THE 20th CENTURY TRADE UNION WOMAN: VEHICLE FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Oral History Interview

with

SARA BARRON

Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America

by

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Program on Women and Work

Institute of Labor and Industrial Relations

University of Michigan - Wayne State University

Ann Arbor, Michigan

VITAE

SARA BARRON

Sara Barron was born in Russia on January 8, 1900, emigrating to the United States in 1914. A year later she began working in a clothing factory in Baltimore which, combined with the political orientation of her family, led Barron to join the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America in 1916. Barron is one of the earliest members of that union.

In this period of fervent organizing among clothing workers, Barron lent her support and activism. During her long involvement with the union she was involved with innumerable strikes, picket lines and organizing campaigns. Barron's activities put her in jail on more than one occasion.

Although officially a business agent with the Baltimore Joint Board of the ACWA, Barron's work always included organizing workers in various factories. She also devoted a great deal of her time to workers' appeals for unemployment compensation and retirement benefits. She continues to be active with those problems today.

Retirement from the union staff did not put an end to Barron's busy schedule. Since the 1930's Barron has been very involved politically. She still is today, working in various electoral campaigns. Barron spends most of her time, however, working to improve the conditions of the elderly, both on an individual basis and through lobbying efforts. She has put in well over 600 hours as a volunteer worker at the senior citizen center in Baltimore.

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Baltimore, Maryland

June 4, 1976

INTERVIEWER: I'd like to introduce Sara Barron, who is retired now but has devoted most of her life to the Amalgamated Clothing Workers and to organizing and working with, with workers in the clothing industry. We're going to talk first about Sara's family background, way back, perhaps some of your memories Sara, about your grandparents, your parents. Do you remember your mother or father talking about your grandparents at all? Did you know them?...No...you didn't?

BARRON: No, they died before we came to this country.

INTERVIEWER: And where did they live?

BARRON: They lived in Russia.

INTERVIEWER: Do you remember what part of Russia?

BARRON: Yes, Ukrainia. I remember the city too.

INTERVIEWER: What was that?

BARRON: Kremnchuck. Can you spell it?

INTERVIEWER: No. How do you spell it?

BARRON: I don't know how you spell it. I think it's a K, K-r-e-m-n-c-h-u-c-k, Kremnchuck.

INTERVIEWER: Kremnchuck, in the Ukraine. And they died before you all came?

BARRON: The grandparents did.

INTERVIEWER: Then you came here with your parents?

BARRON: My father came in 1911.

INTERVIEWER: And then he sent for the rest of the family?

BARRON: ...with, the two sisters were here. One sister took him out and then he came with another sister.

INTERVIEWER: His sister or your sister?

BARRON: No, no, my sister.

INTERVIEWER: Your sister, I see. And then when did you come?

BARRON: We came in 1914. He took my mother and four children.

INTERVIEWER: Three brothers and sisters and yourself?

BARRON: No, one brother and three more sisters. Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: And then what, where did they settle?

BARRON: We settled in Baltimore; we came to Baltimore.

INTERVIEWER: You came to Baltimore?

BARRON: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: What kind of a trip over was it?

BARRON: What I remember is a big boat. (Soft laugh) We were on the bottom.

INTERVIEWER: How old were you when you when you came over?

BARRON: I was eleven.

INTERVIEWER: Eleven years old. And what did he do in Russia? What was his....?

BARRON: He was a tailor in Russia and he used to be half-rabbi, you know. He used to sing, like a cantor.

INTERVIEWER: And your mother?

BARRON: My mother was a house....

INTERVIEWER: She was a housewife? And when he came here what did he do?

BARRON: Well, he went to tailoring; but he was very religious and he wouldn't work on Saturday. So he'd work up to Friday and he wanted to go home early. They told him they had no job for him.

INTERVIEWER: So what did he do?

BARRON: We lived on what little my sister had. And he struggled and he was one of the first members to join the Amalgamated [Clothing Workers of America].

INTERVIEWER: But actually your sisters supported him?

BARRON: They helped him, and they helped us too, because we were in Europe then.

INTERVIEWER: I see. And sent money to you in Europe?

BARRON: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: Now, I want to try to get clear in my mind. You came here in 1914. You said he was one of the first to join the Amalgamated. Was that when it formed in 1914?

BARRON: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: He never belonged to the United Garment Workers?

BARRON: Yes he did. And so did my older sister belong to the United Garment Workers. Two sisters belonged to the United Garment Workers. Then they turned over to the Amalgamated.

INTERVIEWER: I see. And when you came over you were eleven. What was life like? What kind of community did you live in in Baltimore?

BARRON: We lived in a Jewish community. You know, everybody lived there. Downtown.

INTERVIEWER: And was it near the factory? Where you were?

BARRON: No, a little far away. We had no money--had to walk.

INTERVIEWER: You walked to work?

BARRON: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: What were the hours like? When did he have to be at work and when did he have to leave home to get there?

BARRON: When <u>he</u> had to be to work or when <u>I</u> had to be to work?

INTERVIEWER: Well, I'm trying to go from him to you.

BARRON: (Laughs)..not pertaining to me.

INTERVIEWER: Let's, let's....

BARRON: Well, they used to go to work at seven o'clock.

INTERVIEWER: I see. And how long did they work? How long was the working day?

BARRON: When they finished the work and let them go home. When they finished the garments.

INTERVIEWER: Went home when they finished. When was that usually?

BARRON: Sometimes he used to come seven o'clock, sometimes he he used to come five, he used to come five. There was no limit of hours. You never punched a time (card).

INTERVIEWER: And your mother kept house here too, she didn't go to work?

BARRON: No, my mother had a heart condition when she came here. Since she was thirty years old. Yes, she had heart trouble from Europe.

INTERVIEWER: How many of you were there all together? There were seven of you, seven children?

BARRON: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: And do you remember anything about your childhood when you came over? Like when you were eleven and twelve?

BARRON: Yes, it was better to go to school.

INTERVIEWER: You did go to school here?

BARRON: Yes, I started to go to school. And then my father didn't make any money and my mother was sick, so one of my sisters took me in the factory.

INTERVIEWER: I see.

BARRON: I was only twelve and a half.

INTERVIEWER: Twelve and a half when you went to the factory.

BARRON: Uh-huh.

INTERVIEWER: And was that it for schooling? You didn't go back to school?

BARRON: No. I went to the fourth grade.

INTERVIEWER: Through the fourth grade.

BARRON: I was pulling out threads, in a basement full of....

INTERVIEWER: Pulling out threads. And how many hours a day did you work when you. . . ?

BARRON: When did we work? They used to lock the elevator when they needed the work. My sister was in there too, but she was already eighteen and then, when nine o'clock come to finish, my mother was outside of the building waiting for us. It was not far from....

INTERVIEWER: Nine o'clock at night?

BARRON: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: Wow.

BARRON: It was hot and there wasn't even no payroll. They used to give my sister the money for me too.

INTERVIEWER: What did you get?

BARRON: I don't know.

INTERVIEWER: You don't know?

BARRON: We didn't know--(Laughs)--what we got.

INTERVIEWER: Well, so, how many of you all worked in the factory?

BARRON: My two older sisters...and myself, first. Later on one of my other sisters but she was already sixteen when she went to work.

INTERVIEWER: Do you remember the name of the factory?

BARRON: Yes. I worked for Wohlmuth's. Here, it's in here.

INTERVIEWER: Oh.

BARRON: Read this.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, great! I'll take...May I take this with me?

BARRON: Yes, yes.

INTERVIEWER: Is this extra?

BARRON: Yes, yes.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, that's a nice picture of you. This is the testimonial dinner honoring you in 1967. Isn't that lovely.

BARRON: ...Boy Scouts...

INTERVIEWER: Oh, that's great. Well, you didn't retire then?

BARRON: No, no.

INTERVIEWER: You were still working then, right?

BARRON: I retired in 1972.

INTERVIEWER: Well, so, the name of the company is here, I just wanted to get it, Wohlmuth. I see.

BARRON: That was the first one where they locked the elevator. Most of the time I spent in Sonneborn's.

INTERVIEWER: Is that where you went after Wohlmuth's?

BARRON: Uh-huh.

INTERVIEWER: How old were you then?

BARRON: I was about 13.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, then you didn't stay there too long, at Wohlmuth's.

BARRON: No, no. No, I didn't stay there too long.

INTERVIEWER: What did you do when you went to Sonneborn's?

BARRON: Sonneborn's? I was pulling threads?

INTERVIEWER: You did the same job, pulling threads?

BARRON: Yes, but then I started to work on a machine.

INTERVIEWER: And, what kind of machine? What did you do? What kind of job did you do?

BARRON: Well, I was just doing a little job of sewing linings.

INTERVIEWER: On pants?

BARRON: No, coats.

INTERVIEWER: On coats.

BARRON: Coatmaking.

INTERVIEWER: Coatmaking. And that was about 1914? 1913?

BARRON: No, 1915. The end of 1915.

INTERVIEWER: I see. So you didn't have too much childhood over here did you? You went to work fairly soon.

BARRON: No, no. At school we used to play and when I'd go home sometimes, we didn't have enough to eat. It was so bad. My father couldn't get a job because he wouldn't work on the holidays and they wouldn't keep him. And my mother was sick since she came and all. We had to work...to support ourselves.

INTERVIEWER: Who kept house? Your mother kept house? Was she able to do that?

BARRON: My mother kept house but my oldest sister--she worked in Sonneborn's already--she used to be like the head of the household. We all had to do a little bit, see, 'cause she was in the hospital and out of the hospital. She had a weakened heart for many, many years.

INTERVIEWER: And just looking back on your family, do you feel that you were closer to your mother or to your father? Was the whole family religious? You said your father was very religious.

BARRON: Yeah, we were all religious. I'm still religious in some ways. (laughs)

INTERVIEWER: I noticed a very beautiful mezuzah outside your door.

BARRON: Yes, yes, we're Orthodox. Today's a holiday, Shevuas, but it's not strict...you're not Jewish?

INTERVIEWER: Well, I am, but I'm not a religious Jew.

BARRON: It's called Shevuas. It's like the spring holiday.

INTERVIEWER: Right, that is a beautiful day too. But did you feel closer to maybe your mother or to your father. Or did you have any... one of your sisters?

BARRON: My mother.

INTERVIEWER: Closer to your mother?

BARRON: But mostly to my older sister, the one that went to Sonneborn's because she used to be like our boss. She'd tell us who had a job. Each one had....

INTERVIEWER: Something to do in the house?

BARRON: ...assignment, assignment.

INTERVIEWER: And did your mother and father ever talk about what they would like to see the family do, or was it really just so much involved with getting enough to eat?

BARRON: No. Too much talking to get fat. But my father didn't like it here. (laughs) My father didn't like it here because of the religion and he always wanted to go back but what would he do with us? It's a good thing he didn't go back, look what the war brought back.

INTERVIEWER: He always wanted to go back? So he really wasn't happy here?

BARRON: No.

INTERVIEWER: And your mother?

BARRON: My mother was happy to be with the children. She loved the children. But my mother was a rebel. She was participating in a meat strike here.

INTERVIEWER: When was that?

BARRON: That was in 1918. Because the meats were not kosher or something. And she got locked up one night. (laughs)

INTERVIEWER: Really?! Ohhh!

BARRON: And my father went in the patrol wagon. (laughs) We were sitting on the porch on Front Street and we were right across the street from the union and they said, "Your mother got locked up!"

INTERVIEWER: For goodness sake! That was like a consumer strike, right? Of people who bought the....

BARRON: Yes, that's right.

INTERVIEWER: And your father had to go and get her out?

BARRON: No! My father went in the patrol wagon. (both are laughing).

INTERVIEWER: Oh, that's a wonderful story.

BARRON: No, it was someone else, some other organization that took them out.

INTERVIEWER: Did you live for a long time in that Jewish community?

BARRON: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: How long, do you remember?

BARRON: Oh, a long time.

INTERVIEWER: Until when?

BARRON: Until 1924 when we moved in a mixed community where they had Scotties and Jews and all--Northeast Baltimore. But we lived mostly over there [Jewish community].

INTERVIEWER: And did your family take in boarders at all, or was it just too many children as it was?

BARRON: No, we didn't take no boarders in.

INTERVIEWER: Did a lot of people in the community take in boarders?

BARRON: Yeah, some, that came from the other side. There were a lot that came from the other side [Europe].

INTERVIEWER: I know that was very common in New York.

BARRON: We had some people in, but my mother never charged them anything because she felt sorry for them. We kept them for a few weeks until they could find a place, 'cause we had a big house. And our house was right across the street from the union.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, really?! Well, we'll get to the union later because I want to hear about it because evidently a lot of your family was involved in the union. What were the special jobs that you had, that your sister gave you to do at home when you came home from the factory?

BARRON: To scrub the kitchen; we didn't have any oilcloths. We had to scrub it with a brush. (laughs)

INTERVIEWER: It was a wood table?

BARRON: It was a wood floor. Scrub the kitchen, scrub the bathroom.

INTERVIEWER: Well, I gather that she was really interested in having a clean house. And you said religion was very important, and you were an Orthodox family? Did your family argue with each other or did they all get along well together?

BARRON: Well, the only thing wrong was with one sister because her assignment was to sew. And she never sewed and never did nothing. (laughs) Not real arguments, but we said that she had to take a job. She knew how to sew well, you know, and she was supposed to sew our clothes but she never sewed. She very seldom wanted to sew. She didn't do nothing; we did.

INTERVIEWER: Did that last? All her life. . . ?

BARRON: No, no. We got along real well. We're a very close family even now.

INTERVIEWER: Did you have political discussions at all? Or religious discussions?

BARRON: Well, political yes. We were political-minded. My oldest sister, the one who came here first; she went away because she was a socialist in Russia and they were trying to line them up. So she came here. She got in illegally, see. She belonged to the Workmen's Circle and she belonged to organizations that were politically-minded here. Of course, we all listened to it.

INTERVIEWER: And were you all socialists or just she?

BARRON: Yes, I was a Yipsel [Young People's Socialist League] many years ago. I went to the Yipsel school when I was a kid. You know what Yipsels are?

INTERVIEWER: Oh sure, sure.

BARRON: Dr. Nysten was my teacher.

INTERVIEWER: Dr. who?

BARRON: He was a dentist, Dr. Nysten. He was a socialist, and he used to be so nice, just recently died. He used to be, he was a teacher of the Yipsels.

INTERVIEWER: When did you go? After school? Or on Sunday or what?

BARRON: On Sunday.

INTERVIEWER: And what kinds of programs did they run? Lectures or what?

BARRON: Lectures, and we had a headquarters; we had to clean that too. (They both laugh.) He used to tell us to sit around because he was making speeches. We did, we did. But I'll tell you the truth, at first I didn't understand what it was, but later on I learned because my sister always talked about it.

INTERVIEWER: And did you have any money to have books at home on socialism or on political things?

BARRON: No, no. We used to read everything at the Workmen's Circle library. That's where. He was with the Workmen's Circle too. Downtown too. We used to go there, get books.

INTERVIEWER: Were you mostly just friendly with your own sisters and family? You didn't have much time, I gather, for outside friends. Or I guess maybe you had some friends at the Workmen's Circle.

BARRON: Yes, yes we did because we lived three doors down from a Jewish Educational Alliance. You know it's a Jewish Community Center called now. And they had all kinds of clubs there. And we joined the clubs because we could have gone on Sunday, you know. It was three doors from us. We would visit these clubs. There were dancing performances. I had a Russian costume, dancing the Kazatskal. (laughs)

INTERVIEWER: Oh, that sounds great.

BARRON: ...in the clubs. And...the one that was with us, [who] took care of our club was a Reform rabbi's wife. Mrs. Lazaro. She took us on bus, on trips to parks, you know. Yeah, we were in clubs, we had a lot of. . .

INTERVIEWER: Do you have pleasant memories of your childhood?

BARRON: Yes, because I used to like to perform and I'd perform. In a big theatre too...but in Jewish...it was some kind of a Jewish [theater] company, we were just about a half a block from. They needed a child, so somebody said, "She goes in the club." She come, and my mother let me go in performance. (laughs)

INTERVIEWER: How old were you, do you remember?

BARRON: Before I started work, uh...I don't remember.

INTERVIEWER: Well, before you started work, then you were really very young. Eleven or twelve.

BARRON: Yes, that's right.

INTERVIEWER: Did you have much time for theater after you started work?

BARRON: Well, we still had the club.

INTERVIEWER: And you went on Sundays.

BARRON: Went on Sunday mostly.

INTERVIEWER: But you worked a pretty long day.

BARRON: That's right. I worked pretty long. When I went to Sonneborn's, we worked from seven to seven.

INTERVIEWER: Seven to seven. Then on Fridays did you get off early?

BARRON: No...my father got off early.

INTERVIEWER: And on Saturday you didn't work?

BARRON: That's how he used to lose his jobs. Because, especially winter times, he wouldn't work after two o'clock. That's why we had to go to work. You know, it was you had to be fifteen years at that time to get a permit to work. I wasn't fifteen years, and there was a few others. And they had inspectors. I never did forget that name, Miss Campes, she was the child inspector. She used to look around.

