

Emma Lazarus (1849-1887)

These lines are from the inspiring sonnet, "The New Colossus," which has become more than a poem; it is an anthem for America. Conceived by an accomplished writer and poet, Emma Lazarus, it synthesized her strong beliefs in the rights and equality of Jews in America and the compassionate acceptance of immigrants. The compact power of the poetry was not an accidental bullseye; Lazarus was part of the circle of notable late nineteenth-century writers and was one of the first successful Jewish-American authors.

Emma Lazarus was born in 1849 into a prosperous Jewish family in New York City. She grew up near Union Square and summered with her six siblings in the family cottage in Newport. Her parents Moses and Esther Nathan Lazarus, proudly traced their ancestry to the first Jewish Sephardic settlers in America. Moses owned profitable sugar refineries and moved in wealthy Christian circles that included the Vanderbilts and Astors. Along with them, he founded the elite Knickerbocker Club in New York.

Emma grew up amid both material and intellectual riches. She was well educated in the classics and mastered both French and German. Her father, recognizing Emma's literary talent when she was very young, privately published her first book of poems and translations when she was only seventeen. In 1868, Emma sent Ralph Waldo Emerson a copy of her book. He was impressed and, over the next several years, became a trusted mentor offering both encouragement and criticism. Later, on her trips to England, she attended literary salons and became friends with the renowned writers Henry James and Robert Browning as well as the artist William Morris.

Lazarus's second book received excellent reviews and an even more glowing reception for her 1881 translation of the works of the German-Jewish poet, Heinrich Heine. She felt a kinship with him in several ways: their work overlapped covering romantic, political, and satirical genres and each wrote about both ancient Greek myths and current issues concerning social justice. Like Lazarus, Heine was not personally observant but was deeply committed to the rights and equality of Jews.

In 1883, amid the growing concern in America over the soaring numbers of immigrants from Eastern Europe, France bestowed a magnificent symbol of freedom to the United States, The Statue of Liberty, sculpted by Frédéric-Auguste Bartholdi. France donated the work and paid for its transit; however, the United States was responsible for the construction and installation of a pedestal to fit the majesty of the work. All over America, people donated money—from a few pennies to large amounts collected through community efforts—including an auction of art and literary works. To help realize the goal, Emma Lazarus wrote her contribution, "The New Colossus."

The poem evoked the grandeur of the mythical Greek colossal sculpture of a mighty guardian, standing astride two land projections above the ancient port of Rhodes. Lazarus inverted the symbolism, reframing the protector as a columnar woman; strong and maternal, commanding and welcoming. The poem rejects the verbiage of classical odes replacing it with a vivid description of modern suffering that captures the desperation of immigrants. In only fourteen lines, it still elicits empathy and instills pride in America's ideals.

Although the poem was read aloud, and admired, at the auction, it was not included in the opening ceremonies for the statue in 1886. However, recognition grew after Lazarus's death in 1887 when the poem was published in *The New World* and *The New York Times*. In 1901, Emma's friend, Georgina Schuyler, began an effort to memorialize her and, sixteen years after the poet's death, in 1903, the plaque with the inspiring text was installed beneath the sculpture adding meaning and depth to the Lady with the Lamp.

It is often written that Emma Lazarus "discovered" her Jewish identity later in life. In actuality, she wrote about Jewish themes before the 1880s. In her 1867 poem, "In the Jewish Synagogue at Newport," she relates her awe while standing in the historic sanctuary and reflecting on the entire history of the Jewish people. Though steeped in the past, she concludes "The sacred shrine is holy yet."

It was the widespread intensification of antisemitism that propelled Lazarus to write articles in both secular and Jewish journals including "Epistle to the Hebrews" published in American Hebrew. In it she dispelled Jewish stereotypes, praised the Jewish concepts of charity combined with justice, embraced the belief that Jews held equal patriotic attachment to America and their identity, and proposed a free Jewish state in Palestine. Not seeing a need for American Jews to emigrate there at the time, she advocated for a homeland for Jews of the world who could not live in freedom writing, "Until we are all free, we are none of us free." In addition to using her pen to effect change, Lazarus visited Russian refugees living on Ward's Island, volunteered at the Hebrew Aid Society, and helped establish the Hebrew Technical Institute to train young people so that they would have a solid livelihood.

Emma Lazarus was only 38 years old when she died, but her impact extends beyond the inspiring poem we treasure. She was an important forerunner of the Zionist movement writing about a homeland thirteen years before Herzl used the term Zionism. And in our own era, from 1951-1989, her legacy endured through the establishment of Emma Lazarus Clubs by The Federation of Jewish Women to fight against antisemitism and racism. Henrietta Szold, the founder of Hadassah, wrote of her: "With her own hand she has sown the seeds that shall transform her grave into a garden."

Bobbi Coller

Henrietta Szold (1860-1945)

Henrietta Szold, best known as the founder of Hadassah, the Women's Zionist Organization of America, was an ardent Zionist before that term came into common usage. She guided women in cultivating a wide range of skills at a time when most women's lives centered strictly on their families. She created progressive education and welfare programs in pre-state Israel that continue to influence the way today's state teaches its young and cares for its needy. And she became known as a mother to thousands of young people whom she rescued during the Holocaust, but never had a child of her own.

She was born in Baltimore, Maryland, in 1860, the eldest of five daughters (three others died young). Her father, Rabbi Benjamin Szold, treated her as he might have treated a favored son. At his side, she learned Hebrew, Torah and Talmud, read great Jewish and German writers, and mastered French. From him, she also learned to love the land of Israel, a love he regarded as integral to Judaism. From her mother, she acquired extraordinary organizational skills.

As a young woman, she founded a night school to teach immigrants English, which became a model throughout the United States. Although she never attended college (she helped pay her younger sisters' tuitions), with her intellectual gifts, she became the first editor of the Jewish Publication Society of America, a position she held for more than twenty years. She left her mark on Jewish culture through the books she published and the essays she wrote in the American Jewish Yearbook. To extend her knowledge after her father died, in her early forties she entered New York's Jewish Theological Seminary, accepted on condition that as a woman, she would not pursue a rabbinic degree.

There, she fell madly in love with Louis Ginzberg, the Seminary's brilliant professor of Talmud, thirteen years her junior. She worked slavishly helping him with his multi-volume magnum opus, *Legends of the Jews*, a compilation of stories from biblical times onward, and believed he reciprocated her feelings. When he announced after a trip to Europe, that he had become engaged to another (much younger) woman, Szold descended into a debilitating depression that lasted several years. Summoning great inner strength, she finally emerged from her depression a different woman: stronger, more independent, and a determined supporter of women's rights. She never married and she never spoke of Ginzberg again.

During her dark years, Henrietta and her mother traveled to Europe and Palestine. Moved by the poverty and illness she saw in the Holy Land, in 1912, after she recovered, Szold organized a group of women into what would become Hadassah, tasked with offering health care to Palestine's Jews. Led by her, the group formed the first school for nurses in the land and created a unit of doctors and nurses to provide medical aid for the region. That unit evolved into the Hadassah Medical Center, the most important hospital in the Middle East. Szold set the policy that Hadassah still follows of treating all patients equally—Jews, Muslims, and Christians.

