



**Greenwich Village  
Society for Historic Preservation**

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October 28, 2010

Hon. Robert Tierney, Chair  
New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission  
One Centre Street, 9<sup>th</sup> floor  
New York, NY 10007

**Re: Congregation Hessed LeAvraham - The Langer Brandwein Family of the Strayner  
Dynasty, 328 East 4th Street, Manhattan.**

Dear Chair Tierney:

We have uncovered some additional historical information on the rowhouse at 328 East 4<sup>th</sup> Street which, along with its neighbor at No. 326, we have asked you to consider for landmark designation. For nearly fifty years from as early as 1927 through 1974, this largely extant Greek Revival townhouse, now in danger of being altered beyond recognition, was home to Congregation Hessed LeAvraham, the first location in America for the Langer Brandwein family of the Strayner Dynasty of Hasidic Jews.

Like most who came to America during the height of Eastern European Jewish immigration, the earliest Hasidic leaders and their followers settled in New York's Lower East Side, as did smaller numbers of Jews who continued to arrive up to and following World War II. Today's well known Hasidic communities in Brooklyn, upstate New York, Montreal, Toronto and elsewhere in North America are composed of post-war immigrants and their forbearers, often from once thriving Lower East Side Hasidic communities. The history of these communities is little known; few traces remain of their decades in our neighborhood. But these communities, and their synagogues, are a central aspect of New York's Jewish and immigrant histories. The building at 328 E 4<sup>th</sup> Street is exemplary of this period, having served for half a century as a Hasidic synagogue established by an important rabbi.

From 1924-1970, Rabbi Uri (Ira) Langner (1896-1970) headed Congregation Hessed LeAvraham. Following his father, Rabbi Langner had been the *rebbe*, the Hasidic leader, of the small town of Knihynicze, in a part of Galitzia (formerly Poland and Austria-Hungary) now in the Ukraine. He was the grandson of the original Strettiner Rebbe, the founder of this respected Hasidic dynasty. Rabbi Uri Langner (see the attached) was the author of several important religious volumes, including *Nehmad VeNa'im* on the Torah (New York, 1934), *Or HaAggadah* on the *Aggadot* of the *Talmud* (Brooklyn, 1942), *Or HaDe'ah* (Brooklyn, 1958), and *Or HaHaggim* (Brooklyn, 1955). This

Hasidic line remains active today in Brooklyn, with followers also in Monsey (upstate New York), Montreal, Toronto and Israel.

The open door of immigration to the United States was closed by the Immigration Act of 1924. Rabbi Uri (Ira) Langer was able to arrive just before the enactment of this law, with sufficient followers to open Congregation Hessed LeAvraham. He and his congregants suffered from anti-Semitism, the turmoil of World War I Europe and the Russian Revolution. As such, this synagogue and its renowned rabbi represent the last of the major migration of approximately 2.2 million Eastern European Jews who immigrated to the United States beginning in 1880. Thereafter, many of those unable to immigrate due to the new immigration law—or their progeny—perished in the German Holocaust. In this way, too, the building at 328 East 4<sup>th</sup> Street stands as a central memorial to New York immigrant history.

We strongly urge you to landmark Nos. 326 & 328 East 4<sup>th</sup> Street before the planned alterations to the buildings obliterate all evidence of their remarkable past.

Sincerely,



Andrew Berman  
Executive Director  
Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation



Kurt Cavanaugh  
Managing Director  
East Village Community Coalition

Cc: Mary Beth Betts, Director of Research, LPC

D. ...  
P. ...

**E<sup>T</sup> H E  
NCYCLOPEDIA  
OF HASIDISM**

edited by  
**Tzvi M. Rabinowicz**



**JASON ARONSON INC.**  
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**LANGER, Uri, of New York** (5 Elul 1896–4 Elul 1970)—Son of Abraham of Stretyn, he was born in Knihynicze. He married his cousin the daughter of R. Israel of Arad. From 1918 to 1921, he was rabbi in Knihynicze, and in 1924, he emigrated to the United States.

He lived on East 4th Street, in New York, and was the rabbi of the *Hesed LeAvraham* community.

