



The Grandees: Americas Sephardic Elite

By Stephen Birmingham

Lyons Press. Paperback. Condition: New. 394 pages. Tracing their origins to medieval Portugal and Spain, the Sephardic Jews consider themselves the nobility of Jewry, in contrast to their pushier and more aggressive German counterparts. They were also the first Jews to inhabit the new world first exiled from Spain and Portugal, and then forced out of Brazil, a ship bearing 23 Sephardic Jews was blown off its course to Holland, beset by pirates, and then captured by a French captain before being ransomed for the payment of their freight in the City of New Amsterdam. And so the American Sephardic Jewish story begins. Here Stephen Birmingham tells the rich and varied history of this insular group of bewilderingly interrelated families, spiced with gossip and the gentle rattling of family skeletons. We find tales of fortunes made in the fur trade long before the Astors, revolutionary heroes and heroines, and poetic spinster Rebecca Gratz, thought to be Scott's model for Rebecca in *Ivanhoe*. Through it all emerges a picture of a proud haughty people, who have chosen to remain aloof from the later-arriving Jews from Europe, and have staunchly refused to be swept up in the movement of Reform Judaism, preferring to...

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