INTERVIEWER: What happened when she came to your shop?

BARRON: When she came to our shop they used to give three rings. We had to get in a box, that had rags down there.

INTERVIEWER: Really!

BARRON: Yes, and they'd close it up and [tell me to] wait in it 'til she got through looking for me, you know, for children. And after she left, we come out again. Well, the one time we got caught.

INTERVIEWER: You did? What happened?

BARRON: They took us to Mr. Blumberg (laughs) and they took us to juvenile court or something, I don't remember. Anyhow, they let us out and they told us not to go to work, but we went anyhow.

INTERVIEWER: Well, I gather lots of your friends at this Jewish Educational Alliance were also talking about politics and socialism and it was something probably everybody felt very keenly about? Do you remember anything about the First World War?

BARRON: No, we just came over, we just came about two weeks. We came April the 8th and I think, no, no, we came April the 8th and the war broke out I think in August.

INTERVIEWER: That was in 1914. Do you remember when this country entered the war in 1917.

BARRON: 1917?

INTERVIEWER: Did anything change very much in the factory?

BARRON: We were making uniforms...overcoats.

INTERVIEWER: And, by then, you were on a machine, right?

BARRON: Yeah, yeah we were making uniforms.

INTERVIEWER: Do you remember anything about after the war was over? When the men came back, did it do anything to the jobs that women had or did they always just have the same jobs?

BARRON: No, it took the jobs back...we used to sew our names in the pockets. Our names in the uniforms and we'd get letters from them. (laughing)

INTERVIEWER: For goodness sake, that's interesting. Oh, I'm sure the soldiers were pleased to have someone to write to. But what kind of jobs did the women do that the men took back when they came back?

BARRON: Sleeve-setting...pockets.

INTERVIEWER: Sleeve-setting, that was a man's job?

BARRON: That was all a man's job.

INTERVIEWER: What other one's?

BARRON: Sewing tape, that was a man's job at that time. And making linings. Setting inside pockets, pressing, and underpressing. That was all man's jobs.

INTERVIEWER: The women did all of those?

BARRON: Yes, yes.

INTERVIEWER: What about cutting? The men still kept on cutting during the war?

BARRON: I don't remember women cutting, no. Sew-bar girls we used to be.

INTERVIEWER: So they did take those jobs back then when they came back. What did the women do then who had been doing the pressing and the underpressing? What kinds of jobs did they get?

BARRON: They got small jobs. If not, they got laid off.

INTERVIEWER: Do you think that any of your earlier work experiences would have been different if you'd been a man? Did you have any feeling about discrimination at that point in your life?

BARRON: Well, I wouldn't call it discrimination. I know they wouldn't let a woman in to sew sleeves or to do some jobs. Nobody thought about it. Like the men did basting, they came in and took small jobs. Mostly felling, hands, buttonhole-makers, basting under-collars. They wouldn't have small operating jobs like special machines, like padding lapels.

INTERVIEWER: There was a difference in pay, though, wasn't there? Men made a lot more money?

BARRON: Yes, yes.

INTERVIEWER: Do you remember what you got paid?

BARRON: The men didn't get paid too much either at that time.

INTERVIEWER: What were some of the wages? What did you make when you were sewing coats?

BARRON: When I first started working in the basement pulling [threads], I made about four dollars a week. But then, after.... Well, I didn't belong to the union to begin with, because I wasn't working. Dorothy [Bellanca]* signed me up in 1916. And I was making about six dollars then.

INTERVIEWER: Was that on a machine?

BARRON: Yeah. And the women only paid twenty-five cents a month dues, and the men paid fifty [cents].

INTERVIEWER: And do you remember what the men tended to make? How much would they make in a week? What was the difference?

BARRON: They make twenty, twenty-five [dollars]. They made twenty-five, the cutters upstairs, that's what they called them.

INTERVIEWER: That was a lot in that day.

BARRON: That day. They made it. But not tailors. They made about ten, eleven, twelve. My father made about nine dollars a week. He couldn't support all of his children. Even though things were cheaper, they'd give you liver for nothing where we went.

INTERVIEWER: Now I think it would be a good point, because we're getting there anyway, to start talking about the union. You mentioned over the phone that after Sarah Rossner*, you are the earliest Amalgamated [Clothing Workers Union] member.

BARRON: Yes, that's right, because the rest of them all died out. And Mamie Santora. I think we're the only three left.

INTERVIEWER: When did Mamie join?

BARRON: Mamie joined about the same time I did. Mamie started working in 1914. She was with the Buttonhole-makers' local.

INTERVIEWER: And you joined the union in 1916.

BARRON: 1916, but I was with the man's local union, 36. Local 36 [Hyman] Blumberg* was in our local.

INTERVIEWER: A men's local.

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* A leader of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers Union
* An ACWA member from Chicago
* Later Secretary-Treasurer of ACWA

BARRON: That was the clothing workers' local. The man's coatmaking local.

INTERVIEWER: I see, and because you were working on coats, that's the local you joined. Now tell me, let's go back for a couple of minutes. You were starting to tell me that so many of your family were part of the United Garment Workers before the Amalgamated was formed.

BARRON: That was my father. He was...belonged to the United Garment Workers for awhile, you know, before the Amalgamated. And my two sisters, see, they both died. Their picture's over here. This was the oldest sister who was our boss because our mother was always sick.

INTERVIEWER: Those are very nice pictures, Sara.

BARRON: Take off the tape, I want to tell you something.

INTERVIEWER: Sara, that's a very interesting story. . . That's an unusual reason for having a strike and I think it would be very interesting if you would talk about it on tape. In 1914, this big strike in Sonneborn's, you said, was because about twenty to twenty-five old men with beards were fired. Were they fired actually because they were very religious?

BARRON: They were fired because they (the management) claimed that they didn't do the work, they didn't do enough work...and [that they were] religious.

INTERVIEWER: And the United Garment Workers to which they belonged wouldn't take up their fight for them.

BARRON: ...while they went on strike, they went to the Amalgamated [Clothing Workers Union].

INTERVIEWER: So when they went on strike they probably sent for the Amalgamated.

BARRON: Uh-huh. Signed up...came in...a lot of other people... There's a book here that I see some of those people from the pin shop and all, I have a book, I'll let you see it. That went to Nashville, Tennessee.

INTERVIEWER: That was the founding meeting.

BARRON: Well, the strike was settled and, but they wouldn't take this man back so they put him on a pension. (laughs) Sonneborn paid him every Friday, they used to come and get a pay...The old man....

INTERVIEWER: Do you remember how long that lasted?

BARRON: Well, yes, they paid him for quite sometime, as long as Sonneborn's existed.

INTERVIEWER: Isn't that interesting. Was that part of the settlement?

BARRON: That was part of the settlement.

INTERVIEWER: That's most unusual.

BARRON: But the cutters still remained in the United Garment Workers. And then, of course, Strauss, where Mamie [Santora] was working; it was a big shop. They joined the Amalgamated with IWW too. Another union.

INTERVIEWER: Industrial Workers of the World.

BARRON: There was a lot of IWW there. So there was Amalgamated, IWW, United Garment Workers.

INTERVIEWER: My goodness. That can get a bit confusing.

BARRON: In 1916, they had a big strike here...to try to get everybody in the Amalgamated union. And the United Garment Workers and the Industrial Workers got together with the Amalgamated. And the cutters walked out with the others on strike from Sonneborn's and from a lot of other places and so it was a great big fight. They were fighting the Amalgamated people. And the people used to go to work across the street from me, in lines; they wouldn't go by themselves because they would beat 'em up. One day, I'll never forget, my mother was sitting outside the house and they came, those Industrial Workers union people and because we belonged to the United Garment Workers, and they had beat up Mr. Blumberg who was laying in a puddle of <u>blood</u> right in the middle of the street on the corner from my house. We thought he was dead.

INTERVIEWER: Good heavens. What happened then?

BARRON: [tape interference]...So then they...everybody was walking to Sonneborn's in lines; nobody went to work by himself. When we came back we came to the union. And then they went to where they belonged to. They got cutters from New York to come into Baltimore, union cutters, they took the places of the other cutters. But, in the meantime, before they did that, we worked in Sonneborn's. We had three thousand people. One Saturday morning, I'll never forget that, there was a <u>fight</u> between the cutters upstairs--they were on the ninth floor--and the tailors who were Amalgamated. They went up, and they had such a big fight to get the union in, they had to have ambulances outside. We didn't even know it, we were all inside.

INTERVIEWER: Cutters and tailors? Fought with each other?

BARRON: Yes. For the union. Because we became the majority, the Amalgamated, except the cutters. Oh, it was a bloody thing. We didn't get the union so easy.

INTERVIEWER: You said you were there on a Saturday. You worked Saturday then.

BARRON: We worked Saturday, yes. My father didn't, yes. Oh, my, I'll never forget it. There was ambulance outside, newspaper.

INTERVIEWER: How did that end?

BARRON: It ended. They shut off everything and we were locked in on the seventh floor. We couldn't go in the hallway, until things got quieted down. After that is when they brought the New York cutters because the other cutters walked out.

INTERVIEWER: How long did that last, that strike?

BARRON: It must have lasted several months, with the cutters but with the tailors, finally the cutters joined the Amalgamated. That was the last of 1916 or, or...was it 1917....it had to be 1916, because Mr. Edelman was one of the people who got beat up. Because he was with the Amalgamated and he worked on that floor too.

INTERVIEWER: You said your sisters were with the United Garment Workers; then they went to the Amalgamated. What made them switch unions?

BARRON: Because most of the tailors switched unions because conditions were so bad that, that they wouldn't do nothing for you. Never did nothing for you.

INTERVIEWER: Do you remember when that happened? Was that...I remember reading that the Amalgamated's real founding convention was in New York in December of 1914 and Dorothy [Bellanca] was at that convention.

BARRON: Because she worked in the factory. She represented the Buttonhole-makers' local. So she did organizing work here. But Dorothy had been organizing all along, but no money. She never got any money until 1916. But she was an organizer.

INTERVIEWER: So she really organized from about 1914 to about 1916? Just on her own time for nothing.

BARRON: Yeah, yeah, she had a gripe when they fired some people. My sister was one of them that got fired.

INTERVIEWER: And that was in 1916?

BARRON: 1916 too. And [August] Bellanca was beat up on the downtown, on the corner, by the Industrial Workers. Right in the street, they knocked him down, on the street too.

INTERVIEWER And he was such a small man too.

BARRON: He was thin at that time, yeah. Bellanca, he was here.

INTERVIEWER: I remember him.

BARRON: And then they had a big factory among the Bohemian section in Northeast Baltimore. And there was a lot of scabs coming in. So, Dorothy came up to Sonneborn's and worked there with a bunch of young kids, but we had a lot of spunk in us. And she said that the women have to go on the picket line and we'll have to go first because they had a lot of police and we should give a push and then the men will follow us in the back.

INTERVIEWER: (laughs)

BARRON: And, Barbara, all we, all I remember, and a lot of them remember, it was like a, I don't know what happened, like a lot of shouting and everything else. And a lot of us landed in the police station. Some of them had to nurse their babies. They let them out but they didn't let us out until the following day.

INTERVIEWER: Really? So you were overnight in jail.

BARRON: ...we were kids!

INTERVIEWER: We were running like nobody's business. But Dorothy let us, see. Because she used to go to the meetings with Blumberg, Blumberg, may he rest in peace, Ulisse De Dominicis.

INTERVIEWER: They were all there. . . ?

BARRON: They were all there in Baltimore, you know. They were working here, and there were a lot of others who were here that I remember. Schnapper, he's still living! Yes, he's ninety years old. And he was the chairman from the, oh, he was one of the organizers of the Amalgamated. I saw him at a banquet.

INTERVIEWER: Oh really?

BARRON: Oh, yes! He was the president of a Baster's local. Oh yes, he was a strong fellow. He was standing right near Blumberg when they knocked him down. Abe Schnapper.

INTERVIEWER: Well, you started, you didn't belong to the UG [United Garment Workers] though, you started in 1916 and Dorothy signed you up with the Amalgamated. Were you active right away in the union?

BARRON: Yes! You know, I suppose I had missed childhood and you had to take something to take its place, see. So it was an exciting thing then. You come to meetings and I was, I was fifteen years old, I was elected chairlady for Sonneborn's.

INTERVIEWER: Really?!

BARRON: For the women, for the women. The women had their chairman and there was a lot of people working there. There were three thousand people working there.

INTERVIEWER: Were you chairperson for the whole, chairlady for the section or for the. . . ?

BARRON: First I was just for the seventh floor, just for the women. But then I had to work with the men. Then they elected me head chairlady.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, and that was over both the men and the women?

BARRON: No, no, just the women in that building.

INTERVIEWER: Head chairlady for all the women.

BARRON: Yes. Later on I was elected chairman for the seventh floor for both men and women because they saw that I did more for the women than the men did. (laughs)

INTERVIEWER: Later on the seventh floor for the men and the women. Do you remember when that was?

BARRON: That must have been the late twenties, the twenties. Yes, it had to be because they closed in 1931. It was a couple of years before that. I was the youngest delegate in the [ACWA] Boston Convention.

INTERVIEWER: And that was in 1916?

BARRON: No, 1920. And Dorothy, may she rest in peace, because they had all the men, always went. They wanted to be big shots. And she said, she said to a group of women, "You wanted to get elected a woman? You're entitled to four delegates." Well, Blumberg was always our friend; he said, "instead of voting for four, vote for one."

INTERVIEWER: So you voted, (laughs) a lesson in politics.

BARRON: And you know who got defeated?

INTERVIEWER: Who?

BARRON: He used to be the business agent. Philip Pudik. He got defeated. (laughs) He didn't want me to go.

INTERVIEWER: And Blumberg was also behind Dorothy on doing this?

BARRON: Yes, they were very good friends from the beginning. You know that Hyman Blumberg's home was the headquarters for the cutters from New York. She fed them. Many, many cutters stayed in her home and she used to feed them breakfast, and feed them their

BARRON: dinner. Yeah, while they were here. She was a wonderful woman, Bessie Blumberg.

INTERVIEWR: Oh, you're talking about Bessie Blumberg?

BARRON: Yes, she fed them when they came [to Baltimore].

INTERVIEWER: Yes, she was quite something, so tiny, a very tiny little woman.

BARRON: She worked with us here.

INTERVIEWER: Was she in the shop?

BARRON: Yes, she was...that's where she met Blumberg. She was a vest-maker. Yes, worked in the vest shop. And he worked in a coat shop. He was a pocketmaker, making sleeves, that was his first job.

INTERVIEWER: Yes, she was quite something. I remember her very well.

BARRON: Do you know, when they were organizing, trying to work over to the Amalgamated from the United Garment Workers, Blumberg was with the Amalgamated and some of the old-time people or you know, the leaders, they didn't want to. So when they were negotiating for something, I could run real fast, so my sister was with Blumberg, the one over here [in photo] because she was on the committee, and she sent me all across the street right about a block away to call Blumberg to go into the negotiations. (laughs) There were two people negotiating at that time. (laughs) Oh my God!

INTERVIEWER: So you were a runner?!

BARRON: I was a runner, yes. I tell you, our shop has a better history than a lot of the other shops has.

INTERVIEWER: Well, it sure has some history.

BARRON: And I'm glad I was in it.

INTERVIEWER: Well, you were starting to tell me that, in a way, being active in the union was the childhood that you had missed. That it was exciting and so you started going to meetings and you got elected chairlady and what was the next thing you did?

BARRON: The next thing was, I, we went to meetings, because we found we wanted something, so we begin to work among the women. And then when, 1920 when they had a general strike in New York, Bessie Blumberg and Dorothy went to help there. They said they needed money for milk for the children. So we got together in the city of Baltimore with women from other shops because we used to have like a women's committee. We didn't have a local

BARRON: and we worked with this Buttonholemakers' local, you know, 'cause they were nothing but women. And we said, "Bessie Blumberg", and we all got together and we said, "We're going to have a bazaar. And we're going to raise money for milk funds for the children of New York." So we had some liberals, we had Elizabeth Gillman, who was the daughter of the first president of Johns Hopkins. She was with us. And Sidney Hollander and Brodus Mitchell who was teaching in Johns Hopkins [University]. He was my teacher at school!

INTERVIEWER: Oh, yes, I know him... Really?!

BARRON: We paid him a quarter a week for class; the union didn't have any money.

INTERVIEWER: Each person paid him?

BARRON: Yes, he was our teacher on economics. And we had this bazaar and we made over.... The women were crocheting, knitting. Everything was handmade. Everything we brought in, our headquarters was on Front Street, brought it there and we got a big hall on Palmer Street because most of the people lived around there. We made over a thousand dollars! We sent it to Dorothy [Bellanca] to use it for the milk fund because she was over there conducting the strike, helping to conduct the strike.

INTERVIEWER: That was a lot of money in that day.

