books from Pickwick through the entire controversy, and remained a good customer, and probably still is. — [L.E.]]

GARDNER

At what point was this?

EPSTEIN

Well, let me see. It would be in 1958.

GARDNER

Who was your attorney?

EPSTEIN

I can't think of him. [See note.] I haven't seen or talked to him in [years]. I had to hire a special labor attorney. My attorney advised me to seek him out, and I did. I got him through some people here in Hollywood who had had similar trouble. I can't think of his name.

GARDNER

So back to Wilbur Needham.

EPSTEIN

That was one incident where it really hurt--not my pride, but I thought that I was unjustly accused of doing a bad thing. I don't think I did a bad thing because operating a bookstore under a union, especially with what the unions are trying to do now in bookstores, would be an almost impossible task. At least, I thought so at the time, and I still think so. At that time, it was even worse, because of the demands they make. They came in with a series of demands: to have a policy in the business, and to even have a right to reject certain books — which is totally impossible to run the kind of a bookstore I want and the kind of a bookstore any reasonable man would want to run if he wanted to be independent, have an independent mind of his own. At any rate, the thing fell through. Wilbur was angry with me and really told me off in no uncertain terms that I was a goddamned capitalist. I used to bump into Ida every so often in book places. I did bump into Wilbur once or twice over the years, but we just exchanged hello, nothing beyond that. But Ida probably was a little bit more open-minded on the subject, and she used to come in when she needed something or when she thought she had something that we might need. But I never saw their shop that they opened. I understand it's a very nice shop.

GARDNER

Well, they've moved now from Brentwood.

EPSTEIN

When Wilbur died, Ida sold the shop, and it's now moved to Westwood Boulevard, 2000 block something. I'm trying to think of the name of the couple that own it. I'll get you the name. It should be in the record right now.

[tape stopped] The Needham Bookshop is now the Needham Book Finders. Ida sold out to the Needham Book Finders, the [Stanley and Eleanor] Kurmans. And they belong to the Antiquarian Booksellers now. They're running a nice shop. They do some library business, of course, like most of the old-book shops have to these days. Well, that's the story of Wilbur and Ida Needham. I was fond of Wilbur, and that's why it hurt me so much. You know, some things you pass off, but it hurt my pride and it hurt my feeling of friendship. We were really friendly to him. We went out of our way to give him deals, and when they went in the old-book business, sometimes when [there was] something we couldn't deal in, they could. We recommended them at every turn. We did the most we could--because it was a hardship. The man had an extreme handicap. Perhaps it was the handicap that made him more bitter than perhaps some other people. But he was a true idealist. The fact that he expressed his idealism in that form — well, like a great many others. I don't know; the full history isn't told yet. It takes a couple of hundred years, maybe, to find out actually which system is better. And it also proved to me that it was still a very active party. Within days of the whole thing, I started getting nasty letters from people and phony phone calls. "Come out to such and such an address; we've got a big library." We'd get out there, and there was no such address. It strictly emanated from that, which, of course, reminds me of the time when Hollywood had a powerful commune here before and after the Hollywood Ten incident. They were quite arrogant when they thought they were in power, almost as arrogant as the Birchers were when they thought they were in power — you know, taking a book and throwing it on the floor: "Why in the hell are you selling this fascist book?" Or "Nazi book" or whatever. And it's only fascist and Nazi because they said so. Maybe the man's leanings were that way. I don't know. But they weren't that bad, except that they said it. And by the same token: "Why don't you put this one in the window?" when it was somebody they liked — which is exactly the same tactics that the Birchers used, except the Birchers used to write more letters and [have] more direct phone calls saying, "Close my account." They didn't write nasty letters. They would write nasty letters in the sense that, "I won't trade with you now; you're a traitor to your country," but not nasty letters, in the sense that they called you names or things of that nature, which was the other type. But the extremes go to extremes, which of course has taught me--and would teach anyone who was a reasonable person — a lesson: stay away from extremes.

There's room for everybody. Stay away from extremes. Extremes are dangerous in many ways. In politics, in science, you have to find a means of doing things which is reasonable, to make it fit into the machinery or change the machinery when you can, but you have to mesh into the machinery for everyday living. And there's a certain way of having the machinery changed-- or repaired, you might say--to do a better job this way or the other. As far as politics was concerned, I was almost apolitical, in the sense that parties themselves were meaningless terms to me in most cases. When I did vote, I would vote for the man. I was a registered Democrat. You have to pick one party or another, and my leanings were more for the Democratic ideas rather than the Republican. But if the Republicans put up a man like Warren, I voted for Warren — or [Goodwin J.] Knight — rather than whoever the Democrats had at the time. Even to this day, people ask me who I'll vote for. I'll wait and see and listen to the guy for a while rather than say, "Well, I'm a Democrat. I have to vote for the Democratic party." Well, that's quite an aside from where we were. That's the story of my relations with the Needhams. Curiously, I bumped into Ida. She was in the shop several years ago, before I retired. The year before I retired-- about three years ago. And we had quite a nice visit together. When Wilbur died, I sent her a nice letter, telling her how much I admired his knowledge and the fact that he put up such a fine struggle to do what he wanted to do in the book business. I didn't say anything about the fact that we had our differences. Because I did admire him: I admired his courage, and I admired his literary knowledge and his taste for books. He was one of the first ones to pick up Steinbeck with his first book; he picked him as a comer. He had all the early Steinbecks, which later became very valuable. And he became acquainted with Steinbeck. He had a lot of autographed Steinbeck material, which I imagine Ida still has. Well, that's that. In 1952 we noticed that Milton Luboviski and Ida had separated. I'm not sure whether Ida just worked for him or whether it was a partnership.

GARDNER

At that point the shop is Milton Luboviski's, isn't it?

EPSTEIN

Yes. Larry Edmunds.

GARDNER

What's happened to Larry Edmunds in the meantime?

EPSTEIN

Didn't I mention when I spoke of Stanley Rose that Larry Edmunds later had committed suicide?

GARDNER

Oh, he did, too?

EPSTEIN

It's a curious thing. Milton Luboviski's first wife — he and his first wife was divorced, and Larry Edmunds married her. Later on they had problems, and next we heard that Larry had committed suicide. Larry, I think, was involved to some degree, involved in the [Communist] party. I heard rumblings that that in some way led to his suicide. Now, I've never heard the full details, and I offer this statement only as something that I heard. But I'm convinced in my own mind that he was involved with the party, because the actions and reactions to the Russian-United States relationship was such that you could feel it — the way they reacted to something that Russia did and the way they reacted to something the United States did versus Russia. There was quite a colony here in Hollywood, and anybody that denies it isn't so. . . . Not that I feel that the Hollywood Ten were treated properly, because I think they were not. And I knew them all. And 80 percent of them that I knew were Communists, but two of them I was not too well acquainted with. They were all customers of ours. I never approved of the treatment they got. But they were; there was no question in my mind that they were. The fact that it was nobody's business whether they were or not is something else again. To be condemned for what they were years later was wrong. That's the way they felt and that's the way it was. But there was that colony which was related to that particular Luboviski and Larry Edmunds bookstore when they were partners. Now, to what extent Milton was involved in those days, I don't know, but there's no question in my mind that he has no use for them now. There at one time was an Anti-Nazi League, as you remember. And they had a bookstore on Fairfax for a short time. A lot of the Hollywood people were supporting it, and of course the Anti-Nazi League were fighting Nazis. We paid membership dues for a while, because, well, we used to think. . . . But there was a strong

Commie group in it, and they were prepared to use it only as it affected Russia versus Germany. It was all for a second front, for the United States to come in right away. Of course, when things got turned around, it was exactly the opposite later. When the second front had to be extended to the Pacific area, they were not there. Well, at any rate, that's a digression from bookselling. But it was part of the Hollywood scene.

GARDNER

To get back to the bookselling, Milton Luboviski runs the store to this day, right?

EPSTEIN

He's loyal to Larry Edmunds's name. It's run to this day. Milton is a top authority on books pertaining to the movies and movie people and so forth. He did a lot of appraising work for movie writers when it was the fashion to give things to some charitable institution. For instance, a writer had a lot of scripts, and they were valued at x number of dollars, given to USC, for instance, where they have a school of motion pictures--or whatever they call it — and also UCLA, to get a tax deduction for it. But I think the government has stepped in on that and is not as liberal in the tax allowances for that type of thing. [tape stopped] Milton has done a lot of appraising work as an official appraiser, as a licensed appraiser. And he is an authority on certain types of books, especially the film arts and some theater. He does an international business.

GARDNER

Well, it's an area that's become extremely topical.

EPSTEIN

He specializes mostly with libraries all over the world. It seems like every country that gains a little bit of independence wants to become thoroughly cultured, so they establish a motion picture department. He's listed in all the bibliographies and directories, I suppose, for that kind of thing. So they approach him or they had heard of him or they had been here. We have had many groups of motion picture people visiting the Pickwick during my time, where there were a group of motion picture people sent by the government.

And we have sold many books to such groups and shipped them to the government. But he has a lot of old things.

GARDNER

And he's one of the only ones that specializes in that, too.

EPSTEIN

One of the only ones — yes, one of the few that specializes. There are a few others. But he has accumulated a tremendous stock of that thing, and he has them in identifiable order--which is the big thing. So if they ask for something, he can immediately tell them. But his prices — maybe it shouldn't be in the record — are quite high. And he admits they're high. He says, "Well, where else are you going to get it?" — which I suppose is right to do.

GARDNER

Supply and demand.

EPSTEIN

To come back to another year, '53, I want to go on record with the name of Joe Chevalier, who started a small business on Larchmont Boulevard, still going there-- Chevalier's Bookstore. Very nice chap. One reason I want him to be on the record is that he later became the president of the local new-book sellers' group. Not an overly ambitious person in the sense that he wants to expand his business. He has no family to provide for, so he just enjoys a good small business on Larchmont, south of Beverly, in that old area there. Well, that is about all I have from the record. I'll have to do some more research, maybe, to bring it up to date.

GARDNER

Well, at your leisure.

EPSTEIN

At my leisure? Who has leisure anymore?

GARDNER

Well, I'll take the list that I have of the antiquarians. For the oral record, Mel Royer gave a document box full of old papers. Apparently he was secretary to the antiquarian society during those early years.

EPSTEIN

Yes, he was. He's a past president of the antiquarians, too, later on.

GARDNER

And perhaps the most interesting piece of information in there was the first listing of the Southern California Antiquarian Booksellers [Association], which was 1950. Now, many of these names we've gone through. But there are some I think perhaps we could discuss in more detail, or there might be some who got left out here and there. So as long as I have this list handy. . . . And then when we get through with that, we can go into the background of the Antiquarian [Booksellers Association] and the founding of the organization. Well, the first few are Ernest Gottlieb, whom we did; Max Hunley, whom we did; Harry Levinson; and Walter E. Neuman. Did we talk about him?

EPSTEIN

Walter E. Neuman.

GARDNER

He was on Le Doux in Beverly Hills. Do you recall him?

EPSTEIN

I recall him. I don't know if I got Gottlieb and Neuman confused. They were both German refugees.

GARDNER

Gottlieb was music.

EPSTEIN

Gottlieb was music.

GARDNER

Neuman was old maps and prints.

EPSTEIN

Right. So I did get it right. Gottlieb was music. Yes. Neuman was old maps and prints, and he would appear at book auctions and book sales and buy anything with colored plates in it and colored maps. At one time we competed with each other at a sale. I got a few things, but he got the bulk of it because he was a specialist. I would sell it as a book, where he might take the book apart and sell it as plates.

GARDNER

He was at 132 North Le Doux in Beverly Hills at the time.

EPSTEIN

Yeah. Then he later moved out to Melrose. He had a small store on Melrose near Robertson; 132 Le Doux is a residence. He was operating from his home at first.

GARDNER

Is he still in business at all?

EPSTEIN

I don't know. I never hear of them. I'm inclined to doubt it.

GARDNER

Well, we did Kurt Schwarz. The next one that's listed is in Claremont, of all places. It's called the Claremont Book and Art Shop.

EPSTEIN

A chap by the name of [Samuel L.] Brier. Brier as a bookseller came out here from New York. And he settled in Claremont. He wanted to be in a college community. And he operated a small bookstore there--no great shakes. He was a peculiar type of person in the sense that he wasn't out to be a real bookman. I wouldn't call him a poseur, but he wanted to be intelligentsia. But he wasn't quite. He wanted that atmosphere. And if he was happy there, of course, that was his privilege. He used to come in town ; he used to come to meetings occasionally. And actually at one time we had a meeting, when Charlie Yale was at Claremont.

GARDNER

At Griswold's or Claremont Inn or something.

EPSTEIN

Right. That was a sort of memorial meeting. Brier was there and I think he furnished the refreshments for that meeting, because it was his community. They were nice people, but I never considered him as a real major book person.

GARDNER

I was curious seeing it. I wondered how extensive a book market there would be in Claremont.

EPSTEIN

Well, theoretically, because of the college, there should be some book market. Of course, there weren't as many colleges then as there are now. There wasn't [an extensive book market]. The college community wasn't big enough, apparently, or maybe he was not the right person to draw them. You know, it takes a marriage of two. There are many small college communities where a good bookstore has been established simply because the person operating it had the type of rapport with the college community and the town community to establish enough business to make a nice go of it. There were several in New England. There was one woman in particular. I can't think of her name or the name of the bookstore. She ran a bookstore under a trade name of some kind, so-and-so bookstore--somewhere in a town with a famous girls' college, and I don't even remember the college, whether it was Smith or somewhere. But it can be done. I already mentioned that; it has been done in many areas. But I don't think he was quite the person.

GARDNER

Next is Bechtold, whom we've discussed. He was in Culver City at the time, doing mostly book search. And after that is Arthur Clark, who was in Glendale.

EPSTEIN

Arthur H. Clark.

GARDNER

Yes. We talked about Arthur H. Clark, but in a very limited way.

EPSTEIN

Arthur H. Clark — his business was established in Cleveland many, many years ago. He published Americana. A lot of his books were brought to him by amateur historians and other historians, and he would publish them in nice editions. And his trade was mostly to libraries. And then he also dealt in old books of Americana, mostly Western. In the thirties — I forget which year — he moved to the Los Angeles area, bought a place in Glendale. They continued their business there and did a lot of printing. They did considerably more books here, I think, than they did in the Cleveland area. They did an excellent job of it and continued to be in the old- and rare-book business. I always considered them to be high priced, but apparently they sold enough books to continue in business. Their business is now on South Brand Boulevard. It's the son now who owns the business. And I don't think he himself is participating in the business too much. What's the name? Garrity or something? [P.W. Gallaher]

GARDNER

No, that's not there.

EPSTEIN

They've always been friendly to the booksellers. Clark--I call him young Clark, as distinguishable from the father, who died many years ago — participates in the Los Angeles Corral, keeps his contacts with all the important Western collectors and Western writers. They're still publishing books. They publish a lot of excellent series.

GARDNER

The next one is another person who's in Glendale — who I suspect was fairly minor — John Valentine.

EPSTEIN

John Valentine actually was not a bookman in the sense that he operated a store. I forget now who he backed — Jake or who. I think it was Jake and he had quite close relations. He made his money, I believe, in the food business some way. And he came out here, and his relationship was in the sense that

he backed — by golly, if my memory doesn't fail me, it was Jake. And he used to come around the bookstores, almost as a dealer--usually not alone, but with somebody else. And I think he was a collector on his own for a while. Whatever happened to him, I don't really know.

GARDNER

The next after John Valentine was Karl Zamboni.

EPSTEIN

Karl Zamboni is a long, long story.

GARDNER

Oh, good.

EPSTEIN

Well, I don't know if I can remember it all. It goes way back. Karl Zamboni and Phil Brown had each worked, I think, at one time for Holmes during the real bad Depression days. Later on, somehow or other they raised enough money to buy the Abbey. At one time they owned the Abbey Bookshop. There was somebody else's money, of course, in it. It was a peculiar mix-up there, and I never did get the facts totally straight. Jake, I'm sure, was closer to the situation than I can recollect it. But at any rate, one of their backers was a music writer here for many, many years who wrote a lot of fine music for the movies (and I'll be darned if I can think of his name; if I'm not mistaken, it began with an A) . [Lee Harline] He died rather young, about ten years ago. Well, this musician divorced his wife and married Zamboni's wife, and the musician's wife married Zamboni. They swapped wives, the backers.

GARDNER

[laughing] That was really before their time. It was very avant-garde.

EPSTEIN

Yes, well, there were people like that then. Later on, they sold out the business. Zamboni kicked around the book business quite a while. I think he worked for Jake for a while, then he worked for Kovach for a while. And Phil Brown — he fooled around with books, too. He was married to Helen Brown. Helen Brown was a cookbook writer, and she was a caterer in Pasadena [with]

a very fine reputation for knowledge of cookery. And Phil started collecting cookbooks for her, and they formed a fine collection. And then Helen wrote a number of books which were published, and some of them got national recognition. Phil Brown later went to work for Charlie Yale in Pasadena. And when the father died--older Charlie Yale — the son Bud took over. (His name was Charlie, but everyone called him Bud.) He was working with Phil. Phil was, I think, more knowledgeable of books than Bud Yale was, so they worked together for quite a while.* And then Phil left Charlie Yale and went to work with his wife in the catering business. They used to have a party every New Year's, and we attended several of them. But the house was just packed with cookery books — besides other books. Phil had wide interests. He was a literary person, and she, too, besides her knowledge of cookery. They both wrote. They wrote a couple of things together. But she died, unfortunately, about ten years ago or so, and Phil was left with all the books and with the business--which I think he gave up because she was the one people hired because of her reputation as a cook.** When you went to their house for a New Year's party. you got some beautiful food. So that, starting with Zamboni, brought me back. I lost track of Zamboni. I don't know where he is now. I mentioned Zamboni's name to Jake a number of months ago, and he said, "Well, he's somewhere up north." Zamboni was a good bookman; he knew his books. But he didn't have that strength of character to stick with something. I think he was a moody person, psychological in some ways, maybe. But a nice person. I do not mean that he was a no-good person. He was a good person. I'm sorry I can't think of the name of that musician who took part in that exchange. It begins with A. Not Albright. I don't know his name. [* Actually Phil had a piece of the business because it was later called Yale and Brown for a while. — [L.E.]] [** I find that Phil is in the catering business. — [L.E.]

GARDNER

We'll try to come back to it.

EPSTEIN

I'll crack my head.

GARDNER

A fellow named John Cole had a place in La Jolla and was the only San Diego person who was involved in the Antiquarians.

EPSTEIN

It was called the John Cole Bookstore. He and his wife ran a shop in La Jolla. It was a nice little shop. They had half new books and half old books. He died, unfortunately, too young. I think he worked for Marshall Field before he went into the service. I'm racking back into my brain the stories I heard. One of the salesmen selling for Merriam-Webster, whose name may come up later — Russell Goodrich — and he were great friends. They went in the army together, and I believe Russell at one time told me that John had worked in the book department of Marshall Field. And when they got out of the service, Goodrich and Cole thought of opening a business together, but they were afraid they didn't have the capital, afraid that they couldn't support their families. Russ had children who were a little older than John's, I think; John may not have had any children at that time. At any rate, they did whatever they did after the war. Finally, John came out here and opened up a business in La Jolla. And he did a nice business. La Jolla, you know, has several small bookstores--none of them great bookstores, but little shops. Each one specializes in some kind of thing. I think his wife's name is Margaret [actually Barbara]. She was more or less adopted by the big family, the main family there, the Scripps. Mrs. Scripps sort of took her under her wing and I think perhaps might even have helped them out. I did hear that the Scripps woman helped to educate their children; they paid for their college education and whatnot. Margaret Cole is still down there. John, as I said, died. I used to see him once in a while. I remember we were at La Jolla one time, and Russell Goodrich, who was a Merriam- Webster salesman for dictionaries, happened to be in town. And we met, and Ann and I took them all to dinner. We just happened to be at the racquet club there, the tennis club — the La Jolla Tennis Club or whatever they call it. We were surprised that we got in because it was not too open for Jews. We heard that later. But we walked in, and they had room for us. And we had a very nice apartment, incidentally, and we stayed there a week.

GARDNER

Oh, you stayed at the tennis club?

EPSTEIN

Yes.

GARDNER

You never signed the register. [laughter]

EPSTEIN

Oh, I signed the register. [laughter] So I know her quite well in the sense that whenever I go there I visit her, and whenever she has a problem, she even writes me. She, too, is inclined to be overstocked. But she specializes in everything: sewing things for women and all the latest fads — macrame and all that. She gets the material and sells it along with books. But she's horribly overstocked in books. She doesn't return what she should return, which is one of the things she asked me about. I said, "Look, you're always asking me and I'm always telling you, but you never do it. I see the same books I told you three years ago to return, and you didn't do it. You certainly can't return them now." But apparently she's still getting by, so there's no problem there. But they were a nice couple.

GARDNER

The next on my list comes to Los Angeles, and it's the Abbey Bookstore. Of course, you've talked about the Abbey Bookstore to such a great extent. But at the time of this, there was someone named Pinans.

EPSTEIN

They had the Spanish Bookstore for a while. Then they got rid of that and went into the Spanish Bookstore, later moved. Yeah. Juan Pinans. He was a very nice person. His wife was Jewish; they were very much in love. I used to see her quite often. She, I think, was a legal secretary, if I'm not mistaken. And he ran a small business in Spanish books. There were certain Spanish things that we would buy from him. He always tried to keep one or two Spanish cookbooks, which we would buy from him at wholesale. And there were a few other small items he would wholesale. He would import them, and it would be easier for us to buy them from him than to send to Spain or wherever he got them. They were nice people. But he died about seven, eight years ago, and the poor widow, she didn't know what to do with his stock. Finally she sold the

business to somebody else. She was really broken- hearted. I don't know what happened to her. She probably went back to work. She's a very capable legal secretary; they're hard to find.

GARDNER

Well, the next few on my list I think we've gone into pretty well. They're Argonaut, and Bennett and Marshall, and John Q. Burch. We spoke of all of those. And then comes Dale's, which of course we talked about. It mentions here that his wife was also active. Dale's wife, I assume. Celia Dalinsky? Or is that not his wife. Who is Celia Dalinsky?

