Kashrus in New York: 1654–1812

By Dr. Yitzchok Levine

Kosher Meat

In 1655, Congregation Shearith Israel was the only synagogue in New York. It bore the responsibility for and had control over the supply of kosher meat. In the earliest times, this [kosher meat] was in the hands of synagogal authorities. Shearith Israel elected its shochet, paid his salary out of the funds of the congregation and supervised his work. Before appointment, the shochet's ability and knowledge were thoroughly examined by a board of three men, of whom the chazan was often one. A similar Bet Din frequented the shochet's competency. (Pages 294–299)

Introduction

When 23 Jews arrived in New Amsterdam (New Netherland/New York) on September 7, 1654, they faced a variety of problems, not the least of which was eating meat. The synagogue, and Moses Lucena were sworn in, and were among the first Jewish boarding house in New York, bought in the market a piece of meat which had been slaughter, and sealed properly. The shochet, the parnas and the assistants consulted a certain Rabbi Samuel Bar Isaac, who had late come arrived from London to New York, and who seems to have had rabbinical ordination. After due investigation, the shochet was completely released; the widow Hays was obliged to make her kashrucha kosher so that her boarding house might not be considered a "Treffo house." (Page 299)

Sadly, there have always been some who have attempted to sell non-kosher meat as kosher.

In 1747, a regulation was adopted by Shearith Israel which provided that no kosher meat must be exported unless a certificate was presented. All certificates were, moreover, a special fee had to be paid by the exporter. In 1752, another change was introduced; because of the additional expense, the usual seal was not to be affixed to exported meat. In place of the seal, the barrel containing the kosher meat was to be inscribed "K. SH. I.

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ii. Unwritten History: Reminiscences of N. Taylor Phillips, Brooklyn Eagle Archives 6/2 June 1954: 77-104, pages 87-88. The term "kosher" in "according to Hoyle" denotes "by highest authority" and is a corruption of the Hebrew word koheir (1672-1769), who wrote a number of game books, including A Short Treatise on the Game of Whist (1742).

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