



1999 Inductee
to the
South Carolina
Academy of Authors

Penina Moise was born the sixth of nine children on April 23, 1797, in Charleston, SC. Her parents had fled to South Carolina from the island of St. Eustace during a slave insurrection. Having been raised in the Judaic faith in a diverse Jewish community, she began to focus on Jewish rights and issues at an early age. After her father died when she was twelve, Moise left school to support her family, especially her asthmatic brother and ill mother. She studied whenever she was not caring for her family, and reading and writing became her early passions.

Poetry served as her main form of self-expression. She printed many of her poems in both Jewish and non-Jewish publications shortly after her father's death. In the early 1830s, she published a collection of poems entitled *Fancy's Sketch-Book*. This was the first book of poetry published by a Jewish American woman and made her widely recognized in Charleston. Many of these poems celebrate the Jewish community as well as acknowledge the struggles of a Jewish American, including "Cain," "Joseph's Dream" and "To Persecute Foreigners." Her recognition grew with the appearance of other poems in popular publications such as *Godey's Lady Book*, the *Washington Union*, the *Boston Daily Times*, and the *New Orleans Commercial Times*.

Aside from her poetry, Moise wrote dozens of songs, recitations, and hymns. In 1845, she became a superintendent of the Beth Elohim Sunday school, the first Jewish religious school in Charleston, and used her creativity to help teach the children about the Jewish faith and traditions. Secondly, her writing described the plights of other groups such as the starving Irish during the 1840s famine and those under religious persecution in England. Her patriotism also shone through in her writing during the Civil War. While living in Sumter as a war refugee with one of her sisters and one niece, she wrote poems of encouragement to the Southern soldiers.

During the last couple of decades of her life, her failing eyesight further deteriorated to near-blindness. Moise wrote about two hundred hymns during her lifetime, and it has been argued that her most inspiring hymns were written during this period. She died on September 13, 1880, in Charleston and is buried in Coming Street Cemetery beside most of her family.

-Sarah Marie Williamson

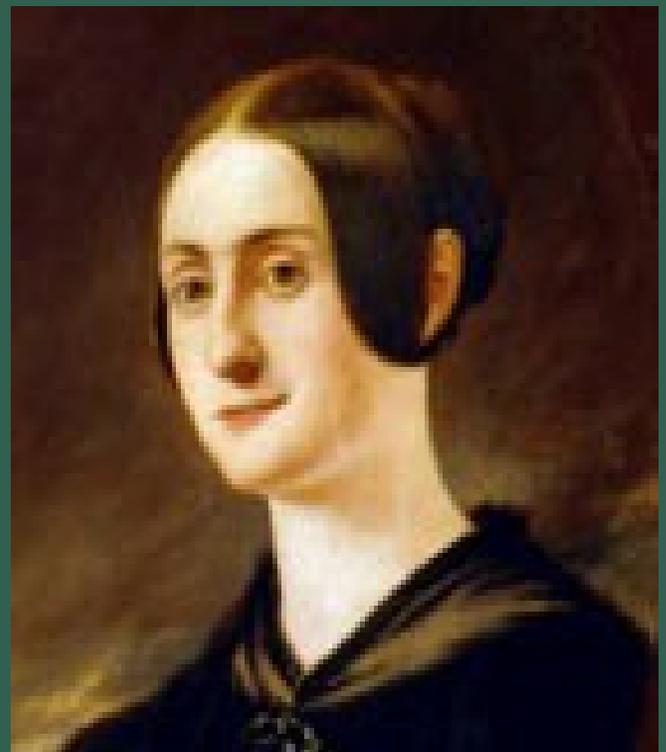


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