

By Chance or Choice: Jews in New Amsterdam 1654

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In late summer 1654, two ships anchored in New Amsterdam roadstead. One, the *Peereboom* (*Peartree*), arrived from Amsterdam on or about August 22. The other, a Dutch vessel named the *St. [Sint] Catrina*, is often referred to as the French warship *St. Catherine* or *St. Charles*. Yet, only the name *St. Catrina* appears in original records, having entered a few days before September 7 from the West Indies. The *Peereboom*, Jan Pietersz Ketel, skipper, left Amsterdam July 8 for London, soon after peace negotiations in April concluded the first Anglo-Dutch War (1652–1654). Following a short stay, the *Peereboom* sailed for New Amsterdam, where passengers and cargo were ferried ashore, as there were no suitable docks or wharves. Among those who disembarked were Jacob Barsimon, probably together with Asser Levy and Solomon Pietersen. These were the first known Jews to set foot in the Dutch settlement, and with them begins the history of that community in New York.¹

A number of vessels arrived and departed New Amsterdam during 1654 and early 1655, including the *Gelderse Bloem* (*Flower of Gelderland*), *Swarte Arent* (*Black Eagle*), *Schaal* (*Shell*), *Beer* (*Bear*), *Groot Christofel* (*Great Christopher*), *Koning Solomon* (*King Solomon*), *Jonge Raafe* (*Young Raven*), and *d'Zwaluw* (*Swallow*). Perhaps Pietersen and Levy were on one of these, but given the extensive use of the *Peereboom*, it seems likely they would have been on that ship. Regardless of which vessel they were on, they came by choice. These were not refugees fleeing imminent persecution.

The second arrival, the Dutch *St. Catrina*, Jaques de la Motthe in command, probably a Walloon or Huguenot, carried, as reported by Pietersen, twenty-three Jews, “big as well as little.” Here the story becomes somewhat confusing. The vessel came from St. Anthony — a place Berthold Fernow, the editor of the *Records of New Amsterdam*, finds was in Brazil, just as he insists at first mention that the vessel was the *St. Charles*, although later correctly writing *St. Catrina*. Strangely, he does not correct his first impression and leaves unquestioned his Brazil conjecture.²

The *Peereboom*, as mentioned, left Amsterdam in July 1654 and, via London, continued to New Amsterdam. As noted, probably several Jews were aboard. One, Jacob Aboaf, departed in London. But who were the others? One was Jacob Barsimon; others were likely Pietersen and Levy. Pietersen, who is not listed in Brazilian congregational records, was seemingly a passenger since he witnessed and noted the arrival of twenty-three Jews on the *St. Catrina*. He says nothing

as to who the twenty-three were. Was his count correct? That number cannot be supported using existing evidence. Levy, a possible third passenger, also was not from Brazil and was not on the *St. Catrina* but was in New Amsterdam when the supposed twenty-three arrived. Originally from Vilna [then Poland] and one of the few Jews whose place of origin is known, Levy, like the other two, was an Ashkenazic or eastern European Jew and obviously chose to travel to the Dutch colony. They were not bothered by Peter Stuyvesant, appointed director-general in 1646 by the West India Company, probably because all three had passports issued by the company. Barsimon's passport is certain. Historians, such as Samuel Oppenheim and Arnold Wiznitzer, have placed Levy in Brazil, but they appear to be mistaken.³ The terrible Khmelnitzki pogroms begun in 1648 were a probable cause of Levy's as well as others' departures from eastern Europe. After that year, the Jewish population, particularly in Amsterdam, grew steadily to six thousand, or 3 percent of the population, by 1700. This expansion mirrored the Netherlands' economic expansion and a flourishing overseas trade.⁴

The intentions of these first three arrivals were clear to New Amsterdam's resident minister, Domine Johannes Megapolensis, who on March 18, 1655, sent a letter to the Classis at Amsterdam, noting, "Last summer some Jews came here from Holland in order to trade." His reference to "some Jews," not one or two, supports the view that there were at least three Jews on the *Peereboom*. He continued, "[A]fterwards, some Jews, poor and healthy, also came here on the same ship with D[omine] Polhemius." This is certainly a reference to the arrival of the *St. Catrina*, which came indirectly from Brazil after the Portuguese conquest in 1654. The clergyman further wrote, "God has led Domine Joannes [Johannes] Polhemius from Brazil over the Caribbean Islands to this place," probably meaning Jamaica and Cuba. (There were *St. Anthonys* at both places, as well as in Brazil.) He then voiced his resentment at having to spend several hundred guilders to support the new, indigent arrivals. Megapolensis continued, "They came several times to my house, weeping and bemoaning their misery. If I directed them to the Jewish merchants, they said they would not even lend them a few stivers." Were the Jewish merchants Barsimon, Levy, and Pietersen? Was the *St. Catrina's* passengers' poverty a result of having their goods and money taken or lost during their voyage from Brazil "over the Caribbean Islands?" Perhaps a good deal of their property had to remain in Brazil after the Portuguese seizure. Megapolensis further argued that the followers of the "unrighteous Mammon" aimed to get possession of Christian property and to outdo other merchants by drawing all trade toward themselves. These "godless rascals, who are of no benefit to the country, but look at everything for their own profit, may be sent away from here."

