

# Portraits

Highlighting the exceptional contribution  
of European Jewish Women

## Minnie Marx

Mother of Karl Marx

(1865-1929)

Born Minnie Schonberg in Dornum, Germany. Wife of Samuel Marx.

Mother of the Marx Brothers: Leonard (Chico), Adolph (Harpo), Julius (Groucho), Milton (Gummo), and Herbert (Zeppo).

At fifteen, Minnie landed at Ellis Island. Her father, Levy "Lafe" Schonberg, repaired clocks and umbrellas, and was a ventriloquist conjurer.

Her mother, Fanny Salomons, accompanied him with the harp. Her brother, Al Shean, played in vaudeville. Minnie meets Sam Marx, of Alsatian descent, in New York. She calls him "Frenchie." He is a tailor without much success. She's 19 and he's 23 when they marry in 1884.

It was Minnie who decided that her sons would succeed in show business. "Matriarchal, tyrannical and endearing force, as so many excessive, irrational, generous Jewish mothers are, Minnie projected her aspirations with such force onto her children that she made them as successful as she would have liked to be. She forbade Harpo from becoming a doctor:

"Definitely not! It is a non-profit making occupation that takes too long and is too difficult. Please your mother, you have to become an actor or a singer".



[https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/e/e1/Early\\_marx\\_brothers\\_with\\_parents.jpg](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/e/e1/Early_marx_brothers_with_parents.jpg)

When Harpo proves to sing very badly and reveals a catastrophic voice, it does not discourage Minnie. She visualises his future as a mute cinema actor. All he has to do is play the harp! For several years, the Marx family scoured all the theatres in shabby tours, and kept failing. It wasn't until 1907 that Minnie found the brilliant idea of reuniting her sons on stage.

Harpo writes in his memoirs: "It is probably a miracle that we got away with it. Neither my brothers nor I wanted to continue where others had already given up: but we had our mother behind us, and she did it for us. She did that miracle. » Minnie Marx's obstinacy pays off: 13 films in 20 years (including the best known: "Duck Soup," "A Night at the Opera," "At the Circus"). And they had a huge influence on American humour and culture.

The very existence of the Marx Brothers is linked to the will and the hard work of their mother. There was a musical "Minnie's boys" written after her life.