

# The Mother of Exiles

by Lynne Belluscio

Now that Lady Liberty is back in LeRoy, I'm getting ready to put together an exhibit about her. Last week you read that I need to find a couple of 1950s Boy Scout uniforms. (Haven't heard from anyone yet.)

But now I'm reading about the Statue of Liberty in the New York Harbor. I'll be sharing some of the history in the next couple of weeks. Most of us are aware of the lines from the poem: "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free..." The words are from "The New Colossus." But I never knew that it was written by a Jewish woman in an effort to raise money to build the base.

France had agreed to build the statue and to present it to the United States, under the condition that Americans would raise enough money to build the base. Joseph Pulitzer, the noted newspaperman, was afraid that the money couldn't be raised, so he contacted American writers, including Mark Twain, Walt Whitman, and Emma Lazarus and asked them to write poems which would be auctioned to raise money.

Emma Lazarus' poem, "The New Colossus" brought the highest bid of \$1,500. It was the only poem read at the 1883 fund-raiser. Three years later, the money had been raised, the base had been built, and the statue was shipped from France and erected. But sadly, a year later, Emma Lazarus died at the age of 34, of Hodgkin's disease. Her story is very interesting.

Emma Lazarus was born in 1849 in New York City. Her family was very wealthy and her ancestors had arrived in America many years before the Revolution. She was well educated and enjoyed writing. But she was well aware of the poverty in New York, particularly of the European Jewish immigrants.

She visited Ward's Island in New York

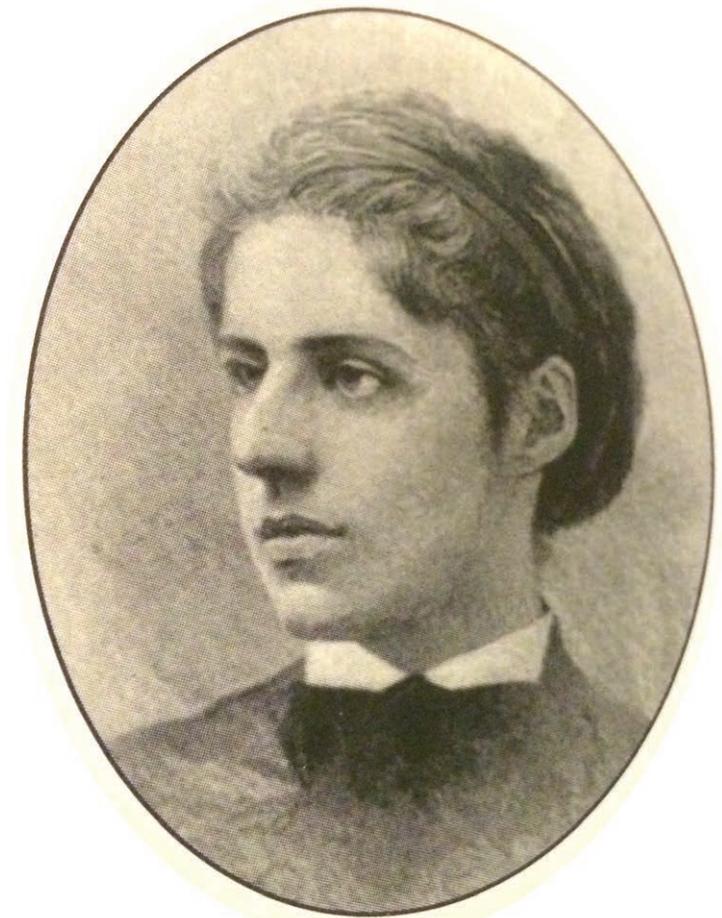
Harbor and became an active member of the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society. When she wrote the poem (actually it's a sonnet) she focused attention on the plight of the millions of immigrants coming through the New York Harbor. She called the statue the "Mother of Exiles." It was Emma's words that welcomed people to this land of liberty and freedom.

Twenty years after Emma's death, her words were engraved on a bronze plaque and placed in the entrance to the statue. Ten years later, her words were included in school books and memorized. (Now forgotten.) Sixty years later, in 1949, her words were used by the composer, Irving Berlin, and the song was sung on Broadway. I hope to find a choral group to perform the Irving Berlin song -- I think it is more like a hymn -- at the dedication in July.

If you are not familiar with Emma Lazarus' sonnet, here it is:

## The New Colossus

Not like the brazen giant of Greek fame,  
With conquering limbs astride from land to land;  
Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand  
A mighty woman with a torch, whose flame  
Is the imprisoned lightning, and her name



Mother of Exiles. From her beacon-hand  
Glowes world-wide welcome; her mild eyes command  
The air-bridged harbor that twin cities frame.  
"Keep, ancient lands, your storied pomp!" cries she  
With silent lips. "Give me your

tired, your poor,  
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,  
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.  
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,  
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"



**Strengthen the Arm of Liberty - these folks rented a Statue of Liberty tie for the night at LeRoy House and raised \$300 to help restore LeRoy's Statue of Liberty.**