

Heritage Highlights

A PUBLICATION OF THE JEWISH HERITAGE MUSEUM OF MONMOUTH COUNTY

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Sivan, Tammuz, Av, Nissan 5780



Katherine Elkus White

Red Bank Mayor,
US Ambassador,
and daughter of lawyer, judge,
and diplomat Abram Elkus.
Their story is found on Page 5.

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President's Message



Alice Berman
President

As I write this message in early May, each of us is feeling the uncertainty and nervousness created by the arrival of the coronavirus pandemic at our doorsteps. At its first Conference Call meeting on March 12th, the Board of Trustees and Executive Director responded quickly by authorizing the suspension of programming and closing the Museum. During its April phone meeting, the Board continued this strategy for May and June. This means that the Museum's General Membership Annual Meeting, scheduled for June 14th will be postponed. The Board is committed to following the guidelines and recommendations of the State of New Jersey and the

medical community in determining when the Museum might be able to open again to visitors, and when this meeting can be rescheduled. In the meantime, some Museum business can be accomplished remotely, including membership renewals (which we hope everyone will continue) and the spring Annual Appeal. While we know that this year is unlike any other, and there are many needs competing for our financial consideration, we hope that you will recognize the value of ensuring the future of this home for local Jewish history and culture. A donation to the Annual Appeal will help the community get back to "normal" when the crisis has passed. Thank you for your loyalty. Stay home (or wear a mask and stay apart for shopping.) Stay safe. We hope to see you soon at the Museum.

- Alice Berman
President, Board of Trustees

Executive Director's Message

As you know, the Museum temporarily closed its doors to the public due to the Coronavirus. This stark time has been new to everyone, given that we all have to adjust to social distancing and to slowing down our fast-paced lives. I would have never predicted my first year as the Executive Director would end with the Museum closing and ultimately changing our course of action for the future. This year has been filled to the brim with learning experiences through several nonprofit management courses, webinars, and firsthand experiences that I value greatly.

The Museum has incorporated new means of communication with our members through MojoTxt, which will send periodic updates about the Museum via text messaging. If anyone wishes to receive updates to their phones, feel free to email the Museum with your name and cellphone number. To continue to fulfill our mission and educate the community, the Museum will be sending out short videos about our Speaker's Bureau presentations that are filled with local Jewish history. The full presentations are available to be presented at Hadassah meetings, Men's and Women's Clubs, and other organizations once this pandemic subsides.

It is disheartening to see the Museum so empty with no engaging and exciting programs on Sundays that took so long to plan for our members. As we continue to navigate through these challenging times, we are reminded daily of your appreciation and support of the Museum from your encouraging messages and financial support. With the significant loss of vital admission income and program revenue, the Museum is reaching out to our membership for assistance to ensure that the Museum will hopefully reopen in the Summer. Please consider donating to our **2020 Annual Appeal**, as we have an anonymous donor matching every donation dollar for dollar. We understand it has been hard for all of us during these unprecedented times and we want to send our best wishes to all our members.

- Jessica Solomon
Executive Director



Jessica Solomon
Executive Director

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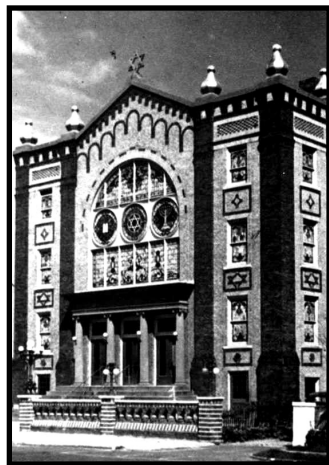
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Congregation Brothers of Israel - The Shul at the Shore

As the largest city in Monmouth County at the turn of the 20th century, Long Branch attracted numerous Eastern-European Jews. In 1877 the Jewish population was 35; by 1907 it rose to 500. In 1936 the *American Jewish Year Book* reported Long Branch's Jewish population at 2,000. Most of these newcomers worked in the resort industry, opening small hotels, boarding houses, and shops. The first kosher meat market was established by Hyman Schneider; Alexander Joffe served as the first shochet.



