

## The Christian Israelite Church in New York

### Excerpts from Contemporary Sources

#### I. The Sanctuary

*From 1852 to 1913 the Christian Israelite Church occupied a building at 108 First Street on the Lower East Side of Manhattan.*

“The Christian Israelites . . . occupy as a place of worship the second story of a house which they own, No. 108 First-[street] and they rent the rest of the building.” *New York Times, January 28, 1878. According to a table annexed to this article, the building had a value of \$12,000 and was held without debt.*

“We were induced, on Sunday evening, to go and hear a discourse advertised to be delivered by MARGARET L. BISHOP, at a little chapel, a sort of conveniently-furnished upper room, No. 108 First-street. About fifty persons were present, but the place will easily seat a hundred. The people style themselves ‘Israelites.’” After an ‘elder,’ or some other officer, had read the eleventh chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, a hymn was sung, to a well-known psalm tune, accompanied on the seraphine. There was no introductory prayer, nor any at the close.” “Margaret L. Bishop – John Wroe,” *New York Daily Times, June 26, 1855.*

“The three-story building at 108 First Street has been sold by the Society of Christian Israelites to Isaac Yagoda. It occupies a lot of 25 by 100 [feet] and has been held by the society since 1852. The consideration was about \$18,000 . . .” “Old East Side Building Sold,” *New York Times, January 16, 1913.*

*In a column titled "The Building Department," the New York Times on March 20, 1913 listed the details of the sale of the sanctuary. The building lot consisted of 20x105.11 feet and was located on the north side of First Avenue, 175 feet west of Avenue A. On March 18, 1913, the Religious Society of Christian Israelites sold the building to Isaac Yagoda for \$17,200.*

## II. The Leadership of the Church

*During much of the early history of the Christian Israelite Church in New York, John L. Bishop and his wife, Margaret L. Bishop, were its leaders. Mr. and Mrs. Bishop had received instruction from John Wroe, the founder of the Christian Israelite Church, as documented in his "Divine Communications." Following is a sampling of the announcements that they placed in The New York Times during their tenure.*

*"MRS. BISHOP is to preach to-morrow at the C. Israelite Sanctuary, No. 108 1st-st., near Avenue A, -- at 3 o'clock P.M., and 7 in the EVENING. Subject -- 'Israel's Restoration and the Millennium.' Seats free." New York Daily Times, April 10, 1852.*

*"Israelites. -- The Christian Israelites' Anniversary is always celebrated at the Feast of Pentecost. TO-MORROW is the day. The brethren give an invitation to the public to attend the preaching in the evening at 7½ o'clock, at the Christian Israelite Sanctuary, No. 108 1st-st. MRS. BISHOP will be present. Seats free." New York Daily Times, May 29, 1852.*

“Margaret L. Bishop is to preach TO-MORROW EVENING, at 7½ o’clock, in the Christian Israelite Sanctuary No. 108 1st-st. Seats free. No service in the afternoon. N.B. – J. L. BISHOP intends to preach in the Park at 2 o’clock. P.M.” *New York Daily Times, April 15, 1854.*

“Margaret L. Bishop --- Intends, by Divine permission, to speak in the Park on SUNDAY, at 3 P.M., and in the Christian Israelite Sanctuary No. 108 1st-st. at 7½ in the EVENING. Subject --- The Building of the Latter House.” *New York Daily Times, June 24, 1854.*

“MARGARET L. BISHOP is to preach TO-MORROW EVENING, at 7 o’clock, at the Christian Israelite Sanctuary, No. 108 1st-st. N.B. – J. L. BISHOP is to preach at the corner of Washington and Grand-st., Jersey City at 4 o’clock P.M., if the weather permit.” *New York Daily Times, October 21, 1854.*

“MARGARET L. BISHOP is to preach TO-MORROW AFTERNOON at 3 o’clock and 7 in the EVENING at the C. Israelite Sanctuary, No. 108 1st-st. *on Christ’s Second Coming, Israel’s Restoration, and the Millennium &c.* Seats free.” *New York Daily Times, January 6, 1855.*

“Margaret L. Bishop will preach TO-MORROW EVENING at 7½ o’clock, in the Christian Israelite Sanctuary, No. 108 1st st. Subject --- *The Bridegroom and the Bride, the nations of them which are saved, &c.* Public are invited. Seats free.