EPSTEIN

Celia Dalinsky must have been his sister. Harry's wife actually was Irish.

GARDNER

Oh, his sister, I see.

EPSTEIN

Because she was not his wife.

GARDNER

Oh, I see. It says, "Harry Dale and Celia Dalinsky, genealogy and local history." Don't know her, huh? Never came to the meetings?

EPSTEIN

Well, I knew Harry's name had been Dalinsky in Milwaukee or somewhere he came from. He came from the Middle West — Detroit or Milwaukee, I forget which. Yes, I remember that a sister of his was involved in some way. But I don't think she stayed in the business too long.

GARDNER

She just wanted a membership in the society?

EPSTEIN

Yes. Well, I didn't know her too well. I met her.

GARDNER

Then Dawson's, of course, we talked about. Then N.A. Kovach. Do you know him?

EPSTEIN

Oh, Nick Kovach? Of course, I knew Nick Kovach. Nick was around when I moved around to Eighth Street. He followed me, I think, by two or three years. He used to dabble in old books. He'd run across things, sell them to other dealers. He was a smart guy. He later opened a store- I forget what the name of the store was. I wonder if that was the store that Sarah Borden and Manny Borden bought out? At any rate, they had a store on Sixth Street for a while. He got rid of that; then I remember he got into a partnership with. ... I'll think of the name. [snaps fingers] Carl Haverlin. And they opened a store on Wilshire Boulevard on the second floor of a little nice old building there. Rents were cheap there. And they were going to have a rare-book business. Nick was a very erratic person at that time. In some ways, he's erratic still. I remember going up there, buying some things from them and selling some things to them. The partnership didn't work out. It ended in a great disagreement. The partnership didn't last. Nick went on wheeling and dealing — wholesale, retail, whatever. Finally, he found his way into the business of old periodicals — not single-copy magazines, not the old magazine business in that sense, but periodicals of runs, literary periodicals or technical periodicals, supplying new libraries, replacing for old libraries. In the later forties, especially, and the fifties, that became extremely big business, because there were a tremendous number of new libraries opening up and a tremendous spread in research institutions per se . And they all needed back files of especially technical periodicals, historical periodicals. And the people who went into that business did quite well. Nick used to go around to libraries and buy their duplicates or their discards. And for a long time he gave the book association a lot of trouble, because when he would go in, he would say, "Well, I'll take these, and I will give you so much in trade." Well, a library would never be able to contact him for what they needed in books. So they used to write letters to the association. [laughter]

1.22. TAPE NUMBER: XI, Side One (July 29, 1974)

GARDNER

As I mentioned when we left off, we had a couple of names left on this list of the original Antiquarians, the 1950 list, and just to run through them and finish off. We finished off last time with Nick Kovach. Is there anything else you want to say about him?

EPSTEIN

I believe I mentioned all the things that I wanted to say about Nick. Nick became very successful in his way. He's established a fine business and I think is pretty happy with his career--considering that when I first met him, he was, like we all were, pretty sort of starving characters in those days. In that sense, I admire his perseverance and building up a sort of a new business. He did a good job.

GARDNER

The next one on the list that I have is Cambridge Bookshop.

EPSTEIN

The Cambridge — Salzman was his name. He never established a large business, but his business has maintained him for all these many years. It's still in existence. He dealt more with scholarly books, more literary things, and I imagine it's probably part of his plan not to have a great big shop — and just control his own working hours more, where you can't in a big bookshop. And that's why I think some of these smaller dealers perhaps might have been smarter than the larger dealers who tie themselves down to a big business, or were tied down with a big business and a lot of employees. Some of us made a little more money, but in the end, I think they got what they wanted and we got what we wanted. And there, too, the family relationships sometimes are a deciding factor in how far a person wants to go in this business. People with several children whom they have to educate have to strive to do more business, where a chap like Salzman doesn't need it. He leads the kind of life he likes, and I think that's very agreeable. He's a good bookman. I shouldn't forget to say that, because when one old bookman can say about another old bookman, "He's a pretty good bookman," then he's gotten his degree.
[laughter]

GARDNER

Next after that is Larry Edmunds, and of course we talked about him. We talked about him, and we talked about the shop, and we talked about both Milton Luboviski and Ida Needham.

EPSTEIN

Yes.

GARDNER

Then after that was Lee Freeson.

EPSTEIN

Lee Freeson is sort of a maverick--as I suppose most bookmen are; otherwise they wouldn't be in the old-book business. That's the place where mavericks, a great many, wind up. It's a place where a maverick can operate his own style, his own way, and still make a living at it. This is a great thing about the old-book business. I don't think you could do it in the new-book business because the investment, the original investment to start, is so great for a new-book business. But in the old-book business a person can start with half a dozen books, and sell two of them, and go out and buy four more, and in that way begin to become general or specialized, whichever he wants. But Lee is an odd character. It's very difficult to describe him. I can describe him only as he relates to the book business. He built up a very interesting facet of it. Unlike Milton, [who handled] the movies and some theater, he specialized solely in the theater and some books relating to theater: fashion as it relates to theater, and costume, all the related areas — dance. His wife Margo — or common-law wife, maybe — was a dancer, an excellent dancer.* But she was very political, and if she didn't like the audience in front of her, she'd walk off the stage. And poor Lee would go with her and have to suffer through all that. By that I don't mean to indicate that this Margo was in any way unappreciated, but if she thought her audience wasn't worth the struggle that she was putting through, why, she would just walk off the stage. And, of course, it hurt her career immensely. Lee suffered terribly during the difficult days because there was no market for the type of thing he had to offer at that time, and she was having a very difficult time. She was, as I say, political, extreme left, and probably Communist party. And I'm not saying so to hurt Lee in any sense — his reputation. But I think that both were extreme left — at

least, if not party members. I have no way of knowing positively, but I do know that they both were extreme left. That, of course, is not the point of our conversation — politics. But he did build up an enviable reputation. The main thing in my eyes is not that he built up money or more money. I don't know whether Lee has any money. But he built up an enviable reputation as an authority in his field — looked upon with a great deal of respect for the knowledge he has. And he and I, being more or less neighbors, and knowing him from way back in the old days downtown, we always had an informally close relationship — not that we visited back and forth but we were always glad to see each other in spite of our differences of opinion on many, many things. I used to fight with him like anything about his politics. But still I respected the man, and it happened to be my lot to have to help him out on many occasions when he needed a few bucks, either for a business deal or to get by on for a month or two. And he always came back — sometimes a year or two late, sometimes I had to press a little bit, but those were the way things were. I just met him a couple of weeks ago, and we had quite a talk and reminisced a little bit. He's the exact age that I am. His main fear now--it's not a fear, it's a knowledge that he's going to have to quit within two years, five years, eight years, and there's no way he can transmit his knowledge to anyone else. It was always a one-man operation. And when he dies, it's going to die with him. He always operated individually, never employed anybody. He told me of many letters he received from universities asking him to come and lecture to them. Of course he wouldn't do that about the theater, but theater bibliography. And he's not a scientific bibliographer, by any means, but he has all this knowledge about the important books just because of specializing in one narrow field. Of course, the theater is not as narrow as, say, shells. I don't know, maybe it's narrower; I have no idea. [*Do not confuse this Margo with the actress Margo who is married to Eddie Albert--both of whom were customers of ours. — [L.E.]]

GARDNER

And he's going to carry this with him to his grave?

EPSTEIN

Right. That's the unfortunate thing about so many booksellers: they develop over the years a knowledge, a specialized knowledge, a specialized memory;

and if they're very independent, they usually work alone or pretty close to alone. They might hire a secretary or so, but that's not a book person. They don't train anybody. And probably they haven't the patience to train anybody. Not that they're secretive; they just don't want to work with anyone. They're loners; they want to work alone. That's their choice. And unfortunately a great deal of knowledge, research, is lost. It goes back into limbo. Somebody'll have to rediscover it again years later. And he never issued catalogs particularly. Very often a dealer, a specialized person, will spill a lot of bibliographical knowledge in his catalogs, little points that he himself has discovered while perusing a book. I have two books, exactly the same book, on my shelf, and every catalog says that they're both first editions, that this is the first edition. On examining them, I can point to you several different differences, where type has been broken--in one issue, perfect type, and the other issue, broken — and the brightness of the plates. But by the bibliographical standards, they're both alike. They're not alike. One of them must have come out years before the other.

GARDNER

What is the book?

EPSTEIN

It's not an important first edition; it's rather common. But nobody makes any distinction. And there are many areas, if somebody would go through it. . . . I made a few notes on it, which were so apparent that even I could recognize them without looking for them. I didn't have any reason to go through that book. To Have and to Hold, by Mary Johnson. It's not a rare book in any sense, and it's an important book as a good historical novel. But these are the kinds of things that one discovers by chance. And these become of bibliographical importance. To go back to Lee, he has an exceptionally good specialized knowledge. He was just almost in tears telling me about the fact that he has no way of putting it all down. People have asked him to write a book, and he said, "Louis, how can I sit down and write a book? I can't sit still long enough to finish a meal." He's that kind of a person. And he's having a problem with Margo. She has arthritis very badly, and sometimes she can't get out of bed. He has to take care of her. But that's another issue. That is the story of Lee. He

is not always a likable character, not always a totally dependable character, but by and large he did something.

GARDNER

The next on the list is Larson's and I think we talked about Larson.

EPSTEIN

Yes, I think we mentioned Larson. He had his shop on Hollywood Boulevard west of Western, first block west of Western. He's an odd person, and he went into metaphysics a lot. He loved his cats and his coffee, and he just sat there. And I think probably one of the reasons he died at an early age, he probably wasn't active enough physically--which is hard to say about a bookman. I could never be inactive physically when I was in the old-book business, or even the new-book business. I moved around. But he developed a metaphysical business, I think from the ground up. I don't think he had any original knowledge of it. And he just, little by little, from what the people asked for, he learned to sell, and he learned the values by knowing what he could get, how high he could push the price up. And of course that makes value: how much is a customer willing to pay for a rare book? Not all his things were rare, but they were good secondhand things. It was not a used-book shop in the classic sense, where they had a good variety of stock in many subjects. It was run pretty messy. And his widow [Louise Larson] ran it for several years. I was much surprised that she was able to carry it on, but she kept plugging at it. You had to admire her. She used to come to see me quite often and buy things from us occasionally. We would buy from her occasionally, and she had great respect for me. She would ask me questions on what she should do as a matter of policy, or her business, and I always tried to be very helpful. And she appreciated that. I think the book people thought that I had a great deal more wisdom than I really have. [laughter]

GARDNER

After that one, I have Dr. Kurt Melander.

EPSTEIN

Dr. Kurt Melander. He was a refugee. He's still around, although I haven't seen him in a number of years. A refugee from Germany, I think he went to South

America before he came to North America, the United States. And he learned the Spanish language there. Or he may even have lived in Spain; I don't know. My impression is that he may have told me this: that he went to South America when they had to run into whatever corridor was open. At any rate, he learned Spanish fairly well. And having a doctorate to begin with and a well-rounded background of knowledge, he began to work with Spanish books. There was a field in which the dealers here knew little about, he knew something about. And he began to pick up whatever Spanish things there were around, and visited libraries, and built up a small business, which maintained him, of selling Spanish books. And he would buy also English books, too, but primarily he went in for Spanish literature, which he would sell to libraries — catalog, or by letter — and maintained himself not badly. He's a very nice, quiet person. He paid me a very fine compliment on the last occasion I saw him. I bumped into him at the Pickwick, oh, just before I retired. And we got to talking. When we had old books he was there at least once or twice a week. And we got to talking about a number of things and the fact that we had known each other for at least twenty-some-odd years, and he paid me a compliment. He said, "You know, I watched you progress from way back in a small bookstore to a business far beyond what you probably yourself had ever anticipated, and the way you ran it and the success of it." He said he always had great admiration for me in the way I treated him and the way I maintained my business, and he said he wanted to tell me that. And two days later I got a little card from him saying how much he enjoyed knowing me. I think he works out somewhere in the Valley now. I remember one time I visited him in North Orange Grove. [tape stopped]

GARDNER

Okay, is that it on him? Well, Pickwick is next, and I think we've talked about Pickwick. Then comes F.N. Bassett. Do you know F.N. Bassett?

EPSTEIN

Well, Bassett was what I would call a specialist dealer, and his specialty was nature books, in a very narrow field. There again is an illustration of what a person can do. At one time it was as a hobby. I don't know what his profession was, whether he was a teacher or what, but he just decided that he would expand on it and make it his business. And he did. I didn't know too much

about him personally. We used to sell him things in his field from the old-book department. Whenever we'd get something, he'd buy from us. And there again, with every specialist with whom we came into contact, we learned something from them. I always did, and I think that's where I picked up the knowledge in these various fields that a general bookman carries around with him.

GARDNER

Roman Novins is next.

EPSTEIN

Roman Novins: he had a small, a very small business, but he dropped out of it after about two or three years. A very nice person. I don't know too much about him. He did, one day, bring me two framed pictures of Pickwick characters--the characters out of [The] Pickwick [Papers] — and I still have'em. And I said, "I'll buy these from you." "No," he said, "I want you to have them; this is with my compliments." That's the kind of a guy he was. A very nice guy. But there must have been some little bit of money behind the family, because the way they were living certainly was not from anything he could make as a beginner in the book business. His wife may have had inherited money, or--I don't know. But he didn't last too long in it.

GARDNER

Then next we have Mel Royer, whom we talked about.

EPSTEIN

Yes, we talked about Mel.

GARDNER

And Zeitlin and Ver Brugge, which we talked about at length.

EPSTEIN

Did I mention about Mel that the Japanese came and bought all his entire stock?

GARDNER

No, I don't think so.

EPSTEIN

Yes. You know, I think maybe we ought to mention that. It's an interesting episode, and it's historical. Mel, you know, had been not too well in the last number of years. Mel must be close to eighty now, if he isn't past eighty, because when I was a beginner, I looked upon him as a mature person — me being all of twenty-four, beginning in Los Angeles. And he was a customer; and, as I mentioned before, he already was established with a firm — I think in the accounting department, or whatever. And the last number of years, he had been trying to sell his business, because it became more and more difficult for him to operate it. He had one possible sale, where he actually went to take inventory; and for one reason or another, the sale fell through. I don't believe the people who were wanting to buy it had any idea that the inventory would run to that amount of money. And we in the trade heard about it. Even though I wasn't in the trade at the time, I still maintained my contacts, you might say. Then one day I heard that Mel sold his entire stock--lock, stock, and barrel — to a Japanese group who came over, and came in, and packed everything that was in the shop--every scrap of paper, everything. Someday I'm going to run across Mel and get the background of it, because it's a very unusual type of deal. They just packed up everything and shipped it to Japan. Now whether they were Japanese dealers, or whether it was the Japanese government, or to give to a university, or whatever, I don't know. But that's what happened to Mel's stock. It's probably somewhere in Japan, maybe the University of Osaka, or somewhere like that. Eventually it'll have to wind up in a university. It was too varied and too large for an individual, unless somebody makes an American art-book store out of it.

GARDNER

Well, it's possible, in Tokyo. Also, we talked about Phil Brown, and we talked about the Yales. I think perhaps now we could insert something about the founding of the organization, how it happened to come together, and your own participation in it.

EPSTEIN

Well, like so many organizations, difficulties come up which affect all of us, everyone in the trade. It was founded because there was a need. The need was created by some problem that came up. And we were having problems

with two things: the main problem we were having was that from time to time there would be — I wouldn't say police harassment but the police would discover that somebody had stolen a book somewhere and sold it to a dealer. Were we not bound by the same laws as secondhand- furniture dealers, or pawn shops, or things like that? Now this goes back; the same things come up from the earliest days. Most of the time we were always able to beat the police back, in the sense that, "Look, this is an isolated instance. You never have any trouble with us, and we police ourselves to a certain degree. There might be some of us who would buy books which he knew might have been stolen. But for the most part, none of us are looking for trouble." And the second thing, the other thing, is that whenever anyone discovered a book in a used-book shop which had been stolen from somebody, they were always given that book back, or they were given it back for the price that the dealer paid. This was a haphazard arrangement, but it worked, in my opinion, much better than rules and regulations by the policemen had worked. It caused less harm and less fuss. [lawnmower noise; tape stopped] So with all this trouble we were having from time to time, there was one particular period where they really started getting tough. [tape stopped] There's one spot there where they really became tough with us, and they passed a very strict law that we must report every book we buy and have to get the signature and identification of the seller, whether it's one book or a thousand books, whether we bought it in the store or we bought it at the person's home. This was almost an impossible task. If you bought a library of several hundred books, you'd have to hire a person to catalog them. So we got around, and we organized a group of us, and we said, "Look, we've got to have a group that'll get together, and maybe hire an attorney, and fight this thing." [tape stopped] So we did just that, and that's the way our organization was born, or revived. The people who were looked upon in those days in the trade were Jake, Louis Epstein, Dawsons, Charlie Yale. Holmes never participated in anything, although he probably was one of the largest dealers here. And [with] many of the smaller ones around the city, we got together and organized this group. That's the way it was. And we took turns being the president of it. We used to meet informally. Well, like all these drives, the thing finally quieted down. We tried to hire an attorney to fight city hall, but attorneys who fight city hall are extremely expensive. We spent about \$500 in cash, which was a lot of money for our group, but he did us very little good. I think our own conduct probably

helped us more than whatever the attorney did. We got the law modified a little bit. The law is probably still on the books, but it's never been enforced.
[tape stopped]

GARDNER

Well, my next question would be your own involvement. You were one of the first presidents, if not the first.

EPSTEIN

Yes, I was one of the first. I think Charlie Yale, if I'm not mistaken, was the first. There isn't much to say, you know, about being president of that. It was a small group; we did what we had to do. Most of our meetings we discussed a minimum of business and a maximum of gossip. Booksellers are a notoriously gossipy group. They can't keep a secret — in no way. Almost every year we had a dinner. And our meetings were held at our homes, as a rule. I think we had several meetings up at the other house on North Curson. After one of the meetings--I may have mentioned, in speaking about Harry Lawyer--word got around (he later threw it up to me) that I lived in a mansion. That's the North Curson house. It's far from that. But [it was] a very loose organization. We really didn't have too many problems to settle. I think what it eventually evolved into, when they got into the national group, the AABA--they became more exclusive. We would take anyone in the trade who wanted to join. As a matter of fact, we dug them out to have them join us. The present group, which is part of the international — they have certain standards. You have had to be in the business x number of years.

GARDNER

Is that so?

EPSTEIN

I don't know what their standards are now, but they vote you in or out. You have to be of good character. We never questioned a guy's character.
[laughter]

GARDNER

From some of the stories you've told me, that would have limited the membership quite a bit. [laughter]

EPSTEIN

If anyone had any reason to blackball you, which I think is totally illegal in the trade organization — I'm not necessarily going to express my opinion. This is quite a different organization now. I think it only has those who are specialists and real rare-book dealers. I don't think it has the total number of people, of used-book sellers, in the area in proportion to the total number of booksellers there were. We had a greater proportion of the members of the booksellers than the proportion they have now. But I think the present group intentionally wants it to be so. But the chap who has just an average secondhand-book store — I don't really think they want him in the organization. Which, I think, is a mistake, because two things happen: There's a certain amount of contact that's lost between the two, and the one who has what I term an ordinary used-book store — that is, not being a specialty shop; the chap who buys and sells almost any kind of book—he has less chance to learn from the other people if he doesn't belong to their group. Discussion always takes place at every meeting, informally. They ask each other questions, and they hear of a book that somebody said was rare. I didn't know it was rare, and I immediately perked up my ear. And I learned that that was a rare book instead of a common book, or it was worth x number of dollars instead of two, three dollars. And that is a means of learning the book business, the constant mingling of these people in the trade. This is an aside from your question. They have so many tools now of learning values which we never had in our day. They have more active reporting in the trade papers, where they give you resumes of auction sales. And they have something new that's come up within the last eight, ten years. It's a set of books; the compiler of it goes through all the catalogs issued by dealers. When I say all of them, I'm positive it can't possibly be all, but a great many catalogs issued by various dealers across the country. And he gathers that information, and they list it in those books. And from time to time, they bring them up to date. Now, a lot of that information is published regularly, has been, in American Book Prices Current, over the years. But the American Book Prices Current did not list as many books as individual catalogers did. The American Book Prices Current only listed those for auction. So they have a tool of knowledge for getting the values quickly.

GARDNER

What is that? What is that book?

EPSTEIN

I don't exactly know the name of it, but I think your library probably has it.

GARDNER

Oh, I'm sure, yes.

EPSTEIN

And you might get it, or you might call one of the dealers and stop in and look at it. I've never used it; I've never looked into it. But I know that it exists. I've seen advertisements for it, and I've seen it on some dealers' shelves. So in that respect, their knowledge about values is greater. But the harmful thing is that a house that issues a catalog is usually aimed at the library market, and the library market will pay more for things that they want than the average person walking in off the street. So I found this to be true, and I will go into some used-book stores, on some days when I run across them, and do a little browsing. They all will have those books marked up at the highest possible value. And they sit there, month after month after month. And if you question them about it: "Oh, well, that's what it has to bring in the "--whatever the name of the book is — the trade prices. And I think in that respect, it lessens the turnover of stock for the merchant. The person who doesn't issue catalogs is riding on the back of those who do issue catalogs. But I think they're making a mistake. I think they should maybe price them proportionately, but not exactly. Anyway, my reasons for questioning the wisdom of not allowing all the booksellers in or asking them to join: I question that as being totally good for the book trade. It may be good for some of those participants who are rare-book dealers. They get together and do the same things we used to do — talk about books, and bring in a person who's knowledgeable of books who'd occasionally give us a lecture, in addition to having our business meeting. I think they should try to teach more people, rather than restrict the numbers they can teach or trade with. In my way of thinking it has a certain amount of selfishness put into it. They have control of the organization, and they do good things. They encourage business from librarians, because librarians are their chief customers now — it wasn't so in the early days. Libraries didn't have as much money, and there weren't as many of them. Especially college libraries. And the rare-book libraries — a lot of them have been established over the years by foundations. The college libraries, university libraries, and

foundations are probably the chief buyers of rare books. And they're very thoroughly cultivated by the rare-book dealers — which is proper. Every other industry tries to cultivate relationships with their customers to increase business. At any rate, the organization just kept on. It would quiet down. Then something else would come up, and we'd get excited and boom up again. It had its ups and downs. But it was a great place to have a little fun, do a little bit of drinking. At our annual dinners, a lot of the boys would like to show off their prosperity. It was a nice group. And practically every person we mentioned of the old-timers has been a president of it at one time or another.

