

2001

“The Exceptional and the Mundane: A
Biographical Portrait of Rebecca Machado
Phillips, 1746-1831”

Aviva Ben-Ur, *University of Massachusetts - Amherst*

Women and American Judaism

Historical Perspectives

Edited by

Pamela S. Nadell and
Jonathan D. Sarna

Brandeis University Press

Published by University Press of New England
Hanover and London

Brandeis University Press

Published by University Press of New England, Hanover, NH 03755

© 2001 by Brandeis University Press

All rights reserved

Printed in the United States of America

5 4 3 2 1

COVER ILLUSTRATION: Postcard from the collection of the American Jewish Historical Society, Waltham, Massachusetts and New York, New York. Used with permission. The Hebrew verse reads, "A tear from a Jewish girl, / A prayer; a pleading look. / Do not disappear into the abyss / And do not come back unanswered."

Beth S. Wenger, "Mitzvah and Medicine: Gender, Assimilation, and the Scientific Defense of 'Family Purity,'" was previously published by Indiana University Press in *Jewish Social Studies* 5, nos. 1-2, pp. 177-202, and is reprinted here by permission of the publisher.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Women and American Judaism : historical perspectives / edited by

Pamela S. Nadell and Jonathan D. Sarna.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 1-58465-123-7 (cloth)—ISBN 1-58465-124-5 (pbk.)

- I. Women in Judaism—United States—History—Congresses.
 2. Jewish women—United States—History—Congresses.
 3. Jewish women—Religious life—United States—Congresses.
 4. Feminism—Religious aspects—Judaism—Congresses.
- I. Nadell, Pamela Susan.
II. Sarna, Jonathan D.

BM729.W6W655 2001

296'.082'0973—dc21

2001001236

Brandeis Series in American Jewish History, Culture, and Life

Jonathan D. Sarna, Editor

Sylvia Barack Fishman, Associate Editor

Leon A. Jick, 1992

The Americanization of the Synagogue, 1820-1870

Sylvia Barack Fishman, editor, 1992

Follow My Footprints: Changing Images of Women in American Jewish Fiction

Gerald Tulchinsky, 1993

Taking Root: The Origins of the Canadian Jewish Community

Shalom Goldman, editor, 1993

Hebrew and the Bible in America: The First Two Centuries

Marshall Sklare, 1993

Observing America's Jews

Reena Sigman Friedman, 1994

There Are Our Children: Jewish Orphanages in the United States, 1880-1925

Alan Silverstein, 1994

Alternatives to Assimilation: The Response of Reform Judaism to American Culture, 1840-1930

Jack Wertheimer, editor, 1995

The American Synagogue: A Sanctuary Transformed

Sylvia Barack Fishman, 1995

A Breath of Life: Feminism in the American Jewish community

Diane Matza, editor, 1996

Sephardic-American Voices: Two Hundred Years of a Literary Legacy

Joyce Antler, editor, 1997

Talking Back: Images of Jewish Women in American Popular Culture

Jack Wertheimer, 1997

A People Divided: Judaism in Contemporary America

Beth S. Wenger and Jeffrey Shandler, editors, 1998

Encounters with the "Holy Land": Place, Past and Future in American Jewish Culture

Contents

<i>List of Illustrations</i>	xiii
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	xv
Pamela S. Nadell and Jonathan D. Sarna Introduction	I
Holly Snyder Queens of the Household: The Jewish Women of British America, 1700–1800	15
Aviva Ben-Ur The Exceptional and the Mundane: A Biographical Portrait of Rebecca Machado Phillips (1746–1831)	46
Dianne Ashton Shifting Veils: Religion, Politics, and Womanhood in the Civil War Writings of American Jewish Women	81
Karla Goldman The Public Religious Lives of Cincinnati's Jewish Women	107
William Toll From Domestic Judaism to Public Ritual: Women and Religious Identity in the American West	128
Felicia Herman From Priestess to Hostess: Sisterhoods of Personal Service in New York City, 1887–1936	148
Eric L. Goldstein Between Race and Religion: Jewish Women and Self-Definition in Late-Nineteenth-Century America	182

Chapter Two

The Exceptional and the Mundane

A Biographical Portrait of Rebecca (Machado)

Phillips (1746–1831)

Aviva Ben-Ur

Introduction

Woman's biography does not flow with ease from the pen of the contemporary scholar. As Carolyn Heilbrun noted in 1988, "Despite the wonderful biographies we have had in recent years, there still exists little organized sense of what a woman's biography or autobiography should look like."¹ Women's stories usually end at marriage at an early age, Heilbrun observed, and are not likely to consider achievements other than those accomplished through domestic channels. While this state of affairs has improved in the eleven years since Heilbrun's *Writing a Woman's Life* appeared,² the field of colonial and early American Jewish women's history is still in its incubation stages.³

Rebecca Phillips (1746–1831), née Rebecca Machado, is a colonial-early American Jewish woman whose remarkable achievements encapsulate both the domestic and public realms. In considering the religious aspects of her life, the methodological separation of the religious sphere from the secular represents somewhat of a false dichotomy, particularly since religion permeated the daily life of most colonial and early American Jews. Because so much of the traditional Jewish religion is domestic and centers around the role of the woman, it is especially important in treating Phillips's biography to consider the religious as bound up with the secular. Moreover, much of the surviving evidence indicates that Phillips's public life, in many ways unconventional and atypical for a Jewish woman of her time, also entwined the religious with the secular. This essay seeks to reconstruct the public and private life of Rebecca Phillips and is the first attempt at her biography⁴ or, for that matter, the biography of any American Jewish woman who lived during colonial times.

While Rebecca left no known writings of her own, there are, nevertheless, many sources that shed light on her family background and life, most of them overlooked by previous scholars. These include both written and unwritten sources, such as receipt books, organization and synagogue records, censuses, portraits, tombstone inscriptions and engravings, communal and medical records, her husband's will, family lore and oral traditions, family correspondence, city directories, and the semifictional memoirs of Rebecca's grandson Mordecai Manuel Noah.⁵

Family History and Childhood

Rebecca Machado was born into an eminent Jewish family of Portuguese descent. Her parents, Zipporah Nunes Ribeiro (1714–1799) and David Mendes Machado (1695–1747) were former secret Jews and refugees of the Portuguese Inquisition.⁶ Their respective families had lived as crypto-Jews in the Iberian peninsula for centuries, and it was the harrowing events of the first and second decades of the eighteenth century that finally compelled them to flee.

According to Rebecca's mother, Zipporah, we know that many members of Zipporah's family, including her father, Dr. Samuel Nunes Ribeiro, a prominent court physician in Lisbon, were arrested by the Inquisition for Judaizing in the early 1700s.⁷ David Machado's older brother was also arrested by the Inquisition and burned at the stake for publicly mocking Christianity at his trial. David was consequently forced to flee Portugal along with the Nunes family in 1726.⁸ The anti-*converso* oppression that forced this crypto-Jewish exodus had been intensifying since 1706 with the accession of João V to the throne and his reorganization of the Inquisition into a more scrutinizing institution. The years 1720–1735 were the heaviest in terms of Sephardic immigration to England.⁹ Rebecca's parents, Zipporah and David, were part of this large stream of secret Jews who fled Portugal during the 1720s and 1730s and found freedom in London.¹⁰

Zipporah transmitted through oral testimony the sensational and ingenious flight of her father, Dr. Nunes, and his family from Lisbon to London. The story reveals the high social and economic status of the Nunes family, attributes that often rendered Christians of Jewish ancestry particularly vulnerable to charges of Judaizing. Dr. Nunes owned a spacious mansion along the shores of the Tagus River, where he often entertained the leading families of the capital city. The day of the anticipated flight, the doctor convened a host of guests at a dinner party. Among them was a captain of an English brigantine anchored near the mansion. During the party, the captain invited the Nunes family and a number of guests to lunch with him aboard the ship. As they were dining, the anchor was lifted, the brigantine set sail, and the entire company

was transported to England. The captain had previously agreed to aid the family in their escape in exchange for a generous sum of money. The Nunes women had carefully sewed their diamonds and precious stones into their garments, and the doctor had liquidated his assets into gold, which was secreted out in the leather belts of the Nunes men. Subsequently, Dr. Nunes's mansion and belongings were confiscated by the Inquisition and handed over to the state.¹¹

Seven years later, in July 1733, the Nunes family arrived in Savannah, Georgia, shortly after Governor Oglethorpe founded his settlement.¹² Although the members of the Nunes family apparently did not all arrive in Savannah on the same day, they all resettled in the year 1733. Thus, by the time of her birth, Rebecca had a number of relatives outside her immediate family living in America.

These relatives, particularly the females, did not easily discard their former lives and memories as secret Jews. A family oral tradition reveals that the Nunes women were so conditioned to leading a double life that for years after their move to America they continued to recite their Hebrew prayers with the aid of the Catholic rosary.¹³ Rebecca's grandson, Mordecai Manuel Noah (1785–1851), recalled in 1818 that “[a] great aunt of mine, who died in this country, carried with her to her grave the marks of the cords on her wrists, &c. with which she was tied to the wheel and, as it was called, ‘put to the question.’”¹⁴ Similarly, he recounted that Rebecca's mother, Zipporah Nunes, “was observed, whenever the clock struck, to repeat a silent prayer, which had some reference to her imprisonment in the Inquisition.”¹⁵ These practices suggest that the secret Jewish legacy of the Machado family, still very much alive when Rebecca was born, fused a consciousness of historical oppression with religious piety, and was at the same time highly personal and individualistic.

These anecdotes of residual crypto-Jewish practices and lingering reminders of Inquisitorial oppression also speak to the difficulty with which former secret Jews shed the trauma of their past. It is noteworthy that all recorded Phillips family traditions relating to the endurance of crypto-Jewish tendencies and memories are attributed to women exclusively. This is perhaps an indication of the exceptional religious tenacity of crypto-Jewish women, who, historically, were the primary transmitters of secret Jewish rituals on the Iberian peninsula.¹⁶

Former secret Jewish men, on the other hand, appear to be remembered for their ability to rapidly shed remnants of their oppressive past. Rebecca's father, David Machado, did not actually immigrate to America with the Nunes family in 1733 but apparently had arrived several years earlier, somewhere between 1726 and 1728. His early presence on American soil is substantiated by synagogue archives, which record that he was already a contributing member of Shearith Israel in 1728.¹⁷ David Machado married Zipporah shortly after the

arrival of the Nunes family in Savannah in 1733. Zipporah must have immediately joined David in New York, where he served as teacher of the Shearith Israel synagogue school beginning in 1733 and as cantor (hazan) of the congregation from 1736 until his death eleven years later.¹⁸ We are left to marvel at the speed with which former secret Jewish men adapted to open Jewish life and rapidly rose to become communal religious leaders.