He was a prolific writer and was the author of *Nehmad VeNa'im* on the Torah (New York, 1934), *Or HaAggadah* on the *Aggadot* of the Talmud (Brooklyn, 1942), *Or HaDe'ah* (Brooklyn, 1958), and *Or HaHaggim* (Brooklyn, 1955).

**LANGER, Uri, of Rohatyn** (1820–18 Iyyar 1889)—Son of R. Yitzhak Langer, the rabbi of Tartakov, he married Sarah, the daughter of R. Abraham of Stretyn. He was a disciple of R. Israel of Ruzhyn and R. Yitzhak Isaac of Zydaczov. His discourses and customs are recorded in *Hillulei De-Rabbi* (Kolomyja, 1890).

He was survived by his sons—R. Yehudah Tzvi, R. Yitzhak Aaron, and R. Yisrael.

A. Shu.

**LAWAT, Abraham David, of Nikolayev** (1835–1890), *Habad* scholar—Son of R. Yehudah Leib, he was a disciple of R. Menahem Mendel Schneersohn and of his son, R. Samuel. In 1875 he became rabbi in Nikolayev, where he established a *yeshivah*.

He was the author of *Kav Naki* (Warsaw, 1868), on the laws of divorce, and *Bet Aharon VeTosafot* (Vilna, 1881).

H. M. Heilman, *Bet Rebbe*, vol. 3, p. 21.

**LEBOVITCH, Barukh Yehudah, of New York** (1909–6 Adar II 1951)—Son of R. Michael, he was born in Hungary and was a descendant of R. Samuel (Shmelke) of Nikolsburg.

In 1927, he married Yentel, the daughter of R. Shmelke Schnitzler. He acted as *dayan* at Kish. He spent the war years in Nazi labor camps.

After the war, he emigrated to New York, where he died.

His son, R. Menahem Mendel (b. 1930), is the head of *Bet Birkhat Yehudah Bet Ha-Midrash* in London.

**LECZNA, Solomon Leib, of Leczna** (1778–19 Nisan 1843)—Son of R. Barukh of Rszeszov, he was a disciple of R. Mendel of Rymanov and of R. Jacob Yitzhak, the "Seer" of Lublin and the "Holy Jew" of Przysucha. "Each time he comes to my room," said the "Holy Jew," "I feel a sense of holiness."

His first rabbinical post was in Bokovsk, near Sanok, and later he succeeded R. Eizig as the rebbe of Leczna, in the Lublin province.

Apart from delivering discourses, he would refrain from speaking on the Sabbath. Every detail of the Sabbath was precious to him. He even kissed the twelve loaves on the table. He greeted each visitor affectionately, calling him "my son" or "my brother." Unlike many hasidic rebbes, he recited *yotzerot* (liturgical poems).

Among his disciples were R. Samuel of Sianiawa, R. Mattathias of Kosov, and R. Mottel of Neustadt. Many of his discourses are found in *Toldot Adam* (Yosefov, 1878), published by his son and successor, R. Joshua of Ostrova. His other son was R. Abraham, who married the daughter of R. Samuel of Slonim. His daughter Esther married R. Moses Leib Kligsbberg, who settled in the Holy Land. His second daughter, Lieba, married R. Leibish of Leczna.

*Tiferet Avot*, pp. 78–79.

**LEIB SARAH'S** (1730–1791)—Aryeh Leib ben Sarah was one of the early figures of Hasidism. He is known by his mother's name, a feature not uncommon in those days. In his case a fanciful reason has been given: His mother, Sarah, fell victim to the glances of the son of the local potentate (*por-etz*, in the Hebrew-Yiddish phrase). She was at that time a young unmarried girl, and in order to avoid his advances, she married very suddenly and of her free will an elderly widower who was the local *melamed* (teacher) and who was known for his extreme piety. As a reward for her modesty, she gave birth to a son who became a great and pious man. His father claimed descent from the famous R. Judah Loew, Maharal of Prague, after whom the boy was named—Loew being a form of Leib.

At the age of fifteen the lad is said to have visited the Besht. The boy displayed his devotions by means of certain ecstatic pranks and was warned by the master that such

His son R. Jacob Mordecai emigrated to the Holy Land in 1912, and his sons were R. Pinhas, R. Hayyim Joseph, R. Yehudah Tzvi, and R. Abraham.

