
Portuguese Sephardim in the Americas

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Recife

The year was 1654. For twenty-four years the Dutch had held the bulge of Brazil that extends into the Atlantic Ocean, the province of Pernambuco, with Recife as its capital. Jews from Holland arrived in ever-growing numbers to join New Christians from Portuguese Brazil who had converted to their ancestral faith. Eventually two congregations were formed, Zur Israel in the island city of Recife, and Magen Abraham on the mainland at Mauricia. By 1641 they had imported from Amsterdam Rabbi Isaac Aboab da Fonseca and the haham (scholar) Moses Rafael de Aguilar, and public Jewish worship was held for the first time in the New World. Synagogues were built as the community grew and flourished.

In 1645, however, the Portuguese began a guerilla campaign that ultimately spelled the end of Dutch dominion. Four years later, the colony was besieged. For five years the Dutch held out despite starvation and lack of ships and supplies from the homeland. By 1654, when the Dutch surrendered to the Portuguese, the Jewish population, which had peaked at about 1,450 in 1645, had diminished to about 600.

The Portuguese commander, Barreto, agreed to give Dutch citizens the right to emigrate within three months. Despite a paucity of available ships, every professing Jew left. The majority seem to have gone to Amsterdam, whence some of them returned to the New World. Others had already been trading in the Guianas and the Caribbean and found their way to new homes in these areas.¹

Caribbean Jewry

The Spanish settlements in Mexico and Peru had attracted many Portuguese New Christians, no small number of whom were accused by the Inquisition of judaizing. Of the islands discovered by Columbus, only the larger ones were under Spanish rule in 1654: Cuba, Hispaniola (later subdivided as Santo Domingo and Haiti), Puerto Rico, Jamaica, Trinidad, and Tobago. The Spanish rulers sought gold or other mineral wealth and abandoned the smaller islands to be fought over by Holland, England, France, and Denmark, which made them bases from which to prey on Spanish shipping carrying the wealth of mainland America.

Sephardic communities soon came to be established in many parts of the Caribbean. Since refugees leave few records, it is difficult to document the arrival of the first Jews in any locality. The existence of laws forbidding Jews to live in a place cannot be taken as evidence that there were none there, for Jewish survival has always required ignoring or bending man-made laws, and living as a Jew meant taking risks. Thus, although Jews were prohibited from settling in England before 1655 and in most of France after 1390, secret Jewish communities existed in both countries; in the same manner, refugees from Dutch Brazil undoubtedly found homes in the island provinces before their presence was officially countenanced. While individual Jews can be found on almost every island of the Caribbean prior to the abandonment of slavery in the mid-nineteenth century, here we shall describe only those areas where congregations were organized and synagogues built.²

Surinam

The legend of El Dorado, a city of gold purported to be in the hinterland of the Guianas, led to futile explorations by Sir Walter Raleigh and other sixteenth-century adventurers. The discovery of well-watered, tropical coastland brought settlers and inevitable fighting among the English, French, and Dutch that eventuated in the formation of three Guianas, one belonging to each nation.

Surinam, originally British, but Dutch after 1667, may have had Sephardic settlers by 1639. The Amsterdam Jewish archives contains a *ketubah* (marriage certificate) from Surinam dated 1643. A shipload of secret Jews from England came with Lord Willoughby in 1652. Eager for colonists, he had assured them freedom of worship and endenization (the right to settle and trade). By 1665 they had built a synagogue in Paramaribo, the capital.

Farther north in Cayenne, in 1662, a colony of Dutch Jews was organized by Abraham Cohen, as financier, and David Cohen Nassy, as manager. Nassy was typical of the Portuguese New Christian seeking to flee the Inquisition. Born in Portugal about 1612 with the name Christovão de Tavora, he escaped to Holland and adopted the name Joseph Nuñez da Fonseca. To conceal his trail, or perhaps to protect relatives still in Portugal, he became David Cohen Nassy.

Nassy was the founder of a prolific and important family in the Dutch colony. His sons, Samuel and Joseph Cohen Nassy, became military leaders in the Guianas and played a major role in the founding of Surinam's second congregation in 1605, in the hinterland upriver from Paramaribo at what came to be known as the Joden Savanne. Again, a synagogue was built, the ruins of which, along with a cemetery, can still be seen in the jungle.

The census taken in 1694 shows the Dutch colony of Paramaribo as having ninety-two Sephardic families and a dozen Ashkenazic ones. The following century brought such growth that the Ashkenazim opened Congregation Neve Shalom in 1734. The community's prosperity brought a rise in anti-Semitism despite the fact that Jewish militia units had helped to defend the colony against slave uprisings. The abolition of the slave trade in 1819 and the formal emancipation of slaves in 1863 made plantations unprofitable and so decimated Jewish trade that the Paramaribo congregations all but disappeared.³

Barbados

Barbados is one island for which there is documentary evidence of the arrival of refugees from Brazil. In the minutes of the Barbados Council for November 8, 1654 can be found: "Ordered that the consideration

of the Jews and foreigners brought from Barzele to the Island be presented at the next sitting of the Governor and Assembly."

In January 1655, months before England sanctioned their presence, it was enacted that the Jews of Barbados, provided that they "behav[ed] themselves civilly and conformably to the Government of this Island . . . shall enjoy the privileges of Laws and Statutes of the Commonwealth of England and of this Island, relating to foreigners and strangers."

In April of 1655 Oliver Cromwell issued a pass to Dr. Abraham de Mercado and his son David to go to Barbados "to exercise his profession." Both had been residents of Recife, returned to Amsterdam, then lived for a time on the island. The doctor returned to Amsterdam a second time and died there in March 1669. David died in Barbados in 1685 and was buried in its Jewish cemetery.

By the end of the seventeenth century the Jewish population of Barbados had grown to 250, sizable for an island that measured only 14 by 21 miles. Its Jewish community was organized by another refugee from Recife who later returned to Amsterdam, known as Luis Dias, alias Joseph Jesurun Mendes.

Born in Portugal in 1616 as Ludovico Luis Gutteres, Mendes settled in Bridgetown with his wife and six children. By the early 1660s, he had prevailed on his fellow Jews to found Congregation Nidhe Israel ("The Scattered of Israel"), purchase ground, and erect a synagogue. Following the traditional pattern of English churchyards, their cemetery, subsequently enlarged, surrounds the synagogue on two sides.

The large number of Jewish merchants in Bridgetown, the capital of Barbados, is indicated by the fact that Swan Street, its main business thoroughfare, was dubbed "Jew Street." As the Jewish community grew, so did its property. A house was erected for a rabbi. Other buildings surrounding a smaller graveyard for suicides and intermarrieds were purchased for various functions. And in due course a second congregation, Semach David ("Sprout of David"), was founded in Speightstown.

The Speightstown synagogue was destroyed in 1739 during an anti-Semitic riot occasioned by a non-Jewish imposter's claim that he had been falsely accused of theft during a Jewish wedding. The

Bridgetown synagogue was almost totally destroyed in an 1831 hurricane, but was handsomely rebuilt and rededicated two years later.

Unfortunately, economic depression resulting from the earthquake and the emancipation of slaves led to the emigration of many of the island's Jews. In 1869, the remaining members of the community, by deed of trust, vested the ownership of the Bridgetown congregation's property in the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue of London.

By the beginning of the twentieth century the synagogue was still open for worship solely because of the dedication of a lay member, Edward S. Daniels. Upon his death, only the two elderly Baeza brothers remained. One of them secured power-of-attorney from the London congregation and sold the synagogue to a local lawyer, who offered to make it into a law library for public use. The government, however, did not accept this proposal.

On his death in 1934, another attorney acquired both the synagogue and the cemetery. He converted the former to rental office space and began erecting garages over the graves. Many of the synagogue's fittings were sold. The eight handsome wrought-iron chandeliers were purchased by Henry S. Du Pont for his museum at Winterthur, Delaware (where two of them may be seen on an upper porch).

At this point a history-minded solicitor, Eustace M. Shilstone, who had visited the synagogue as a boy with members of the Daniels family, endeavored to buy the properties, but the owner rebuffed him. On the latter's death two years later, Shilstone prevailed on the island government to put the cemetery in perpetual trust for the use of the new community of Jews then arriving from Europe. He also created a Barbados Museum in a former prison and included several items from the synagogue in its collection, among them a pew, a clock, a brass Hanukah menorah, and an alms box. He then proceeded to teach himself Hebrew, Spanish, and Portuguese, had the cemetery cleared of tropical growth, and copied the 472 surviving epitaphs.