Zipporah and David apparently did not produce children right away. Not until thirteen years after their union, when Zipporah was already in her early thirties, was their first daughter born. Rebecca was the eldest of two daughters (her sister Sarah lived from 1747 to 1810).¹⁹ David Machado died almost immediately after Sarah's birth on December 4, 1747, leaving Rebecca fatherless at the age of one, along with her infant sister. Some of the economic hardships of Zipporah's widowhood were alleviated by an annual “salary” paid to the “relict of our late Hasan” by the Congregation Shearith Israel.²⁰

Sometime after David Machado's death, though it is unclear when, Zipporah married Israel Jacobs of Philadelphia (1714–1810). Zipporah apparently relocated her family to Philadelphia upon remarriage. The union produced Rebecca's half sister Rachel (1754/60–1821).²¹ If Zipporah did not remarry until shortly after 1753, as a family historian claims, this would mean that Rebecca had grown up without a father figure from the age of one to approximately seven. Rebecca's stepfather was known for his “fondness for children, from whom when separated he was never happy and in whose society he spent much of his time.” Despite these fatherly attributes, Zipporah's second marriage was apparently considered a *mésalliance* since Jacobs, a shopkeeper, was “a man of ordinary attainments.”²²

If Rebecca lacked a father figure with more than “ordinary attainments,” she was not deprived maternally. Zipporah, who passed away at age eighty-five,²³ was “a woman of many accomplishments, conversant with several languages, [who] until her death maintained a lofty dignity, and was known in her earlier years as a great beauty.”²⁴ Similarly, Zipporah's great-grandson, Mordecai Noah, described her as “as a very remarkable personage” who “was celebrated for her beauty and accomplishments.” According to Noah, Zipporah “spoke several languages” and “preserved to the last a beautiful set of teeth, unimpaired.” Noah also emphasized the deep piety of this matriarch, who periodically recited a prayer memorializing her escape from Inquisitorial imprisonment. The members of the entire Nunes family, too, “were rigid in their attachment to the doctrines of their faith.”²⁵

Contemporaries report that Rebecca inherited many of her mother's attributes, particularly “her dignity of person and refinement, which were preserved unimpaired until her death.”²⁶ Physically, too, Rebecca was apparently striking. Rebecca was “a true specimen of a ‘Sephardi,’” wrote Sephardic historian Henry Samuel Morais (1863–1935), and “were it not known, [she] might be

mistaken for a belle of sunny Andalusia.”²⁷ These laudatory testimonials to the beauty and refinement of the Machado ladies suggest that the esteem in which Rebecca and her mother were held during their day extended into the early twentieth century.

If much is remembered about Rebecca’s physical appearance and demeanor, no explicit evidence concerning her childhood education has survived, but much can be inferred indirectly and from what is generally known about women’s learning in colonial times. Certainly, colonial Jewish America, like European Jewry and Christian America, provided more formal education for its sons than for its daughters. The records of the Shearith Israel Talmud Torah (probably established in 1736) bear no reference to girls until 1793, and it is possible that formal education for females did not arise until that year. By 1748, the curriculum of the school included Hebrew, Spanish, English, writing, and arithmetic. Even though Jewish girls might not have been privileged to partake of this instruction, the fact that New York colonial Jewish women served as executrices of estates would suggest that women were provided with some numeracy and at least a rudimentary level of reading and writing.²⁸ Given that some parents had their children tutored at home in Hebrew and secular studies,²⁹ it is also possible that Rebecca received some instruction informally from tutors or family members. As we shall see, at least one of Rebecca’s own daughters received schooling in the 1780s, if not before. In general, however, female education in the eighteenth century placed emphasis on the domestic rather than the intellectual. Women of the period were trained in needlework, music, dancing, and etiquette.³⁰

Rebecca Machado’s literacy can be inferred in a number of ways. Her father’s position as a teacher (from 1733), and cantor (1736–46) might have influenced the family to place a special emphasis on the education of his daughters. Any instructional impact David Machado might have had on his offspring, however, would have been curtailed by his untimely death when Rebecca was only a year old. Zipporah, supposed to have been fluent in a number of languages and fervently pious, might also have had an important influence on her daughter educationally, in both the religious and secular realms. The most forceful argument for Rebecca’s literacy is her organizational and leadership activism in the community and synagogue in the latter part of her life. These activities indicate that her abilities in the English language most probably extended beyond mere competence.

An Early Marriage

When Rebecca married at the age of sixteen, she was perhaps much younger than most American Jewish brides of her time. While Rebecca’s own mother

had married at age nineteen, Rebecca’s half sister married either at age twenty-six or thirty-two (the marriage age of her full sister, Sarah, is obscure).³¹ The average age of marriage for Jewish women of New York between 1728 and 1765 was 23.3 years; for men, 30.8.³²

Rebecca Machado was married in Hickory Town, Plymouth Township, Montgomery County, Pennsylvania, on November 10, 1762, to Jonas Phillips (1735–1803), eleven years her senior.³³ Phillips, an Ashkenazi, was born in Buseck, in present-day Germany, and had immigrated to Charles Town, South Carolina, in 1756.³⁴ The nuptials are recorded in the annals of Congregation Shearith Israel in New York. As in all congregation records of the period, Machado is identified as her father’s daughter only: “On the 24th Hesvan 10 November 1762 Was married at Philadelpa Mr. Jonas Philips [*sic*] of our Congregation With Miss Rebeca [*sic*] daughr of the Late Hazan of this Kahal Mr. Davd Mendes Machado.”³⁵ This unassuming entry appears amid a series of birth and death announcements whose phrases “Was Born” and “Departed this Life” would also be applied to the Phillips’s offspring in alternating joy and sorrow.

Rebecca’s marriage to Jonas Phillips is emblematic of the melding of Sephardic and Ashkenazic families in colonial America, a process accelerated by the outnumbering of Sephardim by Ashkenazim by the 1720s.³⁶ For Jonas, marriage to Rebecca would have symbolized social upward mobility, since Sephardim were associated with nobility and culture. Conversely, many eighteenth-century Sephardim scorned German Jews as “ill-bred and uncouth.”³⁷ These attitudes help to explain the fact that until the early 1800s all American congregations followed the Sephardic rite, although by around 1730, Ashkenazim were more numerous than Sephardim in a number of cities, including New York, rendering intramarriage a nearly inevitable prospect.³⁸ Perceptions of social inferiority also help explain why Jonas and so many other Ashkenazim of his time period adopted a Sephardic identity by marrying Sephardic women and adopting the Sephardic rite.³⁹ The deference to Sephardi culture, together with the fact that breakaway congregations, rebelling against Sephardic tradition, were not formed until the very late eighteenth century or early nineteenth century, ensured that Rebecca would probably not have had to adjust her Sephardi ritual practices to the religious traditions of her Ashkenazi husband.

Phillips’s financial situation at marriage was likely auspicious, though his origins were humble. He had arrived in Charles Town as an indentured servant and by 1759 had become a freeman of the city of Albany, New York. In that city, Jonas Phillips supported himself as a merchant of various food products and staples⁴⁰ until, in 1761, he shut down his business in Albany and set off for New York, presumably for the purposes of securing an introduction to Rebecca Machado.⁴¹ A family receipt book confirms his move to Albany that year. This

receipt book, which begins in 1759, is a recording of payments made by Jonas and Rebecca for household and business transactions. An entry dated October 9, 1761, and signed in New York details a payment "for freight [*sic*] and Passage from Albany."⁴² The two previous receipt entries are dated Albany, November 7th 1759 and New York, February 5, 1760, indicating that Phillips's interest in New York and perhaps in Rebecca began at least in early 1760.

Phillips's track record as a successful businessman was no doubt an attractive economic prospect to mother and stepfather seeking a financially secure match for their daughter. Although perhaps most matches of the time were arranged for utilitarian reasons, Rebecca and Jonas may have been drawn toward each other romantically as well.⁴³

Motherhood and Domestic Duties: A Difficult Beginning

Shortly after their marriage, Rebecca and her husband moved to New York, where Jonas resumed his activities as a businessman. By the next autumn, Rebecca had given birth to the first of their twenty-one children. The early years of marriage were financially strained. Phillips's business dealings were complicated by England's restrictive colonial trade regulations, and he became an insolvent debtor in 1764.⁴⁴ The following year, he secured a position as a ritual slaughterer and examiner of meat (*shokhet* and *bodek*) for Congregation Shearith Israel, in which capacity he served until 1769.⁴⁵ Thus, Rebecca, the daughter of the synagogue's late teacher and cantor, now had a new connection to a congregation official. Her husband earned a mere thirty-five pounds per annum, barely enough to support a growing family.⁴⁶ In the winter of 1769–70, Phillips resigned as *shokhet* and *bodek* and reclaimed his earlier calling as a businessman. He worked variably as an auctioneer, merchant, and broker, occupations with which he remained until his death.⁴⁷

The financial hardships the Phillips family endured early on were augmented by personal tragedy. From 1763 to 1772, four of Rebecca's children, including her firstborn, died before the age of one year. The years between 1770 and 1772 were particularly trying; over the period of these two years, Rebecca and Jonas lost three daughters. Although in these early years they faced dire financial straits, struggled to raise a growing family, and endured the death of a number of their babies, in the long run, Rebecca and Jonas were fortunate. Perhaps the majority of their children survived into adulthood. According to Malcolm H. Stern, from age seventeen to forty-six, over the span of twenty-nine years, Rebecca bore twenty-one children: Uriah (1763, died in infancy), Zipporah (1764–1792), Phila (1766–1852); David (1768–1817),⁴⁸ Sarah and Rachel (twins, the first dying in infancy in 1770, the second 1769–1839), Judith (1770, died in infancy); Hindlah (1771–1772); Naphtali (1773–1870); Benjamin Jonas

(1776–1830); Manuel (1780?⁴⁹–1826); Esther (Hetty) (1778–1845); Zalegman (1779–1839); Joseph (1788/5–1854); six others whose names and dates are unknown; and Aaron J[onas?] (1792–1847).⁵⁰ The size of the Phillips family is surprising given the high infant mortality rate of colonial and early American times. Having birthed twenty-one children, Rebecca is believed to have set the fertility record among early American Jewish families.⁵¹

Other than childbearing and child raising, very little is known regarding the early married period of Rebecca Phillips's life. Referring to the elusive history of early American women, Laurel Thatcher Ulrich reminds us that "historians should not confuse a paucity of documents for a dearth of activity."⁵² While her statement may seem axiomatic today, it was not to earlier historians who researched and wrote before the emergence of so-called pots and pans history. Reflecting on the New York Jewish women he included in his 1952 study, David de Sola Pool concluded that the majority "have as little 'biography' as a child for whom life has scarce begun."⁵³ Sola Pool did not find fault in the source, but rather in the subjects themselves, "For what life, other than one of routine domestic propriety, did women lead in 1725, or even in 1825? No public office, no community service, no business distinction was theirs, and living traditions of the personalities of a century ago or two centuries ago are as rare as they are apt to be unreliable."⁵⁴

While Sola Pool's suspicion of oral traditions is well taken, if not a bit too dismissive, his evaluation of women's activities in the private and public realms would have to be revised today. As historians have recently demonstrated, colonial women filled diversified roles even within the domestic sphere. Most women of the eighteenth century manufactured cloth, clothing, soap, and candles and prepared processed comestibles to serve as their winter food supply. Many took in boarders, and others functioned as shopkeepers. It is often erroneously assumed that women who worked in such capacities were spinsters or widows, "perhaps because the work of wives . . . who shared their husband's business and interests was little noted."⁵⁵ In light of this information, it is not impossible that Rebecca may have served as a helpmate to her husband, if not directly in his business endeavors, then at least through her economic contributions from producing domestically manufactured products.

What is certain is that Rebecca played at least some role in the management of the household, even before Jonas's death. The receipt book Jonas kept includes two transactions executed by his wife. One of these transactions occurred in 1766, when one pound, eight shillings, and nine pence was received from "Mrs Phillips" "for Minister and poor tax for this year."⁵⁶ In August 1780, two pounds and fifteen shillings was received from "Mrs J: Philipps [*sic*]. . . for 1/4 Schooling."⁵⁷ While these examples are admittedly few, it is possible that other transactions or efforts remained unrecorded. It is also possible that Rebecca may have undertaken these tasks while her husband was away on business.

There is also evidence that the Phillips family received extra income from a boarder on at least one occasion. Around 1769, in order to increment family earnings, Jonas Phillips took in an ailing man as a lodger. We may assume, as does Jacob Rader Marcus, that it was Rebecca who tended to the boarder's needs and upkeep. "After all," Marcus assumes, "a young healthy woman of twenty-four, who had only three or four children of her own, could easily assume the care of another person, even if he was sick. Hard work certainly did not hurt her; we know that she lived to be eighty-five years of age."⁵⁸ While appreciation for the immense tasks of child raising and household management in colonial and early America is somewhat understated here, Marcus is correct in recognizing the economic elements inherent in domestically related activity.

