



## Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

## WIERNIK'S "JEWS IN AMERICA"

*History of the Jews in America.* From the Period of the Discovery of the New World to the Present Time. By PETER WIERNIK. New York, JEWISH PRESS PUBLISHING COMPANY, 1912. pp. xxiv + 449.

THE book before us is a volume of about 430 pages in which the writer proposes to give a history of the Jews not only in the United States but on the whole American continent, from the period of the discovery down to the present day. To do anything like justice to so important and so large a subject, would require years of study and of careful research. This the author does not pretend to have done but tells us frankly in his preface that his work has been compiled in large measure from the publications of the American Jewish Historical Society and from the Jewish Encyclopedia.

While therefore the book is in no sense a scholar's history, it is, despite its many shortcomings, a useful work, presenting to the public a considerable number of facts and data concerning the history of the Jews on American soil. Though merely a compilation, it has the merit of having arranged a considerable mass of material in logical order so as to make a fairly connected narrative, and while lacking the attractive style of Judge Daly's earlier work it has the advantage of including a large quantity of material discovered since Judge Daly's day and at the same time of covering a much more extensive field.

In one of his famous essays, Lord Macaulay mentions three qualities as the most important for the true writer of history. "Great diligence in examining authorities, great judgment in weighing testimony and great impartiality." Judged by any such standard as that, it must be confessed that Mr. Wiernik cannot be considered an historian, and it is unfortunate that he has se-

lected so high sounding a title for the work under consideration. Our author calls special attention to the fact that he has not made any original research, and we will now endeavor to point out the logical result of such a course.

The first third of the book relates to the history of the Jews up to the period of the Civil War. This material is taken practically without exception from the volumes of the Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society, a series of some twenty volumes containing original essays and notes by students of American Jewish history. Such a series, in its very nature, must be fragmentary. Many subjects of even great importance have never been written up, not because they were deemed unimportant but rather because students working in that field were few, and each followed some special line of research. Thus while the colonial and revolutionary period in the older States have been covered by a number of essays, the same periods in other sections have not been investigated at all. The early history of most of our Middle and Western States has scarcely even been touched upon, though it offers a most attractive and fruitful field and though much of the material is readily available, since many of these States have been publishing their early records.

Anyone, therefore, who undertakes to write a history of the Jews of the entire continent, or even of the United States alone, cannot simply rely upon the essays found in the publications referred to, but must, by his own research, fill in the very large gaps which exist and supply equally complete sketches of those States and those parts of our country which have not yet been written up. This is what Mr. Wiernik has utterly failed to do, and instead of calling attention to the fact, he has simply used the published material, leaving the gaps, which in many cases are enormous. His book thereby creates the erroneous impression that Jews are new comers in considerable portions of our country and that their history in those parts dates only from the last quarter of the nineteenth century, whereas even moderate research might well prove the contrary.

Mr. Wiernik assumes that the volumes from which his compilation has been made, contain all available material on the subject

and that because he could find no published essay in connection with the history of certain States, there were, therefore, no Jews in those parts. For this reason that part of his book which deals with the largest area of the United States is covered by some 20 pages only, and the activity of Jews in connection with the War of 1812 and the Mexican War is dismissed with about two pages, though we know that very respectable essays might well be written on both these topics.

Our author is equally unfortunate in weighing his testimony. He overlooks the fact that the books from which he draws his material were not written by one and the same hand but that some of the articles were written by persons more scholarly than others; that while some of the essays give numerous citations of authority, others are based largely on tradition and hearsay. To all this mass of information he accords equal weight and so repeats statements which have little or no foundation in fact. Among the more striking instances of such unverified statements we find that "Abrabanel assisted Columbus financially," that Hayman Levy was the largest fur trader in the colonies, that Manuel Mordecai Noah contributed large sums to the Revolutionary War and that the letter of the Jewish community of Newport to Washington "bears unmistakable traces of having been originally composed in Rabbinical Hebrew." In the same way David S. Kaufman is claimed as a Jew and Rev. S. M. Isaacs is credited with having introduced English sermons in the Synagogue, though it is well known that Gershom Seixas delivered English sermons not only in his own synagogue before and after the Revolutionary period but even preached in St. Paul's Church, New York, by invitation.

The work contains comparatively few citations, and while this may be pardoned because it is intended for popular reading, yet it is to be regretted that where citations *are* given, they are frequently made in connection with matters of little importance, while statements of real importance are not so fortified. Occasionally too, the work of one writer is credited to another.

Broadly speaking, the author divides his book into three parts; the first, which he calls the Spanish and Portuguese Period, and to which he devotes 128 pages, deals with the participation of

Jews in the discovery of the New World, their settlements in Mexico, Peru, Brazil, Guiana, the West Indies and finally their settlement in New York and the English colonies. This is followed by a short chapter on the services of Jews in the Revolution which covers some seven pages, unfortunately omitting some important names while dismissing others with but two of three lines, and in conclusion there is a short discussion of religious liberty, an account of the Jews in the early days of the republic and their service in the War of 1812. The period is so named presumably because the earliest Jewish settlers were in large degree of Spanish and Portuguese origin.

The second portion of the book is named the German Period, and includes the Jewish settlements in the Mississippi Valley, the Middle West, and the Pacific Coast. Almost a whole chapter is devoted to a history of the Jews in Texas, which in turn is followed by a most interesting account of the Jewish Reform Movement, in the discussion of which a sympathetic sketch of Isaac Leeser is deserving of note. Some 25 pages are devoted to the Jews in connection with the Civil War and this portion concludes with an account of the Jews of the United States from the end of that struggle down to 1880.