BARRON: Oh, yes, but you should have seen the beautiful things that was, Lithuanian women and Italian women and the Bohemian women. Everybody was doing something. We had everything and Bessie Blumberg and Eleanor Pankhurst, who was teaching at Goucher College and Emily Richardson and one who taught at [Johns] Hopkins. They brought the groups to buy the stuff. A lot of liberals and a lot of the workers bought things too. We made a thousand dollars.

INTERVIEWER: That's fantastic.

BARRON: We gave it to Bessie Blumberg, the honor to deliver it to Dorothy Bellanca...'cause she was with us all the time. She got a scholarship to Bryn Mawr [Summer School for Women Workers]. You know, I went to summer school.

INTERVIEWR: You did go to Bryn Mawr? I want to hear about that.

BARRON: Dorothy, Dorothy got me to go that summer. We didn't have money so I think some of the liberals paid for me, the fare. Then after that the school started, when I was already active and all in. You know, we used to send. . .

INTERVIEWER: But Bryn Mawr, when you went to it, that was for the whole summer? That was like two months, wasn't it?

BARRON: No, no,...yes, no, no, it was a summer school.

INTERVIEWER: What year did you go there, do you remember?

BARRON: Well, it had to be in 1919, I know.

INTERVIEWER: Well, it didn't really start until 1921.

BARRON: Well, then, it was the first year it started. Bessie Blumberg got me to go. And there was another girl, a buttonhole-maker, her name was Sadie Coats, a girl from Dorothy Bellanca.

INTERVIEWER: And she went too?

BARRON: She went too. And after that I think that every year we sent somebody [from] the Amalgamated [to] these summer schools.

INTERVIEWER: And it was the liberals in Baltimore that raised this money?

BARRON: That's right. They helped us out on strikes too.

INTERVIEWER: That summer school was really very interesting. The person who directed it, Hilda Smith, do you remember her? She's still alive and she lives in Washington.

BARRON: And Edith Christianson, do you remember her?

INTERVIEWER: Ethelyn Christianson.

BARRON: What's her name?

INTERVIEWER: Oh, you mean, you mean Ethelyn Christianson, or do you mean Elizabeth Christman? Which one?

BARRON: Julia Lesniak, do you remember her?

INTERVIEWER: Yes, yes. She was married to David Monas.

BARRON: She was here. We worked with her. She was here in the early thirties, when things got so bad down here and you couldn't get a job and Sonneborn's closed and of course I got blacklisted because I was a chairlady; I couldn't get a job no place.

INTERVIEWER: When was that? In the thirties?

BARRON: 1931. I worked at Sonneborn's 'til 1931.

INTERVIEWER: And then you were blacklisted? Was the company trying to get rid of the union?

BARRON: No, they just went out of business.

INTERVIEWER: They went out of business in '31?

BARRON: A big place like that. It's sad, it's sad. The old people died and the young people didn't want to be in that business. They're still in the oil business, Sonneborn's.

INTERVIEWER: But you said you were blacklisted. Does that mean that other companies, the other shops wouldn't take you?

BARRON: Wouldn't take me, no.

INTERVIEWER: They were non-union shops?

BARRON: Some were union and some were non-union. One shop I later helped to organize and I could have gotten the job, but what? A couple of the women worked there that worked with me and they say, "Oh my God, there goes Sara our chairlady!" And I knew I wasn't going to get the job! (laughs)

INTERVIEWER: So what did you do in 1931?

BARRON: I needed a job badly, so I went to Schulte United.

INTERVIEWER: What was that?

BARRON: It was a store.

INTERVIEWER: Oh! Like a cigar store?

BARRON: No, no, no. They had, Schulte United, they had like ten cent stores with shoes. I got a job to sell shoes and I never even knew the numbers, how you tell. You know, the sizes and all. (Interviewer laughs.) So I went in early in the morning and asked some of the salespeople, I says, "Well, I worked before, there were different sizes." And after they told me the sizes, I wrote it down.

INTERVIEWER: That was pretty smart.

BARRON: Yeah, (laughs) I wrote it down. I worked there and six months, then, I got a job at Liebow Brothers. That was my last job. Things got so bad in our industry. It was terrible. They was making the coats for a dollar and a quarter. So they decided, they came in from the [ACWA] national office, [Sidney] Hillman, [Jacob] Potofsky, and [Reuben] Chapman and said, "We're going to call...". We were so bad, we had a headquarters on Utah Street already, and they shut off the gas,

BARRON: the electric, we didn't have no...we met... I was still a member of the union, I used to go to union headquarters. We were meeting under a candle. Then we pitched in and we....

So I got into Liebow Brothers--it was a union shop. The conditions was terrible, too. And, I'll never forget, we had this big meeting and at the Fourth Regiment Armory and every tailor from all the alleys and all turned out, and all was there. And they decided to call the general strike. But not include Schoeneman's and not include Cohen and Goldman's shop. But everybody else was on strike. We were all on strike.

INTERVIEWER: You said Schoeneman's went out of business. This was before. . .

BARRON: Not Schoeneman's. I didn't say Schoeneman's.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, Sonneborn's.

BARRON: Right. Schoeneman was in business. They had shops here. So we went on strike and. . .

INTERVIEWER: What year was that?

BARRON: That was 1932, September the 13th. That was the first day we were striking. Then the manufacturers begin to come up; we're standing in line, Blumberg was settling. And anyway, it was taking too long and they told him to get out and send somebody else in. Well, on this strike, while we were on strike we knew a lot of people from this Cohen and Goldman place, the cutters wanted a union in New York and the shop was here and they had one shop in Newburgh, North Carolina and another shop in Poughkeepsie. So we went...Potofsky at that time said, "Let's go in front of Cohen and Goldman's," so we took the mass picketing. It was in different places; there were a whole lot of oh...from the...section... We got to Cohen and Goldman's and got on the window sills and when they saw us, we saw those people begin to drop and get dressed to come out. And they locked the doors. They wouldn't let them out. So, they, I don't know who, somebody, called the fire department to open up the doors, see. And we took out a lot of the vest department but all those Yankees, they didn't come out, they stayed inside. We picketed there. So we got Cohen and Goldman's picketing; that's when myself and six other people, we got locked up and they wouldn't let us out. (Interviewer laughs.) In the front of that shop, see.

INTERVIEWER: You got locked up where?

BARRON: Near Cohen and Goldman's, where we were picketing.

INTERVIEWER: In jail or in the company?

BARRON: No, we were locked up in jail. They said that you can only walk four. And we were eight. Therefore, they wouldn't let us out on bail. We were in the Northeastern police station. So then Mr. Revermen was already our lawyer so they took us out the following day and Blumberg was making connections with New York for the cutters and all. Potofsky...and everybody was here from the general office. Irvin was here with us. That's right--Charlie Irvin was with us all through the strikes.

INTERVIEWER: What a wonderful guy he was.

BARRON: Do you remember Gus Straebel?

INTERVIEWER: I never knew him.

BARRON: Well, he was here in 1932 with the strike. And Dorothy was here, and while there was all this commotion about the strike because in the Industrial Building where Schoeneman's had a big shop, there was a lot of our shops that was settling and going back. So they started a commotion and oh, somebody got the Schoeneman people on strike. (laughs)

INTERVIEWER: Oh, Schoeneman's wasn't organized at that time.

BARRON: No, no.

INTERVIEWER: I see. So you got Schoeneman in too.

BARRON: So we got the shops, there was two different locations of Schoeneman's. So my shop settled. They didn't have anybody here except Dorothy and Mamie was here. But Mamie was afraid to go out. She didn't like to get arrested. She was too little a girl. So when they had that law you could not picket only four and we had mass picketing. The inspectors named us. So one day we had four or five hundred girls arrested. 'Cause among these people at Schoeneman's there was only thirty-five men because the men was from a contract shop at Schoeneman's. Otherwise we wouldn't have any men. It was all women in Schoeneman's.

INTERVIEWER: Did the cutting get done somewhere else?

BARRON: It was done in Fredricksberg, Virginia, where it is now. So we went out and said, "That's no good." So, you know, about five or six girls and myself went out together. I'll never forget; it was in February. Dorothy was outside, and as the buses were coming in, streetcars, with the people, we walked in with them inside! We walked to the third floor. We didn't need to make any hell, or anything. All we wanted to see was if we could get them out. And the boss running after us and they threw us out in the snow. And Dorothy was there with the kleenex picking us up and wiping our faces. (laughs) But we had

BARRON: to picket. See, he made a decision and not only did it help our union, it helped all the other unions in the city. So we were really the test case at that time.

INTERVIEWER: I see. So it didn't matter how many there were as long as you walked two-by-two.

BARRON: Since then they allowed mass picketing. And we were really the ones who had something to do with mass picketing. That was in 1932. When the strike was lost, it was lost in March, 1933, the Schoeneman strike. We didn't win. But we had gotten Cohen and Goldman to open another shop. Because he was already organized, they were negotiating with the union. Blumberg and Ulysse, they were the ones that were doing the negotiating. Open up a shop and put a lot of those people to work, you know, in the shop. Try to get a job.

INTERVIEWER: Were a lot of the Schoeneman workers involved?

BARRON: Well, yes, it was eight hundred girls on strike. Now I went back to Leibow's, to my job. The strikers, you know, we were only paid three dollars a week strike benefit; they had no money. We had a shoemaker who gave us cut-rate, half-price to fix the shoes. The women cooked; we had soup kitchens and all. So I went back to Leibow's. And Blumberg and Ulisse called me in. He said, "Sara, we're getting so many women organized,"--that was in 1934 already--"I think you ought to go on the staff." He says, "Because we'll give you Cohen and Goldman's; they've got nothing but women and very few men and some other shops and then you'll work with some organizers; we will begin the organizing campaign." Because they wanted to start organizing. You know, we went to see Governor Pinchot for the committee of the people who lost their jobs. See, see, the people who had a company union and when they closed the shops....

INTERVIEWER: Who had a company union?

BARRON: Schoeneman's. They were the scabs. They came to our union office and wanted to know what we can do for them. So we went, at that time; so we got some of the liberals with us--Elizabeth Gillman, daughter of the first president of Johns Hopkins University. She paid for the bus and she made an appointment with Governor Pinchot and Mrs. Pinchot was there too. "Tell him about shops in Chambersberg [Pennsylvania], that Schoeneman is moving, building a shop," he says. So he turns around and these girls was mostly company union girls, not the strikers, and he says, "Well, you girls should have all been out on strike. Maybe you would have won!" That was something. We went to see Pinchot that time and Mrs. Pinchot....

INTERVIEWER: She was supposed to be quite a wonderful person.

BARRON: Oh! She was wonderful! Look what she did for the shirt workers in the early days.

INTERVIEWER: Well, tell me, tell me about it.

BARRON: She was on the picket line all the time. She was helping them out even though her husband was a governor.

INTERVIEWER: It went all through Pennsylvania or . . ?

BARRON: She went all through Pennsylvania with them. Julia Maietta was also in the early part of the thirties in there. In 1937, Julia Maietta came and [Nettie] Mahaffey came because we began to want to organize drives in Raleigh; see, we have a big shop in Raleigh here. So they came in and went into Westminster where the strike was. That was in 1937. They had a law that you couldn't give out a circular there. And we were lucky not....

INTERVIEWER: Is that in Pennsylvania or Virginia?

BARRON: No, Baltimore, Maryland.

INTERVIEWER: Westminster is in Maryland?

BARRON: Yes, she worked with me here. She worked with me in Fredericksberg, see.

INTERVIEWER: You're talking about Julia Maietta now?

BARRON: Yeah, yeah. We were organizing. And Nettie Mahaffey came too, to organize in 1937. And we started to organize the cotton garment too, in 1936, actually. We started, but they came in 1937. And I'll tell you, Dorothy [Bellanca] was with us all the time. Because in 1936, when we started out the cotton garment thing, you know, Dorothy was here. And it was the first move you made in cotton garment. We didn't have cotton garment.

INTERVIEWER: Until 1936?

BARRON: That's right, in 1936, 1936, Potofsky came in and he said, "The "There's too much competition." And he was squawking about we should have organized cotton garment. So the International [Ladies Garment Workers Union] came in. Did you know Angela Bombacci?

INTERVIEWER: Mm-hmm.

BARRON: Yes, well, they sent her in as an organizer. Potofsky, Ulysse, Dubinsky, they made arrangements that we should work jointly in 1936 to try to get the cutters of both-- cutters that belong to us and the cutters that belong to them-- and have a joint

BARRON: strike. Which we did. Dorothy, Angela was very good, of course. Dorothy was here again at that time.

INTERVIEWER: What happened with that joint strike?

BARRON: Well, we had to strike. We won the strike. One of the places was trying...off the picket line, picked off the cutters off the picket line and got 'em inside and they were gonna settle, get a yellow dog contract with them with a raise. And Dorothy and I walked in that shop when the cutters walked in with us! And they said they were going to get police to get us out. And Dorothy and I didn't get out; instead of that the cabs were waiting for them to go to see a lawyer to sign a yellow-dog contract, that was Rosenbloom's shop. So we put them in the cabs, Yellow Cabs, and Potofsky talked about it and about a week later Potofsky signed a contract for them. He was negotiating even though for the cotton garment people too, for Angela and Kleindler. We had one big shop, a pajama factory, Steiner Liberty.

INTERVIEWER: Where was that? In Westminster?

BARRON: In Baltimore, Baltimore. They had a shop in Shrewsberg, Pennsylvannia and Glenrock, Pennsylvania. We had a strike. We went over there and pulled out the people; the country people were there because we had a strong farmers' union there. But our headquarters in Glenrock where they were fixing the horses' feet, you know, blacksmith.... It was a red-line, on one side Maryland, the other side was Pennsylvania. So we find out that they were, so I was over there. That's when Irvin came in; he came in too. Dorothy was here. I don't remember...and Nettie [Mahaffey] was here. I don't remember the other fellow who came in; he was not with the Amalgamated anymore. A heavyset fellow. He was there too. We found out that the trucks was coming in from Baltimore to Shrewsberg to take, pick-up some work. So we laid down--it was wintertime--on the line, where it says here, you pass about two hundred people. We were laying there, and the trucks got to the line and they went back.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, for goodness sake.

BARRON: Yeah, then we had services on Sunday. They brought a preacher from here in the blacksmith's shop. Irvin described it. It was the most dramatic meeting we ever had with the strikers. He was one of the speakers, see.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, he was fantastic.

BARRON: In the blacksmith's shop. I liked him, too. He liked me a lot. He wouldn't let nobody say anything about me because anything he wanted....

INTERVIEWER: Do you remember how his eyes used to twinkle?

BARRON: Uh-huh.

INTERVIEWER: He had the most mischievous eyes.

BARRON: Then we started the organization drive and Julia [Maietta] was here, in cotton garment, and Nettie was here. We had, went around, and we all must give Nettie credit because it took a lot of nerve and guts, there was a Betty Cunningham, do you remember her?

INTERVIEWER: No, but the name is familiar.

BARRON: She was an organizer. When we started organizing the rest of the cotton garment workers with the Marlborough Shirt, Stadium Manufacturing Company and the BVD which was a big outfit. . .

INTERVIEWER: Now, tell me what...I'm full of questions, Sara. You said that Nettie had guts, it took courage. What did you. . .

BARRON: On the Eastern shore [of Maryland], they wouldn't let a union organizer in.

INTERVIEWER: This was on the Eastern shore?

BARRON: Uh-huh. That was a part of BVD and a part of Manhattan and a part of Rob Roy and all. So, Mr. Ulisse, it was all under Mr. Ulisse; he sends Nettie and Betty Cunningham to investigate the territory there. They had met 'em. They didn't let 'em go back and they didn't let 'em stay there. They were locked in the car, until finally. . .

INTERVIEWER: These were like the sheriffs or who. . . ?

BARRON: Yes, the sheriff, police and some other anti-union people, until finally they got to a phone and called Ulisse. Ulisse had to get--at that time O'Connor was the governor--state police to send 'em back. I tell you, that took a lot of sacrifice, too. I have the greatest respect for her. Well, anyhow, then she came back to Baltimore and we started on this Marlborough Shirt Company. There was a lot of Polish people there. And I want to tell you something, that we worked that Sunday. We woke them out of bed; we got their signatures. Because we had until Monday morning to produce 51 percent. Gladys Dickerson was already with us, too. She was the negotiator of our. . .

INTERVIEWER: This must have been 1937?

BARRON: No, no, this was in 1938.

INTERVIEWER: Because that was after the National Labor Relations Board was. . .

BARRON: Yes, yes, that's right. It was in 1938. We had gotten those people signed up over the weekend and we had committees inside. They did a wonderful job themselves. The pressing department was signed up. She's still, the Johnson girl, she's still alive and we talk about what happened. So we got recognition.

INTERVIEWER: You got 51 percent over. . .