Fortunately these were published, for after Shilstone's death, the self-appointed leader of the new Jewish community conceived the unfeasible notion of digging up the tombstones and plastering them into the walls, with the resultant ruin of hundreds of the stones. In 1984, the government threatened to tear down the dilapidated syna-

gogue to replace it with a building for the supreme court. A native Jew, Paul Altman, persuaded the government that the synagogue restored would prove a tourist attraction. With a group of Jewish winter visitors he began an effort to restore the synagogue, enlisting the support of the American Jewish Congress. Although much still needs to be done to achieve the building's original beauty, a service was held in it on December 18, 1987.⁴

Martinique

A few of Recife's refugees found their way to Martinique, where they were joined by Portuguese Jews from southwestern France. Encouraged by Colbert, King Louis XIV's minister, the community grew and by 1676 was able to build a synagogue in the capital town of St. Pierre. That same year Benjamin da Costa Andrade went to Amsterdam to acquire both a bride and a Torah scroll, which he brought back to the island. A 1680 census lists eighty Jews; a subsequent one, three years later, lists ninety-six. But in 1685, the Jesuits, who controlled trade in the French colonies, took advantage of Colbert's loss of power to persuade the king to introduce the Code Noire (Black Code), banishing all Jews from the French colonies. The majority of them left for Curaçao. Any surviving traces of this short-lived community disappeared when St. Pierre was wiped out in the eruption of Mount Pelée in 1902.⁵

Curaçao

From a Jewish standpoint, Curaçao is the most important island in the Caribbean. It has maintained a functioning Jewish community for nearly three and a half centuries. From its historic Mikve Israel synagogue went founders of other Jewish communities. Rabbis, cantors, and financial aid were supplied to struggling North American congregations. By 1745, Curaçao's Jewry numbered 1,500, more than the entire Jewish population of contemporary North America.

A Dutch fleet captured Curaçao from the Spanish in 1634. On board as interpreter was a Portuguese New Christian, Samuel Cohen,

who had lived in Brazil in the 1620s and was fluent in Dutch, Spanish, and Portuguese, as well as in Indian dialects. Cohen searched the island unsuccessfully for gold and returned to Amsterdam, leaving behind at least one other known New Christian, Juan or Julio de Araujo, who moved on to Mexico.

In 1651 the Dutch West India Company contracted with João de Yllan, a former New Christian who had been active in the Brazil trade, to bring fifty Jewish settlers to the island, but he succeeded in enticing only twelve. Discouraged by the island's barren soil, they all left. Eight years later, Isaac da Costa in Amsterdam enlisted seventy fellow-refugees from Brazil to establish Curaçao's first permanent Jewish settlement. Some of their descendants are still there as members of the synagogue.

Although de Yllan's group undoubtedly met for worship, Mikve Israel can be documented only from 1659. It was probably then that land was purchased for a cemetery, although no records survive prior to 1668. Enlarged many times, the cemetery came to be known for its sepulchral art. As individual Jews prospered they demonstrated their status by ordering tombstones carved in Holland with scenes illustrative of the biblical figures who were their namesakes. Unfortunately, a twentieth-century oil refinery's fumes have obliterated much of this art, but it survives in photographs and in a few examples preserved in the synagogue's recently established museum.

Imitating Amsterdam's congregation, the *adjunta* (trustees) of Mikve Israel enacted *hascamot* (regulations) to govern the lives of Curaçao's Jews for the next two centuries. Infractions were often punished by excommunication. By 1674 the congregation was able to bring over its first rabbi, Haham Josiau Pardo, a scion of Amsterdam rabbis. Nine years later he departed for the growing congregation in Port Royal, Jamaica, where he perished in the earthquake of 1692.

The slave trade helped Curaçao to prosper, and her Jewish community grew rapidly, enlarged with every ship by immigrants both from the French colonies and from Holland. Until its first synagogue building was erected in 1703, the congregation worshipped in rented quarters. Within a generation the community had outgrown the edifice, so funds were raised for the present handsome building, dedicated in 1732, the oldest surviving synagogue in the Western Hemis-

phere. Two chandeliers remain from the earlier structure; and as a memorial to the clandestine worship of their Portuguese forebears, the congregants covered the floor with sand to muffle footsteps. Until 1880 some of the sand came from Palestine to symbolize the congregation's close ties with Eretz Israel.

The factionalism so endemic in Jewish life was exacerbated in an insular community like Curaçao, at times necessitating the intervention of the local government or of the public authorities in Holland. A few months after the synagogue's dedication in 1732, Jews living across the inlet that bisects the capital city of Willemstadt organized Congregation Neve Shalom ("Dwelling of Peace"), which became the focal point of rebellion against Mikve Israel. By 1746 Neve Shalom had its own synagogue, but it was abandoned in 1817 when the majority of the members moved to other parts of the city.

In 1863 another split occurred, more between members of the same families than ideological. This arose when an El Porvenir Society, ostensibly created to further reforms in worship, published an editorial vilifying individual members of Mikve Israel, including the incumbent rabbi, Aron Mendes Chumaceiro (1810–1882). This precipitated the birth of Dutch Reform Congregation Emanu-el, named for its New York counterpart. By 1867 its members had erected a handsome temple not far from Mikve Israel.

Nearly a century later, this congregation engaged Rabbi Simeon Maslin, the first graduate of the Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institute of Religion to serve on the island. He found the remaining 750 Jews split into three congregations, an Ashkenazic Orthodox one, Shaare Tsedek, having been formed by newcomers from Eastern Europe. Rabbi Maslin bridged the groups by organizing a chapter of B'nai B'rith for cultural activities. He subsequently persuaded the leaders of Mikve Israel and Emanu-el to reunite under the banner of Reconstructionism. Emanu-el's building has become a community center.

The merger was made easier by Mikve Israel's unhappiness with the stringent orthodoxy of its incumbent rabbi, Isaac S. Emmanuel, who came to the synagogue from Salonika, Greece, in 1936 and resigned three years later. World War II kept him in Curaçao, where he worked as a government librarian. After the war, supported by a generous grant from Joshua ("Jossy") M. L. Maduro, a member of one

of the island's oldest families, Emmanuel recorded the entire cemetery and researched his two-volume history of the Jewish community.⁶

Jamaica

Jamaica remained a Spanish possession from its discovery by Columbus until the British captured it in 1655. Thereafter it became the largest Caribbean island open to Jewish settlement until the Spanish-American War in 1898 liberated Cuba and Puerto Rico. Individuals of Marrano origin settled in Jamaica throughout the Spanish period. When the English conquered the island, they noted that about half the white population were "Portugals." One of them, Captain Campoe Sabbatha, guided the invading British fleet into Kingston Bay to capture the capital, St. Jago de la Vega, which they renamed Spanish Town. The Spanish surrender was negotiated by Acosta, a New Christian who succeeded in having all the Spanish residents banished except the "Portugals."

Port Royal, at the mouth of Kingston Bay, was the first spot in Jamaica to attract Jewish settlers, who were granted rights by Cromwell, later confirmed by King Charles II of England. Jews immigrated from all parts of the Caribbean as well as from England. By the late 1660s a cemetery had been secured across the bay at Hunt's Bay, where the oldest surviving grave dates to 1672. An attempt to restore the cemetery in 1938 has long since given way to squatters and tropical growth.

Kahal Kadosh Neve Tsedek ("The Holy Congregation, the Abode of Righteousness") was the name taken by Port Royal's Jews for their congregation and for the synagogue they erected in 1676. The name was probably chosen to counteract Port Royal's evil reputation as a haven for pirates and other criminals. Preying on the Spanish galleons carrying the riches of Mexico and Peru to Europe proved a very lucrative trade for some of the town's inhabitants, but Port Royal's prosperity was seriously diminished by a destructive earthquake in 1692. The synagogue was rebuilt, but the town was destroyed again by a fire in 1815.

Meanwhile, many of Port Royal's Jews left after the earthquake and settled in Spanish Town. The Sephardim soon founded a new congregation there, *Neveh Shalom* ("Abode of Peace"), and were able to erect a synagogue by 1704. The Ashkenazim separated themselves into Congregation *Mikveh Israel* and built their own synagogue two years later.

With Port Royal in ruins because of the earthquake, Kingston became Jamaica's economic center. As a result, Spanish Town's Jewish population began to decline, and by 1844 the two congregations had to merge. In the aftermath of another earthquake in 1907, the surviving Sephardic synagogue was permanently closed and its furnishings moved to Kingston, by then the island's capital. Vestiges of this once-thriving community may still be seen in the synagogue building and in the remnants of four Jewish cemeteries in Spanish Town.

Kingston's Sephardic community created Congregation *Shaar Hashamayim* ("Gate of Heaven"), but it was 1744 before they could build a synagogue and eventually a community house, both destroyed by a fire in 1882. Meanwhile the "English and German Jews," as the Ashkenazim styled themselves, formed Congregation *Shaangare Yosher* ("Gates of Righteousness") in 1797, and built a synagogue. Their first hazzan (cantor) was Myer Lyon ("Leoni"), best known for his adaptation of the Slavic folk-melody to the Hebrew hymn *Yigdal*.

Growing faster than the Sephardim, the Ashkenazim built a larger synagogue in 1837, only to have it destroyed in the 1882 fire. This led to the creation of an Amalgamated Synagogue, but diehards of both groups attempted to keep separate congregations functioning. The 1907 earthquake compelled them to strive for a merger, not totally achieved until 1921, ten years after the present synagogue was built. The hurricane of 1989 caused the small surviving community to attempt another reconstruction of the synagogue. Two Sephardic cemeteries, the older opened in 1716, and an Ashkenazic one begun in 1798, are visible in Kingston.

