

## Sigmund Livingston (1872-1946) & Hilda Freiler Livingston (1891-1962)

Sigmund Livingston was born on December 27, 1872 in Giessen, Germany. He was one of eight children born to Mayer and Dora (Bluemenfeld) Livingston. The Livingston family immigrated to the United States on November 12, 1881 on the *S.S. Rhine* from Bremen, Germany. Sigmund became a naturalized citizen in 1888.

The Livingston family were members of the Moses Montefiore Temple in Bloomington. The Moses Montefiore Temple, named after a Jewish **philanthropist** from England, was established on May 14, 1882 after a group of men of the Jewish faith met in Bloomington “for the purpose of forming a **Congregation**.”

Hilda Valerie Freiler was born on April 25, 1891 in Elgin, Illinois. Hilda’s parents were Philip and Lizzie (Ehrlich) Freiler. Hilda graduated from Elgin High School in 1908. Most notably, Hilda was vice president of her school’s Dramatic Society during her senior year.

Sigmund Livingston graduated from the Law School at Illinois Wesleyan University in 1894, ranking second in his class. Shortly after graduation, Sigmund formed a law partnership with William R. Bach, who graduated first in their class.

In numerous newspaper articles, Sigmund was described as extremely intelligent and well respected. One article claimed, “he gives promise of becoming one of the **ablest** as well as the most prominent attorneys in the state.” However, Livingston gave a personal account in his book *Must Men Hate?* of how, outside of dear friends, he had a “general distrust to overcome” because locals had never known of a Jewish lawyer when he was beginning his career. Livingston recalled that after a few years, he had earned their trust.

In 1895, Livingston and Bach’s office was located at 202 W. Front Street in Bloomington. By 1904, they relocated to the Livingston Building, located at 102 W. Washington Street. Livingston and Bach mostly took on civil work like recovering property, administering **estates**, and financial work. After twenty-three years of practicing law together, Livingston and Bach’s partnership ended. By 1917, Livingston formed a new partnership, Sterling, Livingston, and Whitmore, and their office was located at 607 E. Washington Street.

On December 18, 1918, Sigmund and Hilda were married at the Blackstone Hotel. Sigmund was forty-six, while Hilda was twenty-seven. *The Pantagraph* described the groom as “highly respected” and the bride as “quite a talented young woman.” After a month-long honeymoon in California, the couple settled in a “handsome home” at 1320 E. Grove Street in Bloomington. The couple had one son, Richard.

In 1894, Livingston became the president of Bloomington’s local **B’nai B’rith** (*pronounced Buh-nay Buh-reeth*), Abraham Lincoln Lodge No. 190 (which was founded on October 27, 1872). By May 1899, Livingston was elected vice president of the 6<sup>th</sup> District of B’nai B’rith.

The B’nai B’rith is a Jewish social and charitable organization founded in New York City in 1843. The organization was created to confront the “**deplorable** condition of Jews in the United States. According to the B’nai B’rith International’s website, the organization’s work is inspired by the following pillars: Human Rights and Public Policy, Supporting and Defending Israel, Senior Advocacy and Housing, and Helping Communities.

As time passed, Livingston began to take more notice of the unfair treatment of Jews. Shortly after the turn of the century, he had an experience that impacted the course of the rest of his life. When he was in Chicago on business, Livingston decided to drop into a **vaudeville** theater to while away a couple of hours before an appointment. Halfway through the show, the routine turned into “bum jokes, told in **dialect** and at the expense of Jews,” which caused Livingston to walk out of the theater. It was this life changing event that made him decide then and there that he would try to do something about the **prejudicial caricaturing** of Jews.

Believing that publicity would help to alleviate prejudice, in 1908, Livingston established a Publicity Committee of the Publicity Bureau within the B'nai B'rith, which became the **Anti-Defamation League** (ADL) five years later in 1913. It had a simple plan: "the solution to the problem must be publicity." The thought was if the public record was set straight, then Americans could recognize Jewish **slander**. An early victory was the successful campaign to pressure the publisher of a travel booklet to halt the practice of including hotel and resort advertisements featuring the phrase, "No Jews Wanted."

Members of the ADL and other Jewish groups worked hard to expose **anti-Semitism**. In order to aid their work, the ADL employed correspondents who would report any "**scurrilous** attacks on Jews." This included motion pictures and textbooks in the schools, which would be **censored** if they were found to depict Jews negatively and promote prejudice. Livingston himself was so influential that he was able to get *Roget's Thesaurus* to remove words with negative connotations like "**cunning**" and "**extortioner**" as synonyms to the word "Jew." *Time* magazine also reported that the ADL sent out a memo that advised readers to stop using the word "Jew" as an adjective or a verb. The ADL also ensured that post offices stopped sending postcards that had caricatures of Jews on them.

On January 1, 1929, the Livingstons moved to Chicago. After working as a lawyer in Bloomington for 35 years, Sigmund went on to work with Hilda's brother-in-law, Charles Lederer, and the firm became Lederer, Livingston, Khan & Adler. Even though Livingston relocated to Chicago, he still represented several clients back in Bloomington and always considered Bloomington his home.

Throughout his career, Livingston wrote ten books, and many speeches and articles. His devotion to educating the public about discrimination was remarkable. His most **noteworthy** publications were *Must Men Hate?* and *Facts About Fictions Concerning the Jew*. *Must Men Hate?* had thirty editions published in three different languages from the years 1944 to 1987. *Facts About Fictions Concerning the Jew* had seven editions and was published in 1938. Both works dove into the analysis as to why the Jewish people have been hated and **vilified** for centuries.

On June 13, 1946, Sigmund Livingston passed away at his home in Highland Park at the age of seventy-three. His body was brought back to Bloomington for burial in the Jewish Cemetery.

In 2003, a historical marker was placed in honor of the founding of the Anti-Defamation League in Bloomington and in honor of Livingston's work to fight anti-Semitism. The marker is located on the ground floor of the Livingston Building (the site of Livingston and Bach's office) on West Washington Street in downtown Bloomington. The ADL is still active today.

Unfortunately, very little information is available on Hilda. What is known is that she participated in women's clubs and activities in Highland Park. She was skilled at flower arranging and somewhat of an expert on early American antiques. In numerous newspaper articles it was said that she loved to make floral arrangements for organizations such as the Sisterhood of Glencoe congregation. There is no evidence of her being an active participant in ADL activities.

During the last ten years of Hilda's life, she was extremely ill. On February 20, 1962, Hilda passed away at her summer home in Highland Park. Like her husband, Hilda's body was also brought back to Bloomington where she is buried next to Sigmund in the Jewish Cemetery.

By: Haley Youhas, 2021