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The Jewish pilgrims to America, 1954.

For "Girl Scout Leader"

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Apr. 2, 1954

The Jewish Pilgrims to America

Dr. Abba Hillel Silver

The Temple, Cleveland, Ohio

This year the Jewish community of the United States, numbering over five million souls, is celebrating the Tercentenary of its establishment. In 1654 a group of twenty-three Jews from Brazil, where the Portuguese had defeated the Dutch, were now forced to flee from threatened persecution and sought sanctuary in Nieuw Amsterdam, now New York, which was under Dutch rule. These twenty-three Jews were of Spanish and Portuguese origin. Spain and Portugal had expelled the Jews from their countries at the close of the sixteenth century, and wherever these governments succeeded in establishing their power, they pursued the Jews with relentless intolerance.

Nieuw Amsterdam in 1654 boasted a population of a thousand souls, among whom were people of quite a number of nationalities. Here was the first Jewish settlement established in the United States. Shortly thereafter, other Jewish settlers came to Delaware and Maryland, to Newport, Philadelphia, Boston, and Charleston. Jews were thus among the early settlers of our country. Jews were also with Columbus on his first journey of discovery.

The beginnings of the Jewish community in the United States were thus very humble, as were the beginnings of all peoples who came to these shores, either fleeing from persecution or seeking opportunities in a new world. Steadily through the years, and more rapidly in the last three-quarters of a century, their numbers increased. The Jews shared eagerly in the growing and evolving life of America. Coming from many parts of the world and from many backgrounds, they soon became one in outlook and in hopefulness, true children of the New World, and, in service and devotion, loyal and proud citizens of the United States. They served America in peace and in war. Jewish officers and men took part in the Revolutionary War, the War of 1812, the Civil War, the Spanish-American War, and the two World Wars.

Many Jews served with rare distinction, were honored for their bravery, and many of them lay down their lives for their beloved country and for the principles of freedom and democracy.

Jews have made valuable contributions, in some instances outstanding contributions, to the material prosperity of the United States, to its political and social progress, its labor and industry, its arts, science, literature, and music. They have supported generously all the philanthropic and social agencies and institutions of their communities - Jewish and non-Jewish alike. They have been, through the years, not an unimportant part of that colorful, unique, and noble mosaic which is America.

Nor have they ignored their religious heritage. They have remained faithful to it. Upon the shores of the new land they built their synagogues and temples, their religious schools and institutions of learning which have embodied the high ethical ideals of Judaism, the oldest monotheistic faith of mankind, from which other great religions received so much of their inspiration. The Jews of America did not isolate themselves from their fellow Jews, who, living in other parts of the world, in lands of persecution and depression, stood in need of their fraternal solicitude and help. They came to their defense when they were attacked. They poured out their generosity when tragedy overtook them.

It is with pride and with humble gratitude to a kind Providence that the Jewish community of the United States now celebrates the 300th anniversary of its establishment on these gracious shores, praying to the Father of all nations to continue to favor it with His abundant grace and to enable it to serve in the future as in the past their beloved country and all its noble institutions.

Upon the Liberty Bell, now in the city of Philadelphia, are inscribed these words: "Proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants

thereof." These words are from the Book of Leviticus, XXV, 10, part of that Bible which the Jewish settlers treasured and brought to the land which is now the United States of America.



The Jewish Pilgrims to America

by *Abba Hillel Silver*
Rabbi, The Temple, Cleveland, Ohio



Nieuw Amsterdam about the year 1650.

EDITOR'S NOTE: From time to time, the LEADER tries to give information about events that may be of interest to Girl Scout groups. This year marks the 300th anniversary of the first Jewish settlement in this country, so we asked Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver to tell our readers about it.

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