

## PREFACE & ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

SOMETIME IN THE WINTER OF 1998–99, I was chatting with my friend, then the head of the Penn State Department of History, A. Gregg Roeber. He asked me out of the blue if I knew anything about colonial Pennsylvania Jews. I said no and asked him, “Does anybody?” The conversation was the inspiration for a paper I delivered at one of several conferences Gregg has organized bringing German and American scholars together to study the interaction of the German-speaking world with colonial America. Entitled “Jews and Pietists in Dialogue in Enlightenment America,” it produced the first installment of the present project, “Jews and Anti-Semitism in Early Pennsylvania,” which was published in the *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* in July 2002.

Thanks to the article’s reception, I decided to write similar essays on the other four major Jewish communities in mainland British North America: New York; Newport, Rhode Island; Charleston; and Savannah, to put them in order of Jewish settlement. Although historians of early American Jewry, notably Jacob Rader Marcus, have been studying colonial Jews throughout the twentieth century, my approach has been different. I was interested in placing each Jewish community in the context of the history of the five cities and colonies. When were Jews welcomed, and despised, and by whom? Why did anti-semitism or its converse, philo-semitism, occur when it did? Why did Jewish communities grow, decline, remain stable, and quarrel among themselves? What was the role of Jews in the American Revolution and the politics of the early republic?

My main conclusions are that a strain of popular anti-semitism appeared intermittently before the American Revolution, largely derived from traditional European prejudices. There were few Jews in early Amer-

ica, but a good number of those were closely associated with the gentile elite. Opposition to the Jews came from the very populist or “democratic” elements who were themselves contending for liberty against governors or leading merchants. In consequence, the revolutionary era witnessed increased anti-semitism along with increased popular participation in civic life, as the Jews were linked with the local elites even though they, too, sought political privileges they had lacked (except in New York) during the colonial era. Political anti-semitism exploited popular anti-semitism as the status of the Jews in a republic, and a predominantly Christian republic, became an item of debate far out of proportion to the minuscule number of Jews (about three thousand) in the new nation as of 1790. The nature of anti-semitism changed, too: Jews were no longer greedy, dishonest, and comic although inconsequential; now their intelligence made them a real threat to lead other negatively signified ethnic groups—Germans, Irish, French, and African Americans—and undermine the republican experiment.

Politicians used anti-semitism in an effort to secure votes. Until 1793 the Jews were supported by and supported the Federalists, who had worked with them at the highest levels of revolutionary government. They were attacked by the Anti-Federalists, or Democrats, or Republicans, or Democratic-Republicans, or Jeffersonians. But when the French Revolution gave the Jews complete equality, the parties switched their attitudes. The Federalists became more narrow minded, insisting on a Christian, largely Anglo-Saxon America; the Jeffersonians for their part welcomed Jews—both ethnic and practicing, for even Jews who converted or were the gentile children of mixed marriages were tarred with anti-semitism. Each party’s version of anti-semitism reflected its political ideology: Anti-Federalists and Republicans viewed Jews as wealthy, conspiring with merchants and speculators to impose aristocracy; Federalists focused on poor Jews who they thought were trying to foment a second revolution and rise to power and wealth on the ruins of the nation. My story ends in 1800, with a few excursions into the nineteenth century, by which time the Federalists’ anti-semitism had proven to be a failure.

Some scholars have questioned the existence of anti-semitism in early America. There were no pogroms, and probably no murders of Jews because they were Jews, with the possible exception of a Jewish loyalist in

Rhode Island. Southern Jews who were insulted fought duels on equal terms with their antagonists, a practice of which both law and society approved. Yet the extent to which Jews and Judaism, and their role in what either was or was not to be a Christian nation, was a lively subject of debate in the last quarter of the eighteenth century. At this time, the United States set a precedent of which it ought not to be proud: for the first time in modern history, democratic politicians, with varying degrees of sincerity and cynicism, exploited popular anti-semitic prejudices in an effort to gain votes. Others, such as Presidents Washington and Adams, who personally expressed the highest admiration for Jews both individually and collectively, did not challenge prejudices uttered by their supporters. Jews and their defenders, in an atmosphere where abuse rarely went beyond the verbal, in turn were able to articulate powerfully their patriotic contributions to the new nation and their worthiness of full equality.

