

# Nobel Prize Winners from Montclair

CONTRIBUTED BY MIKE FARRELLY, MONTCLAIR TOWNSHIP HISTORIAN

**A**CCORDING TO [nobelprize.org](http://nobelprize.org) the process of choosing Noble Prize winners begins every year in September when nomination forms are sent out. February 2 is the deadline for nominations. Various committees consult with experts until May. Reports are issued between June and August. In September the committees make their recommendations. In October decisions are made and the results are announced. On December 10, the anniversary of Alfred Nobel's death, the winners are presented with actual gold medals, specially designed diplomas and cash awards. The recipients of the award for physics, chemistry, medicine, literature and economics receive their awards from the Swedish royal family in Stockholm. The Peace Prize winners are given their awards in Oslo by the chair of the Norwegian Nobel Committee, in the presence of the Norwegian royal family. The Nobel prizes are probably the most prestigious awards anyone can receive in these categories. Two natives of Montclair have been so honored.

John Raleigh Mott was born in Livingston Manor, New York in 1865. His family moved to Pottstown Iowa, where his father started a lumber business and became the town's first mayor. John went to a small Methodist college. He transferred to Cornell University. He was deciding between a career in law and his father's lumber business when he attended a lecture given by J.E.K. Studd. Studd, and his two brothers, were born wealthy. They were all champion cricket players. They were "reborn" during a Fundamentalist campaign in England, but seriously devoted themselves to Christ when George, the middle brother, miraculously recovered from a near fatal illness. J.E.K went on to



Left: John Raleigh Mott Right: Joshua Lederberg

be a businessman and Lord Mayor of London, but always kept Jesus foremost in his life. Brothers George and Charles devoted their lives completely to the missions.

Mott arrived late to the lecture, but was deeply moved by the words, "Seekest thou great things for thyself? Seek them not. Seek ye first the kingdom of God." That summer, the summer of 1886, Mott represented Cornell's branch of the YMCA at the world's first international, Christian Student conference. This was the first activity in his lifelong devotion to the "Y" and to missionary work. Mott became the national secretary to the Intercollegiate YMCA of the United States and Canada; a position which required him to travel to campuses all over North America. Later on, as general secretary to the International Committee of the YMCA; still later, as the president of the YMCA's World Committee, he had to travel all the time. He sailed across the Atlantic over 100 times. He sailed the Pacific 14 times. According to an article by Greg Dougherty, which appeared in the March 2012 issue of the Smithsonian Magazine: a manager of the White Line, who was interested in his ideas, offered Mott and a colleague free passage on the maiden voyage of their brand new, super luxury liner, the Titanic. Thinking it a little too ostentatious,


they sailed on the more humble, SS Lapland. Upon reaching New York and hearing about the Titanic disaster, the two turned to each other and said, "The good Lord must have more work for us to do."

During World War I, Mott offered President Wilson the services of the "Y". He became involved in relief and relocation efforts for prisoners of war. He repeated this service during WWII. In 1910 he was one of the organizers of the World Missionary Conference held in Edinburgh, Scotland. The conference led to the formation of the World Council of Churches. He became honorary president of that organization in 1948. In 1946 the Nobel Committee recognized him for his devotion to brotherhood and his zeal to live by, and to spread, Christian principles. He was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, along with Emily Greene Balche, a teacher at Wellesley College, a social activist and central figure in the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom. John Mott and his wife, Leila, moved to Montclair in 1900 and lived at 75 Midland Ave. for 30 years.

The next recipient was born in Montclair. To be honest, his family moved away when he was still an infant, but we claim him as a native son none the less. Joshua Lederberg was born at Mountainside Hospital on May 23, 1925. His parents had just emigrated from Palestine. The records are not clear as to where, or why, they lived in Montclair. He matriculated through the NYC public school system. He was asked to join the American Institute Science Laboratory, a forerunner of the Westinghouse Science Talent Search. He studied zoology at Columbia. He served as a naval medical corpsman during WWII. Instead of going back to Columbia to finish his medical degree, he went to Yale to study under his mentor, Edward Tatum. He received a PhD in microbiology in 1948. From there he went to the University of Wisconsin, where he ended up as chair of the Genetics Department. He was elected to the National Academy of Sciences in 1957, the year before he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Physiology (Medicine) for his work in bacterial genetics. He shared the award in 1958 with his teacher, Edward Tatum, and another geneticist, George Beadle.

After he received his Nobel Prize, Joshua was chosen to head the Genetics Department at Stanford University Medical College. He became interested in the effects of unknown micro-organisms entering earth's atmosphere from space and became an advisor to NASA. At NASA he also became interested in artificial intelligence. He was president of Rockefeller University from 1978 to 1990. He was married twice. He met his first wife, Esther, at Yale. He met his second wife, Marguerite, at the University of Wisconsin. He passed away in 2008.

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