For Megapolensis, trade and profit were basic motives for those "godless rascals." These "obstinate and immovable Jews," who "come to settle here," he

continued, caused greater confusion in the colony already troubled with having dissident Catholics (Papists), Quakers, Mennonites, and Lutherans. This view of the acquisitiveness of Jews was often used as a reason to try to restrict immigration. For example, in 1641, Johan Maurits, governor-general of Dutch Brazil, was told by resident merchants that the colony was being overrun by Jews and “every contract with a Jew ends in bankruptcy of a Christian.” In his reply, however, Maurits stated that Christians should be more careful, avoiding their “lust for speculation.” Besides, he said, Jews deserved and earned more liberties than others as they have always been “reliable political allies.”⁵ Obviously, this was a view not held by Megapolensis or Stuyvesant.

Who were these “godless rascals”?

On January 26, 1654, some twenty-five years after the Dutch had taken Brazil from Portugal, the colony once again fell to Portuguese control. The gamble of the West India Company had failed. Terms of surrender were, however, very generous. Movable property could be retained, and ships would be provided for those who chose to leave. No reprisals would be taken, including reprisals against Jews, who were largely at Recife, Mauricia, and Pernambuco — principal ports of the colony. Further, three months’ stay was granted, and all, including Jews, would be treated with “great respect and courtesy.” The Portuguese commander, Francisco Barreto, approved these seemingly magnanimous terms. Still, what Jews could carry with them was not clear. Certainly real property remained, but could they keep gold, silver, and jewels? Or were these taken by the Portuguese?

There were at the time about 150 Jewish families in Brazil, most of whom left for the Dutch Republic.⁶ Barreto also provided at least sixteen ships as transport, some Dutch, some Portuguese.⁷ One of the vessels, the Dutch *Valck (Falcon)*, skipper Jon Craeck, left Brazil on February 24 but was driven by adverse winds to Spanish-held Jamaica. Its passengers apparently remained on the island until the end of April, when they might have sailed to Cuba, perhaps on the *Valck*. It is possible, too, that Pietersen’s twenty-three Jews and Polhemius then boarded the *St. Catrina* and sailed to New Amsterdam.

In a document dated November 14, 1654, at the request of the Amsterdam Sephardic community, a representative of the Dutch government wrote to the King of Spain to protest the detaining of Portuguese Jews in Jamaica, in contradiction of a treaty between the Netherlands and Spain. This treaty may explain the presence of the Dutch *St. Catrina* in Spanish territory. The report stated that Jewish passengers had left Recife for Martinique, but winds carried them to Jamaica. Their immediate release was requested.⁸

Whether the *St. Catrina* came via Cuba or Jamaica, it seems certain that it was not the first ship to bring Jews to New Netherland. As seen previously, the *Peereboom* arrived earlier from the Netherlands by choice. Was it a second choice for those twenty-three who sailed from Brazil? But why did both groups select

New Amsterdam? Answers are found in the story of the Dutch Republic, New Amsterdam, and the largely Sephardic Jewish community in Amsterdam.

For those on the *Peereboom* and *St. Catrina*, New Amsterdam could fulfill a variety of dreams and aspirations. This small outpost, managed by the West India Company, was settled to profit from trade in furs and agricultural products, especially grain. But, interest in New Netherland was also related to the remarkable rise of the Dutch Republic during its “Golden Age,” the time of Rembrandt, Grotius, Huygens, masters of art, law, and science. It was also the age of its naval supremacy. Admirals such as Michiel De Ruyter, Cornelis, and Maarten Tromp often defeated their English adversaries. The West India Company, chartered in 1621 following an armistice with Spain, had a member of the States General on the company’s governing Council of XIX and exemplified the aggressive spirit of the republic. Willem Usselinx, a militant Calvinist and one of the leading advocates for establishing the company, was a zealous anti-Catholic refugee from Antwerp who sought revenge against an invading Spain. An added interest in New Netherland could be to establish a base for possible seizure of Spanish treasure carried from Mexico and Peru. In 1628, Piet Heyn captured the Mexican silver fleet, a spectacular victory that helped stimulate the Dutch economy and fund company operations. Certainly a Protestant colony questioned the authority of a Spanish Catholic claim to the New World. Usselinx also reasoned that immigrants and foreigners were a prime asset for the Republic. “It is,” he wrote, “because of foreigners [like himself] that the country will be peopled as its might is derived most from those who come from abroad, settle here, marry and multiply.” New colonies would strengthen the economy. Interestingly, Usselinx wanted to prohibit slavery.⁹

