The Democratization of American Judaism

Jonathan D. Sarna

In an influential volume titled *The Democratization of American Christianity*, Nathan Hatch proclaimed that the “American Revolution and the beliefs flowing from it created a cultural ferment over the meaning of freedom.” Common people, he showed, became significant actors on the American religious scene in the Revolution’s wake. Turmoil swirled “around the crucial issues of authority, organization and leadership.” The tension between traditional religious values and new American values, he concluded, provoked “a period of religious ferment, chaos, and originality unmatched in American history.”

Hatch confined his evidence to the world of American Christianity, including early Mormonism. Was the story the same with respect to America’s small community of Jews? We might have supposed that Jews would have been wary of religious ferment. The small size of the American Jewish community (estimates range from one thousand to twenty-five hundred²); the fact that Jews were scattered over six communities (Savannah, Charleston, Richmond, Philadelphia, New York, and Newport); and Jews’ centuries-old emphasis on tradition and deference would presumably have made Jews wary of “chaos and originality.” They had lived through the Protestant Great Awakening without its transforming, in any discernible way, Jewish religious life.³ The impact of the Revolution, we might have conjectured, would likewise have been muted.

And yet, the more we learn, the clearer it becomes that the Revolution’s impact on the American Jewish community was anything
but muted. Instead, in response to the political, social, and spiritual revolution wrought by independence and the beliefs flowing from it, Judaism in America was challenged and radically transformed. The values of the American Revolution—liberty, freedom, and especially democracy—profundely affected the Jewish community. In the first quarter of the nineteenth century, before masses of central and eastern European Jews arrived, a new American Judaism took shape. In this early period, as so often later, American Judaism and American Protestantism experienced similar influences and developed in parallel ways. More often than we realize, the individuals who brought about change in both faiths marched to the sounds of similar drumbeats.4

As a rule, in talking about early American Judaism, scholars look first to New York, for that is where the bulk of the Jews lived and the bulk of the surviving documents remain. But I begin here in the unlikely Jewish community of Richmond, Virginia, which took shape in the very midst of the American Revolution. Jacob I. Cohen and Isaiah Isaacs, the city’s earliest known Jewish residents, arrived about 1781 from Charleston, South Carolina.5 Both men had fought, in 1779, under Captain Richard Lushington as part of the Charleston Regiment of Militia (“Free Citizens”), known at the time as the “Jew Company,” although only a minority of its members were actually Jewish. Cohen fought in the Battle of Beaufort under General William Moultrie and, according to Lushington, “in every respect conducted himself as a good soldier and a man of courage.”6 Isaacs may well have been in Richmond previously,7 but now the two veterans established the commercial firm of Cohen & Isaacs, locally known as “The Jews’ Store.” Subsequently, it expanded to include a tavern inn, known as the “The Bird in the Hand,” as well as assorted other properties.8

A year after the original store’s founding, in 1782, Cohen traveled to Philadelphia on a prolonged buying trip, and in May of that year he applied to join Philadelphia’s Mikveh Israel synagogue. Having established himself in business, he may also have been looking around for a wife: He was, after all, thirty-eight years old and still single. Within three months he had fallen in love with a recently widowed woman of his own age, Esther Mordecai, whose husband had left her impoverished and with three children. Since Esther Mordecai
had applied to the congregation for nine pounds to pay her rent, the community had reason to be especially gladdened by this turn of events; the match likely seemed providential. 9

But then a problem arose, for Esther Mordecai was a convert to Judaism. Her original name was Elizabeth Whitlock, and she had converted as a teenager to marry her much older first husband, Moses Mordecai. Who converted her and where she was converted remains uncertain, 10 but few at the time seem to have doubted the legitimacy of her conversion. The real problem was that the marriage of a kohen, a Jew of priestly descent, to a convert is explicitly prohibited by halakhah (Jewish law); a kohen may only marry the daughter of a Jew. 11 In much of the Jewish world, this obstacle would almost certainly have doomed the match, no matter how extenuating the circumstances. 12

What is therefore remarkable, and extremely revealing, is that Cohen proved defiant. Although informed of the law, he spurned it. Why, he must have wondered, should he be denied the right to marry a convert to Judaism just because his ancestors had been descendants of Aaron, the high priest? The dictates of the synagogue and of Jewish law ran counter to his newfound sense of democracy and freedom.