In America, Hadassah women raised vast sums of money for their growing organization, becoming, with time, the largest and most powerful Zionist institution in the world. Women who had built their lives around their homes learned to handle finances, give public lectures, run meetings, and become politically active. Szold served as the organization's first president and remained influential in it through much of her life.

But she also expanded her activities. For a while she traveled back and forth to Palestine, targeting her work there on education. In 1931 she moved to Jerusalem to head the social welfare division in the Yishuv, the pre-state government of Israel, and that land became her permanent home. As she assumed one assignment after another, (a workaholic, she slept about four or five hours a night), she became known throughout America and Palestine. In 1933, at the age of seventy-three, she was asked to head Youth Aliyah, created to rescue German children from Hitler's furnaces. With the Nazi menace spreading across Europe, her work spread also. Szold met boatloads of children arriving at Palestine's shores, and personally involved herself in settling them in their new homes. Under her supervision, thousands of children reached safety in the land of Israel. Many, now orphaned, called her "mother."

In the life of the spirit," Szold would say, "there is no ending that is not a beginning." Her work had many endings, as she undertook one goal after another. But each ending spurred a new beginning that enhanced the world around her. She died in 1945 and was buried on the Mount of Olives.

Fran Klagsbrun

Shari Lewis (1933-1998)

"I have deep convictions, and I know that there is in the human spirit hate and violence and other dark emotions. It is right that we should acknowledge them on TV in responsible ways. We should also acknowledge that in every human spirit there is the desire to learn and laugh and do good and help other people." Shari Lewis, 1993 testimony, Congressional hearings examining broadcaster compliance with the Children's Television Act of 1990.

For almost half a century Shari Lewis—ventriloquist, puppeteer, magician, dancer, and writer—educated, entertained, and delighted generations of children (and adults) in a series of television shows. By her side, or more accurately, on her right hand, was her long-time colleague Lamb Chop, a sock puppet.

At a time when most women were shut out of the industry, Shari Lewis was one of the few women to run a television production company. In addition to producing her television shows, which eventually won 12 Emmy awards, she wrote 60 books for children and also produced numerous audio and video recordings for children.

Shari Lewis was born Phyllis Hurwitz in New York City to Ann (Ritz) and Abraham Hurwitz. Her mother, a pianist, was a music coordinator for the Board of Education in New York. Her father was a founding professor at Yeshiva University of New York. His lifelong specialty was encouraging children in their studies through play, a focus that his daughter continued. He also played a significant role in his daughter's dramatic capabilities; she began her entertainment career at age 13, performing magic acts with Jewish content that her father had taught her. One candle multiplied to become eight candles to illustrate Hanukkah and a torn newspaper that, once restored, had the design of a Jewish star. When she started performing ventriloquism, she added Old Testament tales to her repertoire. Multi-talented, she studied piano and violin at New York's High School of Music and Art (now Fiorello H. LaGuardia High School of Music & Art and Performing Arts), dance at the American School of Ballet and acting with Sanford Meisner of the Neighborhood Playhouse. She also attended Columbia University for a year before dropping out to begin her career as a performer.

In 1952, Lewis and her puppetry won first prize on Arthur Godfrey's Talent Scouts television show and her career took off. In March 1956, she and Lamb Chop appeared on Captain Kangaroo, and by 1960 she had her own television program, The Shari Lewis Show, with Charlie Horse and Hush Puppy joining Lamb Chop in the puppet family. Even though the host and her puppet companions were among America's most beloved television characters, the show ran for only three years, until animated cartoons replaced live performances on television.

After 1963, Lewis did television specials, acted in touring companies and conducted symphony orchestras. She performed and conducted with more than 100 orchestras, including the national symphonies of the United States, Canada and Japan. From 1968 until 1976, Lewis had her own series on British television, and she also did television series and specials in Canada and Australia.

After Lewis's almost thirty-year absence from American TV screens, the Public Broadcasting Service approached her about reviving her television show. During those 27 years, children's television had become more commercialized, with producers focusing on age groups for the purpose of selling products. Lewis's new show, Lamb Chop's Play-Along, seen on PBS stations and reproduced on video, grew out of PBS interest and Lewis's discontent with commercial television. This new program—the "second act" of Shari Lewis's career—invigorated the genre. It wasn't "selling" anything; it was exploring values and feelings. It featured songs in languages other than English and a group of on-air children to represent racial diversity; it included physical involvement on the part of children and stressed situations that affect kids, such as not being invited to a party or feeling lonely. The shows did not preach; they demonstrated.

Throughout her career, Shari Lewis focused on providing children with educational and moral content. Deeply concerned with the quality of children's television, Lewis testified in 1993 at hearings before the House Telecommunications Subcommittee about the Children's Television Act, giving an impassioned

speech about the need for the government to regulate children's programming. In addition to the sentiments quoted above, Shari Lewis laid down a challenge to the broadcasting community. "If each broadcaster had to provide a minimum amount of educational, information stuff," she said, "stations would boast of what they were doing for the community's children as they now boast of ratings. And advertisers would be very pleased to be seen as servicing the community. It all comes down to responsibility."

Shari Lewis was diagnosed with uterine cancer and died of pneumonia while under treatment in Los Angeles in 1998. She was 65. Just days after her death, Rep. Edward Markey, who chaired the hearings at which Lewis testified, praised her extraordinary accomplishments, calling Shari Lewis "America's Gentle Giant of Children's TV." Her contributions forever changed the history of children's television for the better.

Gerry Solomon

Lee Krasner (1908-1984)

At recent international art auctions, the work of Lee Krasner yielded among the highest prices ever paid for a work by a woman artist. However, it took a long time for people to appreciate, or even notice, the powerful paintings and collages that she created during a time when the work of women artists was not taken as seriously as that of male artists.

Lena Krasner was born in Brooklyn in 1908, the youngest of six children, and the only one born in the United States, to Ukrainian Jews who fled to escape Anti-Semitism and the Russo-Japanese War. Although raised in an Orthodox Jewish family in the Bronx with no exposure to art, she knew at an early age that she wanted to be an artist. After attending Cooper Union Woman's Art School on a scholarship, she applied to the National Academy of Art and submitted a self-portrait. The jury could not believe that at twenty-two years old, she could compose such a strong likeness the way she claimed—painted outdoors, using only a small mirror suspended from a tree branch.

While Lee (whose first name morphed from Lena to Lenore and finally Lee, and who also dropped one "s" from her last name) became adept at figurative drawing, her entire conception of art was transformed when she visited the Museum of Modern Art soon after it opened in 1929. She realized that she wanted to go beyond her academic training and found a teacher who could bridge the gap between Realism and the experimental abstraction emerging from Europe. Hans Hofmann's class was the place to absorb cubism and abstract composition and he was known to be a critical teacher. One day Hofmann stood before Krasner's easel and said, "This is so good you would never know it was done by a woman." Lee didn't know how to respond. But she also later received less sexist encouragement from Piet Mondrian when he told her, "You have a very strong inner rhythm; you must never lose it."

In order to support herself during the Depression, Krasner worked as a waitress, a department store model, and, like numerous artists, joined the Works Progress Administration Federal Arts Project in the mural division earning \$23.50 per week. She assisted in the creation of large-scale public murals and was quickly recognized as an administrative leader.