Usselinx’s views on the need for immigration and colonization to strengthen a free nation perhaps influenced these first Jewish travelers to New Amsterdam. In addition, the writings of Adriaen Van der Donck — particularly his *Beschrijvinge van Nieuw Nederlant*, or *Description of New Netherland*, first published in 1655 after his 1649 *Vertoogh*, or *Remonstrance*, published in 1650 — would have stimulated interest. His work was known by 1655, when the thirty-five-year-old author died. Van der Donck, a doctor of laws, graduate of the University of Leiden, became a member of Stuyvesant’s advisory Council of Nine. He was a severe critic of the director-general and the company because of their failure to promote good government and permanent, substantial settlement.¹⁰ *Description of New Netherland*, Van der Donck’s “little book,” contained a very detailed and positive account of the natural abundance found in the province. “It is,” he wrote at the beginning of his essay, “a very beautiful, pleasant, healthy and delightful land, where all manner of men can more easily earn a good living and make their way in the world than in the Netherlands or any other part of the globe that I know.”¹¹

This reference to health is quite interesting. In the seventeenth century, a number of terrible epidemics could have persuaded many to seek a more beneficial climate. In 1636, more than 17,000 out of a population of 120,000 died in Amsterdam; in 1654, almost 11,000 of some 60,000 died in Leiden; and in 1664, more than 24,000 of about 200,000 died in Amsterdam. Surely seeking a “healthy” land was an added inducement to travel¹² and, perhaps, motivation to relocate.

Central to the rapid growth of the republic was the Dutch attachment to freedom and liberty. This was exemplified by the Utrecht Union of 1579, which placed the seven provinces under an elected parliament, the States General, and the leadership of its elected Stadtholder, Willem of Orange, and after 1584 to that of his son Maurice, also the Stadtholder. Medieval economic restrictions were lifted, and the concept of free trade was introduced. This freedom to trade, it could be argued, also promoted tolerance and freedom of ideas and encouraged the first Jews to settle and flourish in the republic.

The rise of this Jewish community parallels the rise of the republic. The histories of the Dutch nation and of Jewish society are remarkably similar. The Netherlands, a small country geographically, achieved greatness, while the Jewish community, small in number, also prospered and contributed significantly to the prosperity and growth of the country. In 1654, the arrival of the *Peereboom* and the *St. Catrina* reflected the accomplishments and ambitions of the “Golden Age.”

The largely Protestant Dutch nation liberated itself from Spanish Catholic domination by the early seventeenth century after an eighty-year war of independence. As mentioned, the Utrecht declaration of tolerance and religious freedom attracted Jews to the republic; they began arriving sometime before 1597, when the first Amsterdam congregation, Beth Ya’acob (House of Jacob), was established. Its synagogue opened in 1614, joining two others formed in 1604 and 1609. It was not that authorities or the people of the Netherlands gladly welcomed these largely Spanish-Portuguese (Sephardic) Jews or the east European Jews who joined them, particularly after 1648; but it was generally recognized by those like Usselinx that members of this community took part in the vital business activity of the East and West India Companies’s ventures and were “among the earliest seventeenth century contributors to the prosperity of the Netherlands in general and Amsterdam in particular.” Officials in Amsterdam made certain such important citizens were not lured to neighboring and competing cities, such as Haarlem or Leiden.¹³

There are still other reasons for the migration to New Amsterdam. With the end of the first Anglo-Dutch War on April 5, 1654, the Dutch were made to pay huge damages to the victorious English, including loss of trade in the Orient. During the war, the building of Amsterdam’s Stadt Huys (city hall)

halted, grass grew in the streets, and begging — almost unknown earlier — became very common. This economic downturn affected decision making. Perhaps poor economic conditions were also a consideration in the minds of the Amsterdam *parnasim* (Jewish religious leaders) in support of colonization. In January 1655, they called attention to the fact that the company had offered land free to immigrants under their 1650 “Freedoms and Exemptions” and that loyal citizens, like Jews, would help pay taxes and increase trade and population. The French and English, perhaps reluctantly, permitted Jews in their colonies. Why not the West India Company? Such arguments were successful, and except for the twenty-three who again did not come directly from Holland, all others probably had required passports.¹⁴ This act of 1650 also stipulated that free individuals obtaining land would have a year to put it under cultivation, and this perhaps mitigated against Jewish settlement. Jews, it seems, did not become farmers.¹⁵

The West India Company’s interest in its colonial possessions was, as mentioned, primarily one of trade and profit and, perhaps secondarily, settlement. Still, as Usselinx suggested, increasing population could be turned into assets. However, New Netherland was a problematic colony from the start, despite its possibilities, and few people — including, of course, Jews — bothered to make the Atlantic voyage.

