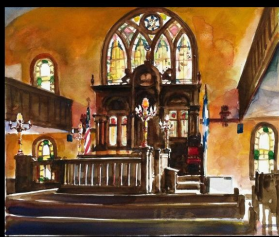




THE MAINE JEWISH MUSEUM

Celebrating Jewish Art, History, and Culture in Maine

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Celebrating
Jewish Art, History, and Culture
in Maine

Maine Jewish Museum
267 Congress St.
Portland ME 04101
207-773-2339
mainejewishmuseum.org

Hours: M-F 10:00-4:00
Often later, call ahead.
OPEN SUNDAYS
12:00 - 4:00 PM

Gary Barron
Executive Director

Nancy Davidson
Curator in Residence
nancyd.mj@gmail.com
207-239-4774

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Yom HaShoah 2020

On this Holocaust Remembrance Day we honor

Cantor Kurt Messerschmidt & Sonja Messerschmidt

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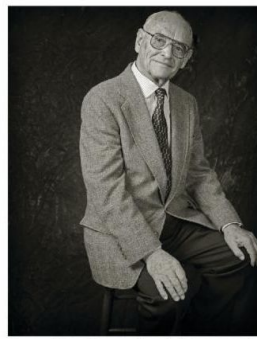
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Cantor Kurt Messerschmidt (1915-2017)

CANTOR KURT MESSERSCHMIDT was born in Germany in 1915. He grew up in Berlin, raised by his single mother, Else, at a time when poverty gripped post-World War I Germany.

He was a coach and teacher at a Jewish school in Berlin until 1943 when he was deported with his fiancé, Sonja, to the Theresienstadt ghetto in Czechoslovakia. Within the ghetto, despite long days of forced labor, Kurt sought to be a source of comfort and leadership. Kurt and Sonja married in Theresienstadt but soon were separated when Kurt and his brother, Henry, were deported to Auschwitz-

Birkenau and assigned to work detail at Golleschau. Kurt survived Golleschau and a death march and was liberated in 1945.

In the early post-war days, Kurt worked as a teacher and translator in Germany while searching for news of his family. After Kurt's reunion with Sonja, they lived in Munich where Kurt was a soloist in a radio choir broadcast across Europe. In 1950, they emigrated to the US. Kurt continued his career of connecting with people through words and music. At Temple Beth El in Portland, he led all Jewish music programs and coached generations of B'Nai Mitzvah students from 1951 to 1985. He remains cantor emeritus.

Cantor Kurt Messerschmidt was best known for having a generous spirit, a ready wit and a gorgeous baritone voice that transports listeners to a spiritual realm. Throughout his life, words and music have been at the center of his survival and his success, and we have been blessed that he shared his gifts so freely.



Sonja Messerschmidt (1925-2010)

SONJA MESSERSCHMIDT was born in Berlin in 1925 and spent her early years with her parents Emmy and Sally (Sol) Kolbelsky in Nazi Germany. She had to leave school at age 16 to perform forced labor under the Nazi regime. After her parents were deported in the spring of 1943, Sonja was hidden by her fiancé, Kurt Messerschmidt, and his family. Subsequently deported themselves, Sonja and Kurt were married in April 1944 in the Theresienstadt concentration camp in Czechoslovakia. After being separated and sent to different camps, they were eventually reunited in October, 1945, after Kurt found a hand-written note

Sonja had left on a bulletin board at the Jewish Home for the Aged in Munich. In 1950, Sonja and Kurt emigrated to the United States and began a new life. They moved to Portland in 1951 and raised their children. Sonja was a major figure in the Jewish community as the wife of the Cantor at Temple Beth El, and was renowned for her warmth, her wisdom and her ability to make people laugh. She was an accomplished seamstress and even made her daughter's wedding gown.



Maine Jewish Museum

The mission of the Maine Jewish Museum is to honor the contributions and diversity of Maine's Jewish immigrants in the context of the American experience. Through exhibits and programming, the Museum seeks to build bridges of appreciation and understanding with people of all backgrounds.

Maine Jewish Museum, 267 Congress St, Portland, ME 04101

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