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Roger Williams University School of Law

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Newsroom

New York Times: Teitz on Touro Synagogue

Professor Louise Ellen Teitz on a federal court decision awarding control of the nation's oldest synagogue, in Newport, R.I., to the congregation housed there.



NEWPORT, R.I., May 16, 2016 - A federal judge on Monday awarded control of the nation's oldest synagogue, in Newport, R.I., to the congregation housed there, ruling against a New York congregation that had claimed ownership in a four-year legal fight between two of the oldest examples of America's religious pluralism.

The Touro Synagogue in Newport, built before the Revolutionary War and with a connection to George Washington, is a landmark of American Jewish history, but its congregation, Jeshuat Israel, suffers from dwindling membership and resources. Pitted against it in District Court in Providence was the oldest Jewish congregation in the United States, Shearith Israel of New York, which predates the synagogue by a century.

The ruling clears the way for Jeshuat Israel to sell a pair of Colonial-era silver ornaments called rimonim, valued at more than \$7 million, to raise money that it says is needed to keep the synagogue operating. The ornaments, adorned with small bells, were made by a noted 18th-century silversmith, Myer Myers, to go atop Torah scroll spindles.

"Because of the financial situation, we've been unable to do necessary maintenance," said **[RWU Law Professor] Louise Ellen Teitz, a co-president of the congregation**, which has 130 members. [...]