The region had been “discovered” in 1609 by an Englishman, Henry Hudson, sailing for the Dutch East India Company. The 1497 voyage of John Cabot, who was employed by Henry VII, established England’s initial claim to this part of the New World; Hudson’s discovery solidified it. There was no such right of discovery for the republic, though a number of merchant explorers, such as Adriaen Block, established the first settlements in New Netherland. Still, neighboring English colonies, Massachusetts Bay and Connecticut to the north and Virginia and Maryland to the south, were constant reminders of a threatening English presence. For the English, the Dutch were interlopers. It could be argued that the States General, perhaps aware of a sense of being trespassers as well as having to face rising financial costs, never really fought to retain their possession. The New Netherland Company in 1620 suggested moving four hundred families to New Netherland, but the Dutch Admiralty advised rejection of the proposal as “it might make a bad impression in England and France.” Stuyvesant was concerned about the English, especially from pressure from Connecticut. Therefore, just before a peaceful surrender in 1664, he asked for an overall settlement of boundary disputes between the Dutch and English colonies. Such agreement, reached in 1650, led to the loss of the Connecticut Valley and eastern Long Island. No clear States General mandate was issued for New Netherland — at least none that the republic was willing to fight for. Only just before surrender did Stuyvesant ask for a charter containing the great seal of the States General, an image of authority “which [the] Englishman commonly dotes upon



One of the earliest Jewish communities in the western hemisphere was established on the island of Curaçao in the seventeenth century. (Courtesy American Jewish Archives)

like an idol.” It was not done. The West India Company, with interests in the Caribbean and southern Africa, had little money or desire to defend the colony. It paid few dividends to shareholders. In 1674, at the time of reorganization, investors received but 30 percent of their deposits, though creditors were paid in full.

The precarious hold of the company on its territory was particularly tested by the surrounding English colonies, especially in the spring and early summer of 1654. Rumors of possible invasion by English forces added to deeply felt unease and a need for help. On July 7, 1654, the directors wrote to Stuyvesant that in “these dangerous times a good quantity of ammunition of war may be sent to them, among which some muskets of 3½ feet in length to be distributed in time of need among the citizens.” This was probably in response to the concern of the director general on news of the arrival of four English warships in Boston and that “the English, living among and under us, would we believe, enter into a plot with our enemies to our great disadvantage.” The letter was sent on May 30, 1654.¹⁶

Stuyvesant wanted to prevent the ship *Koning Solomon* (*King Solomon*) from leaving, as it would weaken defenses by carrying away one thousand to two thousand pounds of gunpowder together with gunners. While the company would profit by sailing of the vessel, “people here would be unhappy.”¹⁷ War or its possibility surely deterred immigration. However, on June 15, 1654, news of the April Peace Treaty with England was received, and immediately the yacht *de Hoen* (*Hen*) was sent to Curaçao. The panic was over for a time and normal trade and commerce resumed. By July 27, the *Koning Solomon* was about to leave for the Fatherland, and by August, the barque *D’Zwaluw* arrived from Virginia. Earlier, the barque *De Jonge Raaf* arrived from the West Indies. The company directors wrote to Stuyvesant and his council to expect the ships *Peereboom* and *Gelderse Bloem* together with “a party of boys and girls from the orphan asylum here [Amsterdam] making first a trial of 50 persons,” this to show

“our zeal in increasing the population but you also must promote cultivation of soil and not rely on English neighbors.”¹⁸ And, it could be added, reduce economic problems in the republic.

The arrival of the *Peereboom* with seeming orphans and some Jewish merchants was a result of the war’s end, the urging of the Amsterdam Kahal (Congregation), changing economic and social conditions, and the desire of the company to increase, perhaps as Usselinx had suggested, population and settlement. For example, a year later, on May 27, 1655, the burgomasters and regents of the city of Amsterdam wrote to the “Noble, Honorable, Wise, Prudent, Very Discreet Sir, Petrus Stuyvesant,” again informing him that, with the West India Company’s consent, some children were being sent from the almshouse to “increase the population of New-Netherland.” Thus, “taking a burden” away from Amsterdam authorities, they requested that the youths be treated “kindly” to the advantage of the company and the children.¹⁹ Despite the arrival of orphans, whose numbers are not certain, and a small increase in immigration, the directors were not successful in maintaining control of the province.

