

A biographical sketch of Jacob Henry Ellis

Compiled by Bill Gill

For anyone wishing to compile a more complete biography of Jacob Henry Ellis, please feel free to use this research without any restrictions or obligations whatsoever.

The Family of Jacob Henry Ellis

Nathan Ellis (Father) Born January 10, 1841 Died June 13, 1910

Celia Ellis (Mother) Born December 24, 1847 Died June 14, 1940

Jacob Henry Ellis (Son) Born December 10, 1870 Died October 24, 1930

Emanuel Ellis (Son) Born July 29, 1872 Died October 25, 1930

Isadore/Israel Ellis (Son) Born August 31, 1874 Died January 28, 1899

Isaac Ellis (Son) Born August 1, 1876 Died April 14, 1932

Mabel Ellis Heyman(n) (Daughter) Born October 20, 1879 Died October 30, 1954

Edyth Ellis (Daughter) Born July 7, 1886 Died April 16, 1905

- Jacob Henry Ellis was born on December 10, 1870 in Kingston, Ulster County, New York to German Jewish immigrant parents Nathan and Celia Ellis. Throughout his life he was known as “Jake” to his friends and “Smiling Jake” in the sheet music trade and was described as having a happy disposition and a magnetic personality. His life-long career was both as a composer and a sheet music salesman.
- The 1875 New York State census lists him as being 5 years old along with brothers Emanuel (3) and Israel Z. (1).
- For the 1880 Federal Census he is listed as 9 years old with his occupation as “school”. Also listed are brothers Emanuel (7), Israel (6), Isaac (4), and sister Mabel (2). Note: in this census taking Emanuel is listed as “Mania” and Israel as “Essie” most likely due to a misunderstanding involving accents.
- In 1884 he published his first known composition titled *Ulster Academy March* and dedicated it to his sister Mabel. Further research of available records in the Kingston area might shed more light on the back story of this composition.
- The Kingston City Directory of 1889 lists Jake as “cutler” located at 149 Strand. In this same directory his father’s occupation, also located at 149 Strand, is listed as “Merchant tailor and clothier”. It doesn’t state whether or not his father owned the store but an entry a decade later in the 1899 Kingston City Directory confirms that his father owned a clothing store, at least at that time.
- The 1891 City Directory lists Jake as a “musician” but with no location.
- The 1892 City Directory lists Jake simply as “leader” but in the same directory his brother Emanuel is listed as “musician”.
- In 1893 Jake along with lyricist Wallace H. Becker, published two vocal works titled *Willie Pells: Waltz Song and Chorus* and *The Man Who’s Got the Cash: Song and Chorus*.

- In 1894 his *Shenandoah March* was published by Willis Woodward & Co. He continued to publish pieces, no less than 80, all of them for either piano solo or piano/vocal until 1924. Of course the publishers had many of them arranged for band and orchestra and in 1903 his *Dancing in the Starlight* was recorded by the Edison Concert Band.
- In 1898 he published his *Carnation Waltzes* dedicated to “Prof. Ferdinand C. Amend, Kingston, N. Y.” Further research of available records in the Kingston area may shed some light on exactly who Prof. Amend was.
- Starting in 1900 Ellis’ name begins to appear in various articles in the *Music Trade Review*. This publication provides a wealth of information about Ellis as a sheet music salesman and provides insights into his personality but provides little or nothing about him as a composer or about his music.
- In 1901 and 1902, along with various lyricists, he published at least six vocal works under the pseudonym of E. H. Ellison. The pieces were published by his then employer Willis Woodward & Co. An article in the *Music Trade Review* of Sept. 22, 1900, Vol. 31, No. 22, p 22 pretty much sums up what his future career would be, that of both a composer and sheet music salesman. An excerpt from that article follows.

Mr. Ellis, besides being a talented musician, is a clever business man, and with his able assistance one can foresee increased prosperity for the firm of Willis Woodward & Co.