In 1940 she joined the American Abstract Artists group and met the other members who would become the greatest abstract artists of the twentieth century. They included Mark Rothko, Willem de Kooning, Arshile Gorky, Franz Kline, Adolph Gottlieb, Barnett Newman, and Clifford Still. Krasner was surrounded by artists grappling with new ideas about the look and content of art and was present at the birth of a revolutionary art movement reflecting the anxiety in post-war America. As a member of this avant-garde group, in 1942 Krasner was asked to show her work with a group of downtown artists. When she heard the list of participants, there was only one name that she didn't recognize, Jackson Pollock. She learned that he lived around the corner from her so she went over to his studio to introduce herself. She described her first impression when seeing his work:

"I was overwhelmed. Bowled over that's all. I saw all those marvelous paintings, I felt as if the floor was sinking." Krasner first fell in love with Pollock's paintings and then with Pollock. She was convinced he was a genius and devoted herself to ensuring that the world recognized it too. At the same time she was expanding her own art and experimenting with varied styles. Her little Image series, from 1946-1949, has the appearance of block letters from an unreadable alphabet and she once said that she worked on it from right to left, like Hebrew. Although she rejected Judaism as a teenager, she retained the visual memory of Hebrew writing from prayer books.

Krasner was also self-critical. She was periodically dissatisfied with what she created and destroyed her own work. When she experimented with the medium of collage from 1951-55, she often incorporated the cut remnants of her past work into new compositions. Although Pollock was an intense and inspired artist, he suffered from a longstanding, destructive drinking problem and Lee tried to stabilize him. After their marriage in 1945, they borrowed money from his dealer, Peggy Guggenheim, to purchase a modest house in Springs, Long Island. The quietude and natural setting allowed him to create his most famous large canvases in the converted barn while Lee continued to make her smaller works in a bedroom studio.

These were momentous years, but Pollock found it hard to deal with the glare of fame and, in the mid-1950s, he returned to alcoholism. In 1956, while Lee was on a rare trip to Europe, Pollock was at the wheel of his car when it crashed, killing him and one passenger.

After Pollock's death, Lee returned to work, moving into the larger studio space and strategically building Pollock's legacy. During his life, Pollock's enormous career overshadowed Krasner's and people assumed that he influenced her. In reality, she was more entrenched in the art scene when they met, and they each worked independently while also sharing ideas and offering support.

After her death in 1984, Krasner was given a retrospective exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art and since then, there have been major exhibitions of her work at the Brooklyn Museum in 2002, the Guggenheim Bilbao in 2020, and the Whitney Museum of American Art in 2022. During her life, Krasner expressed the desire to open the home and studio in Springs to the public and to establish a research resource. Since 1987 The Pollock Krasner House and Study Center, under the direction of Stony Brook University, has been a destination for viewing the home and working studio of both artists. She was also intent on creating a separate Foundation that provides financial grants to assist artists of merit; The Pollock-Krasner Foundation.

It has taken a long time, but we can now rephrase Hofmann's misguided compliment to say that her work is so good, it must have been done by a great talent: a woman who was an integral part of the golden age of twentieth century American art.

Bobbi Coller

Gertrude Elion (1918-1999)

Most people who use therapeutic drugs have no idea how those medications evolved from an idea into an available therapeutic. Medicinal chemistry, the general and classical discipline of conceptualizing, designing, and developing pharmaceutical products that work with minimal adverse reactions and side effects, is a difficult and time-consuming undertaking, fraught with financial and professional risks.

On occasion, a unique individual—who is inspired, self-motivated, and incredibly hardworking—makes a contribution to the field of pharmaceutical research and development that broadly enriches the development of drugs to improve human health and save lives. Gertrude Elion, a Jewish woman scientist, attained the highest achievements in scientific research by pioneering a new, more scientific approach to drug development that forever altered medical research. Her discoveries enabled treatments that have benefitted, and continue to benefit, millions of people around the world.

Elion was born in NYC in 1918 to immigrant parents from Lithuania and Poland. Her outstanding high school record earned her a tuition-free position at Hunter College where she graduated summa cum laude with a BA in chemistry in 1937. After graduation, challenges of gender-bias limited her career options so she worked as an office secretary, high school teacher, and chemistry lab volunteer. Perseverance led her to a position as a quality-control chemist for A&P and Quaker Oats before she landed a position at Johnson & Johnson. In 1944 she was offered the opportunity to work as an assistant to George H. Hitchings at Burroughs Wellcome (now part of GSK). Wellcome promoted her to head an experimental therapy group where she continued to collaborate with Dr. Hitchings.

Dr. Elion's research work with Dr. Hitchings significantly contributed to the discovery of drugs based on the structure of a class of molecules known as purines, which include adenine and guanine. Purines are critical for the core structure of molecules required for replication of cells and viruses. Dr. Elion realized that non-functional structural analogs of purines could be identified in a lab and used as therapeutics to treat a variety of disease conditions by halting the biological pathways required in the disease state; such molecules are called anti-metabolites. This novel foundational principle of rational drug design led to the development of the first treatment for leukemia, an immunosuppressant to prevent transplant rejection, a medicine for gout, and, most notably, the anti-viral agents AZT to combat HIV infection, and acyclovir targeted for herpes. These are all enormously beneficial scientific contributions.

Elion's contributions to rational drug design resulted in the award of the 1988 Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine "for their discoveries of important principles for drug treatment." In 1991, she was awarded the National Medal of Science and was inducted into the National Women's Hall of Fame. Years later, when reflecting on her career Elion said, "The Nobel Prize is fine, but the drugs I've developed are rewards in themselves."

Remarkably, Gertrude Elion accomplished her work and made her contribution to medicine without a Ph.D. Having earned a Master's degree from Brooklyn Polytech, she was denied the opportunity to earn a Ph.D because Polytech (now part of NYU) would not allow her to work and pursue a Ph.D at the same time. Despite that restriction, during her illustrious career she was awarded 20 honorary degrees from universities including Brown, Harvard, and NYU. Her Ph.D training was on the job; she did not let outmoded, arbitrary policies dampen her desire to improve health through scientific discoveries.

Charlie Spielholtz

Gertrude Weil (1879-1971)

Gertrude Weil was a social activist who was involved in many progressive causes including women's suffrage, labor reform and civil rights.

She was born in Goldsboro, North Carolina on December 11, 1879, one of several children of Henry and Mina Weil. Her father, Henry Weil, had immigrated from Hamburg, Germany in 1860 at age 14. He joined his brother, Herman, who would later fight in the Confederate Army during the American Civil War. The Weil brothers opened a general store, H. Weil & Bros., soon after the Civil War. They invested in other areas and the family was wealthy and prominent in Goldsboro.

Gertrude's mother, Mina Rosenthal Weil, was a North Carolina native of German Jewish descent. Mina was involved in local charitable organizations and women's causes. In 1899, she established the Goldsboro Women's Club which focused on serving their community as well as women's roles in social work and reform. The Weil family formed North Carolina's first Jewish congregation and founded Congregation Oheb Sholom, a reform synagogue that still stands.

Gertrude Weil was educated in public schools as well as Sabbath School, German School and Hebrew School. At age 16, Weil was sent to New York City to attend Horace Mann School. During her time at Horace Mann, she was introduced to Margaret Stanton Lawrence, daughter of Elizabeth Cady Stanton. Lawrence was an early influence on Weil.

