

They Came to Stay

PORTRAITS ETCHED IN STONE. Early Jewish Settlers, 1682-1831. By David de Sola Pool. Illustrated. 543 pp. New York: Columbia University Press. \$10.

By FRANCIS S. RONALDS

IN 1654 about twenty-three Sephardic Jews "reached the end of the inhabited earth called New Holland" and the following year petitioned for permission to purchase a burying ground, then showing that "they intended to remain in this part of the New World and throw in their lot with the new Colony."

Dr. David de Sola Pool, rabbi of the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue, has, in this history of the second oldest burial ground in New York—on New Bowery Street near Chatham Square—succeeded in producing a truly interesting bit of Americana. It goes without saying that the volume will be a collector's item in the library of every New Yorker with a genuine interest in the history and origins of Manhattan. But it will be particularly prized by descendants of those persons who were laid to rest in this "house of eternity," as well as by genealogists in quest of information.

This handsome volume is divided into two main sections;

Mr. Ronalds is director of the Morristown National Park.

The first is a narrative account of the cemetery's history, from the acquiring of the ground in 1682, until the last burial to be recorded, that of a child named Brandilla Isaacs on Feb. 4, 1833. The second portion of the book, comprising almost two-thirds of the whole, is devoted to short biographies of the 179 individuals known to have been buried in this hallowed ground. Excellent illustrations, maps and charts, genealogical tables, a glossary of Hebrew words used in the text and a bibliography of manuscript and published sources add to its usefulness.

The history of the cemetery depicts the growth of the Jewish community of New York from the original handful to "the greatest aggregation in Israel's story." New York City's Jewish Congregation Shearith Israel, founded in 1655, is the oldest Jewish community in North America, and for a century and three-quarters its cemeteries were the only Jewish burial places in the city.

THE cemetery played a part in the American defense of New York in 1776 as Gen. Charles Lee placed several of his guns in the "Jew Burying Ground," and among the graves today are those of eighteen Revolutionary soldiers. Other graves serve to memorialize men who them-



Illustration from "Portraits Etched in Stone,"
Chatham Square Cemetery.

selves, as well as many of their descendants, have played notable parts in the history of New York City.

The irresistible growth of the city gave scant respect to graveyards, and it is most remarkable that despite the all engulfing advance and rapid change of the city the cemetery is still there. Eighteenth-century maps show this old burying ground just beyond the city's

streets and houses, but soon after the Revolution the city spread all about and around it. In 1825 the Corporation of the City prohibited all burials south of Grand Street. In 1855 the cutting through of New Bowery Street made it necessary to remove some 256 graves. Nevertheless, this quiet spot still remains, "a sentimental triumph over the city's sheer utilitarian growth."

To Worship Freely

VIRGINIA'S MOTHER CHURCH, and the Political Conditions Under Which It Grew. Vol. II: The Story of the Anglican Church and the Development of Religion in Virginia, 1727-1814. By George M. Brydon. 688 pp. Philadelphia: Church Historical Society. \$10.

THE nearly ninety years, 1727-1814, covered by the second volume of G. M. Brydon's account of religion in Virginia were a crucial period, not only in the field of religion but in other cultural and political fields as well. In its specifically religious aspects it was a time when the established Anglican Church learned to co-exist, if not always harmoniously, with dissenting sects and after the Revolution to take its place, as the Episcopal Church, in a new nation.

Mr. Brydon states that "the great and essentially important goal to be attained by the state was to develop and put into effect a scheme of political life in which religion should be free, and every individual have full right and opportunity to worship God in his own way and according to his own beliefs." In moving toward this goal eighteenth-century Virginia served not only itself but the nation and generations yet to come. NABII K. BURGER.



In reply refer to:
158 WASO

UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
WASHINGTON 25, D. C.

Jewish Cemetery

Drawn
Leavesy with
October 15, 1952
The subject Oct 21, '52
ISR

Dr. Francis S. Ronalds, Superintendent
Morristown National Historical Park
Morristown, New Jersey

Dear Fran:

I have received your letter of October 11 in which you inquire regarding the manner of submission of the Jewish cemetery on Bowery Street to the Advisory Board and its coming meeting in November.

I discussed your comment with Director Wirth, and we are agreed that the project can be submitted in such a manner that if the Board does not feel able to approve the designation, no action for or against the project will be taken at this time. Of course, if the Board should approve the designation, this aspect would not arise. I am having copies made of that portion of your letter which deals with this matter, and I am sending a copy with this copy of my reply for the information of Regional Director Cox.

