

Independence Day J-Vault: Rev. Gershom Mendez Seixas

Posted At : July 4, 2011 12:20 PM | Posted By : Seth Chalmer

Related Categories: J-Vault, clergy, history, war, holidays, religion and state



Happy Independence Day! Today, a special patriotic installment of the J-Vault:

Rev. Gershom Mendez Seixas "The Patriot Jewish Minister of the American Revolution" (1905)

In this excerpt from the 1905 American Jewish Yearbook, N. Taylor Phillips profiles Rev. Gershom Mendez Seixas, the Hazzan during the American Revolution of **Congregation Shearith Israel**, the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue (which happens to be the oldest *congregation*, though not nearly the oldest synagogue building, in the USA).

...He was an ardent patriot during the preliminaries to the struggle for independence, and it is related that when at length the crisis came, rather than continue the Synagogue under British auspices, he closed the doors of the edifice, which act was fiercely contested, even families being split apart as the result of it. Many of the members of the Congregation were merchants in active business in New York City, and their interests naturally were with the Tories rather than with the feeble little band of patriots endeavoring to secure freedom for the Colonies. When the patriot members of the Congregation were about to flee from the city upon the appearance of the British fleet in New York Bay in August, 1776, preparatory to the occupation of the city by Lord Howe, the Rev. Gershom Mendez Seixas preached a sermon in English, in which he feelingly stated that the service

on that occasion might be the last to be held in the historic old edifice situated in Mill Street (now South William Street), then approaching the half-century mark, and we are told that it was delivered with such force and eloquence that tears were shed by all present, men and women alike...

...[T]aking with him the sacred objects of holy worship, [he] established at Philadelphia the Congregation **Mickve Israel**, a majority of the members being patriot refugees from New York...

[Note: Mikve Israel's own web page traces the congregation's history back to before Rev. Seixas's arrival. [See this page.](#)]



GERSHOM MENDEZ SEIXAS

...On the inauguration of President Washington as the first President of the United States, at New York, 1789, the Rev. Mr. Seixas with thirteen other clergymen of various denominations participated in the ceremonies, which notable fact may serve to remind American citizens for all time that our republic is founded on the very broadest principles, tolerating every race and creed, and American Israelites should ever recall with pride that the lives of Hebrews like the Rev. Gershom Mendez Seixas and his brothers, who cheerfully offered their lives and fortunes for the establishment of American independence, give to their brethren throughout the world a right of asylum on these shores which no truehearted or grateful American will ever have the temerity to challenge...

[Download this publication...](#)

