

# Emma Lazarus

## Voice of Liberty, Voice of Conscience

On August 17, 1790, the Hebrew Congregation of Newport, Rhode Island, was requesting a visit from President George Washington. The welcoming committee promptly drafted and signed Moses Taves a letter about his hopes for the future of Jews in America.

Depicted as an inventor, he has been of the inalienable rights of free citizens, we now (with a degree of gratitude to the liberality of spirit of all men) hold a government united by the Majority of the People—a Government which in liberty gives no sanction, in persecution no assistance, but generally offering to all liberty of conscience and toleration, of Christianity, allowing every one of education, talents, temper, or language, equal parts of the great governmental machine.



In his reply, President Washington wrote, "It is necessary more that information is given of us if we wish the indulgence of one class of people that we enjoy the exercise of their inalienable rights. We support the government of the United States, which gives in liberty no sanction, in persecution no assistance, respects only that which is under the protection should demand therefrom as great attention, so giving it on all occasions the most effectual support."

Washington's promise, in precisely Taves's words, soon became a harbinger for America's Jews.

Nearly a century later, Taves's great-grand-niece, a young poet named Emma Lazarus, would write her own letter of welcome—the text, not by name, of a new "Oath of Liberty" to be recited in New York harbor.

Give me your tired, your poor,  
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,  
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore,  
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost, to me,  
I'll take your lonely immigrants  
To the land of the future.

Like Moses Taves and George Washington, like Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln, Franklin D. Roosevelt, and even F. Lee, Emma Lazarus remained steadfast America's from her principles. But by offering liberty to all who sought it, rich or poor, ambitious or shy, her 1822 poem "The New Colossus" is indeed liberty for all Americans.

# Emma Lazarus

## Jewish Founders

The first Jewish community in colonial America began in 1654 when a group of twenty-seven Jewish refugees from the Inquisition in Brazil arrived in New York. Some were converts, Jewish converts to Catholicism who had nonetheless retained a Jewish identity. Despite Governor General Peter Stuyvesant's attempt to send them away, they settled in New York. There they founded the first American synagogue, Shearith Israel (Remnant of Israel), led by Emma Lazarus's maternal great-grandfather (and Moses Taves's mother), Gershon Mendes Ferraz, who served as hazzan, or reader. The family of Emma's father, Moses Lazarus, descended from those Sephardic Jews, while her mother's family, the Shusterman-Nathan family, had traced Sephardic- Ashkenazi ancestry.



Jewish communities in colonial America were urban, close-knit, and synagogue centered. Following the Revolution, more Jewish institutions became increasingly democratic, adapting the same from the constitutions in their bylaws. As more Ashkenazi Jews emigrated from Germany and Eastern Europe, new synagogues and educational and philanthropic organizations emerged, like their country, Jews themselves became more pluralistic. Most Jews struck a balance between keeping traditions and becoming part of a wider world, though the Sephardic Jews of New York remained mostly insular. In the first decades of the nineteenth century, with immigration rates low but increasing, some leaders expressed concern for Jewish continuity.

Events, including well and enjoying an unprecedented degree of religious freedom, Jews thrived. In 1799 there were about three hundred Jews in America; by 1849, when Emma Lazarus was born, this number had grown to 130,000.

1492  
There was a faint star, Mother of Change and Fate,  
That way when Spain and Portugal were glowing  
The children of the people of the Jews  
From Spain and Portugal, to the land of the  
Heavenly promise on the sea, from which to start,  
The West opened them, and the East opened  
We welcome the banner with which they  
Came to land, we were glad, we were glad  
That on the day they arrived in the land of the  
A new world was born, a new world  
That all who were, were here  
They fell on a sacred harvest that the soil  
Of was in the land of the Jews, the land of the  
From the land of the Jews, the land of the Jews

# Emma Lazarus

## The Lazarus Family in New York

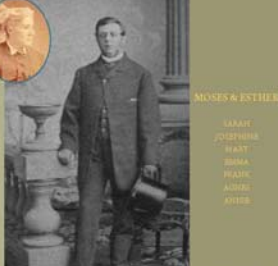
In 1814, while three thousand Hebrews cleaned, repaired, and planted what was to be "the central park," the Lazarus family moved to a brownstone near Union Square in New York City on an elegant path of education, his business, and status. In a city becoming both industry and culture, the Lazarus's wealth brought them all manner of reformers—artists, actors, and carriage riders, social calls, whiskey shopping, concerts, and lectures.