Even with its various problems, Amsterdam was still Europe’s chief financial center. Its free-market economy produced a vast commercial center where French wines, colonial sugar, and Swedish copper were found in endless quantity. Investment capital was readily available. Loans in England could be had at 6 percent, secured by adequate bonds, while in the Netherlands, loans were at 3 ½ percent without “pawn or pledge.” Surely, low-interest rates stimulated the possibilities of the western Atlantic settlement. In 1656, Jews were about 4 percent of the chief investors in the company; by 1658, they were 6 ½ percent. Portuguese-Jewish merchants were of vital importance to the Dutch economy, especially in centering the profitable sugar trade in Amsterdam.²⁰ Maps by Lucas Wagenaar, Nicolas Visscher, and other contemporary cartographers were often decorated with views that depicted the abundant richness of the colony in vivid, complimentary detail. New Netherland was shown as a thriving, flourishing province, full of promise. For the Dutch in the mid-seventeenth century, as well as for their Jewish compatriots, it was their “Golden Age,” and all was attainable.

In early 1655, or just possibly late 1654, still another group of Jews arrived in New Amsterdam, all from the republic, all probably granted passports partly as a result of the influence of the Amsterdam *parnasim*. Many had been in Brazil and were part of the 1654 exodus. One, Jacob Cohen Henriquez, was the son of principal investor Abraham Cohen, alias Francisco Vaez de Leon. While Cohen, accused of theft and smuggling, and many of the others did not stay very long, these early arrivals were surely influenced in their decision to go to New Amsterdam by their coreligionist West India Company shareholders.²¹ This must have also applied to those on the *Peereboom*.

Stuyvesant seems not to have objected to those on the *Peereboom* or those coming directly from Amsterdam. However, he did raise questions about the twenty-three in several letters, which were carried by the *Schaal* and the *Beer*. Two letters, dated September 22 and 25, 1654, were to the directors of the company asking, if not insisting, that “these new territories not be invaded” by people of the “Jewish race.” Another letter, dated October 27, was received via England. Stuyvesant’s writing came after the *Peereboom* arrival and seems to have been a reaction to the *St. Catrina*’s passengers. Stuyvesant used the same objections raised by Domine Megapolensis. The directors replied on April 26, 1655, stating that although they recognized these objections:

We observe that it would be unreasonable and unfair, especially because of the considerable loss sustained by the Jews in the taking of Brazil and also because of the large amount of capital, which they invested in shares of this Company. After many consultations we have decided and resolved upon a certain petition made by said Portuguese Jews, that they shall have permission to sail and trade in New Netherland and to live and remain there provided the poor among them shall not become a burden to the Company, or the community, but be supported by their own nation. You will govern yourself accordingly.²²

The Amsterdam *parnasim* had asked incoming Jews — the post-*Peereboom* and *St. Catrina* arrivals — to provide financial aid to the twenty-three indigent Jews. As a group, however, they were primarily interested in possibilities of commercial enterprise.²³ Isaac Israel became active in trade on the Delaware River, as did David Ferera and Joseph d’Acosta, a major shareholder in the company. They dealt in furs, cattle, butter, cheese, tobacco, cloth, and lumber. Ferera bought and sold tobacco in Maryland. D’Acosta was an agent in March 1655 for a newly formed Gilles Verbrugge and Co., engaged in trade between New Netherland and Amsterdam.²⁴

Though Jews asked for permission to erect a synagogue, Stuyvesant did not grant it, and this issue was never pursued. No evident congregation was established, and these early arrivals appear not to be the “Founding Fathers of Congregation Shearith Israel.” Abraham de Lucena, a leader of the last group, had a “Sefer Torah” (holy scroll) given to him by the Amsterdam community, but there was little need for it. De Lucena left New Amsterdam soon after arrival and returned the scroll to its donors.²⁵

Stuyvesant’s dislike of these new immigrants might have also stemmed in part from some Jewish experience in Curaçao. In 1651, a letter by the company directors to Stuyvesant, where he was governor-general of the island, directed him to be aware of one Jan de Illan, who was Jewish, as were his associates, and was under contract to bring a “considerable number of people” to settle on

the island. They wrote that de Illan meant only to trade to the West Indies and the mainland. De Illan instead turned to exporting horses and timber and not importing people. The contract appeared to have been a subterfuge. Surely the incident reinforced Stuyvesant's suspicions and dislike.

Despite the possibilities and wonders described in Van der Donck's books, the dream of success was quickly dispelled for all of the *Peereboom* passengers except for Levy, as well as for all of those on the *St. Catrina* and for the Abraham de Lucena, Salvador d'Andrada, and Joseph d'Acosta travelers. Possibly the last arrived on the ship *Gevelekte Koe* (*Spotted Cow*), Pieter Jansen skipper, but more likely they were on the ship *Great Christofel* (*Great Christopher*), Willem Tomassen skipper, which was in port by spring 1655. The de Lucena voyagers first appear in records on March 1, 1655, when Sheriff Cornelis Van Tienhoven brought "Abram de La Sina, a Jew into court claiming the merchant had kept his store open during the sermon and sold by retail," a privilege reserved for burghers. Tienhoven asked for a fine of six hundred guilders and deprivation of trade. He also declared that Jews arriving last year from the West Indies (those on the *St. Catrina*) and "now from the Fatherland must depart forthwith." The court decided to let the resolution "take its course."²⁶ David de Ferera and Salvador d'Andrada were sued on May 5, 1655, for payment of freight shipped on the vessel arriving in 1655 from Amsterdam. All left after a troubled stay a year or two later.²⁷ Possibly, a sense that the colony would fall to mounting English pressure also hastened their departure.

