Towering above Independence Hall, where the U.S. Declaration of Independence was written, the National Museum of American Jewish History opened in 2010. It tells the story of how, over more than 350 years, Jews coming to America faced challenges and choices about how to live as Jews and as Americans. This illustrated lecture, by the Museum’s Consulting Historian for Media, surveys the core exhibition with its focus on the dreams dreamed by the Jewish women and men who came to America and how America’s notions of freedom shaped the choices they made. The lecture also asks how the historian, working in the medium of the museum, navigates the challenge of distilling a rich and complicated scholarship into an accessible narrative conveyed through material culture and technology.

***

Professor Pamela S. Nadell holds the Patrick Clendenen Chair in Women’s and Gender History at American University where she chairs the Department of History and directs the Jewish Studies Program. An expert in American Jewish history, her books include Women Who Would Be Rabbis: A History of Women’s Ordination, 1889-1985 and Making Women’s Histories: Beyond National Perspectives. Named American University’s 2007 Scholar/Teacher of the Year and the recipient of the American Jewish Historical Society’s Lee Max Friedman Award for distinguished service to the profession, she is currently Vice-President for Program for the Association for Jewish Studies.