BARRON: We got 60 percent! We woke 'em up out of bed to get the signatures. Then we started on the other shops. The next big shop was BVD. They couldn't...they negotiated and Petofsky come in and all and we called a strike. So we called a strike here and we called a strike in the Eastern shore. They had a shop someplace else. Well, anyhow, Nettie was here. That was already in the forties. We still didn't finish the cotton garment shops. And we had some picket lines. There was someone from the shop I worked at Sonneborn's. That's when Irvin was here. We put on horses, we rented horses, things, you know. . .

INTERVIEWER: Real live horses?

BARRON: No! They were costumes of horses! We put four strikers in there (laughs) and they were walking the picket line. We had girls dressed in BVDs. (Interviewer laughs.) And Nettie was here with the strike and Julia was here and finally she went to Eastern shore, see. Stayed with the people down on Eastern shore and Nettie did.

INTERVIEWER: She became the manager there, didn't she?

BARRON: Yes, that's when the union organized, got an agreement with Rob Roy and with Manhattan and some other. Yeah, she became manager. We got to cotton garment at that time. We had a kitchen. We had a nice headquarters. That's when you were on Redford Street, right?

INTERVIEWER: Right.

BARRON: We had the headquarters there. We had the women, the committee of women. They were all Polish people. They made the best lunches. And we had the picket lines. We had some arrests, but not so many. But we had a lot of fun moving pictures taken on the picket line.

INTERVIEWER: This was the Marlborough strike you're talking about?

BARRON: BVD. Marlborough we didn't have to. The Stadium was no strike either. We got organized the cotton garment. But unfortunately, later on, now there's no BVD here, they're out of town.

INTERVIEWER: Then most of the people are unionized, then. . . ?

BARRON: Yeah, then came in the organization of Raleigh. We went around; did an awful lot of organization work. Never charged a thing. We went at night. We had, Local 70, had a wonderful executive board. I never had any trouble getting a big committee. We went to Westminster....

INTERVIEWER: Was this Local 70?

BARRON: Yes, that's the big local.

INTERVIEWER: Your local?

BARRON: Right. Instead of having a women's local after the general strike of 1932, we talked to Dorothy and Dorothy said, "Sara, don't get a women's local because Rochester isn't doing too much with a women's local. Let's get Local 70 and it's going to be a majority of women and then you'll be able to elect women to participate and be active." Well, I thought it was the right thing to do. So, we got this Local 70, which became the largest local under the [Baltimore] Joint Board and the officers were women. We gave a little bit to the men, too. (Interviewer laughs.) We begin to get a lot of the black people in. Wonderful people, still are. We begin to work, organization work in Raleigh. Julie helped us. She was a wonderful person. I'd work with her anytime.

INTERVIEWER: You're talking about Julie Maietta?

BARRON: Yes, anytime. Never, never had any trouble together. And we signed out Raleigh; we didn't have to strike. Signed them up through negotiations and we went up to Londontown. We begin to sign up too, see; these people were always here to help out. Oh! Hilda Cobb. Do you remember her, Hilda Cobb? She was an organizer.

INTERVIEWER: I didn't know her.

BARRON: Hilda Cobb was very nice. See, Blumberg used to come and say, "Sarey, I don't have a car. Go help them out." They were organizing Friedman, Harry, Marks. And she was there. Hilda Cobb. So I went to Richmond to organize.

INTERVIEWER: Sara, you know, you have the most amazing memory. You remember every single person, and their names and where they worked.

BARRON: Yes, yes. How about Clammie Shook? We were on a sitdown strike in Alexandria, Virginia one day. She was with the Amalgamated. Clammie Shook?

INTERVIEWER: I didn't know her.

BARRON: Well, it was a few years ago. Many years ago. And they were finding out I belonged to the International Ladies Garment Workers. (Interviewer laughs.) I had to get up after laying on the ground for three days.

INTERVIEWER: Can I take you back to something you said that I thought maybe you could recall for me? You were talking about when Charlie Irvin talked in this blacksmith's shop. What did he say? What was the feeling?

BARRON: His feeling was, the atmosphere, see, there were the horses' things in the half-light and the minister performed the service. He was a Methodist minister from Hamden, Baltimore, and Irvin stood there like an actor bringing back the strikers to the history, the American history and the revolutions. . .

INTERVIEWER: Oh! I can just see him.

BARRON: ...and the people were sitting quiet. He praised them for the courage they had. In a small town that was so opposed to the unions, except that farmworkers. The farmers had a nice union; they were really nice to us. I'll tell you, you know how he gets up this way. I can see him now. I loved him.

INTERVIEWER: I did too.

BARRON: Yes. Elizabeth Gimmel was his girlfriend. That's how he got a lot done.

INTERVIEWER: (laughs) Really?! I didn't know that.

BARRON: I do remember. I'd exercise my brains but I wouldn't get a thing out.

INTERVIEWER: Oh my goodness, you just remember everything. You were in that meeting, then, at this blacksmith's shop.

BARRON: Oh! Of course. I was helping to conduct the meeting.

INTERVIEWER: That must have been a really unforgettable experience.

BARRON: Oh my, it was unforgettable. And such lovable people. But Sidney Hillman was living yet and we had to give up the jobs and the people said, "We'll give a reduction." I was sitting there, crying there. And Cecil was giving me hell because I was crying there. "We just want to come out of the union. You're the nicest people," he says, "even if you don't get anything, just to be with you." And it was fate for Ulisse to stay in the union. And, I'll tell you, so when we got up from this dirt floor, you know, laying on the ground; those people were laying, too. Cecil and Charlie Irvin came up and Ulisse and he picked me up to come back. So they stopped at the

BARRON: Lord Baltimore Hotel, (interviewer laughs) they all did, so I came in (laughs). I know my coat was dirty and Dorothy was washing up my coat (both laugh) to go in there. We had to leave four o'clock back to the picket line.

INTERVIEWER: Sounds like you never got any sleep in those days.

BARRON: No, I didn't mind it. I tell you the truth, I still have, I was so worked up in there, twenty hours a day didn't mean nothing to me really. Before I got a car I used to go to sleep at two o'clock in the morning and come back the following night at eleven o'clock, but it didn't mean anything.

INTERVIEWER: It was really your life, wasn't it?

BARRON: Yes, yes, I never got married. I took care of my family and a always said, "I'm married to the Amalgamated."

INTERVIEWER: You really did.

BARRON: I really did.

INTERVIEWER: There were a lot of women who were really involved, like you. That was their life; they didn't get married.

BARRON: I was always busy.

INTERVIEWER: You were too busy to get married.

BARRON: So then we went to organize in the smaller towns, like Frederick. We first went to Frederick to organize Schluss Brothers, a shop, a tailoring company. I think that's where you talked to me, and their Baltimore shop was with the United Garment Workers. It was a funny arrangement about the Baltimore shop. The cutters, the cutters, the coat shop was in United Garment Workers. The pant shop, pressing department, the button sewers, and the examiners were in the Amalgamated. So we organized and finally got the signatures. Schluss said, "If you show me that you have more than 52 percent, I'll sign the agreement with the Amalgamated." He says because we didn't have an agreement for the pressers and all, but they did everything they could for the what-you-call-it, the pant shop. So we got, God bless Julie, we worked day and night to get that shop organized. I'll never forget her. I don't forget people who do, do the work. We got a wonderful group down there! That's who you addressed that time, the Schluss Tailoring Company. Well, that was 1944. Then begin the wave of organizing. We went to a shop in Turman, Maryland, not far from Frederick. We didn't know these ladies; we organized Turman. Everybody, Julie and I, when we came back to Baltimore and Angela says, "Go see Mr. Ulisse." He says, "That don't belong to you. That belongs to us."

INTERVIEWER: So you had to turn it over.

BARRON: So her son, Phil--he teaches at Columbia University, I think--Phillip, yes. He came with us; we didn't want to go there anymore because "You came and signed us up. It's our cards." So we turned it over to them. From there we went to Sagner's. That was a tough, a tough baby to organize. It was terrible.

INTERVIEWER: When did that campaign begin? The Sagner's campaign.

BARRON: 1950. That's when they signed up. Then we signed up them and we signed up Raleigh at the same time.

INTERVIEWER: Was there a strike at Sagner's?

BARRON: There was a stoppage at Sagner's. No! Strike, they didn't want to join the union. We had a hard time getting them in; got inside after Sagner agreed to both the McConnellsburg. See, they had a shop at McConnellsburg and the pant shop was in Newberg, North Carolina.

INTERVIEWER: They were all over.

BARRON: The coat shop was in Frederick. None of the people would sign the majority. They had to go around and ask them to sign and we went around. (laughs) I'll never forget, one of the presidents of the company union at Frederick said, "Who sent for you?"

INTERVIEWER: So they had a company union there?

BARRON: Oh, they had a company union. All three shops.

INTERVIEWER: So how did you finally get them to sign?

BARRON: Because of the union label thing. They weren't union labels.

INTERVIEWER: So the company really wanted the workers to join then?

BARRON: Oh, they had to go around and tell them not to join. There was a big fence. (laughs) Julia and I came one time; the following time we came with circulars. They had a great big fence and they didn't want us to get near the door. So we signed them in 1950. I'm very happy to think that in a small way, with all the work I had to do, business agent work, I always participated, at night, helping in something else. You know, we always did. Up until now we always used to say at the conventions, "I got my army, with enthusiasm, with friendship, with devotion." Friends of mine and when Raleigh closed, the mostly black people, they didn't have money to pay their gas bill, so we took it out of our pockets. I went to the gas company with eleven bills one day and they wanted to know if I was a real estate lady. I said, "No, these people are poor." These people were so wonderful to me. We had a reunion like and all the black people there had a dinner and I was there. You should have seen the way we carried on. "You better come to the dinner because

BARRON: Sara's going to be there!" So you make friends in all these years and I'm not sorry, I'm really not sorry.

INTERVIEWER: Obviously people have not forgotten you at all or they wouldn't keep calling you. . .

BARRON: They always do. The last place we organized was Londontown.

INTERVIEWER: When was that?

BARRON: That was in 1962. No, no, no, it had to be 1959; because you see Ulisse died in 1961. Of course there was the union label campaign. We had talked to him, I didn't; Potofsky talked to them, and Blumberg. I tell you I miss Blumberg, because you know what? He was the most devoted person, as far as I was concerned. You know what he used to say to me? He used to tell the business agent, they say, "Well, we can't go in that shop. They wouldn't let us in." He'd say, "Take Sara. She's got a lot of nerve; she'll get in." (Interviewer laughs.) Yeah, yeah. In the early days when we were organizing, he remained a friend. Because when he came in and gave away twenty-five hundred dollars of an increase that he got, to the retirement here. You know, they have a retirement named after him, and they had a luncheon here and I was in Raleigh taking up complaints and he would not have the luncheon until they called me up to come back, because he wanted me near him. And he gave it twenty-five hundred dollars. They all said, "Why did you cry so much for him?" I said, "Because he was like a father to me, and he had a lot to do with me being what I am, and Dorothy and Ulisse and August Bellanca." Because in 1918 they had, you know, they had a convention in 1918 in Baltimore when Dorothy was elected for vice-president and Bessie Hillman resigned. We had a strike there with Schluss'. They asked me if I was gonna help. I always wanted to go picket because it was a lot of fun, a lot of excitement. I got locked up and then from the station house we had a meeting there and he wanted me to stand up and say something and I couldn't say nothing! It was 1918. I was, I didn't want to say anything. He pushed me on the stage and he was for me. . .

INTERVIEWER: Blumberg?

BARRON: No, August. I was his, what-you-call, I never forget what he said; went to the 1967. He was to the testimonial dinner at that time, and I saw him. Barbara, Dorothy, I loved her, she loved me. I saw her a day after Hillman's funeral. And I went to see her. Then Blumberg says, "You better go on and see her because you're not going to see her very much." I went to New York and they wouldn't let nobody in but me. Her sister was there. She took my hand and she says, she kissed it and she says, "Sara, please take care of yourself, they need you." She says, "I may not see you anymore, but they need a person like you." Ohhh, I never forgot what she said to me.

BARRON: She really was a friend: she signed me up in the union, she gave me a chance to go to see, she took me to lunch with her to Mrs. Roosevelt. I was twice in the White House. Anytime there was something going on that she wanted me to be, she would go to Blumberg, and so did Bessie help me. She thought a lot of me. To be, to be, to learn something. But one time, I didn't know the difference between the, the equal rights people weren't the kind of people the union was supporting. So she heard that I was going to Detroit; she calls me up. She says, "Why are you going to Detroit?" I says, "Because Mrs. Donald Hooker was the chairman of the equal rights people. Told me she says that she'd take me along." She says, "You can't go there. We're not approving of that." Then she wrote me a letter explaining what it is. She was a wonderful. . .

INTERVIEWER: When was that?

BARRON: Oh, I don't know, it was in the early twenties. Because in 1918 when they got the, when they passed the amendment?

INTERVIEWER: For voting? 1920.

BARRON: 1920. Well, they had a march in Washington in 1918, though. Because it took some buses down there and gave them some capes, some capes to wear.

INTERVIEWER: What did you do for suffrage?

BARRON: We didn't do nothing.

INTERVIEWER: Sara, that was a delicious lunch, and I want to get it officially on the tape, you entertain me royally. It was a most fabulous dinner. (Sara laughs.) You told me that you had taken up cooking when you retired. I believe it. It was a wonderful, wonderful lunch.

BARRON: I'd never cooked before.

INTERVIEWER: You never had time, you said.

BARRON: I never had time.

INTERVIEWER: Now you do.

BARRON: The only time I used to eat, maybe, was over the weekend if I didn't go away and if I was away I didn't even eat at home over the weekend. When I came home at twelve o'clock I wouldn't eat dinner. I'd eat dinner outside: most of my meals were outside, anyway.

INTERVIEWER: Well, while we were having lunch you mentioned a few really interesting things that I thought we ought to get on tape--they were so significant. One of the first you mentioned was

INTERVIEWER: Mary Mullins and the fact that there was a real fuss over her being a sleeve-setter because that was men's work.

BARRON: That was at Sonneborn's.

INTERVIEWER: I wonder if you want to say what role the union played in seeing that she got to be a sleeve-setter.

BARRON: Well, she was working. Can you mention the place she worked in, where she got fired? We, we're trying to organize in 1917 or 1918 after a long strike in 1916. She was one of the women who signed union cards, and she got fired. She worked in the Milton Avenue plant in Baltimore. She was a sleeve-setter there. I signed her up, going around organizing, even though I was not an organizer. I was a chairlady of Sonneborn's; she came to me. I went to Mr. Blumberg, Dorothy and Ulisse and told them that, "This woman is a sleeve-setter. She lost her job, she's a widow with four children. I think something should be done." Mr. Blumberg and we all talked it over and we decided that the best place to send her in to work would be Sonneborn's because I'm there, the chairlady. Ulisse worked there as a top-collar baster. He wasn't on the staff yet. Dorothy was in the office, coming in, coming out, and Blumberg was the manager.

Blumberg took her in there and got the boss to put her back to work. And the men rebelled because they didn't want a woman sleeve-setter. This went on for a couple days and then Blumberg told them that, "She's gonna stay here and it's up to them what they want to do." They stopped for two days. Then they went back to work and she worked there until the place closed in 1931. I've been in touch with her. She worked in other plants later. We were very good friends all these years. When she passed away her family sent for me and said that I helped her mother to make a living for the four small children. And after all these years when I retired and I joined the Webster Center, a senior citizens group, her daughter recognized me and came over and told the people there how grateful she was for what I did, the union did, for her mother.

INTERVIEWER: That's quite a story. That really, really is.

BARRON: That's a true story.

INTERVIEWER: That's very moving.

BARRON: She was a Bohemian woman.

INTERVIEWER: Now the next thing you started to tell me about which I thought was interesting because I hadn't realized it at all was that you changed your name. What was your name before you changed it?

BARRON: Sara Barrinsky. B-a-r-r-i-n-s-k-y.

INTERVIEWER: And you changed it in the 1940's. That's so interesting. Could you tell us why?

BARRON: That was the time when the CIO went into being, or the late thirties and we were trying to organize in the smaller towns. They considered a name like mine foreign and too radical. It made it difficult to go around and organize. It was suggested to me that I cut my name, make it Sara Barron, which I legally through court changed my name. A name to go in and be able to say my name is Sara Barron instead of Sara Barrinsky.

INTERVIEWER: Nobody else in your family changed their name? They're all Barrinskys.

BARRON: They're not all Barrinskys now.

INTERVIEWER: That was in the late thirties or the early forties?

BARRON: It must have been in the forties. Because the CIO, John L. Lewis was considered to them a communist. And they didn't want to hear nothing about John L. Lewis. (Both laugh.)

INTERVIEWER: No, the other thing you started talking about was the Ku Klux Klan. What was that story about lynching on Halloween?

BARRON: We....we were organizing in Westminster and they had a Halloween parade. The children were wearing Ku Klux Klan costumes. We later find out that there was a big movement there of the Ku Klux Klan.

INTERVIEWER: And the children borrowed their fathers' costumes?

BARRON: I guess so.

INTERVIEWER: But that's the kind of community you were organizing in, where the Klan was riding?

