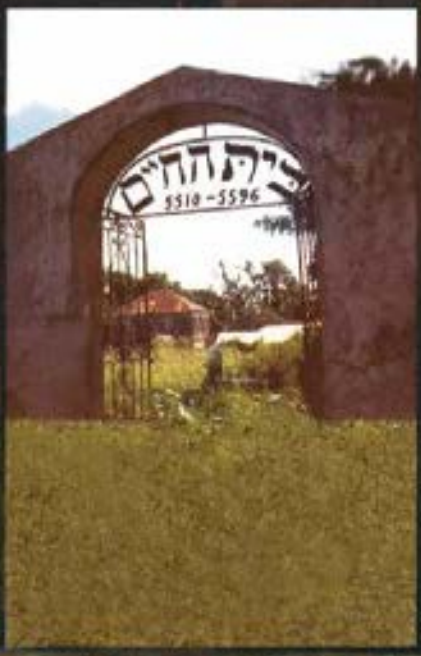
500 YEARS IN THE JEWISH CARIBBEAN:

THE SPANISH & PORTUGUESE JEWS IN THE WEST INDIES



HARRY A. EZRATTY

500 YEARS IN THE JEWISH CARIBBEAN:

THE SPANISH AND PORTUGUESE JEWS IN THE WEST INDIES

Harry A. Ezratty

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The Spanish and Portuguese Jews in the West Indies

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DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to my father, Joseph (Pepo) Ezratty (1904-1998), whose family reluctantly left Spain in 1492, finally settling in the Ottoman Empire, in the city of Salonica.

For more than 400 years, each male born into the family was duly registered with the Spanish consul of that city. The practice stopped when Pop moved to America, but he always took great care to instruct me in my Jewish and Sephardic heritage.

Acknowledgements

I thank Gloria Sanchez, for her dedication in the preparation of the first edition of this book (she tells me she learned much about the Jewish people while in front of her computer); Alan Hirsch for designing an eye-catching and pertinent cover; and José Kercadó and Deborah Lewis for the interior design.

Many thanks, too, to Barbara Tasch Ezratty, my wife and editor. As a professional writer, she led me through many parts of the book with kindness and understanding. Her patience and encouragement made my work much easier.

And finally, thanks to all the people I've met and spoken with throughout the islands, whose names may not appear in the book but who, for more than three decades, have helped me increase my knowledge of the Caribbean.

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INTRODUCTION

In the fall of 1991, the adult education chairperson of Temple Beth Shalom in San Juan, Puerto Rico asked me to prepare a program celebrating the role of the Jews in Caribbean history. The project was scheduled for 1992, in time for celebrations surrounding the discovery of the New World by Christopher Columbus 500 years earlier.

I mounted photographs and documents of Jewish life covering those 500 years, highlighting islands in the West Indies in which Jewish communities once flourished or still thrive. Accompanying the exhibit was my 20-page pamphlet, "500 Years in the Jewish Caribbean." I also lectured on the topic. To prepare all of this, I catalogued the photographs, documents, pamphlets, letters, books, newspaper and magazine articles concerning West Indian Jewry in my personal collection, as well as notes of conversations held with residents of the Caribbean over a 30-year period.

I have always been fascinated with the impact a small band of Sephardim (Jews of Spanish and Portuguese origin) made on the Americas from the 17th to 19th centuries. The history of their sojourn in the Caribbean Basin honors the Jewish people, for they paved the way for freedoms now taken for granted by all Jews of the Western Hemisphere.

Processing all this information reaffirmed for me certain facts: Caribbean Sephardim, from Colonial times to the end of the 19th century, were a close-knit group. Their common languages were Portuguese, Hebrew, Spanish and English. They maintained solid business and family contacts throughout the islands, even to the American mainland. These connections helped them in business and kept their bloodlines going for many generations. They knew no political boundaries, moving

back and forth between English, French, Dutch and Danish islands and the colonial American mainland as easily as we travel by jet today.

Finally, history tells us that from the beginning of their arrival in the Caribbean, Jews fought to gain a significant degree of liberty and religious freedom. To be sure, they were saddled with civil disabilities by their governments. Early in their Caribbean experience, they lobbied governments to be allowed to own land, farm, sit on juries, vote, and bear arms to defend their homes and property.

Most of these rights and obligations were then unknown to European Jews, who were only just emerging from medieval political strictures. In the Caribbean, Moses Delgado won the vote for Jamaican Jews; Campoe Sabbatha led the British navy against the Spaniards, and was instrumental in freeing his fellow Marranos from Spanish-dominated Jamaica; and Captain Isaac Pinto in Surinam led an intrepid militia of Jewish plantation owners, defending their homes against pirates, Indians, slave revolts and the neighboring French. More than one writer has said these Sephardim were the world's first modern Jews.

Caribbean Jews voted earlier than their European cousins and, having won these rights, quickly jumped into the political, social and commercial life of their islands. So integrated were they that there have been few examples of anti-Semitism in the Caribbean. No West Indian government ever passed an anti-Jewish law following the infamous French Code Noir of 1685. (See the section on Martinique and Guadeloupe for a discussion of the Code Noir.)

Here, then, is the book that developed from my earlier writings on the subject. It is intended to give readers an overview of the essence of the remarkable and exciting five hundred year experience of Jews in the Caribbean.

In writing this introduction, I was reminded of when I took my children back to my old neighborhood, to show them where I grew up: where the movie houses and restaurants once were;

the streets I walked and played on; the synagogue I went to; the house I lived in and the school where I studied. The children saw only run-down streets and buildings. The restaurants are no longer there; the schoolhouse was razed years earlier; the synagogue is now a Baptist temple. Only a few of the old buildings and businesses remained, still dedicated to their old functions. They are islands in a sea of change.

From the 17th to the 19th centuries, the Caribbean was a Jewish neighborhood. It has since changed. Sometimes a building still remains in use after hundreds of years but, mostly, the buildings and other sites have fallen into disuse. Why should an old Jewish neighborhood in the Caribbean be different from one in New York, Chicago, Los Angeles or Detroit?

Read further and you will learn what the "old neighborhood" was like and meet the people who once lived there. You'll also meet the people who remained.

Harry A. Ezratty
San Juan, Puerto Rico
1997

Preface to Second Edition

Reader reaction to the publication of this book's first edition was interesting. Puerto Rican colleagues I have known for decades related that they had been told by grandparents and great-grandparents that they were Jewish, or that a Jewish thread ran through their lineage. Their comments were always positive. I felt an affirmation on their part that we shared a common Hispanic history.

One caller, a member of the Dominguez Wolff family of Puerto Rico, related an interesting story, one I never would have documented from available records.

His great-grandfather, a Wolff from St. Thomas, married his great-grandmother, a De Castro from that same island. Both families were well known and distinguished members of the St. Thomas Jewish community. In 1833, a Wolff served as president of the St. Thomas congregation and contributed $300 to the construction of the island's historic synagogue.[1]

Fifty years later, during the last years of the Spanish colonial period, the Wolffs intended to establish a plantation on the island of Puerto Rico. They entered Puerto Rico through the satellite island of Vieques, off the main coast. Vieques was sparsely populated. There would have been a minimum presence of Spanish officialdom and security present.

In order to buy land in the Spanish colony of Puerto Rico, the Wolffs were required to affirm they were Catholics. There was probably little scrutiny or concern for the truth or falsity of such an undertaking. But had they not done so, under Spanish law the Wolffs could not legally buy or own land in Puerto Rico. The descendents of the Wolffs living in Puerto Rico today are all Catholics.

Members of the Bravo family, also of Puerto Rico, lay claim to Jewish descent. This knowledge has been passed down through generations.

Through a mutual friend, I made contact with Jill Tattersall,

an historian in Tortola, British Virgin Islands. She maintains there are no records of any existing Jewish cemeteries, synagogues or other communal structures on these islands. There were, however, Jews living in Tortola by the middle of the 17th Century. There is documentation verifying the presence of Sephardic bankers during this period and evidence of them later being driven off by marauding Spaniards. Most refugees sought safety in nearby St. Thomas, or Dutch St. Eustatius.

Ms. Tattersall advises that one Abraham Mendes Bellisario was known to be Jewish. He was a leading resident of Tortola and a respected Road Town merchant. He must have been an outstanding citizen. In 1814, he was appointed Marshall of the Court of Vice-Admiralty, an important English tribunal at the time, especially in the West Indies where shipping was of great importance.

At the request of his descendants, she tried unsuccessfully to locate Bellisario's grave, and those of other Jews who may have lived on this English island colony.[2]

A review of registered graves in the Jewish cemeteries of Barbados and St. Thomas reveals several Mendes Belisarios or Belessarios buried there. And a Henry Mendes Belissario shows up as a bridegroom in 1862 in the Curaçao Marriage Register.

Differences in spelling should be of no importance. The 1800s was an age in which spelling was not a refined art. So the Belissarios were well known West Indian Jews who settled throughout the islands. They followed the traditions of many other Jewish families who could point to relatives across the Caribbean.

Further research into Jamaican Jewry reveals that the national artist for that nation, Isaac Mendes Belisario, was a member of the Jewish community. He was famous for painting Jamaican Blacks when they were emerging from slavery in the mid-1800s, with compassion, wit and understanding. [3]

I learned about Mendes Belisario through a slim volume

called, "The Spanish and Portuguese Jews in the Postage Stamps," by Mordehay Arbell. This interesting book is printed in three languages, Hebrew, English and Ladino, the latter being the language of the Sephardic Diaspora.

Arbell, an Israeli diplomat, is knowledgeable about the region's Jewry. In his book, I read of Dr. Juan Lindo, jurist, educator and president of both El Salvador (1841-1842) and then, amazingly, of Honduras from 1847-1852.[4]

Lindo was a descendant of Sephardim, as was Moises F. DaCosta Gomez, one of modern Curaçao's great leaders. Another Caribbean educator and political leader who has West Indian Sephardic roots is Pedro Henriquez Urena, a past president of the Dominican Republic.[5] Another family from Curaçao, the Shalom Delvalles, were to later have the honor of seeing one of their descendants, Max Shalom Delvalle, become the first Jewish president of Panama.[6]

A grand picture emerges, which by itself could be the subject of another book: the contemporary impact of West Indian Sephardim across their region. The story would be one of Jews and non-Jews now living throughout the islands who can trace their ancestry to early Sephardim and who are still making significant contributions to their island nations. The tale could extend to Central America, as Arbell has shown us, including Panama. While not strictly speaking West Indian, Central America has much Jewish history in common with the islands.

The most exciting new material of all is Cuba. Events for the Jewish community there now move with such speed, anything written today will have changed within a month. The changes are mostly all positive.

