

A Word about Moses Stuart and a Plaque that Bears an Erroneous Claim

It is claimed in *Youth From Every Quarter* (1979) by Frederick S. Allis Jr. that Moses Stuart's 1813 book, printed in Andover by Flagg and Gould, was "the first Hebrew grammar to be published in the United States."¹ The same erroneous information had been previously published in 1931, in Scott H. Paradise's *A History of Printing in Andover, Massachusetts, 1798-1931*. Paradise also wrongly claimed: "The new press was fortunate in having the first fonts of Greek and Hebrew type in America."²

A probable source of Paradise's error was a misreading of "An Illustrious Town, — Andover" by the Rev. F.B. Makepeace, published in *The New England Magazine and Bay State Monthly* in April 1886.³ In discussing William Newcombe's *A Harmony in Greek of the Gospels*, first published in Dublin and then reprinted by Flagg and Gould, the Rev. Makepeace said: "This was probably the first book in Greek published here" — here, meaning Andover, not the United States, as I understand it in context, especially since he added: "The first book in Hebrew printed at the Andover Press [meaning Flagg and Gould] was Stuart's Hebrew Grammar. . ."⁴ Note: At *the Andover Press*, not in the United States.

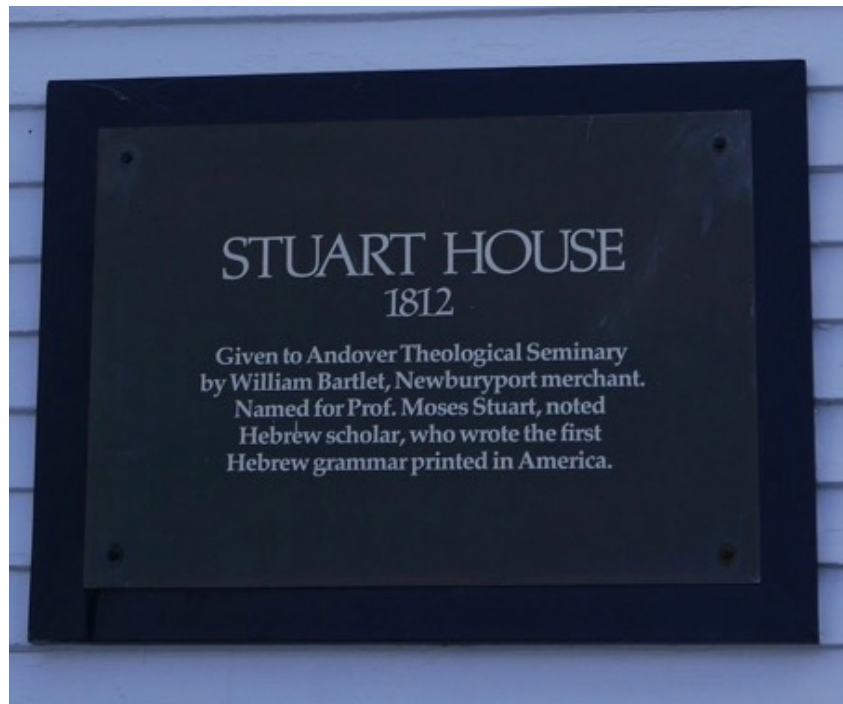
Whatever the cause of these errors, the fact is that Judah Monis (1683-1764), North America's first college instructor of Hebrew, at Harvard from 1722 to 1760, was the author of the first Hebrew textbook published in the United States — and indeed, in the Americas. Bostonian Jonas Green published 1,000 copies of it in 1735. Titled *Dickdook Leshon Gnebreet*, it was subtitled in English: *A Grammar of the Hebrew Tongue, being an Essay to bring the Hebrew Grammar into English to facilitate Instruction of all those who are desirous of acquiring a clear idea of this primitive tongue by their own studies*.⁵ Monis, who had converted from Judaism to Christianity in 1722, sold the books himself out of his Cambridge home, his best customers being Harvard students, since it was a required text for all graduates for some twenty-five years.

Professor's Stuart's daughter Sarah Stuart Robbins published *Old Andover Days* in 1908. This, too, may be a source of the errors of Paradise and, then, Allis, but I don't think Robbins got her information from the 1886 magazine article. She probably got it from her family, if not Professor Stuart himself. "A little way down the hill toward Boston . . . stood Shipman's store," she wrote, speaking of the building that Mark Newman had occupied initially, and where Newman began his bookstore, from which today's Andover Bookstore directly descended. ". . . Even the stronghold of trade in the guise of this little country store was in Andover made to pay tribute to the requirements of theology and learning; for in this same building my father had his printing-press." Note: *his* printing press. "This may seem a strange possession for an Andover professor," she went on; "but when my father began to teach Hebrew, he found that he must write a Hebrew grammar, there being nothing adequate on the subject in the English language. When the grammar was written, because there were no Hebrew characters in American printing-offices, and no printers capable of setting up Hebrew type, he had to solicit contributions, buy a press, and import Hebrew type. He even set up some of the grammar himself, until he could train compositors capable of doing such work."⁶

It's touching that a proud daughter would be so boastful about her father and his accomplishments; I wish, though, that she had got her facts right. Same for Paradise, Allis, and,

then P.A. headmaster Claude M. Fuess, who repeated the same claims in one of his books. I especially wish this since the signage on the former home of the Stuart family on the P.A. campus continues to spread the false news to new students every single year. I have pointed out these errors to P.A.'s archivist, who believes the plaque went up around the time of P.A.'s bicentennial in 1978 (which was also the impetus for the Allis book's publication the following year), citing the information I have posted here. As of this writing, it remains in place.

Perhaps, to some, it may seem pedantic of me to bring this up, but I believe it is a correction that needs to be made, since, if it were true, it would be momentous. I also believe in the axiom: everyone is entitled to their own opinion, but they're not entitled to their own facts.



¹ Frederick S. Allis, Jr., *Youth From Every Quarter: A Bicentennial History of Phillips Academy* (Andover: Phillips Academy; Distributed by the University Press of New England, 1979), 129.

² The unpaginated Paradise pamphlet is online at <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uc1.b4198088&view=1up&seq=9> Retrieved June 1, 2022.

³ Vol. I, No. 4, 314.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ For more information, see Robert H. Pfeiffer, "The Teaching of Hebrew in Colonial America," *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, Vol. 45, No. 4, Tercentenary Issue (April 1955): 363-373.

⁶ Sarah Stuart Robbins, *Old Andover Days* (Boston: The Pilgrim Press, 1908), 20-22.