Nor was he alone. According to the laconic minutes of the congregation, “great while was spent in debating” the marriage—a sure sign of communal restiveness. In the end, Congregation Mikveh Israel prohibited its hazzan (minister) from conducting the marriage or even from mentioning the couple’s name within the synagogue’s portals. Interestingly, stricter punishments, which some proposed, were voted down. 13

The response on the part of Cohen and his friends was a public act of defiance. The congregation’s leading member, Haym Salomon, along with the Revolutionary War hero Mordecai Sheftall of Savannah and the well-respected old-time Philadelphian, Israel Jacobs, privately conducted and witnessed the wedding ceremony. 14 The ketubbah (wedding document) survives, and the copy in the American Jewish Archives makes clear that the officiants acted in conscious awareness of what they were doing. Esther Mordecai is described in the Aramaic ketubbah as an armalet giyorret—“a widow and convert”—and her husband is listed as Yaakov Ben Reb Yehoshua Ha Cohen, Jacob, the son of Joshua the priest. 15 The three highly respected signators on the
document, having been apprised of Jewish law, thus knowingly placed personal liberty above its dictates. In performing this wedding in the face of the synagogue’s objections, they served notice that times had changed and that the congregation’s power to regulate Jewish life was waning.

This conclusion is reinforced by a second document that survives, this one from 1785 and written in Western Yiddish (Judeo-German). The document is a fascinating letter written by the leaders of Congregation Mikveh Israel of Philadelphia to Rabbi Saul Halevi Loewenstamm (1717–1790), Ashkenazic chief rabbi of Amsterdam, seeking his advice and support in a battle against one of their most learned (and contentious) lay members, Mordecai M. Mordecai (1727–1809), a native of Telz, Lithuania. Mordecai—no relation to Esther Mordecai who married Jacob I. Cohen—was akin to one of the “common people” whom Hatch highlights as emergent religious actors in this period. A distiller and unsuccessful businessman, he, like so many of his Protestant counterparts, did not feel bound by people of privilege and status, such as the hazzan and the members of the synagogue’s governing body (adjunta). Himself the son of a rabbi, he felt that he understood Jewish law better than they did, and he therefore took the law into his own hands, much as some Protestants of that time insisted that, based on their own independent reading, they could interpret the Bible.

“Reb Mordecai,” according to our document, took the law into his own hands on two separate occasions. First, in an apparent attempt to reconcile members of his extended family, he performed an unauthorized Jewish marriage ceremony on a previously intermarried couple: his niece, Judith Hart, and her unconverted husband, Lt. James Pettigrew. On another occasion, the document charges, he openly flouted synagogue authority by performing the traditional last rites on Benjamin Clava, an identifying but intermarried Jew whom the synagogue, as a warning to others, had ordered buried “without ritual ablution, without shrouds and without funeral rites.” Since on both occasions Mordecai vigorously defended his actions, insisting that he knew Jewish law better than those who judged him, the congregation sought “the illuminating light” of the Dutch rabbi’s opinion.
The real question here plainly had less to do with Jewish law than with Jewish religious authority in a democratic age. Mordecai, echoing the spirit of the American revolutionary tradition, and like many Protestant rebels of his day, challenged his religious superiors and claimed the right to interpret God’s law as he personally understood it. Nor was he alone. According to the document, “In this country . . . everyone does as he pleases. . . . Yet, the Kabal (community) has no authority to restrain or punish anyone, except for the nominal penalty of denying them synagogue honors, or of withholding from them sacred rites. However, these vicious people completely disregard such measures and continue to attend our synagogue, because under the laws of the country it is impossible to enjoin them from so doing.”

In other words, the problem, from the perspective of Mikveh Israel, was that Jews in post-Revolutionary America were making their own rules concerning how to live Jewishly, and there was little that the synagogue could do about it.