During those dark days of Cuba's isolation from the West, only three synagogues in all of Cuba remained open: Havana's *Shevet Ahim*; *Adath Israel*; and *La Patronata*. Since the publication of the first edition of this book, all three have seen increases in membership and activity. Bar Mitzvahs, weddings, circumcisions and other religious rites are now celebrated reg-

ularly. A cadre of volunteer rabbis, many Chasidic, from Canada, Mexico and elsewhere make regular visits to Cuba to service the blossoming community. American children, through their Jewish religious schools, make regular visits to Cuba, bringing food, pharmaceuticals and religious texts. [7]

From the 700 known Jews in 1991, the population had increased to 1,800 in 1997. There are reasons for the dramatic rise: gentile spouses of mixed marriages are converting; Jews who for decades maintained silence have come out into the open. And outside Havana, the city of Santiago has reopened the doors of its synagogue after having been closed for over 20 years. A new synagogue is being built in Camaguey to accommodate that small Jewish community.[8]

It is not illogical to expect more Jews to soon surface with all of this increased and vigorous religious activity. As predicted in the first edition of this book, Cuba should soon become the Caribbean's leading Jewish community, providing its amazing rebirth continues.

In this edition of my book, the bibliography has been expanded to include more newspaper and magazine articles, current books and conversations and letters. In addition, footnotes have been added to the text to enable readers to investigate this fascinating history in greater depth. And, of course, wherever necessary, there have been updates of island life, including the addition of the Bahamas, which while geographically not in the Caribbean, are islands that have much in common with the West Indies.

Finally, having revisited many of these historic sites between the first and second editions and reading extensively about the conditions of others I could not get to, it is certain that these unique monuments of the Jewish people are in peril. Aside from environmental assaults, the existing Jewish communities, which are in custody of these treasures, are so small they find it difficult to finance their preservation. On islands where there is no Jewish community, such as Nevis and St.

Eustatius, the goodwill of governments who understand their custodial obligations cannot be depended upon indefinitely.

I hope this book will help in some way to set before the public the condition of these historic monuments so a greater interest will help to preserve them for posterity.

Harry A. Ezratty
Baltimore, Maryland
2002

A New Diaspora: Spain 1492

In 1391, the Archdeacon of *Ecija* harangued Seville's Christians until they became an anti-Jewish mob: this event had significance that extended far beyond its immediate importance.

The mob ran wild through the *Juderia* (Jewish quarter), leaping from Seville to all of Spain: to Cordova, Toledo, and Barcelona, even to the island of Mallorca. Wherever it went, it attacked Jews, destroying their homes and looting their property. Vandals dragged Jewish families into the streets and handed them over to frenzied crowds.

It was the most concentrated anti-Jewish attack by Christians on the Iberian Peninsula. There had been anti-Jewish riots in Spain before, but none had been as ferocious or as long lasting as the countrywide turmoil of 1391.

From written accounts, the only way to escape alive was to submit to baptism: to accept Christianity. For many, it was a desperate act of self-preservation. Spanish Jews, also known as *Sephardim* from the Hebrew word for Iberia, had lived on the Iberian Peninsula in relative peace for centuries, never victim to the vicious anti-Semitic pressures their Central and Eastern European cousins lived with. Mob tactics of this sort were new to them. Perhaps Spanish Jews were not equipped to withstand these pressures: their reaction was to give in to the conversion demands.[1]

Over the next one hundred years, many descendants of

those who reluctantly accepted Christianity continued to practice Judaism in secret. But as outwardly professing Catholics, new social and economic opportunities were now legally open to them. Rising in power and influence throughout Spain, they were represented at court, in business and even in the Church. But despite their conversion, the perceived stigma of a Jewish past clung to them. They were derisively known as "New Christians," "Secret Jews," or "*Marranos*," the latter a degrading term meaning swine. It was a name Jews themselves would later use with pride.[2]

By the mid-15th Century, alarmed Christians sought to curb the power of the rising Marrano class by forcing their strict adherence to the principles of the Church. In 1480, Queen Isabella and King Ferdinand issued commissions, under authority of a Papal Bull, permitting Spanish clerics to organize an Inquisition to detect and punish heretics within the Catholic Church. Punishment could be death or loss of property and public penance of the most humiliating sort. During this period, the Church was at least as powerful as the Crown and shared confiscated Jewish property with the state.[3]

Practicing Jews, however, were outside the Inquisition's grasp. It was no secret that they were helping New Christians. Within Marrano circles were relatives, friends and business associates who secretly clung to their old religion, and Jews who sympathized with their difficult position.

It was an intolerable situation for the Church: the Inquisition had no jurisdiction over Jews. Tomas de Torquemada, an influential priest (himself possibly of Jewish antecedents) solved the problem: he proposed the expulsion of Jews from all of Spain.[4] Expulsion would at once remove the support system which nourished Marranos: it would rid the country of Jews and would allow the confiscation and division of their properties between Church and Crown at a time when funds were needed to pay for Spain's war against the Arabs.

By 1492, all political factors were in place for

Torquemada's plan. The Spanish army destroyed the last Moslem enclave at Granada. Spain could now enlarge and secure its borders and unite all its separate kingdoms into one nation. Spain would be bound by language and religion. The Expulsion would forever rid Spain of Jews and Moslems.

The Crown signed the Expulsion Decree of 1492. Stripped of all Jewish support, New Christians were defenseless before the Inquisition. Practicing Jews fled east, to the Ottoman Empire. Others converted in order to remain. A significant minority fled to Portugal. But sanctuary there was brief. In 1497, Spain pressured Portugal to install its own Inquisition as part of the political price for the union of their royal houses in marriage.[5]

Portuguese Jews had no choices. King Manoel, aware that his Jewish subjects were valuable, would not allow them to leave and ordered they all be converted. Each and every Jew in Portugal who protested was dragged to the baptismal font and forcibly baptized.

Portuguese Jews were not like the Spanish Jews who had elected to remain in Spain: Portuguese Jews had no choice. Many remained Jews in secret.[6]

By the end of the 15th century, there were no openly professing Jews on the Iberian Peninsula. The Expulsion of 1492 and the 1497 conversions dropped the curtain on more than one thousand years of Hispanic Jewish life.

Simultaneous with the Decree of Expulsion, Christopher Columbus was authorized to sail west to contact Asian lands and rulers. His voyage opened a new chapter in Jewish history, one that would propel Jews to their greatest freedom.

To understand the Jewish role in Columbus' discovery of the New World, we must examine some New Christians in the Spanish Court and Jews whose scientific discoveries were to have a great influence on the Admiral.

* Luis de Santangel, Gabriel Sanchez, and other descendants of converted Jews who were members of Ferdinand and

Isabella's court, undertook to raise the necessary cash for Columbus' enterprise. Contrary to what children in elementary school have been taught, Isabela never pledged her jewels or anything else of value for that matter, to underwrite Columbus' voyage; [7]

* Abraham Senior, a rabbi and Queen Isabella's long-time advisor, (who later converted in order to remain in Spain) also urged the Crown to back Columbus; [8]

* The Crescas family, known as "the map Jews", whose charts and navigational instruments were used by Columbus; [9]

* Abraham Zacuto, one of the Iberian Peninsula's leading astronomers and a geographer who, in addition to refining the Astrolabe (a medieval wooden version of the sextant), also provided Columbus with his "Tables of Zacuto."

By measuring the rising and setting of the sun and moon and the positions of important stars, the Tables were of great use to Columbus and later to Vasco de Gama. On one occasion, Zacuto's Tables predicted an eclipse, which saved Columbus' life. He was able to correctly predict that event to hostile Caribbean natives who, awed by what they believed to be his magical powers, became docile.[10]

Zacuto refused to convert and fled from Iberia to exile in North Africa and the Ottoman Empire, where he spent the remainder of his life teaching in obscurity at small schools and academies.[11]

At the close of the 15th Century, the world was a grim place for Jews. During the preceding four hundred years, they had been expelled from every country in Western Europe, forbidden to return. Until 1492 and 1497, Spain and Portugal had been safe places. Now, Turkey and its conquered territories along the North African coast offered the only haven.

Scores of thousands of forcibly converted Jews were trapped in Spain and Portugal, their position intolerable. The Inquisition was tracking them down and swiftly eliminating all hidden traces of Judaism from Hispanic society.

It was Columbus' "discovery" of a new world that gave Sephardim new hope and the greatest outlet for their talents and for religious liberty.

100 Years of Hiding in the Caribbean

It is no small irony that Luis de Torres may have been the first European to walk upon the soil of the New World on October 12, 1492. He was not only a member of Columbus' crew, he was Jewish.[1]

As a practicing Jew, de Torres would not have been permitted to live in any Spanish territory, let alone sail on the expedition of discovery. To leave Spain with the crew, de Torres had to accept Christianity before sailing. It is said he was baptized at the dock as the squadron was about to leave on what was to become one of the world's great voyages.

De Torres signed on as ship's interpreter. Fluent in Hebrew and Arabic, it was expected that he would use these languages as the Admiral's voice before the rulers of the East.[2]

There may have been as many as four others in the crew who, like de Torres, were Jews who converted. At least two, Mestre Bernal, the flotilla's surgeon and its doctor, Marco, have been documented as Marranos.[3]

The enterprising de Torres, when he had no official duties in Cuba to keep him busy, soon became acquainted with the dried tobacco leaf that Cuban natives rolled, burned and inhaled with great pleasure. He remained in the Caribbean cultivating tobacco, one of the West Indies' first European colonists, the first in a long series of Jewish planters in the Caribbean.

For one hundred years, Jews who sailed to the New World were forced to hide their true religion. That was the price exacted to escape the Inquisition in Spain and Portugal. Discovery of

this secret could mean death, as first the Spanish and then the Portuguese Inquisitions followed them across the Atlantic Ocean.

Jews in the Caribbean during the 1500s hid their true religion to escape torture, murder or, at the very least, confiscation of their property. The Crown became so alarmed at the number of New Christians seeking to colonize the New World, it issued edicts preventing them from doing so.[4]

In one of the most dramatic actions by the Inquisition in the New World, members of the Carvajal family of Mexico, headed by the Governor of Nuevo Leon, Luis de Carvajal, were burned, hung and hounded for over a decade for their religious beliefs. The Inquisition began its investigation of this family in 1589, alternately torturing and executing all of them until 1601, when Mariana de Carvajal, the last of the family, was strangled and then burned in a mass *Auto de Fe* (ritual burning of victims.)[5]

Inquisition records reveal that secret Jews were discovered and tried in Hispaniola, Cuba, Puerto Rico, Trinidad and Jamaica. The threat of discovery was paramount to all Marranos living in the New World. But in 1588, a significant event occurred, one that would affect the entire Caribbean and the future of its Jewish presence.