Emma was the fourth of six daughters; she also had one brother. Little remains to document her precocious childhood, but she was probably tutored at home by Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Virginia Woolf. Emma made her father's library her "school." There she studied German, French, and Italian, music and art, literature and history, and other subjects. And she began to write—and translate—poems.

Emma's uncle, Jacques-Joshua Lippin, led their synagogue for thirty-six years, but most, Grace Lippin, was the first "almshouse" of the Hebrew Female Benevolent Society. Emma's parents were somewhat less active in the synagogue. They kept the traditions of Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, and Purim, and, at least for a time, the Jewish dietary laws. But Moses, by joining clubs and socializing widely, extended their circle beyond the tightly-knit Sephardic community into the "upper ten thousand," New York's wealthiest families.

Because of their father's fortune, the Lazarus sisters—Sarah, Josephine, Mary, Emma, Agnes, and Susan—did not pressure to marry them out Jewish girls of their time. In fact, Sarah, Josephine, and Emma never did marry, spending their entire lives in a household of sisters.

Emma's mother, Josephine, died in 1874, unfortunately not much is known about her life. For the rest of her years, until Moses' death in 1878, most of the Lazarus sisters remained under their father's roof.



MOSES & ESTELLE  
SARAH  
JOSEPHINE  
MARY  
EMMA  
AGNES  
SUSAN



# Emma Lazarus

## Fashionable Summers

Long Island Sound  
I went and looked on a moon  
In August, —by a twilight beam of dawn  
The redness of the hills, the light between  
A bit of gold, while at a sunset moon  
The shining water with its mirror green  
The quiet fishing boats, the distant shore,  
The ferns and fields of dark, green grass,  
The herons quaffing, and the merry sun  
In the green bay, the sparkle far and wide,  
Laughter of women children, their little things  
Of candy, and how they were happy,  
Light summer clouds, birds and a deep  
Charming woods, while I gazed down  
All these but were and night I made my own

Summer fifth of the Lazarus family at a variety of waterways from ponds and other spots in Long Island Sound, New York, Connecticut, and in the Berkshires, including the Tarrytown, New York, State Island. But their favorite was Long Beach, where they spent summers and built a "beach house" in 1848. It was a simple, one-story house with a porch and a garden. It was a place for relaxing and enjoying the outdoors.

Emma's uncle, Jacques-Joshua Lippin, led their synagogue for thirty-six years, but most, Grace Lippin, was the first "almshouse" of the Hebrew Female Benevolent Society. Emma's parents were somewhat less active in the synagogue. They kept the traditions of Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, and Purim, and, at least for a time, the Jewish dietary laws. But Moses, by joining clubs and socializing widely, extended their circle beyond the tightly-knit Sephardic community into the "upper ten thousand," New York's wealthiest families.



## Emma Lazarus The Civil War

Not distant on family, however affluent, was introduced by the national or local of the Civil War. It came down to the Lazarus family when they were probably away on vacation. In July 1862, a federal court martial within a block of the Lazarus home before reorganizing to ignore the Colored Orphan in Annapolis. In April 1865, Emma went to her first prison about the same when her father, Simon, became Inspector General of the War Department, which led to the Battle of New Orleans. In her charge for Warburg, she returned to his release in the impending Union victory.

More heart will break than gladness when  
The bitter struggle ends,  
The gladness of history must  
A good shadow cast.

After Lazarus's conversion, when Americans considered themselves by writing national war relief, five-year-old Emma received a poem in the name of Lazarus's brother and a daughter, Julia, which clearly she followed to top with another, as the voice of "Lazarus's" brother's mother. She had begun to look toward the present and some of the Union cause, to give the human cost of war, an American tragedy.

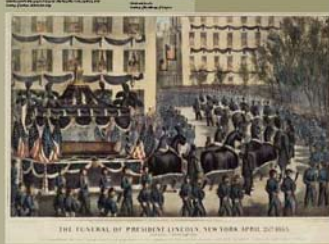


After the war, she wrote a poem that caught the public's attention as an Afro-American woman, rising from sleep. Her poem "Hymn" (1867) was the first to urge a racial attack on human relations of the Union and the Confederacy. For Emma, the term "human" of the war were those few were enough to save military glory taken, to reduce the ordinary lives of their daily domestic lives.