At the beginning of the eighteenth century, eighty Jewish families were recorded in Jamaica. The Assembly found them so convenient a source of taxation that they were repeatedly forced to appeal to the crown for relief, which finally came in a 1737 edict of King George II.

Thereafter, imitating the local Christian leadership, the Jewish community made certain to present a handsome gift to the island's governor annually. This earned Jews honorific posts in the militia. By 1831, Jews could hold office, a right not granted in England until 1858. So many Jews won elective posts that in 1849 the Jamaican Assembly adjourned for Yom Kippur.

The growth of the sugar industry enlarged the Jewish immigration and a number of Jews became plantation owners. More than a dozen scattered Jewish cemeteries attest to the location of Jews in many towns. Montego Bay's Congregation Beth Yangakob ("House of Jacob") erected a synagogue in 1844, but by the end of the century there were too few Jews to keep it open. A 1912 cyclone destroyed the building. The abolition of slavery in the British dominions lowered the economy and scattered the Jews. Intermarriage also had an effect on the dwindling population.

In 1942, the discovery of bauxite, the source of aluminum, on the plantation of Sir Alfred d'Costa, created a new mining industry. Two world wars brought new Jewish immigrants to the island, many of them from the Ladino-speaking lands of the eastern Mediterranean, and the leadership of today's Sephardic community is largely of Ladino origin.⁷

Nevis

The existence of a seventeenth-century synagogue on the island of Nevis was comparatively unknown until this author learned of it serendipitously. In 1957, he served as a chaplain on a cruise ship sponsored by the Virginia State Chamber of Commerce, which was endeavoring to promote the 350th anniversary of the settlement at Jamestown. The cruise's itinerary included the places visited by Captain John Smith's expedition en route from England via the Caribbean to Virginia in 1607. Among these was Nevis.

The author already knew the tale, substantiated in his son's biography of him, that Alexander Hamilton, born out of wedlock on Nevis, had been denied admission to the Anglican school there and thus had been educated at the island's synagogue. When our cruise ship arrived in the harbor of Charlestown, we asked to be shown the loca-

tion of the synagogue. A black native designated a vine-covered ruin as "the Jews' school." This was connected by a path known as "Jews' Walk" to an overgrown field in which goats were feeding, labeled by our guide as "Jews' Burying Ground." There the author and his wife discovered sixteen flat tombstones in Portuguese, Hebrew, and Elizabethan English, which they copied and subsequently published.

The article caught the attention of a Philadelphia attorney, Robert D. Abrahams, and his late wife, Florence. They visited the island and purchased a ruined plantation that they converted to a vacation home in which they installed their collection of Admiral Nelson memorabilia. Over the years they collected donations from visitors to their Nelson museum for the purpose of having a wall and gates erected for the cemetery. On February 25, 1971, a ceremony of rededication was held.

Jews were in Nevis as early as 1671, when the British separated the administration of their Caribbean islands into Leeward and Windward. The presence of mineral springs made Nevis a popular health resort and the population grew. A muster roll from 1678 lists five Jewish heads of families. A decade later the community had enlarged sufficiently to erect the synagogue. The outbreak of a tropical disease, followed in 1707 by French raids, may have taken a toll of Jews, but in 1723 the Anglican minister reported to England that one-fourth of the island's white population was Jewish, with the Jews catering well to the plantation owners but resented by the Christian merchants. The tombstones, dating from 1679 to 1730, show the brief span of the active community.⁸

St. Eustatia and St. Martin

Starting in 1660, Jews from Curaçao began to settle on the Dutch island of St. Eustatia. Although driven out by the French in 1709, they soon returned because of the island's rich soil and because the harbor of Oranjestad offered convenient trading with neighboring British, French, Danish, and Spanish islands. A census of 1722 showed twenty-one Jews. These acquired the cemetery, still visible.

By 1737 the community had founded Congregation Honen Dalim ("Kindness to the Poor") and was ready to build its synagogue, which was dedicated two years later. When French raids resumed,

the Jews fled to Curaçao, taking along the synagogue appurtenances. By 1744 they were back. A hurricane in 1772 leveled the synagogue, but it was rebuilt in three months with financial help from individuals in New York and Curaçao.

The Jewish population of St. Eustatia reached its zenith during the American Revolution, when the island became a major supply base for the patriots. This brought an attack in February 1781 by British Admiral Rodney, who confiscated all Jewish property and exiled all able-bodied Jewish males without their families. Because some of his victims were Jews loyal to Britain and some of the confiscated merchandise belonged to British shippers, he was denounced in Parliament by Edmund Burke, who defended the Jews.

The families of many of the exiles joined their menfolk on St. Croix and St. Thomas, and St. Eustatia never regained its Jewish population. The synagogue and cemetery fell into disrepair as the Jews disappeared. The last epitaph dates from 1843. Attempts to have the synagogue restored have so far been unsuccessful.

The small island of St. Martin/St. Maarten was divided between the Dutch and the French by the simple expedient of having two sailors, one of each nationality, walk around the island in opposite directions; where they started and met again became the boundary line. The Dutch settlement attracted occasional Jewish traders from Curaçao, but it was Rodney's raid on nearby St. Eustatia that enlarged the population to the point of building a synagogue. This community was short-lived, however, and a Dutch traveler in 1828 noted that the synagogue, probably devastated by a hurricane, was a rubble-heap.⁹

St. Croix and St. Thomas

St. Thomas was colonized by Denmark in 1672. Because it is the closest to Europe of all the Caribbean islands, it was a strategic lair for privateers preying on Europe-bound vessels. In 1684, Gabriel Milan, a Jewish soldier-of-fortune, was appointed governor of St. Thomas by the Danish government, but after two years of misrule and apparently criminal behavior, he was brought back to Copenhagen, tried, and hanged.

In 1733, the French sold St. Croix to Denmark. When the official documents reached St. Thomas a year later, the governor sent Emmanuel Vass, a Jewish resident, to Martinique to complete the negotiations with the French colonial governor. There is evidence of a synagogue at Christianstad on St. Croix by 1760, but the Jewish community had disappeared before the end of the nineteenth century. An overgrown cemetery had eleven decipherable epitaphs, dating between 1779 and 1867.

The majority of the refugees from Rodney's raid on St. Eustatia settled in St. Thomas and soon thereafter purchased a cemetery no longer extant. Its epitaphs, predominantly Sephardic, were recorded between 1792 and 1802. By 1796 Congregation B'racha V'shalom ("Blessing and Peace") had been organized and had erected a synagogue. The community was enlarged when a number of Sephardim moved there during the British occupation of Curaçao between 1807 and 1816. The community also acquired members from Jamaica and from the United States.

A new cemetery was purchased in 1837, by which time there were 400 Jews on the island, almost half its white population. The original synagogue and several of its successors were destroyed by fire, until the present brick and stone structure was erected in 1833. In the hubris of dedicating their new synagogue, the congregation renamed itself B'racha V'shalom Ugemiluth Chassadim ("Blessing and Peace and Loving Deeds").

Steam navigation ended the era of sailing ships, destroying the island's economy and diminishing its Jewish population, which included the family of native-born artist Camille (born Jacob) Pissaro. An 1867 hurricane heightened the economic disaster, while an outbreak of cholera, brought on a ship from India in 1895, sent many of the women and children to join relatives in Panama, and few returned.

In 1917, at a ceremonial marking the United States purchase of the Virgin Islands from Denmark, the synagogue provided the island's only clergyman for the occasion. Rev. Moses David Sasso, as a pious youth, had sat at the feet of his predecessor, Rev. David Cardoze. When the latter, at age ninety, had a stroke on the pulpit and was being carried out of the synagogue, he pointed to Sasso and said,

"You must carry on." Sasso kept the synagogue functioning from 1914 to 1965 despite a paucity of Jewish families.

Another Sephardi, Morris Fidanque de Castro, was appointed governor of the Virgin Islands by President Truman, after having served as acting governor in the 1930s. Among his successors was Ralph Paiewonsky, son of Romanian immigrants. Following World War II, tourism rebuilt the island's economy, and many North Americans, including author Herman Wouk, enlarged the congregation's membership. The synagogue joined the Reform movement, and since Rabbi Sasso's retirement it has been served by a series of graduates of the Hebrew Union College.¹⁰

Haiti

In 1697 Spain ceded the western third of the island Columbus had named Hispaniola to the French. They restored its Indian name, Haiti. Under Spanish rule Marranos were to be found on the northern coast at Isabella. Despite France's Black Code, prohibiting Jewish settlement, there are indications of Jews doing business with almost every port on the island during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The Gardis and Mendes families of Bordeaux maintained trade depots after the 1750s. A tax list, dated January 16, 1765, shows twenty-nine Jewish heads of families in Cap-Haïtien plus eight others as either plantation owners or in widely scattered areas. Cap-Haïtien undoubtedly had a congregation and a cemetery, but the black uprising of 1790 slaughtered or scattered Haiti's white population. The majority of the surviving Jews migrated to other islands or to the North American mainland.¹¹

British North America

All the communities described so far were totally dominated by Sephardim through much of their history, although almost all of them had an admixture of Ashkenazic settlers. North America was different in this respect: the colonial communities were tonally Sephardic, but the rapid accretion of Ashkenazim soon outnumbered the "Span-

ish-Portuguese," and, as we shall demonstrate, often challenged Sephardi domination. Until well into the nineteenth century, however, the Sephardic minhag (rite) was the American way of Jewish worship in the congregations we shall describe.

