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THE JEWS IN BOSTON TILL 1875.¹

BY JOSEPH LEBOWICH, *Cambridge, Mass.*

It is extremely fortunate for this Society that such a careful and painstaking historiographer as Mr. Leon Hühner should have been the first to plough in the almost virgin field of Jewish history in Massachusetts. Usually the most careful of historians leave some sod in the historical field unturned, thus allowing for those that follow in their wake some opportunity for historical discovery. But so thoroughly has Mr. Hühner done his work² that there is little new that I can now add in the history of the Jews in Massachusetts before the nineteenth century. I shall, however, pick up the few crumbs that Mr. Hühner has left.

On June 6, 1716, there arrived in Boston the good ship *Restoration* from London with three merchants on board: Isaac Lopez. Abraham Gotatus and Jacob Ruggles.³ No direct mention of their being Jews is made. Of Gotatus and Ruggles nothing is known, but Isaac Lopez became a successful merchant in his new-found home. On December 31, 1722, the Selectmen granted Mr. Lopez the liberty to erect a "Timber Building near the Wind Mill."⁴ I have been unable to ascertain the date of Mr. Lopez's death, nor the place

¹ I wish to express here my grateful appreciation of assistance and advice, both in preparation of this paper and in other work, so freely and cheerfully given by Mr. Max J. Kohler. I also wish to acknowledge assistance and advice given by Mr. Leon Hühner, and by my friend Dr. Solomon Schindler, in the preparation of this paper.

² See *American Jewish Historical Society Publications*, No. 11, p. 75, *et seq.*

³ *Boston Records*, Vol. 29, p. 234.

⁴ *Ibid.*, Vol. 13, p. 108.

where he lies buried. Mr. Lopez was most probably laid to rest in the Jewish cemetery at Newport, but as no trace of any of the interments there prior to 1761⁶ has been found, his tombstone, if he was buried there, must have perished along with his earlier coreligionist, Mr. Frasier, the Unconvertible.⁷

Of Judah Monis, the first regular instructor of Hebrew in Harvard College, enough has already been written, both in the *PUBLICATIONS* and elsewhere.⁸ But nowhere has there been printed the two manuscript letters of Mr. Monis preserved in the Harvard College archives.⁹ These letters, more than any thing else, throw a fresh light on this interesting figure. The first letter, dated "June ye 29th, 1720," reads as follows:

Most Reverd Gentlemen

Having made an Essay to facilitate ye Instruction of Youth in ye Hebrew Language, wch probably may be publishe if there may be a prospect of its being serviceable, I make bold to present it, to Your Judicious perusall; I am Sensible not to be Such A master of ye English tongue as to avoide Improprieties in some Expressions, in wch I, must have your excuse, as also your Candour in ye other part of my composure.

Being aproved by such worthier & Learned Gentlemen as your-

⁶ "The Jewish Cemetery at Newport, R. I.," A. P. Mendes, in *Rhode Island Historical Magazine*, Vol. VI, p. 81.

⁷ Of this interesting person and his relations with Cotton Mather, see "The Jews in New England," by Leon Hühner in *American Jewish Historical Society Publications*, No. 11, p. 79. Also J. Lebowich in *The Menorah*, January, 1903, p. 3.

⁸ The best and most detailed accounts of Mr. Monis are those written by Mr. George Alexander Kohut, which may be found in the *American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literature*, Chicago, July, 1898 (Vol. XIV, pp. 217-226) and October, 1898 (Vol. XV, p. 56, *et seq.*). Also by the same author, "Ezra Stiles and the Jews," New York, 1902, pp. 22, 23, 39, 42, 136, 137. Also an article by Rev. Louis Meyer in the *Jewish Era* (Missionary) for April 15, 1901, p. 49, *et seq.*, and a short account by J. Lebowich in the *Jewish Comment*, August 22, 1902.

⁹ Vol. I.

selves, as some of the Best & Learned Gentlemen of the Desenters & of Different Churches have done, it will be gratefull to me, & I, do purpose to draw it over again (If God be pleased) with quotations & In Chaldean Characters & Interim I, remaine Gentlemen Your m't

humble servnt, to Command

Judah Monis.