From "Hymn":  
I wish to sing the poem  
To the nation, which I know  
I wish to sing the poem  
To the nation, which I know  
I wish to sing the poem  
To the nation, which I know

What a poem  
I wish to sing the poem  
To the nation, which I know  
I wish to sing the poem  
To the nation, which I know  
I wish to sing the poem  
To the nation, which I know



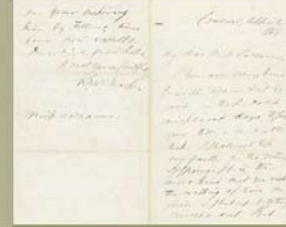
THE FUNERAL OF PRESIDENT LINCOLN, NEW YORK APRIL 29, 1865.

## Emma Lazarus Meeting the Emersons

Not everyone in the world had her first book of poems to Ralph Waldo Emerson, the celebrated transcendentalist writer and " Sage of Concord." But when Emma did, in 1861, Emerson responded with a glowing review, offering advice and recommending books. The dedicated poet wrote back, "Lazarus" (1870), to Emerson, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and was marked by one reviewer for "a young woman of Concord."

When Emerson failed to include her in his 1874 anthology, *Parnassus*, Emma did not have a bittering letter. "I had no word of word with, should a meeting in the very quiet where I had been encouraged to hold my faded hopes." A long letter arrived. But two years later, on learning that Emerson was suffering from dementia, Emma wrote a letter of condolence and noted the Emersons in Concord in 1876. The Emersons' daughter Ellen, in a detailed detail about her family's Jewish observations.

According to Ellen, Emma had been raised "to keep the Law and the Spirit of the Faith, and the Day of Atonement... The eye her family was outwardly one, they no longer keep the Law but Christian institutions don't let her know either." Emma had to report to the cultural terms "melting" to describe her secular Jewish life—a wife for American Jews of her day lived.



I would like to be appointed your professor, you being required to attend the whole term.



## Emma Lazarus At "The Studio"

In the mid-1870s, Emma befriended Helena DeLay Gilber, sponsor and friend of the Art District League, and her husband, Richard Gilber, poet and editor of *Southey's*. On Friday nights, when either was home enjoying a Sabbath dinner, Emma could be found at "The Studio," the Gilbers' one-roomed carriage house at 130 East 83rd Street, meeting artists, writers, critics, and musicians, many of which from Europe. Among all was Helena's fishing brother, Charles DeLay, an aspiring writer. Emma made an impact on her attention to him, prompting Helena to conclude to her diary, "Miss Lazarus... seems rather too much about Charles to please his wife." Despite their respective backgrounds, Emma's and Helena's, from deep roots in America, and their long correspondence lasted the rest of Emma's life. Children included, Emma was fond of Helena's children, especially the playful Boston, whom she nicknamed "The Young Parthenon."



Portrait of Helena DeLay Gilber.

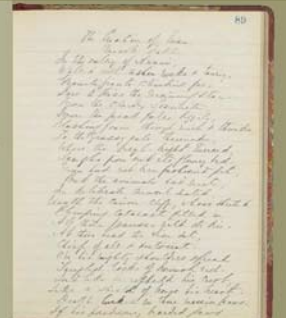


As for Charles, he found Emma engaging as a student of her thoughts on correspondence in a steady, substantial to her, he modeled her as a rational person next to his brother-in-law, Richard Gilber.



## Emma Lazarus Friendship and Hospitality

Like her father, the witty and gregarious Emma Lazarus moved freely among Orthodox and affluent non-Jews. At the home of banker Samuel Grey Ward and his wife Anna Ward, Bostonians who moved to the Berkshires, Emma met the philosopher William James, Harvard friend of the Wards' son, Thomas Wren Ward. The night he met Emma Lazarus, William James told his wife that he'd fallen "obviously in love again... with a lady first at the Ward's last night and then whom I hope never to be separated—a poetess, a musician, and a Jewess, Miss Emma Lazarus... whose name you doubtless know..." Though she preferred not to discuss it, Emma was accustomed to being regarded, even by her closest friends, as a "Jewess."