After Horace Mann, Weil attended Smith College in Northampton, MA. She graduated in 1901, becoming North Carolina's first Smith College alumna. While at Smith, Weil was introduced to the work of progressive reformers like Jane Addams. Before graduation, Weil visited settlement houses in New York and considered teaching in one. However, she decided to return to Goldsboro.

After college, Weil worked with her mother and the Goldsboro Women's Club. She became involved with the North Carolina Federation of Women's Clubs where she gained experience in social activism. She was nicknamed "Federation Gertie." The women's clubs in North Carolina focused on legislation that would aid women and children and ameliorate their working conditions. In 1911, Weil joined the National American Woman Suffrage Association which sought women's right to vote.

She was president of the North Carolina Equal Suffrage League in 1920, when the North Carolina General Assembly failed to ratify the 19th Amendment to the United States Constitution, which gave women the right to vote. Gertrude then became president of the North Carolina League of Women Voters which educated women on their newly-acquired voting rights. She was so committed to women's voting rights, political fairness and equality that in 1922, during the first election in which women were allowed to vote, she ripped up hundreds of suspect ballots after she was given a pre-marked ballot. Gertrude was also active in many other civic organizations that fostered social justice for women and African Americans.

Among Jewish causes, she sat on the board of the North Carolina Home for the Jewish Aged, worked for the National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods, and helped to raise money for numerous Jewish charities. In the 1930's and 1940's, she and her mother raised funds to help Jews escape from the Holocaust.

Gertrude opposed segregation and described the system in an interview with the News & Observer on March 14, 1965 as being "separate but by no means equal." On one occasion, when a public pool was closed to African Americans, Gertrude and a cousin donated land and money for a pool to be built for their use. Even in her eighties she could be found hosting bi-racial committee meetings in her home.

During her lifetime, Gertrude received several awards, including the Howard Odum award presented by the North Carolina Council on Human Relations, an honorary doctorate in 1957 from UNC Goldsboro, and the Smith Medal from Smith College for a lifetime of service to others.

Gertrude Weil died on May 30, 1971 at the age of 91 in the house in which she was born and lived almost all of her life. She was buried in the Jewish section of Willow Dale Cemetery in Goldsboro.

Diane Okrent

Clara Lemlich (1886-1982)

11-22-1909 International Ladies Garment Workers Union, Great Hall of Cooper Union

A restless crowd filled the Great Hall of Cooper Union in 1909. The workers had listened for hours to labor leaders, including the respected Samuel Gompers, orate about the possibility of calling a general strike. Suddenly, as Gompers was about to conclude his speech, an uninvited speaker assumed the podium. Clara Lemlich, a twenty-two-year-old immigrant from Ukraine, made her way to the platform.

Clara Lemlich was not a stranger to the attendees. She was known for her work organizing women in the International Ladies Garment Workers Union and most recently, as the

woman who had helped organize a strike at her employer's company. (As a result of that, hired thugs broke her ribs. The attack had no impact on Clara's organizing activities).

Clara spoke fiercely in Yiddish:

"Brothers and Sisters: I have no further patience for talk. I am one of those who suffers from the abuses described here, and I move that we go on a general strike."

Clara's words had a dramatic effect on the crowd—it clamored for an immediate strike. This was not what the male union officials and middle-class reformers had planned. They felt a strike led by women would fail. But the crowd had spoken and there was no turning back. The strike, now known as "The Uprising of the Twenty Thousand" was in effect. On November 23, 1909, more than 20,000 Yiddish-speaking immigrants, mostly young women in their teens and early twenties, launched an eleven-week general strike in New York's shirtwaist industry. It remains the largest strike by women in American history.

When the strike ended, some of the women's demands were achieved. Of the 353 firms struck, 339 signed contracts granting a fifty-two-hour week, at least four holidays with pay per year, no discrimination against union loyalists, provision of tools and materials without fees, equal division of work during slack seasons, and negotiation of wages with employees. Among the firms that refused to negotiate with the women was a very large employer, The Triangle Shirtwaist Factory. When a fire at that factory caused the death of 146 young women in 1911, the tragedy received enormous publicity. The public was outraged when it learned that the young women had been locked in their workplace and had no way to escape. The tide had turned: laws began to be enacted to protect workers' rights.

Lemlich's activism went beyond workers' rights. She was a major organizer in the kosher meat boycott of 1917 and a city-wide rent strike two years later. As a suffragette leader, she repeatedly reminded her audiences:

"The manufacturer has a vote; the bosses have votes; the foremen have votes; the inspectors have votes. The working girl has no vote. When she asks to have a building in which she must work made clean and safe, the officials do not have to listen. When she asks not to work such long hours, they do not have to listen. . . . Until the men in the Legislature at Albany represent her as well as the bosses and the foremen, she will not get justice; she will not get fair conditions. That is why the working woman now says that she must have the vote."

With time, Lemlich moved further to the left, joining the Communist Party and founding the United Council of Working-Class Women. The Council supported anti-eviction activities and food boycotts so it is not surprising that Lemlich was called to testify at the hearings of the House Un-American Activities Committee. She was not indicted, but her entire family was under government surveillance for many years.

Well into her old age, as a resident of a New York City nursing home, she encouraged hospital workers who were trying to form what became New York's 1199 health care workers' union. That union, after many splits and mergers, evolved into what is known today as the SEIU, the Service Employees International Union. The SEIU now represents almost 1.9 million workers in over 100 occupations in the United States and Canada.

Many of Lemlich's causes, regarded as radical earlier in the century—such as public housing, rent control, and gender equality—are now considered equitable social and economic policy. Clara Lemlich fought for justice her entire life, and in doing so, made lives better. Even as a young girl, she was a Woman of Valor.

Barry Feldman

Theda Bara (1885-1955)

According to the publicity department of Fox Studios, Theda Bara was the daughter of a sheik and a French woman born in the Sahara. According to U.S. government records, she was the daughter of Bernard Goodman, from Poland, and his wife Pauline Francois, from Switzerland, who were prosperous residents of Cincinnati, Ohio. The couple named their daughter Theodosia Burr Goodman when she was born in 1885. (Burr was in honor of Aaron Burr: the origin of Theodosia is not clear.) Perhaps her parents had a dramatic flair that took full expression in their daughter.

Theda attended the University of Cincinnati for two years and then moved to New York to pursue an acting career. This was the era of the silent film, and the movie production business was located in the New York /New Jersey area. Later she would move with the industry to Hollywood, where she signed a contract with Fox Studios.

Theda soon became one of the studio's hottest "properties," making more than 40 movies from 1914 to 1926. She was the undisputed sex symbol of her day, earning a fortune. In all of her films, she played the same persona: the scantily clothed "oriental" seductress. She was the vamp, short for vampire, a destructive force who seduced, dominated and/or destroyed men. Her character was totally unlike later frothy blond sex symbols like Marilyn Monroe. Theda was dangerous, not delightful.

The concept of the evil woman, the vamp, is a long-standing one in Greek and Near Eastern mythology. In the Jewish tradition she is embodied in the figure of Lillith, who is seen as a destroyer of children rather than men. Pictures of Sephardi children, taken as late as the early 1900s in Jewish communities like Baghdad, show children wearing numerous amulets designed to ward off the evil Lillith, literally a femme fatale!

