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Touro Synagogue and the Colonial Jewish Cemetery: An Unexpected Experience Atop Newport's Scenic Old Quarter

It is now no more that toleration is spoken of, as if it was the by the indulgence of one class of people, that another enjoyed the exercise their inherent natural rights. For happily the Government of the United States, which gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance requires only that they who live under its protection should demean themselves as good citizens, in giving it on all occasions their effectual support.

George Washington, August 1790

It [Touro] is not only the oldest Synagogue in America but also one of the oldest symbols of liberty. No better tradition exists than the history of Touro Synagogue's great contribution to the goals of freedom and justice for all.

John F. Kennedy, September 15, 1963

Virtually unaltered since its dedication in 1763, Touro Synagogue was designed by Peter Harrison, America's first great architect. Seen from the street, the structure is all classical grace; inside, its ornate yet elegant sanctuary reflects Sephardic Jewish worship practices that date back hundreds of years. Here, Newport's active congregation and visitors from around the world come to worship and reflect.

When George Washington visited Touro Synagogue in August 1790, he wrote "To the Hebrew Congregation in Newport" that *happily the Government of the United States... gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance....* These words, and the architectural gem that was home to that congregation, have come to symbolize freedom of conscience and make Touro Synagogue a must-see destination of any visit to Newport.

The oldest standing Jewish house of worship in the United States, a National Historic Site and a National Trust for Historic Preservation affiliate, Touro Synagogue attracts over 30,000 visitors a year. Both the congregation and its public arm, the Touro Synagogue Foundation, work actively to ensure the preservation of this remarkable site for future generations. In 2006, a 16-month, three million dollar restoration of the building was completed, thanks in part to support from the Save America's Treasures program. The Ambassador John L. Loeb Jr. Visitors Center, the centerpiece of the reconfigured Touro Synagogue Campus, is scheduled to open in the summer of 2009. Please see our enclosed newsletter, Touro News, for information on the new Touro Campus and Visitors Center.

PUBLIC PROGRAMS & SPECIAL EVENTS

The Touro Synagogue Foundation offers a variety of programs and events throughout the year. Please check our website, www.tourosynagogue.org, for the most up-to-date information.

Guided Tours of Touro Synagogue

Join experienced guides on a half-hour exploration of Touro Synagogue, its place in American history and 350 years of Jewish history in Newport. Synagogue tours last approximately 30 minutes; no walking is required.

Colonial Jewish Newport: A Walking Tour

Mid-18th Century Newport was home to a thriving and diverse Jewish community. As you wind your way through Newport's colonial town center and old, narrow lanes, discover a vibrant colonial city, and the thriving Jewish community that built Touro Synagogue. Walking tours last approximately 1-1.5hrs and cover about a mile of easy walking.

Touro Moments

Explore Touro Synagogue's deep and diverse history during informal conversations with our guides. Presentations last about 10-15 minutes. Topics include:

Divine Inspiration: The Architecture of Touro Synagogue

The Colonial Jewish Cemetery: Through Poets' Eyes

15th Century Spain: The Road to Inquisition

A Sabbath Evening with Sarah Lopez, a Jewish Woman in Colonial Newport

Sephardic vs. Ashkenazic Jews: What's the Difference Anyway?

The Levi Gale House: An Inside Look

Slavery in Colonial Newport

Paint, Polish & Analysis: The Restoration of Touro Synagogue

Growing up Jewish in 20th-Century Newport

Journey to Freedom Lecture Series

Since 2003, this lecture series has brought nationally known scholars and other experts to Newport to explore a diverse array of topics related to Touro Synagogue and Colonial Newport.

The George Washington Letter Celebration

Every year, Touro Synagogue celebrates George Washington's famous 1790 letter to "To the Hebrew Congregation in Newport, Rhode Island," written during his first visit to Rhode Island as President of the United States. In the letter, Washington affirmed the new national government's absolute commitment to the free exercise of religion, which he regarded as an "inherent natural right." The federal government, he stated, "gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance." The annual event has featured a long tradition of distinguished keynote speakers, including Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg and Brown University President Ruth Simmons.

Save the Date: The 62nd annual George Washington Letter Celebration will take place at Touro Synagogue on Sunday, August 16, 2009.

PLANNING YOUR VISIT

An admission fee is charged.

Public restrooms are not available onsite.

Unfortunately, Touro Synagogue is not wheelchair accessible.

Touro Synagogue is located in the heart of Colonial Newport, within easy walking distance of many restaurants and area attractions.

Parking is available at the Newport County Convention and Visitors Bureau, 23 America's Cup Avenue, a 10-15 minute walk from Touro Synagogue.

Touro Synagogue is open year round, however the tour schedule varies seasonally. Please check our website for the most up-to-date information: <http://www.tourosynagogue.org>

2009 Summer Season: June 21 – September 7, 2009

Open daily, closed Saturdays

Please contact Malka Benjamin, Coordinator of Public Programs and Outreach, with inquiries or to schedule a visit to Touro Synagogue. mbenjamin@tourosynagogue.org or 401.847.4794 x23