

Preserving American Freedom

The Evolution of American Liberties in Fifty Documents



Historical Society of Pennsylvania

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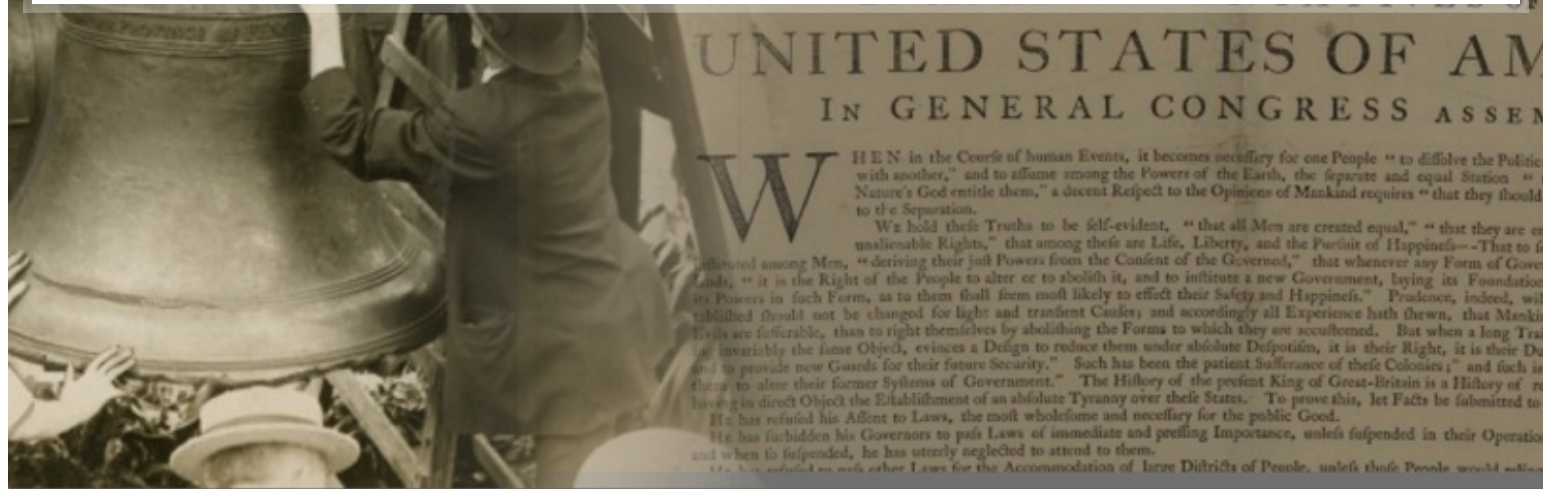
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[William Penn to the Kings of the Indians in Pennsylvania, October 18, 1681](#)

About this Project

Preserving American Freedom, a Historical Society of Pennsylvania digital history project funded by Bank of America, explores how Americans have interpreted and fought for their freedoms from the 1600s to the present and how these freedoms have shaped America's history.

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Document Details

Jewish Petition to Dutch West India Company

Author(s): [Unknown Document Creator](#)
[Dutch West India Company](#)

January 1655

[High Resolution Image \(460,006.19 KB\) \(Right-click to download\)](#)

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[1655, January Petition of the Jewish Nation](#) ^[1]