**BRANDWEIN, Nahum, of Bursztyn** (1847–15 Elul 1915)—Son of R. Eliezer of Jesupol, he was born in Stretyn. He married Bluma, the daughter of R. Tzvi Hirsh Hager, and he studied under his father and his uncle, R. Abraham.

In 1865 he succeeded his father as rebbe in Bursztyn, where he lived for forty years. In 1914, a fire burned down the town, and he moved to Stanislav.

He was the author of *Imrei Tov* on the Torah (Lvov, 1891), *Imrei Hayyim* on the 613 Commandments (Lvov, 1893), *Imrei Berakhah* on the *Aggadot* in the tractates of *Berakhot* and *Shabbat* (Lvov, 1898), and *Imrei Ratzon* on the Book of Genesis (Lvov, 1909).

He was succeeded by his only son, R. Eliezer. His daughters were Miriam, Sheindel, Yohebed, and Peshe.

**BRANDWEIN, Yehudah Tzvi, of Stretyn** (1780–11 Iyyar 1830)—Son of R. Samuel Zanvil, he was born in Zawalov, Galicia, where his father served as a rabbi. He was the favored disciple of R. Uri of Strelisk. He married the daughter of R. Eleazar Kahana of Rozdol.

On the suggestion of the "Seer" of Lublin, he gave up his position as slaughterer and established a hasidic dynasty of his own while R. Uri was still alive. After R. Uri's death, many of R. Uri's hasidim followed him.

Like his teacher, he prayed with great ecstasy. He had a reputation as a healer, and he prescribed popular remedies as well as *segulot*. During the last three years of his life, he was afflicted with a terrible disease, and his body was covered with sores.

Three of his sons—R. Abraham, R. Samuel Zanvil, and R. Eliezer—and their descendants were all hasidic rebbes. R. Abraham succeeded his father in Stretyn.

He was the author of *Sheerit Yehudah Derekh Hayyim Tokhahat Musar* (Brooklyn, 1971) and *Degel Mahaneh Yehudah*, a collection of tales and homilies (Jerusalem, 1957). R. Mahler, *HaHasidut VeHaHaskalah*.

T.P.

**BRANDWEIN, Yehudah Tzvi, of Tel Aviv** (11 Adar 1903–18 Nisan 1969)—Son of R. Abraham, he was born in Safed. His mother, Hannah, was the daughter of R. Meshullam Weisblum, a descendant of R. Elimelekh of Lejask and R. Levi Yitzhak of Berdichev.

Yehudah Tzvi studied in the *yeshivah Hatam Sofer* in Safed and also at the *yeshivah Hayyei Olam* in Jerusalem. He was ordained by Rabbis Kook and Sonnenfeld. He married Miriam Hadassah, the daughter of R. Shlomo Wexler, and on her death, he married Leah, the daughter of R. Meir Joseph Abramovitch, whose sister was the wife of R. Ashlag.

In 1957, he began to work in the religious department of the *Histadrut* and was known as the "rabbi of *Histadrut*." He made notable contributions to Kabbalah and completed the work of his brother-in-law, *Maalot HaSulam* (Tel Aviv, 1960).

His children were R. Moshe Hayyim, Esther Miriam, Alta Rachel, Zipporah Devorah, Tubah, Menuhah, and Bat Sheva.

**BRATZLAV**—A town in Podolia on the river Bug. It was the home of R. Nahman of Bratzlav and of his disciple, R. Nathan Sternharz, who set up a printing press in 1819. Among the books printed were *Likkutei MoHaran*, *Likkutei Tefillot*, and *Kitzur Likkutei MoHaran*. On the eve of the Second World War, there were 2,500 Jews living there. The community was destroyed by the Nazis between July and September 1941.

**BRATZLAV CONTROVERSY**—The controversy concerning the Bratzlav group was one of the most bitter in the history of the hasidic movement, yet its origins and precise causes have not been ascertained. The Bratzlav sources, while openly acknowledging its existence and, moreover, presenting it as a positive and essential constituent of the Bratzlav way, suppress much of the evidence relating to its contents. Other hasidic circles directly involved in the controversy have not produced literary records that might shed light on the affair.