Theda's most famous role was in Cleopatra in 1917. Although the film print was lost, many photos of the movie exist, such as the ones shown here. Her revealing clothing and vamp behavior raised some concern. That concern mounted as the movie industry produced many films that contained nudity, profanity, drunkenness, or infidelity. Opposition to depicting what was termed "immorality" led to the adoption of the Hay Codes of 1930. These made it illegal to produce movies that included nudity, profanity, and other elements considered to be immoral. The codes were later rescinded and replaced by the rating system (with its PG 13, R, and X) used today.

Theda, frustrated by being typecast as "the vamp," let her contract with Fox Studios expire so she could take on roles that would demonstrate her real acting skills. She portrayed wholesome characters in several movies and even played Juliet in a movie version of Romeo and Juliet. However, her non-vamp films never gained popularity. She also appeared on the stage on Broadway in 1920. Although her presence in the play brought great crowds, the critics savaged her acting. Up until that short Broadway appearance, no one had heard Theda's voice. All her work had been in silent films.

After marrying Charles Brabin, a British-born American filmmaker, Theda essentially retired from acting. In the 1930's she announced that she would be making a movie comeback, but that never materialized. She died in 1955 and is interred as Theda Bara Brabin at the famous Forest Lawn cemetery in California, the final resting place of many cinema stars.

Joanne Feierman

Beatrice Alexander Behrman (1895-1990)

Countless children around the world have played with, loved, and collected Madame Alexander dolls. They probably never suspected that the longstanding doll company, cited as one of the major doll manufacturers in America by Fortune Magazine in 1936, was the creation of a young Jewish woman who started making cloth dolls in her cramped family kitchen on the Lower East Side. Raised in poverty, she became one of the foremost female entrepreneurs of the twentieth century.

Bertha Alexander was born in 1895 in New York. Her connection to dolls began soon after she was born when her stepfather opened the first doll hospital. At that time, most dolls were fabricated in Europe and the faces and hands were made of painted china. The Alexanders repaired expensive dolls and the young Bertha, observing the families that brought their dolls for repair, became aware of the contrast between the wealthy customers and the hard-working immigrants in her neighborhood. She aspired for more.

During World War I, the allies placed an embargo on German exports, including dolls. To save her parents' failing business, Bertha designed a cloth doll modeled on a Red Cross nurse. She and her sister sewed them at home and when her parents took them to sell at the hospital, they flew off the shelves. Spurred by that success, in 1923 she obtained a \$1,600 loan and formed the Alexander Doll Company. Renaming herself Beatrice, and in need of trusted help, she insisted that her husband, Philip Behrman, quit his job to work with her. She also added the French honorific "Madame" to her name, lending an aura of elegance and European sophistication.

During the economic depression of the 1930s, Beatrice looked for a way to sustain the doll market. She had already created dolls based on characters in classic books, but now pioneered the practice of movie tie-ins, reissuing her Alice in Wonderland and Little Women dolls to coincide with the new film versions of the books. Her Scarlett O'Hara doll, issued before the film version of the popular book, was an enormous success. And beyond the film industry, Beatrice was perceptive about cultural events and recognized the potential of the world-wide fascination when the first surviving quintuplets were born in 1934. She acquired the license to produce a set of Dionne sisters. The set was wildly popular and established the company as a leader in the toy industry.

Unlike most successful businesswomen, Beatrice Alexander achieved her stature singlehandedly. She was not part of an existing family business, nor did she inherit one from her husband. Because of her introduction of unbreakable plastic materials, clever marketing, and attention to detail, she is credited with revolutionizing the toy industry.

To Alexander, dolls were not a decorative frivolity. She once said, "I wanted dolls with souls...You have no idea how I labored over noses and mouths so that they would look real and individual." To create distinctive characters, she researched the clothes so that they were historically accurate and full of design details.

By the middle of the century, Madame Alexander dolls and their eye-catching costumes were so admired, the Abraham and Strauss department store asked Beatrice Alexander to produce a large set of dolls representing the coronation entourage of Queen Elizabeth II. The thirty-six doll set cost \$25,000 at the time and CBS used it to illustrate the coronation proceedings on television.

Madame Alexander again demonstrated her ability to envision future trends in the doll market when, in 1955, she created the Cissy doll, the first full-figure high-heeled fashion doll. Barbie was introduced four years later, in 1959.

Madame Alexander believed that more than being attractive, dolls provided an important, and fundamental, educational experience for children. She said, "Dolls should contribute to a child's understanding of people, other times and other places. Dolls should [help] develop an appreciation of art and literature in a child." She continued, "Dolls can bring out the creative interests in children." Alexander also felt that both

girls and boys could learn from dolls. She said, "After all, the paternal instinct in man is as important as the maternal instinct in woman." She believed that dolls helped children build a capacity to love others.

Beatrice Alexander's childhood left her with a deep sense of compassion for those less fortunate. As a prosperous adult, she was a generous philanthropist who, as early as 1920, was dedicated to helping Jewish women through the Women's League for Palestine, later the Women's League for Israel. She donated generously to both Jewish and secular causes and was proud to produce her dolls in America, with American materials. Her longstanding factory, located on 131st Street, was one of Harlem's largest employers.

From dreaming big on the Lower East side to producing over a million dolls a year and earning the Fashion Academy Gold Medal, Bertha/ Beatrice/ Madame Alexander demonstrated that Jewish women could attain the American dream.

Bobbi Coller

Beverly Sills (1929-2007)

It is said that redheaded Beverly Sills received her nickname, "Bubbles", because of her effervescent personality. But the moniker also evokes the high, light and sparkling voice she possessed, capable of spewing forth high C's and F#'s with effortless vocal acrobatics and musical flair. She also had the capacity to plumb the depths in such roles as the three queens in Donizetti's *Roberto Devereux*, Maria Stuardo and Anna Bolena, and Elvira in Bellini's *I Puritani*.

Beverly Sills did not debut at the Metropolitan Opera until she was forty-six years old, way past her singing prime, but she made a niche for herself and was successful performing unusual repertoire in less well-known venues. Unlike many opera singers of her time, she was a natural and convincing actress. These attributes alone would have written her legacy into the annals of opera history. But Beverly Sills, nee Belle Miriam Silverman, developed business skills along the way that served her well, first as artistic director of the City Opera and then as manager of Lincoln Center itself.

Her life's journey was not as breezy as the lighter roles and her nickname might suggest. Her ability to play both comedy and tragedy mirrored her own life, one that brought her great joy despite the ongoing tragedy of being a singer whose first child was born deaf and whose second was severely autistic. She used her talent to navigate these treacherous waters, partly by putting all her challenges aside when she performed.

Sills was born on May 25, 1929 in Brooklyn, New York. By age seven she had memorized twenty-two Italian arias by listening to old recordings of Amelia Galli-Curci, a legendary soprano. She performed for family and friends and it was one such friend who suggested the name "Beverly Sills" because she thought it would look better on a marquee. At that time, Beverly, having sung on the Uncle Bob's Rainbow Hour at the ages of four and five, became a student of the noted singing teacher, Estelle Liebling, who remained her teacher until Liebling's death in 1970.

Beverly auditioned for the New York City Opera from 1952 to her acceptance into the company in 1955. It was a fortuitous union for both Sills and the company. Her years of training paid off and she was now a featured singer at NYCO and instrumental in transforming the company from a "second" opera house with no significant budget to one that produced creative works by the likes of Stephen Sondheim as well as musicals such as *Brigadoon* and, of course, the well-known opera repertoire.