Publications on the doctrines can be obtained at the Sanctuary.” *New York Daily Times, July 14, 1855.*

“MARGARET L. BISHOP – Is to preach TO-MORROW EVENING, at 7½ o’clock, at the Christian Israelite Sanctuary, No. 108 1st-st., on the *Fulfillment of the Prophecies*. Preaching in German at 3 o’clock P.M. Seats free.” *New York Daily Times, March 15, 1856.*

“MARGARET L. BISHOP is to preach TO-MORROW, at 7½ o’clock in the evening, at the Christian Israelite Sanctuary, No. 108 1st-st, on *the Fulfillment of the Prophecies, and the Second Coming of Christ*. German preaching at 3 o’clock P.M.” *New York Daily Times, March 22, 1856.*

“Margaret L. Bishop is expected to speak in the Sanctuary, No. 108 1st-st., near 1st av. TO-MORROW EVENING, at 7½ o’clock. Subject: *The Kingdom of God on Earth – the Hebrew’s Jubilee &c.* Seats free.” *New York Daily Times, July 25, 1857.*

“Margaret L. Bishop is to preach TO-MORROW AFTERNOON, at 3 o’clock, and 7½ in the EVENING at the Musical Academy, No. 288 Bowery, two doors above Houston-St. Subject – *The Mortal Body made Immortal – The Second Coming of Christ, &c.* Seats free.” *New York Times, February 27, 1858.*

*Before the Christian Israelite Church established its Sanctuary at 108 First Street, Margaret Bishop preached in various locations in the City of New York and achieved a level of respect and recognition. Following are the impressions of a reporter for the*

*Brooklyn Daily Eagle, as published on April 6, 1846, after attending a meeting at which Mrs. Bishop spoke.*

“In the afternoon we stepped into Israelitish Coventic[!]es in Lispenard street, New York, and were there refreshed by hearing ‘the word’ from ‘dear woman’s’ lips. The famous Margaret Bishop was laying down the truth, as she understands it. She is rather a remarkable woman, about forty years, and preaches with great fluency. Her countenance is intelligent, and lights up very finely in her more elegant passages. She belongs, we believe, to the sect founded upon the pretended revelation of God to John Wroe, in 1819, for the gathering and sealing of the twelve tribes of Israel. Her disciples never despair [*sic*], and their long beards consequently present a peculiarly striking aspect. Mrs. Bishop preaches in a strong Scotch accent, and her discourse was nevertheless very impressive, and listened to with exemplary attention. Upon the whole we think that female preaching is a decided improvement; and if there was [*sic*] more, it is pretty certain that there would be an increase of church goers.” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle, April 6, 1846.*

*In June, 1855, a journalist attended public worship at the Sanctuary of the Christian Israelite Church. The resulting essay includes the following description of Mrs. Bishop.*

“Mrs. BISHOP then rose. She is a matronly-looking middle-aged lady; when animated, her face is lighted up with much expression. Without a text, she recited the Lord’s Prayer, and commenced a very orderly-worded address, seemingly taking for her subject, ‘*Thy will be done.*’ We have not room to follow her through a discourse

which occupied an hour in its delivery, -- it may be sufficient if we characterize it as indicative of great natural talent, a copious and close familiarity with Scripture, a most figurative aptitude at what is termed 'spiritualizing' the whole historic record, and all the tact of illustration necessary to a practiced debater. She evidently is sincere in her convictions, amiable in her conceptions, and in the main sound in the parallelism of her own notions with those of most sects of rational and orthodox Christians." "Margaret L. Bishop – John Wroe," *New York Daily Times*, June 26, 1855.

*Margaret L. Bishop died on November 24, 1858. Her death was not unexpected, as made clear by the following excerpt from An Abridgment of John Wroe's Life and Travels; also Revelations on the Scriptures, and Various Communications Given to Him by Divine Inspiration for the Public (vol. 3, third edition), p. 282.*

"Wakefield, 1st of 6th month, 1849. Given in the Sanctuary on Whit Sunday morning, the 27h of 5th month, 1849, in answer to an inquiry of Elizabeth Deane, of Gravesend, for the recovery of Margaret Bishop, of New York, she being much afflicted, and her husband states that many a time he has thought there was scarcely any other prospect but the very next letter would carry the tidings of her death. She wishes to be kept in this hour of temptation with sufficient strength to do the work of God, that her spirit, soul, and body may not be divided by death.

"Answer.—She shall be kept in this hour of temptation to do the work, and shall recover of this disease . . ."

