

OH-071 Elizabeth Elson Cohen (1903-2004)

Interviewed by Stuart J. Hecht, November 7, 1980, as part of his research for "Hull-House Theatre: An Analytical and Evaluative History, 1889-1982" (Ph.D. dissertation, Northwestern University, 1983).

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Mrs. Cohen: And then they themselves would have a deep interest in Hull House. I mean it wasn't just – I'm going to give \$10,000 or \$100,000 – whatever the thing is, but they really came and observed – not observed but enjoyed the plays, enjoyed the art exhibits, enjoyed the concerts. The Christmas concert was excellent and known throughout the city. It was done in Bowen Hall and had the most magnificent – absolutely, the scenes from Michelangelo – tableaus – as we sang below, the darkness. You had the whole Nativity, the whole Christmas and I am Jewish but it was the most beautiful cantata, Christmas cantata. People came from all over, from the suburbs – to hear this particular.

Mrs. Cohen, Continued... It was of that quality, Miss Smith, Eleanor Smith – I heard it again when I was in Austria, that early, early cantata. I hadn't known where it had come from but it came from Humperdinck, you see? But she had – she gave it such quality. And Miss Benedict had her troubles. Alex, my brother, was Joseph in one of them, marries the father of – presumably the father of Christ – and every Christmas everyone wondered whose baby [would be] the Christ child. It was a live child you see. When their child was chosen, if it happened to be Christian, they felt doubly blessed, you see? But, really people from all over who saw those tableaus said they were as like the famous paintings in Italy. The arrangement, the costuming, the coloring and it was really quite outstanding. The best of quality. I mean it went right straight through, in the pottery, and everything else. They didn't lower their standards for the young people who came there. They expected them to do this and we realized it I think.