New Amsterdam/New York

As is well known, the first Jewish settlement in what became the United States was in Dutch New Amsterdam. The generally accepted history is that in late August or early September of 1654, a French ship, called variously the *St. Catherine* or *St. Charles*, captained by Jacques de la Motthe, arrived in the harbor of New Amsterdam with a number of Dutch refugees, including twenty-three Jewish men, women, and children, presumably from Recife. The surviving documentary references have given rise to a number of theories regarding the route and circumstances that brought these pioneers to Peter Stuyvesant's small village.

At least two Jews met the boat: Solomon Pieters or Petersen, who appears briefly in the Dutch records as advocate for the Jews in their first dealings with Stuyvesant; and Jacob Barsimson, an Ashkenazi trader who had just arrived in the colony. Captain de la Motthe sued his Jewish passengers for the promised fare, and when they were unable to meet his demands, two heads of family were imprisoned as hostages until funds to pay the debt could be obtained from relatives in Amsterdam.

Stuyvesant, who objected to any settlers who were not members of the Dutch Reformed Church, attempted to evict the Jews, but Jewish stockholders in Amsterdam prevailed on the Dutch West India Company to order the narrow-minded governor to let them remain. Possibly at the instigation of the Amsterdam Jewish community, six heads of Sephardic families, led by Abraham de Lucena, went to New Amsterdam as settlers in March 1655 to investigate its business potential. They brought a Torah scroll with them, an indication that a private synagogue was created.

Stuyvesant, determined to drive the Jewish settlers out of New Amsterdam, made efforts to restrict their trade, prohibited their owning property, and taxed them to pay for the town watch. When Bar-

simson and Asser Levy, the community butcher, both Ashkenazim, protested that they had "burgher" (i.e., citizenship) rights from Amsterdam and should be allowed to take their turn as guards on the town wall, Amsterdam ruled in their favor. In 1655, the Jews applied for a plot of land for a cemetery, but the governor denied the request, pointing out that no one had yet died. The following year the death of one of the Jews compelled him to designate "a little hook of land" beyond the town wall. This site has long since disappeared.

Stuyvesant's recalcitrance and the extreme cold of New Amsterdam's winters led the Sephardic Jews to depart for Amsterdam, London, or the Caribbean, where relatives were better established. By 1663, the Torah scroll had been returned to Amsterdam. In 1664 a large British fleet forced Stuyvesant to surrender without firing a shot, and all residents who remained in what was now New York were required to sign an oath of allegiance to the English crown.

The one Jewish name on the list was Asser Levy's. He seems to have maintained the only Jewish presence of record in British New York until he was joined in 1680 by relatives from Amsterdam. Levy's death on February 1, 1681/82 and burial in the old cemetery unquestionably led Sephardi Joseph Bueno de Mesquita to purchase a separate burying ground for his own family and for a growing group of Sephardim in the community.

The earliest mention of Jewish worship dates to 1682, but public worship was proscribed until a decade later. A map from 1695 shows a rented synagogue location on Beaver Street; five years later the synagogue had moved to a house owned by John Harpendinck, shoemaker, on Mill Street. By 1728, probably inspired by the erection of a number of churches, the Jewish community purchased a plot adjacent to the Harpendinck house and built America's first synagogue.

The papers of Nathan Simson, a former president of the congregation who moved back to England in 1722, show that in his day the Ashkenazim already outnumbered the Sephardim. The new synagogue, completed in 1730, set the tone for colonial American Jewry by continuing to use the Sephardic form of worship already in place since the arrival of its first lay reader, Saul Brown (né Pardo). Why? Because the community was too small to underwrite the building

fund and relied heavily on donations from the wealthier Sephardic communities.

The incumbent hazzan, Moses Lopez da Fonseca, was the son of Curaçao's rabbi. That community sent the most generous contribution to New York with the stipulation that even though New York was full of "Tedeschi" (Portuguese for "Germans"), the gift was predicated on New York's using the Sephardic ritual. Although Nathan Simson had referred to the congregation as Shearith Jacob ("Remnant of Jacob"), its official title became Shearith Israel.

Another factor may have favored the maintenance of Sephardic custom: In the small town that New York was, Jews lived among non-Jews, and the latter found Jews and Jewish worship of some interest. Sephardic worship, led by a hazzan, must have been considered more dignified for non-Jewish observers than the unstructured babel that was Ashkenazic worship.

The congregation, recognizing that the Ashkenazim were more versed in halakhah (Jewish law), engaged them for such synagogue functions as shochet and bodek (kosher butcher and inspector), and mohel (circumciser). However, for the conduct of worship the New York congregation sought Sephardim who could chant in the Sephardic mode. They were greatly assisted by the appearance in 1761 of an English translation of the Sephardic prayerbook for the eve of the holidays, followed five years later by a more complete prayerbook for the year, both presumably the work of Isaac Pinto, an educated layman.

Shearith Israel was often hard-pressed to find a qualified hazzan. Those it did obtain did not stay long. How the members must have welcomed in 1768 a native son reared in the congregation, Gershom Mendes Seixas! He served for forty-eight years, interrupted by the Revolutionary War. In August 1776, when it was apparent that George Washington was losing the Battle of Brooklyn Heights, Seixas gathered the synagogue's scrolls and appurtenances in a wagon and joined other patriot congregants and his relatives from Newport, Rhode Island, in Connecticut.

The British remained in control of New York until the surrender in 1783. Those members of the community who had no other place to go kept the synagogue open, joined by an occasional Tory hazzan and by

Jewish Hessian soldiers who opted to remain in New York when their contracts with the British army ended. The majority of New York's Jews were either shopkeepers or international traders.

Following the Revolution, the scattered leaders of Shearith Israel returned. By this time, the congregation's leaders were almost all Ashkenazic, but they were so accustomed to the Sephardic ritual that it has remained the minhag. Shearith Israel's strict control of Jewish religious life in New York was all-pervasive. Every Jew who arrived in the community was required to affiliate and to contribute as his means permitted. The congregation was also the sole social-service agency, dispensing charity and caring for the aged, the sick, and the transient.

Following the Napoleonic Wars in Europe, there was a revival of immigration of Ashkenazic Jews. The newcomers asked permission to hold their own separate services under the aegis of Shearith Israel, but when their request was denied, they broke away and in 1825 organized B'nai Jeshurun, New York's first Ashkenazic-rite congregation. By mid-century, Shearith Israel's preeminence in New York's Jewish communal affairs was gradually yielding to the far larger German immigrant community.¹²

Newport

Roger Williams's reaction to intolerant Puritan Massachusetts was to create a colony in Rhode Island open to all faiths. This may have attracted Jews as early as 1656 or 1658, but the first documented evidence of settlement is the deed for the purchase of a cemetery in 1678. Mordecai Campanall and Moses Pacheco of Barbados had visited Newport a year earlier and been favorably impressed. After returning home to collect their families and some fellow-Jews eager to escape the sugar taxes, they established New England's first Jewish community.

Lacking British endenization (the right to trade), the Jewish settlers, as aliens, were subject to arrest and trial for violating the Navigation Act. Their goods were impounded and they were brought to trial. The jury, apparently grateful for the economic benefits they had brought to the town, acquitted them. However, frightened by this experience, and for other reasons as yet undiscovered, most of them

left for more-established Jewish areas. No tombstones of this era survive in the cemetery.

Although we get glimpses of occasional Jewish traders, it was not until the 1740s that Newport's Jewish population began to grow with the town's development as an important whaling and shipping port. The French and Indian War enhanced the town's importance as a supply base for British troops moving on Canada. In 1759, the Jews, already formed into Congregation Yeshuat Israel ("Salvation of Israel"), engaged a Christian architect, Peter Harrison, to erect a handsome building, completed in 1763, and now the oldest surviving synagogue in North America. Once again, the city had to rely on gifts from other Jewish congregations, including New York's Shearith Israel. Here, too, the population included as many Ashkenazim as Sephardim, but the ritual was Sephardic, and the hazzan, Isaac Touro, was a Sephardi.

Newport's Jews prospered with the community. Aaron Lopez, import-export merchant and shipowner, sent his vessels around South America to the whaling grounds. He and other Jews were involved in the triangular slave trade. With his cousin Jacob Rivera, he joined Christian merchants in 1761 to form the United Company of Spermaceti Candles, controlling the price and manufacture of luxury whale-oil candles.

Newport's Sephardim and Ashkenazim met socially to form a card-playing club, the first Jewish social club of record. Its existence is known only from surviving bylaws that prohibited conversation on synagogue matters on penalty of bottles of good wine.