Sir Frances Drake and his British privateers swept Spain's Armada from the English Channel. Helped by a violent storm, they sunk the Armada to the bottom of the Channel. Spanish sailors and ships washed ashore as far West as Ireland. Spain would never again regain its strength and position as Europe's most powerful force in the Caribbean.

Without commanding sea power, Spain could no longer protect all her interests in the West Indies. Once the only colonial power in the Caribbean, she was now forced to focus on the larger islands of the Greater Antilles: Jamaica, Cuba, Hispaniola, Puerto Rico and, further to the south, Trinidad. There, the wealth of her colonies could be consolidated.

Spain's rivals, England, France, Holland and Denmark rushed in to fill the vacuum south of the Greater Antilles. By the 17th Century, Spain had lost control of every island south of Puerto Rico except Trinidad. In the Greater Antilles, she lost half of Hispaniola to the French, and Jamaica to the English. She finally surrendered Trinidad to Great Britain in the early 1800s.

At the same time, the still-practicing secret Jews of Spain and Portugal were filtering out of the Iberian Peninsula. Some sailed east to the Ottoman Empire but most fled to safety in Holland, Germany, Denmark and later, England. During the 17th Century, these latter countries were leaders of the Protestant Revolution: they were outside the grasp of the Catholic Church and its Inquisition.

Western European Protestants could tolerate Jews as long as they did not call attention to themselves with public prayer or the building of synagogues. Even Catholic Italy, a mosaic of city-states, was eager to welcome Jews because of their commercial contacts and far-reaching influence with the Ottoman Empire.

The Jews remaining in Spain and Portugal led double lives. If they traveled abroad with intent to return, they would assume Jewish identities and aliases. When they returned to Iberia, they resumed their Christian lives and names. Caribbean Sephardim would later use this device in a more complicated way. Dealing with Christians in Spanish America, they had to conceal their Jewishness. Sometimes it was prudent to behave as a Christian even among friends. The Inquisition relied on its agents and friends abroad to advise them of Spanish and Portuguese travelers maintaining contacts with overseas Jewish communities.

Sephardim often bore Hebrew first names like Elihu, Solomon, Isaac or Moshe. Families might have place names like Toledo, Sevillano or Murciano; trade names like Mercado, Herrera or Marino; or Arabic names, such as Abudiente or

Abulafia.[6]

To emphasize a family's commitment to Judaism, a Hebrew family name might also be added. Thus, the double family name, as in Cohen-Toledo, Levy-Rivera, or Aboab da Fonseca.

Completely new names were assumed and used when traveling or in business dealings, to prevent retaliation at home should one be discovered practicing Judaism abroad. Moses Cohen might become Antonio Vaez Enriquez, or Joshua Toledo (Toledo was a common Jewish name) might become Juan de la Madrid. The legendary Amsterdam ship owner, Manuel Rodrigues, was elsewhere known as Jacob Tirado. Tirado or Tyrado may also have assumed the names Guimes Lopez da Costa or Simon Lopez da Costa.[7]

Even children were drawn into the "game." One writer notes that when he asked some Marrano children their names, they countered with "which ones, our secret names or the ones we are known by?"[8]

One of the most intriguing examples of the use of double names may be found in the Barbados Jewish cemetery. On one bilingual gravestone, the name Joseph Jessurun Mendes is inscribed in Portuguese, the language used by the Jewish community in Barbados during the 17th and 18th centuries. On the same stone, which would have been read by Mendes' Christian business and social associates in the Caribbean, his name is given in English as Lewis Dias. Mendes/Dias died in 1699. He was one of the founders of the Barbados Jewish community and was earlier active in the Recife synagogue in Brazil.[9]

Another more famous user of the double name was Gideon Rowland. Known as Rohiel Abundiente within the Jewish community of Nevis, Rowland also lived in Barbados and the American colonies. He retired to London a wealthy man and a pillar of Spanish-Jewish life. His son went on to become an advisor to the English crown. Rowland's first wife's grave can be seen in Nevis. She was buried under the name of Batsheva Abundiente.[10]

It was in Holland during the late 16th and 17th centuries that Jews enjoyed their greatest freedom in Europe. At first, refugee Sephardim had a problem in Amsterdam. They arrived seemingly Spanish Catholics. Holland had recently won independence from the Spaniards, renounced Catholicism, and accepted Protestantism. Hence, new Catholic refugees were not sympathetically received.

Early Jewish prayer groups in Amsterdam were broken up, the leaders arrested. But it soon became obvious to the Dutch that these new immigrants were what they claimed to be, "Roman Catholics without faith and Jews without knowledge but wishing to be Jews." The Old Testament was important to the Dutch in the practice of their own religion and they began to see Jews differently, and to accept them.[11]

As a result of this Open Door policy, Amsterdam developed into an important Jewish center, complete with significant religious institutions and leaders. To the Jews, it was "the New Jerusalem."[12]

Dutch Jews became financially active in the Dutch West India Company, which was then colonizing former Spanish islands in the Caribbean. The old ignorance about Sephardim and their real religious alliances existed in Holland's colonies however, and Sephardim had to struggle for early liberties there. Peter Stuyvesant, the Dutch Governor of New Amsterdam (later New York) and subsequently of Curaçao, lost his battles to have them removed as colonists.

Jews became very active not only in Holland but in its colonies as well. The Dutch decided as early as 1588 that in their relationship with the Sephardim, the government of the Netherlands would extend diplomatic and military recognition to all Jews. At a time when Jews had no European citizenship, pirates and privateers could take Jews and their property for ransom without any official protest. The Dutch, then, were the first European power to cloak Jews with this important govern-

mental protection.[13]

The adventurous Sephardim understood the opportunities and the chance for freedom that could be forged in the New Lands. This dream impelled them to begin the first open migration of Jews to the New World. Their arrival in Dutch territories, beginning with Recife (now part of Brazil) in 1630, marked the first open westward migration of Jews. It continued through the 19th and 20th centuries, as millions came to America.

Spanish and Portuguese Jews were so widely known, their true religion was no longer a secret in most places to which they traveled. Among international traders, they were called the "Portuguese Nation." Indeed, in a sense they were a nation. They created and maintained an extensive network among themselves, which ran from Spain, Portugal and Europe to the Ottoman Empire and later to the Americas. They kept, through familial connections and business ties, their common Hispanic background, Marrano experience and, of course, their religion.[14]

To be known as Portuguese among Christians was synonymous with being a Jew. Family names such as Henriques, Robles, Mendes, Nuñes, Castro and Ribera were well known as Sephardic patronyms.[15]

Sephardim referred to themselves as "*La Nación*." It was an exclusive club. Its members, from the 1600s on, almost always founded the earliest Jewish settlements in Western Europe and the Western Hemisphere, and earned the choicest commercial and social positions within these new communities.

Recife: Cradle of Caribbean Jewry; Rock of Israel

Marranos had been living secretly in Portuguese Brazil as early as 1502. As New Christians, they were able to settle by Royal Grant. But within three decades, the Inquisition had been installed, driving practicing Jews underground.[1]

New Christians such as Salvador Correia were operating sugar mills and sailing ships, exporting sugar to Europe. But the Brazilian Inquisition dealt harshly with secret Jews - when it could find them.

More Jews came to Recife, and freedom, with the Dutch West India Trading Company in 1630, following Holland's capture of the Southwestern territory of Pernambuco from Portugal. For almost a quarter century, Recife's Jews engaged in sugar cultivation, finance, export and the slave trade. They built a synagogue, *Tzur Israel* (Rock of Israel). They opened a religious school and by 1642 brought a rabbi from Amsterdam. Isaac Aboab de Fonseca, together with a *hazzan* Moses Rafael de Aguilar, who ministered to their congregations in the New World. They were the first rabbi and hazzan in the Western Hemisphere.

De Fonseca was twenty-four when he came to Recife, and was the community's rabbi for thirteen years. Aside from being the first rabbi in the New World, he is the author of the oldest known Hebrew document in the Americas.[2] Aboab de Fonseca later became Chief Rabbi of Amsterdam. [3]

Altogether, approximately 1,500 to 5,000 Sephardim settled in Recife, numbering at times one-third to one-half of the

colony's European population.[4]

But the Portuguese did not surrender easily. Incited by a religious obligation to rid the conquered colony of its heretics, Jesuits spurred the Portuguese king on by reminding him that these Jews had escaped from Portugal in order to return to Judaism and thus required punishment.[5]

Their continuing guerrilla actions harassed the Dutch. Finally, after a quarter of a century of Dutch rule, Recife once more fell to the Portuguese. January 25, 1654 was a dismal day for the Recife Jews. After twenty-five years of Dutch occupation, Portuguese soldiers marched into their city and following the soldiers came the Inquisition and renewed Jewish persecution.

All Jews had to find a new home. The surrendering Dutch authorities insisted upon safe passage for its Jewish subjects, to which the Portuguese agreed, granting them a time limit within which to leave.[6]

The Portuguese destroyed all evidence of Jewish presence in Recife. We do not know where the old cemeteries were. No remains of the synagogue exist. Yet persistent rumors of a synagogue once located in the heart of Recife, a city today of one and a half million, were confirmed. In 1999, archeologists located a *mikveh* in the basement of a downtown commercial building on one of Recife's busiest streets, once known as Rua Do Judea (Street of the Jews) and now called The Street of the Benevolent Jesus.[7]

No one knows what the Western Hemisphere's first synagogue looked like, but we now know where the mikveh was located and its dimensions.[8]

This relatively small band of Sephardim who opted to remain in the Western Hemisphere became the nucleus of settlements which spread throughout the New World. At the time of the Recife Diaspora, the Caribbean already was divided between Holland, France, England, Denmark and Spain. Spanish islands, of course, were not open to Sephardim. French

territories were a bit friendlier but whatever doors may have been open were sealed in 1685 with the enactment of the infamous *Code Noir*, which banned Jewish settlement on French islands.

Holland, England and Denmark permitted Jewish immigration. It was obvious at the start of each country's colonizing efforts that some form of economic stability had to be established on islands thousands of miles from Europe. In the days when contact between Mother Country and colony was a month or more away by perilous sea voyage, it was essential that island economies be self-sufficient. It was believed that Jews could help accomplish this end.

West Indian Jews did perform this role well, and were rewarded with civil liberties and economic freedom much more quickly than Jews living in European lands. What ensued was a remarkable flowering of Caribbean Jewry. For over two centuries it dominated, influenced and shaped the force of Judaism in the entire New World. Members of *La Nación* became active in the "Royal Highway," the trading merchant's golden triangle that ran from England and Europe to the West Indies and from there to the American mainland.

Jews were traders on the sea. By establishing consortiums with other merchants, they could now own and operate their own vessels. They engaged in commercial trade with Europe. They were privateers, preying on vessels flying enemy flags - an honorable profession at the time. And they supplied the armed forces of any country, including the young rebels of the American nation, an act which in 1781 was to be the undoing of the Jews of St. Eustatius.