It would also appear that Jacques de la Motthe of the *St. Catrina* remained in New Amsterdam after the September arrival of his ship. On March 15, 1655, he appeared before the Court of Burgomasters and Schepens as defendant in a suit brought by Tienhoven. He was asked to give evidence in a case involving adultery.²⁸ Why would de la Motthe remain in port? However, he did leave soon after, as did the others, except for Levy. Did he then depart aboard the *St. Catrina*?

In Summary

Like de la Motthe, none of the twenty-three and none of those with de Lucena stayed very long in the province. Only Asser Levy of those on the *Peereboom* remained, and he died in New York in 1682. By 1664, seemingly none of the original 1654–1655 arrivals, except Levy, were present to see and accept the surrender to the English. These were not settlers. They did not seek to establish a community²⁹ but were drawn by possibilities of trade, the urging of the Amsterdam Jewish community, perhaps fear of plague in that city, and possibly the rhetoric of Dutch expansionists, such as Usselinx or Van der Donck. These few chose first to voyage to New Amsterdam but then to take their leave. The company also chose to surrender and leave. However, as a community, the Dutch inhabitants remained together with their property, customs, language,

and religion. The company's dreams and hopes were lost in the face of reality. For Jews, this was also an adventure that failed.

Many questions remain about the arrival of these first few. Why exactly did they choose 1654? Why not 1644 or 1638 or indeed any other year? Why choose this small, newly founded community at the edge of a vast, unknown wilderness? Was their decision by chance, choice, or both? What was the community's response to the refugees from Brazil or to those from Amsterdam? Unfortunately, those involved seemingly left no extant letters or journals or any account of their experience. Answers to questions raised by historians were far from the minds of participants. Still, with material now available, perhaps some reasonable assumptions can be made that might shed some light on a time long past. Perhaps, more evidence in Dutch archives will come forward, and some of these basic queries can be answered. Asser Levy came from Vilna and conducted business in Germany. What can be found in relevant records regarding Levy and other early arrivals? Obviously, it is important to do archival research and use primary sources where possible instead of depending on secondary information and stories. Using the Dutch name *St. Catrina* instead of the usually accepted French *St. Catherine* or *St. Charles* is a case in point.

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Notes

¹Ketel was probably the skipper since in April he had agreed to command the *Peereboom*, although Jacob Jansz Huys, in December 1654 while in New Amsterdam, agreed to sail the vessel to the West Indies. See Gemeente Archief Amsterdam Inv. fol. 145, April 25, 1654; Berthold Fernow, *The Records of New Amsterdam 1653–1674*, Volume 1, New York: The Knickerbocker Press, 1897, pp. 274, 278 (hereinafter “*R.N.A.*”); Zvi Loker, *Jews in the Caribbean in Colonial Times* (Jerusalem-4 N.D.), p. 63; Teunis G. Bergen, “List of Early Immigrants to New Netherland,” *The New York Genealogical and Biographical Record*, Volume XIV, July, 1883, p. 181 (wrongly cites July 8, 1654, as the date of the arrival of *Peereboom*); Adriaen Van Laer translations of New York Colonial Manuscripts, Reel III, pp. 625–628, microfilm in the State Library, Albany, New York; Peter Padfield, *Tides of Empire*, Volume II, London: Routledge Kegan Paul, 1979, pp. 187, 233; Berthold Fernow, *Documents Relating to the History of Early Colonial Settlement*, Albany, New York: Weed Parsons and Co., 1883, pp. 315, 341, 484, 486, *passim* (hereinafter “*Colonial Settlement*”). The first mention of the name of the ship *St. Catrina* is in the original manuscript of the Records of New Amsterdam in the Municipal Archives, 31 Chambers Street, New York, although Fernow first translates the name as *St. Charles*, *R.N.A.*, pp. 240, 241, 244. Captain de la Motthe had written a petition in French. This does not confirm that the ship was French. There were many French-speaking Protestants (Huguenots and Walloons) in the Netherlands. There is no record of a *St. Catherine* in French archives (see Wiznitzer reference below).