Returning to Richmond, where Jacob I. Cohen had also returned, we see more evidence of “democratization.” In 1789, the city’s first synagogue, Beth Shalome, adopted a constitution. The very term “constitution” is noteworthy. In the colonial era, Jews called such documents by traditional Hebrew terms, *haskamoth* or *ascamoth*, meaning agreements or covenants, and they followed a traditional Sephardic formula. Now, two years after the American Constitution was ratified, we see the English term, “constitution,” employed. The Beth Shalome document echoes its American counterpart. “We the subscribers of the Israelite religion, resident in this place,” it begins. And it continues with three striking clauses, never to my knowledge previously found in a synagogue constitution, and all of them highly revealing:

“Every free man residing in this city for the term of three months, of the age of 21 years, and who congregates with us, shall be a yahid [first-class member] of the kehilla and entitled to every right and privilege of the same.” (Article 1)

The key word here is “every.” In the colonial era, *yehidim* were the equivalent of what Protestants called “communicants.” They were
men of status who materially supported the congregation, and they were different from women, the poor, and visitors, who occupied seats but had no authority. In New York’s Shearith Israel, according to the congregation’s 1761 constitution, the waiting time to become a yahid was set at “at least one Year,” and the cost was twenty shillings—a respectable sum. Now in Richmond, every free man, rich and poor alike, could become a yahid after only three months. Although women and slaves were still excluded, democratization was evident nevertheless. Just as the franchise nationwide was broadening, so too was the franchise within the world of the American synagogue.

“The parnas and assistants shall not be connected in family or in partnership in trade, in order to preserve an equal and an independent representation.” (Article 2)

With these words, Beth Shalome’s constitution outlawed the traditional practice of having only wealthy families run the synagogue. In colonial New York, interconnected merchant families had dominated congregational life for more than fifty years, and such was the case in much of early modern Europe. Post-Revolutionary Richmond Jews, however, rebelled against such undemocratic practices. The phrase “an equal and an independent representation” is particularly revealing. These were good Virginia values in 1789, but by no means traditional Jewish ones.

“No rules or regulations shall be considered as binding on the congregation until it is read 2 Shabbath or holidays separately in the synagogue. Should any member object to the same, it must be by a letter to the parnas within 24 hours after the last publication, who shall be obliged to call a meeting of all the members in toto. . . . A majority present at such meeting, which must be 2/3 of the members in town, shall determine the same and the determination shall be binding on the objecting member and all the rest.” [Article 3]

This provision of the Richmond synagogue constitution promoted the goal of communal consensus by offering dissenters unprecedented opportunity to have their views heard. Even a single dissenter could bring about a meeting of “all the members in toto” to render a binding decision. The practice never became normative in American synagogue life; it was totally impractical. The intent, nevertheless, is fascinating, for a key source of dissatisfaction within colonial-era synagogues was
the stifling of dissenting voices. Following the Revolution, at least for a brief period, synagogue dissenters in Richmond received a guarantee that their views would be heard and voted upon.  

Young people likewise found their voices heard in the immediate post-Revolutionary years. Whereas before, at least in New York, leaders had tended to be older men, the leadership at Shearith Israel now became progressively younger. From 1783–1801, the age of the parnasim (presidents) of that congregation averaged about fifty-eight. From 1801–1824, the average age dropped to forty!28 So dramatic a change cannot fully be explained based on the data at hand, but the generational shift certainly adds credence to the sense that a rising post-Revolutionary generation was demanding to be heard. Moreover, in Judaism, as in Protestantism, religious leadership was becoming divorced from social position, in keeping with the ideology of a democratic age.

The same trend reveals itself in 1805, with the dramatic change in the way that congregants were seated in the Shearith Israel synagogue. Throughout the colonial period, the synagogue seated its members much as Protestant churches did. An anonymous colonial-era poem summed up the system:

In the goodly house of worship  
Where in order due and fit,  
As by public vote directed  
Classed and ranked the people sit.29