In November 1956, Beverly Sills married Peter Greenough, an editor and businessman. Together they had two children, Meredith (Muffy) and Peter, Jr. (Bucky). Bucky required special care, and this heralded a very difficult period for Sills during which she stopped singing until conductor Julius Rudel persuaded her to resume her career. By 1965 she was considered NYCO's Prima Donna. She performed what she considered her finest role, Cleopatra, in Handel's *Julius Caesar* when the company moved to its new house at Lincoln Center in 1966.

Although Beverly Sills did not embrace traditional Judaism, she always acknowledged her Jewish roots. As a Jewish American, she blended the values of both cultures; she believed in equal opportunity for all, respect for all religions, and in artistic freedom as critical to creative success. In her autobiography, Sills characterized her connection to Israel as "historical and temperamental." When she visited Israel to perform with Julius Rudel and the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra, she found the experience stimulating and exciting, but her connection to Israel and Judaism was not "philosophical or spiritual." She believed one could be religious without membership in a particular organized religion.

Beverly Sills debuted at the Metropolitan Opera in 1975 as Pamira in *The Siege of Corinth*. She announced her retirement from singing in 1979 with a farewell gala televised on October 27, 1980. During the next ten years Beverly Sills ran the NYCO, eliminating a five-million-dollar deficit and demonstrating her ability as a fund-raiser and public relations spokeswoman. She was also an innovative manager who introduced supertitles in English and sign language, making the opera accessible to more people. In 1994 Beverly Sills became the chair of the Lincoln Center board, the first woman and singer to hold the position.

Bubbles passed away in 2007 at the age of 78, having had a sixty-year career in the opera and arts world. She was gracious, funny, and a crackerjack businesswoman who endeared herself to practicing artists as well as people in the business world from whom she was able to solicit large sums of money to support her passion and love of the opera.

Shelley Saposnik

Ernestine Rose (1810-1892)

Ernestine Rose was a trailblazing feminist, social reformer, and orator who played a pivotal role in the women's rights movement of the 19th century. Born on January 13, 1810, in Piotrków Trybunalski, Poland, Rose grew up in a Jewish family and was fluent in multiple languages. Her parents encouraged her education, and she became highly literate and well-read, studying the works of Enlightenment thinkers like Voltaire and Rousseau.

At the age of 16, Rose was forced to marry a man chosen by her father, but she refused to consummate the marriage and fled to England with her mother and sister in 1832. In England, she became involved with the radical reform movement, attending meetings and delivering speeches on women's rights and abolitionism. She met and married William Ella Rose, an Englishman, and fellow reformer, and the couple moved to the United States in 1836.

Rose quickly established herself as a prominent figure in the American women's rights movement, delivering speeches nationwide and advocating for women's suffrage, education, and property rights. She was also an active abolitionist, and her speeches often drew parallels between the struggles of women and enslaved people.

In 1848, Rose was one of the few women to attend the historic Seneca Falls Convention, where she spoke on the rights of women and the need for gender equality. Her speech was so powerful that she was invited to address the convention again the next day. Rose was a key contributor to the drafting of the convention's Declaration of Sentiments, which declared that "all men and women are created equal."

Throughout her life, Rose fought tirelessly for the rights of marginalized groups. She was an early advocate for the separation of church and state and argued against the legal subjugation of women and religious minorities. Rose was also a vocal opponent of slavery and supported the Underground Railroad, providing a haven for escaped enslaved people in her own home.

Despite her contributions to the women's rights movement, Rose's ideas were often considered too radical, even among her fellow suffragists. She refused to conform to traditional gender roles and was openly critical of organized religion. Her outspokenness often made her the target of criticism and ridicule, but she remained undeterred.

In her later years, Rose continued to work for social justice, focusing on workers' rights and advocating for the establishment of cooperatives. She also fought against the mistreatment of Native Americans and supported their right to sovereignty and self-determination.

Ernestine Rose died on August 4, 1892, at the age of 82, but her legacy as an international feminist pioneer lives on. Her advocacy for gender equality, religious freedom, and social justice paved the way for future generations of activists and reformers. Her unwavering commitment to these causes serves as a reminder of the power of individual action to effect change on a global scale.

Caroline Goldin

Justine Wise Polier (1903-1987)

Justine Wise Polier, the first woman judge appointed in New York, focused on helping the most vulnerable populations—children and the underprivileged. As the daughter of an outspoken rabbi father and a mother deeply involved in volunteer work, she followed a family tradition of social justice. While still in college she helped textile workers unionize and as a young lawyer she criticized the corrupt and racist social services of the time. As a judge she seized the opportunity to change the system from within, helping to reform both foster care and the school system, thereby ensuring that minority children had access to social services.

Polier was a distinguished judge in the New York City Family Court for almost four decades where she promoted the rights of children from both inside and outside of the judiciary. Hers was an activist's understanding of the law and a rehabilitative rather than a punitive model of judicial process. It pioneered the establishment of mental health, educational and other rehabilitative services for troubled youth. She also took a leading role in opposing racial and religious discrimination in public and private facilities and, as a committed Jewish leader, spoke out against anti-Semitism, urging Jews to lead the battle for human rights for all minorities.

Justine Wise Polier's passionate advocacy was a family legacy. She was born in 1903 in Portland, Oregon where her father, Rabbi Stephen Wise, accepted his first pulpit and became that state's first commissioner of child welfare. Her mother, Louise Waterman Wise, a painter and social reformer, established an agency to provide free medical and nursing care for poor mothers and children. When the family moved to New York City in 1916, Louise Wise founded the Child Adoption Agency of the Free Synagogue (today, the Stephen Wise Free Synagogue on Manhattan's West Side), to find homes for Jewish orphans and other hard-to-place children. In later years, Justine Polier would succeed her mother as chair of the agency's board; she also would succeed her mother as president of the Women's Division of the American Jewish Congress and served as its national vice president.

Upon graduation from Barnard College, Justine took a job in the textile mills in Passaic, New Jersey to learn about factory life firsthand. Believing she would not be hired if her identity as the daughter of the outspoken, pro-union Rabbi Stephen Wise were known, she used her mother's maiden name. Eventually her identity was discovered, and she was fired and blacklisted. A year later, she followed her father's advice to study law and enrolled in Yale Law School. During her second year, workers went on strike at the Passaic mills. Justine became deeply involved in the strike, addressing rallies and encouraging the strikers. Newspapers wrote about her as the "Joan of Arc of the mills." At the end of her second year at Yale, she married a young law school professor, Leon Tulin. He died from leukemia in 1932. Four years later, she married her second husband, Shad Polier, a civil liberties lawyer.

Preferring social legislation to practicing law, Polier served as the first woman referee in the Workmen's Compensation Division of the New York State Department of Labor, later becoming its Assistant Corporate Council. In 1935, New York City Mayor Fiorello H. LaGuardia appointed Polier to a judgeship in the city's domestic relations court (predecessor to Family Court), making her at the age of 32, the first woman judge in New York State. On the bench, she was an activist judge who believed that law should be used as an agent of social change—particularly in matters involving poor women and children. She was deeply moved by the Jewish prophetic view of justice. Her idea of justice was that it should be infused with empathy, but, at the same time, she believed compassion was worthless unless accompanied by a commitment to justice.

