



The Letters of Abigaill Levy Franks, 1733-1748

Edith B. Gelles

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Abigaill Franks' letters are among the earliest extant by a woman in colonial New York City. They are also the earliest known letters by a Jewish woman in British America and probably the Western colonies. Thirty-five letters survive, all written to her son Naphtali between 1733 and 1748. These letters represent a rare resource for the study of family life during the colonial period as well as of the life of a lively and articulate woman.

In this fascinating book, Edith B. Gelles carefully edits all of Abigaill Franks' letters to make them accessible to modern readers. Gelles' substantial introduction provides a portrait of New York City at the time, describes typical colonial family life, and discusses the Jewish immigrant experience in New York. Abigaill's spontaneously written letters tell of one Jewish family's assimilation in eighteenth-century America; it is a story that resonates with other stories of assimilation that permeate the pages of American history.

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