In Shearith Israel and, so far as we know, every other synagogue, the congregation carefully allocated a “proper” seat to each person based on his or her status, and each seat was then assessed a membership tax. Members of the wealthy Gomez family regularly enjoyed the most prestigious seats and paid the highest assessments. Others paid less and sat much farther away from the holy ark. The system generated a great deal of bad feeling, usually on the part of those dissatisfied for one reason or another with the seats assigned to them, but it produced a steady stream of revenue and accurately reflected the social stratification of Jewish society. The synagogue seating chart, in the colonial era, provided an annual map of society’s inequalities.30
Unsurprisingly, this system offended Jews of the post-Revolutionary era. As early as 1786 a special banca (bench) reserved for the aristocratic women of the Gomez family was removed. Elite families such as the Gomezes no longer could impose their will on everybody else. In 1805, in a much more radical move, the congregation abandoned its whole system of assigned seats and assessments and committed itself to a system of what churches call pew rent. Under this procedure, the trustees assigned different values to different seats (as in a theater), and then leased them on a first-come, first-served basis. Practically speaking, this hardly changed the social stratification of the synagogue, since wealthy people rented better seats than poor people did. In the eyes of contemporaries, however, the change represented a dramatic triumph for democracy in American Judaism, for under the new system members enjoyed much more freedom of choice.

The next twenty years, from 1805–1825, witnessed a great deal more ferment in American Jewish religious life, much of which I have described elsewhere. First, women gained new visibility, thanks to the adoption of the open-style women’s gallery in New York (1818) and Philadelphia (1825). No longer did they have to sit, as they had earlier, hidden by a “breast-work as high as their chins.” The number of seats available to women likewise increased—to 44 percent of the seats in New York, and 46 percent in Philadelphia—suggesting that women were regularly expected to attend religious services, much as their Protestant counterparts did. The presence of so many women within the synagogue’s portals often proved a source of contention, especially when disputes arose concerning who should sit where.

In Charleston, so-called “vagrant Jews”—the counterparts to Hatch’s “common people”—literally brawled with synagogue leaders in 1812 over issues of authority that pit the congregation’s minister against its governing board. A one-sided version of what took place is preserved in a letter from the future Jewish leader Mordecai M. Noah, then twenty-seven years old and living in Charleston, to his uncle Naphtali Phillips in New York:
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In my last I enclosed to you a bill of fare relative to a singing
match established by Mr. [Emanuel Nunes] Carvalho[.] [W]ithin this last week the Congregation has been in a state of
warfare sanctioned & approved by that gentleman unheard of
in the annals of religion—It appears he had taught the children
to sing the concluding psalms of the Sabbath Morning Service
in a very handsome manner which in a measure did away
(with) the discordance which attends every Synagogue [.] [F]or a whim or caper he discontinued this ceremony & forbid
the children to sing[.] The private adjunta conceiving it to be
his duty to continue a system which was generally approved
of respectfully requested him to allow the children to continue
which he refused to do and on application for some other
branch of his duty he treated the adjunta with disrespect &
they suspended him for five days which suspension terminated
on Saturday at 10 oclock when he performed the prayers[.] --Saturday evening being a meeting of the adjunta in general
body he collected a rabble composed of all the vagrant Jews
& had a petition signed by them to give him redress[.] [T]his
petition was handed the Parnass who could not act upon it
being in express violation to the constitution[.] Mr. Carvalho
in person aided and abetted the confusion & riot which took
place[.] [T]his outrageous & disgraceful [sic] produced by the interference & cooperation of Mr
Carvalho terminated without any serious injury[.] The result
has completely destroyed the small remnant of respectability
& character yet left for Mr C[.] [H]is duty was not to take
the law in his own hands but to submit with respect to the
conduct & resolve of the private adjunta who are composed
of the most respected & indeed the most enlightened part of
the Congregation[.] 35

Fascinatingly, Noah describes Carvalho in terms similar to those
that synagogue leaders of Philadelphia used against Mordecai Mordecai.
In both cases, the offenders were charged with the same kinds of offenses: taking the law into their own hands, spurning authority, and making common cause with congregational malcontents. Moreover, there proved to be little, in both cases, that synagogue authorities could do about the situation. However much the “enlightened” part of the congregation sought to have dissenters “submit” to the parnas and the adjunta, the new world of American religion conspired against these efforts and favored the forces of change.