THE DUTCH CARIBBEAN:

SURINAM

CURACAO

ST. EUSTATIUS

SINT MAARTEN

ARUBA

Surinam

It all started here. Surinam was the first and is still the oldest continuous Jewish community in the West Indies.[1]

It is not geographically part of the Caribbean. Surinam, or Dutch Guyana as it was formerly known, lies east of Venezuela and about 300 miles south of Barbados. While Surinam is attached to the South American mainland, its 400,000 citizens do not share that continent's history of Spanish domination, revolution and language.

Surinam has always been West Indian because of its political and trading associations with Caribbean islands. Its Dutch associations detached it from the stormy politics of South America. In May 1993, Surinam filed for and received membership in CARICOM, the Caribbean Economic Community, and official recognition of her rightful place as a Caribbean nation.[2]

It was in Surinam where Jews first settled openly in any Caribbean community. The earliest recorded migration, in 1536, was made up of crypto-Jews fleeing the Inquisition newly installed in Brazil. In 1639, for the first time, a small group of openly professing Jews arrived in Surinam and founded a colony called Torarica. It is said that this name was derived from the words, "*torah rica*," which in the Spanish language is "rich Torah." At this time, Surinam was an English colony.

There had to have been some sort of formal community, since a *ketubah* (wedding contract) survives from the period. It was executed by rabbis and bears the date, 14 Elul 5403 (1643.)[3]

A second, more organized group arrived from England in 1652, under the sponsorship of the English Governor, Lord Willoughby. Through Willoughby's efforts, a permanent settlement was established in Surinam's interior. The colony at this time belonged to England.

Lord Willoughby ceded some remarkable rights to the Jews, to encourage settlement in this tropical wilderness. They were permitted religious freedom, including the right to construct their own house of worship, as well as political autonomy, the right of self-defense and ownership of agricultural tracts along the Cassipora creek by the Surinam River. A rich agricultural community flourished, called Joden Savanna (Savannah of the Jews.)[4]

The Jews organized their own militia. Early Jewish defenders led by Captain Isaac Pinto fought pirates, slave uprisings, Indians and French marauders from the nearby colony of French Guiana.[5]

A third and the most important wave of settlers came from Recife, led by David Nassi, also known as Joseph Nuñes de Fonseca. They became active in Joden Savanna and significantly enlarged its population and strength. By 1665, the community had erected its first synagogue, *Beracha Ve Shalom* (Blessings of Peace,) probably the first synagogue in the Caribbean.[6]

In 1667 the British, by the treaty of Breda with the Dutch, exchanged Surinam for New Amsterdam (New York City.) The island's new rulers were reluctant to continue the liberal policies granted by the English but, after much negotiation, relented in 1674.

Even more Jews came to Surinam in 1685, forced to leave French Guiana because of the anti-Jewish statues of the *Code*

Noir. They, too, settled in the Joden Savanna and they established a second synagogue. It was the first time any Jewish community in the Caribbean or the Western Hemisphere had two synagogues.

Dutch census records indicate that over one hundred Jewish families, almost six hundred people with nine thousand slaves, two cemeteries, two synagogues and many plantations were counted in the Joden Savanna by 1694. So prosperous and flourishing was the colony that Jews from as far as Livorno, Italy, came to seek their fortunes. By 1730, more than one-quarter of all plantations in the colony belonged to Jews.[7]

In 1716, the Dutch government donated land for construction of a synagogue in Paramarimbo, Surinam's major city. *Neve Shalom* was completed by 1734 and Jews began leaving the Joden Savanna to establish themselves in the growing city.[8]

The Sephardim ceded *Neve Shalom* in 1736 to *Ashkenazim* (Central and Eastern European Jews) known as *Hoogduitsche*, after a bitter communal quarrel in which the Dutch government was forced to intercede and mediate. One of the conditions of the turnover was that the Ashkenazim perpetually maintain the Sephardic ritual. The Sephardim erected a second synagogue in Paramaribo, called *Tsedek Ve Shalom*, and followed the tradition of other Sephardic Caribbean synagogues by spreading sand on its floors. *Tsedek Ve Shalom*, while still standing, has shipped the entire contents of its interior to Israel for installation in Israel's Jewish Museum.[9]

Migration from the Joden Savanna to Paramaribo increased when, in 1832, a fire ran through the Savanna's old quarter, destroying it almost completely. The remaining Jews of the old quarter now became residents of the city.[10] At the close of the 19th century, fifteen hundred Jews lived in Surinam, a considerable number for a Caribbean community.

Surinam's Jews always maintained contact with other Jews of the Western Hemisphere. Kosher meat was imported from New York among other places, beginning in the 1760s. The

Surinam congregation received pleas from Philadelphia's *Mikve Israel* for building donations in 1782. And there were building requests from Newport, Rhode Island and Lancaster, Pennsylvania. Rabbis and *hazzanim* (cantors) left Paramaribo to lead congregations on the American mainland.

In 1792, David de Isaac Cohen Nassy, a physician and direct descendant of the founder of Surinam's Jewish community, emigrated to Philadelphia. He was that city's first Jewish doctor. Almost immediately after his arrival, the city was struck with a yellow fever epidemic. At that time, medicine's knowledge of the disease was limited. Nassy successfully treated ninety-eight of one hundred seventeen patients seen by him. Working with other West Indian and French-trained doctors, he was able to use cool baths, fluids and other treatments to relieve the epidemic.

Today, Surinam's few remaining Jews live in Paramaribo. They are remnants of a declining community, lost to assimilation and migrations to Holland and the United States. They are not generally of the merchant class. Many are high-level civil servants. Because of the limited number of congregants, religious services alternated between Ashkenazic *Neve Shalom* (still adhering to Sephardic ritual according to the 1736 agreement,) and Sephardic *Tsedek Ve Shalom* synagogues (before its closing,) the two communities having long settled their communal differences. A significant number of Surinam's Jews are of African descent, the offspring of ethnically mixed unions. Many practicing Jews are former Christians who have converted without a rabbi's instruction.[11]

Surinam's Jews seem to be well integrated within their community. Next to *Neve Shalom*, a Moslem Mosque thrives, without any conflict between the two religions.[12]

In 1968 and again in 1992, the government of Surinam commemorated Jewish presence in its country. A series of three stamps were issued in 1968. One depicts a map of the Joden Savanna and the names of plantation owners Nassy, De

Casseres, Nuñes de Costa, De Silva and De Pinto. Joden Savanna's plantations bore biblical names, such as Hebron and Carmel, which are also memorialized.

A second stamp shows a sailing ship passing below *Beracha V'Shalom* synagogue, which rises upon the heights of a hill. The third stamp depicts a typical Caribbean Sephardic gravestone with its unique carvings and markings. (See stamp illustrations at the end of this chapter.)

Another stamp issued in 1992 commemorates Sephardim and their contribution to Surinam's development. It features a sailing ship with the word *Sepharad*, a *Menorah*, and the Star of David.

Paramaribo's community is still aware of its importance in New World Jewish history and their contributions to Surinam. It held ceremonies in 1992 at Joden Savanna, designed to remember and explain the Jewish experience in the Joden Savanna and Surinam.

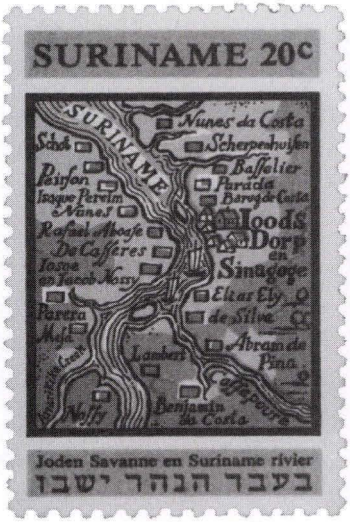
Today, the Joden Savanna lies abandoned beneath a tangle of thick underbrush within the jungles of Surinam. The crumbling foundations of *Beracha V'Shalom* can still be seen, as can gravestones and other monuments of the old Jewish cemetery. Access to the old community is becoming increasingly difficult because of deteriorating roads and guerrilla activity in the jungle.[13]

In a wry twist, interned Nazi sympathizers during World War II were put to work in the old Savanna, restoring Jewish cemeteries and structures. The result of their work was in time lost once again, because of the jungle's growth.[14]

Middle-aged Surinam Jews can still remember when as children they took trips to the Joden Savanna to visit the old cemeteries and the synagogue. Today, this is impossible because of the undergrowth, the presence of guerrillas, and squatters. As a result, the Joden Savanna goes completely untended, resulting in irreparable deterioration.

Today, 150 Jews live in Surinam, both Sephardic and

Ashkenazic. They have had no permanent rabbi since 1969.



Surinam:
(clockwise from top left)

Three stamps commemorating the Jewish presence: A map of the Joden Savanne with Jewish plantation owners; a typical gravestone, and the synagogue built in 1685.

Curaçao

If ever a safety valve existed for Jews in the New World, it was Curaçao. Two decades after Holland conquered Curaçao, the Dutch West India Company invited Jews to settle on this 448-square kilometer island just off the coast of Venezuela. Although some did arrive in 1651, they soon left, because the land could not support agriculture.[1]

A small group of 70 refugees from Recife, led by Isaac da Costa, arrived in 1659. That was the beginning of Judaism's most important presence in the West Indies.[2] For almost two hundred years, Curaçao was to be the home to the premier congregation of the Western Hemisphere. It provided money, religious assistance and other needs to new Jewish communities forming throughout the Americas. It set the tone for Jewish life in much of North America and parts of the South American mainland.

For over 150 years, Curaçao had the largest Jewish population in the New World.3 *Mikve Israel-Emmanuel* is still the oldest synagogue in continuous use in the Western Hemisphere, and the congregation celebrated its three hundred and fiftieth anniversary in April 2001.

In building their synagogue, Curaçao's Jews adopted the architectural arrangement of the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue of Amsterdam, their mother congregation. This meant that Curaçao's synagogue was physically constructed with the *bimah* (reader's platform) in the center facing the Ark

at the Eastern wall. Congregants faced each other from benches *(bancas)* on both sides of the room, the *bimah* and the Ark in the middle.[4]

Women were separated from men in the traditional Orthodox manner, in an upper gallery reached from an outside stairway. Upper galleries in the Caribbean are unique by being accessed through outside stairways, since the climate was not inhospitable.

