

Moses Piza

Joshua Piza's eldest son (1st child) from his first wife

1811-1871

Moses, the eldest son of Joshua Piza and his wife Benvenida Zacuto had an eventful youth. Born in Amsterdam in 1811, he accompanied his parents on the long hard trip by sailing-vessel to the colony of Curaçao when only four years old. His mother dying shortly after their arrival, he and his infant brother were handed over to the care of their aunt, Esther Zacuto who for a very brief period became their stepmother. Soon after her death, she was succeeded by a new one, Hannah Sasso, eighteen, eleven years older than Moses. There is every reason to believe that she was kind and just to her step-sons, even with the cares of her own rapidly increasing family. When Moses was twelve they all went to St. Thomas to live, and there some ten years later, the ageing minister retired from his pulpit, and the boy had to help his mother to support the family which had attained the number of eleven children (including the two by the first marriage).

Blue-eyed, fair and tall was Moses. His disposition was gentle and affectionate. When he was twenty-four, in the year 1835, he married. Rebecca Lopez Fonseca, of a family distinguished in the annals of Curaçao as pioneer settlers and rabbis, ever since the middle of the XVII Century. Moses had

his own store, and now his wife, who was his senior by one year, assisted him. They had six children, five of whom lived: Bienvenida (1836), Joshua (1838) who died in infancy, Rachel (1839), David (1840), Hannah (1841), and Esther (1847).

Moses was a man of imposing mien, and highly respected. In 1844 he was chosen as acting Reader of the Congregation during an interim in the Rabbinical succession; for Joshua Piza had so well taught his two eldest boys that they knew every word of the Hebrew services.

It was in 1841 at the birth of Esther, the youngest child (whose advent six years after Hannah, came as a surprise to the couple then considered middle aged) that an incident occurred that – according to the legend – had a devastating effect on Moses, and indeed on his whole family. Rebecca had had a difficult time at the birth, and her baby was being nursed by her sister Leah, whose own infant, Rachel, was four months old. Her recovery was slow, and the black midwife in attendance was cross and moody. She did not treat his 'Rica' with the gentleness that the sympathetic 'Moshe' felt to be her due. Exasperated by some impudence, he slapped her. The negress was furious. She cursed him. Soon after a strange alteration in the nature of the man became apparent. His gentle cheerfulness vanished. People whispered that the nurse had put '*Obeah*' on him. Others hinted that she had poisoned him with a venom whose effect was slow.

Whatever caused it, Moses' fine mind gave way, and he became subject to periodic fits of melancholy and more violent insanity, which unfitted him for any work and made him a care and worry to the whole family.

On the advice of Dr. Preto, the family physician, he was taken to New York and Boston to see if the American doctors could help his case. He went willingly, and made several trips. On one of these, in 1859, his second daughter, Rachel, aged twenty, accompanied him.

In 1862 Rachel married her father's half-brother, Samuel ('Sampi'). In 1866 David, twenty-seven, married his cousin Rachel, Judah's daughter; and in 1870, Esther, twenty-two, married her cousin, 'Josh' Lindo, a year older.

Eight years after their marriage, David and Rachel went to New York to live. Their offspring numbered six, and increased to nine. With the David Pizas came his mother Rebecca, desiring to be near her now helpless spouse who was being treated in a Philadelphia sanatorium; they were also accompanied by Bienvenida and Hannah, David's two unmarried sisters. At the age of Sixty-six Rebecca died, in 1876, more than a year before her invalid husband. When it was seen that her death was imminent, both her married daughters, Rachel Piza in Paris, and Esther Lindo in Panama, made ocean voyages

to see her once more but both arrived too late. In June 1871 Moses died and was laid to rest from the house of his son.

Reprinted from: *The Chronicle of Joshua Piza and His Descendants*, by Vida Lindo Guiterman, New York.

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