**Brothers of Israel,
85 Second Avenue, Long Branch**



North side of Broadway, Long Branch 1909, showing Goldstein's Department Store (12); Kahn's Market (8); Rosenberg Drug Store (6); Steinbach's Department Store (1)

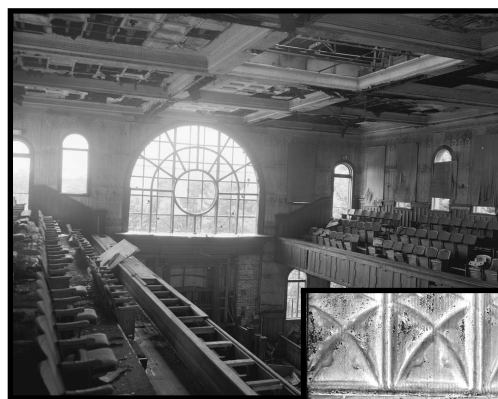
James F. Durnell Collection, Long Branch Public Library

The Eastern-European settlers were aware that Long Branch already had a small but organized assimilated Reform German-Jewish community affiliated with Temple Beth Miriam. But the newcomers were poor, unassimilated, Yiddish-speaking residents who practiced Orthodox Judaism and required a place of worship that met their spiritual needs.

At first, as reported in *Peddler to Suburbanite: The History of the Jews of Monmouth County, NJ* (1981), minyans (10 Jews required for a religious service) met at individual member's homes. Then, as the need for a permanent congregation grew, traditional services were instituted at the home of Benjamin Feinberg, a furniture dealer. In 1898 a small group of families, many of whom came from the same village in Lithuania, acquired a house on Jeffrey Street which became their first "shul," Congregation Brothers of Israel. There was another Orthodox congregation organized later by the

Independent Order of Brith Abraham. This congregation met in a hall at the corner of Broadway and Mill Street and held High Holy Day services in the ballroom of a summer hotel. It gradually went out of existence and most of its members joined Brothers of Israel.

In 1912, the Jeffrey Street building was destroyed by fire. Services were again held at members' homes until a building at 176 Chelsea Avenue was converted for use as a sanctuary, mikvah, and Talmud Torah.



**Interior Images,
Brothers of Israel
Synagogue, 1920**

It continued these functions until 1930, but in 1918 the cornerstone to the Brothers of Israel synagogue was laid, presided



over by Sigmund Eisner of Red Bank, a member of Temple Beth Miriam, who donated \$2000. The building with its elaborate Romanesque revival facade and interior was completed in 1920 and from the start was viewed as one of the city's architectural landmarks.

The Synagogue became the center of Long Branch Orthodox Jewish life, providing spiritual comradeship, a Hebrew school to educate its children, a cemetery, and mutual aid when a \$25 interest free loan from its Hebrew Mutual Aid Society (established in 1911) could resolve a perilous financial crisis.



**Congregation Brothers of Israel Hebrew School Building
with teachers and students, Chelsea Avenue, 1925**

When Brothers of Israel's space needs outgrew its inner city site, a new synagogue was built in the more "suburban" Elberon section of Long Branch. On March 27, 1977, a parade of congregants and guests carrying Torahs and ornaments proceeded from the old building on Second Avenue to the new synagogue on Park Avenue, which has a beautiful decorative frieze by Israeli sculptor, Saidi, gracing its facade.



Mildred and Benjamin Kaabe participating in moving the Torahs from the Congregation Brothers of Israel, Long Branch to their new Elberon location. Various members walked a few blocks with the Torahs and then passed them to other participants.



Brothers of Israel Synagogue, Park Avenue, Elberon

- Jean C. Kerman aka Jean C. Hershenov
co-author of *Peddler to Suburbanite*
Co-Chair of the History Committee



The Annual Meeting, scheduled for June 14th, has been postponed until further notice. We will keep all Museum members apprised of the new date. Please make sure your membership is paid up so that you can participate.

The Messnick Family and Brothers of Israel Synagogue

My great grandfather, Hyman Messnick, born in Vilnius (Vilna), the capitol of Lithuania on April 4, 1880, was a founding member of the Brothers of Israel Synagogue. His original family name was Mester. Hyman arrived in New York City in 1904 after deserting the Russian army to follow his beloved Minnie Kuritsky to America. They married on August 5, 1906 and had their first daughter, Rebecca, in 1907. In 1910, the Messnick family moved to 261 Jeffrey Street, Long Branch. My grandmother, Lillian, was born in 1911; their only son, Samuel, in 1912; and the youngest daughter, Ida, in 1916. In 1917, the Messnick family moved to 144 Westwood Avenue, Long Branch where they also owned a Dry Goods/General Store.