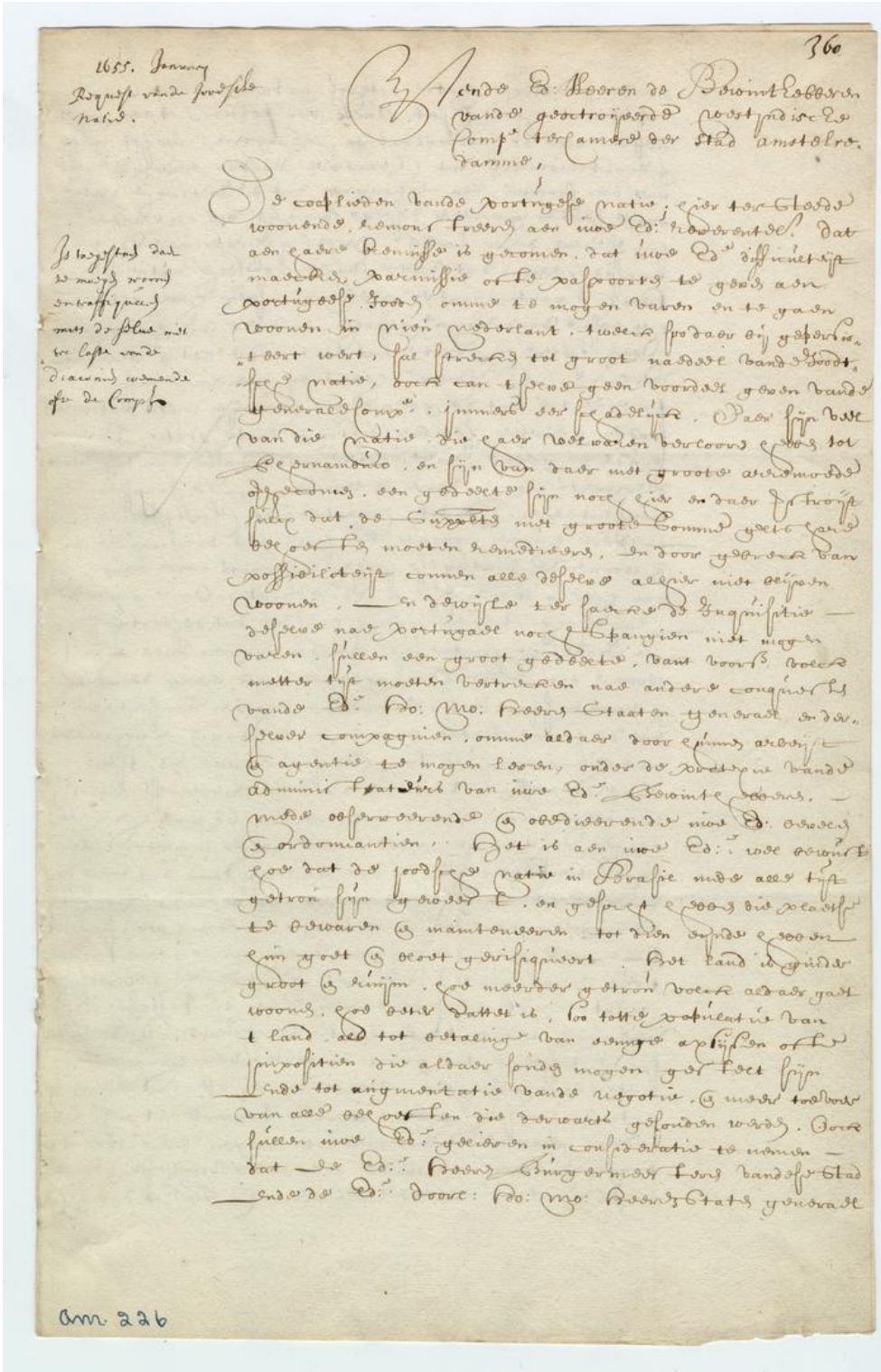
To the Honorable Lords, Directors of the Chartered *West India Company*, Chamber of the City of Amsterdam.

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Granted that they may reside and traffic, provided they shall not become a charge upon the deaconry or the Company. [2]

The merchants of the Portuguese Nation residing in this City [3] respectfully remonstrate to your Honors that it has come to their knowledge that your Honors raise obstacles to the giving of permits or passports to the Portuguese Jews to travel and to go to reside in New Netherland, [4] which if persisted in will result to the great disadvantage of the Jewish nation. It also can be of no advantage to the general Company but rather damaging.

There are many of the nation who have lost their possessions at Pernambuco [5] and have arrived from there in great poverty, and part of them have been dispersed here and there. So that your petitioners had to expend large sums of money for their necessities of life, and through lack of opportunity all cannot remain here to live. And as they cannot go to Spain or Portugal because of the Inquisition, [6] a great part of the aforesaid people must in time be obliged to depart for other territories of their High Mightinesses the States-General and their Companies, [7] in order there, through their labor and efforts, to be able to exist under the protection of the administrators of your Honorable Directors, observing and obeying your Honors' orders and commands.

It is well known to your Honors that the Jewish nation in Brazil have at all times been faithful and have striven to guard and maintain that place, risking for that purpose their possessions and their blood.

Essays

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Yonder land [8] is extensive and spacious. The more of loyal people that go to live there, the better it is in regard to the population of the country as in regard to the payment of various excises and taxes which may be imposed there, and in regard to the increase of trade, and also to the importation of all the necessaries that may be sent there.

