

## The story of Lewis Elkin

Lewis Elkin's paternal great grandparents were Solomon and Sprincela Elkin of New Street, Whitechapel in the east end of London, England. Solomon and Sprincela were married by 1749 and they had 6 children: Israel, Samuel, Solomon jr, Moses, Sarah (Sally) and Rose.

Lewis Elkin's grandfather, Solomon jr, moved to the West Indies by 1783. He settled in Kingston, Jamaica where he married a girl named Judith. Solomon and Judith had 6 children: Abraham (Lewis Elkin's father) in 1784, Rose (b Nov 27, 1790.....married a man named Kopman and moved to New York), Sarah (b Jan 16, 1792.....married a man with the last name of Lewis and moved to London, England), Priscilla (b Jan 16, 1792....she and Sarah were twins. Priscilla married Edward Hime and moved to Liverpool, England. They had 10 children and owned a musical instrument shop at 33 Great George Street. Priscilla died in the Spring of 1879.), Leah (b Mar 21, 1794...died as a child) and Catherine (b Mar 1, 1796.....married Joseph Alexander. They lived in Kingston, Jamaica and raised 11 children. Catherine died in 1861). Solomon jr (Sol to his friends) became very wealthy working as a merchant broker. Records show that Solomon owned dozens of slaves during his 40 odd years in Kingston. One of his slaves was a Creole Negro woman named Betsy Benton who was born 1767. Betsy had 3 mulatto children who were all given the last name of Elkin: Nancy (b 1798....she was given her freedom in 1820), Isaac (b 1805....drowned by 1826) and Mary (b 1809... she was given to Solomon's granddaughter, Priscilla Alexander, in 1824). Solomon died in 1824. Judith died on April 16, 1831.

Solomon and Judith's only son, Abraham, was Lewis Elkin's father. Abraham married Rachel Moses on March 23, 1803 in Kingston, Jamaica. Abraham and Rachel had 3 children: Emanuel (b May 25, 1804), Priscilla (b June 9, 1805) and Zipporah (b Dec 21, 1806). Rachel and the 3 children all died by 1810. Abraham came to Philadelphia about 1814. Like his father, he worked as a merchant broker and became very wealthy. Abraham married Eve Andrews on July 10, 1816. Eve was the granddaughter of Haym Salomon. Haym was a wealthy immigrant merchant who used most of his own fortune to support Washington's Army during the Revolutionary War. He was close friends with Robert Morris, a signer of the Declaration of Independence. Haym also was the largest single contributor towards the construction of the Congregation Mikveh Israel Synagogue in 1782 (the Elkin family were members for more than 130 years). Abraham and Eve had 6 children: Priscilla (b 1817....married William Henry Freeman), Solomon (1818 - Nov 19, 1900), a son name unknown (b 1820 - d 1840's), Samuel (October 7, 1823 - March 12, 1907), Joseph (b and d Jan 11, 1824) and Lewis (1826 - July 7, 1901). Abraham was listed in most of the editions of the Philadelphia City Directory from 1818 until 1867. He always listed his occupation as "Gentleman". In 1818, the Elkin family lived at 354 N 2nd Street. From 1819 to 1822 they lived at 313 N 2nd Street. From 1823 to 1831 they lived at 2 S 10th Street. In 1832 and 33 they lived at 340 High (Market) Street. From 1834 to 1842 they lived on 12th Street above Cherry. Abraham's oldest son, Solomon, married in 1838 and moved to 251 Callowhill Street. Like his father and grandfather, he worked as a broker. On July 15, 1840, Solomon was arrested and charged with stealing a \$5 bill from the office of Mills B Espy, a 3rd Street broker. Two weeks later a Grand Jury exonerated

him for lack of evidence. When Abraham's youngest son, Lewis, turned 13, he had his name listed in the 1840 City Directory. From 1843 to 1849 they lived at 156 N 11th Street. From 1850 to 1857 they lived at 172 S 10th Street. While living there they had a young Irish cook named Mary Johnston. From 1858 to 1871 they lived at 304 S 10th Street. While living there they had another Irish cook named Elizabeth Best. Abraham died at 304 S 10th Street on August 17, 1867 of old age. In 1872, Abraham's widow Eve, along with her 2 youngest sons, Samuel and Lewis, moved to 308 S 10th Street. They had another Irish cook there named Mary Williamson. Neither Samuel or Lewis ever held a job. Lewis was graduated from the University of Pennsylvania but lived his entire life off of his investments. This left him with a lot of free time so he joined the Philadelphia Public School Board from 1866 to 1886. Lewis's mother, Eve, died on April 7, 1884 from inflammatory rheumatism. Later that same year, Lewis decided to marry at age 58. He chose for his bride Matilda Patton, a Philadelphia public school teacher who was 17 years his junior. At first Lewis and Matilda lived at 704 Spruce Street and then 242 S 7th Street. In 1893, they moved to 1119 Walnut Street. The 1900 Census shows Lewis and Matilda living there with an Irish cook, Mary Platt and an Irish maid, Katie McKenna. Lewis Elkin died on July 7, 1901 at age 74 from chronic nephritis (kidney disease). He left instructions that his death was not to be announced until after his funeral and the only mourners were to be his wife Matilda and brother Samuel (all of his other siblings were dead by this time). When his will was read the next week, the entire country took notice. Lewis had left the bulk of his \$2,000,000 estate to be set up as a trust fund for Philadelphia public school teachers. Any unmarried female who had 25 years on the job would qualify for a \$400 yearly pension. At the time, it was the second largest gift ever to the City of Philadelphia (only Girard's Trust was larger). As for his widow Matilda, she was very proud of her husband's generosity and was quite happy to live on the \$6000 yearly allowance that the will provided for her. The school board was so pleased that it announced that a school would be named for Lewis. The Lewis Elkin Public School at D and Clearfield Streets was opened in October of 1904. It had 17 rooms and was amongst the finest equipped schools in the city. Matilda and Lewis's brother Samuel attended the opening ceremonies. Samuel died on March 12, 1907 from heart disease at age 84. He was a life long bachelor and like his brother Lewis, had amassed a \$2,000,000 fortune. As I mentioned earlier, Samuel's great grandfather, Haym Salomon, was the largest single contributor towards the building of the Mikveh Israel Synagogue at 7th and Cherry streets in 1782. Samuel left his money for the construction of a new Synagogue for the Congregation of Mikveh Israel at Broad and York Streets next to the new Dropsie College. Lewis's widow Matilda died later that year on August 28, 1907 at age 63 from a diabetic coma. She left behind \$75,000 which was also donated to Lewis's charity.

I attended Elkin School for Kindergarten in 1969/70. My teacher was Miss Rubenstein and the Principal was Mr. Whitman. The school was overcrowded and portable trailers were set up in the school yard for the Kindergarten classes. Before the year was out it was arranged that the Kindergarten would be held at the old church at E and Allegheny. For First Grade, 1970/71, my teacher was Miss Jay. My classroom was on the first floor of the old building. They tore the old building down in 1973 (along with 2 or 3 adjoining streets). The new school was built at D and Allegheny (where the razed streets were). Where the old building stood was now a large school yard and a small parking lot. I used to play stickball in the school yard. Home plate was where the furnace chimney was. I

once hit a pimple over Crazy Mary's house at Clearfield and Gransback. At some point over the last 10 years, Elkin added an addition which takes up a good part of the schoolyard.

**Researched and written by Bob McNulty, March 29, 2013**