²*R.N.A.*, Volume I, pp. 240-244; Jacob R. Marcus, *The Colonial American Jew 1492–1776*, Volume 1, Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1970, pp. 215, 216, *passim*; Samuel Oppenheim, *The Early History of the Jews in New York 1654–1664*, New York: American Jewish Historical Society, 1909, pp. 37–43 (hereinafter “*Early History*”). Oppenheim believes there was a direct voyage of what he calls the *St. Charles* from Brazil. For a contrary view, see Arnold Wiznitzer, “The Exodus from Brazil to New Amsterdam of the Jewish Pilgrim Fathers 1654,” *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society*, Volume XLIV, Philadelphia, 1954, pp. 88, 90 (hereinafter

"Exodus"), referring to the *St. Catherine* and a Caribbean voyage. Wiznitzer is very critical of Oppenheim. Egon and Frieda Wolff, "The Problem of the First Jewish Settlers in New Amsterdam 1654," *Studia Rosenthaliana*, Volume XV, August, 1981, pp. 176-177, strongly support the idea of a voyage from Surinam to New Amsterdam for the twenty-three Jews.

³Samual Oppenheim, "More About Jacob Barsimon, the First Jewish Settler in New York," *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society*, Volume XVIII, Philadelphia, 1910, pp. 39-44 (hereinafter "Jacob Barsimon"); Leo Hershkowitz, "New Amsterdam's Twenty-Three Jews — Myth or Reality," in *Hebrew and the Bible in America*, Shalom Goldman, ed., Hanover, New Hampshire: Brandeis University Press, 1993, pp. 172-173. The author finds no evidence to support the twenty-three figure. Wiznitzer cites his own publication of Recife's *Congregation Zur Israel* to support his assertion, but Levy does not appear on any such list. "Exodus," pp. 92-93; Arnold Wiznitzer, *The Records of the Earliest Jewish Community in the New World*, New York: American Jewish Historical Society, 1954, pp. 50-52; Arnold Wiznitzer, *Jews in Colonial Brazil*, New York, 1960, pp. 138, 176-177. They also find Levy in Brazil and one of the "twenty-three." For a list of immigrants into New Netherland, see "A List of Early Immigrants to New Netherland," New York Genealogical and Biographical Record, Volume XIV, New York, 1883, pp. 181-190. Aboaf and Barsimon are noted on pages 182-183.

⁴Jonathan Israel, *The Dutch Republic*, Oxford, England: Oxford Clarendon Press, 1995, p. 658; S.M. Dubnow, *History of the Jews in Russia and Poland*, Volume II, Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1916, pp. 144-152.

⁵*Ecclesiastical Records of the State of New York*, Volume I, Hugh Hastings, ed., Albany, New York: James B. Lyon, State Printer, 1901-1916, pp. 335-336; Oppenheim, *Early History*, p. 2; H.S. van der Straaten, *Mawrits de Braziliaan*, Den Haag, the Netherlands: Van Soeren, 1998, p. 51. Translation and reference, as well as many helpful suggestions, are provided by Joep de Koning.

⁶There is an early account by Saul Mortera of a French ship rescuing the twenty-three from the hands of Spanish pirates. Often accepted by historians, this odd tale involving the *St. Catherine* or *St. Charles* has little substance. Wiznitzer, "Exodus," pp. 80-86, 89, 91.

⁷Isaac Da Costa, *Israel and Gentile*, London: J. Nisbet and Co., 1850, p. 449; Pierre M. Netscher, *Les Hollandais au Brésil*, The Hague: Belinfante Freres, 1853, p. 163.

⁸"Exodus," p. 86. Under Dutch law, Jews were considered, at least in part, as a separate entity governed by their own laws. But as citizens they were protected by Dutch law. Jacob A. Schiltkamp, *De Geschiedens van Het Notariaat in Het Octrooigebied van De West-Indische Compagnie*, S'Gravenhage, the Netherlands: H.L. Smits, 1964, pp. 175-181. I would like to thank Dr. Schiltkamp for his insight and helpful corrections in regard to this article.

⁹C. Ligtenberg, *Willem Usselinx*, Utrecht: A. Oosthoek, 1915 (Bijlage), p. cxvi. My thanks to Joep de Koning for this insightful information and translation. Amandus Johnson, *The Swedes on the Delaware 1638-1664*, Volume I, Philadelphia: International Printing Co., 1927, pp. 52-56. Angry at the company for not receiving proper recognition, Usselinx traveled to Sweden in 1624, where he met King Gustavus Adolphus and convinced him to establish a trading company in the New World. This expansion would not only defy Spanish power, but also add to the glory of Sweden even if on New Netherland property. Established was a short-lived New Sweden on the Delaware River. Herbert I. Bloom, *The Economic Activities of Jews of Amsterdam in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, New York: Kennikat Press, 1970, pp. 124, 125, 162.

¹⁰*A Description of the New Netherland*, Thomas F. O'Donnell, ed., Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1968, pp. xxxi-xxxix.