The synagogue’s reduced power was amply illustrated just a year later in New York City, when its authority to regulate kosher meat was challenged. Formerly in New York, as the historian of Jewish ritual slaughtering details, “all Jewish slaughtering was done by one man, the elected shohet [ritual slaughterer] of the Shearith Israel Congregation. The meat was distributed through a number of Christian meat dealers who had entered into contracts with the Congregation.” In 1813, the shohet, Jacob Abrahams, failed to win reelection and instead set himself up as an independent ritual slaughterer, slaughtering meat “without warrant of the Congregation and for butchers with whom the Congregation had no contract.” Horrified, the synagogue’s leaders petitioned the New York Common Council to have their sole authority over kosher meat restored. The Common Council obligingly agreed, approving an ordinance that “no Butcher, or other person, shall hereafter expose for sale in the public Markets any Meat sealed as Jews Meat, who shall not be engaged for that purpose by the Trustees of the congregation Shearith Israel.” But in an era that exalted freedom and democracy, an ordinance that granted monopoly power to synagogue trustees provoked immediate opposition. Eight dissident congregants who supported Abrahams protested the ordinance as “an encroachment on our religious rites [sic] and a restriction of those general privileges to which we are entitled.” They asked that it be “immediately abolished” and privately complained that it was an “infringement on the rights of the people.” The Common Council, unwilling to enter into what it now understood to be an internal Jewish dispute, quickly backed down. It expunged its original ordinance and washed its hands of the whole matter. Once again, synagogue dissidents emerged victorious, while the traditional authorities of the congregation lost both power and face.
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being shamed at their death. The intermarried Benjamin Clava, we
have seen, was ordered buried “without ritual ablution, without
shrouds and without funeral rites.” In extreme cases, individuals
might be denied a Jewish burial altogether. Seeking to preserve
this venerable authority, which was perhaps the strongest deterrent
in the congregation’s disciplinary arsenal,37 Beth Elohim reacted
strongly when several notable families purchased their own “places
of interment.” It proclaimed in its 1820 constitution that “there shall be
one Congregational Burial Ground only, . . .” although in the interests
of peace it conceded “that this law shall not extend to any family place
of interment already established.” The proclamation, however, made
no noticeable impact. In a free country, Beth Elohim proved no more
able to control where Jews would choose to be buried than Shearith
Israel was able to control whose kosher meat they would choose to
eat.38

Whether all of this adds up to what Hatch calls “democratization”
may be open to dispute. The word “democratization” itself—which
means “the process of becoming democratic”—was actually unknown
in early America, and it only appears in print in the second half of
the nineteenth century.39 But if the word was unknown, the process,
if anything, was accelerating. Synagogues, much like the Protestant
churches that Hatch described, experienced burgeoning religious
ferment, challenges from below to established communal authority,
and appeals to American values (“freedom,” “rights of the people”) in
order to legitimate expressions of religious dissent. Over time, the
hierarchic, deferential, and tradition-based world of colonial Judaism
gave way to a new Jewish world: one where Jewish law and the
authority of synagogue leaders could be openly challenged; where
every man was a “yahid” (first-class member); and where power no
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choose seats within the synagogue, the freedom to buy kosher meat outside the synagogue, and the freedom to bury dear ones in a private cemetery if that is what one chose to do.

After years of stirring, this new Jewish world emerged into the fullness of life in the mid-1820s. The hallowed "synagogue-community" model of American Judaism, which assumed that each community would be organized around a single synagogue that governed all aspects of Jewish life, collapsed at that time. In its place came a more free-wheeling marketplace model of American Judaism, the "community of synagogues." 40

Two nearly simultaneous "revolts" between 1824 and 1826 occasioned this transformation: the secession from Shearith Israel that led to the establishment of Congregation B'nai Jeshurun in New York, and the secession from Beth Elohim that led to the creation of the Reformed Society of Israelites in Charleston. Both of these well-known episodes sought to bring a greater measure of freedom and democracy into Jewish religious life, legitimating religious change on the basis of American political values.