The Inquisition in Portugal, which the Lopezes and Riveras had fled, reverberated in Newport with the arrival of Aaron Lopez's half-brother Michael, age fifty-six, and his three sons, Duarte, twenty-eight, José, twenty-four, and João, seventeen. In keeping with the well-established custom of New Christian converts to Judaism, the four men were circumcised in suburban Tiverton, Rhode Island, and given the biblical names of Abraham, Moses, Samuel, and Jacob, respectively. The mohel (ritual circumciser) was Abraham I. Abrahams of New York, who had previously serviced members of the Lopez family.

Newport lacked a mohel until 1772, when Moses Seixas, a prominent resident, learned the ritual by correspondence with Abrahams. The correspondence and the silver surgical implements made for Seixas by New York's outstanding silversmith, Myer Myers, are preserved at the American Jewish Historical Society.

Thanks to the copious diaries of Rev. Ezra Stiles, later president of Yale University, we know much about the colonial Jews of Newport. In 1760 Stiles reported the town as having fifteen Jewish families, totaling fifty-eight souls. By 1774, according to a census, they numbered 121.

The outbreak of the Revolution sent Newport's leading Sephardic families elsewhere. The Lopezes and Riveras moved first to Providence, then north into Massachusetts. The Seixas clan went to Stratford, Connecticut, where, as mentioned above, they were joined by Rev. Gershom from New York.

Newport remained under British control until 1779, when the French helped the patriots to capture it. Those merchants who had remained under the British, largely Ashkenazim, were accused of Toryism and fled. Hazzan Touro, a Tory sympathizer, moved to New York and then to the Caribbean, where he died suddenly, leaving his young wife and three children to find their way to the home of her brother, Moses Michael Hays, in Boston.

One of the hazzan's sons, Abraham Touro, died unmarried in 1822, leaving a bequest to preserve the Newport synagogue and cemetery. His better-known brother, Judah, whom we shall meet in New Orleans, amassed a fortune. Dying unmarried in 1854, he left a bequest to pay the "minister" of the Newport synagogue. As a consequence, the synagogue, the cemetery, and the connecting street all acquired the Touro name.

After the Revolution a few of Newport's merchants returned, but the town's importance as a port was finished. Moses Lopez, "the last Jew," left for New York in 1822. The synagogue was closed, its key turned over to the New York congregation, the cemetery vested in the Newport City Council.

During the nineteenth century, Newport became a summer resort and the synagogue was occasionally opened for worship. By the 1880s area Jews sought permission from Shearith Israel to hold holy

day services in the sanctuary. Permission was granted with the proviso that they engage a Sephardic hazzan. After several years of this, the area Jews sued to sever the hold of Shearith Israel, but the court upheld the requirement that the Touro Synagogue follow the Sephardic rite. The disgruntled Ashkenazim held their own services elsewhere until more recent generations capitulated and returned to the Touro Synagogue and a Sephardic service.¹³

Savannah

In the 1720s, the Portuguese Inquisition renewed its rigor, causing new flights of refugees, a number of whom descended on the London Jewish community, taxing the Sephardic synagogue's resources. Meanwhile, around 1730, several members of Parliament began efforts to create a buffer colony between the Carolinas and Spanish Florida, intending it as a new home for many of the inmates languishing in London's prisons as debtors.

When the trustees of the new colony issued a call for commissioners to raise funds for the venture, they were delighted to accept an offer from the leaders of London's Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue in Bevis Marks. The latter, hoping to relieve the congregation of its numerous refugees, applied for permission to send colonists at no cost to the trustees. After some debate the trustees concluded that Jewish settlers might be a detriment and denied permission, with a request that the synagogue's leaders give up their commissions.

Ignoring this, the synagogue proceeded to charter a vessel, the *William & Sarah*, under Captain Hanton, and put forty-three passengers aboard. Outbound for Georgia the ship sustained some injury while in the Thames River. Repairs having been made, she again set sail and, after a storm-tossed voyage, arrived in the five-month-old colony at Savannah on July 11, 1733. Nine of the passengers were Ashkenazic; the other thirty-two, Sephardic. One child had died at sea.

Leading the group was Dr. Samuel Nuñez (1668-?), born in Portugal as Diogo Nuñez Ribeiro, a former physician to the Portuguese king. He had become an active judaizer in Lisbon and was proscribed by the Inquisition, but had escaped with his family to London. There he and his wife were remarried in 1726 as Jews. Seven years later,

with his mother, two sons, a daughter, and a manservant, he arrived in Savannah. His wife brought other family members on a later ship.

The first arrivals found the Savannah community suffering from an outbreak of dysentery that had already killed twenty people. The London trustees wrote to James Oglethorpe, the founder of the colony, objecting to Jewish settlers, and ordered him to "use your best endeavors that the said Jews may be allowed no kind of settlement." This crossed a letter from Oglethorpe to the trustees reporting the arrival of the forty Jews with a physician who had stopped the plague.

The trustees responded with an expression of gratitude to the physician and the hope that Oglethorpe would pay him off but not grant him land. However, Oglethorpe had already sought legal advice from Charleston, since Georgia was governed by the liberal constitution of the Carolinas. Charleston must have ruled that any adult males who came at their own expense were entitled by the trustees' plan to a town plot of five acres for house and garden, and a farm of forty-five acres outside the town. Oglethorpe assigned property to each Jewish family and even allocated a plot for a Jewish cemetery on the town common. Although the graves can no longer be found, a monument now marks the site.

Every ship brought new Jewish arrivals, and the first shipload "brought with them a Sefertora with two Cloaks and a Circumcision box which was given by Mr. Lindo a merchant in London for the use of the congregation they intended to establish." But it was July of 1735 before Congregation Mickve Israel was created.

Quarrels between Sephardim and Ashkenazim contributed to the delay. What precipitated worship was undoubtedly proselytizing by Christians. According to a letter of Oglethorpe's, one Jew had been converted. Nuñez's sons, Moses and Daniel, born Catholic, were reported by the Anglican minister as occasionally attending his service, although not as Christians. He and other Christians noted differences between the more assimilated Sephardim and the rigidly orthodox Ashkenazim, especially in matters of kashrut.

The notion that viticulture might flourish in Georgia was a fondly held dream of the London trustees, so they willingly made a loan to Abraham de Lyon, Nuñez's son-in-law, who had experience with wine-growing in Portugal and secured vines and vignerons from that

country to carry out his ambitious plans. Unfortunately for him, the Georgia soil proved uncondusive.

Even before he came to that conclusion, however, Oglethorpe had made some unsuccessful raids against the Spanish in nearby Florida. When it was rumored that the Spaniards, in reprisal, might overrun Georgia, the Sephardim, all of whom had been born in Iberia, fled the colony in fear of the Inquisition, leaving only the Ashkenazic Minis and Sheftall families.

Moses and Daniel Nuñez returned to Savannah in 1750, the former working as a trader and interpreter with the Indians, and later as port inspector. Both were leaders of Savannah's Masonic lodge. Their nephew, Isaac de Lyon, returned from Charleston in the 1760s.

Meanwhile, the colony was suffering from the trustees' idealistic insistence on no slaves or liquor, and the consequent economic failure compelled the trustees to relinquish the colony to the crown in 1752. With more Jews arriving, the community petitioned to enlarge the cemetery. The Georgia Assembly, responding to the objections of neighborhood residents, denied the request, whereupon Mordecai Sheftall deeded a piece of his suburban property to the Jewish community for the erection of a synagogue with an adjacent cemetery. However, only the cemetery came into being; the remainder of the property was sold, and the proceeds were used by later generations for the erection of the synagogue's community house.

By 1774 Congregation Mickve Israel had been reestablished in the home of Mordecai Sheftall, but its development was totally interrupted by the Revolution, which again scattered Georgia's Jews. It was July of 1786 before the communal record kept by the Sheftalls could report the permanent establishment of Mickve Israel, soon chartered by the new Georgia General Assembly. By this time only two of the leaders of the predominantly Ashkenazic community were Sephardim: David Nunes Cardozo, gabay (treasurer), and Emanuel de la Motta, hazzan (lay reader).

Economic difficulties, intensified by a major fire in 1796, forced the congregation to use a rented facility. When this was sold by its owner, the congregation was compelled to build a synagogue. It was dedicated in 1820 with a noteworthy address by attorney Jacob de la Motta, the last Sephardi of influence in the community until the arrival as

"rabbi" in 1877 of Jamaican-born Isaac Pereira Mendes (1854–1905). Mendes came in time to dedicate the congregation's present synagogue building, but Mickve Israel was already veering toward Reform and gradually moved from the Sephardic liturgy, although Sephardic terminology (e.g., *adjunta* "board"; *tebah* "altar," etc.) remained in use at least in the temple's minutes.¹⁴

Charleston

A friendly rivalry has existed between Savannah and Charleston as to which is the older Jewish community. As we have indicated, Savannah can date its origins as an organized Jewish settlement to 1733, its congregation to 1735. However, periodic losses of population led to lapses and revivals. Charleston can date its first Jew of record to 1695, when the governor used an unnamed Jew as interpreter to a delegation of Spanish-speaking Indians. Two years later, four Jewish names, one undecipherable, were appended to a petition. The others were Abraham Avila and Jacob Mendes, Sephardim; and Simon Valentine, an Ashkenazi and a nephew of New York's Asser Levy.