Despite tiny numbers, early American Jews played important roles in commerce, frontier expansion, the American Revolution, and the partisan battles of the early republic. The degree to which continental European and English Jewish behavior patterns were successfully transferred to the colonies was frequently manifested in the extensive correspondence between Jews on both sides of the Atlantic. Small communities that sometimes fell below the critical number of ten men, the minyan required for religious services, struggled to maintain Judaism while at the same time interacting with gentiles in cities, rural areas, and on a frontier that attracted Jewish traders. As with others who populated British North America, the tiny number of Jewish immigrants hailed from an astonishing range of places in both the Christian and Islamic worlds, and encompassed rich and poor, Ashkenazi and Sephardic Jews who assimilated to, accommodated, and antagonized the greater gentile population as well as their own. The integration of elite Jews into a transnational enlightenment culture through the Masons and other associations of well-off colonists threatened Judaism even more than it did the Protestant Christian denominations, for only a Jewish mother could produce a Jewish child. It was easier for Jewish men to renounce their faith—especially given the shortage of both minyans and Jewish women—than for Christian women to convert to Judaism. Between 1790 and 1840, all the American Jewish congregations combined only accepted twelve converts, a figure dwarfed by the 28 percent of Jews who intermarried.<sup>1</sup>

Studying the Jewish experience in early America will strike many chords familiar to students of European Jewry in the early modern world. By the eighteenth century, both European and English Jewry included a mixture of Sephardic and Ashkenazi elements. Because of persecution, many Spanish (Sephardic) Jews had moved to Italy (where the popes after the Counter-Reformation for the most part protected them), the Near East or North Africa (where Islam was even more tolerant), and the Netherlands (the most tolerant of all). German Jews first were pushed eastward toward Poland during the Reformation, but as would occur time and again after persecutions and wartime devastation, they returned, prospered, and were for the most part tolerated from the time of the Thirty Years War into the early twentieth century. Although many adopted the Christian religion, they soon found that they could not shed their ethnic identity as easily, for anti-semites continued to use their Jewish heritage against them. For instance, although the fathers of Felix Mendelssohn and Karl Marx converted to Christianity, and the former was a Protestant and the latter an atheist, their enemies accused them of writing “Jewish” music and philosophy. (Gustav Mahler and Sigmund Freud suffered a similar fate.)<sup>2</sup>

Visibly concentrated in ghettos or particular neighborhoods, and wearing distinctive clothes, Jews in Europe outside England and the Netherlands lived precarious lives. They could easily be attacked by Christians who dared not directly oppose the aristocracy under whose regimes elite Jews prospered. From time to time, rulers such as Philip II of Spain, Louis XIV of France, and Maria Theresa of Austria joined in the persecution, putting religious zeal ahead of the financial interests of their kingdoms, but these were exceptional. Elites found Jews economically useful, whereas the general population that confronted them as tax farmers and moneylenders in western Europe or estate agents in eastern Europe tended to blame Jews for their problems. At the same time, some Jews themselves reacted against assimilation, which became more pronounced as the Enlightenment progressed. Like the Protestant Great Awakening in Britain and North America in the 1740s, the Hasidim emerged in eastern Europe at this time and also questioned an increasingly secular, rational, and cosmopolitan society. No Hasidim, however, are known to have come to America before the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>3</sup>

The history of English Jewry, too, was initially marked by persecution.

No Jews were allowed to live openly in England from the time Edward I expelled them in 1290 until 1655, when Menasseh ben Israel of Amsterdam arrived and successfully pleaded for their readmittance and naturalization. His efforts enabled a secret Jewish community that lived in London's East End to reveal itself. Thereafter, English Jews joined their Dutch counterparts in their immunity from formal persecution if not popular anti-semitism. Beginning in 1655, England "naturalized" Jews, permitting them to stay, do business, and own property without granting them political rights.

English Jews Christianized more rapidly than those on the continent. This "radical assimilation" occurred, historian Todd Endelman notes, because there was no long-standing Jewish cultural community in England—its rabbis came from abroad—and the Jews endured neither the isolation in ghettos nor the persecution endured by Jews on the continent. With these liabilities had come a tradition of limited self-rule and the defense of tradition that comes from persecution. In England, Jews had most of the rights of gentiles except political participation, an exclusion that encouraged conversions, especially among upper-class Jews, notably Isaac D'Israeli, father of the great prime minister. British elite relations with Jews were sufficiently friendly that the term *philo-semitism* has been commonly used by scholars to describe the interaction of well-to-do English Jews and gentiles who shared a philosophical commitment to the Enlightenment.<sup>4</sup>

The great mobility of early modern Jews did not reflect a rootless people, but rather the tight connections maintained between the mainland communities of Newport, New York, Savannah, Charleston, and Philadelphia with those in Europe and the West Indies. International connections came into play when London Jews appealed successfully to their American brethren for funds to aid their fellow religionists in Palestine, a major, repeated destination of European Jewish charity.<sup>5</sup>