About 1918, Hyman Messnick traveled to New York City to pick out the stone for the Brothers of Israel Synagogue. The founders wanted the shul to look like the synagogues in Vilna.



A group portrait of Synagogue members: front row, left to right: Alter Schwartz, Hyman Messnick, Jacob Weinkofsky, Benjamin (Pop) Glass and Mr. Lasky; Back row, left to right: unidentified, Julius Golden, unidentified, David Sokol, Mr Lefkowitz, Morris Yankow, Mr. Hyman,

While Hyman emigrated to the United States most of his family remained behind. When Germany invaded Lithuania in 1939, the Nazis reportedly took groups of people into the woods and shot them, including Hyman's sister.

Rebecca Messnick married Abraham Vogel who was the co-owner of Vogel's Department Store on Broadway, Long Branch and also co-owner of Breakwater Beach Club (which still exists).

Lillian Messnick (my grandmother) married Alex Taikeff who owned Kelly Clothes, 187 Broadway, Long Branch. The extended Messnick family is proud of the contributions it has made to the commercial and religious life of Long Branch.

- Lisa Adams
Member, JHMOMC History Committee

Abram Elkus and Katherine Elkus White



Abram Elkus

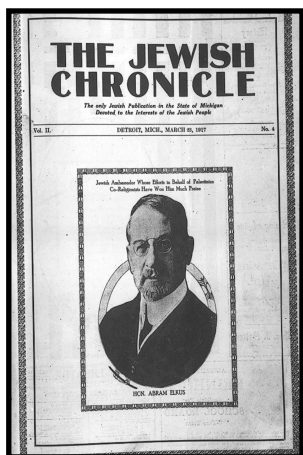
Two individuals who lived noteworthy lives are associated with Red Bank. What is remarkable about them is that they were father and daughter, Abram Elkus and Katherine Elkus White, and they both served as United States ambassadors.

The Elkus family story in the United States began with the arrival in 1849 of Abram's widowed grandmother and her four sons. Born in 1867, Abram was raised in an orthodox family. At 13, he

entered City College but left the school before graduating to study at Columbia Law School. A few years after graduating, he formed his own law firm, and in 1896 he married Gertrude Hess, daughter of German Jewish immigrants. The Elkus family grew to include Jane (1900-1916,) Ethel (1901-1953,) Katherine (1906-1985,) and James (1909-1966.) In 1916, Elkus purchased a mansion in Red Bank for his summer home. He called it Elkridge.

Elkus was a skillful and highly successful trial lawyer. The pinnacle of his legal career may have been his service as chief counsel of the New York State Factory Investigating Commission, which investigated the tragic Triangle Shirtwaist factory fire in 1911. While pursuing his legal career, Elkus was also very involved in Jewish communal work. Among his interests were serving as a founder and president of New York's Free Synagogue and as a trustee of the Baron de Hirsch Fund.

Elkus was also active in Democratic politics, both on the national and state level. As a result, President Woodrow Wilson in 1916 appointed him Ambassador to Ottoman Turkey. He served in that position for over a year, until the Ottoman Empire broke off relations because the United States had entered the world war. Elkus then served briefly on the New York Court of Appeals. Shortly after, illness compelled him to retire from both his legal and political career. He died in Red Bank in 1947.



A portrait of Abram Elkus on the cover of *The Jewish Chronicle*

Although Elkus had a prominent career, the more unusual and interesting life may have been that of his daughter Katherine. She was born into a privileged life; she lived in Constantinople for a few years when her father was ambassador, she graduated from Vassar College in 1928, and she took a six-month cruise around the world with her family. In 1929 she married Arthur Joske White, a stockbroker whose parents were German Jewish immigrants. The wedding ceremony, which was held at Elkridge, was conducted by Rabbi Stephen Wise, possibly the most prominent rabbi in the United States. The Whites' son Lawrence was born in 1931 and their daughter Frances followed two years later. But rather than being the society woman that her cultured background would have prepared her for, Katherine Elkus White's life took a very different turn—politics.

