

**WLIW21 New York Profiles Ed Koch, Russ & Daughters Appetizers,  
Mount Sinai Hospital and Other Iconic Individuals and Institutions to  
Explore the Cultural Impact of Jewish Immigrants on New York City**

## **THE JEWS OF NEW YORK**

**Premieres Sunday, January 20 at 8 pm on WLIW21**

Following the success of the local documentaries produced by WLIW21 New York Public Television to complement Ken Burns' "The War," WLIW21 will supplement the national PBS series "The Jewish Americans" (Sundays at 9 pm beginning January 13 on WLIW21) with a locally-focused documentary, **THE JEWS OF NEW YORK**, premiering **Sunday, January 20 at 8 pm on WLIW21**.

**THE JEWS OF NEW YORK** profiles Jewish individuals and institutions that changed the face of New York, woven together with expert commentary, to present a broad spectrum of the ways in which the Jewish community has impacted secular New York life from the earliest immigrants through today. These slices of Jewish life in New York reflect the larger community experience - what one people did for a city, and what the city did for them - from medicine to politics; from finance to Broadway; from real estate to retail, including a business that truly represents the quintessential 'flavor' of New York - delicatessen. Narrated by award-winning actor Tovah Feldshuh (*Golda's Balcony*), the program will encore on WLIW21 Tuesday, January 22 at 8 pm and also air locally on Thirteen/WNET on Thursday, January 24 at 9 pm. The program will also be distributed to the seven public television stations serving upstate New York and will be available to stream nationwide beginning Wednesday, January 16 at [www.jewsofnewyork.org](http://www.jewsofnewyork.org).

**THE JEWS OF NEW YORK** begins as many Jewish immigrant experiences began - with the Statue of Liberty. Emma Lazarus, a Sephardic Jew who didn't identify as particularly Jewish in her privileged East Coast upbringing, first focused on Jewish themes in her writing in response to an essay in the magazine *Century* which criticized the Russian Jewish immigrant population. Her controversial essay led to an invitation to write a poem about the statue gifted to the United States from France. That poem, inscribed on the Statue of Liberty, changed the perception of a statue originally designed to represent American enlightenment, to represent America's - and New York's - acceptance of immigrants and became the ultimate connection for generations of families to their ancestors.

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Jewish immigrants arriving in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries created tiny businesses and humble institutions originally intended to serve the needs of their own, but as the program explains, what they built became central to the general social, economic and cultural life of New York and much of what is considered 'typical' New York, including the organization of labor unions, has roots in the Jewish community. In retail, this included stores like Cohen's Optical and Katz's Delicatessen, and a fixture that remains on today's Lower East Side, Russ & Daughters Appetizers. **THE JEWS OF NEW YORK** focuses on three generations of the family-owned business to explore this industry – Anne and Hattie, two of the namesake daughters who, with their late sister Ida, made their father Joel's store a local attraction; Anne's son, Mark; and Mark's daughter and nephew, Niki and Josh, who run the store today. Their story takes the family business from a Polish immigrant selling herring out of a pushcart in 1905 to a progressive business left to three women by their father in a time when only sons would be considered for such a role, to a still-thriving local icon that has expanded to online sales but never gotten too far from its roots.

The story of another Jewish immigrant with modern ideas, German Jew Jacob Schiff, serves **THE JEWS OF NEW YORK**'s exploration of the Jewish community's role in New York's success. As the head of Kuhn, Loeb & Co, one of a number of Jewish investment banking companies on Wall Street in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, Schiff made his mark raising capital for such risky ventures as America's railroad system. His legacy as told by his great grandson, David, and great, great grandson, Drew, in the program also relates an important role he played through his personal support of Russian Jewish immigration in the 1880's and 1890's - the ancestors of many of today's Jewish New Yorkers. Schiff poured much of his personal fortune into establishing charities to support the Russian Jews who came to escape the pogroms, including the 92<sup>nd</sup> Street Y and the Henry Street Settlement to help poor Jews. Schiff's philanthropic legacy extended to non-Jewish institutions as a founder of the New York Zoological Society and an early board member of the NAACP, and he encouraged his family members to follow his example of sharing their wealth, as they continue to do today within these organizations.

As Schiff filled the needs of Russian Jewish immigrants by establishing institutions that later assisted the greater New York population, the story of Mount Sinai Hospital, founded in 1852 as "The Jews Hospital in New York," demonstrates the Jewish impact on medicine. **THE JEWS OF NEW YORK** tells Mount Sinai's story by highlighting the personal experience of Dr. Arthur Aufses, a second-generation surgeon at the hospital who served for 21 years as the Chief of Surgery and still works there today.