Such transatlantic ties were not peculiarly Jewish: Rose Beiler has demonstrated similar networks among Pennsylvania German Christian sectarians, many of whom could understand their fellow Jewish immigrants, since Yiddish is a dialect of German. Quakers and Anglicans, among others, also supported each other across the ocean.<sup>6</sup> But Jewish ties were among the closest. Historian Nuala Zahedieh has found that in seventeenth-century England, Jews, along with Quakers, were disproportionately represented in the colonial trade because "their religious belief sys-

tems allowed community leaders to enforce conduct and insure information flow.” In short, Jews and Quakers could trust each other as members of more numerous Protestant faiths could not. Examining business practices two hundred years later, in nineteenth-century America, scholar Rowena Olegario observes that Jewish merchants in the United States stood apart from gentiles, who used the services of credit-reporting agencies to determine the reliability of their clients: instead, the Jews continued to rely on personal contacts among themselves. In the intervening eighteenth century, tight connections among the Jewish traders of British North America were the product of Jewish integrity (despite stereotypes to the contrary), the Franks family and its numerous connections, and habits of mutual assistance that grew out of the experience of persecution on the continent. In the exceptional national diversity of their population, in their role in occupying borderlands, and in their desire to prove themselves worthy members of the body politic, Jews exemplified trends found among ethnic groups on the cultural margins of the British world.<sup>7</sup>

I could not have written this book without the financial and moral support of a host of people and institutions. I hope anyone I omit will forgive me. The Jacob Rader Marcus Center, which holds the American Jewish Archives at Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, Ohio, offered me a Wiener-Lowenstein fellowship for a month in the summer of 2002. I stayed in a dormitory with a group of rabbinical students, and was extraordinarily moved by their willingness to pursue their scheduled studies in Israel despite an exceptionally brutal spate of terrorist activity at the time. Camille Servizzi, Elise Nienaber, Kevin Proffitt, Fred Krome, and Gary Zola were the most congenial of hosts, as was all the staff in the library. And of course there is the debt I, and everyone who studies American Jewish history, owes to the late Jacob Rader Marcus. By collecting available materials from all over the globe, he made it possible to do research in American Jewish history with exceptional ease and thoroughness. He also left to the archives his many publications during his long lifetime, which fell just a year short of a century.

Mark Häberlein and Michaela Schmölz-Häberlein, whose fine work on the Jews of Lancaster appeared in the same issue of the *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* as mine, were especially helpful to me at the

conference. My article, “Jews and Anti-Semitism in Early Pennsylvania,” appeared in *PMHB* 126, no. 3 (July 2002): 365–408. I thank the editors, Shan Holt and Tamara Miller, who helped me write a much better essay, for permission to reprint parts of it in altered form. I also presented a preliminary version of the article at the McNeil Center for Early American Studies, where Daniel Richter, Michael Zuckerman, Susan Klepp, Miriam Bodian, Brendan McConville, and George Boudreau belonged to another fine audience that helped me refine my work. Along the way, Natalie Zemon Davis, Leonard Dinnerstein, John B. Frantz, Alison Olson, and Adam Sutcliffe also read the article and offered both criticism and encouragement.

My department head at Penn State, A. G. Roeber, and Dean of Liberal Arts Susan Welch, persuaded me to cut down drastically on historical editing, take a sabbatical, and write this book. I didn’t know I had another book in me, but they had more confidence in me than I did in myself. Several of my colleagues, especially Baruch Halpern, Paul Rose, and Brian Hesse from our Department of Jewish Studies, which works closely with History at Penn State, were unfailingly helpful and encouraging to someone who is, after all, a colonialist poaching on their territory. I hope some of my insights will partially repay them. Sally McMurry, our department head, offered both friendship and a semester’s leave when I became seriously ill. The Penn State Department of History—staff, faculty, and graduate students—is the most congenial imaginable, and if I can’t remember who helped me how and when, may I simply offer a hearty “thank you” to everyone. The department’s Robert Haag Research Fund paid for the reproduction of the maps and illustrations.

I should also like at this point in my career to reiterate my thanks to all my teachers who nourished my love for history, beginning with Mrs. Tropper in the sixth grade, Mrs. Laird and Mr. Haken in junior high school, Messrs. Passy, Chiarello, Karp, and Pleven, and Mrs. Reichmann, Santor, and especially, Mrs. Gottlieb in high school. At Columbia, I will always be indebted to Alden Vaughan, William Leuchtenburg, Marcia Wright, J. M. W. Bean, Peter Onuf, the late Eric McKittrick and Leonard Krieger, and especially, Chilton Williamson Sr.

I was also fortunate to receive the Mellon Bank Fellowship for 2002–3 from the Huntington Library in San Marino, California. Everyone there—most notably research director Roy Ritchie, Susi Krasnoo, and Paul Zall,

the legendary discoverer and editor of Benjamin Franklin's "real" *Autobiography*—made that year one of the most productive and enjoyable of my life, especially given that weatherwise it was among the most balmy in California history, and one of the stormiest on the East Coast. I was able to write nearly the entire book there, and even make a significant dent in my next one (a study of John Jay and his family) despite the fact the library was only open until 5:00 p.m., an hour at which I am usually just shifting into full gear. While in California, I presented some of my research to the Huntington Library Seminar and the Bay Area Seminar in Colonial History, and also at California State University, Long Beach. Special thanks to my friends Edith Gelles, Brent Mizelle, Peter Mancall, Jack Rakove, Dee Andrews, and the late, wonderful Jackie Reinier for their incisive questions and warm hospitality.

