



Jean Lehman

June 22, 1919 - February 4, 2018

Copies of Jean Johnson Lehman's genealogies of her four grandparents are in the (Ohio) Marietta College Library, the (Morgantown) West Virginia University Library, and the Mormon Family History Library in Salt Lake City. Copies of her genealogies of the four grandparents of her husband, Nat Louis Lehman (1915-1996), are in the (Cincinnati) Hebrew College Library and the Mormon Family History Library. Jean collaborated on her genealogy of the Abraham Jacobs family with her husband's cousin, Nancy Felson Brant (died 2013).

Mary Jean Johnson Lehman was born in West Virginia, near the small town of Williamstown (across the Ohio River from Marietta, Ohio), on June 22, 1919. Both her parents came from families that had settled in that area about the time of the Civil War, descendants of Scotch-Irish, German, Dutch, Swiss, and Huguenot immigrants who had come to the New World from as early as the 1670s to as late as the 1850s.

Mary Jean--or just Jean, as she called herself after she left home at 16 to go to college--became very interested in genealogy after she retired from nursing, and spent two decades researching and documenting her family's history (going back, in a couple of branches, to almost 1500). She made trips to graveyards and libraries and courthouses all over West Virginia, and eventually produced a detailed, several-hundred-page description of her

family's background. After completing that, she went on to research and write up the genealogy of her husband, Nat Louis Lehman--a very different sort of history, as he was Jewish, though his ancestors--from Germany and Holland--had also come to America long ago, many of them before the Civil War. For this endeavor she even traveled to Europe, trying to identify some of Nat's collateral relatives who had survived the Holocaust.

Jean's father, Charles Joshua Johnson, was a wonderful man, very gentle and with a childlike simplicity and rapport with the natural world. Everyone who knew him, loved him. He never raised his voice in anger, never was afraid or anxious, but instead had an absolute serenity in his religious faith (Baptist, though he later compromised with his wife to join the United Methodists). He worked his whole life (until he was 80) in the West Virginian oil fields, "pumping" the old wells that had been drilled during his youth in the fields, forests, and swamps near the Ohio River. Jean's mother, Irene Lyon Johnson, was a more dominant figure, full of energy and common-sense wisdom. She had to be; the Depression hit hard when Jean was 12, and the family, now with two younger daughters Ruth and Betty Sue, struggled to make ends meet, raising watermelons as a cash crop when the oil business faltered. Their small house, during the years Jean was growing up, was way up in the hills, on a dirt-road, with a one-room schoolhouse across from it (where her mother sometimes filled in as teacher). Despite the isolation, and the long walk down from the hills and then small-gauge trolley train ride to get to town, the family always valued education highly, and Jean maintained the best grades in her class at Williamstown High School. She was encouraged in her studies by her aunt, Effie May Johnson, a respected high-school teacher and adventurous traveler who had even earned a Masters Degree (unusual for a woman in those days) from the University of Michigan, and who took her niece on several eye-opening touring trips around the country.

At 16 Jean went to Marshall College in Huntington; she can still be seen there,

as she was the female model for the figures in the murals at the College's James Morrow Library. After graduation she went to nursing school at the University of Cincinnati, becoming an RN and working as a visiting nurse until she met and married Nat, in 1943, in the midst of World War II. The couple had a son, Mark, in 1947, and in 1949 moved to a house "way out in the sticks"--in Kenwood, where a daughter, Vicki, was born in 1949. Nat worked as a salesman for a steel door company; as part of his job duties, he was a liaison for a possible business deal with the acting president of Diebold Safe Company, who used to visit at the Lehman's house during the 1950s. This well-dressed, suave gentleman died a few years later; only then did the Lehmans learn of his earlier career working for the Treasury Department—from a television show called "The Untouchables." They had no idea that Mr. Ness (as they called him), who never spoke about his past, had ever been famous.

In 1963 the Lehmans moved to a "ranch" house in Amberley Village—not far in distance from Kenwood, but culturally more cosmopolitan. Then, since the children were now older and more independent, Jean decided to try her hand at starting her own business, and (with a friend) began an antique store in Pleasant Ridge called The Gold Elephant. This spurred her interest in antiques but made no money, so the store folded. Then Jean returned to her profession and resumed work as an RN, working for the next 15 years at General Hospital, mostly in the various out-patient clinics, mostly notably in the very stressful Burn Clinic. The money she earned she used to fund the many long trips to places all around the world that she and Nat began to take, first to Europe, but soon to more exotic locations. The two were among the first American tourists in Communist China, spending two weeks there, and two weeks in India, in the early 1970s. At the Great Wall of China crowds followed Jean around in amazement; they had never before seen a person with blue eyes and blonde hair. Jean and Nat also made extended trips to the

Middle East, to Russia, to Scandinavia, to the British Islands, to Japan and Hong Kong, to Thailand, and to South America. These travels deepened Jean's appreciation of Eastern culture, and she began collecting Asian artifacts including carvings, scrolls, and screens.

Nat and Jean both retired in 1977, giving them more time to travel; they also at that time began to spend their winters at Longboat Key, Florida, every year renting the same comfortable condominium right on the beachfront. They returned each Spring relaxed and refreshed.

Those winters in Florida ended in 1990 when Nat became ill. They sold their house in Amberley to their son and daughter-in-law, and bought a condominium in Hyde Park. Nat died six years later, but Jean continued to travel on her own, making trips to Central Africa and to Macchu Picchu, Peru, when she was well into her eighties.

Jean's life took her a long way from the hills of West Virginia, but she still held them and their people in her heart for all her days. Jean died 4 February 2018, at 98 years old.