Sincerely yours,

Ronald F. Lee

Ronald F. Lee
Assistant Director

Copy to: Regional Director, Region One - with excerpts from incoming letter

Morrison
Copy referred to MLP: By Region One 10-6-52

File
In reply refer to:
158 WAGO-H

RECEIVED

OCT 8 - 1952
MORRISTOWN NATIONAL
HISTORICAL PARK

~~10/8/52~~
10/8/52
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Cemetery
ca. 1850
primary
Memorandum

To: Assistant Secretary Wolfsohn
From: Director, National Park Service
Subject: Chatham Square Cemetery

Pursuant to your request of August 29, we have made inquiries concerning the Chatham Square cemetery. The historical interest of this cemetery was called to the attention of this Service by Mr. Arthur Hays Sulzberger, publisher of the New York Times, last May. We then arranged for Dr. Francis S. Ronalds, Superintendent, Morristown National Historical Park, to examine the Chatham Square Cemetery and to confer with Dr. David de Sola Pool, who has made a special study of the cemetery and has a special interest in its preservation. We attach a copy of Dr. Ronalds' report of September 26.

The Chatham Square Cemetery has much historical interest. It is not the kind of area, however, which has been found in the past to lend itself to national historic site purposes. Before advising you further regarding the views of this Service, I should like to have the benefit of discussing the matter with the Advisory Board on National Parks, Historic Sites, Buildings and Monuments, which has scheduled a meeting for November 17-19, 1952.

(SGD) Conrad L. Wirth

Director

Attachment

Copy to: Regional Director, Region One (2)

Jewish Cemetery

September 26, 1952

Memorandum

To: Regional Director, Region One
From: Superintendent, Morristown National Historical Park
Subject: Report on old Jewish Cemetery in New York City

In accordance with instructions from Assistant Regional Director Tobin I am sending the original report to the Director. Unfortunately, I could obtain only one copy of the map showing the exact location of the Jewish Cemetery in relation to the City Hall and Brooklyn Bridge.

As soon as review copies are available Dr. Pool will give me one, which I will send on to the Director as an accompaniment to my report.

Francis S. Ronalds
Superintendent

Enclosures

September 26, 1952

Memorandum

To: Director
From: Superintendent, Morristown National Historical Park
Subject: Report on old Jewish Cemetery in New York City

Together with Dr. David de Sola Pool I twice visited the Jewish Cemetery on New Bowery Street and I have read in galley proof Dr. Pool's forthcoming work on the Cemetery. This book will be published by the University of Columbia Press and is part of the plans for the celebration of the three hundredth anniversary of the first settlement of Jews in this country. In 1654 their arrival in New York was reported by the fact that "they reached the end of the inhabited earth called New Holland."

The Jewish Cemetery is the second oldest burial ground in New York with an unbroken tradition. A portion of Trinity Churchyard is still older. The existing residual graveyard on the New Bowery is about 56 feet long and 50 feet wide, which is almost identical with the amount of land originally purchased "for a Jew Burying Place" in 1682.

The Jewish Cemetery in Newport was purchased in 1677, "thirty foot Long, Butting South West upon the Highway that Leads Down from Ye Stone Mill" (This could refer to the "Viking Tower" i.e. Arnold's Mill)

However the earliest tombstones at Newport date from 1761 while the oldest in New York is 1683. Many of the stones are quite interesting. For instance, one remarkable stone depicts the New York skyline of 1798. This is the grave of Dr. Walter J. Judah, who gave his life trying to save lives in the Yellow Fever Epidemic of that year. The story is written both in English and Hebrew. The English "dreadful contagion" was translated by Dr. Pool to read "the yellow fire."

As pointed out by Dr. Pool there are a number of Revolutionary soldiers buried here and in 1903 the American Scenic and Historic Preservation Society placed a bronze tablet on the entrance gate. These graves are decorated every Memorial Day and in 1932 the Manhattan Chapter of the D. A. R. marked the graves with bronze tablets.

Burials were made in this plot from 1683 to 1831. Today only 107 can be identified. When New Bowery Street was run through in 1851, some 256 graves were moved uptown.

The attached map, showing the location of the Jewish Cemetery, is taken from Gilmore Clarke's, "Plan for Manhattan Civic Center and Related Improvements," published by the City Planning Commission in 1948. Number 8 on the map is the Cemetery. The old Elevated that once looked down on the Cemetery has been removed.