GARDNER

It had a turnover?

EPSTEIN

Yes, we encouraged the turnover, because the amount of actual business we transacted for the organization was minimal. We paid our dues, and we had a little fun. And a problem would come up. It was usually the president's job — at least when I was president— to settle differences between dealers: transactions where one felt that he wasn't being paid, or paid on time, or had been taken advantage of by someone else. A couple of dealers, I had a great deal of correspondence with libraries about: they felt that the libraries were promised certain deliveries of books which never came through. But that's the nature of people, and they're in the book business, same as everywhere else.

GARDNER

When did your own participation end?

EPSTEIN

Frankly, I made one serious error: I dropped out of the organization when we went out of the old-book business. But my participation, before that even, wasn't active participation. I would go to the dinners, but I rarely attended the other meetings. My lack of participation increased as my new-book business increased--and demands on my time, too. I dropped out, and I remember Glen Dawson calling me and saying, "Why did you drop out, Louis? We need you in the organization." I said I felt that I was no longer of any use because I was no longer in the old-book business. Well, he was right; I should not have dropped

out. And as a matter of fact, after I retired, I asked to be reinstated--which I was, but only on one of the rare exceptions. I think I'm the only one in the whole country who is not an active dealer who was reinstated after having dropped out. There would have been no question of my continuing to be a member had I retired from the old-book business.

GARDNER

Because of your longevity.

EPSTEIN

But here I dropped out before my career was ended in the book business. And I wrote them. I said, "You can't do that to me ; I'm one of the founding members." So they made the exception, and now I'm an associate member. I don't have any voting rights, but I can go to their organizational meeting. And I've attended a few meetings. But in thinking back, I realize that Glen was right. I should not have dropped out because I'd been such an active participant in it. But now everybody's happy I'm back in.

GARDNER

Even though you can't vote. One of the big activities of the local chapter is the book fairs. Do you participate in this?

EPSTEIN

Well, the book fairs are relatively recent, you know. They didn't have those in our day.

GARDNER

Oh, I see.

EPSTEIN

Fairs of all kinds have become more common. They have these international book fairs now for rare-book dealers, and I think from that the idea evolved that we should have one in the city. They now have them in New York; they have them in London; they had one in Toronto, Canada, just early this spring, I think, or sometime this spring. So this is relatively new, I think--what, seven, eight years?

GARDNER

Oh, is that all it is?

EPSTEIN

Maybe a couple of more years. And they've been successful. They're planning one, I think, for sometime in October.

GARDNER

One of the early activities when you were there was an auction. Do you recall that auction at all?

EPSTEIN

I don't recall any auction. Oh, yes, yes. It was after my time — where each bookseller brought in something to raise a few dollars for the organization. Yes. I did not participate in that, because by that time, I was out of the picture.

GARDNER

There are just a few minutes on the tape, so to wrap it up I'll just ask you about some of the people who are in it now who weren't before, and who we haven't discussed. Cherokee is one that I'd like to talk about because it's one of your neighbors.

EPSTEIN

Cherokee is Jack Blum, of course. Incidentally, the Cherokee is where Lee Freeson makes his headquarters. I don't know if he still has, but he had a little bit of an office there, and he kept a little bit of a stock there. But Jack Blum started in, oh, I would say in the fifties, with a little shop on Cherokee Avenue just south of Hollywood Boulevard. And he was specializing in Hollywood material — pictures of stars and anything related to the movies and movie magazines and whatnot. There's always a market for these movie collectors. I never did fully understand, and I don't to this day. I can't see that many of them being scholars and why they want these pictures, but for one reason or another, they do. Jack stuck with it and learned more and more. He finally had to give up his store on Cherokee, and he moved over to Hollywood Boulevard. He now has a very well established business. His sons are now taking over. And he has gone into the business with variety, enlarged the scope of his

business. He has a lot of very fine sets. His sons started in with the comic-book business, and they developed that and a lot of other areas. He operates a little bit differently than any other bookseller I know of, where he gives each one of his people a certain specialty that they develop. And now he has [Clark] Casey in the Americana department; and he has his sons, as I say, in the movie business and one in the other business; and he himself takes care of sets and things like that. All his buying has always been done for him by his employees. He himself has sat in the back of the picture. But it apparently worked out quite successfully; he seems to be doing well. Jack is a very nice person. I say that because I've involved him in other things where only a nice person would be involved in.

GARDNER

Such as?

EPSTEIN

Like the United Jewish Welfare Fund. Even in the days when things weren't very good with him, he always managed to make a contribution. I could mention some names of other Jewish booksellers, and I hope that the record doesn't indicate that I'm over involved with Jewish affairs because I think Jewish affairs need some intense involvement since the Hitler days, and they're still going on in the state of Israel today. And I always felt that it was my duty as a Jew--I always felt that it was the same duty of the other people who were Jews — and I tried to involve the Jewish booksellers in addition to many other people, and I'm happy to say I was very successful.

1.23. TAPE NUMBER: XI, Side Two (July 29, 1974)

GARDNER

You want to finish the sentence?

EPSTEIN

As I say, I was happy to say I was successful in involving some--and totally unsuccessful in involving some other — Jewish booksellers (whom I will not name) . I'm particularly proud of the fact--and I think this should not be taken amiss by anybody if they happen to hear what I'm saying--that I was able to

originally get contributions, say, from a chap like Jake Zeitlin, when he was not as affluent as he is today. Now his contributions run into sizable sums. Also Jack Blum, when he was having a very difficult time, he gave me at least something, to at least express his involvement, his duties, his duty as a person of a particular group that needed help. My feeling about it has always been, "Look, I am part of that group. I don't care where I live, and I don't care what I do . If I were in the circumstances they were in and it was only because they were of that group that they were attacked, I might have been attacked — and undoubtedly would have been attacked. And I might have suffered the fate that the others have suffered, so it's a part of my duty to help those to escape who could escape, and to help them get a foothold somewhere where they can earn their own existence and become persons again." But some people don't want to be involved in anything--which applies to local charities and local civic affairs, too. One does not exclude the other. It happens to be the lot of the Jewish group in our community to be involved in both. You do not — by no means — neglect the local affairs, local charities. I contribute to them, too, and I think everyone who contributes to the welfare organizations I'm talking about is the same type of person who will contribute to all charities, all kinds of organizations that need help in doing a worthwhile task. It's my philosophy. I don't know whether it's because of it; maybe that would help create me, help create my outlook on life that attracted the people to my place of business. I don't know. I have theories about it--they're surmises; I would call them theories. And, you know, "bread upon the waters" sort of thing, but not exactly in that phrase. We gave away a lot of money, and we're still giving away a lot of money, but there seems to be money coming back to us. And we had to struggle to get it; and if we didn't have it, obviously, we wouldn't have given so much away. But I'm very thankful I was able to involve people, to convince them, to show them that this is the right thing for them to do. Take a man like Milton Luboviski. He's of Jewish background — raised perhaps. It might have even been an Orthodox Jewish family; I don't know that much about his family background. But from the first time, Milton--his original contribution was sort of an offhand thing: "Okay, Louis. You asked me for it; I'll give it to you." I said, "Milton, don't give me a nickel. I don't need it. But I want you to feel that you're giving something to help somebody who cannot help himself simply because he is part of our group-- your group and my group." If it was a Catholic group who was being persecuted, or as the

Armenians were by the Turks. Well, the Armenians lost a million and a half people. For no reason. And over the years, he got the idea better, and his contribution now is not a great deal of money, but it's meaningful. And what's more important to me is it's a contribution with something behind it, not just something for Louis Epstein because I asked for it. And by the same token, some of the contributions I originally got simply because I asked for it. I'm sure that if somebody else had come in. . . . They knew me; they had a certain respect for me, which enabled me to talk to them. I had a personal basis on which to talk to them that perhaps nobody else could talk to them on. Like Milton, for instance — I'm almost positive that had somebody else gone to see Milton that first time, I don't think they would have gotten it. This is totally aside from the book business, but it's an aside to show that book dealers should be — and are, some of them — in activities which are beyond the book business itself. And I'm sure if you talk to Jake or some of the others, they will find areas in which they participate. Jake does a lot of things for libraries. Well, I do a few things for libraries, too. Politically, Jake is involved. Well, I am involved politically, too. The reason I mention Jake so often is because I think Jake is a very broad-minded person and a very significant person, with whom I've been associated so many years, and whom I respect so much. I use him as an example, too, of how a man has climbed way above his adversities at the beginning, both his family adversities and his financial adversities. And I think in that respect, I have a certain judgment of Jake which is perhaps beyond that of others in the trade whom I might mention--which I certainly won't. He's a bigger man. I don't know how to put it. His reputation should be much greater beyond that of his reputation in the book trade alone. And I think it is. I think he has been involved. I think Glen Dawson is deserving of a great deal of credit, because beyond his participation in everything pertaining to the book business, he's also involved with many things: involved in church, involved with libraries, involved in many things pertaining to the reading and spreading of knowledge. A good churchman. And he raises a nice family, participates, and he does other things which are not particularly related to books which are worthwhile. I think somewhere along the line, of course, [the fact of] this being a story of books should not preclude people being cited for things other than their particular business.

GARDNER

Well, the other one that's on the new list that wasn't on the old is Heritage Book Shop.

EPSTEIN

Heritage, I know very little of their background. They opened in the same block as the Pickwick, and I went in to see them--a couple of very bright youngsters, the Weinstein brothers [Louis and Ben]. And apparently they've learned their business very well, and they're, from what I hear, extremely successful. I don't know how they started, where their finances came from, but to me it appears that they must have brought a great deal of finances into the book business when they came in because of the rapidity of their growth in certain areas which involved a lot of money. In my mind that is beyond the capability of what they might have earned in the relatively short time they were in business. Now, I'm not saying that in any critical sense whatever. That's my opinion. Someone else may know more about them than I .

GARDNER

How long have they been at it?

EPSTEIN

Well, let's see, two, four, six . . . they've been on the Boulevard close to about eight years now, I think. Maybe a trifle longer. Time just telescopes with me. But I really do know very little about them. There's another brother who has a bookstore in Hollywood. Book City, I think, is owned by Jerry Weinstein, who's a brother. And I understand there's a brother in Long Beach who has a bookstore, used books. The brother from Long Beach now runs The Book Treasury of 6707 Hollywood Boulevard--the former location of Heritage. So they're very much integrated in the book business. [tape stopped] You ask me about Theodore Front. He is in the [business of] books about music. He used to come to the Pickwick to buy books on music or whatever other things he might need, and he was more or less of a collector. And then he decided he would like to go into the thing full time. As a collector, he probably sold things now and again. And he came to me and said what did I think of him going into the music-book business? I knew him as a man who knew music books. And I said, "I think it's a very good field." He said, well, he'd been doing a little business in his home, in the off-hours and all that, but he wanted to quit

whatever he was doing and go in full time. And I said, "If you've got the idea, you'll eventually worry yourself all about it for a long time. And I think you can make a go of it. There are a few people in the country who are doing it, and the market for music in Southern California is tremendous. You know your books and you know your business. Go ahead." Sure enough. "Well," he said, "by golly, I think now that you've said these things to me, you've pointed out the areas in which I could serve." I mean, it was a general discussion, a little bit of general ideas how to go about it. He knew a lot about it already--where to buy music, where to sell music he bought, and he knew all the music people so the doors would be open to him. I said, "I'm sure you could make it." And I understand he's doing quite nicely. I see they have a member here on the list by the name of Marian L. Gore. "Cookery, wine, hotels, inns, coffee, tea, gardening, herbs, mushrooms." Marian Gore, Mrs. Gore, was an old customer of ours. Her husband had a graphics business in Hollywood on Santa Monica Boulevard. And the family were customers of ours. One day we heard that there was a divorce coming up. They were separated. And it eventually happened. And Mrs. Gore kept coming in, and he kept coming in, too. We got two accounts instead of one. But then she told me she wanted to start into the book business. She wanted to open a new-book store. And I talked her out of it. For two reasons: she told me the amount of money she would have available, and I didn't think that was enough to start a store, and it would be risking all that she had, which was a risk that was too great for her to take. And she had no particular background in running a business, either — let alone running a bookstore business. And I explained it to her. I told her how much she would have to have for initial stock and how much rent she would have to pay. We sat down, and we went over the skeletal figures. And she decided it was not for her. Well, it was my surprise that a few years later, I found out that she went into this old-book business. She moved to San Gabriel and went into this business little by little, and apparently picked up these books and sold them to people she knew who were interested in the subject, and gradually built up--I don't think it's a big business but it's enough of a business, apparently, to help earn her living. It may support her entirely; I don't know. I bumped into her at a Friends of the UCLA Library dinner. And that was the first I had heard of it. And she said she'd issued catalogs. I said, "Well, why didn't you send me some?" She said she'd send them to me. A very interesting catalog. So now, occasionally, I pick up something in her field and

I'll write to her about it. But there again, it proves the theory that if a person has a specialized knowledge or special interest, he can gradually build a book business into it. Mrs. Gore again proves that case. Doris Harris Autographs: she was president of the group for a while. I don't know her too well, but she seems to be a very capable person. And [G.F.] Hollingsworth, who is a Western Americana dealer in Manhattan Beach, is an excellent bookman. We used to sell him a lot when we had old books. He used to buy a lot of remainders from us and keep them a year or two until the remainder supply would be exhausted, and then he would put them in his catalog at close to the original price — which is a common practice. I'm not taking away from his reputation. It's a common practice, and I think it's a worthwhile practice because he saves a certain number of books for collectors who'll come later and want the book. And many remainders in later years become quite scarce. A remainder sometimes is an excellent book of which there weren't enough buyers for the original edition. It has nothing to do with the quality of the book. And very often when the supply is gone, they become extremely scarce. I myself have paid three times the price of what I could have bought it as a remainder at. The International Bookfinders is Dick Mohr — Richard Mohr. There again is an example of a person who is in one kind of a business and built up a sideline which eventually proved greater than his original business. He was in the advertising business in some area. And he went into a search service operation, but he advertised his services in certain areas which brought him a lot of excellent accounts. And now he's really a very knowledgeable bookman and apparently does a very fine business. His wife is involved; his son was involved until he went off to college. And I think that's his principal business now. I think he's doing extremely well. There are a number of people on the list now, on the list of members here, who I know very little about, or absolutely nothing. I don't know Carolyn Kaplan; I may have met her. I don't know Caler publications; I don't know [Laurence] McGilvery. We talked about Kurt Schwarz, and I think we've covered all the old-book men about whom I can have any knowledge, about whom I have any knowledge.

GARDNER

The next section, then, that we'll cover will be the different bookmen, the book salesmen who've come in and out of Pickwick.

EPSTEIN

Well, they now like to be called book publisher's representatives.

GARDNER

Publisher's representatives, okay.

EPSTEIN

They feel they're one cut above the drummer. The new-book business, of course, has no relation to the old- book business. But in the new-book business, a publisher's representative or salesman — whatever you wish to call him — is a very important person. At least, they were to me. They bring you news of the new books of their own particular field, their own particular house; and then they bring you what's happening in the industry, which way the trends of books are going, which publishers are having good seasons or bad. They talk about more — not more about other people's lines than their own, but they constantly have to bring you news to compare what they're selling with what the house is selling — why their book of fiction is a better book of fiction than, say, Doubleday's. And then, especially the major houses like Random House; Doubleday; Little, Brown; Houghton Mifflin; Macmillan; Morrow; and McKay, now--they had varying degrees of successes from season to season. Each year they're competitive for the bookseller's dollar. And they have to tell you why we have to buy their books rather than their competitor's books; so, in a degree, they have to know what their competitor is doing. And they provide us with a great deal of knowledge, and we have to learn how to accept that knowledge--which salesman's judgment to respect, and which house's judgment to respect. Viking is a house that requires a lot of attention. [So is] Knopf. So we had to learn to listen to the salesmen, to read the salesmen, you might say. We'd have to know which one puffs more than the other, which one is likely to exaggerate, which one is carried away by what his sales manager told him or what his editors told him. And over the years you get to know them. You get to know which are the men whose information is totally reliable. And that depends, of course, a great deal on the house he's working for. Is the house totally reliable in giving honest information? Rather than some houses, who we know are always puffing 1,000 percent. There are houses that do that. They don't know how to judge their own product. Everything they produce is going to be the best seller, and they expect us to buy accordingly — which, of course, we can't and we don't. So in this respect,

the salesman is a great teacher. To me, they were tremendous teachers, because I had never bought new books. I had never worked in old books until I started the store. Then I had to start over again to learn another new business, really. The two businesses are very much unlike, although I would tell everyone starting in — if they asked me, that is--that if they spent two or three years in the old-book business and then went into the new-book business, they would have a much broader scope of the new-book business, because in the old-book business we handled a broader scope of knowledge. We're not confined to those things that come out today, with a minimum of classic material that every new-book store handles. At any rate, to me at least, the book publisher's representatives were extremely important because of my ignorance to begin with and the scope of knowledge that they brought to me. And there were some outstanding men who were in the field when I started who had almost national reputations as knowledgeable and excellent salesmen. There were two or three of them who were extremely beneficial for me to know and for me to have been called on by them. One of them,, particularly, was one of the men whom I knew before I went into the old-book business, James D. Blake. He represented Harper's. The first time I ever saw his books, I had to go to the hotel. In the old days (this was in the 1920s and before), the book salesman would bring a trunkful of books, take them to the hotel, and invite his clients to come up to a series of appointments. And then they would show them the books and tell them what there is. Of course, that is not being done now. And I remember one time, even before I bought new books particularly to any extent, I was invited to his suite. And I, first time, saw a publisher's layout. I knew him before we opened in Hollywood, but when we opened in Hollywood and began to buy a few new books, he would call on us, sell us a few. Then when we announced that we had to go into the new-book field, and were going to really put in a stock of new books, then he said, "Louis, I have to spend a whole day with you going over the Harper line." In those days Harper had a very big line, probably larger than they have today — of classics and basic books on many, many subjects. I think their list is much more narrow today than it was then. I said, "Jim, I don't need a whole day of your time." I said, "I'm not going to buy that many books." He said, "I know you're not going to buy that many books. But if you're going to start buying new books, you have to be knowledgeable of what is available, and Harper is one of the broadest lists in the business." And then he named two or three

other publishers; he said that "you must become acquainted with their whole list." I said, "Okay." I mean, he was a good deal older than I was, and I respected him. And he said, "Well, I'll come in, and we'll break for lunch, and then. ..." And sure enough, he came in, and he went over every book on the Harper list, whether it was relevant to my business or not. He said, "I'm going to tell you about every one of these books in the list. " And he went down every book in the Harper list, and the catalog was about an inch and a quarter thick. Well, he had my mind reeling in many areas. But there were certain books about which he said, "Louis, now this book you've got to have." He didn't try to sell me everything--by no means. But he said, "I want you to know they're available in case somebody asks you for them." He said, "Let it sink in a little bit." And it was a great thing. And all that little bit of sinking in, somewhere in your consciousness you became aware of it. I think a bookman's mind is either trained for that or inherited for that. And if he's got that, he's really got something. And at that time, my mind was much more accurate than it is now. But we went over every book. And there were certain books he'd tell me, "You've got to have this. You'll sell this." And occasionally we would come across a book, and he said, "Louis, this book you'll never sell, but you've got to carry it in your store." "Why? Jim, why would I need a book that I won't sell?" He said, "It'll make your store stand out. People will be impressed with it." And he said, "You'll sell one occasionally. You'll sell enough in a year. You may sell only one in a year, but then you may be discouraged about handling it." And for those days, it would be a rather high-priced book. And by golly, he was absolutely right. He had an uncanny knowledge; he had specialized knowledge of every book in the store. There was a book on music of some kind; I forget the title of it. [There were] two or three of them that he picked out--a book of English grammar. There are thousands of English grammars for less money than he had, but his grammar was a particularly good one. It was much more expensive than the others, but it was a book. . . . And he taught me that a bookstore must be broad in scope. I say, "He taught me." He encouraged me to follow the principle. In the old-book business, in the general old-book store, you learn that the broader the scope, the better the business, you see. And he pressed me, impressed on me, that it applies also to the new-book business. And I think those little things helped me. He went on and sold me for years, and he would guide me through a catalog. Occasionally he would say, "Now, Louis, this is a good book, but I'm not sure

you can sell it." Well, we compromised. The minute he told me it was a good book, from what he had told me previously in that first lecture day — let's call it that--that if he said this was a good book, somebody's going to want it. And I adopted a principle, consciously or unconsciously in those days, [that] if there was a chance of selling a copy of a book, of a good book, I would buy it, figuring that somebody in Hollywood, somebody in our community would hear of it and would want it. Maybe it would be a feather in our cap if we had it. And maybe our competition didn't have it. And it turned out thousands of times, literally thousands of times where we were the only ones in Southern California who ordered that particular book. And we would get a call from someone, and they'd say, "Well, I'm looking for this book. Nobody has it." "Well," I'd say, "we have it, and next time you start asking us first." "Oh, you've taught me." We tied in a customer that way. But to go back to the men themselves, there were a number of salesmen who were that knowledgeable of what they were selling. I must criticize the modern, the younger book representatives — and in that respect, I think, the house they represent should be criticized, perhaps, rather than they — because there is no longer that emphasis on the backlist. By backlist, I hope you know what I'm talking about. For anyone listening--if anyone listens-- [laughter] the backlist means those books that were published anywhere from last year to a hundred years ago, and the publisher's still carrying that book, maybe in revised editions. The younger men never try to sell you backlists. They don't know their backlists; they're not the least bit interested in even taking an order for backlist stock. Once a year, maybe, their house will give them a list of some of their back stock and ask them to take orders for it on a special deal. Jim Blake is one of the men — of course, he's gone a great many years now — of whom I have a great and fond memory as a person and as a teacher. I can mention a few others. Louis Freedman, who at that time represented Macmillan. There's another big house. Macmillan had an entirely different policy. But they, too, had a tremendous backlist. Louis knew his backlist. We didn't go over the backlist as extensively with Louis Freedman as I did with Jim Blake. But every time he came in, we took a portion of it. Macmillan, at that time, when Louis was there, had the good fortune, or the planning, or the books, or the titles, or the ability to create a best seller every season. (By season I mean the fall and Christmas season.) Every season [they were] bringing out a best seller, promoting it in such a way. The book was usually of very high quality, and they

would either have the best seller or very close to the top of it. Now, Louis would come in with the book that they had for that fall (fiction as a rule; they had one major fiction, one nonfiction), a fiction book, would come in and say, addressing me, "I want you to buy a hundred copies of the book." I'd say, "Are you out of your mind? A hundred copies of the book for me? With the volume of business I do?" "You will sell every one of them." "Well," I said, "Louis, I've heard that story from a lot of salesmen." "Well," he said, "I'm telling you." He said, "If you don't sell them, I'll take them back." Well, in those days the return policies were not as liberal as they are today. Now practically everything is returned. In those days, they didn't allow you to return very many. Maybe some publishers had a policy, a certain proportion of value of what you bought for the season or the year. And they used to allow maybe 5 percent, which was nothing if you got stuck with a big buy. He said, "If you don't sell them, I will take them back." Well, 75 percent of the time, he was right. We sold them. We didn't sell a whole fifty or a hundred, but whatever he sold us, the carryover past the Christmas season--if it was a good book it would carry on till the spring--would usually take care of that. He was accused of being a hard-sell man, and in some ways he was. But if you learned to read him, and fought back in certain areas, you got along with him. But he was very knowledgeable, and he could dissect a book and tell you why it will sell. And he had ideas of selling. He is still active, but he doesn't make many calls himself. He has three or four people working under him, but he's going to retire, I think, at the end of this year or next year. He represented the Cambridge University Press after he left Macmillan. He left Macmillan and went to work for other — Macmillan came in with a new group of executives; it separated from the British company. Macmillan of America is not related to the Macmillan of England anymore. So he went and he represented other publishers — which were totally unlike Macmillan, but he did a good job with them. We're very good personal friends. Whenever we get together, we have dinner together; we visit back and forth. There were several whom I will mention. Harrison Leusler--his nickname was "the sheriff of Petaluma." I heard the story once, but I've forgotten how he started being called the sheriff. I think he adopted western clothes, so his eastern counterparts named him. He, again, was a totally different kind of salesman than the others, but still extremely knowledgeable of every book on the Houghton Mifflin list. But he had one fault: he got carried away by his own enthusiasm for every Houghton

