



THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK

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AMERICA'S FIRST SYNAGOGUE FINALLY GIVEN COMMEMORATION THANKS TO EFFORTS OF CM CHIN, HISTORICAL, AND COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS

THE FINANCIAL DISTRICT-Council Member Margaret S. Chin joined the Lower Manhattan Historical Association, the Sons of the Revolution in the State of New York, the American Sephardi Federation, the Temple of Universal Judaism, and the Jewish Learning Experience in finally recognizing the Mill Street synagogue by co-naming portions of South William Street between Mill Lane and Broad Street “Mill Street Synagogue/Seixas Way”. Mill Street synagogue was the first synagogue in North America, and its spiritual leader, Gershom Mendes Seixas, was an American Revolutionary War leader.



“Lower Manhattan is an area rich in the history of the Dutch, the English, and the Americans who fought for a free and independent nation,” said **Council Member Margaret. S Chin.** “Though their contributions are largely overlooked, the immigrants of the Jewish faith who constructed the Mill Street synagogue near this spot also possessed that Revolutionary spirit. After Gerhsom Sexias, one of the leaders of the synagogue, gave a rousing and emotional speech, the congregation decided to become supporters of the patriots’ cause and would leave New York for Pennsylvania rather than live under British rule. Today, we finally recognize the role this synagogue played in the history of the Jewish people in America, as well as the history

of a nation that has never just been white Anglo-Saxon Protestant, but from the beginning, has been a mixture of people of different races, religions and national origins.”

During the war, the congregants of the synagogue passionately defended both the fight for independence and the principle of religious liberty speaking out against a religious test in Pennsylvania. Though historians have written about the importance of the Mill Street synagogue for centuries, there has been no marker to commemorate this sacred place. Last year, the Lower Manhattan Historical Association secured a recommendation from Community Board 1 to co-name a portion of South William Street "Mill Street Synagogue/Seixas Way". Council Member Chin worked with her colleagues to ensure the passage of the co-naming by the New York City Council.

“289 years ago today in 1730 at this spot with the support of Jewish congregations from around the world the nascent Jewish community of New York City dedicated the first synagogue in North America,” said **James Kaplan, President and Board Chair of the Lower Manhattan Historical Association**. “The co-naming of this Street as Mill Street/ Seixas Way provides long overdue recognition of the fact that this is one of the most historically important sites for the Jewish people in America. The Lower Manhattan Historical Association is proud to have spearheaded this community effort to bring about this co-naming as part of its continuing effort to educate people who live or work in Lower Manhattan or throughout the City about the tremendous historical importance of this area.”

“We are pleased to join with the Lower Manhattan Historical Society in this commemoration of the Mill Street Synagogue and American Revolution patriot Gershom Mendes Seixas,” said **Peter C. Hein President of the Sons of Revolution in the State of New York**. “Each year, Sons of the Revolution is pleased to participate, with the Veteran Corps of Artillery, in honoring Jewish Soldiers and Patriots of the Revolution whose graves in the Shearith Israel cemetery at Chatham Square are decorated for Memorial Day. We are also pleased to be joining today with the LMHA in bestowing our Religious Freedom Award on our long-time member and Honorary President Ambassador John L. Loeb, Jr.”

“South William St now also known as Mill Street



Synagogue & Gershom Mendes Seixas Way, like Passover, is the story of renewal and redemption,” said **Rabbi Nissi Eber of the Jewish Learning Experience**. “As a Rabbi in this neighborhood, it is great to see this street receiving the proper recognition it deserves in forming Jewish American history.”

“This historic renaming represents a symbolic recognition of the tremendous impact the Jewish people have had on New York,” **Cheryl Bier CEO of the Bnai Zion Foundation and a representative of the New York Board of Rabbis**. “Our culture and our values have been an essential part of New York’s vibrant melting pot since the first group of Jewish settlers arrived in the 17th century.”

After remarks were given by those assembled, the crowd moved down the street for the unveiling. Despite the narrowness of South William Street, everyone gathered to watch the unveiling of the new street sign which read “Mill Street Synagogue/Seixas Way”.

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