Sand covers the floor. There are several explanations for this practice. Some commentators say the sand is to remind congregants of the silence in which their ancestors were forced to pray, to escape the Inquisitor's deadly detection. Others say that the sand symbolizes the desert across which Moses led the children of Israel for forty years.[5]

Spanish, Portuguese and Hebrew were used in the synagogue service until the middle of the 19th century. The same strict congregational rules and regulations *(hascamoth)* that were then in force in Amsterdam - resulting in the excommunication of philosophers/thinkers Benedict Spinoza and Uriel D'Acosta - were put into use on this Caribbean Island. These rules had to be approved by Prince William II of Holland in 1751. Later amendments were approved by Princess Anne in 1755.[6]

The result was that from very early on, synagogues in the West Indies and American mainland adopted the Curaçao architecture and, to an extent, the Amsterdam rules. Even synagogues built in English colonies followed this design. London's Bevis Marks (Spanish and Portuguese), which is England's first synagogue, owes its design and creation to the Mother Synagogue of Amsterdam. Curiously, the only Sephardic synagogue that departs from this design by not having an upper gallery, is that of St. Thomas, which was a Danish colony. Otherwise, the St. Thomas synagogue follows the Sephardic placement of *bimah*, Ark and benches.[7]

So influential was Curaço that a religious writer in 1746

called Curaço, "Queen Mother of all the islands in America."[8]

Curaçao's rabbis made circuits throughout the Caribbean, ministering to congregations lacking spiritual leaders. Curaçao was the place to which both Caribbean and mainland Jews looked for religious guidance. This island community not only provided a religious example for all American Jewry, but they often assisted with financial aid and gave religious artifacts to new congregations and synagogues. This was true not only for the West Indies, but on the North American mainland as well. Synagogues in New York, Philadelphia, Newport and Savannah were among their beneficiaries.[9]

In 1730, the Curaçao Jewish community sent $379 worth of copper to New York's Spanish and Portuguese congregation *(Shearith Israel)* to help construct its Mill Street Synagogue, the first in colonial America. A letter accompanying the gift read, *"Yevarech Hakahal Beshalom Bevo E Veyiskon Bekhavod Bi-Shearith Israel."* [May the Lord in his coming bless the congregation with peace and may He dwell with Honor in *Shearith Israel.*][10]

By the mid-1700s, at the eve of the American Revolution, the island's approximately two thousand Jews were fifty percent of its European population, a significantly greater number than all Jews on the North American mainland.[11] When one considers that in 1800 Charlestown, South Carolina was home to five hundred Jews, the largest Jewish community in the United States, and that there were only 2,500 Jews in the entire American republic, Curaçao and the rest of the Caribbean loom large as an influential community in the Western Hemisphere.

The 1745 census in Curaçao listed fourteen hundred Jews; by 1750, 2,000. In 1785, there were twelve hundred and by 1789, 1,495. The reason for the fluctuation is simple: As business opportunities arose, male *Sephardim* formed colonies in Maracaibo and Coro in Venezuela; St. Thomas; Aruba; Jamaica; Santo Domingo and Central America. With Hispanic family names and fluency in Spanish, Curaçao's young men fit

into Latin societies without any difficulty.[12]

Unlike Barbados, Jamaica, St. Thomas and Nevis, Curaço's soil was not fertile, so the community engaged in shipping, insurance, banking and other commercial enterprises rather than agriculture. Jews became so important in island society that one 20th century rabbi has remarked that outside of Israel, he knew of no other place where Jews were so represented as in "the 400" of Curaçao.[13] Curaçao's Jews, especially its *Sephardim*, retain a strong pride in their Judaism and ancestral roots, which most trace to Iberia.

Curaçao's *Sephardim* supported Simon Bolivar during the South American Revolution, as did most of Curaçao. Called "The Liberator of South America", Bolivar sought and received refuge at the home of Abraham De Meza after his defeat at Puerto Cabello.

The first of Bolivar's champions from Curaçao was Mordechy Ricardo, an attorney. Several members of Curaçao's Jews fought with Bolivar and participated in the battles that wrenched Venezuela and Colombia from Spain. Bolivar received money and credit for arms purchases from the island's Sephardic merchants who assisted in financing his revolution.[14]

No other island in the West Indies offers so much material for the seeker of Jewish history. *Mikve Israel-Emanuel* is the oldest synagogue building in continuous use in the Americas. It dates to 1731. Congregation *Emanuel's* synagogue was built in 1864. Emanuel merged with *Mikve Israel* in 1965. Its tall, distinct steeple still stands, a short walk from *Mikve Israel-Emanuel.*

A three hundred year old *mikve* (ritual bath) was unearthed during street restorations in the 1970s and can be seen today. There is a Jewish museum near the synagogue. Streets and monuments throughout the island are name for prominent Curaçao families, such as Maduro, Capriles and Salas. Curaçao's Jews have been doctors, members of the island's militia, lawyers, important businessmen and movers of the

island's economy.

Perhaps the most dramatic testimony to the close partnership between Curaçao and its Jews are its cemeteries. They are some of the oldest Jewish burial grounds in the Western Hemisphere still in use, dating from 1659.[15] Because of their location next to an oil refinery in the 1960s and 1970s, the fumes were causing the tombstones to deteriorate. They were painted with chemicals to prevent decay.

Some 2,000 decipherable stones are located at the island's old cemetery. Names of Jews whose descendants are still active in Curaçao society can be found inscribed on elaborate stones, many hundreds of years old. These are not the sorts of stones you will find in other Jewish graveyards. They are carved in Hebrew, Spanish, Portuguese and Dutch. What makes them special are the unique and elaborate scenes depicting the professions of the deceased, such as sailing ships and physician's implements.[16]

Also carved on the stones are non-Jewish symbols, such as the Grim Reaper's scythe, hourglass, and skull and crossbones. There are carved details of the dying during their last moments on their deathbeds. Because there were no marble or limestone quarries in the Caribbean, families had to send to Italy for the stones and then ship them to Holland for carving. Sometimes the sculptors were not Jewish and were not always familiar with the requirements of Jewish law or its symbols. As a result, rabbis are sometimes depicted without skullcaps, errors are made in Hebrew dates and spelling, and non-Jewish symbols are plentiful.[17]

Curaçao gravestones are not only rich with the history, professions and depictions of social class, but they are a record of the other places from which Jews were attracted to this island. Throughout the Caribbean, old Sephardic cemeteries have the look, if not the size, of the Curaçao cemetery.[18]

Besides the Sephardim, Curaçao is home to an active Ashkenazic community of approximately one hundred and sev-

Curaçao's Temple *Emanu-El*, built in 1864. The Congregation merged with *Mikve Israel* in 1964

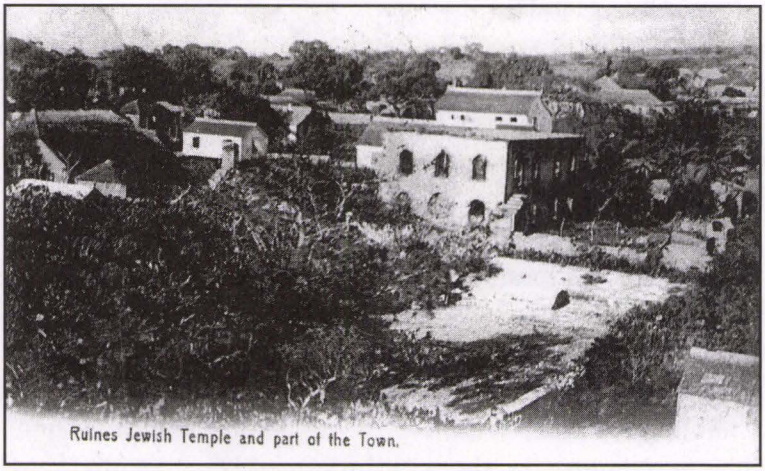
In Curaçao, the gate leading to the oldest Jewish cemetery in continuous use in the Western Hemisphere. Note the refinery in the background. Its fumes damaged many stones.

enty five. They maintain their own synagogue, *Shaare Tzedek*, and hold regular services. Ashkenazim have been active in Curaçao's life for almost a century.

Today, there are about 350 Jews living in Curaçao. They maintain two active synagogues but are unable to maintain a rabbi. The Sephardic community has been steadily dwindling.[19]

In April 2001, at the 350th Anniversary of the founding of the oldest Jewish community in the Western Hemisphere, the chairman of the festivities, Ron Gomes Casseres, stated that Sephardic life on the island has "become improbable."[20]

Despite this, Jews will continue to live in Curaçao and earn their livelihoods here. What will cease, as has occurred on all Caribbean islands, is the continuity of the Spanish and Portuguese families who once dominated the region with their unique culture. *La Nacion* no longer has meaning in terms of economic and social power. It is an historic memory, a binding influence only for those few families who have survived the centuries of integration in the modern world.



Honen Dalim synagogue, St. Eustatius, as it appeared on a Dutch post card circa 1920. Compare the building with the photo taken in 1993 on page 36. (photo from the collection of Gérard Silvain, as it appears in his book, *"Sepharades et Juifs d'ailleurs"*)

St. Eustatius

It was only natural that Sephardim should settle in Holland's New World colonies, as the Dutch were benevolent in their treatment of Jews.

Four families first settled on the Dutch colony of St. Eustatius in 1722, although settlers from Curaçao sailed back and forth between the islands as early as 1660. Two of the original settlers in St. Eustatius were the Cohen Henriquez and the Nuñes Neto families.[1]

Later colonists requested that the Amsterdam synagogue act as their representative in the Netherlands, to seek equal religious rights for them. During the colonial period, the Spanish and Portuguese synagogues of Amsterdam and London acted as representatives to their respective governments for Jewish colonists: they obtained rights to build synagogues and establish cemeteries. They requested exemption from militia duty on Jewish holy days. They received exemption from military guard duty on the Sabbath in 1730. In 1739, they received permission to erect their own synagogue, *Honen Dalim* (Merciful to the Poor.)[2]

After a hurricane damaged the synagogue in 1772, it was rebuilt. The communities in Curaçao, Amsterdam and New York contributed money and ritual objects towards the reconstruction.[3] *Honen Dalim* may be the second oldest synagogue structure in the Western Hemisphere still partially standing. The congregation was affluent enough to have enjoyed the services

of two rabbis between 1775 and 1790: Rabbi Ezekiel and Rabbi Jacob Robles.

On the eve of the American Revolution, this tiny dot in the Caribbean, which measures seven square miles, was home to a thriving commercial community in which Sephardim played a leading role.

Non-agricultural St. Eustatius was an important go-between for war supplies traded between Europe and the rebel American colonies during the Revolutionary War. Sailing in Dutch ships or American cutters swift enough to breach the British blockades, supplies often reached the American mainland, to the anger of the British.