Mifflin book that they ever put out. It was the best book; it's going to be the best seller; it's going to be the biggest book. And until you learned how to fight back, how to resist his pressures, you would have a little bit of trouble. Once I learned to read him, we got along beautifully. Oh, we would have almost fistfights, but we were good friends. He would come in, and he would sit there and give you the story of every book. He was one of the few that read every book on his list for that season. And he would give you the whole story of it. You had to be patient, just sit there and listen patiently, but he had an honor about him. If you wavered on the line, and he wanted to sell you twenty-five or fifty or a hundred, then you could maybe make a bargain with him--and will he pay the freight back if they don't sell? Which he very often did. But he was a very honorable person, and he did a good job. But until you learned how to take him, he would be inclined to be domineering. But once you sat down and cooled him down, you got to know him. In every other way he was the finest gentleman. His word was 100 percent. If he told you that he would take them back, he would take them no questions asked. Or if you pointed out to him that he misled you about something, he would make it right. And occasionally, he would unwittingly say something which might have misled you. Of the three I spoke of, Harrison is gone, and Jim Blake is gone. Carl Smalley was a Kansan converted into a bookman who was a very unusual character. He had a voice like a foghorn. And when he laughed you could hear him a mile away [makes noise like foghorn]. He was a very fine man. He had a great appreciation for books, and he knew books. But he represented a lot of very small publishers. He had one major publisher: he had Dutton for a while. Oh, he would come in with about fifteen small publishers, university presses, who had five books, six books, or eight books, or whatever. And he had lines that nobody else would take. But usually they would publish good books. And over the years he built up a business which was remarkable in the sense that he carried these lines which nobody else wanted to take and built them up. They became better publishers and became more knowledgeable publishers--especially the university presses. Some of them became quite professional at it. One of them, the University of Oklahoma, which he had, was one of the most efficient presses of any publisher-- university press or other--in the whole country. I've always admired their way of doing business. They publish a lot of western books. And we used to sell a lot of them. We were their best account on the West Coast. And it was because of the way Carl presented the

line to me. I had a certain interest, and I felt that our people would buy a certain number of them. [tape stopped] Now, to continue about the publisher's representatives or publisher's salesmen. Ray Healy was one of the earliest salesmen to call on me. As a matter of fact, he was amongst the first group, that first year we decided to see salesmen. A very fine Irishman, very religious. He taught me a great deal about the book business. At that time, he had the Modern Library, and he had Random House, and I think he had Simon and Schuster, too. He had a lot of very good lines for those days. And we did a tremendous amount of business together, became very good friends--and had our usual fights, just proving my theory that if you fight with a man long enough, you will become very good friends. It's true. If you remain adversaries long enough, you get to know each other so well that you're eating together. You may fight together, but you eat together. But he, too, had an influence on my education as a new-book store man — which, of course, is a totally different way of buying books than old books. There's one incident that I'd like to relate — I may have related it to you before--when I first had the United Jewish Welfare Fund, Hollywood Division, and our quota was a half a million dollars to raise. This is the Ray Healy I told you about--a very human person. And we still correspond. He now lives in New Hampshire and comes back here once in a while. When he does, we see each other. Another chap who had some influence in teaching me was Jess Carmack. Now, each one of those people I mentioned sold me in the very first season when we decided to have new books. And they all did something for me, to help guide me — very honestly, too. And one of the reasons I love to mention it is because there was a certain amount of trust established between the representative of a line and the buyer of a line, and that applies to many other trades, too. A good representative for a company, selling for a company, is a tremendous asset, both for the company and the customer. If they are honest with each other, they will maintain a relationship which promotes good business for both of them. Jess Carmack--he lives now on San Vicente in Santa Monica. We had dinner with them just two Saturdays before last. He also was one of the early ones. He represented Dodd, Mead; and later on he represented Morrow and one or two other publishers. At that time there weren't so many publishers' men representing one house, exclusively. They were commission men, and they represented two or three and sometimes four houses. But his principal line at that time, I think, was Dodd, Mead. Dodd, Mead didn't have anywhere

near the catalog that Harper had, but we went through the catalog again, and we picked up the high spots. And he had a dictionary of music he was selling at that time-- [Virgil] Thomson [Encyclopedia of Music] ; I think they still publish it. And he brought it out. At that time it was selling for eight dollars and a half, which was a heck of a lot of money for a book in those days. Well, I said, "Oh, Jess, who's going to pay me eight dollars and a half?" "Well," he said, "Louis, you're not going to sell very many of them, but every time you sell one, it's going to make a beautiful tinkle in the cash register." I never forgot that line. [laughter] And we bought it, and we sold it. On my own, I never would have chosen that book. But he convinced me that it sells, it's staple stock. You won't sell too many, but if you sell one of those, that was the equivalent of selling four novels at two dollars apiece in those days--which is the total amount of business. It's helped me in the sense that it helped me create a good stock of merchandise where people can find staples as well as best sellers. I think that was one of our major strengths, right from the beginning. There's a chap named Ellis Baker. He's now retired, and he lives up in the Bay Area, Fremont. And I correspond with him occasionally; occasionally I'll call him on the telephone. He, too, is one of the old-timers. He used to be a very heavy drinker. And when he was in his cups, he had an ugly mouth. But he later gave up drinking and almost became a reformer; then he wouldn't associate with anyone that drank. He always used to travel with a chap name of Charlie Johnson, who also called on me. And they were great friends. But when he stopped drinking, he fell out with Charlie Johnson because he wanted Charlie to stop drinking. Charlie rarely drank to excess, but occasionally he would drink to excess, but not the way Ellis would. And he didn't react the same way that Ellis did. But Ellis was a good book salesman, in spite of his faults. He represented several good lines--Lippincott was one, and Winston, at that time. We established a very nice rapport, and we got along very well. Drinking was an occupational hazard. These chaps would go out on the road, away from their families, and when their work was done at the end of the day, they would either invite the buyers from the stores that they visited to come have dinner and a drink with them, and the inclination would be to just sit there and drink.

1.24. TAPE NUMBER: XII, Side One (July 29, 1974)

EPSTEIN

I mentioned Charlie Johnson. He was a very hard-sell salesman. And although I liked him as a person, I always dreaded sitting down to see his line because he bore down so hard and he was so difficult to fight off. And he represented a good many lines, too, so it would be almost an all-day fight by the time we were through with him. But he was a very fine person. After he got through, he would do anything for you, anything. But when he was selling, it was just hammer, hammer, hammer, just like I was the anvil and he was the hammer. But he had an unfortunate ending. His wife had a stroke, and for years she just lay there, almost as a vegetable. And he, poor man, would come from a trip and be faced with that. Eventually she died, and he married again. But he was very sadly taken in his marriage. He married a woman who wanted to be on the go all the time. After a day's work, they'd go to nightclubs, and dancing. And he was up in years--he was an old man--and he just couldn't keep up the pace with her. Finally it ended in a divorce. But I think his mind went before his body. The last time he called on me, he was in such pitiful shape that it was embarrassing to me, and we felt so sorry for him. He tried to perform like he always did, but it just wasn't there. It was just like watching a man in a prize fight on TV sometimes. You know the man is through, had no business going into that ring with a younger opponent or whatever; he's taking a beating from the word go. And that's the way it was watching him trying to sell. But he died. I'm not sure that he was totally there when he died. And I think of him, really, with a great deal of sorrow because personally he was a great guy, a great host, but his selling manner I didn't like. But he did a good job in calling attention to the things he had. And he was very successful. In addition to books, he had a line of toys. He made a very great deal of money, but it all scattered away with his bills, and second wife or whatever. But it was very sad; it was very sad to see him on his last trip. There was a very interesting chap by the name of Denny Chase who used to be with Harcourt Brace, one of the very early ones. Denny was a very finely educated man, probably the most literary of all the people who called on me in those days — although Jess Carmack had a degree in English literature from Harvard. He knew his books. But Denny — I don't know what college or university he went to, but he was quite literary. He represented Harcourt Brace and one other line. And he called on me for, oh, about ten, twelve years. Then he retired. He inherited some money, and his wife inherited some money, and they bought an island up in the straits of Juan de Fuca near Seattle. And very interesting. We visited

him one time on the island. It was really the kind of a life that I wouldn't care for, but, oh, they just loved it. They were the only ones on the island. It was about half a mile from shore, and they had a nice house which he was constantly improving. And they had a limited amount of water. But later I heard that they got another good well. So, of course, that made the island much more habitable. But they enjoyed it immensely. I heard recently that he moved back to the mainland — I guess because of medical reasons. He was getting up in years, I guess. Those are most of the old-timers. We had a number of them who came on later--excellent bookmen, a good many of them — like Ben Burke, who represented World Book Company. Jim Wallace came a little later than the others; he represented Lippincott and Harcourt Brace. He took over after Denny Chase left. A very fine man, he's just recently retired--lives in the Valley. Jim is just a beautiful person. Stuie Woodruff, who's now Raymar, was a salesman for Doubleday, represented Doubleday at our store for quite a while. He did an excellent job. He used to give us fantastic service at Christmastime. He would, on his way down down to Raymar — well, it wasn't Raymar then, it was Vroman's- he would stop by at our place and see what Doubleday books we needed. (Vroman's operated a separate wholesale business then.) He'd do that three, four times a week during the Christmas rush the last three, four weeks of the season. And he would get our order in the morning, deliver it back to us in his own car on the way back home in the evening. He lived in the Valley. He did that. It was a tremendous service, and it would be amazing how many dollars of extra business you can pick up if you can get that kind of service. At that time, no matter how smart you are in your buying, you never knew how much or which ones the public is going to want during the Christmas season. It's a very frustrating time for most booksellers.

GARDNER

Can we talk about Raymar for a minute now?

EPSTEIN

I think we talked about Raymar.

GARDNER

Oh, did we talk about that?

EPSTEIN

Yeah. I'm quite sure we talked about Raymar.

GARDNER

In detail, really?

EPSTEIN

He and Fran Howell both had worked for Vroman . When Stuie left Doubleday, he went to work for Vroman. Well, he did other things, too. He and Fran were sales managers for a record house — I think Warner Brothers — for a couple of years. [tape stopped] [They wanted to be in the] wholesale-book business, and they got some backing from somewhere, and they opened Raymar--made a marvelous success. They now have three places: one up in Bellingham, Washington, and one in some town near Chicago for that area.* [* The Chicago area one recently was closed .-- [L.E.]] And they're doing very well. They work on a very close margin of profitability, but they're quite efficient. They've developed a lot of new ideas, and they're a great boon to any territory which they're in because they carry quite a good stock. The booksellers depend on them — especially smaller booksellers — for a great deal of their supply. They're both very fine people. Raymar is an acronym of the names of the wives, Raymone and Margaret: Raymar. They twisted them around. Incidentally, they just bought out the Ward Ritchie Press. And I haven't talked to them. I don't know what their plans are for it, but I imagine they plan to run it as a publishing arm.* [* They are definitely running a publishing business.- [L.E.]]With their three major outlets, they could give them distribution. But I don't know. You can combine publishing with wholesaling, and you begin to diffuse your energies and your thinking, your executive powers. But so far they've done an excellent job. We're coming now to what I might call almost the second generation of salesmen, apart from those fellows who were the first to call on me. Amongst those, perhaps as prominent as any, would be Errett Stuart. When I first met him, I was still on Eighth Street. He had been in the service. He came from St. Louis, and somehow or other, when I first met him, he was working at the May Company book department. Occasionally he'd get a review copy of a book and come rushing down to sell it to me. And we had a gag running between us that if it hadn't been for Louis Epstein being on Eighth Street, and [his] rushing in and getting fifty cents for the brand new book, he might not have survived. And I said, "Yeah, but where in hell did I get

fifty cents?" [laughter] But he's an excellent salesman. He's still selling. He had Viking up until a couple of years ago. He lost that; they hired their own salesman--which was a mistake. But he got other lines. Now he has his two sons [Jeff and Terry] working for him, and they've got a nice organization of commission salesmen. They have several good lines. He's a very nice man-- nice family--and one of the people that we're very friendly with and who really did an excellent job. Ron Smith handles Abrams and several other lines. He came out of the retail-book business. He worked for the Sather Gate, up north, for a number of years. He left them and started selling as a commission salesman. He sold for Doubleday for a while, I think, and he sold me for years and years and years. Why he doesn't retire, I don't know. Well, I talked to him; we discussed that. I saw him one day about two years ago crawling around on the floor, checking paperbacks for some one of his lines. And I said, "Ron, aren't you a little bit aged for doing that kind of work?" "Well," he said, "as long as it has to be done, I've got to do it." It's a good answer, but it wasn't particularly healthy for him. But he says he feels fine and all that, but he's a little bit nervous. I hope nothing happens to him till he does retire. He is a good bookman — knows his books. Bob Cohen is one of the later ones, representing Random House. He came out here when Random House decided to have their own man instead of a commission man. And it was a little difficult at first. Very New Yorkish — very house conscious, in the sense that he wanted all the advantages for the house. I thought when he first came around that he was asking too much for his house and not giving too much to the customer — in various things. We had our difficulties at first, one time a very serious one. However, we straightened that out, and we've become very good friends. And he changed his methods of selling. As a matter of fact, I gave him a good long lecture on that. I said, "Look, you may think you're doing a great deal for your house, but you're not. You're making demands on your customers which are unreasonable, and you're not satisfying the reasonable demands of your customer." I said, "In my opinion, all the good salesmen I ever knew would fight my battles for me with their house. You do just the reverse." And I told him I didn't think that was good salesmanship; I didn't think eventually it would be good for the house. Of course, he resented my telling him that. But later we settled our differences, and he changed his methods. And we became very good friends. He's a very good friend of the family, Aaron's and Eugene's. As a matter of fact we took them to dinner at

Scandia on their anniversary. They thought I was great. I thought he just wasn't using good judgment, and I told him so. I pointed out to him that every salesman on my list — I went over all the old-timers--I said, "I can ask any one of them to do certain things, and they will do them for me. You always look on it as me demanding something from your house. I am demanding something from your house. But I think I have a right to demand certain things from your house. I am a very demanding man," I told him. "I have to be. But it's your job to transmit my demands." The controversy came up about advertising. All the other publishers were giving us certain allowances for cooperative advertising. And he refused to do it. I said, "Okay, then I'll buy just a minimal amount of that kind of merchandise." I said, "Why should I take any less from you than I get from so-and-so." "Well," he said, "We've got a better house. It's our house's policy," and so forth. I said, "It was the house policy of every one of these other publishers until we convinced them that it would be to their advantage to do these things. And you don't want to even transmit these demands." I said, "Do you want me to call New York?" I said, "I don't do that." I said, "I don't call New York. But if you will give me permission, I will." "No," he said, "You don't have to call New York." And little by little he broke down. But it was a battle. He's a firm-minded guy, but he's a nice guy. But he thought he was doing the very right thing. I told him that he wasn't. But all's well that ends well. But this is a way we had to teach the salesmen certain things, and they taught us certain things. We created a certain type of business at Pickwick. We created a certain type of promotions--which were to the advantage of the Pickwick but they were also to the advantage of the publishers. And it was a very rough go to try to convince them to give us, say, \$200, \$500, for an ad. That will benefit us, but it will also benefit them. And a few of them were willing to go along with us and give us a trial. And it was, on the whole, very successful. And now they're all doing it--not only doing it for Pickwick, but they're doing it for others. So we created something that benefited the whole industry. But we had to fight like hell for it. It was my contention--if you'll allow me to diverge-- that if Pickwick advertised a book, every bookstore in the area would get the same benefit of that ad as the Pickwick did. So although the Pickwick was given an allowance to run that ad, on a certain number of dollars, the publisher wasn't giving it to the Pickwick alone, really. Because Bob Campbell's customers weren't about to call me for that book. They're smart enough to know that Bob would have it. Vroman's

customers are not going to call from Pasadena for it. And the people living in Long Beach who read the Times weren't going to call me from Long Beach. Or May Company's customers. And we went right down the line. And those who were a little bit open-minded--well, it's something they'd never done before. And it never was explained to them that way before. So finally, one or two of them tried it, and they found out that that's exactly what happened. Every store in town got benefit of that ad. It was proven to them by the phone orders that started coming into Vroman. The minute they saw that ad Monday morning, the wholesale house would start getting calls for that book because the bookstores started getting calls for that book. And it was proven — I think the most dramatically--with Ron Smith, Arco. I think I mentioned that before.

GARDNER

Yes, you told the story.