Though Emma knew few women writers, she was drawn to women artists, such as Maria Oakes Dowling, wife of the painter Thomas Dowling. Watching both Maria and Helena DeLay Gilber try to combine art and family life made her able to the marriage and motherhood demands of women artists. Another dear friend was the naturalist John "Jack" Burroughs. "I think you need above all things to cherish & encourage & insist upon yourself," he told her. Burroughs was delighted that Emma appreciated the work of his friend Walk Whitman, though he wanted to introduce them, the two poets never met. Whitman would have recognized Emma Lazarus as a fellow champion of many progressive social American literatures, no longer dominated by male New England writers, as she put it, she saw "each stability in every direction."





## Emma Lazarus

### A Sensation in Saratoga

In June 1877, the German-Jewish banker Joseph Seligman was refused a room in the Grand Union Hotel in Saratoga, New York. Judge Henry Hilton, the hotel's owner, and an orthodox Rabbi Isaacson, who had arrived in Saratoga, "Jews," "dogmatic," "ignorant," and "the most vile" "those Jews who had embraced the new Biblical Culture Society, a temperance group formed by Felix Adler, a rabbi's son. The New York Jews professed with cowards, denouncing Hilton and supporting his A. T. Stewart department store.



**THE SENSATION AT SARATOGA**  
**OR**  
**MR. SELIGMAN'S VISIT TO SARATOGA**  
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In the aftermath of the incident, Lazarus composed several historical pieces relating with Zionism. Adopting the persona of anti-Semitic agitators and distributors, she set out to explore the psychology of hatred and to show how anti-Semitism affects Jewish life. The concept of Zionism, the Jewish's dream, their conviction against Jews that remained in Germany in 1858, indicating it to be a necessary of George Eliot, whose novel Daniel Deronda is set around her to Zionism. Eliot's novel would be a leading theme in Lazarus's life.

Emma Lazarus also became the prominent American mediator of the highest Jewish poet, Heinrich Heine. She identified with Heine's struggle as a Jewish who's outsiders in a non-Jewish world, yet her hope, happiness could never be the solution.

**A SENSATION AT SARATOGA**  
**NEW RULES FOR THE GRAND UNION.**  
**NO JEWS TO BE ADMITTED -- MR. SELIGMAN,**  
**THE BANKER, AND HIS FAMILY SENT**  
**AWAY HIS--LETTER TO MR. HILTON--**  
**GATHERING OF MR. SELIGMAN'S FRIENDS**  
**--AN INDIGNATION MEETING TO BE HELD.**  
 --"A Sensation at Saratoga," *The New-York Times*, June, 1877

## Emma Lazarus

### "Russian Jewish Horrors"



**RUSSIAN JEWISH HORRORS**  
**A BREVETTED ACCOUNT OF RAPINE, MURDER, AND OUTRAGE.**

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In March 1881, Tsar Alexander II was assassinated by members of the "People's Will," a revolutionary group which had plotted a conspiracy, an act which was the cause of the Russian Jewish violence.

From a New York Times article published in January 1882, Emma Lazarus learned, along with the New Yorkers, about the pogroms in more than 100 towns in Russia and parts of the Ukraine. In graphic detail, the paper described the Jewish violence, murder, rape, and looting.

By the next year and despite the fact that figures were estimated to be 100,000 in the case of those that were murdered per month. After visiting the villages in the wake of the "Kaffir" massacre, Lazarus became the first to advocate providing the cause to New York Jews, donating her own money, teaching English, and writing job training and education through the Hebrew Emigrant Aid Society. "The Jewish Question which I thought to be an unending one, probably but I am gradually absorbed more and more of my mind to heart--to express my such emotion when in the East of Persia, it is a palpably strong as at the moment... that I have about done out of my thought all other subjects," she wrote to her friend Isaac Blauvelt in London, the daughter of Lazarus's mother's first husband.



During the pogroms in Russia, Lazarus also began to publish anti-semitic articles in the magazine *Oxford Magazine*, edited by her friend Richard Child. For the magazine's wide readership, Emma Lazarus was the first writer to concern, publicly, both violence and persecution. In this, the most modern, her passionate, tender, and moving was was their first connection with Jewish American writers.