The second letter is dated May 22, 1722, and reads as follows:

To ye Revd President & ye other Revd members of the Corporation of Harvard College,
Revernd Gentlemen

I have been Informed of the Honour you have put upon me, in chusing me to be a teacher of the Hebrew Language in your College. The respect you have shown to me in this choice, I heartily & Thankfully acknowledge, & I hope you will Interpret these Lines as Testimonies of my Gratitude. Tho, I Believe I Could betake myselfe to such secular Business as by ordinary blessing of Providence would promote my worldly Interest & estate, More than wt I can expect by Instructing Youth in ye Hebrew Yet I find myselfe steadily inclined & Willing to spend my time (If Providence favors my Design) in Giving the best instructions I can in ye aforesaid Language. To all such member of the College, as shall be desirous to Learn of me. I think the More acquainted ye Ministers of the Gospel are wth the Hebrew tongue, and so wth the Old Testament, the Better able they will be understand the New Testament & so to preach our Glorious *Lord Jesus Christ* who was spoken of by all the Old Testament Prophets. But however necessary I may apprehend the knowledge of the Hebrew Language to be, & however willing & disposed I may be to teach it, yet Revd Gentlemen I, hope, you will give me leave to say, that the salary you have voted as an Encouragement or Reward for my Labour is not sufficient to support me, It is not sufficient to sustain me in my single state, much Less if I thought to enter into a married state (wch I have some hope of doing) If I should speedily enter on ye service you have chosen me to, (the) necessary furniture for a Chamber in College Can't Cost me much Less than thirty five Pounds, But if I had such furniture by me already (wch certainly I have not) yet the salary you have voted would not suffice to support me through the year I hope Gentlemen you will Candidly Interpret this representation of my case, & if you Continue to Desire of my being an In-

structor in ye Hebrew in your College, I hope you will please to think of some method whereby a proper support & Maintainance may be afforded to me, & I shall count myself greatly obliged if you will let me know your minds in this matter as soon as you conveniently Can.

I am Rev^d Gentlemen wth Great Gratitude and Respect,
one of Your

humble
servants
Judah Monis.

Comment on these two letters is unnecessary. Suffice it to say that the "Convertible" Mr. Monis received the ardently-asked-for raise in his salary, but not until a year after the above fervid appeal.

Mr. Simon Wolf, in his excellent work on "The American Jew,"^{*} mentions two Israelites who served in Massachusetts regiments during the Revolutionary War. Samuel Benjamin, the first one mentioned by Mr. Wolf, is included among fifty-six other Benjamins, some with even more pronounced Jewish "Christian" names than Samuel, in the first volume of "Massachusetts Soldiers and Sailors of the Revolutionary War."[†] The Jewish identity of Joseph Sampson, the other Jew mentioned by Mr. Wolf, like that of Benjamin, seems to rest on rather unsafe ground.

Just before the outbreak of the War for Independence, there came to Boston from the Jewish settlement at Newport, Mr. Moses Michael Hays. Hays was born in Lisbon in 1739.[‡] He came to Newport by the way of Jamaica in 1768.[§] Here he became one of the important members of that prosperous Jewish community. His sister Reyna married Isaac Touro, the rabbi of the Congregation Yeshuat Israel at Newport. The

^{*} Simon Wolf, "The American Jew as a Patriot, Soldier, and Citizen," Philadelphia, 1895, p. 52.

[†] pp. 938-943.

[‡] G. C. Mason, "Reminiscences of Newport," p. 62.

[§] "Biographical Sketch of Moses Michael Hays," by Sereno D. Nickerson in the *New England Freemason*, Vol. XI, p. 71.

exact date of Mr. Hays' arrival in Boston can not be fixed with certainty. The statement by Mr. Hühner that Hays "lived in Boston years before the struggle (Revolution)" is undoubtedly wrong. Judge Daly places his removal to Boston after the breaking out of the War for Independence," and, as near as I have been able to ascertain, it was some time in the year 1776. Hays took with him his wife and children, his widowed sister Reyna Touro, and her two infant boys, Judah and Abraham. Just after his arrival in Boston his daughter Catherine was born.¹³ Hays entered the insurance business, with an office at 68 State Street, while his residence was situated on lower Middle (now Hanover) Street, at present in the very heart of business life, but at the beginning of the nineteenth century the fashionable district of the town. Here the young Touro, and Hays' five daughters, Rebecca, Catherine, Slowey, Judith and Sally, and his only son, Judah, were brought up in luxury, for Hays was one of the wealthy citizens of the city. Hays took a prominent position among the Masonic fraternities,¹⁴ becoming Grand Master on June 6, 1788.