The domestic domain may have increasingly fallen under the jurisdiction of Rebecca as Jonas, during the second decade of the marriage, assumed an important role in political affairs. In 1770 he was one of ten Jews to sign the Non-Importation Agreement in New York. In 1774 he transferred his family and business to Philadelphia, where Rebecca's family resided after the occupation of New York by the British army.⁵⁹ Philadelphia, the only city in America to escape siege or occupation by the British, was a central refuge for Jewish Whigs, and its Jewish community, like that of Charleston, emerged from the war larger and organizationally improved.⁶⁰

Rebecca is mentioned in passing during this period in the business and personal correspondence of her husband, but references to her seem to reflect epistolary conventions more than the quality of their marriage or domestic life. Still, a certain degree of companionship may be implied in these letters. On September 14, 1769, writing from New York, Jonas addressed Moses Michael Hays in a letter regarding business, sending salutations in his and his wife's name: "Mrs. Phillips joins with me in our unsigned acknowledgment and we pray that the Almighty may reward your children for your intended goodness to a poor, but honest family."⁶¹ In 1776 he sent a letter to Holland in Yiddish, addressed to his relative and business correspondent, which he concluded with the words: "My wife and children, long life to her and them, together send you many greetings and wish your good health up to one hundred years."⁶² In contrast, half a century later, Rebecca's grandson, Mordecai Manuel Noah, would write much more revealing letters to his wife, in which he would share details of his professional life and express his deep concern and affection for her and his children.⁶³

Marriage and Domestic Duties: The Prosperous Years

By the third decade of their marriage, the Phillips family had become prosperous. This was not unusual, for many Jewish males, as Jonathan Sarna notes,

"emerged from the war wealthy men."⁶⁴ According to Philadelphia tax records of 1781 and 1782, Jonas, who worked as a merchant during the Revolution, was the second wealthiest Jew of the city.⁶⁵ During this time, the Phillips family was able to contribute generously to the synagogue, and Jonas became increasingly involved in congregational leadership. Phillips was elected trustee of Mikveh Israel in Philadelphia in 1782 and also served as president and parnas of the congregation in that year, no doubt strengthening the family's ties to the synagogue.

Was Rebecca's time freed up by domestic servants or even slaves, employed by so many Jewish families of the era? An entry in Jonas Phillips's receipt book, recorded nearly a year after their marriage in October 1763, indicates that Jonas purchased a "Negroe Boy" for eleven pounds. In November 1786, Jonas purchased "a Negroe Wench" and "a Negroe Named Gregg," both the "Property of Mrs. Abigl. Watson."⁶⁶ It is not clear what became of these individuals, for the 1790 census of Philadelphia County mentions Jonas Phillips as the owner of only one slave.⁶⁷

Apparently, the Phillips family was also assisted by hired help. An October 1776 entry in the receipt book indicates the payment of "Ten pounds in full for the time of an English Servant Lad."⁶⁸ It is possible that at least one such servant resided with the Phillips family. The 1800 Philadelphia city census, under "Jonas Philips" [*sic*], lists one individual in the column, "All other free persons except Indians not taxed."⁶⁹

Even so, if family lore is correct, until the turn of the nineteenth century even women who employed domestics bore the exclusive onus of supervising a kosher kitchen. N. Taylor Phillips, who was the family's lay historian and a direct descendant of Rebecca, wrote in 1927:

No matter how well off they were, how rich they were, whether they were Gomez or Machado, or who they were, the women either did the cooking themselves or superintended it. It was not left to the slaves, or to the Negroes. If it was, it was a treifa house, that is, the house that permitted the servants exclusively to run the kitchen. People would not eat there, and, therefore, the woman of the house either had to do it herself or had to be on the job and see that it was properly done. If she had a lot of servants, she directed them or could give the final O.K. that everything was according to "Hoyle," but she had to be there personally.⁷⁰

If Sephardic women were particularly exacting in matters of dietary laws, as N. Taylor Phillips implies, their task would have been rendered more complicated during the time period under discussion. Even beyond the Jewish dietary laws (*kashrut*), food preparation and presentation and family sociability became increasingly complex during Rebecca's lifetime. As material culture has revealed, the intricacies of running a household in eighteenth-century America

were numerous. Rebecca was born during an era that witnessed increasing domesticity. Inventory lists, wills, and disposal pits of eighteenth-century America suggest that middle-class families were increasingly purchasing comfortable furniture, replacing wooden trenchers with fine dining utensils, and serving tea as a leisurely drink.⁷¹ This led to a more sociable domestic atmosphere and provided the basis for the emerging cult of domesticity associated with Protestant middle-class ideals.⁷² It is likely that Rebecca was entertaining guests and enjoying more leisurely meals with her family than did her seventeenth-century American Jewish predecessors.

The only known source that may shed light on the manner in which the Phillips household was managed is a newspaper column written by Rebecca's grandson, Mordecai Manuel Noah. Noah was in an ideal position to report on his grandparents' household, since at the age of seven (in 1792) he and his three-year-old sister, Judith (1789–1868), were adopted by Jonas and Rebecca Phillips upon the death of the children's mother, Zipporah. If Noah was deeply impressed by his great-grandmother's memories of Inquisitorial persecution, the influence of his maternal grandparents was probably even more powerful.

From 1818–1820, Noah, then the editor of New York's Democratic-sponsored *National Advocate*, authored a column called "Domestic Economy," which appeared under the pseudonym, "Howard."⁷³ Noah finally revealed his authorship more than twenty years later, when his columns were collected and published in *Gleanings from a Gathered Harvest* (1845 and 1847). In these volumes, "M. M. Noah" appears on the title page, and references to "Mr. Howard" are replaced with "the Major."⁷⁴ The original "Domestic Economy" installments offered a social critique of middle-class American society and also dispensed advice, emphasizing the importance of proper demeanor, discipline of children, and personal industry and frugality. A number of these installments are most interesting for their portrayal of domestic life.

In October 1818, at which time Jonas Phillips had been deceased for fifteen years, Noah published an installment focusing on the importance of "economy" that his grandfather had stressed:

I remember that my grandfather, who was a keen observer of things, used to contend that, in his time, more real happiness was enjoyed with few wants—pleasures never sated, because they were prudently sought after. Our houses then, said the old gentleman, were small, but commodious—our tables plentifully supplied, but with economy—our evenings passed before the cheerful fireside or in a pleasant evening walk—our income was stationary, of [u]r expenditures reasonable—we had always something in store, and accustomed our children to industry—we brought them up carefully, and could give them a small outfit in life.⁷⁵

Could Noah have been alluding to the Phillips household? While this passage does not allude to the author's own upbringing, others do.

In the 1819 installment, Noah refers directly to his own childhood. His upbringing, he recalled, had been one of distinctive simplicity, and he and "seven others" were kept under control with structure and discipline. Noah's description of his childhood gives the impression of parental authorities who neither severely disciplined nor spoiled their offspring and provided warmth and affection. "[W]e had a reasonable proportion of delicacies reserved for us," Noah reminisced, "and at night we joined the family party, who were all pleased to see us, and that was the season for mirth and judicious hilarity: our education was not neglected—our appetites were not pampered—our minds were not ruined by extravagance—and our principles were not vitiated by bad examples."⁷⁶

The social atmosphere Noah describes in his 1818 column confirms what is known of domesticity in the eighteenth century. The picture Noah paints, however, one in which both men and women had abundant leisure to socialize and relax, seems overly idealized. His grandfather's home is depicted as a place of pleasant social gathering where introductions were made and pleasant news exchanged. Again, Noah speaks through his grandfather's voice:

A friend or two would, in the morning, send word to my wife that they would spend the afternoon with her. At two o'clock (for we had then dined) the company would come in, neatly, nay, elegantly, dressed—each had some little fine piece of work to do, some ruffle to hem or handkerchief to mark—conversation was sprightly and amusing. Towards evening the gentlemen, released from their various avocations, would drop in and add to the general hilarity. At five o'clock we drew round the table, which was plentifully and substantially supplied; the jest, the modest repartee, the jocund laugh and sprightly dialogue, went freely round, the men polite, without ostentation, the ladies delicate, without affectation. The approach of night gave an additional zest to salutary amusement—a tune on the Spinnet—a plaintive ballad—"Twas when the seas were roaring," or "Come live with me and be my love"—an anecdote—a tale without scandal—remarks on general topics—literature—the progress of industry—economy—marriages and christenings⁷⁷—a ball—and a thousand pretty things consumed the time until eight o'clock, when the gentlemen gallantly waited upon the ladies home; and from these visits many happy events arose—many matches were made suitable and suited—many friendships contracted beneficial and durable.⁷⁸

Even though the Phillips family were prosperous by the 1790s, the scene depicted by Noah is hardly evocative of a household of over a dozen children. In addition, Noah's childhood was not as structured as he suggested in his columns. As Jonathan D. Sarna notes, Noah's childhood was "as unstable as his later political career," since he "apparently moved from place to place, held down a variety of jobs, and educated himself in between."⁷⁹

And yet a number of historians have interpreted these installments as depictions of the Phillips household. This is partially because of the important impact Jonas Phillips had on his grandson. According to Isaac Goldberg, writing in 1936, Noah was "the son . . . of his maternal grandfather."⁸⁰ Similarly, Edwin Wolf and Maxwell Whiteman remarked in 1957 that Noah was the true "spiritual son" of Jonas Phillips.⁸¹ Jonathan Sarna also agrees that Noah "was heavily influenced by his grandfather."⁸² Goldberg, in his 1936 monograph, even assumed that Noah's discussions of his childhood and his grandfather in the *National Advocate* columns were authentically autobiographical. Goldberg, in fact, cited these two installments as illustrative of Noah's upbringing.⁸³ Perhaps because Noah did not mention a grandmother in his column, scholars have not considered the influence of Rebecca on her grandson in the context of "domestic economy." While Noah's columns should probably not be taken as literally as Isaac Goldberg has, they may contain some elements reflective of the years spent with both Rebecca and Jonas Phillips.

In the correspondence of Mordecai Manuel Noah to his wife (also named Rebecca), however, we do find direct allusions to Rebecca Phillips. Although these twenty-eight letters are almost all undated, it is clear that they were written during the last three years of Rebecca Phillips's life and shortly after her death. Often, it is possible to ascertain the year of the letter through references to Noah's children and the Phillips estate. Many of these letters were composed while Noah was away from his New York home on business, frequently in Philadelphia, where he stayed with his grandmother. In a letter dated only "Philada Thursday" but written between December 1828 and October 1830,⁸⁴ Noah described the scene that awaited him at his grandmother's house, a scene almost reminiscent of his "Domestic Economy" installment of 1818:

My dear Rebeca [sic]

I arrived last evening about 8 after a comfortable ride though rather cold & found my dear grandmother quite well and not a little rejoiced to see me. Mrs Pesoa⁸⁵ and Kate Phillips⁸⁶ were there when I arrived & we had a long dish of chat about every thing [sic] until 10 OClock when I had some hot peed [?] meal & went to bed & had a fine sleep.

After describing the social evening with his grandmother and female relatives, Mordecai alludes to his firstborn child, Manuel Mordecai (Manny), and relays the advice Rebecca Phillips dispensed on motherhood.

. . . Grandma is very anxious to see you & says you must take care & keep flannel over your bosom when nursing as Ann Allen⁸⁷ is suffering dreadful from swelled breasts & that you must not stuff the boy too much & see that some one takes him

from you early in the morning so that you may have some sleep. If your girl wont [sic] answer dont [sic] keep her but get a good careful person at any price & dont [sic] allow yourself to be fatigued.⁸⁸

Rebecca Phillips's advice is probably partly drawn from her own experiences raising children with the benefit of household help, including slaves, servants, and as we shall see, a wet nurse. Rebecca would live to see the birth of yet another Noah great-grandchild; Jacob Noah, born in October 1830.