¹¹A new unpublished translation of the Van der Donck book, *Description*, by Diederik Willem Goedhuys, is preferable to those that came before. A manuscript copy is in the writer's possession. I would like to thank Russell Shorto for a copy of the translation.

¹²Jonathan Israel, *The Dutch Republic*, pp. 621, 625.

¹³F.J. Dubiez, *The Sephardi Community of Amsterdam* (C.F.L. Los, translator), Amsterdam: N.P. N.D., p. 5. For a thorough discussion of this subject, see Miriam Bodian, *Hebrews of the Portuguese Nation*, Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1996, pp. 51–75; Henri and Barbara van der Zee, *A Sweet and Alien Land*, New York: Viking Press, 1978, pp. 246–250; Marcus, I, p. 228; Odette Vlessing, “The Portuguese-Jewish Merchant Community in Seventeenth Century Amsterdam,” in *Entrepreneurs & Entrepreneurship in Early Modern Times*, Cle Lesger and Leo Noordegraaf, eds., Den Haag: Stichting Hollandse Historische Reeks, 1995, *passim*.

¹⁴Jonathan I. Israel, “The Jews of Dutch America,” in *The Jews and the Expansion of Europe to the West, 1450 to 1800*, Paolo Bernardini and Norman Fiering, eds., New York: Berghahn Books, 1997, pp. 341, 344; “Jacob Barsimon” *passim*; *The Jewish Experience in America*, Abraham J. Karp, ed., Volume I, New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1969, pp. 37–38; Van der Zee, p. 250.

¹⁵E.B. O’Callaghan, *Documents Relative to the Colonial History of the State of New York*, Volume I, Albany: Weed, Parsons and Co., 1858, pp. 400–401 (hereinafter “*Documents Relative*”).

¹⁶*Ibid.*, Volume II, pp. 234–237; C.R. Boxer, *The Dutch Seaborne Empire: 1600–1800*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1965, p. 49; Simon Hart, *The Prehistory of the New Netherland Company*, Amsterdam: City of Amsterdam Press, 1959, p. 37; Mrs. Schuyler Van Rensselaer, *History of the City of New York in the Seventeenth Century*, Volume I, New York: The Macmillan Company, 1909, p. 505.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 267, 268.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, p. 279; *Year Book of the Holland Society*, New York: Knickerbocker Press, 1900, p. 174.

¹⁹Berthold Fernow, *Colonial Settlement*, Volume XIV, Albany: Weed, Parsons and Co., 1883, p. 325. It is not known if or how many orphans were sent. In 1655, an Orphan Master Court was established in New Amsterdam. Berthold Fernow, *The Minutes of the Orphan Masters Court of New Amsterdam*, Volume I, New York: Francis P. Harber, 1902, pp. vi, vii.

²⁰Bloom, p. 126; Vlessing, pp. 224, 225, and 233.

²¹Isaac Emmanuel, “New Light on Early American Jewry,” *American Jewish Archives*, Volume VIII, January, 1955, p.15; Padfield, p. 7; Oppenheim, *Early History*, p. 13; Hershkovitz, “New Amsterdam’s Twenty-Three Jews,” pp. 176–177; “Jacob Barsimon,” pp. 38–39.

²²*Documents Relative*, Volume XIV, p. 315; Bloom, *Economic Activities*, p. 126; Marcus, *Colonial American Jew*, Volume I, pp. 218, 219.

²³Oppenheim, “Jacob Barsimon,” pp. 39, 40.

²⁴Hershkovitz, “New Amsterdam’s Twenty-Three Jews,” p. 176.

²⁵This view, stated by David De Sola Pool and accepted by the present congregation Shearith Israel, appears to have no basis in fact. David and Tamar De Sola Pool, *An Old Faith in the New World*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1955, p. 3; Isaac S. Emmanuel, “New Light on Early American Jewry,” *American Jewish Archives*, Volume VIII, January, 1955, p. 17.

²⁶*R.N.A.*, Volume I, pp. 336, 360, 309. The skipper of the *Spotted Cow* appeared in court on August 9, 1655, brought there by Joseph d’Acosta seeking to recover claims on damaged goods “spoiled” in the vessel. Since the de Lucena group, including d’Acosta, arrived in New Amsterdam no later than March 1655, the *Spotted Cow* seems not to have been the vessel they used. Another vessel, the *Balance* from Amsterdam, arrived in mid-August 1655. The ship *Swarte Arent (Black Eagle)* was also in port from April to August 1655.

²⁷*R.N.A.*, Volume I, pp. 290–91, 313; *Documents Relative*, Volume XIV, p. 135.

²⁸*Ibid.*, Volume I, p. 298.

²⁹Hershkovitz, “New Amsterdam’s Twenty-Three Jews,” pp. 179–180; Hershkovitz, “Original Inventories of Early New York Jews (1682–1763),” *American Jewish History*, Volume XC, September, 2002, p. 244.