- Around 1903 Jake began working for the A. H. Goetting Co. of Springfield Mass. and its subsidiaries (New York Music Supply Co., Enterprise Music Supply Co., and Coupon Music Co.). These companies were called “jobbers”. They were middle men between the publishers and the music buyers. Their specialty was the rapid and widespread distribution and promotion of the sheet music.
- In 1920, the founder and owner of A. H. Goetting Co., Col. August H. Goetting died at the age of 64 and his company went into receivership and was auctioned off. Jake then went to work for Sam Fox Publishing Co. in Cleveland Ohio where he worked until his death in 1930.
- In late 1926 Jake got married. A short article in the *Music Trade Review* of October 2, 1926, Vol. 83, No. 14 p 33 makes the announcement. It reads:

Jacob Henry Ellis, Pacific Coast representative of Sam Fox, who was recently married, spent several days of his honeymoon in Portland and while there was entertained by Louis Mack, sheet music dealer, who has his department in the Wiley B. Allen store, and who is doing a nice volume of business.

My research involving copyright renewal entries and census data reveals his wife to be the former Hattie Osterman of Minneapolis Minn. A daughter, Jean Ellis, was born in 1928. Further research is needed to determine where they got married and the exact date of the marriage.

- Then in the November 1930 *Music Trade Review* Vol. 89, No. 11, p 7, his obituary appears. It reads in full:

Jacob Henry Ellis, one of the most popular members of the general sheet music trade and a veteran of the industry, died in Cleveland on October 24. Mr. Ellis, who for some years past has represented the Sam Fox Publishing Co. has spent over thirty years in the trade, in his early days with A. H. Goetting, the well-known jobber of Springfield Mass. He was in his fifties and was born in Kingston N. Y., though his home for many years has been in New York City. He had a host of friends among the dealers in all sections of the country among whom his passing has caused deep regret.

Confusing and bewildering findings.

Jake is buried in Montrepose Cemetery in Kingston, N.Y. along with his family. Their graves have been photographed and posted on the *Find A Grave* website. There appears to have been some sort of a collective reburial of the family after the death of Celia Ellis in 1940. The 1940 census taken on April 5th shows Celia living in San Francisco with Mabel and her husband Max and when Celia died several months later, Mabel most likely accompanied her remains back to Kingston and arranged for the collective reburial, as Mabel would have been the only member of the immediate family still alive at that point. I don't have any documented evidence to prove that but the question would be that if it wasn't Mabel who arranged the reburial, then who did? Mabel died in San Francisco in 1954 and it doesn't appear that she is buried in Montrepose Cemetery although I have not been able to confirm where she actually is buried. A thorough search of cemeteries in the San Francisco Bay area for Mabel and Max Heyman(n) may provide the answer. For the reburial, the names of the family members were grouped together on three different vertical monuments. One monument lists Nathan, Celia, and Edyth. A second lists Jake and Isadore, and a third lists Emanuel and Isaac. Oddly, Jake's date of death on his monument is listed as February 28, 1899. Odd because he published music up to 1924 and was mentioned in numerous articles in the *Music Trade Review* up to and including his obituary in 1930 citing October 24 (in Cleveland Ohio) as his death date. Also odd is that Emanuel's death date on his monument is listed as October 25, 1930, which is one day after Jake's death. I was able to find a death certificate for Emanuel showing he died in Cleveland on October 25, 1930 but no such certificate was found for Jake. So the inference would be that Jake and Emanuel died a day apart in Cleveland. Adding to this confusion is the Federal Census taken on April 27, 1930 in Manhattan listing Emanuel Ellis as Hattie Ellis' husband along with baby daughter Jean. After Jake's death, Hattie and baby Jean returned to live at the Osterman family residence in Minneapolis. The Minneapolis City directory lists Hattie's late husband as Emanuel Ellis for the 1932, 1936, 1937, and 1940 editions. In the 1950 edition it listed Jacob H. Ellis as her late husband. Further research of available records in Minneapolis may provide some clues as to this confusion. Hattie was born to Joseph and Amelia Osterman in June, 1888 in Colorado and died in Minneapolis in December 1978. The last record I could find of Jean Ellis was as a 20 year old student in 1948 and still living at the Osterman residence in Minneapolis.

Additional information useful in researching Jacob Henry Ellis

Mabel Ellis was born in Kingston N.Y. on October 20, 1879. She married Max Heymann on March 15, 1903 in Manhattan and they soon moved to Oakland Ca. The 1920 census shows them living in Palisades Park, N.J. The 1930 and 1940 census shows them living in San Francisco with the latter census showing Celia Ellis living with them. Celia died several months later. They had three children. Jeffrey, November 8, 1904-February 13, 1982. Edward, 1908-?, and Natalie, 1912-? It's entirely possible that Mabel may have left some information, verbal or written, with her descendents concerning her brother Jacob Henry Ellis.