Rebecca apparently enjoyed a close relationship with her grandson, his wife, and their children. In another letter to his wife, Manuel Noah wrote: "Grandma is quite well & sends many loves [?] to you & longs to see you & our little fellow."⁸⁹ At least on one occasion, Rebecca Noah stayed with her grandmother-in-law on 41 North 4th Street, apparently while on vacation. A letter written by Mordecai Manuel Noah to his wife in Philadelphia reveals that at this time the couple still had only one child.⁹⁰

Another undated letter, which was sent from Philadelphia and mentions Noah's two sons, was apparently written shortly after Rebecca Phillips's death. The letter alludes to disputes over (presumably) the Phillips estate. Noah mentions a "disgusting account" of the behavior of certain individuals vying for various possessions and alludes to Mrs. Pesoa's overwhelming grief, which, he adds wryly, "did not prevent her attending the sale & purchasing all the odds & ends of the old trash."⁹¹ Many of Noah's subsequent letters from Philadelphia make direct references to the Phillips estate and Noah's efforts to resolve issues of inheritance and the fate of his grandmother's property. In one letter, Noah expresses his intentions to retain some of the estate within the family, "as a matter of pride that out of 60 children & grandchildren I should be the only one capable of securing part of my grandfathers [sic] estate in the family."⁹² Even though the estate had passed into his grandmother's hands, Noah still conceived of it as his grandfather's legacy. He does mention his grandmother, however, in reference to one of her possessions: "I suppd with Aunt Phila on Friday She gave me a silver shell of grandmother for *Haronsas* [?] which adds something to our small House."⁹³ "Haronsas" might be a corruption of the Hebrew word, *haroset*, a dish consumed during the Passover seder to symbolize the mortar used by the ancient Israelite slaves in Egypt. In the Ashkenazic pronunciation, the word would be pronounced *haroses*. If Noah was indeed referring to his grandmother's *haroset* dish, this would be yet another example of Rebecca's activities in running a traditional Jewish household.

The last reference Noah makes to his grandmother is sometime after 1841 in a letter again written from Philadelphia. In his absence, Noah asks his wife to ensure that their eldest son, Manny, be called up in Noah's place to recite "escokovas [memorial prayers⁹⁴] for my father & mother grandfather & grandmother & your father[.]"⁹⁵ While the above references Noah made to his grandmother

are often brief and undetailed, they are testimonies to Rebecca's impact on her grandson's life, particularly considering that Mordecai Manuel's other grandmother or (paternal) grandfather are never mentioned in these letters.⁹⁶

If Noah did not leave direct testimony regarding the early domestic environment of the Phillips household, the receipt books Jonas and Rebecca recorded are more forthcoming. These records also shed light on the upbringing of the Phillips children. From these records, we know that at least some of the Phillips children likely received nonreligious instruction, probably in addition to the Jewish education provided by the synagogue. In November 1776, Jonas Phillips's receipt book records the payment to "Man Maguire" of one pound, eight shillings, "for Schooling his Children." Similarly, a December 1777 entry records the payment of thirteen pounds, six shillings, three pence to Ann Mark, again "for schooling of his Children." Similar entries, referring to teachers with gentile-sounding first and last names, appear for August and November 1779, October 1782, May 1788, June 1789, March 1803, and May 1805. The receipt books confirm that the Phillips daughters also received an education. An entry from September 1786 indicates Jonas's payment in full "for a Quarter schooling of his Daughter."⁹⁷

The receipt books also bear some traces of the medical preoccupations of the Phillips family. Jonas Phillips's receipt book indicates a number of payments to Dr. John Redman in 1780 for "Sundry" medical visits and medication for a Phillips "Child," including medicine against smallpox. An undated entry, sandwiched between entries dated December 23, 1763, and December 28, 1763, refers to the payment of two pounds, eight shillings, six pence to a Dr. Middleton.⁹⁸

Another doctor, however, appears to have been far more involved with the Phillips family's health and life in general. Dr. Benjamin Rush (1746–1813), who served as family physician to the Phillips family, was "one of the most influential doctors in American history"⁹⁹ and a signer of the Declaration of Independence. Dr. Rush was based in Philadelphia and was also physician to the Franks family.¹⁰⁰ He recorded thirty-seven entries referring to service rendered to a number of Phillips family members, including Rebecca, between June 1787 and May 1795 (the period covering the forty-first through the forty-ninth years of Rebecca's life). Many more entries are recorded from 1795 through 1801, in addition to a charge to Rebecca, already a widow, in April 1805.¹⁰¹ The bulk of these years spans the latter end of Rebecca's fertility period. Between 1787 and 1792, Rebecca gave birth to as many as seven children.¹⁰² The June 1787 entry in Dr. Rush's commonplace book reads, "To sundries for wife £5.15."¹⁰³

Dr. Rush distinguished himself from the other doctors who administered to the Phillips family, for it is known that he also interacted with the Phillips family socially. In June 1787, he accepted an invitation to attend the wedding of eighteen-year-old Rachel, the fifth child of Jonas and Rebecca, whose twin had

died at the age of one. According to historians Edwin Wolf and Maxwell Whiteman, the letter to Dr. Rush's wife, in which the physician describes the ceremony, is the only surviving account of an eighteenth-century Jewish wedding.¹⁰⁴ Dr. Rush's correspondence mentions Mrs. Phillips twice.¹⁰⁵ "As soon as this canopy was fixed," he wrote, "the bride, accompanied with her mother, sister, and a long train of female relations, came downstairs." After Jonas Phillips urged his guest to partake of some wedding cake and wine, Dr. Rush noted that Rebecca had lost consciousness owing to the heat. "Upon going into one of the rooms upstairs to ask how Mrs. Philips [*sic*] did, who had fainted downstairs under the pressure of the heat (for she was weak from a previous indisposition), I discovered the bride and groom supping a bowl of broth together. Mrs. Phillips [*sic*] apologized for them by telling me they had eaten nothing (agreeably to the custom prescribed by their religion) since the night before."¹⁰⁶

Dr. Rush's medical records and epistles reveal some of Rebecca's physical frailties and suggest that the enormous physical exertion involved in bearing and raising a prodigious family was not without its accompanying ailments. Dr. Rush spoke euphemistically concerning Rebecca's condition, in keeping with an epoch during which labor was referred to as being taken "ill" and delivery as being "brought to Bed."¹⁰⁷ Dr. Rush's vague descriptions notwithstanding, it is well possible that Rebecca's "indisposition" was connected to a pregnancy; between 1780 and 1792, Rebecca gave birth to eight children, and she may indeed have been pregnant in 1787.

Medical concerns aside, Dr. Rush's description of the wedding provides an image of Rebecca as a welcoming and gracious hostess and suggests that a warm friendship had developed between the two families. "Upon my taking leave of the company," the physician wrote his wife, "Mrs. Phillips put a large piece of cake into my pocket for you, which she begged I would present to you with her best compliments. She says you are an old New York acquaintance of hers."¹⁰⁸

Social interactions between Dr. Rush and the Phillips family continued into the next decade. In June 1792, Dr. Rush attended the circumcision of Aaron, perhaps the youngest Phillips child.¹⁰⁹ He recorded a description of the event in his commonplace book. Of the over thirty guests in attendance, the physician notes, he was the only Gentile. The men were present in the room during the procedure, Dr. Rush noted, while the "women remained upstairs 'till the operation was completed and the child returned to the mother." After describing the "operation" in detail, Dr. Rush noted, "When the ceremony was finished, and the child returned to its mother, all the friends of the family went up to her and saluted her. The women upstairs showed great marks of distress and sympathy during the performance of the ceremony. Mrs. Norris [an unidentified guest in attendance] said she rejoiced that her last child was a girl, as it thereby escaped the dreadful operation."¹¹⁰ Though Rebecca's voice is notably lost in

this vignette, her marginal role in the actual ceremony is striking. Rebecca becomes the center of attention only after the actual circumcision, when both men and women mingle to congratulate her.

Yet another intimate detail referring to Rebecca as a parturient is offered in the receipt books. According to Jonas's financial records, on at least one occasion Rebecca received assistance from a wet nurse. An entry recorded on June 16, 1788, indicates that Jonas Phillips paid three dollars to an Elinor Anthony "for nursing his child."¹¹¹ This unnamed child must be one of the unnamed "6 OTHERS" that Malcolm H. Stern notes in his genealogy as having been born between 1780/5, the year of Joseph's birth, and 1792, the year of Aaron's birth. We can only conjecture why Rebecca might have called on the services of a "milkmother," and whether or not this was the first time she did so. Was Rebecca ill during this period? Was she merely seeking a brief respite from the onus of nourishing an infant? Given that nursing frequently acts as a form of natural birth control, it is also possible that Rebecca's periodic pregnancies and this reference to a wet nurse indicate that this matriarch was not suckling her children, at least during this period.

Considering that Rebecca spent nearly half of her adulthood bearing children, it is important to consider whether or not she observed the Jewish laws of ritual purification. According to Jewish law, a married woman must immerse herself in a ritual bath (*mikva*) after the completion of each menstrual cycle and after giving birth before she is allowed to resume marital relations with her husband. While there is no direct evidence that Rebecca observed these laws, a document from 1784 suggests that some religious laxity regarding the laws of family purity (*taharat ha-mishpakha*) prevailed among the Jewish community of Philadelphia. This document, a petition written by the members of Congregation Mikveh Israel, complains of "the want of a proper Mikve or Bathing [*sic*] place according to our Law & Institution, for the purification of Married Women at certain periods." The petition noted that children born of unions in which the laws of ritual purification were not practiced were adversely affected, and it warned that "should it be known in the Congregations abroad, that we had been thus neglectful of so important a matter, they would not only pronounce heavy Anathemas against us, but interdict & avoid intermarriages with us equal as with a different Nation or Sect to our great shame & Mortification." The petition resolves to construct a *mikva* "for the sole use of our Congregation."¹¹² The petition is unsigned and makes no reference to the Phillips family, but its date coincides with the period during which Jonas Phillips undertook an active role in congregational affairs, and it sheds light on the religious issues of concern to Rebecca's community at the time.

Indications of the religious observance of the Phillips family are found in Jonas Phillips's receipt book, which notes that "Matsas" were baked for him and that payment was received in October 1772 (suggesting a deferred payment,

since Passover falls in the spring). In November 1772, Jonas paid "Beny N Seixas" ten pounds, ten shillings, four and a half pence for "1 pair Silver Candlestickes," perhaps for the candles Rebecca would have lit on the eve of every Sabbath and Jewish holiday, in keeping with Jewish tradition.¹¹³

Yet Rebecca's involvement in Jewish religious life cannot be considered as limited to traditional ritual observance, particularly in an epoch where public participation in synagogue worship was the exclusive domain of males. In her case, commitment to the Jewish people and religion also extended to what Holly Snyder has referred to as "personal piety,"¹¹⁴ that is, an individual, independent act to benefit the Jewish community. In Rebecca's case, this commitment manifested itself dramatically in the realm of communal voluntarism.

Communal Activism

During the last ten years of her childbearing years, if not earlier, Rebecca began to adopt an active role in both Jewish and non-Jewish public affairs. In 1782 she and Grace Nathan (1752–1831)¹¹⁵ undertook public service for the newly founded synagogue, Mikveh Israel of Philadelphia. By this time, the Revolution had increased Philadelphia's Jewish community to two hundred families (approximately one thousand Jews), and the need for a synagogue building to replace rented halls of worship became pressing.¹¹⁶ Rebecca's husband was among the signers of a memorandum that formally acknowledged the building of the synagogue in 1782. The secure financial status of the family is suggested by the fact that Jonas was one of the most generous donors to the fledgling congregation.¹¹⁷ Rebecca Phillips and Grace Nathan seemed to have been involved in fund-raising and the collection of funds for the purchase of synagogue ritual objects. That fall they received a letter from the congregation expressing gratitude "for the trouble they took in handing about the Subscription to the ladies of this Congregation for to purchase a Tabat [*teivah*] Cloth and Curtains for the Echal [*heichal*], and that they be requested to lay out the money in providing a Tabat Cloth, and if any money left to lay it out for Curtains for the Echal."¹¹⁸ A note found in the archives of Congregation Mikveh Israel substantiates that these funds also went toward the purchase of two mantles for "Sepharim" (presumably Torah scrolls) and lists "Mrs. Phillips" as the donor of one pound, ten shillings.¹¹⁹

By the year of the founding of the Philadelphia synagogue, Rebecca had given birth to perhaps fourteen children, if not more, of whom at least ten were living. In the next several years her communal activism was to extend to the non-Jewish community as well. Rebecca's most impressive communal contributions came in the early 1800s. In 1801, at the age of fifty-five, Rebecca was one of the founding members of the Female Association for the Relief of

Women and Children in Reduced Circumstances. This Philadelphia organization, in which Gentile and Jewish women joined efforts, was dedicated to assisting yellow fever victims in Baltimore, supporting a "soup-house" for the poor, and generally providing food and clothing to indigent women and children.¹²⁰ Only two years later, Rebecca was widowed, leaving her a single mother of as many as sixteen children.