The two brothers Touro, when old enough, were launched on their successful business careers by their indulgent uncle. But Judah, the elder of the two, left Boston for New Orleans in 1803, there to embark upon a career which makes him one of the most important and interesting figures in all American Jewish history. Abraham, the younger brother, remained in Boston with his uncle, became a successful business man, and, for those days, left a considerable fortune, much of it to

¹³ "The Jews in New England prior to 1800," *American Jewish Historical Society Publications*, No. 11, p. 83.

¹⁴ Charles P. Daly, "The Jews in America," p. 83.

¹⁵ *Rhode Island Historical Magazine*, Vol. VI, p. 99.

¹⁶ A wealth of detail of the Masonic activities of Mr. Hays is given by Sereno D. Nickerson in *The New England Freemason*, Vol. XI (1875), pp. 71-81, 117-127, 145-152. An excerpt of this valuable article is given in *The New Era*, October, 1902.

charity.¹⁷ While reviewing a parade in Boston he was thrown from his chaise and received fractures from which he died, October 18, 1822.¹⁸ The inscription on his tombstone in the Newport Cemetery reads as follows:

ERECTED
TO THE MEMORY OF
ABRAHAM TOURO
OF BOSTON.
SON OF ISAAC AND REYNA TOURO
WHO WAS SUDDENLY TAKEN FROM HIS TRANSITORY
STATE IN THE 48TH YEAR OF A USEFUL AND HAPPY LIFE,
DEEPLY LAMENTED BY HIS AFFLICTED RELATIVES
AND INNUMERABLE FRIENDS,
DISTINGUISHED AND ESTEEMED IN THOSE VIRTUES
AND GOOD QUALITIES WHICH EXALT THE
CHARACTER OF A MAN,
HE WAS INTERRED IN THIS PLACE BY HIS OWN DESIRE
ON THE 20TH OF SEPTEMBER,
1822.¹⁹

His mother Reyna also lies buried in the same cemetery as her son. The inscription on her burial stone tells nearly all we know of the wife of Rabbi Isaac Touro. It reads:

BENEATH ARE DEPOSITED
THE REMAINS OF
MRS. REYNA,
THE WORTHY RELICT OF
REV. ISAAC TOURO,
WHO DIED AT BOSTON ON THE
14TH OF TISHRI A. M. 5548

¹⁷ Among his bequests were the following: A fund of \$10,000 to support the Synagogue at Newport; \$5,000 for the care of the Newport Cemetery; \$10,000 to the Massachusetts General Hospital; \$5,000 to the Boston Female Asylum; \$5,000 to the Asylum for Indigent Boys; \$5,000 to the Humane Society, and \$10,000 to a Synagogue in New York City.

¹⁸ Not December as is erroneously stated by me in *The Menorah*, June, 1903, p. 3.

¹⁹ *Rhode Island Historical Magazine*, Vol. VI, pp. 101, 102.

AND THE 28TH OF SEPTEMBER, 1787.
Æ 44 YEARS.
THE MEMORY OF THE JUST
IS BLESSED.²⁰

Moses M. Hays, her brother, died in 1805. His tombstone inscription runs in Hebrew:

"The exalted Moses Michael, son of Judah, liberated for Paradise on Friday, the 11th day of Iyar, 5565, and the days of his life were sixty-six years. The memory of the just is blessed. May his soul lie bound in the bands of life."

Then in English:

HERE
REPOSES THE ASHES OF MOSES MICHAEL HAYS, ESQUIRE,
WHO DIED IN BOSTON,
IN THE STATE OF MASSACHUSETTS,
ON THE 11TH DAY OF IYAR²¹
A. M. 5565,
THE 9TH DAY OF MAY, 1805, OF THE CHRISTIAN ERA,
AGED LXVI YEARS.²²

His wife, Rachel, followed him five years after. The English on her tombstone reads:

THE REMAINS
OF
MRS. RACHEL HAYS,
RELICT OF MOSES M. HAYS, ESQ.,
WERE CONVEYED FROM BOSTON,
AND INTERRED HERE.
SHE DIED ON SATURDAY, THE FIRST DAY OF TISHRI²³
A. M. 5571,
CORRESPONDING TO THE 29TH OF SEPT'R., 1810,
OF THE CHRISTIAN ERA.
AGED 72 YEARS.²⁴

²⁰ Ibid., pp. 99, 100.