Katherine continued her father's involvement with the Democratic party. In 1933 she was selected to run for the Red Bank Borough Council but lost by thirteen votes. She ran for the New Jersey Assembly in 1934 and for the position of Monmouth County freeholder in 1935, but neither attempt was successful. She was a delegate to four national Democratic Party Conventions and a member of the New Jersey Democratic State Committee, which she later served as vice-chair. Katherine ran for elective office again in 1950, when she was elected mayor of Red Bank, a predominately Republican town, an event so noteworthy that it was reported in the New York Times.

Her election was also noted in the *Jewish Press*, which declared her to be the first Jewish woman mayor in the United States. She was twice reelected. In 1954 the Governor appointed her to the New Jersey Highway Commission, the first woman



A blotter from Katherine Elkus White's campaign for freeholder in 1935

to head a toll road body. But in 1960, she lost a hotly contested race for the U.S. House of Representatives.

In 1964, President Lyndon Johnson announced the appointment of Katherine Elkus White as U.S. Ambassador to Denmark, a position that she held until 1968. In a speech in 1973, addressing the underuse of female talent, she noted that as a female ambassador, she was expected to handle housekeeping and cooking chores in her own embassy. She returned to Red Bank, where she continued her work with national and local civic organizations and died there in 1985 at the age of 78.



Ambassador Katherine Elkus White visits American Radar Station in Greenland in 1965 (Source: Department of State)

- Arlene Goldfus Lutz

Sources: *New York Times*: various articles between February 7, 1911 and April 27, 1985.

Vassar Quarterly, "Contemporary Notes," July 1, 1929

Women in the Department of State: Their Role in American Foreign Affairs, Homer L. Calkin, September, 1978

"Abram Elkus," Historical Society of the New York Courts, 2007

The New York Factory Investigation Commission, U.S. Department of Labor, no date

Political Graveyard.com, "White, Katherine Elkus," no date

SPEAKERS BUREAU

The Speakers Bureau is working on a new PowerPoint slideshow focused on *Jewish Nobel Laureates in Literature*. An excerpt on the life of Nellie Leonie Sachs, who won the Nobel Prize in 1966 is presented below and continued in the right-hand column.

Nelly Leonie Sachs Nobel Laureate in Literature, 1966

Nelly Leonie Sachs was a poet and playwright, born to secular Jewish parents who were wealthy manufacturers, in Berlin in 1891. She grew up in an artistic home where, early on, she developed a love of literature and began writing poetry and puppet plays by the time she was 17. Her poems of the 1920s appeared in newspapers, but were mostly for personal enjoyment. When she was 15, she was inspired by Swedish Nobel Laureate Selma Lagerlof's work

and initiated a 35 year correspondence, which eventually saved her life and that of her mother's. In the 1930s, she became an active member of the Berlin Jewish Cultural Society where she gave poetry readings. During this time, antisemitism was becoming more violent and she was traumatized and unable to speak for five days after being interrogated by the Gestapo, as she remembered in verse:



Nelly Leonie Sachs

When the great terror came/ I fell dumb.

Thanks to the intervention of her friend Selma Lagerlof, with the Swedish royal family, Sachs was able to flee Germany with her mother in 1940, on the last flight from Nazi Germany to Sweden, a week before she was scheduled to report to a concentration camp. Living in a tiny apartment, she cared for her mother and supported them by translating poetry between Swedish and German. Her mental health was fragile and she was periodically hospitalized, but she always continued to write.

Sachs had not gone to synagogue nor taken part in Jewish traditions in Germany and had been barely recognized as a writer during her almost fifty years of living in Germany. She had, however, been deeply influenced by the Hasidic stories of Martin Buber, Kabbalistic mysticism, and the Zohar. Throughout the war years Nelly Sachs wrote some of the poetry that would bring her fame. She bore witness to the victims of the Holocaust and became a voice for those whom she described in her poems as the "rescued," the "onlookers," and also the "murderers." The motif of flight, pursuit, and the symbol of the hunter and his prey, are at the center of her poetry. It is mystical, ecstatic, and visionary. She wrote: "If I could not have written, I could not have survived. Death was my teacher...my metaphors are my sounds." For her, Israel was a community bound by collective suffering and the memory of those murdered in the Shoah. In the poem "O The Chimneys," she describes the future of Israel as having been eradicated by genocide:

O the chimneys / On the carefully planned dwellings of death/ When Israel's body rose dissolved in smoke/ Through the air - /To be welcomed by a chimney sweep star/ Turned black/ Or was it a ray of the sun?