*A footnote records that "Margaret Bishop did recover of this illness, but died not many years afterwards."*

*According to the 1860 United States Census, John Bishop, then fifty years of age, and listed as an "Israelite Minister," resided in a household consisting of the following children, all of whom were born in New York: Mary Bishop (14 years of age), Margaret Bishop (13), John Bishop (11), Martha Bishop (8), and Wallace Bishop (5). Also residing in the household were Milton Bishop, listed as a 26-year-old female (?) born in Scotland, and Adolph Dehaun, aged 45, a laborer born in Holland.*

*John Bishop followed his wife in death on June 12, 1866.*

"DIED. BISHOP. – at Digby, N[ova]. S[cotia]., on Tuesday, June 12, Rev. J. L. BISHOP, aged 56 years. The friends of the family are respectfully invited to attend the funeral on Saturday, June 23, at 1½ o'clock, from his late residence, No. 108 1st-st., New-York." *New York Times, June 23, 1866.*

*Two months after the death of John L. Bishop, a newspaper article speculated on the impact of his passing on the leadership of the Christian Israelite Church.*

"John Laden Bishop, head of the Christian Israelite Church in England and America, is dead. His wife, Margaret, was the first successor of Joanne Southcote [sic], the prophetess of Exeter, England. Barbara, her daughter, now styles herself 'Shiloh,' and has assumed the place of prophetess and her father." "Miscellaneous New Items," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle, August 10, 1866.*

*In view of the errors in the foregoing statement, Margaret Bishop's daughter addressed a letter to the editor of the Brooklyn Daily Eagle, which is quoted here in full.*

“An Explanation. *To the Editor of the Brooklyn Eagle.* You will oblige me by contradicting the erroneous statement published in a recent issue of your paper, in which you inform your readers that my mother, Mrs. Bishop, was the successor of Joanna Southcott, ‘Prophetess of Exeter’ – and that I have styled myself ‘Shiloh,’ and have assumed the place of ‘Prophetess’ &c., in the Christian Israelite Church. In the first place, I would inform you that Mrs. Bishop never at any time in her whole life professed to be a ‘Prophetess,’ or to have any supernatural revelations, neither did Mr. Bishop ever claim to be a ‘Prophet,’ their knowledge and teachings were taken from the bible. Now, in regard to myself, and the titles which you inform your readers I have assumed, allow me sir to inform you that the paragraph in your paper is the first intimation which I have had of such a change taking place. I have been a member of the Christian Israelite Church for more than twenty five years, I have taken an active part in the sabbath school, have rendered my services to the sick and the poor (without respect to creed) as far as my means would allow; this I believe is all the leadership to which I can lay claim, such privileges would be granted to me in any other church. I am not a ‘public character,’ neither have I any desire to be. The late Mr. and Mrs. Bishop unitedly devoted their time, talent and means in the cause of religion, both in this country and in Europe, and never aspired to be anything higher than servants in the cause of their ‘divine master.’ Yours respectfully, R. [sic – should be B.] K. M.” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle, August 16, 1866.*



*Many late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century Christian Israelites in New York were German immigrants or of German heritage. Several of them resided with their families in Brooklyn. Among them, John F. Ruge was a church leader.*

“John F. Ruge, who died Sunday night at his residence at 23 Shepherd avenue [Brooklyn] of jaundice following an illness of three months, was for over thirty-five years a hardware merchant in Grand street, in the Eastern District, and he had lived in Brooklyn for fifty years. During his earlier years the deceased organized the Christian Israelite Church in New York City, and was for a time its pastor. He was always industrious in church work and in charitable endeavor and he was known to many as the preaching tinsmith. Deceased was born in Germany sixty-nine years ago and came to this country when a youth. A widow, three sons and five daughters survive him. The funeral services will be held to-night, the interment being at Lutheran Cemetery to-morrow morning.” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle, June 18, 1901.*

*Among the leaders of the Christian Israelite Church in New York following the deaths of Margaret and John Bishop were Joseph Von Helfrich, Andrew Doell, John F. Doell and Henry B. F. [M]ierisch, who are listed as church trustees in a newspaper report about the sale of the church building.*

“ROW OVER CHURCH SALE – Trustee Fails in Effort to Enjoin Fellow-Members of the Board. Supreme Court Justice Bijur denied the application of Joseph Von Helfrich, principal trustee of the Society of Christian Israelites, for an injunction restraining his fellow trustees from purchasing a new site for a church for the

organization. His fellow trustees are Andrew Doell, John F. Doell, and Henry. B. F. Hierisch [*sic – should be Mierisch*].