The developments in Charleston have been amply described elsewhere. 41 Young people, dissatisfied with the "apathy and neglect which have been manifested towards our holy religion" and fearful that Judaism would not survive unless it changed, sought far-reaching changes in their synagogue, advocating, among other things, an abbreviated worship service, vernacular prayers, a weekly sermon, and an end to traditional free will offerings during the Torah service. When their 1824 petition for change was coldly denied, they seceded from Beth Elohim and formed what was officially known as "The Reformed Society of Israelites for Promoting True Principles of Judaism According to its Purity and Spirit." 42

This development is often recalled as the beginning of Reform Judaism in the United States, which in many ways it was. But in addition to ritual reform, the new congregation also provided for a good deal more democracy. For example, a key article of the Reformed Society's constitution declared, "Any Israelite whatsoever, who makes a donation or leaves a legacy of not less than fifty dollars for the benefit of this Society, shall receive every mark of respect, have the right of
burial, and be entitled to every religious attention to which members are entitled.” This article, a silent critique of Beth Elohim, aimed to move away from the plutocracy and authorititarianism characteristic of that synagogue and to link the Reformed Society with the nationwide movement for democracy and equal rights. The “birthright of ourselves . . . is equal liberty,” Reformed Society of Israelites leader Isaac Harby reiterated on the society’s first anniversary. He and his fellow reformers argued, in effect, that a new democratic country needed a more democratic Judaism.43

The same argument characterized the Jewish secessionists of New York.44 In 1825, young members of Shearith Israel petitioned not for reform, but simply for an early worship service “on the Sabbath morning during the summer months.” When their petition was refused (for violating the “rules and customs of our ancestors”), the young people formed an independent society “to promote the study of our Holy Law and . . . to extend a knowledge of its divine precepts, ceremonies, and worship among our brethren generally, and the enquiring youth in particular.” The goal, in this case, was a worship service run much less formally than at Shearith Israel, without a permanent leader, and with no “distinctions made among the member rich and poor.” The movement reflected all of the themes familiar to us from the history of Protestantism in this era: revivalism, challenge to authority, a new form of organization, anti-elitism, and radical democratization. Within a short time, the young people created B’nai Jeshurun, a new and competing synagogue to Shearith Israel.

Revealingly, the new congregation justified itself in the preamble to its constitution by appealing to American democratic values. “The wise and republican laws of this country are based upon universal toleration giving to every citizen and sojourner the right to worship according to the dictate of his conscience,”45 it explained. In New York as in Charleston, ritual change and democratization marched hand in hand.

Later, congregations elsewhere in the country echoed — practically word for word—the stirring value-laden language that the secessionists at B’nai Jeshurun employed.46 In addition to mutual influence, this demonstrates the power of rhetoric in a democratic age. The emphasis on toleration, on equality, on conscience, and above
all on the “wise and republican laws of this country” bespoke the new values that entered the world of American Judaism in the years following the American Revolution. Following “a period of religious ferment, chaos, and originality unmatched in American history,” a new and more democratic American Judaism had emerged.
a turnpike road between Philadelphia and Lancaster in June of 1792 (Charles I. Landis, *The First Long Turnpike in the United States* [Lancaster, Pa., 1917], 136). Moliné’s decision not to indenture his Manumitted slaves may have been made from conviction or simply from his having passed the six-month deadline for such an arrangement.


38. On the influx of about 500 slaves from Saint Domingue and their manumission in the years 1793–1796, see Nash, 141–142.


43. Among examples of Jewish congregations who had once belonged to a Nassy: Joseph de David Cohen Nassy, Simcha de Jacob Nassy. An example from the Reformed Church in 1787: Vrije Janiba van Adjuba van Nassy (Januba was the daughter of Adjuba, who had been Manumitted earlier by David Nassy). For an image of such shops, see Benoit, fig. 32.

44. Jones and Allen, 26–27.

Chapter 6 - The Democratization of American Judaism

This essay honors Dr. Gary P. Zola on the tenth anniversary of his becoming executive director of the Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives. Our deep and productive friendship extends over almost thirty years. An earlier version of this paper was delivered as the 2008 Lapidus Lecture in American Jewish Studies at Princeton University.