Avila and Valentine lived out their lives in Charleston, but few Jews joined them. It was not until 1849 that ten heads of family, led by Joseph Tobias, were available to form a minyan, the quorum needed for the congregation they named Beth Elohim ("House of God"). Of the founding families, six were Sephardic, four Ashkenazic, including Mordecai and Levi Sheftall, both of whom were temporary residents from Savannah.

The Sephardic majority, evidently determined to dominate decision-making, accorded their best-informed layman, Moses Cohen, the honorific titles *Hacham v'Abh Beth Din* ("chief rabbi and chief of the ecclesiastical court"). Isaac da Costa, a leading merchant, functioned as hazzan. It was he who purchased ground for a cemetery in 1762. Two years later he deeded it to the congregation, but named as trustees the leaders and membership of Sephardic congregations in London, "King's Town, Jamaica," and "Bridgetown, Barbados." In the deed a dash separates these from the three North American congregations, also named with their mixture of Ashkenazic and Sephardic leaders.

Charleston's Jewish growth was interrupted by the Revolution. In 1780, the British captured the city, and Da Costa joined other Jewish patriots in Philadelphia. In his absence, the congregation's leadership was assumed by Ashkenazim. When peace was declared in 1783, Da Costa returned to Charleston. He died within a few months, and his remains were interred in a separate cemetery at Hampstead, subsequently described in the local press as belonging to "the Portuguese Congregation of this City, called `Beth Elohim Unveh Shallom.'"

A split had developed, but the two groups seem to have reunited sometime between 1791, when the Ashkenazim determined to abandon their rented facility and build their first synagogue building, and 1794, when it was dedicated. The agreement seems to have included abandoning the separate Sephardic cemetery, but this led to further friction and compromise, for Sephardic burials continued there until 1847.

By 1800 Charleston had the largest Jewish population of any city in the United States, numbering about 600. The congregation maintained strict control over the actions of individual members. Rev. Moses Cohen and his successors as hazzan were all Sephardim, with the exception of Abraham Alexander, and the Sephardic ritual prevailed.

Some restlessness must have existed, though, for in 1820 the congregation issued a new and very stringent constitution. The hazzan of the moment was another Ashkenazi, Rev. Hartwig Cohen, a native of Wartha, Poland. He was dismissed in 1823, and his place was taken by Selomoh Cohen Peixotto, a native of Curaçao, where he had served as ribi (teacher) and shochet (kosher butcher). He had left during the British occupation of the Dutch island between 1807 and 1816 to become hazzan in St. Thomas, and had come to Charleston in 1818.

Peixotto's election may very well have been a precipitating factor in the formation a year later of the Reformed Society of Israelites. One of their complaints was that the Spanish and Portuguese prayers and hymns comprising Beth Elohim's liturgy were meaningless to the membership. However, when Reform leader Isaac Harby prepared a prayerbook for the insurgents, it was the Sephardic prayerbook that he translated.

The two groups eventually reunited, but when a new synagogue, built by David Lopez, a Sephardi member, replaced the old one,

which had burned down in 1838, the agitation for an organ and other reforms led to another breakoff.

The new Orthodox congregation, Shearith Israel, led at first by Jacob de la Motta, formerly of Savannah, still followed the Sephardic minhag. It prospered while Beth Elohim struggled. As late as 1854, Beth Elohim's Reform proclivities undoubtedly eliminated it from a benefaction in the will of New Orleans philanthropist Judah Touro. Following the example of Rebecca Gratz of Philadelphia, Miss Sally Lopez instituted a Sunday school in 1838 which she directed for four years, obtaining weekly lessons copied for her by Rebecca Gratz.

The depredations of the Civil War and the economic depression it engendered in the South led to a reunion of the two congregations in 1866. They agreed to use the "Portuguese minhag" with a shortened version of the Orthodox service. Rev. Joseph H. Chumaceiro, son of Curaçao's hazzan, was elected in 1868 and served for six years. By 1875, the congregation had acquired a growing influx of German immigrants who were assuming leadership. The liturgy was modified and the board agreed to accept the prayerbook of its incumbent hazzan, David Levy.¹⁵

Philadelphia

As an inland port, Philadelphia was slow to attract a Jewish community. As early as 1735, Nathan Levy, son of an Ashkenazic leader of New York's Shearith Israel, had moved to Philadelphia, to be joined shortly thereafter by his brother Isaac and their nephew David Franks. In 1738, the death of Nathan's child motivated him to purchase a suburban plot for a cemetery. Two years later, he acquired a larger plot, presumably for a family burial ground, but it eventually became the property of the emerging Jewish community and may still be seen on Spruce Street, near Ninth.

Worship may have been held by the 1740s, but no formal congregation was organized. By 1761, Philadelphia's Jews had obtained a Torah scroll on permanent loan from New York, but their worship—like the membership—was undoubtedly Ashkenazic. Ten years later they opened a synagogue in rented facilities and named their congre-

gation Mikveh Israel. With the exception of Curaçao-born Solomon Marache, all the leaders were Ashkenazim.

The Revolutionary War brought Philadelphia under British occupation from November 1777 to June 1778. With its restoration to American control and the return of the Continental Congress, Jews from all the coastal communities converged on the federal capital, swelling its Jewish population to nearly 1,000 souls. In 1780, Gershom Mendes Seixas was ordered by the leaders of his New York congregation, now domiciled in Philadelphia, to bring the synagogue appurtenances and serve as hazzan to this growing community.

The rented synagogue soon proved far too small. After considerable difficulties, funds were raised to purchase ground and erect a synagogue, designed in the Sephardic manner. It was dedicated in time for the High Holy Days of 1782, but less than a year later the war ended and the majority of the Jews returned to the communities from which they had fled. This left the Philadelphians with a heavy mortgage. To add to their problems, the New Yorkers demanded the return of their "minister," proposing their latest wartime incumbent, Rev. Jacob Raphael Cohen, as a replacement for Seixas. The trade was effected.

The Philadelphia congregation grew slowly. By 1795, new Ashkenazic immigrants had created their own minyan out of which they formed, in 1800, "the Hebrew German Society" Rodeph Shalom, America's oldest Ashkenazic congregation. It too was slow to grow despite the continuing arrival of immigrants from northern Europe. Rodeph Shalom's use of varied rented quarters continued until 1847, when it acquired a church as its first synagogue building. This led the early German immigrants, as they prospered, to join the more established Mikveh Israel.

Following the death of Jacob Raphael Cohen in 1811, his son served as "acting Reader" until the congregation secured from Charleston Rev. Emanuel Nunes Carvalho, who died within a year of his arrival. After a hiatus of eight years, Mikveh Israel elected the hazzan of Barbados, Rev. Abraham Israel Keys, who dedicated a new synagogue for the expanding community. Following his death, the congregation elected as hazzan the man who was to make Philadelphia the center of American Judaism for most of the century, Isaac Leeser (1805–1868).

Like other Ashkenazim who came to head "Sephardic" congregations, Leeser had studied and worshipped under a Sephardic hazzan. His *Occident and American Jewish Advocate*, published mostly as a monthly from 1843 to a year after his death, was literally the only Jewish medium for half of its history. Beginning as a voice of moderation, but gradually becoming an opponent to Reform, it provoked a number of other papers espousing other viewpoints, helped to create institutions, and disseminated both news of world Jewry and knowledge of Judaism.

In 1850 Mikveh Israel and Leeser parted company, and a number of members joined him in forming a second Sephardic-rite congregation, Beth El Emeth, which survived him and two Sephardi successors before dying out in the 1890s. In the interim Mikveh Israel brought to its pulpit Sabato Morais, a native of Leghorn, Italy, and a recognized scholar and communal leader. He became the instigator for the creation of New York's Jewish Theological Seminary.

Mikveh Israel has retained its Sephardic traditions, although its membership has been overwhelmingly Ashkenazic for most of its history. After years in North Philadelphia in a deteriorating neighborhood, the congregation, as its observance of the American Bicentennial in 1976, joined what has become the National Museum of American Jewish History to erect a synagogue and museum facility in the area redeveloped as Independence National Historic Park.¹⁶

Montreal

Permanent Jewish settlement in Canada began with the British defeat of the French in 1759. Within nine years enough Jews had arrived in Montreal, some from New York, to form a congregation which they named after New York's Shearith Israel. They adopted the Sephardic rite, even though the entire founding group was Ashkenazic, the majority of them either merchants or fur traders. Canada's ongoing ties with England, especially during and after the Revolution, led Shearith Israel to look to London's Sephardim for guidance in its bylaws and use of terminology. By 1777 the congregation had built a small synagogue on property belonging to a member, David David. When he died in 1825, the property reverted to his estate, and what-

ever worship was conducted took place in private homes, led by lay members or, on special occasions, by a hazzan summoned from New York.