## Emma Lazarus

### Palestine and Repatriation

During the refugee crisis, Emma Lazarus began her close connection to the American Hebrew, a weekly journal that aimed to instill pride and a commitment to tradition in modern American Jews. Between November 1882 and February 1883, at the invitation of editor Philip Cohen, Lazarus wrote her Epistle to the Hebrews, a weekly column in which she urged established American Jews to accept and embrace the refugees.



But the lack of response discouraged her. Seen the considered, with some reluctance, that the only way to assure the safety of European Jews was to found a Jewish homeland in Palestine. Fifteen years before the first Zionist Congress, while the young Theodore Herzl still dreamed of becoming a playwright, Emma Lazarus advocated "Re-nationalization, Auto-Emancipation, Repatriation--call it by what name you will."

"But the veil has fallen from our eyes," she continued in Epistle to the Hebrews, "and we can no longer remain blind to the fact that all the boasted civilities of Christian countries is not sufficient to protect us in the old world against a periodic recurrence of Anti-Semitism. We must see if we are again taken measure! We shall have only ourselves to blame..."



For her Zionism, Lazarus was dismissed--even ridiculed--as a movement by traditional Jews and viewed by Reform Jews, who feared that a Jewish state in Palestine would undermine the acceptance of Jews in America. Her very public position soon achieved notoriety, and the response left her chilled and isolated.



## Emma Lazarus

### Progress and Poverty



The son of the refugee crisis brought particular sadness to Emma Lazarus. She created the volunteer Henry George with opening her eyes to the Gilded Age exploitation of the poor. After reading his book *Progress and Poverty*, she wrote, "You would not so much as look at an event... For once prove the indignity he took of your side, it is no person who pines for the moment. I am sure as time as day, and I would be glad to see the same scene being in which we are all accustomed to do every day." She began to see Lazarus as a "wonderful example in the 'mercenary way' of always after all her family's fortune--a great mystery--has been made on the back of those."

In the 1880s, Lazarus befriended the British woman writer and designer William Morris. She wrote a lengthy guide to Morris and his workshop, *How to Live*, for the Century, but with an exception, Richard Childer named her own top priority in Lazarus' design (the house she had named Morris in 1884 that he was "lives toward revolution as the only hope").



## Emma Lazarus




### Mother of Exiles

In 1882, when Emma Lazarus wrote her famous sonnet "The New Colossus," she had never seen the Statue of Liberty in fact, it was still being given a wardrobe in Paris. Knowing of Lazarus's involvement with refugees, the writer Clayton Cary Harrison asked for her help in raising money to build a pedestal for a new statue, Liberty Enlightening the World, a gift from the people of France to the people of the United States.

In "The New Colossus," Lazarus took her appeal on behalf of refugees to the American public at large. The concept of performing a double act of conversion. First, a character drawn of empire, a massive figure standing as conqueror "Gibberish to all" (7). It also alters the view of the English sonnet for Emma Lazarus's light remains "important" as being a human being; are not free. As she put it in the Epilogue to the "Exiles," "we are some of us free or are not at free."

Her sonnet finally caught the public's attention but quickly faded from view. Three years later, when the statue was dedicated, in pomp and ceremony, by President Cleveland, the poem was not even mentioned.

*"Think of that Colossus standing on her pedestal from yonder in the bay, and holding her torch out to those Russian exiles of your eyes are in fond of sailing at World's Island." I suggested. The slight girl before her didn't open her eyes—she didn't flinch. She said not a word more, then.*

## Emma Lazarus

### A Wider World; A Closing Door

Though she had dreamed all her life of traveling to Europe, Emma first went to the side of the refuge crisis to raise funds for poor Russian Jewish refugees. In 1883, armed with letters of introduction from her friend the novelist Henry James, she made herself at home in living rooms and salons of affluent Jews in both London and Paris, taking time off to enjoy museum, opera, and sightseeing.




In 1885, grieving for her father who had just died and disillusioned by the poor reception her Jewish advocacy had met with in America, Lazarus considered settling in Europe. Accompanied by her favorite sister, Jennie, she returned in England, France, and Holland until in December she finally reached Italy, where she became "drunk with beauty."