²¹ This word is in Hebrew characters.

²² *Rhode Island Historical Magazine*, Vol. VI, p. 96.

²³ This word is in Hebrew characters.

²⁴ *Rhode Island Historical Magazine*, Vol. VI, p. 97.

After the death of their parents, the Hays children left Boston, where they were well known and highly respected. An interesting glimpse into the home life of the Hays is given in the "Life of Samuel J. May,"² which is so entertaining that it is given in full:

If the children of my day were taught among other foolish things, to dread, if not despise, Jews, a very different lesson was impressed upon my young heart. There was but one family of the despised children of the house of Israel resident in Boston, the family of Moses Michael Hays; a man much respected, not only on account of his large wealth, but for his many personal virtues and the high culture and great excellence of his wife, his son Judah, and his daughters especially Catherine and Slowey. His home far down on Hanover street, then one of the fashionable streets of the town, was the abode of hospitality, and his family moved in what were the first circles of society. He and his truly good wife were hospitable, not only to the rich alone, but also to the poor. Many indigent families were fed pretty regularly from his table. These would come especially after his frequent dinner parties, and were sure to be made welcome, not to the crumbs only, but to ampler portions of the food that might be left.

Always, on Saturday, he expected a number of friends to dine with him. A full-length table was always spread and loaded with the luxuries of the season, and he loved to sit surrounded by a few regular visitors and others especially invited. My father was a favorite guest. He was regarded by Mr. Hays and his whole family as a particular friend, their chosen counsellor in times of perplexity, and their comforter in the days of their affliction. My father seldom failed to dine at Mr. Hays on Saturday, and often took me with him; for he was sure I should meet refined company there.

Both uncle and aunt Hays (for so I called them) were fond of children, particularly of me; and I was permitted to stay with them several days and even weeks, together, and I can never forget, not merely their kind, but their conscientious care of me. I was the child of Christian parents and they took especial pains that I should lose nothing of my religious training so long as I was permitted to abide with them. Every night I was required, on going to bed, to repeat my Christian hymn and prayer with

² pp. 13, 14.

them, or else to an excellent Christian servant woman who lived with them many years. I witnessed their religious exercises, their fastings and prayers, and was made to feel that they worshiped the Unseen Almighty and All-merciful One. Of course, I grew up without any prejudice against the Jews, or any other religionists, because they did not believe as my father and mother believed.

Much research has failed to find any other distinctly Jewish family in Boston during the time that the Hays and the Touroes resided there, so the statement of the Rev. May that the family of Moses Michael Hays was the only Jewish home-circle in Boston at that time must be taken as true. There is, however, on a tombstone²⁶ in Newport Cemetery, the mention of the death in Boston in the year 5580 (1820) of "Fegla, wife of Mordecai, son of Elchanan,"²⁷ but it continues to explain that she was the "Relict of Mr. Marcus Elkan, late of Richmond, Virginia, who in the 60th year of her age departed this life at Boston on the 1st May, 1820." This would lead us to believe that Mrs. Elkan died while on a visit to Mr. Abraham Touro.

Of the five daughters of Moses M. Hays, Rebecca died unmarried in Boston on July 23d, 1802, aged thirty-three years.²⁸ Slowey and Catherine both died unmarried in Richmond, Va., the latter reaching the age of seventy-seven years.²⁹ The remaining two, Judith and Sally, were both married in Richmond, Va., to gentlemen by the name of Myers. Judah, the only son, who inherited the greater part of his father's wealth, died on May 1st, 1832, and was laid to rest in the cemetery that contained the remains of his parents and sisters. With the death of the only son of Moses Michael Hays there came to an end the small but important Jewish community which made Boston their home for nearly a half century.

²⁶ *Rhode Island Historical Magazine*, Vol. VI, p. 101.

²⁷ This is in Hebrew.

²⁸ *Rhode Island Historical Magazine*, Vol. VI, p. 96.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

After the death of the younger Hays there was not, to my knowledge, any resident members of the Jewish faith in Boston until the beginning of the German emigration in the early forties.