EPSTEIN

That was so dramatic that we used that as an example to the publishers time and time again. Now it's just a matter of course. They call up — would we please run an ad for them? It's a complete turnaround. And that was where one of the major differences with Bob Cohen was when we first came out here. Aaron had a great deal to do with that program — with, of course, the backing of ourselves. A very fine salesman who called on me for many years is Jim Pike, a very reserved guy, from, I think, Philadelphia, who had McKay and Putnam. He's since given up Putnam. A very reserved guy, a very fine person who had a semisoft sell. But he tried to do the best thing he could for his customers, and if anything came up between us and the house, why, he tried his best to get it settled. We always worked with the salesmen first, rather than writing to the house. It's only when the house didn't back their salesman that we went directly, usually on attack for not backing their salesmen. Or they knew what they were talking about, that this is a problem we should be able to settle with the salesmen and not have to write you about. If he represents your line, he should be given some authority. It's one of the problems with a lot of the salesmen that call on the stores today. They're sent out; they're green, have no authority to act responsibly on anything. "Well, I'll have to call the house." And this takes time; they forget. The house gives them an offhand answer and causes a great deal of anguish--and delays for the

booksellers. But Jim was one of the very nice people. There was Jim Nourse and Floyd Nourse. One of the earliest people that I should have mentioned before is Jim Nourse's father, Jim and Floyd's father, Jim, Sr. He used to sell me. About the time I started buying, he sold me for one or two seasons, and then Errett Stuart went to work for him. Then Errett started selling me. They represented Knopf, and Viking, and Harlem Book Company, a remainder house. Is that four lines? I forget what the other was. Later they broke up, and Errett got Viking and Harlem, and Nourse got Knopf — and who else? I forget who else. At any rate, originally the older gentleman sold me. Then later Jim sold me, Jim, Jr. And I remember the first time he came to call on me. He had just gotten out of the service. He had been a flier, and from what I hear — what I found out later—quite a heroic one. He was in the drink a couple of times, rescued, and went right back flying. He never mentioned it, never talked about it. And I remember the first time he called on me. The poor youngster was so worried — well, not worried, but nervous. He had his talk all made up. And every time I asked him a question, it would stop the flow of his talk, and he had to start over again. He sort of memorized his speech, and I always kid him about that. I ask him if he still forgets his speech. And he became a good man. Then he and his brother now represent several publishers. They're doing an excellent job. And they did extremely well. The father made a lot of money in real estate up around Los Altos or San Carlos — or somewhere up there in the Bay Area. The boys are quite well-to-do, but extremely nice, nice people. This is sort of another family affair. There's a chap name of John Storm I should mention. His widow is presently the manager of the Hollywood Pickwick Bookstore. And I knew him first when he had a little tiny store on West Sixth Street, west of Vermont. He had come out from Chicago and attempted to start a store, quite small, and I don't think he quite made it. He went back to Chicago and somehow got a job selling for a publisher. He represented several houses. He did a good job for quite a number of years, but the poor chap died before his time. In one of those pictures I have, I think I showed you where we're playing poker at a bookman's field day, and we're all three of us — Ben Burke, and he, and I — so intensely watching our cards. Well, I'm the only one left of those three in that picture. Bob MacDonald is one of the older men who did a very good job with me, representing Prentice-Hall. He had been in the book business for many years in the city before he went with Prentice-Hall. He was with the Los

Angeles News Company in the days when the Los Angeles News Company was the only wholesaler out here. They were a part of the American News Company, which was a national chain of wholesalers of magazines and books and various kinds of stationery. After he left the News Company, he went to work for Prentice-Hall. He did an excellent job for them. And I see him occasionally. Bill McCullough is the nephew of Harrison Leusler and took over the territory when Harrison retired. Unlike his uncle, he was not a hard-sell salesman, but he was a good salesman, [with a] very nice, nice personality. He has a territory in the San Francisco area. He gets down here once in a while, and we meet. Ernie Greenspan has Crown and the Crown-related companies of reprints, Outlet--a very, very large business. He, too, is not one of the first-generation salesmen but the second generation. He does an excellent job, and he helped us a great many ways on developing remainders and learning to advertise remainders. And he fulfilled, again, that purpose of teaching us, and he would learn a great deal from us--what happens after we advertise a remainder, which ones move and which ones don't. And we created a different kind of ad. They used to have these ads made up for remainders mostly run by department stores. When we first wanted to run an ad, that's exactly the kind of an ad they wanted us to run. I said, "No." I said, "That's not the kind of an ad I want." I said, "I don't like their mix of books, either. You have much better books, from my point of view, to advertise than those that they advertise." They would advertise forty-nine-cent fiction. I said, "I'm not interested in advertising forty-nine-cent fiction. It doesn't mean a thing to me. I don't think it would mean much to my customers. We've got a different type of trade." Well, by give and take, we told them what we wanted, and they learned on their own that we could do a better job by our own selections than the prearranged selections that they made up for department stores. The department store buyers were not knowledgeable enough of books to make up their own ad. And the buyers would change every year in some areas, every three years, and there's no continuity of knowledge built up in a department store--or rarely. And in that respect, again proving the principle that one learns from the other. Ernie still calls, does a big business with the people. Another one of the second generation, as I would call it, is Arthur Babcock, a very fine chap who did a good job. He was almost colorless in a good many ways. But he knew how to sell, even without the color. He was extremely honest about what he wanted to sell you. If he didn't think that you

could sell a book and you wanted it, you almost had to beg him to sell you a copy. Of course, in my case, I always bought, well, less than what they tried and more of what they didn't try. But he's retired, too, now. There's a young-- not young anymore-- woman by the name of Betty Gaskill who calls on us, one of the few women publisher's representatives in the trade, a very enthusiastic person. She had a little bookstore in Van Nuys for a number of years — she and her husband. She became a widow, and she became a salesperson for a publisher. She was one of the first that ever showed up around here. And she's doing an excellent job--a very enthusiastic person. Then, you might say, just for the record, I should mention Jim Mottola, who sold here for McGraw-Hill for a number of years — a very fine salesman. He knew his lines, and he knew how to sell. He's now in the Chicago area. [Mottola recently died.-- [L.E.]] Frank Scioscia. A great many people, maybe, in UCLA might know Frank. He was quite a literary person. He had a nice library of books, which he sold when he left here. He went to work for Harper's and sold them for a while. He's from the Northwest. I think he worked for J.K. Gill for a while and was an excellent salesman, really was. Now he's with Harper's in the home office. I don't know exactly his position, but of course he still has something to do with selling. Unfortunately I heard that he recently had a heart attack. I wrote him. I haven't heard any answer, and I hope he's getting along well. Lou Eaton, I should mention. Lou Eaton started, I believe, working for World Book Company. I think he married a daughter of the owner of the firm. And Ann and I met him for the first time at a convention in Chicago, I believe it was — at the convention there. And we were introduced. And a look came over his face. We were talking for a little while, and he pulls me aside, sits me down over somewhere. We sat down, and he said, "I can't help but tell you that you have exactly the same name as I have. My name is Louis Epstein, too." He said he went to work selling bibles. At that time. World Publishing Company was the biggest publisher of bibles in the country. And they had their salesmen go out. And he had the southern territory, and he said, "How the hell was I going to get into the door with the name Louis Epstein?" So he changed it to Lou Eaton. But I think any knowledgeable person would recognize him after he had talked to him a few minutes. Eddie Ponger was a very nice person who is no longer in this territory. He represented Simon and Schuster here for a number of years-- a very nice man, quite a lot younger than I was. He became a good friend of the family; he and Aaron and the others all got along. He likes to tell the story

about the way I worked in comparison to the way some other booksellers work. He said that even at my age — and I was in my sixties--that with his line the buyers of a department store or some other store would ask for two days to look it over. But, he said, I always went all through it in one day--with all my interruptions. And he said many times when he was all worn out at five o'clock, and nowhere near finished, that I would insist that we continue, that he had to drag himself home. I suppose that's a little bit apocryphal, but it's a good story. Jack Dawley, who represents Simon and Schuster now — who took Eddie Ponger's place with Simon and Schuster — before that was with Harper. Jack Dawley was with Harper; he was hired by Frank Scioscia. Jack is one of the first black salesmen in the West. He does an excellent job--a very fine person — and he is the kind of person that could go anywhere if he wasn't black. But I suppose that even in the publishing business, a number of areas are still closed to him. But he still — he's about middle-aged now — has a lot of opportunity. And he may go back to Harper. There's some little bit of rumor that he might go back; I don't know. He's doing an excellent job and is a good friend of ours. Georgie Kellogg, George Kellogg, represented Grosset and Dunlap for a great many years out here and did a good job. A peculiar character, he was almost too frank with his bosses. They never gave him the recognition that he should have had, I think because he was overly frank with them. In other words, if he saw something wrong, he stepped right out and said it, and sometimes you just can't do that in a large organization. But he did an excellent job of selling. He's now retired, enjoys his fishing, and I mentioned him because he was a good salesman and he had been around for a long time. Bill Webb has been selling for about fifteen years, but I still call him one of the younger men. And he's an extremely literate person. He represents a number of houses--Watson-Guptill, which sells a lot of art books, how-to art books. He does a good job. He's a forceful seller, sometimes too forceful. But on the whole, we had a satisfactory relationship between the Pickwick and he, and he depended on me for a great deal of what he learned. He told me so. And I think I mentioned before a number of the people said, "Well, I always go sell Louie first, because by the time I get through selling Louie, I've learned my line" — which may or may not be true. (They all called me Louie.) I told what I thought of the line, anyway. At least, by the way I bought, they knew what I liked. And I think I was probably as good a bellwether as anybody. Bill Chaffee, I haven't mentioned yet, I don't think. Bill

was around for quite a number of years. He sold a number of publishers, including Bobbs-Merrill . A very aggressive salesman, inclined to be hard sell. He did a good job, but I'm not positive that he was totally happy in the book business. But he did well. He was with the Nourse boys for a while. But he had a disagreement with one of the publishers he represented, and they sort of forced him out of that organization, out of the Nourse group. They told him that if Bill was going to continue to sell the line, that they would have to give up the line — which, of course, they didn't want to do, so Bill was asked to resign. Which was a terrific blow to his ego, and I knew about what type of argument it was. It was a clash of personalities. Bill was sometimes a little pugnacious, and that affected his relationship with people. But on the whole he's a very fine man, and I still maintain a very nice friendship with him. He's retired, living at Sedona, Arizona, in that valley that runs right through from Prescott. As you go from Prescott to Flagstaff, you go through part of it. And I talk to him on the telephone occasionally. A young man name of Ernest Callman — I still call him a young man. He used to work for me and went to selling. And then there are a number of others I could mention, like Herb Chapin was a newer person, Harry Smith, Mel Dir, Fred Hill, George Corey, Geoffrey Barr, Bill Reynolds. Bill Reynolds — I have a little story about him. A great churchman, when he first started calling on us, he represented a religious house. Then he represented the Harper religious line, and then he had another religious line. Later he went to work selling trade books, and his job was combined out of the job in some way or other by some new setup in the selling. So he got a job selling Lippincott, which, of course, is a regular trade house. And about a year and a half ago, I parked in back of the Pickwick, and he parked in back of the Pickwick with a woman. And he introduced me to her. And then we went into the shop, and she was to autograph books. And a most unlikely woman to ever find with a character such as Bill Reynolds — she was a woman who shot her husband, who was a collector of guns up around San Jose. The case was in the papers. She claimed she shot him in self-defense, and they found a whole arsenal in this home. I talked to him about it later. I said, "Well, I am not keeping my eye on you, so here you go with company such as that." Oh, I should mention Russell Goodrich, who was around for years and years — a very fine chap who sold Merriam- Webster dictionaries who is now retired. Henry Caster sold Doubleday for a number of years out here. Dave Bramble used to live down the hill here for a while. He

was a salesman whose wife inherited a lot of money. So he went out of the bookselling business. Joe Carroll, who represented Scribner-- a very fine, very religious Irish Catholic. He did a good job of selling Scribner. Well, he's long gone now. Al Doering, who was the general manager for Grosset on the West Coast, was an excellent salesman. He, poor guy, is gone. Oh, Bill Gordon, Wilmot Gordon, who represented Oxford University Press for years--one of the finest gentlemen, a real gentleman, a good salesman, knew how to sell, soft sell, and did an excellent job. He lives part time in Mexico and part in Pasadena. Herb Chapin is relatively new; Frank Corsello is relatively new. Helen Kosick, who was for years with the Los Angeles News Company: later, when that went out of business, she went to work for Dial Delacorte. And she called on the trade for a while. Bob Wilkie's one of the newer men. George O'Hara represents World. He's represented, over the years, many different houses. He called on me only a few years, but I've known him for a great many years. And my wife says — that's her theory--he was responsible for me getting involved with the ABA, that he was the one that called to the attention of the office of the ABA: "We've got a good man here for the board." Ted Moss, who's now sales manager for Dial, sold us for a while. Bill Maher. These are all names that should be in the records somehow or other. A chap by the name of Harry Smith first sold me paperback. He originally sold me reprints when I was still on Eighth Street. I'm sure I left out some people, but I think I've got most of the important gentlemen--and some of them are really fine gentlemen. They're all nice men, but some were more polished than others. Karl Placht — I think I mentioned him in connection with Brentano's. He later became a salesman, represented Button for a great many years. Let's see, Louis Freedman, I told you about. Oh, Jack O'Leary represented Doubleday for a while here; now he's a big man in the head office.

1.25. TAPE NUMBER: XII, SIDE TWO (August 13, 1974)

GARDNER

Today I'd like to talk first about the Southern California Booksellers Association. I know you don't have all the dates on hand. What brought the group together? What sorts of problems brought the group together?

EPSTEIN

Well, the Southern California Booksellers Association was one of those intermittent things that would start up when some occasion presented itself or some emergency came up, such as postage rates or police action about pornography, or — as in the last case — the advertising program called "Cavalcade of Books." That started perking around 1951, and they came around to us — Jack and Frances Case. Jack Case was an advertising man in the city, very well known. He's in his eighties now and lives down near, oh, San Juan Capistrano somewhere, now.* [* Jack Case has since died. — [L.E.]] But he was an Olympic champion hurdler way back around 1912 or '16 — I forget which of the two. A very fine person, he'd been in the advertising business. His wife was Frances Case, a very promotional-minded woman and a very aggressive type of businesswoman. And the two of them came up with the idea of having a television program about books. And they brought it to two or three of us, brought the program to mind. None of us really thought it would go over, but because they were willing to put in their time and effort, we said, well, we would gamble a few hundred dollars each. I believe it was Vroman's of Pasadena, and myself. Bob Campbell, and Fowler, I think, and Walter Martindale. We each put in relative amounts of money—not the same amount, but how much we were willing to risk. There was no profit to us, except that if we got a program, which would be supported mostly by the publishers' advertising allowances, it would do us all good. But we didn't think that the publishers would come across to that extent, to make it feasible and worthwhile for the Cases to put in their time and effort. But they were good promoters and very hard workers, and they got the thing going. And for a couple of years the booksellers, some of us booksellers, put in some money. But to get the backing for the program, they revitalized the Southern California Booksellers Association. Now this is not to be confused with the Southern California Antiquarians. This was the new-book sellers. It got the program started. Jack did a lot of excellent work on it and excellent promotion. They planned it very nicely, and for a while the program went over big. It was new, it had a lot of new faces on it, and it was an interesting program — not for the literary person, necessarily, but for the literate viewer of TV. The "Cavalcade of Books" would have guests on it, usually the authors of the books, or, if it was an unusual book, maybe some outside guest of prominence to review that particular book. The program itself — well, we have a copy of one of their programs here. They would review about four or

five books, and they would have two reviewers. They started off with Georgiana Hardy, who is presently on the school board, retiring next year. She was one of the reviewers. I knew Georgiana for many years, and I knew her husband [Jack] before I knew her. He was a customer of mine when he was a very young lawyer. He was in one of those buildings downtown with the cheaper rent, and he used to come and buy books from us. And I remember when he was first going with Georgiana. And he, poor man, died much too early in his life. She became a widow. We were quite friendly, and whenever a campaign for her came up, why, I did what I could to help her--including furnishing her with a little bit of money; it's the lifeblood of a political campaign. But she was one of the early reviewers. And you notice on this program that I have here, one of the reviewers was Everett Noonan. Well, Everett was one of our salespeople. But he had a flair for the theatrical and had once been a hooper, a minor hooper. He liked to talk to groups. And he was one of the early reviewers--did a good job. It was a field that was entirely new — they had to make their way-- and they built up the program very, very nicely until it reached a peak. And the peak arrived when the publishers would use their advertising allowances for books — instead of to a general program, they switched over to direct ads in the newspapers under the name of some bookstore, such as the Pickwick. I mean, we were responsible for building the program up, we and other booksellers. But in my mind, we were also responsible for its demise, because when we started the program of publicity and advertising for the publishers, they had less money to spend on the "Cavalcade." And the "Cavalcade," to be honest, really became a little monotonous. The format was the same. There was not a great deal of room to vary format, because if they had to cover six, seven, or eight books in a half an hour, there wasn't very much they could do except name the books, tell a little story. And if they gave one book too much time, then the publisher of that book was dissatisfied with it and complained. So they had to be always walking on a tightrope. They served their purpose, and they did a good job. But like so many things, after they'd been around a while, the public gets tired of looking. And also there was the pressure for publishers' money from the Pickwick and all the other booksellers who were now doing more individual advertising. The Pickwick established a formula — Aaron developed that over a period of time, from one step to another. So we sort of drew away a lot of the available money for that "Cavalcade of Books" program. It took a little

while, but the publishers gave it good support for a while. Then it began to drop off a little bit. They were unhappy how much time they got; they were unhappy how their book was treated; they were unhappy how the reviewer reviewed it--or whatever. All kinds of little things can happen in a relationship which is a bought relationship. So the "Cavalcade of Books" was really the prime reason for the revival of the Booksellers Association at that time. It's still going on. They give two dinners a year--a spring dinner and a fall dinner--and the booksellers get together, have a good time. They have a few authors speaking. But it's not a public program at all now. It's good to have the organization available in case something stirs. But without a cause, it's hard to keep an organization together — which you probably know — and sometimes it drags a little bit. And the hard-to-find good officers--those who are most capable, maybe, are too busy. But it's going on. They keep an active organization. We all pay dues, and there's money in the bank to supplement the dinner. They have a good time, and a few drinks. That was '51, '52 when the Cases started that program.

GARDNER

What sort of issues and causes kept the organization together, then, after the "Cavalcade of Books" folded?

EPSTEIN

Just promoting these dinners, and still promotion for the "Cavalcade." And when the "Cavalcade" ceased, why, the organization went on, just to give a couple of dinners a year, really, and get together once in a while in a business meeting and discuss problems. But even those, we haven't been doing too much lately. The dinner is about the only activity that they're having now. The salesmen are invited, publisher's representatives, and usually they have a couple hundred people show up, and about three, four good speakers — authors whose books are presently current — and have a good time. If anything comes up that's dangerous to the book trade, we have an organization that is ready to act if necessary. There have been a lot of problems in the book business, but none of the type that an organization can discuss. The organizations have to be extremely careful what they discuss; we can't discuss discounts. It's against the law.

GARDNER

Because of price fixing.

EPSTEIN

Price fixing. We can't discuss publisher terms. We can discuss things that are wrong--poor packing, or poor shipping, or late shipping, those types of problems — but not anything that relates to the actual cost or sale price of merchandise. So that eliminates a lot of discussion. A lot of that is done, of course, but in the cloakroom, you might say, one to one. You can't talk to two people about it. Even to one, you can't say, "Well, look, if you price your book this price, I'll price mine the same," or, "You quit buying from this man and I'll quit buying; maybe it'll force down his price." Can't talk that.

GARDNER

But does that happen?

EPSTEIN

It happens in all business; of course, it happens. But it's never serious to the extent that: "We should do this," but nobody says, "Let's do this." There's a difference. You can talk in the air: "Publishers are charging us too much money." Or, "Their discount is too small; we should get 43 percent instead of 40." "We should be getting" But nobody actually says, "Well, let's stop buying unless we get 43." Or, "Don't trade with this publisher." There's a line between the legal and the illegal, and we try not to tread across the line . So far there has been only one suit that I remember that the Federal Trade Commission has filed against publishers, and that was when a number of large publishers started publishing library editions. They had been publishing library editions, but they were selling them through wholesalers. There were certain special wholesalers who would buy these library editions, or buy the sheets and put on their own binding. And the publishers adopted a schedule of discounts — every publisher exactly on the same sliding scale. A retail bookseller couldn't buy those books at that discount. He had to be in a certain business and buy certain quantities, and the retail bookseller was practically frozen out of that edition. You've seen them — mostly children's books in heavy bindings for libraries. From the beginning, I recognized it as totally illegal — not that we wanted to handle any of those editions because we never did get a discount on them. But at least, even if we wanted them now,

we couldn't get any discount--or nowhere near the discount that the other people were getting. Well, one of the booksellers — somewhere in Toledo, Ohio, I think — brought suit. He brought suit, for one thing, because he was excluded. Then the libraries got smart, and the libraries brought suit. They collected several million dollars from the publishers. And the publisher was guilty as hell. They were very, very stupid in the way they handled it. And now they're very, very careful what they do about their discount schedules. It has to be all the same to all, and they can't exclude anybody from doing business.

GARDNER

What is the relationship of the Southern California Booksellers to the ABA?

EPSTEIN

Just a very young stepchild.

GARDNER

It is, though. . . .

EPSTEIN

No affiliation. No official affiliation, no.

GARDNER

I see.

EPSTEIN

The American Booksellers Association has no branches .

GARDNER

Oh, I see. So, in other words, a bookstore owner becomes a member of both, really.

EPSTEIN

Right, right. He becomes a member of the local, and then he becomes a member of the national.

GARDNER

As opposed to with the Antiquarians, isn't the chapter related?

EPSTEIN

Yes. The Antiquarians has chapters. The ABA encourages regional groups, but it's not responsible for them. The ABA very much encourages groups to organize-- and they'll sometimes help them organize--but they do not become officially a branch. In other words, a group of ABA members in Southern California can get together and do the things that the ABA might suggest, but they are not a branch of the ABA. They're a regional group of members; they have no official standing. But ABA cooperates. Like, we have a regional meeting of the ABA from time to time. Well, the local members get together, form a committee, and it's practically the same committee as the local Southern California Booksellers Association, practically the same group. But they have no official capacity. The Southern California group of booksellers has no official connection with the ABA. But when necessary, they will do work for the ABA, because they're the same people involved. Practically everyone in the Southern California Booksellers Association is a member of the American Booksellers Association. It's a wise policy for the American Booksellers, the national ABA, to follow, because otherwise they would have to police all these regional things and it would take away from their main aim, what they're doing. I have here a few notes of some of the original people, I here have a copy of the minutes of the August 28, 1952: "A Report of the Reorganization Committee, presented to the August 28, 1952, meeting of the Southern California Booksellers Association. The Reorganization Committee recommends the following . . ." — president, vice-president, and so forth — . . . "these five members will comprise the Board of Directors. The following members are recommended for nomination to these offices: a) President, Louis Epstein; b) Vice-President, Paddy Paddock; c) Secretary, Otis Yost; and d) Treasurer, Lloyd Severe; e) Bob Campbell"--I don't know what his title is. It's something or other.

GARDNER

Where were Paddy Paddock and Otis Yost from? I don't remember those names.

EPSTEIN

Paddy Paddock — I've never considered him really serious as a bookseller. He had a stationery store and bookstore in Glendale. And he carried a stock of

books, but stationery was his principal business. But he's a very aggressive young man--at the time, young. And he talked well and so forth, so they made him an officer. He later became very much involved in Republican politics in Glendale. I don't think he ever ran for office, but he became very political. One time, at a meeting, he started making what most of us thought was a political speech, and we piped him down.

GARDNER

What about Otis Yost? I don't recall that name.

EPSTEIN

Otis Yost at that time was working for Vroman' s .

GARDNER

I notice that announcement is on Vroman' s letterhead, for the record.

EPSTEIN

Yes. Vroman' s was very much involved then. Well, at that time Vroman's was the major wholesaler here. Otis later became a salesman for Harper and moved up to the Bay Area. And he still is. We just saw him here a few months ago at a function, and he was very happy to see me. Of course, Lloyd Severe was very much involved for many, many years. He was involved both in the group and also in the Jack Case program, the "Cavalcade of Books." He later became financially involved in it. He was with Brown's Book Store, in Pasadena, and then left them later; he retired from there, and went to work for Jack Case. See, Frances Case died, and she was one of the principal workers. She had carried at least half of the load of the whole thing. So when she died, Jack had to have some help. Lloyd Severe helped him a lot. Lloyd has helped in everything in Southern California bookselling. He was very dedicated to the book business as a business. And he deserves a lot of credit for keeping this thing going.[Gladys and Lloyd recently had a sixtieth wedding anniversary which Ann and I attended. — [L.E.]] I don't know what else I can tell you about the Southern California Booksellers. They paid their bills. They went along. And we had good support from all the bookstores of Southern California. Let me see what's here. Leslie Hood was very much involved, set up some committees, The Publishers Relations Committee was Leslie Hood, chairman.