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As Aufses explains, many aspiring Jewish doctors had to contend with quotas limiting Jewish enrollment in medical schools as well as hospital residency programs that excluded Jews. The program also points to a striking number of major medical advances of the past 150 years came out of Mount Sinai, including the first hospital pediatric ward, the modern method of blood transfusion, and advances in anesthesia.

Another New York Jew profiled in the program, Rabbi Haskel Besser, leader of B'nai Israel Ch'aim on the Upper West Side, has not only helped shaped the spiritual life of New York City by bringing the 'page a day' system of learning the Talmud to America, he represents another striking contribution by **THE JEWS OF NEW YORK** to the region's secular culture – in real estate. As the rabbi explains in the program, the Talmud advises everyone to invest a portion of his property in real estate, and as a real estate manager, he follows the post-World War II influence of Jews in property development and real estate that includes the Tishman family's work on Park Avenue and Rockefeller Center, Samuel Lefrak's major role in apartment life in New York, and second generation New York Jew William Levitt's expansion of New York City families into the suburbs with Levittown.

City life is always strongly influenced by the political climate, and Jewish participation has had a strong impact on New York since the tenure of Mayor LaGuardia, the son of an observant Jewish mother. Although LaGuardia and Abe Beam after him did not emphasize their Jewish heritage during their terms in office, Ed Koch, the man who cast himself as the "urban Moses" and promised "if you follow me, I will lead you across the desert" put his "Jewishness" front and center throughout his political career. **THE JEWS OF NEW YORK** demonstrates how the city's second Jewish mayor's 'schtick' brought the gregarious spirit of the Jewish culture to his work in the city and beyond for 12 years, as Koch appealed for the freedom of Soviet Jews and supported Israel during tumultuous times.

In the program's final profile, Joseph Stein and Sheldon Harnick, two of the writers of the quintessential Jewish American play *Fiddler on the Roof*, explore the impact of the Jewish community on the mainstream New York institution of Broadway. During the heyday of the Broadway musical, Stein and Harnick's colleagues were primarily Jewish – Rogers and Hammerstein, Kander and Ebb, Harold Arlen and Yip Harburg – but no musical had specifically addressed Jewish culture in its content. Based on a Shalom Aleichem story, *Fiddler's* overtly Jewish themes were considered a risk to support even by the primarily Jewish producers and investors the writers approached, and the duo talks about their decision to persevere.

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Ultimately, it wasn't just the Jews of New York who responded to the musical – it went on to be the longest running show on Broadway and the most honored with Tony awards at the time, and inspired a movie and countless productions worldwide. Its effect is still felt within the New York community – and even within the program **THE JEWS OF NEW YORK**, as Niki Russ Federman cites the lyrical reference “Tradition!” when speaking of her great grandfather’s appetizing legacy on the Lower East Side.

A WLIW New York production. Major supporters of **THE JEWS OF NEW YORK** include Metropolitan Jewish Home Care and Metropolitan Jewish Hospice, Bank Leumi USA, The Paul & Irma Milstein Foundation, James and Merryl Tisch, FJC - A Foundation of Philanthropic Funds, Barbara Zuckerberg, and The William Petschek Family. Executive Producer: Roy A Hammond. Producer/Director: Julie Cohen. Stereo and Close Captioned.

WLIW New York is an innovator in broadcasting, production and distribution for public television. A leading producer of fundraising programming for PBS, WLIW’s signature productions include the popular *Visions* aerial series, cultural performance specials, and a 15-part series of cultural documentaries including two profiles of the Jewish American experience - *A Laugh, A Tear, A Mitzvah* and *Another Mitzvah*. WLIW’s groundbreaking independent distribution model brings US audiences live daily broadcasts of *BBC World News* as well as the weekly series *Consuelo Mack WealthTrack*, *Wild Chronicles* and *Moment of Luxury* (April 2008). WLIW is also presenting station for the Emmy award-winning PBS KIDS series *Jakers! The Adventures of Piggley Winks*. In the New York tri-state area, WLIW’s diverse programming schedule earns the distinction of third most-watched in the country, a destination for viewers of all ages, featuring public television favorites from PBS KIDS to celebrity chefs in the kitchen. Two digital channels, WLIW Create and WLIW World, offer more public television favorites 24/7. For more information, visit [wliw.org](http://wliw.org).

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