



## **Emma Lazarus (1849-1887)**

*“Give me your tired, your poor,  
Your huddled masses yearning  
to breathe free.”*

Emma Lazarus' famous lines caught our national imagination and continue to inspire the way we think about freedom and exile today. Written in 1883, her celebrated poem, "The New Colossus," is engraved on a plaque in the Statue of Liberty. Over the years, the sonnet has become a part of American culture, serving as everything from an Irving Berlin show tune to a call for immigrants' rights.

Emma Lazarus was the fourth child in a wealthy family of seven children. Born in 1849 to Moses and Esther Nathan Lazarus, she grew up around New York's vibrant Union Square. Her siblings included Josephine Lazarus who was also a well known writer and a featured speaker at the 1893 Jewish Women's Congress.



Emma's early poems and translations show she had a strong classical education and a mastery of German and French. Her father Moses Lazarus recognized his young daughter's talent and began to encourage her work. In 1866, when Emma was seventeen, he privately published her first book, *Poems and Translations written between the ages of fourteen and seventeen*.

The Lazarus family traced their ancestry back to America's first settlers. As descendants of this pioneering group of Sephardic (*Spanish and Portuguese*) Jews, Emma's family belonged to a distinct Jewish upper class. From them, Emma inherited a rich pride in her Sephardic heritage, and often wrote about the medieval scholars and poets of her ancestors land.

Emma Lazarus was a very, very talented Sephardic Jew.

*Emma Lazarus.*