In what she called her "second day" after leaving the bench, Polier worked to broaden services for troubled children and their families with organizations like the Citizens Committee for Children, the Wiltwyck School and the adoption agency founded by her mother and later renamed "Louise Wise Services." As a so-called "fighting judge", and in her extrajudicial work, she constantly challenged practices she felt were not in the "best interest of the child", a concept she helped to develop. In her leadership of the American Jewish Congress, Polier sought to further Jewish interests, including those of women, while also working to foster civil liberties for minorities. Justine Wise Polier died in 1987 at the age of 84. To many, she was venerated as a voice of conscience for her era.

Gerry Solomon

Ruth Gruber (1911-2016)

Ruth Gruber was an eyewitness to many of the atrocities committed against Jews worldwide in the 20th century and a dauntless, award-winning chronicler of them, covering them in countless newspaper articles and 19 books.

In her New York Times obituary published in 2017, after her death at the age of 105, Robert McFadden wrote that Gruber “called herself a witness, and in an era of barbarities and war that left countless Jews displaced and stateless, she often crossed the line from journalist to human rights advocate, reporting as well as shaping events that became the headlines and historical footnotes of the 20th century.”

Gruber was born in Brooklyn in 1911, the daughter of Eastern European Jewish immigrants, graduating from Bushwick High School at 15 and New York University at 18. In 1931, she ignored her parents’ pleas not to study in Germany, choosing to take courses in Cologne; she also attended Nazi rallies, “appalled” by Hitler’s ranting, according to the Jewish Women’s Archive.

Returning to the United States, she began writing for The New York Times and New York Herald Tribune, eventually becoming the first foreign correspondent allowed to fly through Siberia into the Soviet Arctic, where she lived among prisoners and pioneers, many Jewish, in Stalin’s gulag.

Secretary of the Interior Harold L. Ickes eventually hired Gruber as his special assistant, after reading her book about her Siberia experience. In 1944 Ickes asked her to go to Europe on a secret mission to escort European refugees to America, which she did on a ship from Naples. According to the Jewish Women’s Archive, this voyage “became the defining Jewish moment of her life. She knew that from then on, her life would be inextricably bound with rescuing Jews in danger.”

In 1947, as a foreign correspondent for the New York Herald Tribune, Gruber traveled through Europe and the Middle East with the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine, learning about a ship in Haifa called Exodus 1947, with 4,500 Holocaust survivors aboard. She covered the survivors’ saga—they were sent by the British government on navy transports to France, then transported to Hamburg and interned in camps in the British zone of occupation, causing huge protests on both sides of the Atlantic. According to the Holocaust Encyclopedia, “the ensuing public embarrassment for Britain played a significant role in the diplomatic swing of sympathy toward the Jews and the eventual recognition of a Jewish state in 1948.”

Gruber’s book about the Exodus saga later inspired Leon Uris’s 1958 novel, Exodus, and the film based on Uris’s book.

In 1985, when she was in her mid-70’s, Gruber visited isolated Jewish villages in the highlands of Ethiopia to help rescue Ethiopian Jews, writing another book about this experience.

Gruber received five honorary doctorates, including one from Hebrew Union College, as well as numerous awards for her writing, including a lifetime achievement award from the American Society of Journalists and Authors and the Norman Mailer Center’s distinguished journalism prize.

In Gruber’s obituary, McFadden quotes remarks Gruber made in 2001 to a United Jewish Federation seminar at the University of Pittsburgh that aptly sum up her life and mission:

“I had two tools to fight injustice, words and images, my typewriter and my camera. I just felt that I had to fight evil, and I’ve felt like that since I was 20 years old. And I’ve never been an observer. I have to live a story to write it.”

Jane Levere

Betty Comden (1917-2006)

Who knew that little Basya Cohen, born on May 3, 1917, in Brooklyn, New York, to Leo Cohen and Rebecca Sadvoransky, both immigrants from Russia, would one day become one of the greatest actresses, lyricists and screenwriters to grace the Great White Way known as Broadway, and the silver screens of Hollywood. And in addition, that she would team with another equally great Broadway hit-maker, one Adolph Green, a Jew of Hungarian descent born in the Bronx, to become known as the team of Comden and Green. That is right, Basya Cohen is actually the one and only Betty Comden, who won awards from the Writers Guild of America, the New York Drama Critics 'Circle, the Oscars, the Grammys, the Tonys, the American Academy of Achievement and the National Board of Review. So, where and how did this all start and result in legendary stardom?

Betty lived in the "golden age" when Jews were moving beyond the life of pushcarts and onto the upward mobility train. She attended Erasmus Hall High School in Brooklyn, and then went to New York University where she studied drama, graduating in 1938. It was at this fortuitous moment that she was introduced to Adolph Green by Siegfried Schutzman, who later changed his name to Steven Kyle. Betty later married Kyle and they had two children.

The Comden-Green union lasted for over six decades, and their collaboration resulted in many of the greatest hits of Broadway and film. In the beginning, they called themselves the Revuers and persuaded the owner of the Village Vanguard to put them on stage. There they performed zany sketches, which included a young Judy Holliday and a friend who sometimes played piano with them, a talented young musician named Leonard Bernstein. Bernstein, along with Jerome Robbins, was working on adapting a ballet for the musical theater when Bernstein asked Comden and Green to collaborate on the show. It ultimately became the 1944 hit musical *On the Town*. In addition to writing the book and the lyrics for songs such as "New York, New York," Betty and Adolf performed in the Broadway stage show, and later adapted it for the 1949 film that starred Gene Kelly, Frank Sinatra

and Ann Miller.

After that success, the Comden-Green team was a locomotive steaming along with hit after hit after hit. Working at MGM in Hollywood, they wrote several screenplays including *Singin' in the Rain* (1952), which won them an Oscar for Best Written American Musical. They received two Oscar nominations for *The Band Wagon* (1953), and *It's Always Fair Weather* (1955) which was nominated for both Best Story and Screenplay. They also contributed lyrics to the film *Take Me Out to the Ball Game* (1949).

Comden and Green returned to New York to collaborate again with Bernstein on *Wonderful Town* in 1953, winning their first Tony for Best Book of a Musical. In 1954 they were asked by famed composer Jules Styne to write songs for his upcoming show *Peter Pan*, for which they wrote "Never Never Land." Styne, Comden, and Green also collaborated on the hit show *Bells Are Ringing* (1956) starring Judy Holliday who introduced the hit songs "The Party's Over" and "Just in Time." After that, Styne, Comden, and Green teamed up again, producing the hit song "Make Someone Happy." It has been recorded numerous times by many of the greatest artists, such as Doris Day, Coleman Hawkins, Aretha Franklin, Steve Lawrence, Eydie Gormé, Sammy Davis Jr., Jimmy Durante, Judy Garland, The Supremes, Bill Evans, Tony Bennett and Barbara Streisand.

The hits continued when the Comden-Green collaboration produced three more Tony hits, including two with composer Cy Coleman for *On the Twentieth Century* (1978) and *The Will Rogers Follies* Score (1991). In addition, their memorable two-person show *A Party with Betty Comden and Adolph Green* won an Obie in 1958. Comden was also the author of her autobiography, *Off Stage* (1995), in which she told of the difficult circumstances of her son's struggle with drugs which contributed to his early passing.