He was Vroman's, you know. One time, way back, he was with the Los Angeles News Company; that was many years ago. But Vroman's had a wholesale house, and he ran it. Tough guy, but he was a pretty good bookseller. On the Publishers Relations Committee — Leslie Hood, Walter Martindale, Bob Campbell, Virgil Ruick. I think you heard me mention Virgil before. He was with Fowler's. A very fine man, very fine man. He died much too early. The Publicity Committee was Harry Shelton--he also was one of the owners of Vroman's--and Mrs. [Marjorie] Dysinger of Whittier Book Shop, and Bob Campbell. The Membership Committee is Paddy Paddock, Otis Yost, [Willard] Marriner (Marriner has a bookstore down in the Laguna area somewhere; I don't know whether his bookstore still exists or not), Lee Scott (I think he, too, was a salesman for Vroman's), Mr. [Richard J.] Pick of Pick's Book Shop in San Bernardino. He's long since retired. Well, that gives you pretty much the story of the Southern California Booksellers Association.

GARDNER

Well, maybe next we can talk about your participation in the ABA.

EPSTEIN

Oh, my. I think my wife could tell you probably more about that than I.

GARDNER

How far back does it date, first of all?

EPSTEIN

Membership dates way back, but the participation dates back about thirteen years. Let's see, let's go backwards. Well, my memory for dates has never been good.

GARDNER

Why don't we turn it off for a second. [tape stopped]

EPSTEIN

You asked me about my activities in the American Booksellers Association, and how did they come about. Like all those things, they evolved. Number one, I was active in the local group, and a certain amount of publicity reaches out and gets into the Publisher's Weekly, and the name becomes a little known.

One of the principal things that might have caused the directors of the American Booksellers Association to think of me as a future director was an event that occurred in 1955 which was under the auspices of the American Booksellers Association. It was what they call a regional meeting. They started program meetings in various areas of the country, and all the members of the American Booksellers Association would gather, and they'd have a business meeting for one day or two days. In this instance, I think it was a two-day meeting. And you know, we'd have a dinner, and all the booksellers would get together. And the executive director of the ABA came out, and his secretary, and they'd tell us how to set up the meetings. And they had discussion panels of various topics, I was on one of the panels. And it was a panel pertaining to discounts, and, well, primarily to shipping, receiving, and so forth. A lot of things overlapped, but what we were talking about were the problems the booksellers had with the publishers, that, if they would do certain things — do better bookkeeping, do better reporting — the trade as a whole would benefit. They would benefit just as much as the publishers. The waste of time that lack of system creates — that time wasted, that effort wasted, writing back and forth, not having the invoice on time, and all these many, many problems — poor packing. And I was on one of the panels. Not only was I on one of the panels, but I participated quite a good deal in discussion. And I spoke out. I probably spoke out maybe more than I should have, but I felt very strongly about those things. I expressed my opinion, and I didn't hesitate to criticize. I mean, I tried to make the criticism fair. But you get carried away, apparently. You know, you start building up a case the same as anyone else. But at any rate, I must have left a good impression on the executive director, and George O'Hara, who was at that time one of the salesmen — I think at that time he was with Farrar Rinehart--came to me after the meeting. And he said, "Louis, you did a marvelous job." I was chairman of the panel, and I had participated. He said, "You did a marvelous job with that panel." And he was good friends with Joe Duffy. Duffy was the executive director. And I think he must have spoken to Duffy--and I got along very well with Duffy, too. Duffy also congratulated me on how well I handled myself. By no means am I a speaker, but I speak out when I have to. Now, a few months later, I was invited to be on the board of the American Booksellers Association. I think I started on the board in 1956. And then I stayed on the board. I became an officer, a vice-president, second vice-president, and so forth. Finally, in 1964, I

was elected president. And when I would go back to meetings two or three times a year, go back to New York, the people on the board of the American Booksellers Association — at least the board that I sat on all along — we worked very hard. And we took all the problems very seriously. When I first came on the board, we had very little money; the organization had very little money because the expenses would eat up the dues. We had to keep a permanent office in New York. Well, it's a national organization. The mailings, and whatever — a lot of expenses. And we ran the convention. Our principal source of income was not from dues, but from the profits of the convention. Well, for quite a while the profits of the convention were very slim. But as the book business expanded — during that period between the late fifties or early sixties and the seventies, the book business has expanded tremendously. I don't know if you're aware of that: the paperback explosion, and the best-seller explosion, and whatnot. The total volume of books expanded, and there were a great many more new publishers. So there was more demand for space at our convention. And as the demand for space became greater and the publishers, for a while there, became more affluent, we raised our dues. And the organization began to build up a reserve. By the time I retired as president, we had quite a bit of money — well over \$150,000 in assets, in actual cash assets. So they started doing other things. But speaking of my work on the American Booksellers Association: it was arduous at times. Certain problems would come up with publishers, and certain things, as a trade organization, you're not allowed to do, as I mentioned to you before. And we were just stymied how to act. We had to act as individuals, but if we could spread the word. ... So many individuals started protesting on their own that we solved a lot of problems in a quiet way. One of the nicest things we did was [that we] created the publisher-bookseller relations committee. We created the committee about the third or fourth year I was on the board. And it's amazing how many problems we solved by sitting down on opposite sides of a table — either have a lunch first or dinner afterward — and one to one, friendly basis. Nobody blew their stacks, like you do get up at a panel meeting sometimes. You create an antagonistic feeling. Although there is an antagonism — buyer and seller — always; one always wants to get the best possible deal, one side or the other. Nevertheless, it should not be an antagonism that is total, especially in the book business, because you can only buy Macmillan books from Macmillan, and you can only buy Random House

books from Random House, and they can only sell them to booksellers. And if we take their books and don't push them--hide them in a corner — they know they're not going to sell any books. So they have to keep up a reputation. So there's a mutual necessity for creating a working relationship. And it, to my mind, is such a stupid thing. The problems, one by one, are not major. All together they become major. Well, occasionally there are major problems. Some new publisher appoints a person who has never been in the book business, doesn't understand the book business, and he lays down a set of rules which are totally unfit for the book business. Maybe he came out of the grocery trade or a large manufacturing establishment. One person came out of Singer Sewing Machine, Well, it's a great big company. They manufacture computers and everything. Incidentally, we just recently got a person from Singer Sewing Machine who's now the head of the book division of Dayton-Hudson, a chap by the name of Floyd Hall.

GARDNER

Is that so?

EPSTEIN

So there's an idea what poor Elliot Leonard has to get along with. I'm glad I'm not there. So we formed this committee, and it became one of the most important committees, talking out problems with publishers. Also when I used to go to the conventions--I say "used to"; I've only missed one so far--I used to get a lot of difficulties settled in the aisles, talking to the publishers.

GARDNER

Lobbying.

EPSTEIN

Lobbying. I'd get them aside and talk to them and say, "Look. Listen to me for a minute." And I would draw them a diagram. "You don't want to give me this. This other publisher gives me this, so I do a better job for him. This company gave me advertising allowances, so what happened? We found out that every bookstore in the community benefits by an ad run under my name. The only advantage I get out of the ad is that people who haven't got a regular bookstore who might want to mail in an order will send it to me because my

name is on it. But for that, I do all the work for you with the newspaper. You don't have a thing to do with it. You just give me the copy, give me the money, and we will set it up for you. " And we had to convince them. It took us years to do that. And things of that nature, or shipping charges, we would try to make a standard. And that is the purpose of an organization: to control their own members; to teach their own members; and to create a certain amount of public relations for the trade as a whole, for books; and to support things pertaining to books, like Book Week, National Book Week for libraries-- support libraries, support the National Book Award and certain things of that nature; to fight for favorable postage rates and freight rates wherever we can (we have a representative in Washington); copyright — well, we're not that much concerned with copyright, except there are areas in which the retail bookseller is concerned with copyright. So this was the purpose of the organization, and I learned all those things, gradually. I think I sat on the board for nine years, president for two years, and chairman of the board for two years. So I had that relation over a period of thirteen years. And that thirteen years, I think the book business made its greatest strides in dollar volume. I certainly don't take credit for that.

GARDNER

Just coincidental.

EPSTEIN

The change in the book business. . . . And there were a lot of problems that came up because of it, especially with the new publishers. We had to keep our director — give him directives from the board. It's an important job, sitting on the board of the American Booksellers Association. It's important because it represents such a great number of booksellers, and booksellers are definite assets to the cultural well-being of this country. We tried to educate them to be better booksellers, to be better businessmen. We created a lot of programs that were excellent. Now Joe Duffy has died. He's the guy I worked with. We became very close friends. I showed you a picture of him sitting by the pool, I think. Now they have a new executive director [Raysce Smith], and they're doing very well. And incidentally, Elliot Leonard just completed a two-year term [as president] ; he just left office at the last convention--so that Pickwick has had two presidents in a relatively short period of time.

GARDNER

Which I'm sure is unique among Southern California bookstores.

EPSTEIN

Well, it is unique that there were two so close together from Southern California. And perhaps I shouldn't say it, but the eastern booksellers don't — well, they're less provincial now than they were. But the New England- New York bunch--it was really tough on a westerner. And I was surprised when I was picked for president. You know, you don't politick for it, and I was very pleased, and very proud, and very gratified.

GARDNER

What is the political process by which the president is chosen?

EPSTEIN

The president appoints a nominating committee — on which he does not sit — of three people. And they appoint a man to be president.

GARDNER

Is it usually taken from the board?

EPSTEIN

Oh, yes. I mean, there's no reason why it shouldn't be, because they're the experienced people. For instance, I sat on the board for nine years, which is the maximum you can sit on the board unless you become an officer or president. It's only fair and logical, because to get a man green from the outside--number one, he's got to learn the ropes. It took me maybe two years. Sitting on my first two years on the board, I had to be quiet because I didn't know the background of all the things that led up to what they were talking about. So it takes at least two, three meetings--unless you're very forward--before you step out and say something, unless it happens to be in an area in which you're very professional. We've had our problems on the board. People became unhappy and criticized the ABA for certain things--the way we run our convention.

GARDNER

What are the criticisms?

EPSTEIN

Well, especially newcomers, people who don't understand the purpose of the organization and don't understand the value of the organization, they will join the American Booksellers Association and come to a convention thinking that overnight they'll become book people, that the whole convention will be tied to their desire to learn the basics of bookselling. Well, that's not what the convention is for. One woman in particular wrote a very, very nasty letter to the Publisher's Weekly. She was from Long Beach, incidentally. I was president. And I didn't hear about the letter till just before it was published. The Publisher's Weekly sent a copy to Joe Duffy to get somebody to make a reply. The letter said that she had been in the book business now for a period of about five months, and she'd read about the convention, that the convention was going to give her all kinds of classes in how to sell books, Well, she went to the convention. She said nobody paid any attention to her. She was invited to a first-timers, and she was told that she can stop any director at any time. We announce that: go and ask questions of the publishers who are exhibiting. At any rate, she went on and on in a tirade that the whole thing was run for the publishers: the publishers get the best seats at the dinners, the publishers will only talk to the top-notch booksellers or the largest booksellers, and nobody would talk to her, and the publishers threw parties for everybody, the publishers even hired girls to be hostesses at the parties. Which in itself is okay. Here's a publisher having a big party; he's got to have somebody. But she insinuated they were there for a purpose.

GARDNER

Did they invite her to the parties?

EPSTEIN

Everyone was invited. Everyone registered gets an invitation. The publisher will give them. And even if you're not invited, you see a party going on at those conventions, you walk in. Lord knows how many gate-crashers come to the hotel to get good and drunk at those places. Nobody asks any questions. You just walk in, say "Hi," and grab a drink, and that's all. So you invent something. If a guy's a gate-crasher, he knows how to get around. At any rate,

this woman — it was the most horrible, unjust letter. And so I sat down and wrote a letter back for the ABA. I said, "Look, I've been going to conventions for all these many, many years, since before I was a member of the board. I don't get treated any differently than I was the first time. I used to come in; I'd walk down the aisles. I would learn by asking a question or two and talking to other booksellers. If I needed any help, there's 100 people I could go to and ask for help. Stop anybody." And I said, "In my case, I feel that I've gotten a great deal out of every convention. It's certainly broadened my outlook. I talked to booksellers who were doing this, that, and the other. We'd get up when they'd have panel discussions for two days." I said, "I just don't understand this. And as far as getting along with publishers, accusing the publishers of treating big booksellers better than the small ones," I said, "look, I've been through it all the way up." And I said, "I didn't notice where the publisher treated me any differently when my volume went over a million than they did when my volume was 100,000 or less." And they get criticism like that, all unnecessary criticism. But apparently, that's the end of the glass that some people look through, the wrong end of the telescope. They expect too much. Well, this woman apparently expected to become a full-fledged bookseller in three nights. But she came to a sad end. This is really sad. She died, I think of cancer. I was going to go up to see her, but she went out of business. I met her only once. I met her one time after that. I never met her before that. It was at a place where I couldn't get away to talk to her. It was at an affair. I would have liked to talk to her. But she dropped out of the business anyway. Her whole attitude was wrong. I don't think she'd have succeeded in any business. Well, that's the American Booksellers Association. It's a good organization. Right now it's embarked on a program of teaching professional bookselling — which we wanted to do for many years, but we didn't have the staff nor the money. Before Joe Duffy died, they made a deal with the Association of College Bookstores. They had a program going, so they combined the two programs, and this was very successful. They've been spending a lot of money on it. As a matter of fact, I think last year the ABA came up with almost zero profit because they spent so much money on the school and other programs. As I told them, they'd better not go back to operating off the fat we helped build up. It's dangerous. True, I mean that. But I think it's in good hands now.

1.26. TAPE NUMBER: XIII, Side One (August 13, 1974)

GARDNER

You were about to tell me about the chap who is president now of ABA.

EPSTEIN

Yeah. Dick Noyes of Colorado Springs, another Western man. I remember when he came on the board--very intelligent, a relatively younger man. He's forty-two or three. And he and his wife run a very nice store in Colorado Springs. We visited them just a couple of weeks ago. We were in Denver. We had been in Denver before, and he heard about it, and he pushed me into the ground because I didn't go the extra hundred miles to visit him. I promised him next time I was in Denver I would visit him, so we did. And we had a very nice time with him. It's an excellent store for a small community. And he runs it very well, carries a very good stock, and [he's] very businesslike. And financially he's doing extremely well. He mentioned the kind of lease he had, and it's out of this world. Rents now for most booksellers are extremely high--well, like all rents, I suppose. But he has a very beautiful lease, which he's had for some time, and which goes on for some time. But we had a nice visit with him. He's aggressive enough to say what he has to say and recognize truth from fiction. He'll make a good president.

GARDNER

I know how attached you always were to Pickwick. So what were some of the things that you did during your term as president of ABA that took you away from Pickwick?

EPSTEIN

What other things? Well, the organization has a program to follow. They have problems come up, membership problems, finances. Problems come up with the publishers — how much to spend for this, that, or the other, how much to spend, for instance, to start the school.

GARDNER

Did you do much traveling around the country, things like that? What were some of the things, during your two years?

EPSTEIN

For me, getting away from Pickwick was always inconvenient. But by the same token, I always did what I had to do. We went to board meetings twice a year. I never liked New York, and I still don't, so if we had a board meeting on Friday, I would leave Thursday, get there Thursday evening, spend the night; and immediately after the board meeting on Friday, by six o'clock, I was on the plane on the way home. And then when I was on the Executive Committee, then I would have to come in for an extra day because we would meet a day before the board. So I would have to spend two days. But that's the most time I would spend in New York. Occasionally there would be something else that would keep me in New York an extra day. But then they had regional meetings, two a year, in one part of the country or another; and we adopted a system where the president of the organization would go to that meeting with the director. Originally, the first regional meetings we had, only the director would come out with a secretary to help run the thing. Later on, they decided, on my suggestion, that it would be very nice if the president would appear at those meetings. And I was not president at the time, but I thought it would be good for the organization, for the people who don't come to the conventions, to meet the president. We'd get a little extra publicity out of it, and I thought the organization would become more cohesive--which turned out exactly right. So we had the regional meetings, and I had to go to those. I used to take Ann to most of those. Those used to take two or three days. Then there's correspondence back and forth, and telephoning back and forth, with the problems that occur, membership problems and such. It took a great deal of time. But, look, it's something you want to do, and you do it, and I certainly don't regret it. I enjoyed it. All the things in life you do interfere with something else you might do. Some you like to do better, you do better than others. I enjoyed the work in ABA, enjoyed it very much. And I think it did a great deal for me because I was not much of a traveler. I never got around too much. It helped broaden my outlook tremendously--I mean, when I talked with booksellers. Some of them had businesses that had been established for fifty to a hundred years. And I always thought they were almost superhuman. And I discovered that in some respects they were not as good booksellers as I, so it gave me a great deal more confidence, built me up and encouraged me to do bigger things which I might have been fearful of doing. With confidence comes the will to do, as a rule--to expand. As long as we had only one store,

we expanded our business within that store by doing things we might have been afraid to do had I not seen the world more — if you follow what I mean. So the ABA did a great deal for me, and I think I did a little bit for it.

GARDNER

Bob Campbell was president of ABA after the late forties?

EPSTEIN

Bob Campbell was president, but, oh, at least twenty years before I.

GARDNER

How come he was participating in it then, and you even really a part?

EPSTEIN

Well, Bob always has been a joiner. And I wouldn't say that he participated in that as a joiner, but it was a different kind of an organization then. It was almost a closed club. I'm not knocking Bob, but that's the way the organization was. Their goals were nowhere near the goals that we had during the time I served on the board. And even now the goals are totally different. And the book business was different in those days. I pointed out a picture to you there where there were three past presidents, including Bob Campbell, and that was my first attendance at a convention. And sure enough, fifteen or so years later, I became a past president. So now that whole picture is four past presidents.

GARDNER

What other Southern California people have been presidents? Are you, Elliot Leonard, and Bob Campbell the only ones?

EPSTEIN

Well, there's a chap here who was president, I think, even before Bob Campbell, when he was in business in New York. But he was not anybody I would consider a westerner.

GARDNER

He was not a Southern California bookseller.

EPSTEIN

But for the record, he lives out here now; he was a salesman out here after he left New York. He left the retail business and went to work for a publisher. Karl Placht. German — very nice person. He was sent out here by Brentano's to run the Brentano stores. When they tried to break in here many years ago — which is a totally different Brentano's than it is now. That's all I can recall.

GARDNER

So you're the only ones. Well, I think that covers ABA then.

EPSTEIN

Well, I think so. One can go on and talk about it endlessly. It's an important organization for the book trade. The membership has grown tremendously. Their services to members and some of their publications are very helpful. They publish a handbook which saves a tremendous amount of time for book dealers, an informational handbook. And then they have access to other information if they need it, from the home office. They provided all these extra services. Then they have something which is called Single Copy Order Plan-- SCOP--which was devised during the time I was on the board. I helped plan it, and I'm certainly not alone in it. It was a mutual effort. It allows a bookseller to order one copy of a book at a much better discount than he ever had before. But this is what he has to do: he has to send a check with the order, and the order is shipped directly to the customer. So just one transaction: no bookkeeping for the publisher, no bookkeeping for the bookseller. So that made a very unprofitable transaction a little bit more profitable. And it's to the great benefit of the smaller bookstores, because the larger booksellers, the real large stores, can't use it. They can if they set up a special system, and some of them have, where they have a special check drawn. You have to have a special checking account, a special type of check drawn. Large corporations don't like that. They don't like somebody in some department, or in some branch, signing checks. So they don't use that. It's a boon to the smaller bookseller. Also to the publisher: they can give a better service to the bookseller, and they're no money out. They got their money right with the order. A number of other things, they've developed.

GARDNER

Well, I'd like to get back to Pickwick for a while.

EPSTEIN

That again?

GARDNER

Well, we covered, really, up until the early fifties. I don't think we discussed the part from 1952 or '53, say, up until the time of your retirement. The first thing, to get into it gently: I wanted to ask you about those newspaper articles that you did for the Daily News, the "Mr. Pickwick" column. How did you get into that?

EPSTEIN

Oh, that. Scott O'Dell was the literary editor of the Daily News at the time. And we used to meet at cocktail parties, or book affairs of one kind or another, and we talked. We always discussed the book business. One evening, we were standing somewhere over a drink--or sitting, whatever — and he said, "I want you to do a column for me." It was a total shock to me. I said, "Look, I'm a bookseller. I'm not a writer." I said, "I'm not a literary person at all." "Well," he said, "Write the way you talk." "Oh," I said, "come on, Scott," I said, "I just don't know how to write. And besides, where will I find the time?" He said, "Well, you'll find the time." He said, "You just write about books, and book people, whatever." And you know, he just kept after me. He called me up on the telephone: "What about it, Louis? When are you going to give me a column?" So finally I said, "Well, you really are challenging me, because I've never written anything. I'm not sure that I know English grammar well enough to write a proper paragraph." "Well, we'll take care of that." So finally, we made this deal. I would never review books--that was not my forte. I would talk about the book business. But he had to promise me that if the column stank, he wouldn't publish it; and number two, he would see to it my grammar was at least half-decent. He promised. And you know, we started writing that column, and it just kept going. And I learned something. I learned that term "deadline." And I've learned from that. I'd heard before and I've heard since from people who write the newspapers or anything with deadline--magazines or whatever — that you never do anything until the last deadline. I had to mail my column on a Monday so it would get there by Wednesday. He had to have

it by Wednesday. And I would never sit down to write the column till midnight Sunday, [laughter] I may have had a few notes scribbled out, and many times Ann would come to me and say, "Why don't you go to bed?" And there I'd be poking out that column. I wouldn't go to bed until two, three, four o'clock. I'm not a very good typist, and I'm a slow thinker, and so it used to take me about two, three, four hours. Sometimes I'd have a very nice subject, and I'd go through it. It was really interesting work (except that it was work for me-- writing is not easy for me) because I had a chance to mention things that the average person doesn't read about — authors coming through, or what other booksellers were doing. I made it a point to talk about other booksellers and their business. It wasn't a hogging column for the Pickwick at all. Occasionally I would get a fan letter, which was wine for me. And then really I became tired. So I begged off, and he said, "Well, do it every other week, and I'll get Leslie Hood of Vroman's to do it one week." And we went along that way for a while. And the paper sort of petered out, too. But it was fun. It was something I had never anticipated ever being.

GARDNER

We've mentioned briefly your son Aaron's participation at Pickwick, but I'd like to talk about it in more detail because I think it's really important.