Also attached is a photograph of Dr. David de Sola Pool from the New York Herald Tribune of September 15, 1952. It will be remembered that we worked with Dr. Pool in the designation of Touro Synagogue National Historic Site in Newport, Rhode Island. Dr. Pool is Rabbi of the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue in New York City.

Today this little plot is set in rather bad surroundings. Though protected by a high iron fence and brick walls, the wash lines of the surrounding tenements are strung over the burying ground. The property is owned by the Congregation Shearith Israel.

The archives of New York's Congregation Shearith Israel (owners of the Touro Synagogue, Newport, Rhode Island) are amazingly rich in materials concerning the Cemetery.

You will have noticed the controversy over Abraham Lincoln's home in Springfield. What color was the house painted when Lincoln lived in it in 1860? No one really knows. However, the Jewish Archives disclose the appearance of the wall around the cemetery, year by year, in a wealth of detail. For example, originally a fence of wooden pickets, in 1734-36 a stone wall was built. Repaired in 1751, "nine feet high from the foundation, two feet thick." By

1761 the wall was white washed every spring. In 1805 spiked nails were placed on the top of the wall. In 1815 "beards painted and lettered offering rewards to apprehend trespassers." This takes us to one of our modern problems, which really isn't so modern, -vandalism. The New York Weekly Post Boy in 1746 deplored the vandalism in the cemetery and Joseph Jefferson in his autobiography continued to deplore the vandalism of his day.

Interesting are the comments of a ohurlish member of the congregation who did not want to contribute to the building of a stone wall to prevent vandalism. He could see no need for the wall as those on the inside couldn't get out and who on the outside would be foolish enough to wish to get in.

The history of the Jewish Cemetery is well outlined by Dr. Pool in his "Reasons for the proposal to make the Jewish Cemetery on the New Bowery below Chatham Square in New York City into a National Historic Site." This was transmitted to Assistant Director Lee by Mr. Arthur Hays Sulzberger, publisher of the New York Times. Save for the supposition that British soldiers removed the lead from the Graves and the shooting of "prisoners of war", I believe this statement is a reasonably accurate summary of the history of the cemetery.

Dr. Pool states that the inset lead plates were removed by the "British soldiers during the Revolution and melted down for ammunition." This type of statement always interests me. It is so like the popular Morristown story that Tempe Wick saved her horse from the thieving British soldiers, not from men of the Continental Line. I can find no source for Dr. Pool's story, but if the lead was removed in 1776 it would be logical to suppose that it was done by American soldiers, who really needed it, and not by the well supplied British who had no reason to go to all this trouble.

Dr. Pool's statement regarding the emplacement of a battery of guns in the Cemetery for the defense of the East River may be found in The Papers of General Charles Lee, Volume I- page 354.

Attached is a copy of the Preface to Dr. Pool's forthcoming book on the Cemetery. This Preface contains Dr. Pool's arguments that the Cemetery mirrors "the growth of the Jewish Community of New York."

Several years ago, for presentation to the Advisory Board, I reported on St. Ann's Church, Morrisania and the graves of the Morris family in the Bronx. At its meeting of April 28-30, 1948, the Board disapproved the designation of St. Ann's as a national historic site and I do not know whether any action was taken on H. R. 6465 introduced, February 6, 1952, providing for the designation of Saint Ann's Churchyard. This separation of the Churchyard from the Church itself might have some bearing on the present question.

Finally, may I state that to the Jews, a Cemetery has a tremendous significance. The importance of a spot of earth they could really call their own is movingly shown by Dr. Pool in the following statement:

"In Jewish life, to a greater degree than is commonly found elsewhere, the establishment of a common consecrated burial ground is a significant sign of permanent settlement. In medieval Germany the secular authorities would sometimes name and classify Jewish communities by the cemeteries which they used. The cemetery served as the permanent geographic nuclear unit of community organization. At least it was immovable property, while the living Jew, the quarry of many a brutal man hunt, for his own protection had to be a movable chattel of the local feudal prince. Abraham described himself as "a stranger and a sojourner" in the land of Canaan until the cave in the field of Machpelah was "made sure unto him for the possession of a burying place." He took manifest title to his permanent settlement in the land when the burying

place became his assured possession, and the dust of his beloved Sarah was consigned to the soil. So when the Jews of New Amsterdam in 1655 applied for permission to obtain a cemetery they showed beyond all doubt that they intended to remain in this part of the New World and throw in their lot with the new colony."