BARRON: And Nettie Mahaffey was there at the time and the ILG was trying to organize a place there too. While we didn't get too much response when our organization, the ILG, called a strike and we were picketing with them. They got a contract.

INTERVIEWER: Well, that sure made it hard to organize. That kind of community. Then you told a very interesting story that involved Naomi Richardson and the NRA [National Recovery Act], Section VIIA, and you were trying to give out circulars. One of them on the minimum wage and one on organizing. I thought that was so interesting because it was really a test case, right, that you might want to talk about it so it would be on the tape.

BARRON: In the early thirties, we got a circular from the general office explaining the Section VIIA, under the National Labor Relations Act. . .

INTERVIEWER: Which was the right to organize.

BARRON: You have a right to organize without any coercion or sign a card. So one of our business agents, Peter Martucci, and Paul Lefsky was living, and Virginia Rochester and myself, we went to Westminister to give out the circular to two plants. When we got there we began to give out the circulars, people were taking them. The policemen came and said that we had no right to give out a circular. That you had to get a permit to give out a circular and to go to the mayor's office. We took our time to give out the circulars and when we were almost completed we went to the mayor's office and he told us that they do not permit any distribution of circulars without getting a permit. So we offered; I asked him how much is the permit and he said, "A dollar." I offered a dollar and he says, "Not for them." (Interviewer laughs.) So I asked him, I said, "This is just a copy of a government release." I said, "You're part of this country." He said, "Not exactly." They call up their lawyer to find out what to do with us. And the lawyer said, "Let them go this time, but never come here again without getting the okay." So we left. Then a little while later we heard that they were not complying with the minimum wage of forty cents an hour, that they were punching in, punching out the cards, sending 'em out, and bringing 'em back. So we came with a circular explaining the NRA and the minimum wage. That time we had with us Dr. Naomi Richardson of Goucher College, Eleanor Pankhurst from Goucher College, and Dr. Sideman from Johns Hopkins University, and Fifi, Martucci, and Virginia Rochester. We gave out the circulars and we were getting ready, and they didn't find out until we were almost through and I was in Naomi Richardson's car. They followed it in to Baltimore. They lost us. But they took down her license number and they said it was Dr. Naomi Richardson's because I asked them the following day when I came back again there. He says, "We couldn't find where you were but we found Naomi Richardson."

INTERVIEWER: That confused them. That's the same community, the Klan was so prominent. That was a rough, rough place. Now I think it was also a very interesting story that Gladys Dickerson, who was head of Southern organizing campaign for the Amalgamated, used to send her new staff in to you to be trained.

BARRON: Well, not all, but she'd send some.

INTERVIEWER: Well, four of them, you said. Ruth Vaughn. . .

BARRON: Ursula was here. . .

INTERVIEWER: Ursula Coppola. Tell us how to you used to train them. How did she have you. . .

BARRON: Well, Gladys used to come in here to negotiate on the cotton garment. Gladys Dickerson, she was really head of the cotton

BARRON: garment. While she was coming in she was in touch with us and with me because I gave her information on it. So she called up Ulisse who's the manager and said, "I'd like to send in Ruth Vaughn. She seems to be very capable person and she's gonna handle the Palm Beach." See, they organized the Palm Beach at that time.

INTERVIEWER: That was about 1950 or so?

BARRON: Yeah, something like that. They organized the Palm Beach. To get acquainted with the clothing because she came out of a cotton garment shop. So Ulisse called me in and he says, "You get somebody." I said, "Who?" He said, "Gladys talked to me and she wants you to take her into some shops to see the clothing shops and explain the operations and see what you can do to help her. Because she's going to handle the Palm Beach shops." She came in and I had her in the shop, took her around the operation. At that time it was called the Marlborough Manufacturing Company on Preston Street. The man's name was Mr. Felix. Then when we came back from there, in the office in the evening, I took one of our price lists and a coat and I explained each operation, what it meant, 'cause she already saw it and what to do.

INTERVIEWER: That's a good way to teach, too.

BARRON: I always remember the same thing. She went to Miami, I think. It gave her practical experience.

INTERVIEWER: So you were a teacher, too.

BARRON: Yeah, a teacher. No wonder she kissed me. She said, "I'm glad to see you."

INTERVIEWER: Ursula?

BARRON: Ursula? No, Ruth.

INTERVIEWER: Ruth...I'm sure she was at the convention.

BARRON: Yes, she was; I saw her there.

INTERVIEWER: Now, let's see...you have always been very active in politics. You're active now in retirement. You're really helping to elect a new senator from Maryland, we hope. When did you first start getting active in politics?

BARRON: In Roosevelt times. You know, the Depression. It was so bad; it destroyed our industry. I told you I had to get a job in a shoe store, to sell shoes. Wages were so low that people didn't even make eight or ten dollars a week. Everybody rebelled. So, that was Roosevelt.

INTERVIEWER: Was that 1932 or 1936?

BARRON: 1932. Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: What did you do in that campaign?

BARRON: Well, we were giving out pamphlets and talking to the people, you know, to individuals about the Depression. A chicken in every...a machine...a car in every garage.

INTERVIEWER: A chicken in every pot. You say the women were really wonderful? Were these women from the shop?

BARRON: The shop, yes; these women were shop women. We had all kinds of parades. The women in the shops, the executive board, our women were really wonderful. They picketed whenever we needed them and I feel very proud of what we have developed since 1932 of the women members of the Amalgamated. They're a great help to the union. They helped to make the union stronger. They always responded to stoppages. When they were ordered to stop or to stop themselves to give a little courage for better negotiations. They still are wonderful. Those are there, a lot of them retired.

INTERVIEWER: Since you're talking about women in the Amalgamated can we talk a little bit about where women have gone in the Amalgamated? I remember when we were having lunch I said, "Sara, if you had the chance, if you hadn't been a woman when the opening came for manager of the Baltimore Board, do you think you would have been appointed? What did you say?

BARRON: I would have because they considered me the most capable of the group that was there among the business agents. Being, being a woman, they felt that a man would have more prestige for the manufacturers. That was the real truth.

INTERVIEWER: You also mentioned that several of the wives of top officers of the Amalgamated were really strong women, really contributed a great deal. Starting with Bessie Hillman...Bessie Blumberg.

BARRON: Yes. Bessie Hillman...Bessie Blumberg was very helpful here. Whenever we had strikes....They lived in the city of Baltimore, and she was very encouraging to the women to become active because she used to work in a vest factory herself, before she married Blumberg. She was a vestmaker. Of course, Bessie Hillman was a leader from 1910. They were practical women that went through all these depressions, all these hardships, all these fights to get somewheres and conditions for the rank-and-file. Dorothy's out of this question.

INTERVIEWER: I was going to ask you about Dorothy because, even though you knew Bessie and Bess Blumberg very well, you really knew Dorothy best of all, didn't you?

BARRON: Yes, Dorothy Bellanca had worked in the factory prior to 1914. As a very young girl she was a hand buttonhole-maker which needed a lot of skill, you know, to make hand buttonholes. She had developed not only herself but she had developed people in that local, the buttonhole-makers' local. Like Mamie Santora and Sadie Dressner, she used to be called and some of the others. And she also developed us women, like myself, that were not in that local because we belonged to a men's local, Local 36, which was men and women. She gave us advice how to get somewheres as delegates, as Joint Board delegates and as active members. She also taught us how to picket, and we picketed plenty.

INTERVIEWER: Sounds like you were always on strike.

BARRON: Yeah, we had bitter war battles here when Blumberg was beaten up and Bellanca was beaten up. They tried to crucify a lot of the people that were fighting to build the Amalgamated. Baltimore City was one of the first that joined, next to New York, under a battlefield the fight between cutters and tailors, the same building, to get a union here. Dorothy was always with them. She told us how to get a woman elected. We listened to her and we did get people elected--women.

INTERVIEWER: You said that you were, until 1934, you were the youngest delegate?

BARRON: The youngest delegate.

INTERVIEWER: The youngest delegate or the youngest woman delegate?

BARRON: The youngest woman delegate.

INTERVIEWER: At the convention? You also said something very interesting which I wanted to ask you about. At the conventions--and you remembered every single place that all the conventions were at all down those years--you said the women used to get together and talk together. What kinds of talks did you have?

BARRON: Well, there was two cities that had women's locals. We didn't. We didn't consider the Buttonhole-makers local a women's local. They used to come and ask us, "How do we get anywhere?" They'd have a hard time getting things done. So I had decided then what had happened to the election of delegates. We got together with the women and all in our city (laughs) and said, "Instead of voting for four, vote for one." So a woman always got in. We felt when we were getting together that the thing to do was to get organized, get more women active. Then we'll have a right to say to them, "We want to be a part of it because we do as much as you do and we make contributions as much as you do as far as skilled activities and otherwise." I said, "You can't do anything if you don't come and do anything when they ask us to do them." Of course Mr. Blumberg was very encouraging, Ulisse, Dorothy, and Bessie Hillman.

INTERVIEWER: They were the main ones who were encouraging.

BARRON: Of course Hillman and Potofsky, but I was always closer to them. If I needed something I didn't go call Hillman! I went to Dorothy, went to Bessie, Ulisse and Blumberg most of the time.

INTERVIEWER: Actually, today they would probably call what you did a "women's caucus". You got together and exchanged experiences.

BARRON: Yeah, we did, on our own instead of going to a banquet. We didn't get invited anyhow. . .

INTERVIEWER: You didn't get invited?

BARRON: Sometimes we did, sometimes we didn't. (laughs) But we got together; we had a lot of fun, talking over things from different cities. There was quite a group that used to come from Chicago. Well, I know of the only active one who was an official when Sara Rossner left. I'm very thankful that I'm living and able to do and talk about it.

INTERVIEWER: They really would hold banquets and not invite you?

BARRON: Well, not to all the cities. They invite some.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, I see. It wasn't because you were women.

BARRON: No, no. Julie told me that she didn't get invited; not to Chicago, not to the Baltimore thing. They had some in Philadelphia there. Neither did Nettie. I asked them. They said they weren't invited to this convention.

INTERVIEWER: So that's really the kind of thing that women are doing today in a little more organized way. They're having women's meetings to try to see how to move ahead in the unions as women.

BARRON: That's right. I think women are as capable as men and they're more determined than men many times. They don't give up so easy.

INTERVIEWER: A lot of people have said that in the past, that women. . .

BARRON: Well, that's what Mr. Blumberg told me. I came to him and told him, I said, "I can't do nothing with these people." We were organizing. He said, "Sara, if you go in one door and they throw you out, you come in the other door." So we tried to do it. He had a good philosophy about that. I loved that man.

INTERVIEWER: Well, another person you were talking about at lunch was Angela Bombacci from the ILG. You were saying that she was sent in here by the ILG as quite a young woman, really, to head the upper South region.

BARRON: No, no, no. As an organizer.

INTERVIEWER: I see, and she worked her way up to that, to heading that region. But you said she had a really rough time.

BARRON: She did: she didn't know the city. She knew Mr. Ulisse very well-- I don't know where from, other cities. I understand her brother-in-law was with the Amalgamated. Yes, yes. Her sister's husband was an organizer up in Rochester, so they knew each other. She came in. Their union was even weaker than ours. We had a bigger headquarters than they did and we had more members. They wanted to organize the cotton garment. So we did. So Mr. Ulisse introduced me to her and said, "You help her as much as you can." Because he talked to Potofsky and Mr. Kreindler, who was the vice-president of the ILG, that they may have to get a start with a joint strike of cotton garment cutters, you know. So I did. I went up with her and somebody with a car. Fifi drove us most of the time because he's the only one who had a car.

INTERVIEWER: When did you learn to drive, by the way?

BARRON: You know when I learned to drive? Later. When they organized the company shops.

INTERVIEWER: When you had to drive.

BARRON: I had to drive because we were leaving at two o'clock in the morning, coming back at twelve, one o'clock. So I took a chance and the girls in the office were worried sick. I went to get my license and I passed, and the following day I went to Belair, about forty miles from here and they said, "Sara, don't go the first time by yourself." I went. They kept calling up there (laughs) because I wasn't going too fast. When I got there they said, "You better call up your office. They don't know what happened to you." I drove ever since and I drove because we were in Pennsylvania and it was months and months.

INTERVIEWER: When was that? When you first started to drive?

BARRON: 1960.

INTERVIEWER: 1960. That's amazing. Well, I didn't want to get you sidetracked from Angela, but what made it difficult for her? You said it was. . .

BARRON: They [ILG] had a very weak union. She didn't have too much help from committees and all to go with her. She didn't know the streets and she didn't know the people. So we finally got together and I liked her and we worked together to organize these cutters to get them together to go on a strike of cutters. There were quite a few shops that we had. We called a strike

BARRON: in 1936. Then, of course, the shops were working and didn't touch them because we knew we couldn't. We had to work on them to touch them. The manufacturers thought if they break up the strike of the cutters, they'd be sure that we would not be able to organize the shops. One of the shops was ours, Rosenbloom's. They took them off the picket line. We just left, about fifteen minutes, to have some lunch and took 'em inside and were trying to draw up a yellow dog contract for them. Then Dorothy and I gets on the scene, and as they were coming in, Dorothy Bellanca and I came inside. They ordered us out but we wouldn't come out. They called these taxi cabs to take these people to the lawyer to sign the yellow dog contracts and then go back to work. Instead we told the taxi cab drivers--I got in one cab and another fellow came from my union office in another cab, and Dorothy in another cab (laughs)--and we took them to our union office and Potofsky was there and we got him to talk to them, not to agree.

INTERVIEWER: That was the period when yellow dog contracts were just being made illegal, and you didn't have a right to ask them to sign.

BARRON: But they did. So we got through. Mr. Potofsky negotiated for them and for us. Then we started getting organized and they started getting organized. Angela was already getting a little bit established and getting some help and a staff. The dressmakers....and we started to organize our cotton garment, which we organized. We organized the pajama companies and we organized BVD and Marlborough. And Nettie came in and Julie came in. They all helped to organize. They were wonderful help. We all worked together.

INTERVIEWER: You really helped Angela get her feet on the ground.

BARRON: Yeah, we did. Well, I did because she didn't know, not because I was more capable than her. She was a very capable person. That's why when she--before she died--she sent for me, there was someone writing her history while she was sick. I happened to come in at a time; when I came in there she said, "This girl, so glad to see her. If it wouldn't be for her I don't know what I would have done when I first came to Baltimore. She was a great help to me. God bless her." Then the following day she died. I went to the funeral. She sent for me and I took her a box of candy. She wanted me to go home. The nurse was there; she had cancer. I'll never forget that, what she said. She always did used to say....When she had her banquet when she retired and she come over and say hello she said, "Sara, I want to thank you a lot for what you did for me." I said, "Well, I didn't do nothing for you that I wouldn't do for anybody else."

INTERVIEWER: Well, that book you showed me about the history of Jews in Baltimore has her written up and indicates that she met a lot

INTERVIEWER: of resistance because people considered her work was work a man should be doing.

BARRON: That's right. They fought her, too. The cloakmakers. There was a group, Local 4 of the cloakmakers that were all philosophers, you know, old-time philosophers? They thought they ought to have the opportunity. Then they sent a person from the outside. They resent the person from the outside anyhow. But she had, did so much good work among the dressmakers and the other towns that the people liked her. And then Kreindler was very good to her; he helped her an awful lot to get established. He was the vice-President of this territory. Close to Dubinsky; that's why they put him on as an Executive Board member.

INTERVIEWER: Can you tell me something about your relationship to the Baltimore community, because that same book about Baltimore Jews writes you up being the leading active union person in Baltimore for the Amalgamated, and it seems to me that you have always been very involved with the community, too. What kinds of things did you do?

BARRON: Well, I was on the Histradrut of the Jewish Labor Committee; I belonged to different charitable organizations, and I participated in community chest with the CIO and the various drives that they had. But mostly all I was helpful with our people in the unemployment. I had connections with the Unemployment Compensation Board. When people were out of work and couldn't get their checks I used to go down with them: we had hearings and appeals, and I would be their lawyer, representative, to try to get their case won. And help them with their retirement and a lot of people never remember many years ago where they worked. Shops close. Up until now, some of them don't remember where they worked. In order to get the benefits of the extra money for their retirement I help them, even now. Because I remember the shops where they worked. To give the record to the one that takes care of the retirement and when they check up with the Social Security. It's right; what I gave 'em is right.

INTERVIEWER: And you give out the dates. . .

BARRON: And I give out the dates for people who aren't sure that they have been in the industry. They've changed the name of the manufacturers, and they have forgotten. A lot of old people forget.

INTERVIEWER: And your memory is so fantastic.

BARRON: And I'll tell you one thing. A couple weeks ago....It was a black man. He was a truck driver there, where he worked, and they got the records from the Social Security, see, and they want to make sure that it was the truth. I told them exactly the street, where the place was, that Mr. Kroll had died.