Two distinct stages may be observed in the course of the controversy, and it is not yet clear what degree of continuity there was

**LANDAU, Zeev Wolf, of Strykov** (1807–11 *Elul* 1891)—Elder son of R. Abraham Landau of Ciechanov, he married the daughter of R. Zanvil Weiner of Strykov. He was a disciple of R. Menahem Mendel of Kotzk and R. Yitzhak Meir Alter of Ger.

The rebbe of Kotzk made a great impression on him. "I am not surprised," said his friend R. Meir Yehiel Lipshitz of Gostynin, "that he remembers the discourses of R. Mendel better than I do. But what amazes me is that he has not forgotten even a letter or a gesture."

He succeeded his father as rebbe in 1875, when he was sixty-eight years old. He was the author of *Zeer Zahav Keter Torah*—comments on Torah and Festivals—which was printed in Warsaw in 1901. It also has an appendix, *Amarot Tehorot*.

His grandson published his *Mikhtavim*, an anthology of letters, discourses, and poems (Lodz, 1926). He was an elegant stylist who advocated the study of Hebrew as a spoken language.

Two of his sons, R. Moshe Hayyim and R. Yehiel Michael, died in his lifetime. His surviving sons, R. Mordecai Mottel of Strykov and R. Menahem Mendel of Gombyn, maintained the dynasty of Strykov.

**LANGER, Abraham, of Knihy-nice** (1863–28 *Tammuz* 1918)—Son of R. Yehudah Tzvi of Stretyn, he became rabbi of Knihy-nice, Galicia, at the age of eighteen. In 1907 he succeeded his father as rebbe and became known as a miracle worker.

During the First World War, he took refuge in Budapest, where he died. His son R. Moses succeeded him as rebbe.

**LANGER, George Mordecai (Jiri)** (1894–1943)—He was part of a circle of Prague Jewish writers that included Kafka. In 1913 this "Western sophisticate" made a journey to the East, "inspired by a secret longing." His goal was the hasidic village of Belz in eastern Galicia. Although he was much attracted by a community that was living in a "state of unending ecstasy entirely beyond time, space, and matter" and was entirely willing to give up Western notions of success and career motivation, Langer found it difficult to surrender the more spiritual fruits of Western culture such as poetry and classical music.

He writes that when he was tired of learning, the marshes were his only means of "spiritual refreshment in all this wilderness." Moreover, his Western preconceptions of hygiene were appalled by the fact that dirt and insects seemed to be necessary preconditions of sainthood. Hard, too, was it for him to gain complete acceptance in his new society. The distant politeness of his fellow hasidim thawed when, through undernourishment, lack of exercise and air, and a suitable transformation of vestments, he came to look more like them. Conflict, however, was never quite eradicated from Jiri's soul, and while trying vainly to achieve hasidic joy, he was still revolted by what he termed "puritanism," "isolation," "ignorance," and "backwardness."

When he returned to his family, he had to contend with friction there too. In his Foreword to his brother's hasidic anthology *Nine Gates to the Hasidic Mysteries*, the poet Frantisek Langer makes it plain he regarded Jiri's religious foibles as a "case of belated adolescent psychopathy" on the strength of which he got him discharged from the army. Jiri, however, insisted on viewing this exemption as a direct intervention by the Belzer rebbe, and he spent the rest of the war with the hasidim. In the latter part of his life, however, he became again outwardly Europeanized.

For him Hasidism was "the Kabbalah made accessible to the people." The hasidim were notable for having elevated the occult above everything, and perhaps their most beautiful doctrine, according to Langer, is their stress on the ultimate fusion of the holy with all things. The heroic human being can release the sparks of godliness imprisoned in all matter.

J. Langer, *Nine Gates to the Hasidic Mysteries*.

F.G.

**LANGER, Moses, of Toronto** (1878–13 *Adar* 1945)—Son of R. Judah Tzvi of Stretyn, he was born in Brutchin. His mother, Gittel Leah, was the daughter of R. Solomon of Rozdol. He married Fruma, the daughter of R. Shalom Babad and from 1907 was rebbe in Stretyn, near Lvov.

In 1920, he settled in Toronto, where he established his *Bet HaMidrash*. He was survived by his sons—R. Mordecai, R. Shlomo, and R. Yitzhak Eizig—and two daughters.