St Eustatius was a neutral free port. Trade that was illegal between other islands -at that time it was illegal for an island to trade with any other island or country not of the mother country - could pass through St. Eustatius. Cargo in neutral ships could come into St. Eustatius and, after much manipulation of documents and Bills of Lading, after complicated trans-shipment of illegal cargo, could leave for the American colonies either in neutral ships or through properly documented vessels.[4]

In 1776, the American Jewish patriot Jonas Phillips sent a letter to his mother in Holland via St. Eustatius, as many other letter writers did, to ensure swiftness and safe delivery. The letter contained a copy of the newly published Declaration of Independence. Phillips, writing in Yiddish to avoid British snoops, explained that a fortune could be made running the British blockade now that war had started. Unfortunately, the letter was captured along with its Yankee sailing ship. That letter now rests in the British Publication office, with a two hundred year old scholar's note saying that the unintelligible Yiddish must be some sort of shorthand.

That same year, the American trading ship, "Andria Doria," entered St. Eustatius' Oranjestad harbor, her mast flying the colors of the new rebel Republic. Dutch Governor De Graff enthusiastically ordered an eleven-gun salute fired from Fort

Orange located high above the waterfront.[5]

Admiral Rodney, commander of England's Caribbean squadron, was furious when he learned of this event. He knew that the Dutch island, also known as the Golden Rock, or Statia, was trading with the rebels. But there was little he could do about it. Rodney was aware that much of the shipping and trading on Statia was in Jewish hands.[6]

Statia was Dutch territory and England was not then at war with Holland. British ships had to be satisfied with trying to stop rebel and other enemy ships laden with military supplies after they left the island and sailed into international waters. Often, the Yankees were too fast for the British and would outrun them to safety.

But Rodney would eventually have his revenge. When he did, he acted swiftly and ruthlessly. In his view, St. Eustatius was home to a nest of vipers and he was determined to eliminate the fangs directed at his heart.

On February 3, 1781, after Holland and England had declared War on one another, Rodney sailed into Oranjestad harbor. Without firing a shot (the Dutch on St. Eustatius were unaware that war had been declared) he captured its warehouses and emptied them of their contents. Rodney loaded his ships with booty, some $15 million worth. He also captured one hundred thirty merchant ships then at anchor in the harbor and appropriated their wares. He then ordered his sailors to pursue thirty more ships that had just set sail for Europe.[7]

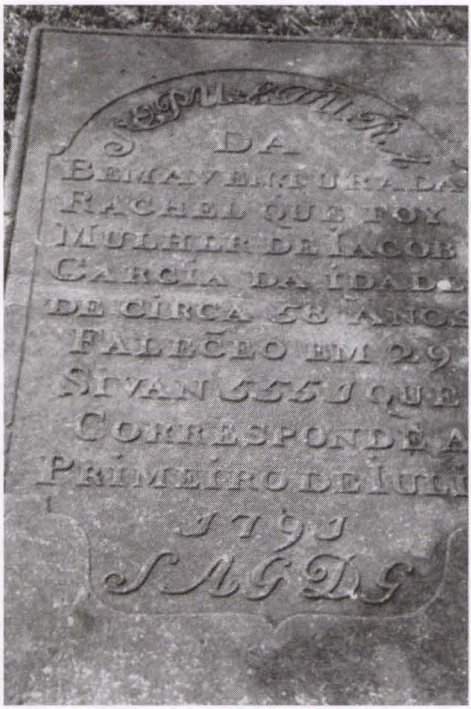
In all, Rodney captured one hundred sixty ships and sent the plunder back to England. He might have become a rich man with his share of the loot, but the convey was seized by French vessels, allies of the Dutch. Rodney saw none of his booty; it was returned to Statia.

The island's capture was a great loss to the Americans. There had been almost two thousand sailors in the harbor that February day, most willing to fight. But they were captured, as the British had the foresight to cut off their supplies.[8]

In St. Eustatius, the ruins of Synagogue *Honen Dalim*. The chairs and lecturn were provided by the island government during a commemoration ceremony in 1993.

In St. Eustatius, the remains of what is believed to be a ritual mikvah. The interior contains a piping system to bring fresh water from an extinct volcano crater. The site is now used for voodoo rites and often contains bones of sacrificed goats.

St. Eustatius
Right: a Jewish gravestone inscribed in Portuguese



Remains of the destroyed piers where Jewish merchants maintained warehouses

Then Rodney committed a controversial act: He arrested all of Statia's merchants and banished them to the British islands of St. Kitts and Antigua. Many of the merchants were Jews. They represented a substantial portion of the exiled Statians.

Strictly speaking, it was not an anti-Semitic act but one aimed at tradesmen who had supplied Rodney's enemies. But Jews were singled out for special treatment: they were given only one day's notice to leave; they were strip-searched; they were robbed of their personal possessions. Rodney's soldiers were ordered to rip the linings of their clothing in search of money and other valuables.

Perhaps Rodney remembered the role Jewish merchants played in assisting the American rebels. In addition to these indignities, he extorted £8,000 from Jewish merchants. One old man, Samuel Hoheb, was relieved of gold coins found sewn into the lining of his coat. Another Jew, Jacob Pollack, who had been expelled from the American colonies for his pro-British leanings, was also robbed of his cash. The English considered him an enemy merely because he was a Jewish merchant on St. Eustatia.[9]

The banishment disrupted the entire Jewish community. When London learned of Rodney's actions, a furor arose. But the general consensus in Parliament, which debated the event, was that the Admiral was not racially motivated. Rodney, trying to justify his acts, subsequently wrote of St. Eustatius, "Instead of the greatest emporium on earth... [it is] a mere desert and only known by report."[10]

So devastating was his attack that it was prominently mentioned in an equal rights petition the Jews of Philadelphia made in 1791 to the American government, to underscore the suffering Jews had endured in order to help the new American Republic.[11]

Although the banished merchants returned to St. Eustatius shortly thereafter (perhaps as a result of petitions protesting the injustice from Englishmen on the islands to which they had

been sent) the community never entirely recovered. Rodney had put the island to the torch after he stripped it bare. Within twenty years, most Jews left, many for the Danish island of St. Thomas, where they founded the community that was to become home to the oldest continuously used synagogue building under the United States flag.

Descendants of Philip Waag, once one of the wealthiest Jews on the island, continued in residence until 1843. By 1850, there were only three Jews left on St. Eustatius.[12]

Today, the walls of the old synagogue, *Honen Dalim*, still remain although the roof and the second floor are long gone. The outside stairway to its second story gallery leads nowhere, as the second floor has been stripped for its building materials. Goats frequented the ruins, so wire mesh has been installed to keep them out.

The street on which *Honen Dalim* is located is still known as "Jew's Way." A small cemetery, about half a mile away, contains the graves of Sephardim who lived here more than two centuries ago. The stone wall surrounding the cemetery has two iron gates: One bears a representation of the Ten Commandments; the other, the date 1739, the year of the cemetery's consecration.

In 1981, this forgotten Jewish place came back to life, if only briefly. A group of Boy Scouts from New Jersey cleared away the underbrush inside the ruined walls so that one of them could celebrate his Bar Mitzvah on this historic spot. The Torah used in the service was lent to them by the Sint Maarten Jewish community.[13]

Honen Dalim synagogue was used again in 1993, when a contingent of fifty Caribbean Jews from Barbados, Puerto Rico, St. Croix and St. Thomas paid homage to this out of the way community. They prayed there and walked among the old gravestones, under the sponsorship of the island's government.

The island's library has a model of the synagogue as it looked 200 years ago. Hoping to restore the structure, towns-

people collect funds from tourists in an ambitious attempt to put its walls, roof and floors back together again. Considering the tiny population of this island, which is not in the mainstream of tourist traffic, it is remarkable that the government takes great care in preserving these remembrances of the Jewish people. Such solicitude needs to be duplicated elsewhere throughout the islands, where we are slowly loosing this heritage to the jungle, pollution and environmental wear and tear.[14]

Aaron Koschitsky, a recent traveller to St. Eustatius, reports that all these efforts are proving fruitful. Restoration has begun: a new roof graces the old synagogue and the window openings have been repaired. A restored building should be available for tourists soon.

Eighteen hundred people live on St. Eustatius. A Massachusetts couple, who have a winter retirement home there, and one permanent resident, a fisherman, are the only Jews on the island at present.

Sint Maarten

This Windward island, thirty-seven miles square and approximately one hundred miles east southeast of St. Thomas, is the world's smallest land mass divided between two countries: Both France and Holland share ownership of this tiny island.

Sint Maarten, as the Dutch side is known, seems to have been first settled by victims of Admiral Rodney's raid on St. Eustatius in 1781. But the refugee community never thrived. Within forty years, the brick synagogue erected on Acherstraat was a pile of overgrown rubble with few, if any, Jews left on the island to worship there. It is said that the West Indian Tavern in Phillipsburg currently occupies the site of the old synagogue and that a portion of some old walls are those of the old synagogue.[1]

At the other end of Front Street, archeologists have found the remains of what is believed to be the old Jewish cemetery. Much work needs to be done for verification. There is a small street called "Jew's Cemetery Lane," which seems to be part of a complex of synagogue, walkway and cemetery.[2]

In 1969, less than ten adult Jewish males lived permanently in Sint Maarten. But by 1971, the wave of tourism throughout the Caribbean brought a modest resurgence of permanent Jewish families and regularly returning winter tourists to the island. Settlers came from the United States, Curaçao, Surinam, the Dominican Republic, Guadeloupe and Israel. There was

even a Holocaust survivor among them.

A Rosh Hashanah service held in 1971 must have been unique: it was conducted with elements of both Ashkenazic and Sephardic ritual in an Orthodox-Conservative setting. There was no Torah, but a tiny souvenir scroll, plucked from a congregant's gift shop, was used as a symbol of the Book of Laws. A tourist who had purchased a *shofar* (ram's horn used for blowing notes during the New Year service) in Israel and was returning to New York with it, produced it for use during the service, blowing it with much gusto.

There was no uniform prayer book. Congregants used their own books. Each had the Hebrew text, but the second language of these books varied from English and Hungarian to Spanish, Dutch and Portuguese, the last three languages being the ones most often used by Dutch Caribbean *Sephardim*.[3]

Gradually, the community's efforts became known. As many as fifty to sixty permanent residents and tourists prayed together on subsequent High Holidays. The congregation even acquired its own Torah. Services were not offered on a regular basis however.

Today, about twenty Jewish families live permanently in Sint Maarten, in an unorganized community.[4] The Torah reposes in a vault, under lock and key.