Your Honors should also consider that the Honorable Lords, the Burgomasters [9] of the City and the Honorable High Illustrious Mighty Lords, the States-General,

Source Information: Title

Jewish Petition to Dutch West India Company

Creator

Oppenheim, Samuel (Translated by)

Authors

Unknown

West-Indische Compagnie (Netherlands)

Collection Information

The Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA

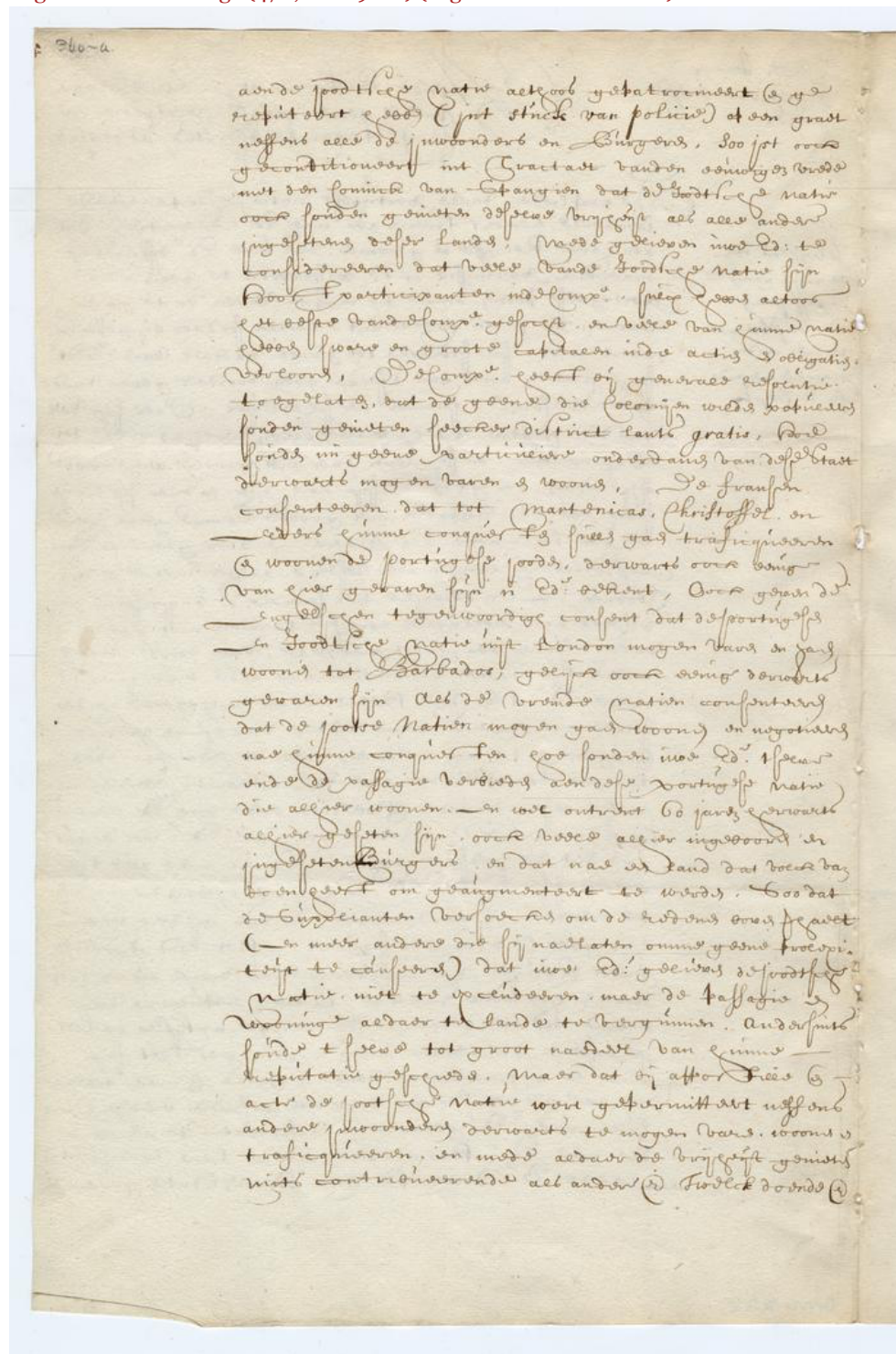
Am.226

Jewish Petition to Dutch West India Company

Author(s): Dutch West India Company

January 1655

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have in political matters always protected and considered the Jewish nation as upon the

same footing as all the inhabitants and burghers. ^[10] Also it is conditioned in the treaty of perpetual peace with the *King of Spain* ^[11] that the Jewish nation shall also enjoy the same liberty as all other inhabitants of these lands.