BARRON: He was a made-to-measure man, and this fellow used to deliver his work. He got all paid for his retirement and I was very happy. He called me up and he said, "You know, Miss Sara, you know I never talked to you, now; I'm black." I knew he was a black fellow that called me, but he says, "God should only bless you," he says, "because I'm gonna get my retirement."

INTERVIEWER: Isn't that something?

BARRON: Isn't that something?

INTERVIEWER: But tell me, how did you find time, working twenty hours a day for the union, to do all these things?

BARRON: Well, this was part of my work, too.

INTERVIEWER: You considered this part of your work. . .

BARRON: Yes, anything that had to do with Social Security or with complaints about unemployment compensation; all of these are part of my work.

INTERVIEWER: But what about the Jewish Labor Committee?

BARRON: And the Histradrut? That was down on Saturday. That was extra, to collect money for them. I'm still a very active member in the Histradrut and I'm an active member of Hadassah. I belong to the Pioneer Women, but I'm mostly active among Senior Citizens. I do social service work at the Senior Citizens Center. I'm a tour guide. I call people over the weekend who are lonesome and I help them with a lot of things there. And a lot of our members belong there. It makes me feel like I'm still in the union when I go there. I belong to the Jewish Community Center, the Senior Citizens' group, and I help them with their lunch program. It's federally funded. I get up early every day, every morning and I clean up, and I leave here and I come back about 3:30, four o'clock. Almost every day, and I feel much better. I'm active. I keep on going; I want to exercise my mind.

INTERVIEWER: You said that you belonged to the Urban League before Equal Rights was even popular. Can you tell me something about that?

BARRON: Well, I belonged to the Urban League through a friend of mine that I knew from the factory. She was white, but she believed in equality and equal rights for all. We were trying to organize a place here many, many years ago that had a lot of black people in it. We needed someone who could talk their own language; they didn't trust us. I don't blame them. So they said, "Go to the Urban League. There's a Mr. Lewis there." I think he later on was in New York. I went to Mr. Lewis and ran around to get the women who worked to try to

BARRON: convince them about it. The Amalgamated Clothing Workers is not that kind of a union; it won't make you all lose your jobs and all. So I became a member and I'm still a member there.

INTERVIEWER: Was this the shop, National Pants in Washington?

BARRON: No, no. It was another shop. That fellow Davison was in there. This was in Baltimore, but the plant went out and closed up on them. But you know what we did? We got that pay for them because they were supposed to pay twenty-five cents an hour, 'cause they were on the pants, but they only paid twenty cents. I went with them to the Wage and Hour and they got back pay and of course they lost their jobs.

INTERVIEWER: When was that? What year. . .

BARRON: That was in the early thirties when they paid twenty-five cents an hour, for them and cotton garment. A lot of money, wasn't it? (laughs) In Washington was Mr. Davison when we had the National Pants Company. I'm sure Julie remembers the National Pants Company.

INTERVIEWER: She was in Newcastle, wasn't she?

BARRON: Yes, right. She got me to pull them out of the strike and then the plant was closed.

INTERVIEWER: Well, you did so much for your family all this time that you were also working so hard for the union. I don't know how you managed the time. I don't know how you did it.

BARRON: Well, I didn't have too much social life, outside of the union social life. But I loved it, it took the place of a lot of things, personal things that I would have been involved with them. I enjoyed doing that better. I still do.

INTERVIEWER: Tell me about the home you built for your father. . .

BARRON: I didn't build it; I bought it.

INTERVIEWER: And you said you took in two sisters whose husbands left them, and their children, and that your father, even though you really supported him, the home was in his name. I want you to tell me about that because. . .

BARRON: See, my father was like, well, we all looked up to him like an independent person. When he had a home, we lost it in the Depression. We had to move, rent it. Couldn't pay the mortgage, so they took the home away. So we rented it. Then it was still rented under his name, see. Then we moved uptown, uptown on Cottage Avenue. Still the electric and telephone was in his name. We felt that he was so <u>good</u> to everybody

BARRON: you know, he struggled and all, and we didn't have much. We didn't get an opportunity; nobody went to college from the family because we were....No money and a lot of sickness with my mother and all. So when my brother-in-law--the sister, the one who was like a mother to us--he was an accountant. Oh, he was better than a brother. He was always, anything we needed we went to him. He knew Ulisse very well. He used to have the insurance work from the union, too. He was an insurance agent. He found a home for me, a big home. He says to me, "Sara, you're paying rent. I think I got a good buy for you. You can pay it off." We went to see and I bought the home. He bought the home for me. And I went to look.

INTERVIEWER: He bought it, but you paid for it. Is that it?

BARRON: He went to look at the home because he negotiated all the settlements. So I says to him, "I'll tell you, you put it in Papa's name." After Papa died, I put it in my name. They knew all about it. So everything was under his name.

INTERVIEWER: That made him feel better.

BARRON: Yes, as long as he felt like somebody, which I'm very happy and grateful, you know, because he was a wonderful father. I know he didn't, I know, with what we didn't have but it isn't because he didn't want to. He was no gambler; he was always with the family and I thought it was a good deed and I'm not sorry.

INTERVIEWER: No, of course not, but I think it was a very understanding thing that you did, and you really had a deep sympathy for his own needs as a....He grew up, he had those ideas with him from Europe.

BARRON: As you know, European people have different ideas there. They're more, they feel that they should be. . .

INTERVIEWER: Some of these questions here in this last section called "General Questions", I think, are maybe some of the most interesting ones of all. There's one question: "What was the most exciting part of your life?" Now, you had such an interesting life. I mean, year after year exciting events. Which was the most exciting of all? Can you decide, really, the one thing that really stands out in your mind?

BARRON: Well, there was always excitement. When we reorganized in 1932 and we got all those people to come out and then when we begin to settle and get recognition of the union and improve their conditions, that was the most exciting. I couldn't get a job and nobody else could get a job. The employment was to the union. They used to call up for help. Now you can't cause.... and we got a lot of members.

INTERVIEWER: Those were, that was when there was a great big walk-out. You were telling me about it earlier today. That was a high point.

BARRON: That was a high point because we begin to improve conditions and from there on we accomplished a lot of exciting things. Improving the wages, we got insurance, we got hospitalization.

INTERVIEWER: So the fact that there were these real improved fringe benefits was as important, as exciting as wage increases.

BARRON: The accomplishments of wage increases and the hours, time-and-a-half for overtime above each eight hours, and vacation. It was very exciting. There were persons who lived otherwise many years ago who thought it would never come through.

INTERVIEWER: Can you remember how many workers were out in that 1932 reorganization?

BARRON: You mean here, in Baltimore? Oh, we must have had about five thousand out. They were like flies, coming from all over.

INTERVIEWER: I can see that because you're coming from a very low point, everything, everybody was low in 1932 and then. . .

BARRON: Hillman, HIllman was surprised when he got to the Fourth Regiment Armory, and not only was the place inside packed, it was hundreds and hundreds of people outside, trying to get in. They didn't think we were going to be able to get a stoppage because we were the first to react against depression.

INTERVIEWER: That was like the beginning of the whole drive through the thirties.

BARRON: Through the thirties and then beginning towards the drive in other cities.

INTERVIEWER: And then the cotton garment later.

BARRON: Then the cotton garment later, we had, it was a lot of exciting things. Whenever you accomplish something, when you got your heart and soul in the thing, it was more exciting than the dinner they gave me, I'll tell you one thing. That was just a matter to raise money. I was very happy they were able to raise all that money for Boys' Town. They were orphans.

INTERVIEWER: That was 1967. That must have been also a very exciting time.

BARRON: It was a very exciting thing to see all those people come to honor you. (laughs) I didn't think I meant that much to everybody.

INTERVIEWER: Well, I think it was interesting. Maybe you should tell about it, that the first hall that they rented for dinner turned out to be too small.

BARRON: Well, the caterer has a big hall and they rented it and then they begin to sell more tickets than what the place would hold. They still had the same caterer so they moved it to the Pikesville Armory, to accomodate. I was very, very thrilled and happy to get representatives from Chambersburg from all these different kinds of towns, as far as Virginia, to come here to help to honor me. Manufacturers were there and workers were there. It was a big thrill.

INTERVIEWER: The pictures are just beautiful. I will get a couple of them reproduced for the archives at the University of Michigan.

BARRON: My hair turned in six months gray.

INTERVIEWER: When, when did it turn gray?

BARRON: Oh, about five, six years ago. All of a sudden!

INTERVIEWER: You were almost seventy, then, when it turned gray.

BARRON: No, no. All of a sudden. I didn't have streaks like other people have. . .

INTERVIEWER:F Like I have. (laughs)

BARRON: It might turn white.

INTERVIEWER: You said it was only five or six years ago that it turned and you're 74 now, right? So that means you were over 65 before you got gray hair?

BARRON: Yeah, yeah. I don't know what. . .

INTERVIEWER: Well, see, the union kept you young, Sara.

BARRON: (laughs out loud) That's right. I feel good. I went to, is it off the record?

INTERVIEWER: No, do you want it off?

BARRON: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: It's nice to know that you're healthy.

BARRON: I'm real fortunate that way. After working, I worked hard in my life. Even though I worked for the union, I worked hard. To be able, I guess the spirit, the spirit and determination and the love of the work and the love of the people mostly.

BARRON: When I get a Christmas card and a little note, how much we miss you, you don't know how much it does to me. If they gave me a big present I wouldn't appreciate it as much.

INTERVIEWER: I think it's very wonderful that so many people still call you for advice.

BARRON: Oh yeah, for everything. You have to go to the hospital in order to find me first, going to the hospital, they know I'll go see them.

INTERVIEWER: Tell the story for the tape recorder about the man, was it, from Social Security who said, "Don't they know you've retired?" That's a wonderful story.

BARRON: That was yesterday. I went to the unemployment compensation because somebody, some people didn't get their checks. I called them up in the morning and I said I'd be there two o'clock. So I came in there and they said, "Oh my God, Sara! You look so good!" (doorbell rings)

INTERVIEWER: Now let's continue, having had your screen door fixed. So what did he say, he said. . .

BARRON: So I gave him the names--who they are--and he looked up for them and then he gave me to another department and he said, "I think you ought to tell them that you're not getting paid for this anymore." I said, "I'll work for them as long as I live because I feel I'm a part of them."

INTERVIEWER: Well, that's wonderful. I think that in itself is a tremendous tribute when they still need you. There's another interesting question here. "If you could be sixteen years old again," this is what the question says, "would there be any part of your life you would want to live over again?" Would you live it differently or would you live it the same way?

BARRON: Well, I don't know if I would live it differently but maybe my personal life would be different, see, because I had a lot of opportunities but to me the union came first, then my dates next. Maybe that would change me, but I'm very happy what I did, very grateful for being able to do it and have people who encouraged me to do it.

INTERVIEWER: If you had a young woman who was coming to ask your advice, would you advise her to go into, to work hard for the labor movement? What would you tell her to be sure to avoid if you could give her advice and if you knew she would take the advice?

BARRON: Well, I'd tell her to go into work for the labor movement, work very hard and then demand recognition. Not as a woman but as a person with knowledge. If she has as much knowledge as a man

BARRON: she should be able to get a job like a man, too. Because the women are getting, really much better than some of the men are.

INTERVIEWER: That's very interesting. What do you think about the Equal Rights Amendment? I know that you talked earlier about the fact that in the twenties the labor movement was opposed to the Equal Rights Amendment, and they've changed now. What do you think about that?

BARRON: Well, I believe in equal, I always did believe in equal rights, that's why I fought for that woman to be a sleeve-setter. We had a saying, as long as we were able to do the work the same as men, we should have a right to do the job. But we want equal pay for the job, the same as the man has, and not to have a preference if they cannot get a man, then they would take the woman and try to get her for cheaper. I do believe in equal rights for work, and equal rights for equal ability in politics and in industry.

INTERVIEWER: So you're for the passage of the Equal Rights Amendment?

BARRON: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: The labor movement really seems to be, now, starting a good, strong campaign to. . .

BARRON: Yeah, but years ago it was different. They said, "Keep out of that, keep out of that."

INTERVIEWER: Do you think it's changing?

BARRON: Yes, it's changing. Well, women go in different industries and are just as good as men. They do the same thing.

INTERVIEWER: It seems to me, and I don't know whether you agree with this or not; today, more and more union women really understand what the Equal Rights Amendment is and are supporting it, whereas in the twenties it was more recognized, as Dorothy said, by society women.

BARRON: She told me herself, she asked when we went to Washington, "They're all society ladies." She was so good, I'll tell you, I'd believe anything she'd tell me. (laughs)

INTERVIEWER: Do you think women that are in the labor movement today are making their mark? Are they getting more recognition than they used to?

BARRON: They're getting more recognition than they used to but I don't think they get enough. But I think they should get more because they really help to organize the labor movement. Without them, the labor movement wouldn't be as strong.

INTERVIEWER: You mean they should also get more recognition for what they did in the past?

BARRON: That's right; because they're responsible--a lot of them--for strengthening the labor movement.

INTERVIEWER: I'd love, then, if you would just tell me--because we've really gone through most of the questions here--to tell me a little about Dorothy Bellanca. She was so beloved in the Amalgamated; when she died there was just this outpouring of expression about her. Can you tell me a little about her?

BARRON: Her family?

INTERVIEWER: Her family, and then what she was like when you first knew her.

BARRON: Dorothy Bellanca comes from a very religious family. Her father was the sexton, or in Jewish we call it a Shamus, in the synagogue. Her mother was dead already, but she had an older sister who, she was a dressmaker. They lived with her and Dr. Milton Cress, was the son of this woman, this sister. Dorothy went to the factory; her sister Reba, who is older than Dorothy, she went to a skirt factory for a while. She went to factory and she learned how to be a buttonhole-maker. That was before 1914. She belonged to the United Garment Workers. But she sort of had a, well, when I knew her it was later. She was like leadership; she liked to do things and she was kind to people to ask them to do it. She didn't just ask them to do it without doing it herself. She always went first.

I told you in 1916 she went with us; in front because she said if we go up front, the men will follow us in back. She'd never send us without going with us. So I got acquainted with her before I even joined the union. She was calling like little meetings and the union was across the street from where we lived. I used to go in there and she was talking to some women who were much older than I was. They were discussing various things. She was telling them what to do and how to organize and what we're supposed to do, yet she was not a paid organizer. They never put her on the staff. So finally we got together; then she came over to me and says, "Sara, I'm going to sign you up in the union and you'll pay twenty-five cents a month dues." The men paid fifty. Oh, I was thrilled. To be with the union, and then you can come to a meeting and then you can go with her wherever she went; she'd take me. We went picketing; I used to go with her. She went to some other meetings; I used to go with her. Finally a group of women got together. She did a lot of organizing work, worked with Mr. Blumberg very close because they knew each other from the meetings. They got acquainted with Bessie very well, and Mr. Ulisse. That was just the time when the beginning, you know, the garment workers, the cutters and the IWW and all, they should have somebody because....

BARRON: So I think Blumberg is the one who went up to New York to put her on the staff. That was 1916 and she became a paid organizer. Then in 1918 they had the convention in Baltimore and she was elected. She was nominated for vice-president in Bessie Hillman's place because Bessie Hillman resigned.

INTERVIEWER: She got married to Sidney.

BARRON: She got married to Sidney Hillman. But she still was with us. Not until with the strike, she used to come and go everywhere we used to send her then. To Rochester; she went a lot to help the women there- But not until 1920 when they had the general strike in New York did she go up there and stay up there. In 1916 is when she got real acquainted with Bellanca; he was here in 1916 helping out the strike we had with Wright's. He also got a busted head. Then they got married so they moved to New York. But she always used to come here. You know what? She had paid for the college for this Dr. Cress, for Willie who is a dentist here. She sent him to college.

INTERVIEWER: This is Willie Cress?

BARRON: Milton Cress, who was a heart specialist here. Later on it was Willie. Here in Baltimore they helped on welfare. Remember hearing of his name. He was a heart specialist. He was nephew of hers; he was her sister's son. There's a dentist here, Willie Cress, that she sent to college. She paid for that, to go to college. She and August Bellanca. She took care of....When they lived in Baltimore they used to live together, you know. Her sister was a very good dressmaker. When we went to the luncheon with Mrs. Roosevelt, Miss Perkins was there and she spoke. Dorothy was there. There was an article--I think it was the Home Journal or some--is it Saturday Evening Post? Something, that Dorothy was the best, the second best speaker in the country.

INTERVIEWER: And who was the first?

BARRON: The first was Eleanor.

INTERVIEWER: Eleanor Roosevelt. Isn't that something?!

BARRON: And I was at the luncheon. And Miss Perkins. Do you remember Miss Perkins?*

INTERVIEWER: Yes, sure. I want to get back to Dorothy as a speaker. I wanted to ask you: is it true that she resigned from the General Executive Board after she married August, right?

BARRON: Yes. Now in 1920 when they had the convention, that was the first convention. . .

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* Frances Perkins--Secretary of Labor in the Roosevelt Administration

INTERVIEWER: That you went to and that was when they elected you by bullet voting.