In 1966, Sachs became the only German - speaking woman to be awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature, an honor she shared with "Shai" Agnon. She was recognized for being the "bearer of a message of solace to all those who despair of the fate of man" and for her "outstanding lyrical and dramatic writing, which interprets Israel's destiny with touching strength" (Nobel Foundation). When she was awarded the honor, she observed that Agnon represented Israel, whereas she represents the tragedy of the Jewish people.

Sources: *The Encyclopedia of Jewish Women*, jwa.org

- Barbara Michaels
Chair, Speakers Bureau



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2020 ANNUAL APPEAL

Dear Friends of the Jewish Heritage Museum,

We hope this finds you and your loved ones safe. For the past thirteen years, thanks to the generous support of our community, the Board of Trustees, staff, volunteers, and members have found it possible for the Jewish Heritage Museum of Monmouth County to recount the uniquely rich history of the Jews of Monmouth County, and to engage its first part-time Executive Director.

Much has changed within the last year, especially in these last few months. The Museum has had to temporarily close its doors due to the Covid-19 outbreak, causing strong economic repercussions with the loss of program, visitor, and donor revenue. As a place of inspiration and education, we are passionate about offering amazing programs for our community and we are committed to offering presentations again when it is safe to gather in groups. Thus, we remain dedicated to continue to be the community's hub for Jewish cultural expression and activity.

The Museum is committed to continuing our efforts to preserve the past and present so that future generations can become stewards of our stories and cultural legacies. To accomplish this, the Museum will need to rely on the support of the entire community. The strength of the Jewish people has always been rooted in our stories of perseverance, traditions, and our faith.

This year, we are delighted to announce that ***an anonymous donor has pledged to match dollar for dollar each contribution given during this Annual Appeal.*** As you make choices about how to support your community during this time, please consider making a donation to the Jewish Heritage Museum, as every dollar makes a difference.

You can donate by mailing a check, or online at www.jhmomc.org/annual-appeal. Your gifts in any amount are deeply appreciated – it is your support that matters!

Until we see you again, please stay healthy.

With gratitude,

Jessica Solomon
Executive Director



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Gloria Sadoff Landy - One of the Original Founders of the Jewish Heritage Museum and a Tireless Worker for Hadassah and Other Jewish Causes



Gloria Landy

Gloria S. Landy was 86 when she passed away after a long illness, on April 23, 2020, at her home in Rumson, the same house where the Trustees of the Jewish Heritage Museum held one of its board meetings prior to taking occupancy of the Levi Solomon barn in Freehold.

Gloria was born in New York City on August 12, 1933, the oldest of two children of parents of Eastern-European descent. Gloria and her brother grew up as active members of the Old Broadway Synagogue in Harlem, New York. She married Eugene Landy in 1957 and worked as a paralegal supporting him while he attended Yale Law School in New Haven, Connecticut. Eugene and Gloria raised three sons.

Gloria was the first woman President of Congregation B'nai Israel in Rumson and she remained very involved in all aspects of the synagogue throughout her life. She worked for many years at the United Nations

headquarters in New York City, as a leader in the Jewish NGO Caucus. In 2014, she was elected Secretary of the World Jewish Congress where she served with great pride and distinction. Her strong voice of solidarity with the Jewish community and the Jewish State was always expressed forcibly both in the public square and in the diplomatic arena.

A graduate of Monmouth College, Gloria was also a gifted poet, writing in both Yiddish and English (see *Heritage Highlights*, Spring/Summer 2013 issue, p.6) and served as the President of the New Jersey Poetry Society for several years.

Gloria always had a keen interest in local history, researching and writing on Joshua Huddy (Monmouth's leading Revolutionary War hero) even before helping in the establishment of the Jewish Heritage Museum. The Museum sends its condolences to the Landy Family.

- Jean Klerman
Co-Chair, History Committee