EPSTEIN

Well, Aaron had the hardest job of anybody in the business — he had to work for his father.

GARDNER

How did he come to it in the first place?

EPSTEIN

Well, he graduated UCLA business administration course. He went to work for Sears Roebuck. He was there about six months. And he learned a great deal about merchandising there. Aaron gets enthusiastic about something he likes, and he liked it there. So there was this business of the Pickwick growing, and he starting out on a career. Which way to turn? Well, I always told my boys, both Eugene and Aaron, that I would love to have them in the business, but never to go into business just to please me. If they had other things to do, go

ahead and do them, as long as they did a good job. Well, then he finally decided to come into business. We taught him, little by little. In those days, we had old books. We started him in with that, and then he went into the new-book business in various departments of the store, and then to advertising. He sold books on the floor. He worked hard; he worked just as hard as any of the rest of them. He didn't want to work any less hard than the rest. And he learned the business, but he fell into the groove. His job became promotion; he liked that. And he did an excellent job of promotion. Buying was done by myself, and then he started to participate in the executive area. I ran the whole thing. I was the buyer; I ran the floor, with the help of Stackhouse and a couple of others. But I was mixed into everything. I had to hire the bookkeeper, and I had to do the executive work, and we got together for planning sessions. And gradually I tried to trim off a lot of that. And I did, to Aaron — well, some of it to Stackhouse, but Stackhouse was involved in remainders. He worked in planning and other areas, but his main interest was remainders. At one time, when we had old books, he was in charge of that. Aaron fell into the open area of promotion. And he did an excellent job of that. That continued more and more as the business grew, as we opened branches. He had more and more to promote. And he set up the advertising department. He hired Nick Clemente, who's still there. (They wanted Nick to go back to Minneapolis, but he said he didn't want to live in Minneapolis. He said he came out from New York to live in California. He said he wouldn't go. So they made a special dispensation for him. And one of these days he may lose his job because he won't go to Minneapolis. They may decide, "Well, heck, if you won't come here, then we don't need you." But at any rate, at least for the present. . . .) Aaron hired him; Aaron set up the basics of it. All the Pickwick ads you see around here emanate from Aaron's policy--he was the one, together with me, of course--of putting the pressure on the publisher to try the experiment: "Just give us one ad--let's try it and see what happens--on a co-op basis." They were very, very reluctant to come out here with co-op money. They would spend it in New York on the New York Times. Well, New York Times goes all over, and it's nowhere solidly. And he was the one who kept writing letters, and I kept putting pressure on the salesmen to tell their sales managers. And little by little we got one, then we got two, then we got another one, then we got to the point where they'd want an ad--they'd call us: would we please run an ad? Mostly that was Aaron's work. So he participated

greatly in that. He participated in many other things--I mean, payrolls, and planning of money, and this, that, and the other, what to do with money. He actively participated. Well, we sat down and we talked these things out. But that was his strong forte. And I kept on buying. And this went on along, and we started expanding. I mentioned how we managed the first branch?

GARDNER

No .

EPSTEIN

I thought I told you that.

GARDNER

I don't think so.

EPSTEIN

Well, that is an interesting story. I don't know if it has any historical value. We got a phone call from Mr. [Robert E.] Getz of the May Company. Bob Getz is the son of the Getz who had the Union Bank. He's the grandson of Kaspere Cohn. Did we mention Kaspere Cohn before?

GARDNER

Well, we talked about this off the tape.

EPSTEIN

Well, to digress. People always interest me, sometimes in an area which is far different than the profession. Bob Getz, number one, we formed a very nice friendship. Occasionally I call him up and either have him buy me a lunch or I'll buy him a lunch. Neither of us are too poor to buy a lunch for ourselves, but it's a starting point. "You owe me a lunch." So at any rate, people interest me, and the Jewish community interests me. Well, Kaspere Cohn — you will find in any book of the history of Los Angeles — was an early pioneer here. He had a retail store, supplies and retail goods which he sold to ranchers and others who would come in. And his particular group of followers were the sheepmen, shepherders . And, you know, the shepherders go away for six months at a time. So they would, number one, buy their stores from him, their supplies, whatever; and they would leave their money with him while they were away.

And then they'd draw on it. If they needed something, they might send somebody after it with a note. They'd draw on it. And so in effect he became their banker. And from that grew a bank. And from that bank grew the Union Bank. And he became a wealthy man. And I don't want to forget, also, that from that man grew the Kaspare Cohn Hospital, which was on Whittier Boulevard, east of Indiana Street. I think it's still there, but being used for something else. And from the Kaspare Cohn Hospital grew the Cedars of Lebanon Hospital. And the Cedars of Lebanon are now the Cedar-Sinai organization. So you see the direct chain of philanthropy from Kaspare Cohn. By no means was he the only philanthropic person in Los Angeles, but he was one of the Jewish philanthropists who became philanthropists after they made money-- with the Hellmans, and the Newmarks, and the Lazards. That whole early Jewish community here was mixed so well with the regular community, with the general community. Well, Bob, to get back. . . . How this relates to Pickwick, whoever listens will often wonder. You'll have to call me "the Rambler," the way I ramble all over the place, from Jewish history to the May Company and Pickwick Bookshop branches. At any rate, Bob Getz is the grandson of Kaspare Cohn.

GARDNER

No longer Jewish, I assume.

EPSTEIN

Yes and no. Certainly not active, but with his background, how can he escape? His mother was married to Ben Getz and she had been a Cohn. He was with the Union Bank. But when they brought in the new management at the Union Bank a few years ago, he took exception to something or another--which is not unusual, you know. So he left the bank, and he got a job at the May Company as the vice-president for real estate — May Company of Southern California. Yeah. I think it's only Southern California. Now he's semi-retired. Although he was Southern California, he traveled all over the country for them. We got a call one day. This was when? Just about '64. Would I be interested in opening a store in a shopping center? So I said, no, no. So he said to me, "Well, you answered that so casually, I'm not sure you know what I'm talking about." "Well," I said, "You asked me if I wanted to open a store in a shopping center." He said, "Yes." "And I said, no." And he said, "I don't usually

get such a casual and definitive answer." He told me who he was. I had no ideas of expanding and opening another store. Oh, occasionally we talked about it, but we were so busy. We were working so hard with what we had. Aaron was up to his neck, and I was. He said, "Well, maybe you don't know what's happening in the retail trade." And I said, "That's probably correct. I have my nose to the grindstone here. I know what's happening in the book business." So he said, "Well, I've never run across a guy like you. If I could explain to you, I'm sure you would be interested. I'll call you again. You might be more receptive." And sure enough, a week later, he called me again; and he said, "You know, I've been thinking about you." He had a very friendly voice, pleasant. He said, "I've been thinking about you, and you worry me." He said, "I know your business. There's a specific reason I'm calling you, because you run a good business. But I've never seen a businessman that didn't want to get ahead, improve his business and create more business." "Well," I said, "that may be; but the book business is a very jealous business, and it takes all my time. And to expand it. ..." "Well," he said, "look. I'm a customer of yours. Will you do me the favor of coming down to my office? I can't bring what I want to show you with me. And let me explain what we're doing, what's happening in the retail-book business as regards shopping centers. And then you might be interested." I told him my son and I were working very hard. He said, "Bring your son with you and anybody else you want to," So I said, "Well, if you put it on that basis--a customer asks me a favor, a courtesy--I certainly will come." So we showed up at his office, and he shows us this whole plan of this great big shopping center out here in the Valley, the first one in the Valley. And explains all these things, and he says how many hundreds of dollars worth a square foot of business can be done in these stores, what's happening in shopping centers in other parts of the country, how this is the coming way of doing business. He still wasn't making too much of an impression on us because there was no real desire on our part to expand. Money wasn't the principal thing, at the moment, that we were thinking about; it was how much more work it was going to be. That was worrying us. Well, he went on and told us, explained to us all these things. We still weren't too impressed. About a week later, he called us--could he come over and bring us a small set of plans? By that time, we recognized him as a nice person and a genuine person who had a real desire to have us in there. He gradually broke down our idea of not expanding. He turned us over to "maybe we'll expand, if the thing is right."

And then it was his job to sell us the idea of taking a store, with the hopes of making x number of additional dollars. And he went on and told us that we could do half a million dollars worth of business at least, or at least \$350,000 worth of business the first year.

GARDNER

Was this Topanga?

EPSTEIN

Topanga Plaza, yeah. I said, "Okay, I'll listen. How do we do that?" "Well," he said, "Fine. You know how to run a bookstore. I don't have to tell you how." "That part is right. But what's the mechanics of it? What do we pay you? How much money do we have to put in for fixtures and things like that?" "Okay, fine." "And then, where in the thing is this thing going to be?" Well, he got us that far, and he was telling us that we would do \$300,000 worth of business-- we would do \$100 a square foot. \$350-, \$400-, \$500,000. Actually there was no limit. He says, "Look, I'll take you to shopping centers where the stores are doing fantastic." And this is true. I'd begun to hear about these things. I'd never been in a shopping center. So we sit down with a plan, and he picks out a 20- X 100-foot store. He said, "I want you to take this store." I said, "That's only 20 X 100. Bob, that's only 2,000 square feet. If I do \$100 a square foot, which is very high for books, I'll do \$200,000." I said, "I don't need a \$200,000 business. It would take too much of our time. And if I make 10 percent, that's \$20,000, and I'll have to give the government \$10,000. So for \$10,000 I don't want to be bothered." So he sort of looked at me. He could recognize my arguments. "Well," he said, "what do you want?" He was sort of exasperated. So I pointed at that store at the corner. I said, "I want 40 feet right at this corner." He said, "You can't have it." I said, "Why?" He said, "You can't have it." He said, "I can't give you that space. The place is spoken for by other people." I said, "It doesn't show on the map that anybody's rented it yet." He said, "You don't understand. I just can't give it to you." I said, "Okay, Bob, thanks very much. I don't need a little bit of business. I struggled all my life to make a little bit of money, and I finally made it, and I'm above that now. I don't want to go back to that." So he said, "You're the most impossible man." I said, "Bob, look. I want a place where I can do a lot of business. That's exactly what you told me. That's why I'm here. But I can't take a small store. I

wouldn't know how to run a small store." [tape stopped] So we fought back and forth. We left that day, and he was angry with me. I wasn't overly happy about it either, because I didn't want a small store. A small store would be difficult for us to run. We called back, or — I forget — Andy, Aaron, called him or I called him. So he called back and he said, "Well, maybe we'll have to get together. Come on down to the office." So I went down there. He said, "What the hell's so magic about that 40 feet right on that corner?" I said, "Nothing magic. I'll take 42 feet. I'll take 38 feet. But the magic 40 — I had to give some area. But I don't want a small store. I don't want a 2,000-square-foot store. I want a 5,000-square-foot store." (It was 40 X 120.) So we fought back and forth, and he finally gave it to me. We got an excellent lease; we got excellent terms. We finally opened the store, and it took off like a rocket. In the first year we did over \$500,000--first full twelve months. Over \$600,000. The store was doing well over a million, until they opened another shopping center in Northridge. That sort of cut the business off that center. But now it's building back again.

GARDNER

Another Pickwick in Northridge?

EPSTEIN

Well, there is another Pickwick there now, but there wasn't when they first opened.

GARDNER

Oh, it just pulled from the shopping center.

EPSTEIN

Yeah. Shopping centers steal business from each other. But now Topanga's building back. I think they're back to over a million dollars at one store--4,800 square feet. A very interesting story comes as an aftermath. Of course, he was very pleased, and I was very pleased. And then we were sold, of course, on shopping centers. I had occasion to speak to him about some mechanical thing — which was not in his department, but the department which was supposed to take care of it wasn't taking care of it. And I couldn't get any action, so I called him. I explained to him what it was. He said, "I'll take care of it for you."

And I said, "Are you opening any more shopping centers?" So he said, "You see, now you're wanting to go into shopping centers." "Well," I said, "Why not? We found out it's a good business. We thank you for breaking our head to try to get us in there." So he said, "Well, there are all kinds of shopping centers. You can get very hurt." He said, "Maybe we ought to have lunch together." I said, "Okay, come down, we'll go to Musso's for lunch." So during the lunch we talked about a lot of things. And he said to me, "You know, you had me over a barrel." I said, "Is that so?" He said, "Louis Epstein had the May Company and Warner Brothers" — you know that shopping center is owned by the two of them. May Company and Warner Brothers. I said, "Louis Epstein had the May Company and Warner Brothers over a barrel? I'd like to hear about this." He said, "Yes." He said, "I was determined to have a bookstore in that center. I felt a bookstore was for the good of the mix of the tenants. But," he said, "there's only one bookstore that I would have." He said, "You have no idea how many bookstores I've turned down. I've turned down a chain from Minneapolis" — which was Dayton, Dalton — "and local dealers." He said, "I've turned down twelve or more booksellers that wanted to come in. But there's only one that I wanted. And that was your store, because I knew your merchandise, I know your store, I've been a customer there for years." He said, "For that location, all the other people on the committee who were working on the center to help rent it — we never give a location like that to a local dealer. We give it to some chain that follows us all over the country." May Company has a lot of shopping centers all over the country." He said, "I took a beating — you have no idea — by putting you in there." I said, "Is anybody unhappy about it now?" He said, "No. Nobody's unhappy. We are not unhappy. But we have a lot of unhappy people in the chains that said, 'How come you gave that location to a small merchant instead of giving it to us? We follow you all over. Where's he going to help you?'" "Well," I said, "We may go with you." And since then, we've been into four of their centers, But that was how the first Pickwick expansion came about. Of course, Aaron was involved in all the negotiations, and so forth. And then we opened at San Bernardino; we opened in Bakersfield; we opened Carlsbad; we opened San Diego. San Diego is another deal that Bob Getz insisted that I take.

GARDNER

Where in San Diego is it?

EPSTEIN

Mission Valley Center. He had a Ford [Automobile] salesroom in the center, and it doesn't belong in a center. So he was waiting for them to give up their location. They negotiated them out of there. He called me up and he said, "Louis, move right in." And we got to the point that we didn't even have to talk terms. He knew exactly what he wanted to charge me, and he knew exactly what I wanted to pay, and it was a handshake deal. Somebody drew up the lease, and it always worked out. If anything came up, there was no fighting, no arguments, no threats of lawsuits. We dealt with other people that--oh, just horrible. One man in particular. This man in particular went as far as to cut off a piece of our signature and paste it onto somewhere else. If that's not dirty. . . . And we caught him at it, fortunately. He did that to impress an insurance company that I, personally, was insuring the leases, which was not so. We're incorporated. So this expansion went on, and the book business generally kept expanding. In spite of the fact that we opened several stores around us in the Valley, we thought we would lose a lot of business by opening in the Valley. I thought we'd lose at least 10, 15 percent of our business. Stackhouse thought so; Aaron thought so. We gained so many customers there, and some of our customers would buy books in both places. But our volume kept growing even in Hollywood, kept right on growing — not quite as fast, but then it started perking up again. And then the Valley just kept growing and growing and growing.

GARDNER

What was your competition in the Valley at that time? There really weren't any major bookstores, were there?

EPSTEIN

No, there were no major bookstores, but there were several small ones. I don't even remember now who they were. There was Lewis, but Lewis wasn't competition. Lewis is still operating, but he had a different type of business entirely. He sells teacher's books and teaching aids and things of that nature. But there were several little bookstores. They survived. And since then a number of others have opened up and are doing fairly well. A personal bookshop can compete with a large chain anytime — if they're properly financed to begin with. Where the personal small bookshops opening break

down is in underfinancing. They invest in their original stock, and they have to wait so much time to get some of it back that they have a hard time keeping up with it. And they have to build up their inventory, especially on a rising market of prices. So from there on, we just kept branching out till Dayton-Hudson came in and asked to buy us out.

GARDNER

How many stores did you have at the time that Dayton-Hudson first approached you?

EPSTEIN

We had seven operating and three on the boards.

GARDNER

Were they the first chain to contact you about purchase?

EPSTEIN

Yes.

GARDNER

And at that point, there was not yet the trend, was there?

EPSTEIN

Not quite, no. No. There were several people that had two or three or four stores. Lew Lengfeld had a number of stores out here. He has Hunter's, you know. And the Hoyt people — Walden — they had a few stores. They had quite a number of stores scattered around, but they hadn't come into this market yet. You know, the Walden is now owned by Broadway.

GARDNER

Weren't they originally in Arizona, or something like that?

EPSTEIN

No, originally they were from New England, and then they hit a lot of college towns in the East. They were branching out, but their business started in a different way. They had a lot of department-store concessions. They had, oh, I don't know, 100 or more of those — 150. But they're usually very small. Then

they started opening up stores. And then, I guess, the Broadway, seeing what happened to us, decided they better get into that business. So they bought the Walden chain.

GARDNER

Of course, Broadway's gone through tremendous expansion, too. It's now tied up with Hale.

EPSTEIN

Yes. Now the whole name is changed. The corporate name is Carter-Hawley . While we were concluding our deal with Dayton-Hudson, Bob Getz and I were talking about something. "Louis, is it too late to talk to you about selling your store?" He said, "It's supposed to be a secret. I happen to know that you've got a deal going." "Well," I said, "I would hate to disturb it now." "Well," he said, "I can understand that." But I don't know, maybe I should have disturbed it, because I think I would rather be connected up with the May Company group than the others. Not that they haven't treated me fairly, but I think May Company might have created a different type of chain, much sooner. Now, they combine the Pickwick stores with the Dalton stores. It's a separate corporation called Dayton-Hudson Booksellers. The Pickwick name does not go any further north than Fresno. All the stores in the West, in my opinion, should have been Pickwick stores because the name is so well known out West. But no, they decided they wanted the Dalton name. Now they're talking of eliminating the Pickwick name altogether.

GARDNER

Is that so?

EPSTEIN

Well, over a period of time, because they want to do national advertising. [The Pickwick name is definitely being phased out. The Mr. Pickwick logo has been dropped from all use, and all the ads are now B. Dalton, with Pickwick below. Soon Pickwick will be in smaller type and a little later not mentioned at all. All the new stores in this area have their signs as B. Dalton with a tiny line Pickwick. So save all your old Pickwick bookmarks. In a hundred years they will be collector's items. — [L.E.]]

1.27. TAPE NUMBER: XIII, Side Two (August 13, 1974)

GARDNER

The next item is the one we just left off on the other side, and that's the moment that Dayton-Hudson approached you with interest in buying Pickwick. Was that the first time that anyone had approached you with something like that?

EPSTEIN

Yes. That was the first time anybody approached us to buy. Oh, over the years, every once in a while, I'd get discouraged, and I'd say, "Well, I'm going to sell out." One time, Walter Martindale thought of buying us. Another time a group of actors and writers were going to buy us out. One of their agents came around to see us, and we progressed quite a bit toward negotiations. They offered a good round sum of money for that time — the business, of course, later became worth much more than that--and we actually started negotiations. And then they began to nibble away on their offer, and we dropped that. I mean, there never was any real necessity for me to sell, but every once in a while I'd get discouraged about something or other, or tired, or the whole situation would be overwhelming. But it would always pass off, and I'd get back to my normal again, so we'd discuss things. The period of which I'm talking about now, we already had seven stores going and three on the drawing board. And it was getting quite a problem for us. We were expanding very rapidly. We had not yet used any outside capital, but we could see in the very near future, if we kept expanding, we would have to. And I always dreaded that. I always dreaded having to go to the bank. We never borrowed money from a bank at any time we were in business. Even when we expanded our real-estate area, we had enough cash money to make a down payment. [tape stopped] As I say, we could see finance problems coming ahead. Not that we couldn't handle them--we had ample assets on which to borrow, but borrowing didn't ever appeal to me, as I said. And to be absolutely honest about the whole matter, I was never cut out to be a top-notch executive; I am the kind of an operator who always liked to do things himself, or have his finger in everything. And I could see problems for myself and problems in organization that we were not familiar with — which might turn out to be very difficult to handle. And then our ambitions were never that

very, very great. The assets of the corporation had grown to a very, very sizable sum of money, dollars, in value. Well, just about that time, we had a visitor come from Dayton-Hudson — their manager of their whole chain [Dick Hagen] They had the Dalton chain, which they had started a year before out of Minneapolis, and they had about four or five stores at the time. And they were trying to get leases in this area. We knew that they were trying to find leases in this area, and some of the developers told them, "Well, what do we need you for? We've got a good operator in Southern California that does excellent volume, brings us good rents, pays his bills on time, gives us no problems. Why should we give you space?" And they were turned away from a couple of shopping centers with just that type of talk. So I suppose they did the next best thing they could do: they came to look to see what it was, probably with the idea, well, "If you can't beat them, join them"-- that type of philosophy. Which is strictly all right. So this chap came in one day. He introduced himself, and he wanted to know if he could look around. I said, "I'd be happy to have you look around." I mean, any visiting bookman, I was very proud to show him around — a little bit of boastfulness in my nature. I showed him around, and [he was] very, very impressed. He asked if I would tell him the volume. I said, "We have no secrets. We do x number of dollars in this store, x number of dollars in that store." And he went away quite impressed. The following week I got a thank-you note from him, and the following week I got a letter that the vice-president of the company, one of the Dayton brothers [Kenneth], was coming out here. .And he had been told about the store; he would like to see it. So I said, "Fine. Send him out. Have him drop in. I'd be glad to have him drop in." So I showed him around. He was very nice, very impressed. He thanked me. A few days later I got a nice formal thank-you note from him, a very formally polite and--company manners, you might say. And by the time he left--and from the kinds of questions that he asked me, the kinds of things that he wanted to discuss — I got an impression that maybe it might be just more than sight- seeing. The impression was confirmed a week later when they said that the other brother [Bruce Dayton], the president of the company, would like to come out and see it. So, obviously, we told him he could, and said we'd be very happy. So he came out. We showed him around, and he, of course, asked kind of other questions.

GARDNER

And they still hadn't said anything to you?