BARRON: Yeah, yeah. I went to the convention. I was a little shy going by myself. So we had an organizer here; Mildred Redkin, her name was. She came and talked to my mother, and we went to Boston. Mamie Santora was working at Strauss Brothers and she was a delegate from the Buttonhole-makers local. I was very good friends with her; we used to work together. So Dorothy was resigning from being a vice-president, a member of the General Executive Board. She came over to me and she says, "Sara, I'm going to write a piece of paper up for you. I want you to nominate Mamie Santora for General Executive Board member." So I got up and I nominated Mamie for General Executive Board member. But she wrote on the piece of paper what to say. That was the same time that Potofsky was nominated for Assistant Secretary. He was nominated the same time, yeah. But she was still active. She wasn't even getting paid, but she was still active. That was against the rule or something that there couldn't be two people on the General Executive Board. . .

INTERVIEWER: Who were related.

BARRON: That's why I guess Bessie Hillman got off the Board.

INTERVIEWER: Then she [Dorothy] got back on the Board when August was sick; the forties or I guess it was the thirties.

BARRON: Not thirties; the forties.

INTERVIEWER: She was on the Board at the time that she died.

BARRON: Yes, 1946.

INTERVIEWER: Tell me about her as a speaker. Everybody says she was such a marvelous speaker.

BARRON: I tell you one thing, if anybody could keep a crowd....They had done away with the NRA which stopped the shops. We carried black eagle things to a big theatre, the Lear Theatre where they have all the operas and concerts here. Dubinsky was talking, and Dorothy was talking and I never....There was ILG people, and there were some other unions, too. Anybody who could keep in the group and heard that applause for her. How dramatic she was; she desribed the NRA and they, what they did about doing away with the NRA, and they called it Black Eagle at the time. She talked to thousands of people that day. It was just Dorothy; she used to have wings over here when she talked. You never knew her, did you?

INTERVIEWER: No, she died just before I came into the union.

BARRON: But I'll tell you one thing, she delivered such a speech, spontaneously, that I thought she was better than Mrs. Roosevelt. That magazine didn't say so.

INTERVIEWER: What was her voice like?

BARRON: It was prettier.

INTERVIEWER: Was it deep?

BARRON: No, no, no, it wasn't a deep voice. It was very clear and loud enough for people to hear. She wasn't talking very fast; she was pausing on different things. I tell you, she was a wonderful person. Me, I felt real deep for her; to think that she told me just a couple days before she died....They said, "What are you crying so much for her?" and I thought about seeing her in the hospital.

INTERVIEWER: That was when she kissed your hand.

BARRON: She kissed my hand. She said, "Take care of yourself." I didn't want to cry in front of her, but I walked out; I cried.

INTERVIEWER: I read the obituaries about her in the "Advance" and there were just pages.

BARRON: Oh, she did a lot of work. Participated in this cotton garment strike. She was everywhere. Everywhere! When we organized the cotton garment she was with us all through the strikes. You know, we had the strike in '32 and the Schoeneman strike. There was a Professor Hollander at Johns Hopkins University. He was teaching; I guess you must have heard of heard of him. The general office must have a copy of his hearings. We had people there, there were young girls who were pressers, and when they would.... The hot heat, would faint and they had no place for them to lay down. They would stretch them out over at Schoeneman's. So we were trying to get public opinion. What's-his-name, Irvin, was here too, working with the liberal groups. So was a man by the name Preston, and he had agreed to choose Professor Hollander to make an investigation and have hearings in the City Hall. So they brought these seventy girls. She was the one who was getting them ready and all, to testify of the conditions in the Schoeneman plant. Under what conditions they worked and all. It was Dorothy who got them all prepared and she was the one who was conducting. He was conducting the hearing and she was representing the girls. The general office must have a copy because they sent them to various colleges.

INTERVIEWER: The whole proceedings of the hearings?

BARRON: The proceedings and the decision of Hollander.

INTERVIEWER: What was his first name, do you remember?

BARRON: Ohhh....

INTERVIEWER: It doesn't matter. What was his decision?

BARRON: The decision was that the plant was, that it was terrible. It was a terrific thing for people who worked under there and that the union was right in calling the strike. It was getting public opinion.

INTERVIEWER: Do you remember what year that was?

BARRON: 1930...1933.

INTERVIEWER: That was the strike you lost, though.

BARRON: Yes. 1932, 1932. That was the end of 1932. Yeah, that's the strike we lost. But she was the one that worked with the liberal groups and all. I thought his name was Sidney... Hollander, too; he was a short, thick fellow.

INTERVIEWER: Sidney Hollander?

BARRON: Sidney Hollander was one of, from Durant's, but his name was Hollander, too.

INTERVIEWER: I'm sure that there must be a copy of. . .

BARRON: There's a copy of the history of the Schoeneman strike.

INTERVIEWER: We'll dig that out. That's really interesting. I wanted to ask you one more question. If you had to look back and point out the most frustrating thing that happened, what would you pick?

BARRON: That was the one when they made me go in the box, to get covered up.

INTERVIEWER: When you were little.

BARRON: When I was little, yes.

INTERVIEWER: And you remember that very vividly.

BARRON: I remember it because I had long curls and I used to come out real dirty with light hair. There was two little Lithuanian girls in that same box.

INTERVIEWER: That's a very interesting thing to remember; that's a long time back.

BARRON: But you know what? I saw a play of the ILG. They gave the history of the Amalgamated and they had young people, too, down there of the International Ladies Garment Workers, but the Amalgamated never worked up to it.

INTERVIEWER: Up to what?

BARRON: To getting a play out.

INTERVIEWER: Are you thinking about "Pins and Needles" or some other play? Are you talking about the ILG production "Pins and Needles" that they played in the Depression or something more recent?

BARRON: Well, on a commercial they had something, too, the ILG.

INTERVIEWER: On television? They've been having big advertising campaigns to try to promote the union label. There is a question here but I already know what the answer is going to be. It says here, "Did you ever feel that it wasn't worth it?"

BARRON: No.

INTERVIEWER: I'm sure you never felt that.

BARRON: No. No matter what they did to me and they did do some wrong to me, not Ulisse, not Blumberg, and not Dorothy and not Mrs. Hillman, not even Sidney Hillman, 'cause he used to like me. He used to call me "The Devil's Firebrand"; he says, "The Firebrand, here comes the Firebrand." (laughs) No, no, I don't regret anything I did. I think I've lived a full, well, I've lived an interesting life. I was never lonesome. If I ever was lonesome I'd call up some of the girls and we'd go out to dinner together.

INTERVIEWER: Was it ever lonesome when you were on the road? When you were away from home, during organizing drives?

BARRON: No, you know why? Because if I stayed over, I used to have the girls come over to the motel. I never was lonesome; when you drive you had to watch the road. I'm not lonesome now. I feel that, Sunday, I'm going over to, they have a Tyson Street here that's like a Greenwich Village--very expensive homes. It's a section where intellectuals live. They have there every year a festival. Last year they had from the Center Stage Theatre, a legitimate theatre, to raise money for the fire there. This Sunday they're having it for the Kidney Foundation and I volunteered there on the Tyson Street. People go, they have everything down there. Now we have, the Webster Center is right near there and they open up the building Saturday and I'm going to be taking tours.

INTERVIEWER: People through the Center?

BARRON: Yes. Explaining why it is that they have the Center.

INTERVIEWER: Isn't that great?!

BARRON: That's what I do. I'm a tour guide. I knew the man--he's dead now--who was the originator of it.

INTERVIEWER: Of the Center.

BARRON: Of the Center. He was one of the people; there was many more people that was involved but he was a judge of the juvenile court, which was for the youth. Then he was director of the state of Maryland welfare, for the poor. The last job he had was city commissioner for the aging. That's why he felt we should have a center located near senior citizens. We have 6500 members.

INTERVIEWER: Is that what you've got? 6500 members?

BARRON: It is no fee for membership. Only thing you have to live in the city of Baltimore. They feed about 1400 a week. The Eating Together Program. That's seven days a week. They have arts and crafts, they have square-dancing, they have swimming pools, they have physical fitness.

INTERVIEWER: That's fantastic.

BARRON: It'd be nice if you could see it before you. . .

INTERVIEWER: How long does it take you to get there from here?

BARRON: I have a couple that used to join. They go there twice a week; they take me by car and I go back by car. It takes me about an hour to get there and an hour to come back.

INTERVIEWER: You can read on the bus.

BARRON: At the Center a couple of times they say, "Sara, we thought you were sick!" And I say, "No, I wasn't sick but I was busy someplace else." I go on hearings. I belong to the Maryland Advocates which consists of elderly people, social workers, retired nurses, and our job is to see, to get legislation introduced through to improve the elderly. Now, Betty Hamburger, whose husband was the big manufacturer one time, Isaac Hamburger--I guess you heard where Hamburger's very expensive clothes--she's the chairman and I am the vice-chairman. We go to hearings, we were in hearings. I came Tuesday; I went to her on a bill for shelters.

INTERVIEWER: That's a logical continuation of your interest in political action.

BARRON: We feel that some of the people don't belong in nursing homes. They should have shelter-houses.

INTERVIEWER: I agree.

BARRON: ...bringing people who can walk around and are able to understand what's what, stick 'em in with senile people, very sick people whether or not they're sick, 'cause I go to a nursing home and I see what's going on. We overtook a project on the investigation of nursing homes. I don't know how it is in New York, but here it's terrible.

INTERVIEWER: It's terrible in New York, too.

BARRON: When we got in there we went to a nursing home and they suggested that I take this woman, that this woman feels lonesome; she tried to commit suicide twice. They gave me her name and I went in there, Margaret Fruss, and I went in there and I wanted to talk to her. She said, "What do you want?" I said, "Are you Margaret Fruss?" And she said, "None of your business," I said, "I came here as a friend." She said, "What is that you want to know for?" I says, "I'm just up here, I'm looking for friends. You looked to me like we could be friends together and I'd like to talk to you. I'm a senior citizen, too." It took me almost an hour to get her to agree to tell me her name. I talked to her and I said, "Let's take a little walk in the dining room. They have the thing there." We talked about it. Then I said, "I'll be coming to see you every week, so we can get acquainted and be friends, and you tell me something about your family." The first thing she told me, she says, "Mmph, I got a daughter. She don't want to know me; I don't hear from her or anything." And she said to me, so I come the following week, I thought I don't want to push her too much. She was a little more friendlier. She says to me, "Do you know that I cut my throat over here? Do you see this," she says, "and blood was coming out in the mirror, but it didn't hurt me." I said, "What'd you cut it with?" She said, "With a scissor." She was in a mental institution. I says to her, "Margaret, do you feel all right now?" She says, "No, I don't feel all right. What am I doing here? I'm 78 years old and my husband died and they put me in here. My daughter don't want to have nothing to do with me; she turned everything over to a sister of mine to take care of. I don't see my sister very much. I had twenty-five thousand dollars," she said. "I been here two and a half years and the money is gone to the nursing home and now I have to apply for Medicaid."

INTERVIEWER: She was in a nursing home for twenty-two years?

BARRON: No.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, since her husband died.

BARRON: Two and a half years. She had twenty-five thousand dollars and now she has to go on Medicaid. It was almost Mother's Day and I said, "You know what? It would be nice if you send your daughter. It's gonna be Mother's Day and you're gonna hear from your daughter." She said, "I don't think so." I said, "You know what? Why don't you write a card, a mother's day to your daughter and to your grandson?" I said, "I'll tell you what, I'll bring in a card for you and for your daughter and for your grandson and you can write it." You know, she remembered the address and the name. I put a stamp on there on both of them and she wrote 'em. I said, "Put your return address on there." She said, "No, I'm not putting the nursing

BARRON: home." So I put it in when I went outside, to get a return address. I wanted to make sure they'll send her. So, the daughter didn't send her nothing but I want to go there on a Sunday when her sister's there 'cause I want to talk to her. So she sent twenty-five dollars with a mother's card for the aunt to take it to the mother. So I brought her an Easter egg before Easter and candies and I sent her a card every week. Not a get well card; different kinds of cards. She said to me, "You know, you're an angel." She says, "I never had somebody be so good to me." I says to her, "You know, I'll see you every week and you're going to be my adopted sister."

INTERVIEWER: Oh, Sara, that's so moving, And you go there every week? That's really beautiful.

BARRON: Yes. But it took me a little while to sort of win confidence. But I felt it was a good deed to do. We do that from the Maryland Advocates.

INTERVIEWER: But that's such a challenge to reach somebody. She obviously cut herself off from everybody.

BARRON: From everybody. She really needs companionship. She needs friendship 'cause she feels she's forgotten. Just waitin' there to sit and die. So I feel so satisfied so I bring her little things. Little candies or something. Now, I feel satisfied when I leave there. I go there by bus, too. It's on the other side of the city.

INTERVIEWER: It's a big city, I discovered today. It's enormous!

BARRON: I feel it's a good deed for somebody like that.

INTERVIEWER: I bet she looks forward to it all week.

BARRON: She calls me, "You're my little angel." But she wouldn't tell me her name.

INTERVIEWER: But now, of course, she does. . .

BARRON: Well, if I can't come there I call up and I leave a message for her--what day I'm going to come. I don't want her to feel that I've forgotten her. You have to be diplomatic about these things.

INTERVIEWER: Sara, I think that's a very touching story.

BARRON: And I enjoyed it. I'm not gonna sit down and just sit, be lazy and go to...I like to have good times. I went to Israel on a trip.

INTERVIEWER: When did you go?

BARRON: Two years ago. Find relatives there. You know, we didn't know what happend to the relatives on my mother's side. We had a lot of relatives so we put an ad in the Israel paper and found cousins.

INTERVIEWER: Isn't that.... Through an ad?!

BARRON: Through an ad, yes. The Hais, they called it. So they sent us pictures of them, so my sister went the year before to meet all the relatives. When I went two years ago I went with a group with the Jewish Community Center, the Senior Citizen group. I went off from the group a little while and met all my cousins. Oh! That was a thrill.

INTERVIEWER: Was that the first time you've been to Israel? How do you feel about it?

BARRON: I think it's wonderful. When I was there they were picketing the Parliament. Kissinger was there. They hate him there. Jerusalem was such a city. Were you there?

INTERVIEWER: I've always wanted to go; I've never been.

BARRON: It's an historical city. But I went to the Bethlehem, everywhere, to see the whole thing. Jerusalem's wonderful. Tel Aviv's like New York. I went to see Hadassah, the hospital. What I saw two years ago--the war, the boys without legs or arms--but what a beautiful hospital. I said, "The money I give them, it's worth it." You know what? The Histradrut, they have hospitals, too. I went into Histradrut office and told them I was a member of the Histradrut. I just was to a banquet that they gave for Dr. Alinsky for additional rooms. I went to the Pioneer Women. They don't have a hospital but they have a lot of different things down there. A lot of interesting things. They have a university there. I went to the Wailing Wall. Ohh, I wish I wouldn't have gone...crying.

INTERVIEWER: Because everybody was sad.

BARRON: Ohhh! All the women dressed in black and crying.

INTERVIEWER: Were they the widows? Is that why they were dressed in black?

BARRON: Mothers of sons, they go down there. Ohhh! It was awful. Hundreds of people were there.

INTERVIEWER: Is that special on Friday because it's the Sabbath?

BARRON: They go early Friday they go there, dressed in black. Then I went to Bethlehem. I seen some beautiful churches. Ohhh! Those churches. We don't have such churches.

INTERVIEWER: I guess someday I'll get to Israel. I would love to see it.

BARRON: I enjoyed it; I'm going to go again. I'd like to go, and I will, I hope. You know, when you get older you've got to have health; thank God so far it's okay. I'd like to go to Denmark and Switzerland. Because at the World's Fair....almost every one of those restaurants....and I like their way. I want to see it, My nephew, he's a resident at Beth Israel Hospital in New York. He's psychiatry, you know. Consultant psychiatry. He graduated from college in Boston...on scholarships.

INTERVIEWER: You must be very proud of him.

BARRON: Yes, we are. You see, it's my sister's, it's her grandson. They live in New Jersey. Course he had to pay, too, but a scholarship because he's so bright. Now he's a resident doctor down there. Beth Israel, it's a big hospital, isn't it? Is that where Bessie was?

INTERVIEWER: No, not at the very end. She was in St. Vincent's, at the last operation she had. When she died she was in St. Vincent's. I think previous to that she probably was there. A very beautiful hospital.

BARRON: Yeah, well, he's interning there.

INTERVIEWER: Well, Sara, I don't want to take too much more of your time. I just want to find out for the record: when you first went on the staff of the Amalgamated, were you hired as a business representative, as a field representative, as an organizer? What was your title?

BARRON: An organizer. But I did all of the work.

INTERVIEWER: And when did you become a business agent?