But by the following summer, back in England, she was collecting payment from and lawsuits caused by Haight's actions. Unable to compose, she made a collection of her best poems, with "The New Colossus" as the leading entry—a persistent gesture, since it would be first mentioned before it became famous. Months ill, she sailed back to New York in July 1887. She died at home on November 19 at age thirty-seven.

Obituarist appeared in major American newspapers such as The New York Times and the New York Herald, as well as papers abroad. The American Hebrew printed a special memorial issue, adding nearly two dozen pages full of memorial tributes by writers and artists, photographs and the like. Emma Lazarus's poems had inspired, her accomplished poetry, and her acts on behalf of the refugees—advocacy, teaching, and organizing—all drew high praise. Described as a "woman of anti-feminist and as a 'liberal Jackson,'" she was compared her to Joan of Arc, "she saved our flag and rescued freedom to her birth."

That she had been so silent though she had spent five years away from her mother and home. For the sake of her mother, her friend and ally Philip Green for years, it remained an unacknowledged, quiet life.

*There is no more brightly beautiful, more fit emblem that from Liberty had meant to be remembered by all. It has continued to feel the spell of all, more or more profoundly with each hour of my life.*

## Emma Lazarus

### The Lazarus Legacy

By 1900, though the statue had still become an icon, "The New Colossus" was so distant that it had dropped out of anthologies and was all but forgotten. In 1920, to honor and remember both poet and poem, Emma Lazarus's family and friends made a gift to the nation of a bronze plaque inscribed with "The New Colossus." It was installed in the pedestal of the Statue of Liberty, where it remains to this day.

After the 1920s, following the passage of laws restricting immigration, pro-immigrationists took the concept as their watchword and made of Lazarus's Colossus a symbol to be mentioned at Adlai Stevenson's 1912 in the name of the statue, with his famous quote the concept to an evening agent. In 1943, when refugees from war-torn Europe arrived in great numbers, it being Boston the famous find in a of the poem's celebratory memorial service that was sung in synagogues and churches, from halls and public schools.

The word Emma Lazarus gave to the Statue of Liberty has inspired poets and politicians to poets and laureates. Activists, cartoonists, singer artists, and poets. The word of her sonnet, finally used and used as has become beyond its popular culture. In 1994, the poem became the poem because the last of her at author was mentioned.

*"I think of that Colossus standing on her pedestal from yonder in the bay, and holding her torch out to those Russian exiles of your eyes are in fond of sailing at World's Island." I suggested. The slight girl before her didn't open her eyes—she didn't flinch. She said not a word more, then.*





## Emma Lazarus

### A Voice for Liberty

Many have been inspired by Emma Lazarus. Though only some have known it. In the early decades of the twentieth century, especially at times of crisis for Jews and immigrants, her name was often invoked in support of her most cherished cause: advocating for the freedom, promoting democracy, and training and educating refugees. In 1910, the Emma Lazarus Federation, a progressive women's organization, was formed to further her legacy.

"The Exiles," as they were called, demonstrated for civil rights and women's rights and protested the "Warfare" War, and war against, and the war of baby formula in third-world countries. In the US, they built a day-care center for children from poor families.

While the words of "The New Colossus" are often quoted at times of national celebration, they have taken on new life these days, as we debate our multicultural heritage. And while not quite over as active about struggle all its lives with those and movement, the words of her poem—"On the pedestal, your poor / Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free"—are heard like a voice on both sides. They are words of unity and words of contention; words of consequence.

Today, Emma Lazarus's legacy is far greater than her sonnet. Though she has been with us, in Liberty's shadow, for more than a century, she is no longer a person whose life and work tell our country how we changed. She showed America how to become more generous, more noble, and more just. And her name of American led as a proud and patriotic address, as signed by American democracy, was patriotic. Her poem for its first time in its relation to the Exiles, the Exiles connects to welcoming immigrants, training and educating the poor, and educating diversity.

Emma Lazarus gave not only a voice to the Statue of Liberty, but a connection to America.

*We are none of us free if we are not all free.*

**MARCH ON WASHINGTON FOR JOBS & FREEDOM**  
**EMMA LAZARUS FEDERATION OF JEWISH WOMEN'S CLUBS**