Even without a building, in 1837 the congregation passed a resolution to continue the use of "Portuguese Service of Prayers and Ceremonies from now on." This would seem to indicate an Ashkenazic counter-effort, which came to fruition in 1846 when members broke away to establish Montreal's first Ashkenazic congregation.

Meanwhile, the "Portuguese" congregation had completed a new synagogue in 1838 and engaged Rev. David Piza from London as hazzan. He was followed by Rev. Abraham de Sola (1825–1882), who, at the request of London's Sephardic rabbi, published a new edition of Sephardic prayerbooks in 1878. On his death, he was succeeded by his son, Rev. (Aaron David) Meldola de Sola (1853–1918), Canada's first native-born minister.

Demography caused the congregation to erect a new synagogue on Stanley Street in 1890. The building fund received a gift from the congregation's New York namesake with the proviso that the Montrealers continue the Orthodox Sephardic rite. At this point, imitating both London and New York, the congregation changed its corporate name from "Portuguese" to "Spanish and Portuguese." This may well have been precipitated by preparations for the 1892 celebration of Columbus' discoveries.

The years after the hazzan's death in 1917 brought two short-term successors, but the congregation went into a serious decline in membership. The westward movement of the city's Jews urged a new synagogue, but it was not until after World War II that this proved feasible. With the completion of its present sanctuary in 1960, the congregation has taken on new growth, largely through the arrival of Sephardim from the former Ottoman Empire.¹⁷

Richmond

Although occasional Jewish traders visited Virginia as early as the 1650s, the colony's plantation economy retarded the development of cities. Richmond, at the head of navigation of the James River, attracted its first Jewish settlers in 1769. The earliest surviving record of a

congregation is its mention in correspondence of the New York and Philadelphia congregations regarding a congratulatory letter to George Washington after his April 1790 inaugural.

An 1856 list of twenty-eight founders mentions only one Sephardic name, but since almost all the founders came from the more established communities, the Sephardic minhag was unquestionably the rite of Richmond's Congregation Beth Shalome ("House of Peace"). The town's first Jewish resident, Isaiah Isaacs, contributed a lot for a communal cemetery whose site has been preserved, although most of the graves have long been covered over.

By 1818 Beth Shalome had purchased land for a synagogue, dedicated five years later. Isaac H. Judah functioned as hazzan. He was succeeded by Isaac B. Seixas, a nephew of New York's Gershom Mendes Seixas, and then by the latter's scholarly son-in-law, Israel Baer Kursheedt.

The 1830s saw an influx of immigrants from the Rhineland and Bavaria who joined Beth Shalome, but by 1839 they had broken away to form German-rite Beth Ahabah ("House of Love"). With the passing of generations the social distinctions between the descendants of Beth Shalome and the rising Beth Ahabah gradually diminished. In 1877, Rev. Isaac Pereira Mendes departed for the Savannah pulpit, and a move was begun to merge the two congregations. Beth Shalome maintained its independence with a lay reader even after its building was sold to the Orthodox Sir Moses Montefiore Congregation, but in November of 1898 the surviving twelve members accepted an invitation to join Beth Ahabah, and Beth Shalome went out of existence.¹⁸

New Orleans

The last community in North America to form a "Portuguese" congregation was New Orleans. Banned by the French Black Code until 1803, when Louisiana became part of the United States, Jews were slow to settle in New Orleans. Few of the early arrivals were family men, and intermarriage was rife. Thus it was 1828 before a congregation was formed. This seems to have been entirely instigated by the efforts of a Sephardi temporary resident from Philadelphia, Jacob da

Silva Solis, who apparently conducted services and wrote the constitution and bylaws before returning to his home city.

The name of the new congregation was Shanarai-Chasset, a spelling that reflects the Sephardic pronunciation of Shaarai Chesed ("Gates of Mercy"), but aside from Solis, only one other founder, "Souza, Sr." was Sephardic. Following Solis's departure, the president, Manis Jacobs, became officiant. He wrote to Solis, "I do not know much about the portuguaise [*sic*] minhag."

The constitution of Shanarai-Chasset specified that the "prayers offered shall be after the custom of the Portuguese Israelites." The officers were to be two parnassim ("senior wardens") and three gabaim ("junior wardens"); at least one of each had to be married. Because of the high rate of intermarriage, no child was to be excluded from the school, and no spouse excluded from burial unless he or she had formally converted to another faith.

The congregation purchased a cemetery plot in the somewhat remote suburb of Lafayette. By 1829 it had also purchased a lot for a synagogue, but none of the wealthy Jews of New Orleans would either join the congregation or contribute to the building fund. The majority of them were fully secularized and had abandoned the Orthodoxy they had left behind in Europe.

Judah Touro, son of Newport's hazzan, was probably the wealthiest Jew in New Orleans. He made a token contribution to the congregation when it organized, but was deaf to further Jewish appeals until about 1847. Until then his philanthropies were totally to Christian enterprises.

The arrival in New Orleans of Gershom Kursheedt had a remarkable effect. Kursheedt was an ardent Jew, a disciple of Isaac Leeser, grandson of Gershom Mendes Seixas, and son of the learned Israel Baer Kursheedt. He convinced Touro to become a pre-publication subscriber to Leeser's *Occident*. Kursheedt found the congregation being led by an actor, A. J. "Roley" Marks, whose antics were an embarrassment to observant Jews.

Meanwhile, the Jewish population of New Orleans was growing. The end of slavery in the Caribbean saw Jews from the islands arriving almost daily in Louisiana, among them many Sephardim. Kursheedt determined to start a new "Portuguese" congregation. In 1845,

appealing to the American-born as well as to the West Indians, he organized Congregation Nefutzoth Yehudah ("Dispersed of Judah"), a name that he hoped would flatter Judah Touro into affiliation.

Although Touro refused to join, Kursheedt prevailed on him, possibly through Touro's best friend and lawyer, Rezin Shepherd, to remodel as a synagogue the building being abandoned by Shepherd's Episcopal church. Three years later, when the remodeling was completed, Leeser came to dedicate the building and Touro was so impressed that he became a regular attender, built a schoolhouse next to the synagogue with an apartment for Kursheedt, and even became a strict Sabbath observer.

Rev. Moses N. Nathan was imported from St. Thomas as hazzan. However, the congregants had come to rely on Kursheedt and Touro, so Nefutzoth Yehudah did not prosper. Shanarai-Chasset had become the "German" congregation.

Following Touro's death in 1854, Nefutzoth Yehudah sold its synagogue and surrounding property for a large sum and erected a synagogue closer to the members' homes. Reform came to New Orleans after the Civil War, and Temple Sinai was established in 1870. The two older congregations merged in 1881 to become Touro Synagogue, a Reform congregation in the manner of Charleston and Savannah, with Sephardic traditions.¹⁹

Sephardic Customs and Influences

In addition to the terminology used in these founding synagogues, which has often persisted to the present, the use of "ng" to transliterate the Hebrew letter *ayin* is a Sephardism.

The Sephardim differed from the Ashkenazim in naming traditions. Until well into the nineteenth century, they followed a strict protocol in which the firstborn children were named for the paternal grandparents, the next children for the maternal grandparents. The Ashkenazim preserve a pious superstition of not naming a child after a living person.

As late as 1858, uncle-niece marriages were not unusual among the "Portuguese Jews," and first-cousin marriages were common, espe-

cially in the Caribbean. These practices undoubtedly reflected the tradition of the Hapsburg rulers of Spain.

The dignity of the Sephardic service, led by a hazzan, made it the early American way of worship. Sermons in the vernacular were first introduced by Isaac Leeser in 1830 over great objections from his Philadelphia congregation. The hazzan's English title of "reader" or "minister" and his role as preacher and pastor were modeled on the dominant Protestant mode. All these patterns became standard for the American synagogue by the time of the German immigration of the 1840s, whose ordained rabbis were forced to accept the established customs, but differentiated themselves from the hazzan by being dubbed "Reverend Doctor."

The majority of the Sephardic congregations kept careful vital records—births, marriages, and deaths. Even though some of these have been destroyed through fires or natural disasters, enough records have survived to make it possible for us to recapture the names of most of the Sephardim in the communities we have mentioned.

Those Sephardim who left Portugal for the freedom of Holland, England, and America were far more comfortable with Christian neighbors than their ghettoized Ashkenazic counterparts. As a consequence, while strongly observing the protocols established by their synagogues, the Sephardim were often lax in keeping kashrut and other ritual observances at home.

A mystique of elitism developed around the Sephardim that led Ashkenazim to join their congregations, and many a latter-day Jew laid claim to Sephardic origins. The East European masses that came to America after 1880 evidently shared this feeling, for a number of the small ghetto synagogues they organized labeled themselves *Anshei Sfarad* ("Men of Spain").²⁰

Sources for Lists of Sephardic Jews in Each Community

(Bibliographic details on works cited will be found in the notes.)