“Von Helfrich in his application said that as head of the church in New York City he had made arrangements to dispose of the property at 102 [*sic*] First Street, where the organization had held meetings since 1852. He contracted to sell the property for \$17,200, but after he had received \$1,000 on account his fellow trustees, he alleges, conveyed the property to the buyer in return for the balance of the purchase price. This money, the applicant said, they had refused to turn over to him, and besides they were making negotiations for the purchase of other property at what he alleged was an exorbitant price.” *New York Times, October 3, 1913, p. 5.*

*One of the trustees, Andrew Doell, is listed in the New York City Directory for 1890 as a “smith.” According to the Directory, he resided at 108 First Street, the address of the church building. In April, 1895 he filed plans for the construction of a new two-story brick wagon factory on a 25x80 lot that he owned on Atlantic Avenue in Brooklyn. The published description of the proposed construction states that Andrew Doell was a wagon and truck builder. New York Times, April 20, 1895.*

### III. Controversy about the “Wakemanites.”

*In 1856, Rhoda Wakeman of New Haven, Connecticut, a self-proclaimed “Messenger of God,” and her brother, Samuel Sly, achieved notoriety when Sly*

*brutally murdered Justus Matthews, whom Mrs. Wakeman claimed was evil and in league with the devil. The Christian Israelite Church had no association whatsoever with Wakeman or Sly. However, in a public statement after his arrest, Sly included the following assertion, suggesting that there was a relationship between the groups.*

“Although we [the “Wakemanites”] number but a few in this place, we are not without comfort in the world, for many there are, and they are constantly increasing, who entertain the faith, not yet perhaps perfected among them, but nearly sure. Of this body we acknowledge MARGARET BISHOP, of New-York. She is nearly right in this respect, and has quite a number of believers that she has confirmed in the truth. I believe they denominate themselves in New-York the ‘Christian Israelites’ – their prophet being a converted Jew [sic], and I believe named JOHN ROE [sic]. These people carry out fully our views and meet for prayer such as we had. Mrs. BISHOP was much interested in my sister and called on her several times, and they frequently conversed on these matters.” *Samuel Sly, as quoted in “More of the Wakemanites,” New York Daily Times, January 7, 1856 (p. 1).*

*As a result of Samuel Sly’s assertions, it became necessary for John and Margaret Bishop to defend the Christian Israelite Church.*

“At a meeting of the Christian Israelites, in Constitutional Hall, yesterday afternoon, Mr. BISHOP, the husband of MARGARET L. BISHOP, read several letters which have been published in the NEW-YORK DAILY TIMES, for the purpose of denying that the Christian Israelites had any connection or sectarian sympathy with the Wakemanites of New-Haven. Such denial was considered necessary, in

consequence of a statement made by SAM. SLY, the murderer of JUSTUS MATTHEWS, and published in the TIMES. He denied the truth of the assertions of SLY in every particular. Mrs. BISHOP, he said, had seen Mrs. WAKEMAN but once, and then by mere accident, and that, at that time, she believed Mrs. WAKEMAN to be insane. He also wished it to be distinctly understood that the Christian Israelite Society of New-York did not know of the existence of Mrs. WAKEMAN until the publication of the murder of MATTHEWS. In conclusion, he remarked that SLY was in the hands of the law, and he did not choose by word or act to injure him. All he desired was, that the Society of Christian Israelites should not be connected in any way, in the public mind, with the so-called Wakemanites, as they had neither lot nor part with them.

After the statement by Mr. BISHOP, the usual service was commenced, and a lengthy discourse was delivered by Mrs. MARGARET BISHOP.

There were about one hundred persons present, many of whom, our reporter was informed, are members of the Society of Christian Israelites of the City of New-York. The others were probably drawn there by the announcement that the statement of SAM. SLY, connecting the Christian Israelites with the Wakemanites would be read and answered." "The Wakemanites Repudiated by Margaret L. Bishop and the Christian Israelites," *New York Daily Times, January 21, 1856.*

*During the meeting at Constitutional Hall, John Bishop referred to a letter written by Mrs. Bishop, which had been published by the Times. The full text of the letter follows:*

“New-York, 9th of 1st month, 1856. *To the Editor of the New-York Daily Times:*  
SIR: In your paper of the 7th inst. you have a lengthy article in detail on the  
Wakemanites, connected with the late horrible tragedy in New-Haven. You inform  
your readers that it is asserted by the alleged murderer that ‘MARGARET BISHOP  
has repeatedly called upon and talked with Mrs. WAKEMAN.’