If Rebecca's communal activism suggests some degree of financial and social independence, the family receipt book demonstrates that she assumed increased control over the household management upon her husband's death. As noted above, until Jonas's death in January 1803, Rebecca carried out only two transactions. From the time of Jonas' death until June of that year, all transactions were executed by Benjamin Jonas (1776–1830), the tenth child born to Rebecca and Jonas; he was the oldest unmarried male child at that time and is referred to in the receipt book as "Executor to the Estate of Jonas Phillips." Yet by June 15, Rebecca was undertaking all business transactions recorded in the receipt book. In July 1804, Rebecca is specifically referred to as "Executrix [sic] of es. [estate] of Jonas Phillips."¹²¹

Jonas Phillips's will confirms that he allotted considerable control to his widow to manage his affairs after his death. The will, which refers to Rebecca as "my beloved wife," names her as executrix and her three sons, Naphtali, Benjamin, and Zalegman, as executors. Jonas willed much of his estate to his wife, for her to keep as long as she remained a widow, an estate including "all my ready money, jewelry, plate and furniture etc."; "the rent ensuing from my house number 38 in Market Street Philadelphia"; the interest from all of his stock; "all my merchandize & stock in trade . . . to help to maintain the children untill they are Twenty one years of age"; and the couple's Philadelphia home at No. 41 Fourth Street North.¹²²

Rebecca's receipt books confirm the central role she assumed in household management after her husband's death. These receipts, which span a period of twenty-two years, bring to life some of the specifications and ramifications of Jonas's will. From entries referring to city, country, poor, and health taxes paid, we learn that Rebecca was paying taxes on a number of dwellings formerly belonging to her husband, including houses at 41 North Fourth Street, 14 South Street, and another two on Cherry Street and Market Street. Many of the receipts reveal the work Rebecca commissioned for the upkeep of her property and households, including "papering" a room in her house, "roofing the front & Back house She now occupys," "Bricklaying," "hawling Wood," "repairing a clock," and "repairing furniture." Others, such as receipts for "one quarter tuition for Aaron" and "one Pair Boots for Aaron," is evidence of the time Rebecca spent tending to perhaps her youngest child's needs. Other receipts relate to household expenses, such as the purchase of "Beef," "Mutton," "veal," "Bread," "Milk," "Mead," "flour," "groceries," and "lumber." Several entries

for "Postage of Letter(s)," spanning the period from March 1817 through April 1827,¹²³ suggest that Rebecca may have maintained an active correspondence, perhaps with her grown children, who now had families of their own.

Rebecca's observance of Judaism and involvement in synagogue life continued well after her husband's death. In May 1818 and 1821, Rebecca made purchases for "Passover Bread." In January 1808, Rebecca paid \$1.25 for her "fourth Quarter Subscription to H. K. Mikva Israel, and in January 1814, she submitted \$10.26 to Levy Phillips, the *gabay* (manager or treasurer of a synagogue), representing "three Bills paid up to this [day] for the Congregation."¹²⁴ Her continued involvement in the local synagogue is also attested to in a receipt from Mikveh Israel dated 1812, indicating that this matriarch contributed two dollars for a quarter of a year.¹²⁵ These membership dues confirm that Rebecca, widowed since 1803, was handling her own financial affairs and enjoyed financial security. Rebecca's dedication to her congregation is also evident in her bequest of a large scroll of the Book of Esther, the *megilah* from which the *hazan* at Congregation Shearith Israel has traditionally read.¹²⁶

Rebecca's personal piety and dedication to her people shone particularly during her widowed years. In 1820, at the age of seventy-four, Rebecca, now widowed for seventeen years, served as first directress and one of thirteen managers serving on the board of the Female Hebrew Benevolent Society of Philadelphia. The Female Hebrew Benevolent Society, founded in 1819 to assist the Jewish indigent, was the first non-synagogue-related charitable society in America.¹²⁷ As Dianne Ashton has noted, the Society represented a pioneering movement that brought women into the public sphere and provided the basis for Jewish feminism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.¹²⁸ Organizations such as this one were particularly vital, given the increasing evangelism of the early twentieth century. In addition, as Ashton has written, "Victorian sexism" was most pronounced in the middle and upper classes, where women's meager earnings made them more dependent on men. Thus, philanthropy offered a means of expressing independent opinions regarding society and enabled women to publicly display their status.¹²⁹ For these women in particular, philanthropic organizations represented a means of developing self-esteem.¹³⁰

Rebecca's responsibilities as first directress are clearly delineated in the society's constitution: "The first Directress shall preside at the meetings of the Board of Managers, preserve order, appoint committees, call special meetings, and give the casting vote in questions where the board are equally divided."¹³¹ The society held two general meetings yearly; managers met once every two weeks during the winter and more frequently if needed.¹³² Phillips served with such well-known personages as Rebecca Gratz and Richea Hays, who were among the thirteen managers of the board of officers.¹³³ In 1820, Rebecca paid the society an annual subscription of three dollars (two dollars annually was

required for membership.¹³⁴ The last record of Rebecca's public involvement dates to 1825, six years before her death, when she donated thirty dollars to Mikveh Israel's Building Committee.¹³⁵ The last entry in Rebecca's receipt book also dates to this time. The abrupt cessation of the receipt book in December of that year suggests either that Rebecca became incapable of conducting her own financial affairs, or that these records were lost.¹³⁶

The Last Years

Perhaps the most tangible surviving evidence of Rebecca Phillips is a portrait housed at the American Jewish Historical Society in Waltham, Massachusetts. The portrait is attributed to Charles Wilson Peale (1741–1831) and is thought to be a copy of the original, now lost. The society also owns a second copy of this painting, suggesting that Rebecca's likeness was often reproduced and probably hung in the homes of some of her descendants. Rebecca's picture is part of a "pendant pair," a tradition imported from Europe, and was meant to be hung alongside a complementary portrait of her husband, also housed at the American Jewish Historical Society. When these two pictures are placed side by side, husband and wife appear to be turned slightly toward each other.

Portraits of colonial and early American Jewish women were almost never painted without an accompanying pendant portrait or without children also appearing in the frame. Portraits of this time period were strictly for family use, and only middle- and upper-class families commissioned such paintings. The exact date of the painting is unknown, but according to the style of dress, it was probably completed in the very late eighteenth century. Certainly, it could not have been produced much later, since Jonas died in 1803.

Rebecca is shown in a bonnet and lace-embroidered dress, fashions typical of the period. Usually, paintings of this period feature domestic or fertility-based symbols, such as flowers. Rebecca, in contrast, is depicted holding a book, perhaps a suggestion of learnedness or piety.¹³⁷ The portrait of Rebecca Phillips is highly significant in that it is the most direct communication we have of her person. The portrait offers a material glimpse of the past and lifts Rebecca out of the flatness of written sources.

As Samuel Reznick notes, the death of Jonas Phillips on January 29, 1803, at age sixty-seven led to "a somewhat unusual separation of the two ancestors and founders of the Phillips family."¹³⁸ Reznick surmises that due to "some unrecorded quarrel" with the Congregation of Mikveh Israel, Jonas Phillips had ordered his remains taken to New York City, where they are interred in the burial grounds of Shearith Israel.¹³⁹ In his will, Phillips simply wrote, "it is my request that I be Buried amongst my Brethern of the Jewish Society of New York



Rebecca Machado Phillips, a pioneering communal activist and philanthropist. Her personal Judaism foreshadowed much that would soon be commonplace in the religious lives of American Jewish women. *American Jewish Historical Society, Waltham, Massachusetts, and New York.*

whereof I consider myself a Member."¹⁴⁰ Interestingly, the original engraving on his tomb, now effaced, allegedly identified him relationally through both his father and his wife: "Jonas Phillips, Merchant, / son of Aaron Uriah Phillips / and husband of Rebecca Mendez Machado."¹⁴¹ Tombstones of early American Jewish males rarely mentioned spouses. It is possible that Rebecca's name was included in order to clarify a relationship not readily apparent due to the geographical distance between Jonas's remains and those of his widow.

One wonders whether, alternatively, the engraving also may represent this patriarch's devotion to his life companion. Another unconfirmed description of Jonas's tombstone refers to an engraving of his widow seated at his grave, accompanied by a small child.¹⁴² The drawing of the child could represent Aaron, perhaps the youngest of the Phillips offspring, who would have been eleven at the time, or perhaps it was collectively symbolic of Rebecca's orphaned children and the distress of widowhood.

Rebecca herself passed away at age eighty-five on June 23 or 25, 1831, in Philadelphia and lies buried in the Mikveh Israel Cemetery of that city.¹⁴³ Two of her sons, Zalegman and Joseph, are buried in the same row. Zalegman, Rebecca's thirteenth child, who served as president of Congregation Mikveh Israel from 1822 to 1834, wrote the following memorandum upon the death of his mother:

On Tuesday 10th of Tamuz 5591 June 1831 my beloved and lamented Mother Mrs. Rebecca Phillips departed this life at half-past six o'clock in the morning aged eighty-five years six months and eleven days. She was buried on the 22nd of June, adjoining Reverend A. S. Key's (Keys). She was the daughter of the Reverend David Mendes Machado, one of the first Hazanim of New York; and of his wife, Zipporah, the daughter of Doctor Nunez who came over from Portugal as physician to Governor Oglethorpe and his suite at the first settlement of Georgia. My Mother was born in the Town of Reading Berks Country Pennsylvania. All her ancestors were born in Portugal.

Signed, Zalegman Phillips.¹⁴⁴

Zalegman's manner of identifying his mother offers little that is new but at the same time, reveals much in the way of her status among the Philadelphia Jewish community and Zalegman's regard for her. Rebecca's burial place next to Abraham Israel Keys, a hazan of the congregation who died in 1828, is perhaps a suggestion of a place of honor.¹⁴⁵ Keys served as cantor and teacher of the congregation from 1824 until his death and is described candidly but favorably in a personal epistle of Rebecca Gratz.¹⁴⁶

Zalegman identifies Rebecca relationally and ancestrally as daughter and mother and as bearing Portuguese descent. The specification of her Sephardic ancestry is significant in that it conjures up associations of legendary nobility and Inquisitorial martyrdom. Rebecca's father and maternal grandfather, meanwhile, are identified according to their profession and status as American Jewish pioneers. Thus, Rebecca's importance and identity, as conveyed through her son's words, lies mainly in the men with whom she is associated. No mention is made of the prodigious family Rebecca raised nor of her public activities in the synagogue and in Jewish and non-Jewish organizations.

Rebecca's own tombstone inscription may have been similar to her son's memorandum. In 1897 this inscription was recorded, but regrettably, due to

"typographical reasons," the Hebrew section was not. Identifying widow Phillips relationally, the English inscription reads: "Phillips, Rebecca: born in New York. 17 Nov., 1746; died in Philadelphia, 21 June, 1831. Daughter of Rev. David Mendez Machado and relict of Jonas Phillips."¹⁴⁷ Today, regrettably, both the English and Hebrew inscriptions are almost completely illegible.¹⁴⁸

A descendant of Rebecca confirms the high status Rebecca enjoyed within the Jewish community of Philadelphia. She was well respected even after the demise of her husband, N. Taylor Phillips wrote in 1894. "She never remarried," he noted, "and was treated with marked attention. I have heard it stated by those who remembered the circumstance that for many years, after service was concluded on the Sabbath, nearly the whole Congregation filed into her house, which was not far from the Synagogue, in order to pay her their respects."¹⁴⁹ In reviewing the life of Rebecca (Machado) Phillips, it seems apparent that the high status she enjoyed derived from her exceptional generosity and productivity, not only in the familial realm, through raising her children and grandchildren, but in the public sphere as well, through her voluntarism in both the Jewish and non-Jewish communities.

