Rabbi Raphael Karigal (1732-1777)

Today is the 29 of Iyar, 5771/ 44 days of Omer, 5771
One of the first rabbinic luminaries to arrive to America in colonial times was Rabbi Raphael Chaim Yitzchak Karigal. Rabbi Karigal was born in 1732 in the ancient Sephardi kehillah of Hebron in Eretz Israel.
In 1772 Rabbi Karigal arrived to Newport, Rhode Island, a major Jewish community in the colonial era. The Newport kehillah – "Kahal Kadosh Yeshuat Yisrael" – had been founded in 1658, the second Jewish community to be established in North America. (New York had been the first, in 1654.) Like all colonial kehillot, it followed Sephardic practices in both minhag and organizational structure. The beautiful Touro Synagogue, which was constructed by the kehillah in the 1800's, is still standing. It is a National Historical Site and the oldest synagogue extant in the United States. The outstanding beauty of its architectural lines is still impressive today.
In Newport, Rabbi Karigal was received with great honor, as the most outstanding talmid hakham to have visited the town until then. While in Newport, Rabbi Karigal came into contact with one of the leading non-Jewish intellectuals of colonial life, Rev. Ezra Stiles. Stiles was president of Yale College (click HERE to read "How Hebrew came to Yale") and a famous Protestant minister. He was very impressed with the demeanor and bearing of Rabbi Karigal and left detailed descriptions of Rabbi Karigal and his actions in his letters and diary. The character and learning of a true talmid chacham were so unusual in eighteenth century America that Stiles became one of Rabbi Karigal's greatest admirers. He asked him many questions concerning the Jewish religion and the Hebrew language and carefully recorded the answers he received.
Click HERE to read the complete article about the fascinating life of rabbi Karigal and part of the memoirs of Ezra Stiles on rabbi Karigal