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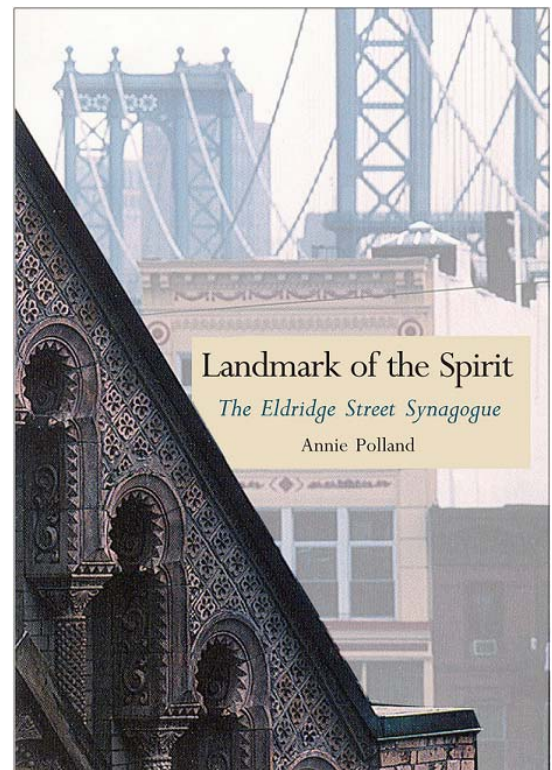
## *Landmark of the Spirit*

**New Haven**—Last year, after a massive twenty-year restoration that reclaimed it from ruin, the famed Eldridge Street Synagogue on the lower east side of Manhattan reopened its doors to a great deal of fanfare. The building, however, is more than an architectural achievement. As Bill Moyers writes in the Foreword to Annie Polland’s *Landmark of the Spirit: The Eldridge Street Synagogue* (December 16, 2008), the synagogue embodies **“the spirit of an ancient people on a new exodus and the spirit of a new nation committed to the old idea of liberty. Every synagogue is a means of keeping Jewish consciousness alive, but this one’s mission of memory is unique in the world. Four-fifths of today’s American Jews descend from the eastern European refugees who came in that exodus. The Eldridge Street Synagogue connects the generations one to another.”**

In *Landmark of the Spirit*, Annie Polland offers the first comprehensive history of this important institution. Polland places the story of Eldridge Street in the context of the rich cultural history of American Jews, beginning with the wave of nineteenth century immigrants fleeing religious persecution in eastern Europe. She celebrates the Eldridge Street Synagogue’s provenance in the evolution of American Judaism: the dynamic the Eldridge Street immigrants forged, as they created a Jewish house of worship that drew on and incorporated their emerging American identities, is still relevant for congregations throughout the nation.

**“Far more than a history of one remarkable congregation, *Landmark of the Spirit* is an extraordinary examination of Jewish religious life on the Lower East Side over three-quarters of a century,”** says **Jeffrey S. Gurock**, Libby M. Klaperman Professor of Jewish History, Yeshiva University. Exploring the synagogue’s extensive and detailed archives, the author shines new light on the religious life of immigrant Jews, introduces various rabbis, cantors and congregants, and analyzes the importance of this special building in the context of the larger American-Jewish experience.

From the façade to the bimah, the balcony to the cantor’s stand, Polland uses physical elements of the synagogue to tell the



inspirational history of the place and of the scores of Jews from all over eastern Europe who came to pray and, importantly, to seek both refuge from and a way to interpret the myriad difficulties experienced by recent immigrants to New York City in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. **Tony Michels**, George L. Mosse Associate Professor of American Jewish History at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, calls the book, **“A fascinating, lively history of the Eldridge Street Synagogue that takes the reader through the inner workings of the congregation and the physical structure of the building itself.”**

At the time of the synagogue’s founding and through its active decades, there was a central tension between a commitment to Orthodox Judaism as it was practiced in the old country, and the need for the congregants to adapt to the reality of life in America. In the words of Annie Polland, “... the members of the Eldridge Street Synagogue were constantly engaged with their surroundings... Rituals, customs, fasts, feasts, prayer, and festivals celebrated there were not mere vestiges of east European tradition transplanted by unwitting devotees but the products of an active and intriguing adaptation to American life.” As Bill Moyers points out in his Foreword, this reckoning is emblematic of the larger story of religious freedom in America: **“You will not find anywhere a more eloquent expression of Jewish faith and American freedom.”**

In 1996, the Eldridge Street Synagogue became a National Historic Landmark, partly because of its exquisite architecture, and partly because it is symbolic of the turn-of-the-century Jewish immigrants who shaped both New York City’s lower east side and American Judaism. **Michael Alexander**, associate professor of modern Jewry, University of California, Riverside, puts it succinctly: **“I can’t think of a better book about American Jewish history published in recent memory.”**

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

**Annie Polland** is Vice President for Education at the Museum at Eldridge Street, where she oversees the development of curriculum and exhibits, and coordinates lecture series. In the 2008-9 academic year she will serve as Visiting Assistant Professor at the New School and at New York University. Her 2004 Columbia Ph. D., *The Sacredness of the Family: New York's Immigrant Jews and Their Religion, 1890-1930*, drew upon oral interviews, autobiographies and Yiddish newspapers of immigrants. She lives with her family in Brooklyn, New York.

**Landmark of the Spirit: The Eldridge Street Synagogue**

**By Annie Polland**

**Foreword by Bill Moyers**

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*For more information about the Eldridge Street Synagogue, please visit [www.EldridgeStreet.org](http://www.EldridgeStreet.org).*

## **ADVANCE PRAISE FOR *LANDMARK OF THE SPIRIT***

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