Phillips lived during a period in which the social and political roles of women were radically transformed. Contemporary scholarship designates the years 1750–1815 as an era characterized by increasing freedom to choose a mate and limit fertility. The heightened status of American women is also suggested in family paintings of this period, which begin to show distinctions between women and children. In part, it was the Revolution that allowed women to take over male responsibilities, become involved to some extent in politics, and achieve a certain degree of autonomy from men. These factors, while they formed the prerequisite for women's organizations, led to the establishment of "Republican Motherhood," a domestic ideal in which women were to be nurturing, sacrificing, and patriotic mothers.¹⁵⁰ Another trend, which scholars refer to as the "Cult of Single Blessedness," and which developed from 1810 to 1860, idealizes the altruistic communal activism of unmarried women.¹⁵¹ Rebecca Phillips is striking in that she embodied two extremes: the fecundity and devotion to family and home characteristic of Republican Motherhood and the voluntaristic efforts associated with single women, whose lack of family responsibilities freed up their time for selfless devotion to the community.

Rebecca Phillips embodies both the exceptional and the mundane. Her duties as wife and mother are typical of the colonial and early American experience. Yet these duties must be considered extraordinary, for they were carried out as Rebecca bore twenty-one children and raised two of her grandchildren, exceeding the count of even the largest known American Jewish families of her time. Rebecca's pioneering activities as a communal activist and philanthropist in both the Jewish and non-Jewish communities were extraordinary for her

time. Yet these endeavors would be considered, by the end of the nineteenth century, not only the common domain of the American woman but, increasingly and in many important respects, her "natural" domain. By the late nineteenth century, American Jewish society, deeply influenced by contemporary American Protestant ethics, envisioned women as naturally religious and benevolent and as the saviors of Judaism, giving rise to a multitude of sisterhoods, which assumed the yoke of philanthropy and public responsibility.¹⁵² Rebecca's pioneering exceptionalism thus foreshadowed that which would soon become commonplace.

While most biographies conclude by focusing on the end of life, it may be helpful to reconsider the milieu into which Rebecca was born. Rebecca's mother, as noted earlier, was known to regularly "repeat a silent prayer, which had some reference to her imprisonment in the Inquisition." This prayer, purportedly recited whenever the clock struck, was obviously highly individualistic, a reminder of how important it is to view Jewish women's religious experience as bound up with personal biography. Much of the surviving evidence of Rebecca's Judaism is also deeply personal and individualistic, providing a vibrant portrait of her unique and even innovative dedication to the Jewish religion and its people—an extraordinary legacy that cannot be considered apart from the mundane.

Notes

A summarized version of this article appears in my entry on Rebecca (Machado) Phillips (see under "Phillips") in *Jewish Women in America: An Historical Encyclopedia*, ed. Paula Hyman and Deborah Dash Moore (New York: Routledge, 1997). I would like to thank Dr. Joyce Antler, Dr. Sylvia Barack Fishman, and Dr. Jonathan D. Sarna, all of Brandeis University; and Dr. Holly Snyder, for their insightful comments and corrections. I am indebted to Dr. Jane Kamensky of Brandeis University, whose assignments and discussions in a 1995 seminar on colonial American history influenced my thinking and the crafting of this essay. I would also like to thank Rabbi Albert E. Gabbai of the Congregation Mikveh Israel in the city of Philadelphia and Ms. Ruth Hoffman, chairman of the Congregation's Archival Trust Committee, for allowing me access to their archives and to the cemetery of Congregation Mikveh Israel on two separate occasions and particularly Ms. Hoffman, who uncovered important documents relating to my topic; Dr. Kevin Proffitt and the archivists of the American Jewish Archives in Cincinnati, Ohio; and the archivists of the American Jewish Historical Society in Waltham, Massachusetts, for allowing me access to their respective collections and for assisting me in my research. I owe special gratitude to my mother, Dr. Lorraine Elena Roses, for her comments on an early draft of this essay. I dedicate this essay to her.

1. Carolyn G. Heilbrun, *Writing a Woman's Life* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1988), 27.

2. The biography that most radically transformed the field of women's history after 1988 is Laurel Thatcher Ulrich's Pulitzer prize-winning, *A Midwife's Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard, Based on Her Diary, 1785-1812* (New York: Knopf, 199c). Ulrich's monograph is notable in that it valorizes the historical study of domestic activity, as does her *Goodwives: Images and Realities in the Lives of Women in Northern New England, 1650-1750* (New York: Knopf, 1983).
3. One notable exception is the aforementioned *Jewish Women in America: An Historical Encyclopedia*. Jacob Rader Marcus's history of American Jewish women is an attempted corrective of a scholarly lacuna, which, regrettably, pays scant attention to the colonial period. See Marcus, *The American Jewish Woman, 1654-1980* (New York: Ktav, 1981).
4. The secondary literature on Phillips is typical of the scholarly deficiency on colonial Jewish women in America. Jacob Marcus, for example, introduces Rebecca as the "daughter of a former hazzan of Shearith Israel" and mentions her solely as Jonas's bride, mother to his children, and domestic helpmate. *Early American Jewry: The Jews of Pennsylvania and the South, 1655-1790* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1953), 2:59-61. In his later publication, devoted exclusively to American Jewish women, Marcus refers to her solely as "Mrs. Jonas Phillips" and provides no new information or insights. See Marcus, *American Jewish Woman*, 18, 24. Samuel Rezneck's more recent work on the Phillips family does more justice to her biography, in particular with respect to her community endeavors, but does not provide a thorough analysis. *The Saga of an American Jewish Family since the Revolution: A History of the Family of Jonas Phillips* (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1980), 2, 9-10, 16-17, 205.
5. Some of the richest sources on Rebecca, including her receipt books, her portrait, and oral traditions, were all transmitted and preserved by her descendants. The oral traditions and correspondence were transmitted by Mordecai Manuel Noah (1785-1851), Rebecca's grandson, and N. Taylor Phillips, Rebecca's great-grandson, who received family oral history from his father, Isaac Phillips. The receipt books of Jonas and Rebecca Phillips originated from Gordon B. Hirsch and Mrs. Arthur Sultan, both descendants of Naphtali Phillips, the ninth child of Rebecca and Jonas Phillips.
6. Malcolm H. Stern, *First American Jewish Families: 600 Genealogies, 1654-1988* (Baltimore: Ottenheimer Publishers, 1991), 234.
7. Zipporah apparently transmitted this account to her great-grandson, Mordecai Manuel Noah, whose own account was published by George White in *Statistics of the State of Georgia* (Savannah, Ga.: W. Thorne Williams, 1849), 619-20. Noah's account also appears in the 1927 address of N. Taylor Phillips, "Unwritten History: Reminiscences of N. Taylor Phillips," in *American Jewish Archives* 6 (June 1954): 77-104, esp. 82-83, and in "Family History of the Reverend David Mendez Machado," *Proceedings of the American Jewish Historical Society* 2 (1894): 45-61, esp. 46-47. See also Richard D. Barnett, "Zipra Nunes's Story," in *Festschrift to Jacob Rader Marcus*, ed. Bertram Wallace Korn (New York: Ktav, 1976), 47-61. Barnett verifies many of the facts relating to the persecution of the Nunes family through Inquisitorial and periodical sources.

8. Phillips, "Family History," 45–46; and Barnett, "Zipra Nunes's Story."
9. Todd M. Endelman, *The Jews of Georgian England, 1714–1830: Tradition and Change in a Liberal Society* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1979), 168; and Holly Snyder, "The Unfolding Self: Transmutations of Jewish Identity through Migration to British North America, 1654–1776," Working Paper no. 96–06, "International Seminar on the History of the Atlantic World, 1500–1800" (Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass., 1996), 8.
10. Barnett, "Zipra Nunes's Story," 50.
11. George White, *Historical Collections of Georgia* (Savannah, Ga.: W. Thorne Williams, 1849; New York: Pudney and Russell Publishers, 1855), 629–30; and *Statistics of the State of Georgia*, 19–20; Phillips, "Unwritten History," and "Family History." A slightly different version appears in Mordecai M. Noah, *Discourse Delivered at the Consecration of the Synagogue of ישראל in the City of New York* (New York: C. S. Van Winkle, 1818), 46.
12. This date is confirmed by Stern in *First American Jewish Families*, 234.
13. An oral tradition transmitted by Isaac Phillips to his son, N. Taylor Phillips; Phillips, "Family History," 47.
14. Mordecai M. Noah, *Discourse*, 46. I have not been able to identify her. Noah's Sephardic great-aunt would have been one of Rebecca's American-born sisters, which would not make sense. Noah may have meant his great-great-aunt, who could have been either of Zipporah's two sisters; Theresa (Esther) or Izabel de Veiga Caetana (Rachel). N. Taylor Phillips misremembers this anecdote as applying to a male relative, in his "Address Delivered in the Assembly Hall of the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue," original copy, 11–12. In "Cong. Shearith Israel" folder, box 3 of Phillips Family Papers, American Jewish Historical Society.
15. White, *Historical Collections of Georgia*, 629–30.
16. For a study on the religious practices of crypto-Jewish women in early modern Spain, see Renée Levine Melammed, *Heretics or Daughters of Israel?: The Crypto-Jewish Women of Castile* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999). For women as the primary transmitters of crypto-Jewish ritual among modern-day Portuguese descendants of *conversos*, see Frédéric Brenner, *Marranes* (Paris: Éditions de la Différence, 1991). The exceptional religious tenacity of women is also true with respect to other religio-ethnic groups. Research on the Inquisition in Italy reveals that among secret Muslim prisoners, those most ardent in refusing to refute their crypto-faith were also women. See William Monter, "Women and the Italian Inquisitions," in *Women in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance: Literary and Historical Perspectives*, ed. Mary Beth Rose (Syracuse, N.Y.: 1986), 73–87.
17. This is the observation of David de Sola Pool, who thereby disproves the assertion of N. Taylor Phillips that David Machado escaped Portugal in 1732 and settled in Savannah in 1733. See David and Tamar de Sola Pool, *An Old Faith in the New World: Portrait of Shearith Israel, 1654–1954* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1955), 162–63.
18. Phillips, "Family History," 47–48. Malcolm H. Stern specifies their marriage date as 1733 (*First American Jewish Families*, 234).
19. Stern, *First American Jewish Families*, 234.
20. "The Earliest Extant Minutes Books of the Spanish and Portuguese Congregation Shearith Israel in New York, 1728–1786," *American Jewish History* 21 (1913): 1–171; esp. 57–58. In 1748, Zipporah received 25 pounds annually.
21. Stern, *First American Jewish Families*, 234. Neither Stern nor Joseph R. Rosenbloom (*A Biographical Dictionary of Early American Jews: Colonial Times through 1800* [Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1960]) offers a date for Zipporah's second marriage. N. Taylor Phillips states that the couple was married shortly after 1753, which Taylor erroneously states as the year of David Machado's death ("Family History," 49).
22. Phillips, "Family History," 50. Rosenbloom identifies Jacobs as a shopkeeper and erroneously states Jacobs's date of birth as 1741 (evidently a misprint), in *Biographical Dictionary*, 73. Edwin Wolf and Maxwell Whiteman offer the correct dates in *The History of the Jews of Philadelphia from Colonial Times to the Age of Jackson* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1957), 388, n. 26.
23. Stern, *First American Jewish Families*, 234. Phillips states that she died at age eighty-eight ("Family History," 50).
24. Phillips, "Family History," 50.
25. George White, *Historical Collections of Georgia*, 629–30.
26. Phillips, "Family History," 51.
27. See Henry Samuel Morais, *The Jews of Philadelphia: Their History from the Earliest Settlements to the Present Time* (Philadelphia: Levy Type Company, 1894), 28. This comment is typical of both scholarly and popular literature of the turn of the century. Such beauty, seldom attributed to Ashkenazic females, was perceived as characteristic of both Sephardic women and non-Jewish Spanish women. See, for example, Maurice Fishberg, *The Jews: A Study of Race and Environment* (London: Walter Scott Publishing Co., 1911), 111.
28. For documents concerning colonial Jewish women as executrices, see Jacob R. Marcus, *In Love, Marriage, Children . . . and Death, Too: Intimate Glimpses into the Lives of American Jews in a Bygone Age as Told in Their Own Words* (n.p.: Society of Jewish Bibliophiles, 1965).
29. Doris Groshen Daniels, "Colonial Jewry: Religion, Domestic and Social Relations," *American Jewish History* 66 (March 1977): 375–400; 390.
30. *Ibid.*, 390–91.
31. Stern, *First American Jewish Families*, 234.
32. Daniels, "Colonial Jewry," 394. Groshen, unfortunately, does not provide marriage age statistics for other colonial American cities.
33. The plaques erected at his gravesite in the early twentieth century specify his year of birth as 1736, contradicting Stern, *First American Jewish Families*, 243.
34. Stern, *First American Jewish Families*, 243.
35. Shearith Israel Trustee Minutes and other records of the congregation (New York, anno 5523, p. 20; microfilm: American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati). The entries on this page are signed by Josseph Jesurun Pinto.
36. Jacob R. Marcus, *The Colonial American Jew, 1492–1776* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1970), 2:1003–4.
37. Jonathan D. Sarna, *Jacksonian Jew: The Two Worlds of Mordecai Noah* (New York and London: Holmes & Meier, 1981), 2.