It was in 1842 when the first contingent of German Jews settled in Boston. Just which one was the first to arrive cannot be stated with certainty, since Mr. Jacob Norton and William Goldsmith, both now dead, claimed the distinction. But both must have come about the same time, for each conceded that the other arrived but a few days later than he had.²⁰ They were quickly followed by others, so that in September, 1842, the New Year's Festival was ushered in with services in the home of Mr. Peter Spitz, on Fort Hill, Roxbury. Beside Mr. Spitz there were William Goldsmith, Moses Ehrlich, Hyman Spitz, Bernard Fox, Charles Hyneman, Jacob Norton, Isaac Wolf and Abraham F. Block.²¹ To complete the necessary ten required for the service, Dr. Rosenstein, of Worcester, Massachusetts, was brought to Boston.²² On May 24, 1843, while celebrating the circumcision of Mr. Peter Spitz's first son, the first child to arrive among the new community, the Jewish residents of Boston resolved to form a congregation. Moses Ehrlich was elected its first president, and a Mr. Salig, who had formerly performed a similar office in Albany, was selected to conduct divine services for the new-born House of the Lord. Prayers of the new congregation, named "Ohabei Shalom," were conducted in a room in the house of the new rabbi, on Carver street. Soon after, the room of worship was transferred to a house on Albany Street,

²⁰ Solomon Schindler, "Israelites in Boston, A Tale Describing the Development of Judaism in Boston." The best account of the period from 1840 to 1890.

²¹ *Boston Daily Herald*, August 9, 1903, also in "The History of Temple Ohabei Shalom" by S. Simmons.

²² This information was kindly supplied by Mr. Isaac Rosnosky and others.

near Kneeland Street. About the same time²² a cemetery was laid out on a tract of 10,000 square feet purchased from the East Boston Land Company. The small square was situated at the corner of Byron and Homer Streets on Noodle Island, or East Boston. The sum paid for this tract of land was \$200. The cemetery was formally created by the vote of the Board of Aldermen of Boston on October 5, 1844. Thus the first Jewish burial ground was established in Boston. In 1845 the Congregation "Ohabei Shalom" was granted a charter by the Massachusetts Legislature. Six years later, 1851, the congregation built a small frame building for itself on Warrenton (then known as Warren) Street. This was the first out-and-out synagogue in Massachusetts.

Things went on smoothly for a while. The Synagogue prospered as the Jewish community in Boston increased. But this influx soon brought with it the inevitable dissension which is bound to arise on questions of dogma and ceremonialism in a large Jewish community. The upshot of it all was that those who wished to change the old Orthodox rites stepped down and out and formed themselves into the Congregation "Adath Israel." It leased a house on Pleasant Street and bought a burial ground of its own in Wakefield. Joseph Schoninger was elected its first regular rabbi, and served for twenty years, when he was succeeded in 1874 by Rabbi Solomon Schindler, now the superintendent of the Leopold Morse Home at Mattapan. The Reform in the Synagogue begun by Rabbi Schoninger was greatly extended by Rabbi Schindler. To-day the Temple Adath Israel is the only strictly Reform synagogue in Massachusetts.

The parent body, "Ohabei Shalom," despite the "secession," grew larger until they outgrew the small wooden place which they had built, and in 1862 they moved into the place of worship formerly occupied by the Fifth Universalist Society.

²² On July 25, 1844, ("A Topographical and Historical Description of Boston" by Nathaniel B. Shurtleff, Boston, 1871).

This new Synagogue was also on Warrenton Street. Their present temple is on Union Park Street.

By 1856 the Jewish residents had increased, making necessary the erection of a third Synagogue. The Congregation "Mishkan Israel" was formed, but its existence was rather precarious until 1870, when it purchased a place of worship on Ash Street. By 1875 several other congregations and smaller groups of worshipers were formed, all of the Orthodox type.

From the first comers in 1842 until 1875, the Jews in Boston were too busy with clearing away the ground for a permanent commercial and social growth to enter into the political or artistic life of the city. But in 1872, Mr. Leopold Morse, without the usual preliminary political apprenticeship, was nominated for Congress by the Democrats in a strong Republican district. He was defeated; in 1874 he was again nominated and again defeated; but in 1876 he was elected by a majority of 1200 votes, thus beginning a political career "without a parallel in New England public affairs."⁴⁴ But by 1875 the Jews in Boston, numbering several thousand, were firmly intrenched in their new home, the preliminary work of taking root among a new people was successful, and from that time until to-day the Jews have constantly increased both in number and in influence, taking their part not only in the commercial, but in the social, artistic and literary life of Boston.

⁴⁴ "Massachusetts of To-day," Boston, 1892, p. 134. For a full account of the life of Morse, see my pamphlet "Leopold Morse."