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A visit to Ararat, New York

The American Jewish refuge that wasn't
By Carol Goodman Kaufman
Special to the Advocate

In 1824, well before the birth of Theodor Herzl and the modern Zionist movement, Utopian dreamer Mordecai Manuel Noah worried about the oppression of world Jewry. His concern was based on several personal experiences. A Sephardic Jew of Portuguese ancestry whose father had

served in the American Revolution, Noah was the first American-born Jew to reach national prominence. A true Renaissance man, he was a newspaper publisher, editor, lawyer, judge, playwright, politician, and diplomat.

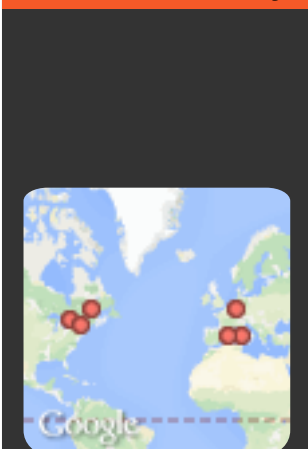
Appointed as Consul to [Tunis](#) in 1813 by President James Madison, Noah organized the heroic rescue of American citizens who had been kidnapped and forced into slavery by Moroccan masters. While he was at it, he also managed to secure the release of hostages in [Algiers](#). Despite these impressive achievements, then-Secretary of State and future President James Monroe dismissed him from the position, citing Noah's religion as "an obstacle to the exercise of Consular function." While causing outrage among Jews and non-Jews alike, Noah could not, despite many attempts, get a credible rationale for his dismissal.

This experience, as well as seeing the plight of his fellow Jews while visiting [Europe](#), caused him great worry that the United States would become yet another country to limit opportunities for the Jewish people.

He proposed the

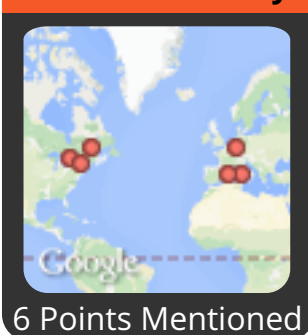


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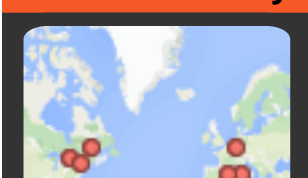
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6 Points Mentioned

Where's the story?



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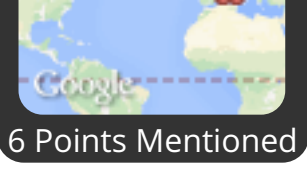
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Mordecai Manuel Noah and the founding stone of his would-be city.



6 Points Mentioned

establishment of a refuge city to be called Ararat, named for the resting place of the Biblical Noah's ark and, not incidentally, a nod to his own family name. To promote his dream of building this refuge, he purchased from the State of New York 2,555 acres on Grand Island, the largest island in the Niagara River, paying \$10,000 for the property.

On September 2, 1825 a parade led by military, civic, and Masonic leaders marched through the streets of Buffalo past thousands of spectators. A grand ceremony at St. Paul's Episcopal church included the singing of psalms and Noah's dramatic reading of a proclamation. Noah even brought a cornerstone fashioned of granite and engraved in both Hebrew and English with the legend, "Ararat, a City of Refuge for the Jews, founded by Mordecai M. Noah in the Month of Tishri, 5586 (September, 1825) and in the Fiftieth Year of American Independence.

Unfortunately, despite hordes of people lining the streets and the riverbanks for the parade and ceremony, only a smattering of Jews attended the event, and Noah found he had little support for his dream. Totally disheartened, and despite all the preparation and expense, he never actually set foot on Grand Island. He left for New York the next day.

Noah did not, however, give up on his idea of a homeland for the Jews, and in 1844, a good fifty years before Herzl became what most consider the first modern Zionist, he gave a headline making speech in which he proposed a return to Palestine.

The cornerstone was removed from the church and left in the back of the building only to gather moss. Over the course of more than a century and a half, it was first neglected, and then moved from place to place. Since 1994, the cornerstone has been on display in the Buffalo and Erie County Historical Society at 25 Nottingham Court in Buffalo. A historical marker on Grand Island indicates the parcel of land on which Ararat, a City of Refuge, was to have been built.

A footnote to history, it is remembered, if at all, largely in fiction. British author Israel Zangwill wrote of the venture in his story, "Noah's Ark," and American cartoonist Ben Katchor fictionalized Noah's project in his graphic novel, *The Jew of New York*. Noah also makes an appearance in novelist Gore Vidal's *Burr*.

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Community Calendar
Singles Calendar

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Candle Lighting Times

PARSHAT VAYEISHEV
BOSTON 3:54
FALL RIVER 3:56
LOWELL 3:54
SPRINGFIELD 4:01
WORCESTER 3:57
PORTLAND, MAINE 3:46
MANCHESTER, N.H. 3:53
PROVIDENCE, R.I. 3:57



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Parenting

Jewish kids and white privilege: A serious conversation



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 yummy latkes & sufganiyot
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 at our school
 December 7th - December 14th
 - Book levels are provided thru middle school
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For more information:
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