While at the Huntington I made the acquaintance of several excellent historians. Joshua Piker of the University of Oklahoma provided invaluable information on Native American relations on the southern frontier. Hermann Wellenreuther and Claudia Schnurmann brought to the Huntington their pathbreaking research in German and Dutch sources along with their stimulating personalities. Their transatlantic approach to early American history has caused me to rethink a subject I have been studying for thirty-odd years now. Gene Fingerhut and Joe Tiedemann made me a silent partner in their new book on the American Revolution in New York, an innovative study that looks at the nature of the Revolution in the different counties and regions of the state. I would especially like to thank Mark Stern, piano tuner and amateur historian extraordinaire, for sharing his excellent research on David Franks and the Franks family with me. I hope to see it in print before this book appears. Mark also arranged a meeting with Leo Hershkowitz, scholar of New York Jews, who not only told me most of the stones in the Chatham Square burial ground were moved (without the bodies) from an earlier site, but corrected me (as I hope to correct others) in the misapprehension that Asser Levy (of Vilna in eastern Europe, as he had signed his name in Amsterdam) was one of the twenty-three original New York Jews who came from Brazil, meaning none of them stayed and the real community was begun by Levy and other Dutch Jewish merchants.

By sheer chance, for the first time several scholars are working on large



topics in early American Jewish history simultaneously. They are also splendid people who share their work gladly and whose sense of community approaches the level of a mutual admiration society. We all gave papers at the Omohundro Institute's Annual Meeting in New Orleans in the summer of 2003. Holly Snyder's book on the Jews of Savannah, Newport, and Jamaica, based on her 2000 Brandeis University Ph.D. dissertation, will appear about the same time as mine. There is little overlap: she probes the psychology of individuals and the nuances of social life as I never could, whereas I focus more on the public realm and the political relationship of Jews and gentiles. If I occasionally present a different interpretation, hers is always worthy of at least equal consideration. Frederic Cople Jaher's *The Jews and the Nation* appeared as I was writing my book: his comparison of how Jewish civil rights developed in France and the United States will provoke thought about the paradox that the instantaneous formal equality Jews achieved with the French Revolution was a mixed blessing as it linked Jewish rights with left-of-center politics in Europe until the Holocaust. Fred's critique for my publisher was a model of both courtesy and incisiveness, and the book is much better because of his criticisms and suggestions. Edith Gelles is working on colonial Jewish women, especially Abigail Levy Franks of New York: she brings to the study of this simultaneously orthodox yet Enlightened woman the beautiful prose and profound insights of her work on Abigail Adams. And Heather Nathans has incorporated into her pioneering work on early American theater the most incisive work yet on Jewish stereotypes in early American intellectual and cultural life. If this book does not examine images of Jews or commercial and family networks as thoroughly as it ought to, this is because Holly and Heather are in the process of doing a far better job than I could with these specialized topics. Thank you all for a great session and your collegial friendship!

Mary Kelly, wonderful historian and an equally good friend, persuaded me to publish this book with the University of Michigan Press. I was extremely fortunate to work with Jim Reische, Amy Anderson, and Kevin Rennells of the Press in bringing the book to publication.

Mary Miles, Eileen Gallagher, Mattie Scott, Jason Kelly, Kristen Cooper, and my nephew Patrick Pencak spent a great deal of time with me in California so I could enjoy the whole experience rather than simply do research. I'll never forget the Pasadena Ritz, the Descanso Camelia Garden,

the Getty, Universal Studios, and the trips to Santa Barbara, Berkeley, and the bottom of the Grand Canyon for champagne lunch. My mother was always ready at the other end of the phone, encouraging me not to work too hard and have a good time. Her moral and financial support and that of my late father is the only reason I have been able to live my dream of being a historian who writes what he wants rather than what pays the bills.

I initially intended to dedicate this book to solely the memory of the late Pamela Manzi, M.A., History, New York University, 1965, whose friendship during my year in California represented more than she could ever suspect. However, between completion of the manuscript and publication, I suffered from spinal meningitis that nearly cost me my life. So I include in the dedication all of the doctors, nurses, and staff at Long Island Jewish Hospital, the Parker Jewish Institute for Rehabilitation, and Mount Nittany Hospital for exemplary care and what I hope will be a full recovery by the time this book sees the light of day. And also my mother, my brother, and Vincent Andrassy, who continued that care and gave me more love and hope than I have ever deserved.