



Remnant of Israel a Portrait of Americas First Jewish Congregation

Shearith Israel, Marc Angel

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In September 1654, 23 Jewish refugees from Recife, Brazil arrived in the Dutch colonial town of New Amsterdam aboard the St. Charles, a French warship. The Portuguese had just retaken Brazil from the Dutch, and these Jews feared living under the same repression that had caused their ancestors to flee Spain in 1492 and Portugal in 1497. Despite strong protests by Peter Stuyvesant, the local governor, the Dutch West India Company ordered that this small group be allowed to stay in New Amsterdam. At first calling themselves Shearith Jacob, or Remnant of Jacob, and later Shearith Israel, they became the first Jewish congregation in North America. For almost 175 years, Shearith Israel was the only Jewish congregation in New York City, and its history has been deeply intertwined with that of the city and the nation. Active in both the synagogue and the outside world have been such figures as Rev. Gershom Mendes Seixas, an incorporator of Columbia College and a prominent patriot during the American Revolution; Commodore Uriah Phillips Levy, a hero in the War of 1812 who later saved Thomas Jefferson's Monticello from ruin; Supreme Court Justice Benjamin Nathan Cardozo; Emma Lazarus, one of whose poems is inscribed on the base of the Statue of Liberty; and Maud Nathan, who was active in the women's suffrage movement as well as a Daughter of the American Revolution. Published to mark Shearith Israel's 350th anniversary, this book tells their individual stories as well as the history of the congregation, explaining its origins, its rituals and its traditions. It is profusely illustrated with portraits, historical documents and ritual objects. This book tells a fascinating story, one that will appeal to anyone interested in the history and culture of the Jewish people, of New York City, and of the United States.

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