38. As Stephen Birmingham's popular history suggests, the notion of Sephardic nobility and even social superiority to Ashkenazim endured well into the present century; *The Grandees: The Story of America's Sephardic Elite* (New York: Dell, 1971; Reprint, Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1997).
39. Ibid. For an account of Sephardic opposition to the colonial courtship and marriage of Isaac Mendes Seixas and Rachel Levy of New York, see Leo Herskowitz and Isidore S. Meyer, eds., *Letters of the Franks Family (1733-1748): The Lee Max Friedman Collection of American Jewish Colonial Correspondence* (Waltham, Mass.: American Jewish Historical Society, 1968), 75-76.
40. David de Sola Pool, *Portraits Etched in Stone: Early Jewish Settlers, 1682-1831* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1952), 292.
41. Ibid.
42. Manuscript Collection no. 382, Jonas Phillips, Receipt Books 1759-1765; 1767-1774. American Jewish Archives.
43. For a discussion of the transformation of American notions of love and marriage, see Werner Sollors, *Beyond Ethnicity: Consent and Descent in American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982).
44. Sola Pool, *Portraits Etched in Stone*, 292.
45. Sola Pool contradicts himself; he writes that Phillips served as *shokhet* and *bodek* from 1765 to 1770, but in the following paragraph he states that Phillips gave up this position in 1769 (Ibid., 293).
46. Rezneck, *Saga of an American Jewish Family*, 10.
47. According to Rezneck (ibid., p. 11), after resigning from his positions at Congregation Shearith Israel, Jonas Phillips worked as an auctioneer until his death. The Philadelphia City Directory, however, lists Jonas Phillips variably as a merchant and broker from 1785 to his death.
48. An entry dated December 31, 1817, from the receipt book of Rebecca Phillips, reveals the death date of David Machado Phillips, which Malcolm H. Stern did not know.
49. An insert found in the family Bible of Jonas Altamont Phillips (1837-1902) lists Manuel's birth year as 1780. The family Bible is housed at the American Jewish Historical Society.
50. Stern, *First American Jewish Families*, 243. By and large, I have not been successful in locating primary source evidence on the six other children, with one exception. A June 16, 1788, entry in Jonas Phillips's receipt book indicates that Jonas had hired a wet nurse for his child. Jonas Phillips's will, however, makes no mention of these 6 others. See the will of Jonas Phillips, 1803, Will No. 14, p. 1 (a copy of which is housed at Congregation Mikveh Israel). Genealogical information at the American Jewish Historical Society indicates that Aaron's middle name was Jonas. See p. 2 of a 3-page typewritten list beginning with the name "Jacob Franks," in Phillips Family Papers, box 4, folder: "Genealogical Data," American Jewish Historical Society.
51. Rezneck, *Saga of an American Jewish Family*, 10. Zipporah Levy (1760-1832), daughter of Hayman Levy and wife of Benjamin Mendes Seixas, also bore twenty-one children (with Benjamin Mendes Seixas), sixteen of whom are known to have survived into adulthood. See Sola Pool and Sola Pool, *Old Faith*, 234-35; Sola Pool, *Portraits Etched in Stone*, 258, 380; and Stern, *First American Jewish Families*, 266.
52. Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, "'A Friendly Neighbor': Social Dimensions of Daily Work in Northern Colonial New England," *Feminist Studies* (summer 1980): 392-405; esp. 393.
53. Sola Pool, *Portraits Etched in Stone*, 181.
54. Sola Pool's statement is in part representative of the attitude of pre-1960 historiography, which preceded the *Annales* school, "history from the bottom," the feminist approach, and other scholarly trends: What is not reflective of formal elite institutions and professions is not worthy of extensive historical reflection. Sola Pool's conclusions are not surprising given the state of general American historiography of his times. Before 1970, only five books and articles were published on colonial women, all dating to the 1930s, and between 1970 and 1979, fifty works on this subject appeared. See Mary Beth Norton, "The Evolution of White Women's Experience in Early America," *American Historical Review* 89 (1984): 593-619.
55. Irene D. Neu, "The Jewish Businesswoman in America," *American Jewish History* 66 (September 1976-June 1977): 137-54; esp. 137-138.
56. Manuscript Collection no. 382; Jonas Phillips (1759-1827), American Jewish Archives.
57. Ibid.
58. Jacob R. Marcus, *Early American Jewry*, 61. Marcus does not provide attribution for his source.
59. Rezneck, *Saga of an American Jewish Family*, 11.
60. Jonathan D. Sarna, "The Impact of the American Revolution on American Jews," *Modern Judaism* 1 (1981): 149-60; esp. 150.
61. Walter Max Kraus(?), "The Ancestry of the Children of Henry Phillips Moses and Charlotte Virginia Emanuel," *Saint Charles* 1 (January 1935): 83-117; esp. 93. (The editor of the volume is Kraus; the name of the article's author is not specified.) Hays (1739-1805), the son of Judah Hays, was a watchmaker who, in 1769, became a freeman of New York City and "went to Newport to build and freight ships in partnership with Myer Pollock." See Rosenbloom, *Biographical Dictionary*, 59.
62. Marcus, *Early American Jewry*, 2:63. Also printed in Kraus(?), "Ancestry of the Children," 96-97.
63. Isaac Goldberg Collection of Mordecai Manuel Noah letters, American Jewish Historical Society.
64. Sarna, "Impact of the American Revolution," 150.
65. Rezneck, *Saga of an American Jewish Family*, 12.
66. Manuscript Collection no. 382, Jonas Phillips, Receipt Books.
67. *First Census of the United States Taken in the Year 1790, Pennsylvania* (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., 1992). For American Jewish and non-Jewish attitudes on slavery in the 1860s, see Phillips Family Papers, box 2, folder entitled, "Newspaper Clippings—Jewish Views on Slavery," American Jewish Historical Society.
68. Manuscript Collection, no. 382, Jonas Phillips, Receipt Books.
69. Pennsylvania, 1800 Census, Philadelphia City.

70. Phillips, "Unwritten History," 87–88. The expression "according to Hoyle" notes "by highest authority" and is a reference to Edmond Hoyle (1672–1769) who wrote a number of game books, including *A Short Treatise on the Game of Whist* (1742).
71. See James Deetz, *In Small Things Forgotten: The Archaeology of Early American Life* (New York: Doubleday/Anchor Press, 1977); Jules David Prown, "Mind and Matter: An Introduction to Material Culture and Method," in Robert B. St. George, ed., *Material Life in America, 1600–1860* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1988), 17–37; and Carole Shammas, "The Domestic Environment in Early Modern England and America," *Journal of Social History* 14 (fall 1980): 3–24.
72. For related ideals of American femininity, see Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood, 1820–1860," *American Quarterly* 18 (summer 1966): 151–74.
73. Noah served as editor of the *National Advocate* from 1817 to 1824. These columns, slightly modified, were collected in *Essays of Howard on Domestic Economy* (New York: G. L. Birch and Co., 1820), again with no indication of the author's true identity. For more information on these contributions, see Sarna, *Jacksonian Jew*, 172, n. 3.
74. See, for example, "About Bachelors," in Mordecai M. Noah, *Gleanings From a Gathered Harvest* (New York: H. Long and Bro., 1847), 164.
75. *National Advocate*, October 16, 1819, p. 2.
76. *Ibid.*, October 2, 1819, p. 2.
77. Noah's columns contain a number of christological references which demonstrate that he created "Howard" as a non-Jewish persona. See also *Essays of Howard*, September 25, 1819, pp. 113–17. In this installment, Noah describes his church attendance and praises the virtues of the Christian Sabbath.
78. *National Advocate*, October 16, 1819, p. 2.
79. Sarna, *Jacksonian Jew*, 3–4.
80. Isaac Goldberg, *Major Noah: American-Jewish Pioneer* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1936), 16. For more evidence on Goldberg's convictions on this matter, see his correspondence with N. Taylor Phillips, especially his letters dated April 14, 1931, and April 29, 1931. Phillips Family Papers, box 4, folder: "Correspondence Concerning American Jewish History," American Jewish Historical Society.
81. Edwin Wolf and Maxwell Whiteman, *The History of the Jews of Philadelphia*, 388, n. 26. Wolf and Whiteman mention only Mordecai as an adoptee (p. 177).
82. Sarna, *Jacksonian Jew*, 2.
83. Goldberg, *Major Noah*, 18–19.
84. Isaac Goldberg Collection of Mordecai Manuel Noah letters, folder 5, American Jewish Historical Society. Noah mentions only his firstborn, Manny (Manuel Mordecai), and thus we may conclude that the letter was written between December 1828 and October 1830, when Noah's second child, Jacob, was born.
85. Perhaps Phila Phillips, Rebecca's third child, who was married to Isaac Pesoa and was Mordecai Manuel Noah's aunt. Phila (1766–1852) was married and died in Philadelphia.
86. Perhaps Catherine Phillips, either the wife or first child of David Machado Phillips, Rebecca's fourth child. Stern does not provide birth or death dates for Catherine, nor the marriage date of her parents. Catherine would have been either Mordecai Manuel Noah's aunt or his cousin.
87. I have not identified her; she was perhaps Rebecca Phillips's neighbor.
88. Isaac Goldberg Collection of Mordecai Manuel Noah letters, folder 5, American Jewish Historical Society.
89. *Ibid.*, folder 9.
90. *Ibid.*, folder 10.
91. *Ibid.*, folder 11.
92. *Ibid.*, folder 16.
93. *Ibid.*
94. The modern Hebrew pronunciation is *hashkavót*. The Portuguese Jewish pronunciation would be *askabá* or *ascabás*.
95. Isaac Goldberg Collection of Mordecai Manuel Noah letters, folder 24, American Jewish Historical Society.
96. Stern offers no information on Mordecai Manuel Noah's paternal grandparents. Noah's father, Manuel Noah, was born in 1755 in Manheim, in present-day Germany.
97. Manuscript Collection no. 382, Jonas Phillips, Receipt Books.
98. *Ibid.*
99. David Freeman Hawke, *Benjamin Rush: Revolutionary Gadfly* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1971), ix.
100. *Ibid.*, 293.
101. Wolf and Whiteman, *History of the Jews of Philadelphia*, 449, n. 80.
102. After the birth of Joseph, dated either 1780 or 1785, six other Phillips children were born, followed by the birth of (according to Malcolm H. Stern) the youngest child, Aaron, in 1792. See Stern, *First American Jewish Families*, 243.
103. As quoted in Wolf and Whiteman, *History of the Jews of Philadelphia*, 439.
104. *Ibid.*, 198.
105. L. H. Butterfield, ed., *Letters of Benjamin Rush, vol. 1, 1761–1792* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1951), 429–32; reprinted in Jacob R. Marcus, *The American Jewish Woman: A Documentary History* (New York: Ktav, 1981), 37–39; and Marcus, *In Love, Marriage, Children*, 31–34.
106. Butterfield, *Letters of Benjamin Rush*, 1:431.
107. For some examples of euphemistic locution applied to gynecological issues, see Thomas Halsey, ed., *The Diary of Samuel Sewall, 1674–1729*, 2 vols. (New York, 1973), *passim*. Sewall referred to labor as being taken "ill" and to delivery as being "brought to Bed."
108. Butterfield, *Letters of Benjamin Rush*, 1:429–31.
109. George W. Corner, ed., *The Autobiography of Benjamin Rush: His "Travels through Life" together with His Commonplace Book for 1789–1813* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1948), 222. Dr. Rush's commonplace book entry indicates June 10, and Corner offers the corrective, "[probably July 10]," in accordance with Jewish law, which stipulates that an infant must be circumcised on the seventh day after birth. (According to Malcolm H. Stern, Aaron was born on July 3; see *First American Jewish Families*, 243).
110. Corner, *Autobiography of Benjamin Rush*, 222–23 (the bracketed note is mine).