Aruba

A former colony of Holland, Aruba is twenty miles long by six miles wide and a mere twenty-five miles off the coast of Venezuela, Aruba has not held great historical prominence in Jewish Caribbean history. At present, however, there is a small but active Jewish community among the island's 70,000 inhabitants.[1]

Although it was first settled formally in 1754 by Moses de Salomon Levy Maduro, a member of the well-known Curaçao family, together with his wife and children, there is some evidence that the island hosted Jews as early as 1563. Whomever these earlier settlers may have been, they made no great impact on the island or its history.[2]

As with the Levy Maduros, other Curaçao Jews settled here sporadically. The lack of drinking water made living on the island difficult: most people traveled back and forth on business trips between the two Dutch islands, which are only 50 miles apart.[3]

A brief and minor flurry of Jewish migration occurred during the middle of the 19th century, when a short-lived gold find was made at Balashi, and again when phosphate mining was introduced to the island. [4]

By 1962, the community was strong enough to erect its own synagogue, a handsome, modern, triangular structure called *Beth Israel*, located on A. Lacle Boulevard.[5]

Aruban Jews number some 200. Their size has increased in

the last 10 years. They are actively in contact with other Jewish communities and organizations in Venezuela, Israel and elsewhere; they have recently had the services of an English rabbi who has been replaced by a cantor or *hazzan*.[6]

There exists in Aruba a small cemetery that contains the graves of early Sephardim. It is located on Boerhavestreat in the capital city of Oranjestad, and it is the only reminder of earlier Jewish settlements on the island. The congregation recently conducted a restoration project to preserve the headstones, which are hardly legible, even though the oldest stone only goes back to 1857.[7]

Aruba is presently a self-governing territory under the Dutch crown.

THE BRITISH CARIBBEAN:

JAMAICA

NEVIS

BARBADOS

TRINIDAD-TOBAGO

THE BAHAMAS

Jamaica

As warships of the British navy sailed into Jamaican waters toward Kingston harbor in 1655, they were led by Campoe Sabbatha, a Marrano Jewish pilot.[1] He may well have enjoyed a secret pleasure watching the English navy surrounding Spanish Men of War and ultimately defeating them. They were liberating his fellow Marranos from the island's Inquisition. Thus Jamaica, the third largest island in the Greater Antilles, began its reign as one of England's great colonies.

Many secret Jews were already living in Jamaica when it was under Spanish rule. By the terms of surrender, all Spaniards were to leave Jamaica … except the Marranos. Once the British wrested control from Spain, island Jews openly professed their religion and were permitted to remain.

Since the Spanish surrender of Jamaica and the Recife Diaspora occurred within months of each other, Brazilian Jews went to Jamaica, together with others from English and Dutch islands (mostly Dutch Jews who had left Recife earlier) quickly making Jamaica's community prominent in the Caribbean. Almost immediately, this group began planting sugar and other tropical crops. They were soon an important part of Jamaican society.[2]

Their numbers must have been relatively large. In 1699, the London Council of Trade and Plantation recommended that the island's governor be directed to decree that:

> Jews "be not obligated to be in Arms on their Sabbath or other Solemn Feast, unless it be when an enemy is in view."

Island life being less formal than that of England, Jews were fairly integrated and a British historian commented that Jamaica had "no reason to repent of her liberality towards them." (Jews).[3]

While the main concentrations of Jews were in Kingston, Port Royal and Spanish Town, there have been as many as twenty-one separate communities flourishing throughout the island since 1655.[4] A synagogue was established in Port Royal, that infamous stronghold of Caribbean pirates, before 1692. In that year, an earthquake destroyed the city and a certain Mr. Heath remembered on that frightful day that:

> "I turned into Ye Jewe's street in order to get home when their Synagogue fell by my side."[5]

By 1735, there were already at least eight hundred Jews in residence in Jamaica. Despite their freedoms and a measure of openness not offered in Europe, Jamaican Jews were still unable to vote in public elections. Moses Delgado saw the injustice of this and on behalf of his fellow co-religionists, worked hard to remedy these abuses. By 1831, Delgado's efforts were successful: all civil disabilities applicable to the Jewish community were repealed. It was twenty-seven years before Jews in England would enjoy the same freedoms. A handsome tankard crafted in silver was presented to Delgado as a gesture of the community's appreciation. That tankard now rests in the synagogue at Kingston.[6]

By 1849, Jamaica's Jewish community had taken full advantage of its political freedom. Eight of the forty-seven members of the island's legislature were Jewish, including the Speaker of the House. On *Yom Kippur* of that year, the legisla-

ture adjourned its session out of deference to its Jewish members who would not be able to attend to the business of legislation on that day. Less than twenty years later, the number of Jews in the Legislature had grown to thirteen.[7]

Jews have not only contributed to Jamaican agriculture, they have been important in politics, culture and business. Included in their accomplishments are:

- Kingston and other Jamaican cities have regularly had Jewish mayors;
- Jews have served on Jamaica's Privy Council;
- Jews have been jurists and distinguished members at the Jamaican Bar;
- The Daily Gleaner, Jamaica's oldest and only daily newspaper, was founded by the brothers Phineas and Jacob de Cordova in 1834. (Jacob de Cordova also laid out the street plans for Waco, Texas);[8]
- Sir Neville Ashenheim, a well-known politician, was Jamaica's ambassador to the United States during the years immediately following Jamaica's independence in 1962.[9]

From early times, when Abraham Henriques, Solomon de Leon, David López and other Jews owned large tracts of sugar and vanilla plantations, to the present, Jews have had a positive experience on this island. In fact, since the English took control of Jamaica and expelled all its Spaniards, Judaism has been the oldest organized religion practiced on the island.

Natural disasters, however, have destroyed at least six synagogues over the centuries. There remains but one in use in Jamaica today. It, too, was wrecked by an earthquake in 1907, but was rebuilt four years later. *Shaare Shalom* (Gates of Peace), the United Congregation of Israelites, was first built in 1885. It is located on Duke Street in downtown Kingston, about ten blocks from the waterfront.[10]

Like many Sephardic synagogues in the Caribbean, *Shaare Shalom* shares the tradition of spreading sand across its floors. The synagogue seats six hundred. Its Ark rests against the Eastern wall and the *bimah* (reading lectern) stands in the center of the building. Instead of facing the Ark, congregants face the *bimah* from both sides.

Women were seated upstairs when services were conducted in the Orthodox ritual. The congregation now follows a more modified and liberal service, and women are seated beside men. Many of the ritual objects one sees here are taken from other, now defunct, Jamaican synagogues, and are hundreds of years old.

Old cemeteries are scattered all across Jamaica. There are ten throughout the island, four in Kingston alone and one of them surrounds an abandoned synagogue. The cemetery at Hunts Bay, just outside downtown Kingston, is the oldest religious burial ground in Jamaica. It was restored in 1938 and is a National Monument controlled by the Jamaican National Trust. It contains tombstones dating back to 1672, but is being ravaged by tropical weather and undergrowth, as are the rest of the historic sites throughout the island. Over a dozen other significant abandoned Jewish sites, including historic synagogues, community houses and individual homes are sprinkled throughout the island.[11]

During World War II, many Jewish refugees, mostly Poles, were sent from neutral Lisbon, Portugal, to Jamaica. They were put up in a camp called Gibraltar II, near Kingston. Some of these refugees remained on the island, but most left after the War.[12]

Unfortunately, the Jewish population of Jamaica is slowly diminishing. From a community of over one thousand in 1960, the number dropped to six hundred just a decade later. There are now about three hundred members of this once powerful and venerable community remaining. They are highly regarded by the government and the other people of their island.

Jamaica currently has no rabbi, but a qualified religious leader, Ernest de Souza, had been active as the synagogue's reader for over forty years.[13]

Nevis

The once active Jewish community of Nevis, which in the 18th century comprised a fourth of its European population, is long gone from this tiny thirty-six square mile island.[1] There remains, however, solid evidence of its presence in this quiet corner of the Caribbean.

Blessed not only with fertile soil for sugar cultivation, Nevis also has hot springs that lured Britains from across the sea to enjoy the warm therapeutic baths in the 18th and 19th centuries.

Nevis was named by Columbus. Because of the almost perpetual clouds covering its large central peaks, its mountains give the impression of being snow covered at over 3,000 feet. Nevis is, therefore, a corruption of *nieve*, the Spanish word for snow.

Sephardim from nearby islands went there in the late 17th century. Records in Amsterdam's synagogue establish the presence of a synagogue on Nevis in 1684, verifying the existence of a Jewish community before that time.[2] Whether that building still stands is a question that at present remains unanswered.

In 1724, note was taken of the influence of Nevis Jews by an island minister. He reported to his bishop in London that seven hundred white Europeans lived in Nevis, of which a fourth were Jews who had their own synagogue. He went on to say that the Jews were well accepted in the country, but in town they were "charged with taking the bread out of the Christian's

mouths."[3]

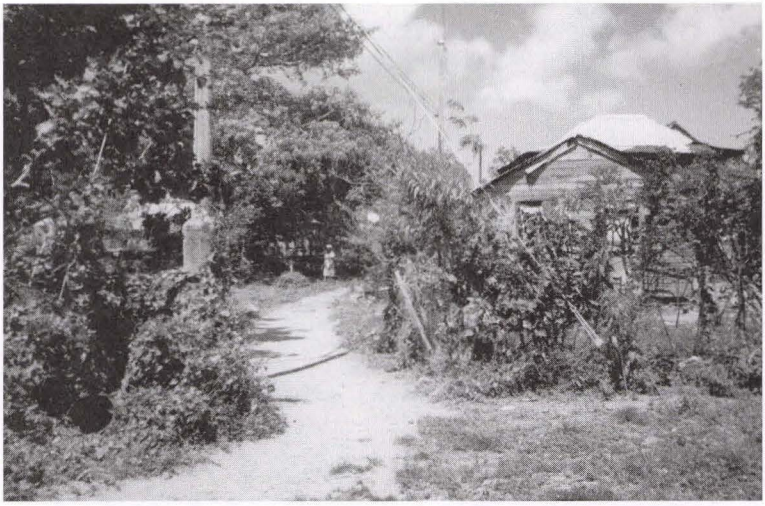
Extant records, however, show that at least one Jew served as a jury foreman and others as witness to wills of Christians, attesting to the fact that that they were accepted within the community. Solomon Israel served as co-executor of the estate of Bernard White in 1769, proof that Jews also enjoyed the same civil status and responsibilities as their Christian neighbors.[4]

The Jewish traders of Nevis sailed all over the Caribbean, engaging in commerce with St. Eustatius, Barbados, Curaçao, Surinam, St. Thomas and St. Croix. Nevis Jews journeyed to Newport, Rhode Island, Holland and England. All these destinations had well-established Jewish communities and, indeed, many Sephardim were related by birth or marriage to Nevis families. Isaac Pinhiera traveled to New York, where he died in 1710 and is buried in the cemetery that belongs to New York's Spanish and Portuguese synagogue. The tiny cemetery is located at Chatham Square, now a part of New York's Chinatown. Pinhiera's family was registered in the 1707 census taken in Nevis.[5]

The community built what seems to have been a handsome brick synagogue with an outside stairway leading to the (now removed) upstairs women's gallery. The building presently believed to be the synagogue is still known by islanders as "the Jew's school."