Francis S. Ronalds
Superintendent

Copy to: Regional Director, Region One
F.S.R. - *vjt.*

REASONS FOR THE PROPOSAL
TO MAKE THE JEWISH CEMETERY ON THE
NEW BOWERY BELOW CHATHAM SQUARE
IN NEW YORK CITY INTO A
NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE

New York City's Jewish Congregation Shearith Israel was founded in 1655. Its earliest cemetery still existing is that on the New Bowery below Chatham Square. The original piece of land forming the nucleus of that cemetery was purchased in 1682. The oldest existing tombstone in the ground is dated 1683. There are records of other interments in the ground and tombstones from 1690, 1694, 1697, and 1699. From 1704 on there are numerous recognizable and identifiable graves.

At various times the burial ground was enlarged. At the time of its greatest extent it reached from Park Row down to James Street and up to Chatham Square. The present reduced dimensions of the ground are due to encroachments of the city, the last being in 1855 when the New Bowery was cut through. At that time, the Spanish and Portuguese congregation removed 256 graves to its cemetery on 21st Street, west of Sixth Avenue.

In March, 1766, the high ground of the cemetery was used as the emplacement of a battery of guns to command the East River. General Charles Lea wrote to George Washington that he had placed a battery at the foot of the Jewish burying ground and guns in barbette on the heights of the Jewish burying ground.

Another silent witness from revolutionary times is presented by two flat tombstones with empty rectangular depressions in their upper half. These depressions originally contained inset lead plates inscribed with the epitaph of those interred beneath the stone. The lead was removed by British soldiers during the Revolution and melted down for ammunition.

Deserters and prisoners of war were paraded by the British and shot by them on the high ground by this Jewish burying ground.

The cemetery bears steady witness to friendly relations among the citizens of New York. Thus, the Spanish and Portuguese Congregation, the owner of the cemetery, granted permission to John Roosevelt, the great-great-great-grandfather of President Theodore Roosevelt, to use some of their unused land for a rent of three peppercorns a year. Later, the congregation bought from a later John Roosevelt, the great-great-grandfather of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, some land which it needed to enlarge the ground. In the year 1789, when the very existence of the cemetery was threatened by subsidences of the surface soil, a group of prominent Christian citizens of the city spontaneously made a collection of funds to help save the cemetery from disintegration.

Inscriptions on the tombstones are found in five languages, Hebrew, English, Portuguese, Spanish and Latin. Some of the inscriptions are of unusual interest in the history of the city. Such is that on the stone of Walter J. Judah "student of physic, who worn down by his exertions

to alleviate the sufferings of his fellow citizens in that dreadful contagion that visited the City of New York in 1798, fell a victim in the cause of humanity, the...15th of September, 1798, Aet. 20 years, 5 months and 11 days."

In this ground are found the graves and often the tombstones of numerous men who have filled a notable place in the story of the city. For instance, there is the grave of Rabbi Gershom Mendes Seixas, the patriot rabbi of the Revolution who closed the synagogue in the city when the British were about to enter New York, and dispersed the congregation rather than serve under the British occupation. Rabbi Seixas was one of the incorporators of Columbia University. There is the grave of Isaac Moses whom Benjamin Franklin called "my friend of austere culture and true knowledge", who signed bills of credit for the Continental Congress; of Benjamin Jacobs, a member of the Continental Congress of 1776, who also served in the patriot army and signed bills of credit for the Continental Congress; of Hayman Levy a signer of non-importation resolutions, who also served in the American army; of Benjamin M. Seixas, a lieutenant in the patriot forces; of Simon Nathan, also a patriot soldier, who advanced large sums of money to help the American cause; of Jacob Hart who advanced money to General Lafayette to clothe and feed his troops; of Jonas Phillips, another soldier in the American forces and a signer of non-importation resolutions; of David Hays whose home was burned by the Tories while he was serving with the American army, and of other notable patriots. Indeed, on Decoration Day every year the graves of no less than eighteen men buried in this little cemetery are decorated because of service which they gave to the Revolution.

This cemetery is one of the very few remaining seventeenth century historic sites in New York City. Dating from 1682, it is a rare historical site with unusual patriotic associations in a city in which each era so readily obliterates its predecessors.

It is therefore asked that this ground, which it is planned to include in the park system of New York City's expanded civic center, should be officially designated as a national historic site.