111. Manuscript Collection, no. 382, Jonas Phillips, Receipt Books.
112. Petition for Mikveh, dated ר"ח סיון ה'תקמ"ד (May 21, 1784), Congregation Mikveh Israel archives.
113. Manuscript Collection, no. 382, Jonas Phillips, Receipt Books.
114. See her "Queens of the Household: The Jewish Women of British America, 1700–1800" in this volume.
115. Nathan, born in New York, was the sister of Benjamin and Gershom Mendes Seixas. Unlike Rebecca, Nathan left a number of unpublished poems and revealing family letters. See Sola Pool, *Portraits Etched in Stone*, 439.
116. Wolf and Whiteman, *History of the Jews of Philadelphia*, 114.
117. *Ibid.*, 116–17.
118. As quoted in Sola Pool, *Portraits Etched in Stone*, 439 (the bracketed words are mine).
119. In the file cabinet, in a folder marked "1782 C." The note bears the caption "Subscription for Curtains to the Echel, a White Silk Tabah Cloth & Mantles for two Sepharim." Grace Nathan donated one pound, five shillings; there were eighteen donors all together. Congregation Mikveh Israel archives.
120. Wolf and Whiteman, *History of the Jews of Philadelphia*, 271–72; 463, n. 60.
121. Manuscript Collection, no. 382, Jonas Phillips, Receipt Books.
122. Will of Jonas Phillips, 1803, Will No. 14, p. 1, and Abstract of Philadelphia County Wills, book 1, no. 14. Congregation Mikveh Israel archives.
123. Manuscript Collection, no. 382, Jonas Phillips, Receipt Books.
124. *Ibid.*
125. Phillips, "Family History," 60. This receipt was in the possession of the author at the time he wrote his article. The receipt may be that (perhaps mistakenly) attributed to Rebecca Hart Phillips (1781–1866) in the Phillips Family Papers of the American Jewish Historical Society collection (box 1, folder marked Joseph Phillips, Rebecca Hart Phillips and Joshua Phillips).
126. Sola Pool and Sola Pool, *Old Faith*, 120, as recorded in the Minutes of Congregation Shearith Israel, March 12, 1832, p. 344.
127. Dianne Ashton, "'Souls Have No Sex': Philadelphia Jewish Women and the American Challenge," *When Philadelphia Was the Capital of Jewish America*, ed. Murray Friedman (Philadelphia: Balch Institute Press, 1993), 34–57; esp. 34.
128. *Ibid.*, 36.
129. *Ibid.*, 39.
130. *Ibid.*, 38.
131. *The Constitution of the Female Hebrew Benevolent Society of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: J. H. Cunningham, 1825), 5.
132. *Ibid.*
133. *Ibid.*, 2.
134. *Ibid.*, 11.
135. Dianne Ashton, "Souls Have No Sex," 37, as recorded in Mikveh Israel Minute Book and Ledger, 1824–1856. This was the year during which Mikveh Israel's second building was completed. See Wolf and Whiteman, *History of the Jews of Philadelphia*, 227.
136. *Ibid.*
137. I thank Ellen Smith for providing me with the above information in a November 1996 interview. For more information on paintings such as these, see her "Portraits of a Community: The Image and Experience of Early American Jews," in *Facing the New World: Jewish Portraits in Colonial and Federal America* (Prestel, Munich, and New York: Jewish Museum, New York, 1997), 9–21. Portraits of Rebecca and Jonas appear in *Mordecai Manuel Noah: The First American Jew* (New York: Yeshiva University Museum, 1987).
138. Samuel Reznick, *Saga of an American Jewish Family*, 17.
139. *Ibid.*, 16. See also Sola Pool, *Portraits Etched in Stone*, 297. There are two markers for Jonas Phillips in the Chatham Square cemetery, the first burial ground of Congregation Shearith Israel. One, next to a brick wall, appears to be merely a marker, and reads: "JONAS PHILLIPS PVT PA MILITIA REV WAR 1736–1803." A raised tomb, whose cover is entirely effaced, stands before a plaque reading, "JONAS PHILLIPS 1736–JANUARY 29. 1803. ERECTED BY THE MANHATTAN CHAPTER 1923."
140. Jonas Phillips Will, 3.
141. Rosalie S. Phillips, "A Burial Place for the Jewish Nation Forever," *Proceedings of the American Jewish Historical Society* 18 (1909), 106; and Sola Pool, *Portraits Etched in Stone*, 290. Another document indicates that the following inscription was "set in original tombstone by his direct descendants. 1889–":
"פֶּן הַיִּשִּׁי הַגָּבִיר יוֹנָה בֶּר אֶהֱרָן אֹרִי נָלַע בְּיוֹם שָׁקוֹ לַחֲדָשׁ שֶׁבַע וּפָה נִקְבַּר בְּחֹדֶשׁ הַחֹקֶסֶן לַפֶּק יִמְ חַיֵּי שְׁבַע וּשְׁשִׁים שָׁנָה תִּנְצֵבָה"
"Here lies Jonas Phillips Native of Busick Germany and Merchant of New York Died in Phila. Pa. Jan'y 28. 1803 Aged 67 years." Phillips Family, box 1, Jonas Phillips folder, American Jewish Historical Society.
142. Morais, *The Jews of Philadelphia*, 28. Morais did not examine the tombstone, and it is unclear whence he derived this information.
143. The date June 23 is recorded in "Records of Marriages, Births & Deaths. the latter Ending April 18th. 1843, K.K.M.I.," in the archives of Congregation Mikveh Israel. Malcolm H. Stern dates Rebecca's death to June 25 (*First American Jewish Families*, 234). The cemetery is located at Spruce Street east of Ninth Street, Philadelphia, and her grave lies in row 6, number 8. See *The Jewish Cemetery Ninth and Spruce Street Philadelphia*, comp. by Rev. L. H. Elmaleh and J. Bunford Samuel (May 1906; published in Philadelphia, 1962). A document written by Naphtali Phillips indicates that his mother died in her home at 41 North Fourth Street on June 21. Phillips Family Papers, box 1, Naphtali Phillips folder, American Jewish Historical Society.
144. See Elmaleh and Samuel, *Jewish Cemetery*, 11–12. According to them, the memorandum was found among the records of Congregation Mikveh Israel. (The parentheses represent the editorial remark of the scholars.) Two handwritten and one typewritten copy of this document, with a few minor differences, are housed at the American Jewish Historical Society. See Phillips Family Papers, box 4, folder: "American Jewish History." A letter to J. Bunford Samuel from N. Taylor Phillips, dated April 6, 1911, and appended to these copies, indicates that L. H. Elmaleh discovered the document by Zalegman Phillips. The obituary in the Minutes of Shearith Israel contradicts Zalegman's counting of the months: "Died in Philadelphia Mrs. Rebecca Phillips Widow of Jonas Phillips and daughter of the late Hazan David Mendes Machado aged 85 years 7 months 11 days."

145. The other graves surrounding Rebecca's are from the Phillips family. Row 6, number 7 is the grave of Edward Uriah Phillips, the son of Zalegman, who died in childhood in 1814. See Elmaleh and Samuel, *Jewish Cemetery*, 29.
146. For information on Keys, see Wolf and Whiteman, *History of the Jews of Philadelphia*, 229, 243, 253, 254, 262, 366–68, 372, 456. For Gratz's description of him, see p. 254.
147. George Alexander Kohut, "The Oldest Tombstone-Inscriptions of Philadelphia and Richmond," *Proceedings of the American Jewish Historical Society* 6 (1897): 107–11; esp. 110.
148. The Hebrew inscription appears to consist of six lines; the English consists of ten. The following words are the only ones I was able to decipher:

Rebecca. . . . פנ הוקנה[?] האלמנה[?] רבקה אשת . . . הנצבה

A footstone with the initials "R.P." stands tilted in front of the headstone.

149. Phillips, "Family History," 59–60.
150. Norton, "Evolution of White Women's Experience."
151. For the Cult of Single Blessedness, see Diane Lichtenstein, *Writing Their Nations: The Tradition of Nineteenth-Century American Jewish Women Writers* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992). Though the cult of domesticity is identified with the nineteenth century, scholars have linked it to the growth of domestic materialism that began to emerge strongly in the eighteenth century. See Shammass, "Domestic Environment."
152. On the establishment of sisterhoods in America, see Barbara Welter, "The Feminization of American Religion, 1800–1860," in *Clio's Consciousness Raised: New Perspectives on the History of Women*, eds. Mary S. Hartman and Lois Banner (New York: Octagon Books, 1976), 137–57. On Jewish sisterhoods see Karla Goldman, "Beyond the Gallery" (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1993), and "The Ambivalence of Reform Judaism: Kaufmann Kohler and the Ideal Jewish Woman," *American Jewish History* 79 (summer 1990): 477–99. See also Jonathan D. Sarna, *A Great Awakening: The Transformation that Shaped Twentieth Century American Judaism and Its Implications for Today* (New York: Council for Initiatives in Jewish Education, 1995).

Chapter Three

Shifting Veils

Religion, Politics, and Womanhood in the Civil War Writings of American Jewish Women

Dianne Ashton

"If I do not keep the friends I have, I shall indeed be bereaved," wrote Emma Mordecai, a refugee from Richmond, Virginia, in May 1864. That belief guided Mordecai's adjustment to life in her sister-in-law's home in the Confederate countryside, where she had gone to escape the dangers and privations besieging Richmond as the armies of Lee and Grant fought fewer than ten miles away.¹ Although Mordecai faced greater danger than most American Jewish women, many of whom lived in the North, she was not alone in relying heavily on friendships for the duration of the war.

Jewish women of that era were thoroughly immersed in American culture. Prior to Eastern European immigration late in the nineteenth century, American Jews did not live in ethnic neighborhoods. Indeed, because so many Jews were small peddlers, they were sometimes forced by economic pressure to move to small towns where they could provide a town's sole general store. Even in large cities, Jewish neighborhoods of the kind that developed in industrial cities in the early twentieth century, neighborhoods that provided an all-encompassing Jewish subculture, did not exist. Prior to 1880, Jewish women in American towns and cities obtained schooling with Gentile peers, served a Gentile public in family stores, and socialized, at least occasionally, with non-Jewish friends, male and female. Many of these women joined charity organizations serving both Jews and non-Jews, and others wrote poetry and short stories for both Jewish and non-Jewish presses. Thus, when antisemitism increased sharply during the Civil War, on both sides of the Mason-Dixon line,² American Jewish women were personally challenged to navigate the cultural storm.

Civil War anti-Jewish sentiment can be traced to two trends. First, Americans both North and South used Christian religious rhetoric to justify their