Sir, you will certainly do me the justice as an individual, and the Christian Israelite  
members in general, by contradicting the assertion made in your print of Monday  
last. I never was in sympathy with these people – never had any ‘interest’ in Mrs.  
WAKEMAN. I accidentally saw her in New-Haven about thirteen years ago, and  
decidedly considered her insane. Neither did the Christian Israelite Society in New-  
York know of the existence of Mrs. WAKEMAN or her followers until this notorious  
circumstance.

The Christian Israelites, as a body, have about one hundred organized societies,  
in various cities and towns of Europe, America, Asia and Africa, and I am nothing  
more than a Missionary for that Society. Yours, respectfully, MARGARET L.  
BISHOP.” *[Notwithstanding Mrs. Bishop’s clear statement of her role as missionary  
in the Society, the Times chose to publish her letter under the heading. “Letter from a  
Prophetess.”] New York Daily Times, January 10, 1856 (p. 3).*

#### IV. Public Notice

*As John and Margaret Bishop and other Christian Israelites became increasingly  
ready to proclaim the prophetic message of their faith, public notice – often  
erroneous in content – was taken of them and their church.*

“This sect [Christian Israelites], which though not numerous in this country, has yet within its pale many intelligent and zealous disciples, distinguished in many cases by their religious enthusiasm as well as personal eccentricity, and largely characterized by their Christian beneficence – dates its existence, as a people, or brotherhood, from 1792, though there was no distinct sectarian organization until as late a period as 1822, when a large number separated from the Church of England” . . . *New York Daily Times, March 25, 1854.*

*An especially egregious article – although approving of Margaret Bishop personally – prompted the following response from her:*

“No. 108 First-street, 27th 5th Mo., 1855. *To the Editor of the New-York Daily Times:* SIR: In your paper of the 26th you have a paragraph headed ‘Margaret L. Bishop – John Wroe,’ the tone of which calls for a reply. You have placed my name and profession parallel with ‘JOHN WROE,’ and the man’s character you denounce demoniac, &c., bringing forth charges against him the [*sic*] which if you can prove, you will do more than ever has been done by his most bitter enemies, and you hold me forth to your readers as an associate with this ‘JOHN WROE.’ I state the following in answer to some of your ludicrous remarks:

“I have been a member of the Christian Israelite Church since 1829, which is twenty-six years, and JOHN WROE was then in said church. This goes beyond the statement given by the TIMES. [*The Times had stated that John Wroe founded the church ‘fifteen or twenty years ago.’*] As to the ‘long beards, white hats, &c.,’ which you say they wear, I would ask you, are these men at liberty to act for themselves in these matters? You say the ‘women are attired in linen exclusively, and wear green

stockings.' Gentlemen, if you had such familiar intercourse *with linen-attired ladies*, so as to know the *particular color of their stockings*, I can in truth assure you that there is no such law or custom among the women in the House of Israel. But be these things as they may. You say, 'It is not for you to *traduce* any system of conscientious belief in this free land.' What then has given rise to this sophistication in your article headed 'Margaret L. Bishop – John Wroe!' What is of man will fail, and what is of God ye cannot destroy. You date the origin of the system of my belief to fifteen or twenty years ago. I date its origin nearly 6,000 years ago, but hid in the measures of time 'till the whole is leavened.' Further, if the JOHN WROE you refer to has erected 'marble lodges as gates to New Jerusalem, leaving them 'unfinished' to this day; or if your JOHN WROE tolerates polygamy or doctrines contrary to the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, then he is not the *same man at all* whose name is attached to the books you found on the table of the sanctuary, No. 108 First-street. We have been acquainted with JOHN WROE, whose name is attached to the books, for over twenty years, and have always found him a faithful minister in the works of God. He has traveled over a great part of Europe, has been three times to America, and three times to South Australia within the last fifteen years. He is a man in his seventy-third year; stands now in the same capacity in the church as he did thirty-three years since; so when you place me with *John Wroe*, let it be *this John Wroe*, not *that* "John Wroe" with whom you are concerned. We shall be happy to have your company next evening. With respect, MARGARET L. BISHOP."