In 1991, Comden and Green were among the recipients of that year's Kennedy Center honors for their contributions to American musical theater.

Adolph Green died in 2002 and Betty Comden died in 2006 at the age of 89. The New York Times wrote in her obituary that the title of one of their own songs summed up their joint career: it was truly a "Perfect Relationship." They met daily, most often in Ms. Comden's living room, either to work on a show, to trade ideas or even just talk about the weather. Comden was quoted as saying, "We stare at each other. We meet, whether or not we have a project, just to keep up a continuity of working. There are long periods

when nothing happens, and it's just boring and disheartening. But we have a theory that nothing's wasted, even those long days of staring at one another. You sort of have to believe that, don't you? That you had to go through all that to get to the day when something did happen."

Following Green's death in October 2002, Broadway turned out in force two months later for a memorial program at the Shubert Theater. At one point during her own reminiscences about Green, Comden paused and said to the audience, "It's lonely up here." After six amazing decades, the perfect relationship was over.

Over it may be, but we are enriched by the legacy of hits given to the world by the Comden-Green team. Two Jewish kids, born of immigrant parents, at a time of the rise of American theater, are truly national treasures to be enjoyed by revivals, high school musicals and TCM movie fans time and time again. For over 60 years, they were the top of the top, among the truly elite of musical theater and film, whose combined talents made them soar to heights rarely if ever seen before or since in the annals of theater and film.

Emilya Sahn

Ray Frank (1861-1948)

Who was Ray Frank? She is most often a brief footnote, at best, in the annals of famous Jewish women. Her story, however, is remarkable; she was the first woman to deliver a sermon from a Jewish pulpit and became known as “The Girl Rabbi of the Golden West.” Although she was never ordained, she deserves to be remembered for her pioneering impact.

Ray Frank was born in San Francisco in 1861. Her parents, whom she characterized as “Orthodox Jews of liberal mind,” were Polish immigrants. Her father was said to be descended from the famous Vilna rabbi Elija Ben Solomon. In young adulthood Frank moved to Nevada where she taught miners’ children and then began a career in journalism. Later, Frank returned to California, enrolled in courses at the University of California Berkeley and, to support herself, became a teacher, and eventually principal of the Sabbath School of Oakland’s First Hebrew Congregation. (It has been said that Gertrude Stein and Judah Magnes were her students.) At the same time, she wrote for San Francisco newspapers, one of which dispatched her to the Pacific Northwest as a correspondent.

It is likely that geography contributed to Frank’s rising reputation. The emergence of Jewish communities in the West, without a centuries-entrenched male Jewish leadership, provided opportunities for the spirited, well-educated, and Jewish-minded Ray Frank.

She arrived in Spokane in 1890 on the eve of the High Holy Days, and was dismayed to discover that the town had no synagogue. The Orthodox and Reform Jews were too divided to form a synagogue, or even to sponsor services on the High Holy Days. Because she already had a reputation as a rousing speaker and teacher, a prominent member of the community offered to arrange for Rosh Hashanah services on the condition that she would deliver a sermon. Curious members of the whole community, both Jews and Christians, heard about it and showed up, filling the entire hall. Her sermon “The Obligations of a Jew as Jew and Citizen” was so well received, the opposing Jewish leaders agreed to continue services through Yom Kippur if she would deliver the Kol Nidre sermon.

Subsequent opportunities to speak made Frank a frequent lecturer at Western synagogues and lodges. Even though she packed houses wherever she spoke and was called “The Girl Rabbi of the Golden West,” Frank insisted she had no aspiration to rabbinic leadership. In 1893 Ray Frank and her colleague, Hannah Greenbaum Solomon, began to organize The Jewish Women’s Congress held in conjunction with the significant national event, the Chicago World’s Fair.

Frank died in 1948 leaving a legacy of contributions to women’s roles in Jewish leadership and education which ultimately led to the ordination of Sally Priesand in 1972. Frank was not a feminist in the modern sense. Her career was revolutionary however, she also held traditional views about some important issues. She did not support women’s suffrage and, after her marriage to Simon Litman, she moved to Illinois where Simon took a teaching position at the University of Illinois. There, Ray Frank became a dedicated faculty wife and advocate for engaging young people. She curtailed her professional life in favor of being a traditional Jewish wife.

So, what is the “real” story of Ray Frank? Frank’s journey begins when opportunities for Jewish women in leadership and education were confined to nascent Ladies Auxiliaries and Sisterhoods.

Although geography opened up possibilities for her, she was confined to the same limitations as Henrietta Szold, a woman who was eminently qualified to attain rabbi status, but culturally prohibited from achieving it.

Barry Feldman

Gertrude Berg (1899-1966)

Is this a photograph of:

- [a] Tillie Edelman
- [b] Molly Goldberg
- [c] Mrs. Jacoby in a Broadway play
- [d] Mrs. Bloom
- [e] all of the above?

The correct answer is [e], all of them:

We know her as Gertrude Berg.

Berg was born in 1899 and grew up in East Harlem, a Jewish neighborhood in the first quarter of the twentieth century. Summers were enjoyed in the Catskills where her parents owned a summer boarding house in Fleischmanns. There she wrote skits about family life for her own amusement and to entertain the boarders. Later, she wrote longer plays and submitted them to radio shows, but rejection letters followed.

In the early years of the Great Depression ethnic humor became popular and NBC Radio accepted her presentation of the Rise of the Goldbergs. It centered on an American-Jewish family presided over by a garment-worker husband, Jake, and Molly, a sympathetic, meddlesome, neighborly, and warm-hearted homemaker. For many listeners, it was their initial contact with, and insight into, American Jewish family life during a period of acculturation. For many Jews, the show reflected their own experiences and journey into American society and culture—"Rise" was the operative word.

In 1948, Berg wrote and staged Me and Molly based on her successful radio show. This segued into an early television sitcom, The Goldbergs. Viewers followed the family as they ascended from a modest apartment on the Lower East Side, to a more gracious one in the Bronx, and then to the American dream—a house in the suburbs.

Berg won an Emmy award for her portrayal of Molly Goldberg, the first Emmy given for a "lead actress in a television series." Berg's success continued after The Goldbergs with The Gertrude Berg Show and Mrs. G. Goes to College, another sitcom. Echoes of Molly Goldberg were evident but now Berg sparred with Sir Cedric Hardwicke as a distinguished professor of English. In 1959, she performed again with Hardwicke as Mrs. Jacoby in the successful Broadway play, A Majority of One, and that performance earned her a Tony Award.

But Gertrude Berg's talents were not limited to being in front of the camera. Her numerous achievements behind the microphone and screen included as a scriptwriter, playwright, memoirist, producer, cast director, and savvy businesswoman.

She sold herself through her talent and was an extraordinary commercial salesperson for many products including Rybitol, RCA televisions, Echo hardware and Sanka coffee. Many of her sales pitches were cleverly incorporated into the body of television scripts.

Gertrude Berg was married to Charney Berg, an engineer who later partnered with Gertrude as writer and producer. They had two children. She was only 66 when she died of heart failure. She is buried in Fleischmanns in the Catskills, not far from the summer boarding house where she first entertained guests with her little plays.

Barry Feldman