5. Myron Berman, Richmond's Jewry: 1769–1976 (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1979). Berman claims that Cohen arrived "a year after the war," but this cannot be right since he was already in Richmond in 1781 when he did business with Daniel Boone and because by the time he came to Philadelphia he was described as being from Virginia; see Jonathan D. Sarna, "Jacob J. Cohen," *Dictionary of Virginia Biography* 3 (Richmond, VA: Library of Virginia, 2006): 345–347 (a footnoted copy is in the American Jewish Archives); Herbert T. Ezekiel and Gaston Lichtenstein, *The History of the Jews of Richmond From 1769 to 1917* (Richmond, VA: Ezekiel, 1917), 15; and Aaron Baroway, "The Cohens of Maryland," *Maryland Historical Magazine* 18 (1923): 359.
10. Gratz Mordecai, a descendant, reported that Moses Mordecai "married in England, Elizabeth Whitlock, who previously became a convert to the Jewish faith, which she ever after adhered to in the strictest manner." "Notice of Jacob Mordecai...," *PAJHS* 6 (1897): 40. However, the English rabbinate had a firm policy of not approving conversions, for fear of breaching the agreement under which Jews had been readmitted into England; see Todd M. Endelman, *The Jews of Georgian England 1714–1830* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1979), 145–146; and Joseph R. Rosenbloom, *Conversion to Judaism From the Biblical Period to the Present* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1978), 75–76. Under the British Penal Laws, moreover, conversion from Protestantism to Catholicism, at least, was strictly punished. See F.P. Moran, *The Catholics of Ireland Under the Penal Laws in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Catholic Truth Society, 1899), 16–18. Perhaps Whitlock traveled to Holland, where conversions were easier to obtain. Emily Bingham, *Mordecai: An Early American Family* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2003), 13, implies that the marriage took place in America and suggests that Mordecai came to America as a convict.
12. For a parallel case in England in 1825, which is strikingly similar to our case, see Endelman, *The Jews of Georgian England*, 145.
13. Marcus, *American Jewry: Documents*, 121–124. On this issue, as on so many others, Haym Salomon and Jonas Phillips clashed. Whether this was the "unrecorded


15. A copy of the original ketubbah, located in the Jewish National Library in Jerusalem, is found in small collections file, SC-6277, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, OH. I am most grateful to Mr. Kevin Proffitt for sending me a copy.


23. For the text of Beth Shalome’s constitution, see *American Jewry: Documents*, 145–146; and Elazar et al., *A Double Bond*, 112.


25. Shearith Israel broadened its franchise under its 1805 constitution; see ibid., 105–111 (where the term yachid is replaced by “elector.”)

26. See the Shearith Israel minutes reprinted in *PAJHS* 21 (1913) and Jacob R. Marcus, *The Colonial American Jew; II* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1970), 897–911. For Europe, see Salo Baron’s discussion of “growing plutocracy” in his *The Jewish Community: Its History and Structure to the American Revolution*, II (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1945), 50–51; and for Amsterdam, see Miriam Bodian, *Hebrews of the Portuguese Nation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 51–52. In London, kinsmen “unto the third generation” were not permitted to hold office together at the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue, but there
was no apparent objection to business partners serving together; see Neville Laski, *The Laws and Charities of the Spanish and Portuguese Jews Congregation of London* (London: Cresset Press, 1952), 5.


37. In theory, the ultimate authority available to the synagogue was the dreaded “excommunication,” but in practice this punishment was almost never meted out in North America; see Sarna, *American Judaism*, 16.


40. Sarna, *American Judaism*, 52–61 sets forth the “synagogue community” to “community of synagogues” model. For a critique, see Holly Snyder, “Rethinking
42. Quotes are from the documents published in Moise, Isaac Harby, 52, 61.
43. Quotes are from ibid., 71, 118.
47. Hatch, 64.

Chapter 7 - Jonas Phillips Levy: A Jewish Naval Captain in the Early Republic
2. Ibid., 220, 225, 227. The authors identify Levy as supporting the Whigs in the election of 1810, but that would have been impossible as the Whig party was not founded until the 1830s. In Philadelphia, the Federalists were forerunners of the Whigs and took the positions the Whigs would later hold.
4. For Phillips’s nurturing spouse, see Aviva Ben-Ur, “The Exceptional and the Mundane: A Biographical Portrait of Rebecca Machado Phillips,” in Women and
New Essays in American Jewish History
Commemorating the Sixtieth Anniversary of the Founding of the American Jewish Archives

Published by
The American Jewish Archives
of
Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institute of Religion
Cincinnati, Ohio