BARRON: Well, I was a business agent, but they called me an organizer. Officially business agent because I wanted to be elected, not appointed. I don't like an appointed job. I was trying to get into the national office to work with them because I knew it was better wages, better oppor...but Ulisse must have told them not to do nothing for me so I went to see Blumberg. He says, "I talked to Ulisse," and I knew that was the end. 'Cause Ulisse didn't want to let me go. He pressed because I was...you know Blumberg used to come and send me to the different cities--I was with Friedman, Harry, Marks. When the early part of the organizing Mr. Hope, I met him, he was working there as a cutter. I was also, in 1935 and 1936. They were trying to make a case with the Labor Board with Blumberg, so Blumberg gets me to go down there. That's where I met Clammie Shook. I met Mr. Weber: he was a minister. . .

INTERVIEWER: I remember Charlie Weber.

BARRON: Charlie Weber and a...she was here, another organizer for a while. I was with them, helping them out. I was helping them out. I was helping them out, the practical things--go to the mechanics and sleevesetter. . .

INTERVIEWER: I think we probably didn't get that on the tape where that was. That wasn't Baltimore; it was where?

BARRON: Richmond, Virginia. Friedman, Harry, Marks. We started organizing and they fired a whole lot of people there, too. I remember how the house it used to be.

INTERVIEWER: But you said that you wanted to get on the national office staff but Ulisse evidently didn't want you. . .

BARRON: He said he needed me here.

INTERVIEWER: He needed you here. So when did your title change? Did you get to be an elected business agent?

BARRON: Yes. I think it was 1936 it changed. Because I said I wanted to be elected, not appointed. I said, "Suppose he gets mad and fires me." I lost a job in the shop. I had a job with Leiber Brothers; I was a sleevesetter at Leiber Brothers, by the way. So he had agreed when the other business agents get elected, I get elected, too. See, other cities don't have elected business agents; they have appointees. I never did like the appointees.

INTERVIEWER: So you were elected in 1936, and did you keep that same job until you retired?

BARRON: Mm-hmm. But I did organizing; I did everything else but, under the title of business agent.

INTERVIEWER: Everytime there were elections you were, you stood for election.

BARRON: Every two years. My local nominated me and then the people voted.

INTERVIEWER: That was Local 70?

BARRON: Yes. I represented it for a while until Sam came in. You were voted by more than one local. I was voted by Frederic Local; I was voted by McConnellsburg Local, by Layer Local: Layer, Maryland and Hampstead, Maryland. When Sam came in he said, "No need for all of those locals. You can service them without the election." But I used to be on the ballot. They used to nominate me; they could nominate someone else. I had a big territory. You know, I was thinking the other night--how did I make all the shops?

INTERVIEWER: How did you?

BARRON: Yeah, well, I used to work day and night to make those shops. Attended the Local meetings and all. Do you know what? I was only off one week on sickness in all those. . .

INTERVIEWER: In all those years?

BARRON: Well, see, I had an operation. I had a bursted appendix in 1962, but it was part of my vacation so. . .

INTERVIEWER: It happened on your vacation?

BARRON: No, a week before vacation and I came back to work after vacation. I shouldn't have come back so early but I came back anyhow. The doctor gave me hell, coming back so quick. That's the only time I was off.

INTERVIEWER: That's fantastic.

BARRON: I was lucky.

INTERVIEWER: Knock on wood for that, too. That is quite a record. So many of the people you serviced were women. Did you ever talk to them about special women's issues? Did you ever feel that they had special problems because they were women?

BARRON: Yes, they had problems. They wanted to know why...well, they wanted to know a lot of things. They said, "How come every time we have a joint board, by the way, you know I was 1932 elected as president of the Baltimore Joint Board?"

INTERVIEWER: Really?

BARRON: Yes sir. There never was a woman of the Baltimore Joint Board, but I was elected. The men and women both voted for me. But then when I got this steady job I had to resign. I felt very proud.

INTERVIEWER: That's a great tribute.

BARRON: And the men voted for me, too. They said, "You work so hard. You preside on the Joint Board."

INTERVIEWER: You said, you started to say. . .

BARRON: They wanted to know why, when we have a Joint Board, a man for manager and a Joint Board president. They came in after I was already on the staff. They said, "Why can't we have a vice-president for a woman?" You know, they were beginning to realize that something should be done for women.

INTERVIEWER: How soon? When did they start talking like that? Was that always from the beginning?

BARRON: No, no.

INTERVIEWER: Could you put your finger on when they started wondering about that?

BARRON: Well, see, in the country towns we have women as presidents.

INTERVIEWER: I think that's true in the Amalgamated in many places.

BARRON: Yes, because there weren't many men. But the only men was the cutters. They didn't amount to nothing. The women held the offices. It's in the larger cities that you don't get a chance to have a woman for a president. So it's not so much a problem in the smaller towns. They had their rights anyhow. I wouldn't say they had their rights in wages because wages were lower because of conditions in the smaller towns.

INTERVIEWER: This region is one of the most interesting in the Amalgamated because you have women as cutters here. There are also women as cutters, I guess--is it Palm Beach?

BARRON: Yes, I understand it's Palm Beach, too.

INTERVIEWER: But they're not very common. How does it work out here?

BARRON: It works out pretty good. The men are getting used to them. They resented it, too, but they're getting used to them. They're not so much in Baltimore but they're in the country shops. Gripes got mostly women cutters in Fredericksburg; Virginia there are women cutters. And Schoeneman has got all women cutters. There's no men. They wouldn't even hire a man cutter: they're afraid they're gonna be troublemakers.

INTERVIEWER: (laughs) Now what did the union have to do to be sure that they got equal pay?

BARRON: Well, there was a scale for cutters and they have to see that they get the scale. The scale is set according to the agreement. They're not getting as much as Baltimore cutters get but the scale's under their agreement. If a woman is a cutter she gets the same thing.

INTERVIEWER: But she gets the same as a man if she had the same job.

BARRON: If there was a man there. It's according to the territory, their scale is. Of course they were organized much later. Londontown has both men and women cutters in all their places in their raincoats.

INTERVIEWER: And do they get the same pay?

BARRON: If they, they give them a certain length of time to come up to the, you know, the skill.

INTERVIEWER: That's almost like a model for the union, then, because in so many places they don't have that many cutters.

BARRON: I understand the International Ladies Garment Workers doesn't have too many women cutters.

INTERVIEWER: No, (laughs) I don't think so. Well, I think that we've covered a great deal of territory and I just want to thank you, Sara. It's been a marvelous experience for me to hear all of this, and it's going to be invaluable for students and people in the labor movement who are just much too young to know about these things, to be able to hear about it.

BARRON: I could never understand, you know, I don't like to, I'm not a speaker. I can talk but I need. . .

INTERVIEWER: You can talk, Sara. Very well.

BARRON: . . .why we didn't have these summer schools in our own union. Why don't they have people? I know you have teachers and educators, to give them the past experience on what they have now is because of people who did these things, men and women.

INTERVIEWER: Now I think it would be interesting if you would just tell the story of the CIO.

BARRON: When the CIO started we were the only ones around here who had already a union and had a headquarters with a hall. Any union that was organizing we were helping because Mr. Ulisse became the president of the CIO council, see. When we came in here to organize the Fisher Body--that's the autoworkers--Mr. Ulisse says, "Sara, get together your girls. You're all going out to give out a circular near the Fisher Body." And to the steelworkers and we conducted here a strike of shoemakers. The headquarters was in our, they had, because all their officials were in jail in Massachusetts at that time. The negotiation was by Mr. Ulisse, Jack Edelman for the shoe place. Got 'em a ten percent raise, and we had them in our headquarters. The textile workers, we helped them organize here, too. There are not too many textile workers here, but believe me, it was the women and the few active men who were in the act in all these places to help them organize under the CIO. Because we were the only union, we were already established and we were beginning to get active to help the CIO. Especially when Mr. Blumberg and Mr. Hillman were negotiating the textile contract. We gave five dollars, an assessment; each member sent five dollars and we gave ten dollars to the steelworkers! All the business agents and myself, we went up to the shop and talked to them to collect the money.

INTERVIEWER: That was what, around 1938?

BARRON: Yes. Yeah, we went around collecting the assessment for the steelworkers. It was just at the time when Hillman and Blumberg was negotiating in Boston somewheres, New England, for the contracts of the textile workers. So they needed money and they called up. Not only to our city but every other city, we collected that. But we helped them.

INTERVIEWER: And you went to a college recently and talked about this?

BARRON: We went to the community college because they were all CIO members, see. They were from steelworkers, autoworkers, and they asked, the president, Nick Frenaro and Patty Sleet asked me to tell them about the experience and what we did. And that's what I talked to them about. There were about ninety students there. They asked questions.

INTERVIEWER: What kind of questions?

BARRON: How many strikes I was in. Was it hard to organize because we weren't in the union. They were all young people. When I told them the response was great, we had no trouble getting the members signed up in the Fisher Body or the automobile workers or the steelworkers. At that time we had even the Teamsters, too. So she asked me to go. She said, "Sara, you come and tell something."

INTERVIEWER: Did you enjoy it?

BARRON: Yes, I enjoyed it and a lot of time if she needs something she calls me up. I like her very much. She's from ILG and she's trying to make herself a big job. Someday she's gonna be on the ILGB [Board] and I like to help people.

INTERVIEWER: She's from the ILG.

BARRON: Yes, she was working in an ILG shop and she got, she's a very nice person. She got appointed by the president of the state CIO to take care of the women's division.

INTERVIEWER: Is that the women's division on many things or is it women's division for political action?

BARRON: No, no, she's in a lot of things.

INTERVIEWER: Very interesting. That's the Maryland AFL-CIO?

BARRON: The Maryland/D.C. AFL-CIO.

INTERVIEWER: Where can she be reached--in Baltimore?

BARRON: Yes, you can call her at 837-4720. She comes from West Virginia originally. She's a very nice person.

INTERVIEWER: Isn't that great--you're able to work with her.

BARRON: She met me at a conference of the--they had to establish something; I don't remember. Oh, I know--the food stamps. Yes, I'm a member of the Food Cultivation for the food stamps.

INTERVIEWER: Oh my goodness! Something else that you do. I don't believe it! (laughs)

BARRON: We got real acquainted and she said, "You're a good union person. People tell me you know so much and can do so much. Come on and tell me a little bit." So I did.

INTERVIEWER: Isn't that great? Well, that must be fun, too, to help her. Is she a young person?

BARRON: She's not old. I don't think she's fifty. A very kind person.

INTERVIEWER: Sara, you've just made my day. (laughs) Because you don't consider fifty old. To my children I am over the hill. I'm fifty, you know; I'm old, old, old.

BARRON: Are they both in college?

INTERVIEWER: I wanted to ask you about the convention because you have spent a day in Washington and this is a very historic convention for the Amalgamated.

BARRON: Yes, but when I came to the convention it was about 10:30, quarter to eleven, and they were about to join, and Mr. Potofsky was talking and talking about the Amalgamated and says, "This is the last day that we'll be called Amalgamated Clothing Workers and Eula McGill--Eula, go lead the 'Glory, Glory Amalgamated'." So I didn't hear anything in the morning 'cause I wasn't there. Then they told me what the new name was gonna be: Amalgamated Clothing Workers Textile Union.

INTERVIEWER: Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers' Union.

BARRON: Right. And that we'll meet tomorrow as an already formed union, I guess.

INTERVIEWER: The two together.

BARRON: Two together; right.

INTERVIEWER: What did you sense was the feeling in the group as a whole?

BARRON: I don't know, very cold feelings as far as I'm concerned. There was no enthusiasm.

INTERVIEWER: Even when they sang 'Glory, Glory Amalgamated'?

BARRON: No, no, because somebody came out and he says, "Sara, they need you in front because you always used to holler a lot." (laughs)

INTERVIEWER: (laughs)

BARRON: ...maybe it was because there was such confusion to the average person, this merging business; didn't understand what the textile and all this thing. Take a little while for them to get used to it. Then somebody said, "Are they gonna take any money away from them?" I said, to one of the girls, "No, they're not gonna take it; they're bringing some in. I don't know how much they got but they're bringing some in." But it wasn't as enthused as it used to be. Times are different, too. I wasn't there when...talked. I don't know who else talked. It must have been the day before.

INTERVIEWER: I don't know either. It didn't say in the newspapers so I don't know. What do you mean when you say times are different?

BARRON: Well, people are getting to be in fear of what's gonna happen, what's gonna be in the next contract; they ask a lot of questions. They are getting a pretty good increase June the first. Nine and a half cents.

INTERVIEWER: That's in clothing, I guess.

BARRON: Clothing, yes. Improvement in the--but I really.... You're off the record, aren't you?

INTERVIEWER: Just a few afterthoughts on the interview with Sara. Perhaps a few items that didn't get onto the tape. I don't think it's clear on the tape that Sara was the next to the youngest of the seven children. I would like to also get on the tape that the correct name of the organization she worked for and belonged to for so many years was the Baltimore Joint Board of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America. Then, after the second World War--probably in the early fifties--the Baltimore Joint Board became the Baltimore Regional Joint Board of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers because it included so many cotton garment shops and clothing companies in a region that extended beyond Baltimore itself. That date, though, would have to be checked. It may not have become the Baltimore Regional Joint Board until the 1960's after Ulisse De Dominicis--who was the manager for so long--left and Sam Nochella came in. That would have to be checked out.

I'd like to describe Sara's home because it means a great deal to her and she takes great pride in it. She lives on the northwest side of Baltimore, quite a ways out from the center of town--a good twenty minute cab ride, or twenty-five minute cab ride out--in what looks like a fairly new area of Baltimore and she lives in an apartment building in which a number of older single people live. And she shared this apartment with her older sister--the one she talks about as being like a mother to her family--until her sister died not too long ago. She decided that she had never had a nice place to live and therefore she would keep that apartment and not give it up and stay there.

INTERVIEWER: She enjoys it very much. It's a very sunny, two-bedroom apartment with a good sized living room which has one wall which is a sliding glass door. And she had a very pleasant balcony which looks out on a green lawn, then on the highway, the main street that goes by the house. Across the street another low-rise development which is very much like hers is also very pleasant. The kitchen is a good sized kitchen with lots of cabinet space, and she has displayed around the house heavy brass candlesticks and a beautiful, huge brass basin that her mother brought over on the boat from Russia with her which she said her mother used to use to preserve fruit in. They used to cook outside, preserve this fresh fruit and cook in this absolutely stunning brass basin which Sara herself keeps shiny. It's really a beautiful, beautiful thing.

On the walls of her apartment are all of the awards and testimonials that she has received. For the Boys' Town dinner that she talks about--which took place in 1967--she received a framed replica of three of the stained glass Chagall windows. Wait, that can't be right. That's what she said. Why would they do that? I'll have to ask her and get that information because it was Boys' Town; it wasn't an Israeli function but maybe it was those windows because they realized that would mean a lot to her and it was a testimonial to her. The dinner was to raise money for Boys' Town but it was a testimonial to Sara.

She went two years ago to Israel and the trip meant a tremendous amount to her. She loved every minute of it. She went to visit relatives. A year before she went, her older sister went and met these relatives that they discovered lived in Israel. They discovered that they lived there by advertising in an Israeli paper. I can't remember whether she talked about that on the tape or not, but this trip meant a great deal to her. Other things that mean a great, a very, very lot to her now are her ability to continue to give service to people. I think that if that ever were taken away from her she would find life not worth very much anymore. She got an award in 1975 from this center where she works for six hundred hours of volunteer service that she gave in 1975 to the center and to the older people from there and participate in it.

I should also mention that I'm sending on, I'm going to get reproduced and will send on to the University of Michigan several photographs that Sara let me borrow which I will have to return to her. I will also send the program from the testimonial dinner, a brochure from the center where she works, and a copy of a letter that Jacob S. Potofsky--the president of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers at the time--sent her at the time of the Boys' Town dinner in 1967.

She did talk on and off--I don't know if that got on the tape--about the members who still keep in touch with her. But they do more than keep in touch with her: they come to her house

INTERVIEWER: and they have lunch or they have supper with her, and they talk with her about things that are happening to them. She has in her living room a great big oval table and she says she just loves it now that she's learned how to cook. She has time to cook, to fix meals for these friends of hers who over the years have meant so much to her. These friends are the people in the shop who she has a very deep, deep attachment for, and it means everything to her that they've not forgotten her and that they still show how much they care for her. She was very pleased to have been taped and to have this kind of recognition for all her years of service paid to her. I think you'll notice at the beginning she was very sort of shy of the tape recorder and gradually as time went on and I stopped being just the impersonal interviewer and sort of participated with her, she lost that shyness and talked more freely.

I think I'd like to close these final thoughts with one very short story which she mentioned in connection with the center and which typifies what I would say is her philosophy right now, probably has been her philosophy all the way along. Somebody said to her--and it wasn't a very kind thing; I don't believe it was meant kindly--somebody said to her recently, "I know why you go to that center, Sara, and spend so much time there. It's because they're mostly black people there." And Sara answered and said, "I go to that center and spend time there because there are people there who need me." I do believe that that is really the key to Sara Barron's life and philosophy. 1976.

SARA BARRON INDEX

SARA BARRON CONTINUED