

Ida Gordon

May 4, 1902 – January 8, 1982



Ida Molly Stein was born in Boston's West End. Her immigrant father owned horse stables where the Museum of Science stands, and her mother had sewn clothing for Russian nobility. When Ida was 17, her mother died, so Ida took over the cooking and housekeeping for her father and brothers. In the 1920s, Ida married Morris Gordon, a housebuilder. They moved to a third-floor walk-up at 150 Shurtleff Street. Ida, an accomplished seamstress, worked for Sophie Leppo, a local dress designer. Soon, Ida established her own formal dress business. She loved to draw and delineate patterns, copying any dress or gown she saw.

When the Depression hit, Morris became unemployed, so Ida designed, sold, and rented ball gowns to support her family. Reflections from a three-sided mirror in her living room "design salon" helped Ida and her clients create one-of-a-kind wedding gowns, fashionable mother-and-daughter ensembles, and the first strapless formals for Chelsea's budding fashion mavens.

Ida and her assistant, Mrs. DeBritto, hand-stitched beading and elaborate lacework in Ida's daughter Dorothy's doll-filled bedroom. Another room held an inventory of fabrics and fox head pelts, ready to adorn the collars of the fine suits many Jewish women showed off at Chelsea's "shuls" during the High Holidays. Ida also dyed matching shoes and purses.

Her grandchildren remember her as a loving, stylish woman with a thriving formal dress business who traveled to Havana for fun and Paris for ideas, enjoyed playing cards, and made them banana bread and hot cross buns in the morning.



Sources: Ellen Rovner, The Chelsea Gateway Project; Laurie Gold, Monty Gold, Gerry Gold