EPSTEIN

No, no. But by the time the second brother came around — the president—I knew that it was more than just curiosity to see. He knew by that time that I probably understood that. I showed him around, then we went to lunch. When we came back from lunch, he said, "Well, Louis, you must be guessing pretty well what might be in our minds." I said, "Yes. I didn't at first, but by the time I was through talking with Bruce I gathered there might be some interest other than just viewing." He said, "Well, to be very honest with you, we've tried to find out as much as we could about the Pickwick, and we could hear nothing but the nicest things in the world. We talked to publishers in New York, and they said you have A-1 credit, you're a great guy, you're probably the best bookman in the world." I tell you, he started building me up to the sky. I said, "Well, it's hard to live up to the reputation you're bringing me." And so he said, "Would you be interested?" "Well," I said, "I'm a businessman; I'll listen." So from there on. ... He said, "Well, we'd like to send some people out here to compare books and try to find some evaluation." And then from there on, it progressed by meetings between their representatives and our accountant, their accountant. And we got together and thrashed out a deal. And they bought it.

GARDNER

What was the deal? Or is that. . . ?

EPSTEIN

Well, I don't think I should mention exactly, but it was satisfactory to us. The figures were satisfactory. And what happened afterward, good or bad, is not their fault. We took a lot of stock and the stock went way down, as all stocks have. Maybe theirs probably went down a little more than most, because they started that expansion program. See, Dayton-Hudson was only in Minneapolis. They were the main department-store chain in the Minneapolis area. And even there they had only the main store and, I think, two branches. And then they bought Hudson's of Detroit, and that was a great drag. It was at one time one of the finest stores in the country, one of the biggest — probably the biggest. And their bigness is now a detriment because they have this

tremendous building in downtown Detroit and downtown Detroit is probably no better than downtown Los Angeles. Business no longer goes there--a certain type of business. But they've made a turnaround there. But they've expanded in the outside areas, and they're doing as well as other department stores are doing. But because of the tremendous costs they run into, they used up a lot of money. I don't want to criticize the top operation of Dayton-Hudson, but I know in the book area, they were very slow in moving it in the right direction. Had they left it to, say, Stackhouse, Aaron, Elliot, or myself, they would have started making the money they're making now three years sooner, four years sooner. But no, in spite of the fact that they built me up as the wisest man in the book business, they never got around to making their stores like the Pickwick stores till just about two and a half years ago. Now they have these running ladders, books from floor to ceiling, major large stocks. The original plan, the Dalton plan, was to have a minimum of stock. And I'm not telling any secrets, and I don't tell this in any derogatory sense except to compare experience with nonexperience. When they started a chain of bookstores, they hired no one, not one single person who had ever been connected in any way with the book business--retail books, wholesale books, publishing, libraries, nothing. They took a man out of their lingerie and hosiery department and told him to start a chain of bookstores. And he spent a year going around Europe and everywhere. He came back with the idea, sat down with an architect, and they built almost museum type of things with a minimum of stock. My first sight of one of those stores was in Minneapolis at Southdale shopping center, which they own. And they took me there to show me, when we first went to Minneapolis. Aaron was with me. I was taken to the store, and the manager of all the stores [Dick Hagen] then showed me around--back and forth, basement and everything. They had 7,200 square feet of space. Now, to a person who doesn't know the book business, or merchandising, or almost any other type of business--you don't take 7,200 square feet of space to do a minimum of business. If you take space, you take it with the idea of filling it with merchandise, salable merchandise, and doing the maximum possible of business. So they had this 7,200 square feet of space, and I could see at a glance that the stock was nowhere near adequate. The shelves were poorly laid out. The store was totally impossible to run as a quick merchandising business. They had an \$800 desk for you to sit down and look at your book at with a chair right towards the middle of the front of the

store. And at the entrance to the store they had a \$1,200 globe. Now, how many \$1,200 globes are sold in the United States in a year? Maybe some large corporation will buy one for their offices, but just for that one--and in the store right at the entrance, instead of leaving all their front with the most possible glass, they purposely closed off the glass on one-third of their front--to sell books, which need utmost exposure, they cut off one-third. As I said before, this man had an idea of making their stores look like fine drawing rooms. Well, people who come to shopping centers are not that kind of buyers. It would be forbidding to Mrs. Jones walking by, shopping for kids' shoes, to even look into a store like that. She would never come in; she'd be afraid. Well, anyway, on the way out of that store, the man said he has only \$65,000 worth of stock in there. That proved what I had been thinking. And he said, "We hope to reach \$300,000 this year." And there he had 7,200 square feet. After we walked out of that store, he was telling me this, so I said, you give me that store, and I'll give you \$600,000 in one year." Well, after I said it, I realized that I was embarrassing him in front of his boss, so I tried to back away from that statement. "Well," I said, "There I go again, boasting," or something like that. Ken Dayton said, "Wait a minute, Louie. You said that. Do you really think so?" "Well," I said, "If you're making a direct question of it, yes, I do." I said, "You'll have to change the pace of the store. You'll have to put some merchandise in." I said, "How do you expect to do more than \$300,000 if you have only \$65,000 worth of merchandise?" I said, "You're a merchant. How many turns can you expect out of it?" I said, "You're going to find that you're going to get fewer turns than you expected." They were expecting five and a half turns a year. You can't do that in the book business. Maybe in New York, where you've got a fine wholesaler right in your backyard, but even there you'd have a very difficult time. At any rate, we talked about that, and I told him. I said, "Look. Your shelves are poor." And I told him exactly what I thought was wrong. And do you know, they didn't do a damn thing about it until a number of years later when this chap left and all that. So, as I say, bigness doesn't necessarily even mean creativeness. Maybe in one area they'll be very creative, and in another area they will take an area which they're totally unfamiliar, and put in people who are totally unfamiliar instead of seeking out somebody who is familiar and have him help set a policy. And I told that to the Dayton brothers one time. I said, "How in the world can you

lay out x number of million dollars, give it to a guy--to spend any way he wants--who has never in his life had a thing to do with a book?"

GARDNER

What was their response?

EPSTEIN

Well, he admitted he made a mistake. But he said, "Well, to us, it's merchandising." "Well," I said, "even if it's merchandising, and suppose you realize that after a year's time, the man is not making progress and you're losing all that money?" He said, "We're accustomed to losing money when we're planning an operation." "But there was no necessity for you to lose money," I said. "You sat there and you told me what a great bookman I was and how I could help your organization. And here I was sitting in Los Angeles waiting for the phone to ring. And it never rang." I said, "There was no reason for you to do that. You had me, you had Aaron, you had Stackhouse, and you had Elliot Leonard — all with proven records--and any one of us would have been very happy to come and sit down and help guide you people. But you persist in losing a million, \$2 million, \$3 million year after year." But that's the way a corporation works. I mean, to me, it's an anomaly. They're smart businessmen — the Dayton brothers are no fools. But this was the smallest portion of their business, and they probably neglected to even give the proper thought behind it. But they have vice-presidents who are supposed to take care of the other portions of the business. But I can't explain it. That's big business for you.

GARDNER

If it's the smallest portion, why were they so interested in getting into bookshops in the first place?

EPSTEIN

Well, they hoped to make it a national chain, and they're progressing toward that. This year, they'll do well over \$100,000,000 of books.

GARDNER

That's a good reason.

EPSTEIN

No, wait a minute. Am I right? No, I think I'm wrong. I think it's probably closer to \$60 or \$70 million.

GARDNER

Tell me, did you undergo a great deal of soul- searching before you sold?

EPSTEIN

Oh, it was one of the hardest things we had to do. The business was so personal to so many people — to my wife, to my children, to myself, to my entire family. And to the community. Really. The Pickwick in Hollywood is the most personal business you can think of. Of course, we would tell as few people as possible about it — my attorney, my accountant. And there was not unanimity of mind. To be honest with you, I had to force the sale, and I did force it. And I'm not positive that I made the wise decision. I'm still not positive. I'm positive in one area--physically . I was sixty-six years old at the time. I was at nerve's edge, constantly. I couldn't hold my food many evenings a week, simply because of nervousness. My doctor kept after me. He said, "Louis, you're a very fortunate man, that you have a good heart." He said, "If your heart showed any symptoms of going astray or becoming irregular, I would have ordered you to quit years ago. But you can't drive yourself. Your nervous system will eventually affect your heart. Cut down, cut down." I have tremors in my hands--which I've had for a long time, but they were becoming worse. And this opportunity came along, and I said to myself, I said to my wife, I said to Aaron, "Look, what are we seeking?" What was our aim? How much money did we aim to make?" Well, Aaron, for obvious reasons, was very personally attached to this business, but he too was becoming nervous--at his age. I said, "Andy, you're becoming as nervous as I am, at your age. And it's only one thing that's doing it--the business. What's the worth of it?" I said, "If I step out of there, you run it by yourself. You'll have the problems you have plus all the problems that I carried. Then you will really have problems. What do we need it for?" I'm the guy really responsible. I'm positive that if it had come to Aaron — Aaron definitely did not want to sell. Of course, Eugene had no special interest in the business other than that he had a little financial stake in it, so he kept neutral. And Ann — she tried to keep neutral. She wanted Aaron to be happy about it; she definitely wanted me out. She knew that I

couldn't carry on the way I was, and she knew also that if I maintained a five-cent interest in the business, I would be there every day, because that's the way I am, and that's the way I am about the book business still. For good or ill, I am responsible for the decision. I think it was for the good — if and when the stock market improves, it will be. [11/75. The stock has come back considerably and will continue to go up.--[L.E.]]

GARDNER

For very good. [laughter]

EPSTEIN

But we weren't sophisticated enough in knowing when to sell. The stock went way up, and now it went way down. But we manage to eat.

GARDNER

Now how about regrets? Any regrets? And in this I also include things like seeing what's happened with the Pickwick since you left.

EPSTEIN

To use the word "regrets" in its full term, I would have to say no. There are some regrets. In total, there are no regrets. I am not sorry I sold the business. I'm sorry that we didn't sell the stock soon enough. But on the other hand, if we had sold the stock, we'd have probably taken that money and put it into something else that would have gone down. So you have to be philosophic about that, too. As far as regretting what happened to the stores, yes. I'm sorry to see that they've become so totally impersonal. I'm sorry to see that they're being run and bought for from Minneapolis. I'm sorry to see that the service in the stores has become that slow and that unhappy. I mean, there are no happy people there. That's a problem. The people working there are not happy.

GARDNER

Why?

EPSTEIN

Well, because they are not doing creative work. All the creative work, if you can call it that--the buying, the policy setting, the merchandise mix--is being done 2,000 miles away in Minneapolis.

GARDNER

By computer.

EPSTEIN

And a lot of it is done by computer. So you have a lot of people who might be bookmen--if they were given an opportunity to be creative in the book business--who are not being helped to become bookmen. As a matter of fact, they're being hindered to become bookmen. And the opportunities for them to grow in the bookish area--they can grow in the management area if they're good, but even the management of the stores is not bookish.

GARDNER

Do you think this is a trend in the book trade?

EPSTEIN

It definitely is a trend at the present. Now, what is happening [is] (and this is strictly off the top of the head--it's my personal philosophy, my personal thinking, the way I see it; I may be 100 percent wrong) the trend is definitely for chains. And the trend is definitely for ordering by computer, because you start a chain, and you've got twenty-five stores. That's another area which was beginning to bother us. The detail was becoming so great before we sold out. The detail was becoming so great and so confusing that we could see in the distance — right now, we need some kind of computer help. And if it's anything I don't know, it's the computer. And from what I saw the computer did for some of the publishers during our time, I didn't want any part of it. So there that was in the offing, too. But to get back to your exact question. The trend definitely is towards that. How long it will continue, I don't know. There are certain things happening that may make the business less attractive to the chains that are operating now. Number one, the rents they have to pay are becoming fantastically high in shopping centers. One of the reasons they're becoming fantastically high is because there are three or four chains competing for the same space. So the landlord just sits back there waiting for

the one who'll offer him the most money. And it was illustrated to me by Mr. Getz, whom we spoke about earlier. There was one store in Eagle Rock. Now Eagle Rock is no great shakes for a shopping center. It's not a big center. But we wanted to go in there. And then Walden wanted to go in there, and then another chain wanted to go in there. We thought we had a deal going, so we called up there. I said, "Well, how about a deal with you?" He said, "I don't think you've got a store. I don't think we can give you a store." I said, "Why not?" He said, "You're not willing to pay enough money." I said, "We offered you more than we ever paid you at any other place." "Yes, but," he said, "we've got two people offering us more." So I said to Bob, "Look, we can do the best job, selling books." "Oh, he said, "they can't hold a candle to you." "Well, then, why don't you give us the store?" He said, "Louie, I work for the May Company. And the May Company's object is to make money. And they love to collect high rents. What would you do if you sat here and you had three people throwing more and more money at you? Which would you take?" He said, "That's exactly what we're doing. These people are just throwing money at us, they want to get in here so bad. We all know you do a better job. But the insurance company who loans us the money, they want to get the biggest rent schedule they can on their books." So we didn't get that. But the rents are tremendously high. Now, shopping centers are beginning to compete against themselves. There are more shopping centers being opened in every area, so they begin to compete with themselves. The labor situation is becoming highly competitive. And one other thing which I see in the offing is a discount schedule for books. The present discount schedule is very much in favor of large buyers, and the chains are getting something they're not entitled to. I know what it is, but I do not want to discuss it because it's a dangerous subject. It may involve [Federal] Trade Commission action between the large stores and the small stores. And I'm afraid that the chain stores are going to be hit in the way of paying for services that they're presently getting and not paying for. And the discount relationship may have to be ironed out. And if they do, it will cost them a lot of money, cost them a lot of money. When they started opening stores in the hundreds — like Walden and Dalton, into the hundreds--they began to exercise a great deal of power over some publishers. And they're beginning to meet some resistance with the large publishers. I can see a clash in the relatively near future. It's got to come, because the publishers can't keep on giving them what they're giving them.

They can't do it legally, and whether they will want to do it illegally. . . . And they're pressing. Well, let's face it, you know that the bigger a customer becomes — the same way in every line — the more they'll press for better discounts or for more advertising allowances. So there's a big head-on collision coming which may cost the chains a large amount of money in operating expenses. There is room, however, for a good independent bookstore in almost any community, which can still give--who will give--personal service, personal attention, and be willing to exercise some authority over his business. He doesn't have to wire or call Minneapolis, or whatever the city, to find out if he can do something out of the usual. There will always be room for that. I was discussing that with the present president of the ABA when we visited him two weeks ago at Colorado Springs, It's one of the things that we talked about at lunchtime. He asked me whether I thought that he would have to chain up. I said I thought he would, at least in his own area, because if he didn't, there would be several chains coming in and they might surround him and hurt him. Even in a comparatively small area like Colorado Springs--shopping centers are springing up all over. "And they may hurt your business. So if an opportunity does come up, and you can chain up in your own area without getting too far afield, it's my opinion you should." With one or two stores, he can still control it very nicely. It's when he gets up in the fifteens and twenties, then he has to have management. And he would have to manage the management rather than the stores. My big problem was I know the book business but I don't know management. We got along very well with the management we had when we had the number of stores that we had. The trend is definitely, to answer the question again, toward further chaining up. It will eventually reach its peak, and it may not be as profitable as it was with fewer stores.

GARDNER

Is the trend, then, also out of the hands of the bookmen? You've been sort of hinting at that without really saying it.

EPSTEIN

There aren't that many bookmen. You see, the trouble with the chains is [that] they train managers but they don't train bookmen. So where are they going to get the bookmen? You see, right now, Dayton-Hudson, the only bookmen they

have, trained bookmen, are the people they took out of Pickwick. Their major buyers are Pickwick people--all trained at the Pickwick. They took Joni Miller, Alan Kahn, Brian Baxter; Geof Rogart just left to go there. I think two other people left; I can't think of their names at the moment--people whom I had not trained. Joni, Alan, and Brian were all people that worked under me. They worked under Elliot; they knew our system; they knew our system of buying. Alan worked for us since he was fourteen years old. And he started, oh, handing out those little bookmarks at the door, that we used to. The purpose was to watch people as they walked out. And then he worked weekends, and then he went to college. He worked summers. And finally, when he was graduating from college, about a year or so before, we sat down. He asked me, "Do I have a future in the book business?" So I pointed to Elliot; I pointed to Stackhouse; I pointed to Aaron. I said, "Well, these guys made a future in the book business. You can if you want to." And I told him what it takes to want to. You've got to work hard, and you've got to learn as much as possible about your business, and just take hold of an area and do a good job. It's that simple. It takes stick-to-itiveness. He said, "Okay." And by God, he did, and turned out to be an excellent man. He's a good buyer, good buyer. He's young; he's loud. But basically, he's a good guy, in the sense that he's an ethical person. He's a good person, but he gets overexcited sometimes and makes noise. Sometimes he uses a few too [many] expletives. But he's right in the generation of expletives. He's in that exact generation that uses that foul language. But fortunately he stayed with something constructive instead of destructive, The language--he adopted that. So where are they going to get bookmen? Who is training them? We're not training any bookmen here now anymore. They don't need them. All they need is people who manage the store, hire and fire, see that the cash register totals up; and all the buying and thinking is done in Minneapolis. And every other chain has the same problem. That's one of the things that worries me about the book trade: so many of the stores, by the nature of their operation, have to become, instead of major collections of books, smaller collections of books, of best sellers, which will necessitate the publisher to try to create best sellers, in this sense: that they will have to spend a lot more money on promotion with the chains. The tendency will be to more emphasis on the sale of best sellers and a diminishing emphasis on the lesser books, which may be far better literary works-- usually are because the general average, in the United States (or any

country; I'm not downgrading the United States) is not literature per se but a story, an adventure, be it fiction or nonfiction. But when you get down to literature, it has to be for the well-educated person and those few people who appreciate fine literature. It applies to fine music as well, or fine merchandise, or fine art. It's relatively the same. The popular is not necessarily the best — in art, in music, or anything. So they're dropping the fine; they're dropping the better because it doesn't move fast. And the tendency will be to shorten the list of titles, the same way that, say, Dalton had before the Pickwick policy went in. Of fifty titles that we handled, maybe they would have five out of the fifty. Why? Because they didn't sell too fast. We would handle a title if it sold even one a year. I felt it was my duty. They have no such duty. They have a duty only to turnover. And with all that turnover, their profits are not superior or even close to what we had with a lesser turnover. That is in general to talk about the question of what is going to happen. But there is an opportunity for an individual store to come in, an individual operator, and gradually build up a business. He has to work like hell; he has to do the same thing that I and some others did when we built our businesses. It can be done.

GARDNER

Well, what about your own future?

EPSTEIN

Well, my future is governed by numbers, and the numbers are the number of years in one's life. I'm presently approaching seventy-three. I'm not planning to do anything much different from what I'm doing right now. Fortunately I keep busy with a lot of things I'm still interested in.

GARDNER

I.e., buying books.

EPSTEIN

Well, I buy books if I buy them cheap enough, [laughter] I've sort of come back to a love that I've really never lost: it's the old-book business, and I like to visit old-book stores and see what I can find. I visit junk shops, as you know. I boast about buying a book for a dime and selling it for five dollars sometimes, most of the time just putting it on my shelf and forgetting about it, thinking it's

worth a lot. Let's face it, approaching seventy-three, you can't plan too far ahead; but on the other hand, I'm not planning just to sit down and sit, either. As long as God gives me strength and ability to keep my mind going, I intend to just get around as much as possible. As you know, I work with the [L.A.] Library Association. We're planning an auction for sometime next February or March at the [Sotheby] Parke Bernet galleries. We've got to find 200 people who will each give us a book or some art object worth approximately \$100. We're hoping to raise \$20,000. The Los Angeles Library Association's running a book sale on the lot at the library again, like they've done for the last two years. We've been working on that. Oh, there are any number of people who call me for this, that, or the other. And I don't need as much activity as I used to. I still read book catalogs, books about books. I meet bookmen. I'm very happy to say that they're all glad to see me. Really. And we discuss a lot. One of the most gratifying things, I think, about the whole business of being where I am today from the route I came through is the fact that along the way I met so many people, made so many friends, who are still my friends and who are always happy to see me. I'm happy to see them. They've always got a question for me to answer. "What would you do with this? What would you do with that?" And I give them whatever advice I can, for whatever it's worth. And amazingly some of it, they take and they use. And if I see them doing something wrong--which I think they could do better, let's put it that way--I suggest it and very often they pursue it. There's that thing called respect which I think I have from them. In spite of the fact they were all theoretically my competitors, there was never that spirit of antagonistic competition between myself and any of the others. I think Mr. Campbell will probably tell you that; I think Walter will tell you that. I think even Lew Lengfeld, who is the most difficult person in the book business to get along with--he and competitors don't normally get along, but he made an exception with me. He told me one day. He came to my farewell dinner, retirement dinner. He said, "Louis, you know, you're the only guy I would ever go to a dinner like this for." I said, "Lew, I'm very complimented." I knew what he was talking about. He admits that he doesn't want too much to do with other booksellers--which is his privilege. I'm happy to have enjoyed that contact with booksellers — in the old-book trade, the new-book trade. Occasionally I'll meet a person in the bookstore, and my name will come up--somebody will mention my name. And somebody will say, "Oh, I've heard about you for years. I'm so happy to meet

you." They've been in the trade, but they're younger in the trade. They'll say, "I've been hearing about you for years." Well, that's not bad to hear, really. I always say, "Well, I hope some of it was good." He says, "Oh, my, you're supposed to be the kingpin." Well, true or not, it's not too bad to hear. In closing, I have a lot to be thankful for, a lot I'm gratified about: the librarians, the booksellers, the publishers, the book readers, the book customers. Writers from all over the world have been through my bookstore. They commended me; they found things there that they hadn't found anywhere else. New Yorkers, who are the hardest people to please when they come to California, express amazement and surprise to find a bookstore of the quality of the Pickwick here, later admitting that there was no such thing, no store of that kind in New York that had the kind of stock we had. Authors thanking me for allowing them to browse because the books were their only friends. Like Elia Kazan telling me publicly, in front of a group of people, that I personally didn't know how much that bookstore (not necessarily me — me, too, he said, because I spoke to him, I was friendly to him) helped tide him over one of the worst periods in his life. He says he didn't know what he would have done if there was no Pickwick to go to every night, go up there and go through the stacks in the old books, picking up a book and reading it. He said he would have gone mad, or committed suicide, or something. That strong, is the way he expressed it. Finding books they'd been looking for for people, helping them solve their problems. I've great things to look back on.

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