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AMERICAN JEWISH ARCHIVES

Tercentenary

1654-1954

Three hundred years ago twenty-three Dutch Jewish refugees, fleeing from the bigotry of Portuguese Brazil, landed in New Amsterdam, at the mouth of the Hudson. There the American Jewish community had its beginning.

The men and women who first came here were followers of the Spanish-Portuguese ritual; many were themselves of Iberian stock. They were Sephardim. Those hard-bitten émigrés, who had known the rigors of the Inquisition, founded the first Jewish synagogues and called into being the earliest philanthropic confraternities on the North American mainland.

Almost two centuries later, by 1840, the spiritual leadership had passed from the few thousands of Sephardim into the hands of the oncoming Ashkenazim, the Jews of Central and Eastern Europe. Most of these were Germans fleeing from the petty intolerance of the post-

Napoleonic reaction, seeking in the United States the freedom, the hope, and the opportunity which were denied them at home. Of the thousands who crossed the Atlantic, many remained in the eastern ports; many more moved west, crossing the mountains, following the rivers and turnpikes, moving ever westward, until they met their fellow-Jews who had come to California with the Argonauts of 1849.

It was the Germans who followed the frontier wherever it led, peddling and keeping store, stopping, when they caught their breath, to build religious and spiritual foundations in every town and village where they could gather a quorum of ten adult males. Those were the men who organized American Jewry on a national basis, creating unions of congregations, civic defense associations, country-wide lodges, associated charities, religious schools, and rabbinical colleges.

A little over seventy years ago the communal rule of the German-American Jews was challenged by the coming of hundreds of thousands of East Europeans, who brought with them their intense love of Hebrew, their proud Orthodoxy, their expressive Yiddish, their romantic nationalism, their fierce intolerance of any form of persecution and exploitation.

Today, in 1954, there are over five million Jews in this land. For a generation now, Sephardi and Ashkenazi—Iberian, German, and East European—have been coming together to create a new amalgam, a new type, a new man, the "American" Jew. The ethnic adjectives proudly pointing to European provenance are stubbornly but surely beginning to fall away.

Tomorrow there will be a new Jew, the child of all that has come to pass here in the last three hundred years, and of all that came to pass in three millennia in Europe and Asia. What he will do, what he will become, no man knows.

But this we do know: here on these shores some new form of Judaism will arise. There will be new spiritual institutions, new ventures in the field of philanthropy, new schools and colleges, new cultural aspirations. There will always be the age-old pride of the past and, linked with it, a keen and deep understanding of the finest that this land has brought forth: a determination to hold on to the best in Judaism and Americanism for the sake of what they have to offer, and because the Jew knows that he can survive only in an atmosphere of freedom.

The Jew is thoroughly aware that he has a stake in a free America.