BRAZIL: Wiznitzer, *Jews in Colonial Brazil*, pp. 137 f.; amended in I. S. Emmanuel, "Seventeenth-Century Brazilian Jewry: A Critical Review," *American Jewish Archives* 14 (April 1962): 32 ff.

CARIBBEAN JEWRY: Many specifics are in the collections of Zvi Loker, former Israeli ambassador to Haiti, now residing at 32 Palmach Street, Jerusalem; Mordechai Arbell, former Israeli ambassador in Colombia and Central America, now at 50 Pinkas Street, Tel Aviv; and in the genealogical notebooks of the late Florence K. Abrahams, in the library of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, 1300 Locust Street, Philadelphia, PA 19107, that include data from V. L. Oliver's periodical, *Caribbeana* (London, 1910–1919).

SURINAM: Rev. P. A. Hilfman, "Notes on the History of the Jews in Surinam," *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society* 18, pp. 179 ff.; Portuguese Congregation, records of births, marriages, and deaths (microfilm, in AJA).

BARBADOS: "A census of the Island of Barbados, West Indies, with the names and ages of all the White Inhabitants of the Island . . . Taken in . . . 1715" (typescript in AJA); and in works cited in n. 4.

MARTINIQUE: Censuses of 1680 and 1683; Cahen, "Les Juifs de Martinique," *Revue des études juives* 31, pp. 102, 114 f.

CURAÇAO: Separate records of male and female births, indicating some death dates (photostats in AJA); marriages in Emmanuel, *Netherland Antilles*, Appendix 17, pp. 841–1007; deaths in Emmanuel, *Precious Stones*.

JAMAICA: Andrade, *Jews of Jamaica*; H. P. Silverman, "The Hunt's Bay Jewish Cemetery, Kingston, Jamaica, British West Indies," *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society* 37, pp. 327 ff.; "List of [Jewish] Wills [in the West Indies Institute, Kingston]," typescript compiled by Mrs. Dorrit Wilson of Jamaica (copy in AJA); "Deaths in K.K. Shaar Hashamayim, Kingston, Jamaica" [1825–26], compiled by Rev. M. H. Nathan (photostat in AJA).

NEVIS: Sources cited in n. 8.

ST. EUSTATIA: Emmanuel, *Netherlands Antilles*, pp. 104 ff.

ST. CROIX: Epitaphs copied by Rabbi Bernard Heller and Florence K. Abrahams (in AJA).

ST. THOMAS: Births, 1796–1847, compiled by Enid M. Baa (microfilm in AJA); marriages, 1841–1869 (photostats in AJA); burials, 1792–1802 (ibid.); "298 Epitaphs from the Jewish Cemetery [sic] in St. Thomas, W.I., with an Index, compiled from Records in the Archives

of the Jewish Community in Copenhagen," by Jul. Margolinsky, Librarian (typescript, Copenhagen, 1957) (copy in AJA).

HAITI: Source cited in n. 11.

BRITISH NORTH AMERICA: M. H. Stern, *First American Jewish Families: 600 Genealogies, 1654–1988* (Baltimore, 1991); Alan Corré and M. H. Stern, "The Record Book of the Reverend Jacob R. Cohen," *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society* 59 (September 1969): 23 ff.

NEW AMSTERDAM/NEW YORK: Shearith Israel vital records (microfilm in AJA); Pool, *Portraits*; Leo Hershkowitz, *Wills of Early New York Jews (1704–1799)* (New York, 1967).

NEWPORT, R.I.: Epitaphs in *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society* 27, pp. 191 ff.

SAVANNAH: Sources cited in n. 14.

CHARLESTON: B. A. Elzas, *Jewish Marriage Notices from the Newspaper Press of Charleston, S.C. (1775–1906)* (New York, 1917); idem, *The Old Jewish Cemeteries at Charleston, S.C.: A Transcript of Their Tombstones, 1762–1903* (Charleston, 1903); Stern, "South Carolina Jewish Marriage Settlements," *National Genealogical Society Quarterly* 66 (June 1978): 105 ff.

PHILADELPHIA: Sources cited above for BRITISH NORTH AMERICA; "Record of the Spruce Street Cemetery presented to Congregation Mikve Israel, with notes by Leopold D. Goodman" (1912) (manuscript, photostat in AJA).

Note: Vital records for MONTREAL, RICHMOND, and NEW ORLEANS have not been found, but almost all names recorded in these Sephardic congregations seem to have been Ashkenazic.

Notes

1. Arnold Wiznitzer, *Jews in Colonial Brazil* (New York, 1960); idem, *The Records of the Earliest Jewish Community in the New World* (New York, 1954).

2. J. R. Marcus, *The Colonial American Jew* (Detroit, 1970), vol. 1, chap. 2.

3. S. R. Cohen, trans., *Historical Essay on the Colony of Surinam, 1788* (Cincinnati, 1974); Robert Cohen, "Surinam," *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (1972), 15:529 f.; also frequent references in *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society* (cited in Cohen article).

4. Bernard Postal and Malcolm H. Stern, *American Airlines Guides to Jewish History in the Caribbean* (New York, n.d.), pp. 16 f.; E. M. Shilstone, *Jewish Monumental Inscriptions in Barbados* (New York and London, n.d.), pp. xiv–xxvii; W. S. Samuel, "Review of the Jewish Colonists in

Barbados in the Year 1680," *Transactions of the Jewish Historical Society of England* 13 (1936): 1-111; 14 (1940): 44 ff.; Samuel Oppenheim, "The Jews in Barbados in 1739: An Attack upon Their Synagogue. Their Long Oath," *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society* 22 (1914): 197 f.; B. W. Korn, "Barbadian Jewish Wills, 1676-1740," in *A Bicentennial Festschrift for Jacob Rader Marcus* (New York, 1976), pp. 303 ff.; conversations with the late E. M. Shilstone; correspondence of the author with Paul Altman, 1984 f.

5. Postal and Stern, *American Airlines Guide*, pp. 76 f.; Abraham Cahen, "Les Juifs de la Martinique au XVIIe Siècle," *Revue des études juives* 31 (Paris, 1895): 93-121; L. M. Friedman, *Jewish Pioneers and Patriots* (Philadelphia, 1942), chap.7; I. S. Emanuel, "New Light on Early American Jewry," *American Jewish Archives* 7 (January 1955): 22.

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8. Postal and Stern, *American Airlines Guide*, pp. 82 f.; Stern, "Some Notes on the Jews of Nevis," *American Jewish Archives* 10 (October 1958): 151 ff.; idem, "A Successful Caribbean Restoration: The Nevis Story," *American Jewish Historical Quarterly* 61 (September 1971): 19-32; J. C. Hamilton, *The Life of Alexander Hamilton* (New York, 1834-40).

9. Postal and Stern, *American Airlines Guide*, pp. 85 f.; Emmanuel and Emmanuel, *Jews of the Netherlands Antilles*, pp. 518 f., 1048 f.; John Hartog, "The Honen Daliem Congregation of St. Eustatius," *American Jewish Archives* 19 (April 1967): 60 ff.; T. C. Hansard, ed., *The Parliamentary History of England from the Earliest Period to the Year 1803* (London, 1814) XXII, 218 ff.

10. Postal and Stern, *American Airlines Guide*, pp. 64 f.; Hartog, "Honen Daliem Congregation," p. 65, n. 13; Isidore Paiewonsky, *Jewish Historical Development in the Virgin Islands, 1665-1959* (St. Thomas, 1959); S. T. Relkin and M. R. Abrams, eds., *A Short History of the Hebrew Congregation of St. Thomas* (St. Thomas, ca. 1983).

11. Postal and Stern, *American Airlines Guide*, p. 79.; Abraham Cahen, "Les Juifs dans les colonies françaises au XVIIIe Siècle," *Revue des études juives* 4-5 (1882).

12. Egon Wolff and Frieda Wolff, "The Twenty-Three Jewish Settlers of New Amsterdam," *Studia Rosenthalia*, August 1981, pp. 169-177, challenges the accepted story that appears in Witznitzer, "The Exodus from Brazil and Arrival in New Amsterdam of the Jewish Pilgrim Fathers," *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society* 44 (1954): 80 f.; David de Sola Pool and Tamar de Sola Pool, *An Old Faith in the New World* (New York, 1955); D. de Sola Pool, *Portraits Etched in Stone* (New York, 1953); H. B. Grinstein, *The Rise of the Jewish Community of New York, 1654-1860* (Philadelphia, 1945); "The Earliest Extant Minute Books of the Spanish and Portuguese Congregation Shearith Israel in New York, 1728-1786," *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society* 21; "The Lyons Collection," *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society* 27.

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20. The author has been compiling unpublished Sephardic genealogy for many years, and these conclusions derive largely from his research. Naming protocol is outlined in Herbert C. Dobrinsky, *A Treasury of Sephardic Laws and Customs* (Hoboken, N.J., 1986), p. 3; congregations named "Anshei Sfarad" appear in lists of Jewish institutions in *American Jewish Yearbook*, 1907–1908, 1919–1920, and in Kehillah of New York City, *The Jewish Communal Register of New York City, 1917–1918* (New York, ca. 1918).