The rest of the book is devoted largely to "The Russian Period of Immigration," which is given in greater detail than necessary. A whole chapter is devoted to the Russian Passport Question, another to Legislation on Immigration, and considerable space is allotted to accounts of the Russian Massacres and the formation of the American Jewish Committee.

Throughout the work one is struck by a lack of historical perspective, which becomes more evident as the reader proceeds. Contemporary events and personages with whom the author possibly has personal acquaintance, loom up big entirely out of proportion to more important events and worthies of the past. By way of illustration the account of the Jews in the American Revolution covers but seven pages in which the notable career of Francis Salvador, a Jewish member of the Provincial Congress of South Carolina, is dismissed with three lines, while considerable space is allotted to the Roumanian Question, the Hay Note, the Kishinev Massacre and to contemporary Yiddish writers little

known to the general Jewish public. The latter are often given an entire page of biography. This lack of historical perspective also leads our author to devote a whole chapter to Lincoln and the Jews, simply because there existed a mass of information on the subject.

Mr. Wiernik has undoubtedly a sincere desire to be impartial, but the fact remains that his readers get the general impression that the Jew in America is really the Russian or possibly the Slavonic Jew. To him, more space is given than to others, and more important still, he is more sharply focused, so that we almost feel that the author's real purpose was to give an account of the Slavonic Jew in America, and that the rest of the book is largely by way of introduction. Though the history of the Russian Jew in this country is a matter within the memory of most men now living, yet the portion of space devoted to him is entirely out of proportion to that brief period. Most minute accounts are given of the founding of Russian and Polish synagogues, much space devoted to lists and biographies of their rabbis, scholars, and leaders, and many of the names and biographies detailed are those of contemporaries of whom the general public has scarcely ever heard, while even among contemporaries other names of considerable influence are but casually mentioned.

From an historical point of view, it would have been preferable had the author drawn a sharp distinction between the Jew as a religious entity and the Jew as an American citizen. We cannot admit that a long list of the names of synagogues and their founders constitutes a history of the Jews in America, any more than an account of a number of Catholic churches organized by Irishmen would constitute a history of the Irish in America. A small group of Jews, whose religious affiliations may be slight, may possibly have been more influential in American affairs than even a large group of strictly religious observers. It is a mistake therefore to give minute accounts of the founding and founders of synagogues, many of which have been of small importance even locally, and to permit these accounts to take up more space than events of wider scope. The maintaining of synagogues is but one of the activities of the Jew and though a most important one, yet in relation to the country at large, far more important than

a list of synagogues and rabbis, is bringing out strikingly the importance of the Jew as an economic factor, his influence in trade and commerce, in science and art, his recognition in the professions and other walks of life. In treating contemporary history it is far more important to bring out how great is the Jew's influence as a merchant, how large his proportion in our colleges, and even in dealing with individual Jews it is desirable not merely to bring out his services as a philanthropist among his own people, but his influence as the head of great interstate corporations, as the financier or perhaps as statesman or reformer, assisting in the building up of his city, his State, and the nation.

It is true in treating of the early American colonies Mr. Wiernik mentions the name of Rivera, Franks, Lopez and others, but he does not bring out in bold relief how important these Jews were to their environment. On the other hand the names of Synagogues and rabbis of purely local note, of Russian scholars and Yiddish writers, is given such undue prominence that the latter impress the reader far more than the accounts of the former.

The chapter dealing with the Jew in Art, in the Professions, in Science and Literature for instance should be among the most important chapters in the book. It is given about ten pages in all. Instead of mentioning the names of Da Ponte, Strakosch, Grau and Conried, who did so much for the entire American public in developing music, in introducing and maintaining grand opera in America, none of these names are even mentioned, nor are their achievements referred to; on the other hand we are given quite a long list of names of Yiddish actors and actresses with the dates of their birth and often of their arrival in America.

In connection with journalism also it seems a mistake in a work of 400 pages to devote considerable space to a list and to biographies of Yiddish journalists while entirely omitting to mention names like those of Isaac Harby and David Naar, of New Jersey, both prominent factors in their generation. While other great Jewish journalists are mentioned, no idea is given of the magnitude of their enterprises or the wide influence wielded by the stupendous journals they founded.

This lack of judgment is likewise evident in the illustrations contained in Mr. Wiernik's book. The selection is the more strik-

ing because pictures are perhaps the very first things the reader examines. Among the portraits of ministers, for instance, one wonders why Gershom Mendez Seixas, one of the incorporators and for over thirty years a trustee of Columbia College, is omitted. It is our impression that a few pictures of great American synagogues might have been included with advantage and substituted for some of the portraits.

Summing up, we must reiterate that Mr. Wiernik deserves commendation for his sincere effort to tell the story of the Jew in America in the form of a complete narrative. His work will be useful for presenting many interesting facts in Jewish history heretofore known to students only, and in showing that in the older States at least, the Jew is by no means a new-comer but has been a pioneer from the start. We appreciate the great labor involved in compiling a book of this kind and the difficulty under which an author labors who has not made original research and thereby loses that subtle something which, for want of a better name, may be called the atmosphere of history. While the book is perhaps only a newspaper man's compilation, it has considerable value in giving the first complete narrative of the coming of the Russian Jew, of his development on American soil, and in preserving data concerning Russian and Yiddish writers and rabbis whose names might otherwise be forgotten. From that point of view it is a distinct contribution while at the same time it supplies the need for a work that will teach Jews themselves something about the history of their people on American soil. From a broader point of view, however, the history of the Jew in America still remains to be written.

New York City

LEON HÜHNER