

ISAACS, U.S. family prominent in New York City. Founder of the family was SAMUEL MYER ISAACS (1804-1878), born in Leeuwarden, Holland, who immigrated to the United States in 1839 from London, where he had been the principal of an orphan asylum. He was the first hazzan and preacher of Congregation B'nai Jeshurun in New York. After the congregation split in 1847 Isaacs became rabbi of Congregation Shaarei Tefila remaining there until his

founded (1857), Isaacs took a stand against Reform Judaism, but called for certain minor ritual changes. A supporter of the abolition movement, Isaacs lost southern subscribers as a result. He was associated with the founding of Mount Sinai Hospital in 1852 and became its first vice-president. Isaacs also helped found the Hebrew Free School Association of New York City in 1864 and Maimonides College in Philadelphia, the first, though short-lived, American rabbinical school, in 1867. In 1859 he was one of the organizers of the Board of Delegates of American Israelites, an organization that worked for Jewish civil and religious rights in the U.S. and abroad. He helped organize the United Hebrew Charities in 1873 with his eldest son, MYER SAMUEL ISAACS (1841-1904), New York lawyer and community leader. Myer Samuel was born in New York, graduated from N.Y.U. (1859) and N.Y.U. Law School (1861), and was admitted to the bar in 1862. He then started his own office, founding the family firm M. S. and I. S. Isaacs. In 1880 Isaacs was appointed judge on the City (then Marine) Court to fill an unexpired term. Later he received nominations to the Superior Court (1891) and the Supreme Court (1895). He lectured on real estate law at New York University Law School from 1887 to 1897. Active in community affairs, Isaacs helped his father found the Board of Delegates of American Israelites and the Hebrew Free School Association, serving in leadership positions in both organizations. In civic affairs Isaacs was one of the organizers of the Citizens' Union in 1897 and was instrumental in creating Seward Park for the crowded East Side of New York City. He was a leader in many other Jewish charitable and educational efforts, particularly to aid East European Jewish immigrants, and was editor of the *Jewish Messenger*, which he helped his father found.

ABRAM SAMUEL ISAACS (1852-1920), another son of Samuel Myer Isaacs, was a rabbi, writer, and educator. Educated at New York University, the University of Breslau (1874-77), and the Breslau rabbinical seminary, Isaacs taught Hebrew, German, and postgraduate German literature at N.Y.U. between 1885 and 1906. He was named professor of Semitic languages in 1906, a post which he held until his death. Isaacs was also a preacher at the East 86th Street Synagogue in New York City and rabbi of the B'nai Jeshurun Congregation in Patterson, N.J. (1896-1906). Following his father's death in 1878 he became an editor of the *Jewish Messenger* until its merger in 1903 with the *American Hebrew*. Isaacs wrote several books for adults and children, including *A Modern Hebrew Poet: The Life and Writings of Moses Chaim Luzzatto* (1878) and *What is Judaism* (1912).

LEWIS MONTEFIORE ISAACS (1877-1944), son of Myer Samuel Isaacs, was a lawyer and musician. Born in New York City, Isaacs joined the family law firm in 1903. Isaacs was secretary and treasurer of the Beethoven Association, and director of the Musicians Foundation and the Edward Macdowell Association. He wrote songs and compositions for piano and orchestra as well as books about music, notably (with Kurt J. Rahlson), *Koenigskinder, a Guide to Engelbert Humperdinck's and Ernst Rosmer's Opera* (1912) and *Haensel und Gretel. A Guide to Humperdinck's Opera* (1913). He was also a trustee of the family's West End Synagogue (Congregation Shaarei Tefila) and a member and officer of several bar associations. His wife, EDITH JULIET RICH ISAACS (1878-1956), was active in the theatrical world. Born in Milwaukee, she became a literary editor of the *Milwaukee Sentinel* in 1903 and wrote drama criticism for periodicals. Later she was the editor and business manager of the quarterly *Theater Arts Magazine*, which became the *Theatre Arts Monthly* in 1924. Edith Isaacs edited *Theatre* (1927), a collection of essays: *Plays of American Life and Fantasy* (1929); and *Architecture for the New Theatre* (1935), another collection of essays. She wrote *American Theatre in Social and Educational Life: a Survey of its Needs and Opportunities* (1932) and *Negro in the American Theatre* (1947).

Another son was STANLEY MYER ISAACS (1882-1962), lawyer and New York City official, who practised law from 1905 until 1919, when he went into the real estate business. A longtime member of the Republican Party, Isaacs was a leading supporter of municipal reform and was elected president of the Borough of Manhattan on the La Guardia fusion ticket in 1937. Failing to be renominated by his party in 1941 as a result of a controversy started when he appointed a Communist to the post of confidential examiner, Isaacs ran and was elected to the New York City Council, where he served until his death, for many years as its only Republican member. An exemplar of civic leadership, Isaacs' many progressive causes included slum housing improvements, laws prohibiting racial discrimination in housing, and the Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy. He was also active in the settlement houses, notably the Educational Alliance, and in 1934 was president of the United Neighborhood Houses. A trustee of the Federation for the Support of Jewish Philanthropic Societies, Isaacs worked also for many other charitable, civic, and political organizations.

[Ed.]

Encyclopedia Judaica
Vol. 9