Your Honors should also please consider that many of the Jewish nation are principal shareholders in *the Company*. They having always striven their best for the Company, and many of their nation have lost immense and great capital in its shares and obligations.

The Company has by a general resolution consented that those who wish to populate the Colony shall enjoy certain districts of land gratis. Why should now certain subjects of this State not be allowed to travel thither and live there? The French consent that the Portuguese Jews may traffic and live in Martinique, Christopher and others of their territories, whither also some have gone from here, as your Honors know. The English also consent at the present time that the Portuguese and Jewish nation may go from London and settle at Barbados, whither also some have gone.

As foreign nations consent that the Jewish nation may go to live and trade in their territories, how can your Honors forbid the same and refuse transportation to this Portuguese nation who reside here and have been settled here well on to about sixty years, many also being born here and confirmed burghers, and this to a land that needs people for its increase?

Therefore the petitioners request, for the reasons given above (as also others which they omit to avoid prolixity), that your Honors be pleased not to exclude but to grant the Jewish nation passage to and residence in that country; otherwise this would result in a great prejudice to their reputation. Also that by an Apostille and Act the Jewish nation be permitted, together with other inhabitants, to travel, live and traffic there, and with them enjoy liberty on condition of contributing like others, &c. Which doing, &c.

Source Information: Title

Jewish Petition to Dutch West India Company

Creator

Oppenheim, Samuel (Translated by)

Authors

Unknown

Dutch West India Company

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About This Document:

From the turn of the 16th century to the mid-17th century, Iberian Jews lived in a dangerous world. In 1492, the Catholic monarchs of Spain had decreed that all Iberian Jews had to convert to Christianity or leave the kingdom. Portugal made a similar proclamation shortly thereafter. During the long diaspora that followed, many Spanish and Portuguese Jews immigrated to the Netherlands and its colonies. Some of these refugees started new lives in the Dutch Brazilian colony of Pernambuco. In 1654, however, the Dutch agreed to return Pernambuco to Portugal, and the Jewish immigrants were once again forced to leave. This time, many traveled to the port city of New Amsterdam in North America.

Unfortunately for the Pernambuco Jews, Peter Stuyvesant, the newly appointed governor of New Amsterdam, immediately forbade the Jewish refugees from entering his city. When merchants living in Amsterdam heard about the situation in North America, they wrote the petition shown above. To the authors, Stuyvesant's actions were in opposition to the religious tolerance cherished in the Netherlands since 1619. Unlike in much of Eastern Europe, Jews were so integrated into Dutch society that they held their own courts and lived in city quarters, not ghettos. On the other hand, Dutch immigration policy lagged behind that of other world powers such as France and England.

The petition was an argument for the positive economic impact the Jewish immigrants would bring to the city. It was no accident that the New Amsterdam petition was addressed to both the Burgomasters of Amsterdam and the directors of the Dutch West India Company. Portuguese Jews had

become powerful players in this sizeable business whose influence rivaled that of the actual Dutch government. The company controlled its own fleet of ships and military operatives and was not under the direct control of the Dutch government. Appealing to the Dutch West India Company was essential to gaining entry to New Amsterdam.

Ultimately, the petition was successful; the Portuguese Jews found a home where they were free to practice their religion and commerce. This community was one of the first groups of immigrant Jews in the North American continent, and its impact can be seen today throughout various neighborhoods of New York City, built right on top of New Amsterdam.

The English translation of this document was found in Samuel Oppenheim, "The History of the Jews in New York, 1655-1664: Some New Matter on the Subject," Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society 18 (1909): 1-20. The translation is found on pp. 9-11; this article also contains a transcription of the original Dutch (pp. 11-13n11) and additional information on the petitioners.

Topics: Freedom of Religion/Conscience
Freedom of Movement
Economic Freedoms

Related People and Organizations:

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1300 Locust Street Philadelphia, PA 19107
T: (215) 732-6200 F: (215) 732-2680



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