The date of the building's construction is unknown. It must have doubled as a schoolhouse, for it was here that young Alexander Hamilton, later to become George Washington's military aide and the first Secretary of the Treasury of the United States, received his early formal education. Hamilton received Hebrew lessons from an unknown woman teacher of the community. It was the only school Hamilton could attend. Since he was illegitimate, the island's Anglican school refused him entry.[6]

Today, the "Jew's School" is used as a warehouse for oil drums. It no longer has a second story. But the remnants of the



Nevis: (top) "Jew's Lane," connecting the synagogue and cemetery.

(bottom) "Jew's School," believed to be the old synagogue.

A LIST OF THE TOMBSTONES IN THE JEWS' BURIAL GROUND, NEVIS.

1. Abenduna, Ralph.
2. Abundiente, Abraham, alias Abraham Gideon – date of death "6 de Tisri do A°5450 (September 27, 1689).
3. Abundiente, Bathsheba, wife of Rehiel (alias Rowland Gideon) – date of death "Tuesday, the 28th of Ab, 5444" (August 20, 1684).
4. Arrobus, Hananiah or Ananiah – date of death January 25, 1729/30.
5. Cohen, Daniel – date of death January 29, 1703/4.
6. C------?, Daniel Mendes – date of death 28 Tamuz 5444 (1684).
7. De Mezqueto (Mesquita), Abraham Bueno – date of death 1715.
8. Gomes, Abraham Isquiao David – date of death February -----?
9. Lobatto, Abraham Cohen – date of death 1869/90.
10. Lobatto, Rachell Cahanet – date of death September 28, 1701.
11. Maniche, -----ter, date of death February 20, 1679.
12. Men(des?), -----uas, date of death November 1768.
13. Rezya, Ribca Levy – date of death 6 Shebat 5444 (1684).
14. Rezya, Rachel Levy – date of death (1688).
15. Rodrigues, Benvenida Cohen – date of death 5 Tishri 5445, December 3, 1684, aged nineteen years.
16. Rodrigues, ? Cohen – (this may be deciphered as Abraham).
17. Senior, -----? date of death 18 de (Fe)brauro 1709 (This was probably Jacob).

There is a fragment of a stone bearing the name "Arobus".

stairway which once led upstairs can still be seen from the outside.

A narrow path leading from the old synagogue to the Jewish cemetery in Charleston is known as "Jew's Walk." Lush tropical vegetation and a stone wall flank it. The cemetery was reconsecrated in 1971, with a full ceremony sponsored by the Nevis government and the aid and funding of Mr. and Mrs. Robert Abrams of Philadelphia. They were encouraged by Rabbi Malcolm Stern, an authority on colonial Jewry of the United States and the Caribbean.

Only eighteen graves out of many can still be identified in the cemetery, the earliest dating to 1684. The re-consecrated cemetery makes a handsome addition to the town of Charleston, which is one of the best-preserved colonial villages in the Caribbean.[7]

Family names on the stones, Bueno de Mesquita, Rezys, Rodriguez, Senior, Gomes and Abundiente, recall the presence of West Indian Sephardim. A stone wall built for the reconsecration surrounds the two hundred by seventy-five feet graveyard. Specially designed wrought iron gates, in the shape of the tablets of the Ten Commandments, grace the entrance. The island government maintains the graveyard in good condition.

In 1993, a team of scholars from Brandeis University discovered what is believed to be a Jewish compound made up of a *mikve* and perhaps some other communal buildings surrounding the area of the "Jew's School." Archeological excavations are being planned. Hopefully, the investigators will come up with some new information about Jewish life in Nevis.[8] It may also be that this structure is the oldest Jewish building still in some use in the Caribbean, possibly even the one mentioned in the 1684 note in the Amsterdam records of the Spanish and Portuguese synagogue. There is a movement in Nevis to restore the old structure as a synagogue.[9]

There is no Jewish community on Nevis at present. The population of this island numbers 9,000.

Barbados

Barbados was another prime beneficiary of the Recife diaspora. Located outside the wide arc of Caribbean nations forming the Windward Islands of the Lesser Antilles, Barbados is twenty-one miles long by fourteen miles wide and lies to the west of St. Vincent on the Atlantic Ocean. Its soil is rich and still bears the fruits of sugar harvests.

In 1654 a significant number of Recife Jews appeared in Barbados, requesting permission to establish residence on the island. Being of "No disturbance and behaving themselves civilly and conforming to the government of this island" the Jews were granted permission to reside in Barbados under the "Laws and Statutes of the Commonwealth of England and of this island relating to foreigners and strangers."[1]

By 1678, the community of three hundred was large enough to summon a Marrano rabbi, Eliau Lopez, who was born in Malaga, Spain.[2] Less than one hundred years later, there were two active synagogues in Barbados, one in Bridgetown and the other in Speightstown.[3] Another Spanish rabbi later came to Barbados. Abraham Izidro Gabay was accompanied by his wife. The Inquisition had earlier imprisoned both of them.[4]

The importance of Jewish migration to Barbados was the transfer of their knowledge of sugar culture, which they learned from their strong experience in Brazil. This skill, together with the use of a new type of sugar mill developed and patented by David de Mercado, catapulted Barbados into the world market

as a leading and important producer of sugar and rum.[5]

Sugar was as economically significant in the 17th and 18th centuries as petroleum is today. Growing, milling and selling sugar were all part of a total process developed by Sephardim, much to the chagrin of English planters who were often not as skilled. The near monopoly under which Spanish and Portuguese Jews handled sugar was offset by special taxes imposed upon them by the Barbados Council to "keep things even."[6] Blessed with molasses, a by-product of sugar refining, Barbados was first to export rum to the rest of the world.

Synagogue *Nidhe Israel* (Scattered of Israel), built in Bridgetown in 1833, recently was restored to its former beauty. It is representative of the fluctuating fortunes of Barbadian Jewry in the past two hundred years. Located at Synagogue and Magazine Lanes, *Nidhe Israel* was completed in 1833 to replace an earlier structure that had been almost completely destroyed by a hurricane in 1831. There has always been a synagogue on that site, commencing with the late 1600s. Not only Jews, but also distinguished members of Barbadian society and its clergy attended the 1833 dedication.[7]

Despite the handsome new religious home, the community's vigor began to abate because of the devastating effects of the 1831 hurricane and, later, by the decline of sugar in the world market. By 1847, many Sephardim had immigrated to England, to other Caribbean islands, or to the United States. Only seventy-one Jews remained on the island.

In 1873, the Jewish population had declined to such a low point, the few congregants remaining successfully petitioned the legislature for tax relief of the community's property.[8]

Only seventeen Jews lived in Barbados in 1900. Nevertheless, one man, E.S. Daniels, ensured that the building was open for Sabbath prayer. Often, he was the only worshipper. When Daniels died, the care of the property fell to two brothers, Joshua and Edmund Baeza. Joshua died in 1928, leaving Edmund the only male of the Jewish faith in Barbados. He

proceeded to sell the property, except for the graveyards located next to the synagogue.[9] (Barbados is unusual in that its cemetery is placed immediately adjacent to its synagogue. As far as records show, only one other Caribbean synagogue, in Jamaica, followed this rare practice.)

The holy scrolls from the Barbados synagogue were sent to Bevis Marks, the Spanish and Portuguese synagogue in London, which also retained control over the cemeteries.

At public auction in 1934, the new owner sold the furniture and fittings that had not already been removed from *Nidhe Israel*. The synagogue became an office building with garages. Wooden storm shutters were torn from their frames. Arched windows were squared off and glass jalousies installed. The balustrade surrounding the roof was also removed, as was the canopy over the main entrance and the moldings surrounding the entrance to the second floor gallery. But the graveyards remained. They were intact, but not maintained, as had been solemnly agreed to in the deed of sale.

Almost simultaneously with the 1934 auction, new immigrants migrated to Bridgetown. They were Ashkenazic Jews from Central and Eastern Europe. Others soon followed. Among the newcomers was the Altman family.

The Altmans resolved to restore Jewish life to the island and helped form Congregation *Shaare Tzedek*. Services were at first held in their home. When "True Blue," an estate with a building was purchased, it was converted for use as a synagogue.[10]

Later, a community of black Jews was also established, called House of Zion. This congregation is made up of Barbadians who had lived in the United States and had contact with Jews there. Upon their return to Bridgetown, they formed their own congregation.[11]

The Barbados government purchased the old *Nidhe Israel* synagogue in 1982, planning to demolish the building and erect a government facility. Community pressure, and a campaign to

collect money to restore the building, resulted in the government deeding the building to the Barbados National Trust. The Trust oversees the preservation of historic sites. A complete restoration was undertaken and on December 18, 1987, the building was rededicated.[12]

Restoration included the return from the Barbados Museum of an 1817 clock manufactured in London, and faithful reproductions of the synagogue's chandeliers, which had been sold to the DuPont Winterthur Museum in Delaware in 1934.[13]

The special prayer book printed for the occasion states: "This service, the first to be held here after an interval of almost one hundred years, is in honor of the British Commonwealth Jewish Council Conference."

The building, beautifully reborn, stands with its old cemeteries at the end of Synagogue Lane, just a block from Swan Street... once known as "Jew Street." It was on that very street that the early Sephardim focused their commercial life during the 1600s.

The story of the old synagogue and its gravestones can never be complete without recognizing Eustace M. Shilstone, a Barbadian lawyer who, fascinated with the stories the tombstones told, proceeded to record each and every one.

As a young man, Shilstone frequently walked past the abandoned graveyards. He became curious about the lives of the souls interred there. Shilstone was not Jewish so he taught himself Hebrew as well as Spanish and Portuguese. Encouraged by the English and American Jewish Historical Societies, he published a book in 1955, called Monumental Inscriptions in the Jewish Synagogue at Bridgetown, Barbados. Complete with notes and the history of the Jewish community, it is a first-class work of scholarship, and each tombstone is documented in its original languages.[14]

The cemetery contains, among many interesting graves, the remains of Rabbi Haim Carigal, who spoke at the Touro synagogue in Newport, Rhode Island, in 1772. It was the first

American sermon every given by a rabbi in Spanish and then published in the United States. Carigal, born in Palestine, traveled throughout the Americas and finally settled in Barbados. Spanish was Carigal's first language and that of many of Newport's congregants at the time.[15]

Graves of the relatives of Solomon Nuñes Carvalho are also in this cemetery. Nuñes Carvalho, who was born in Charlestown, South Carolina, lived with an uncle in Barbados as a young man. He is best remembered for crossing the Rocky Mountains in 1853 with the famous Western explorer and U.S. presidential candidate, John Charles Fremont. Nuñes Carvalho's paintings and photographs, and his written descriptions of the expedition to the West as recorded in his dairies, were to become the major chronicles of Fremont's discoveries.

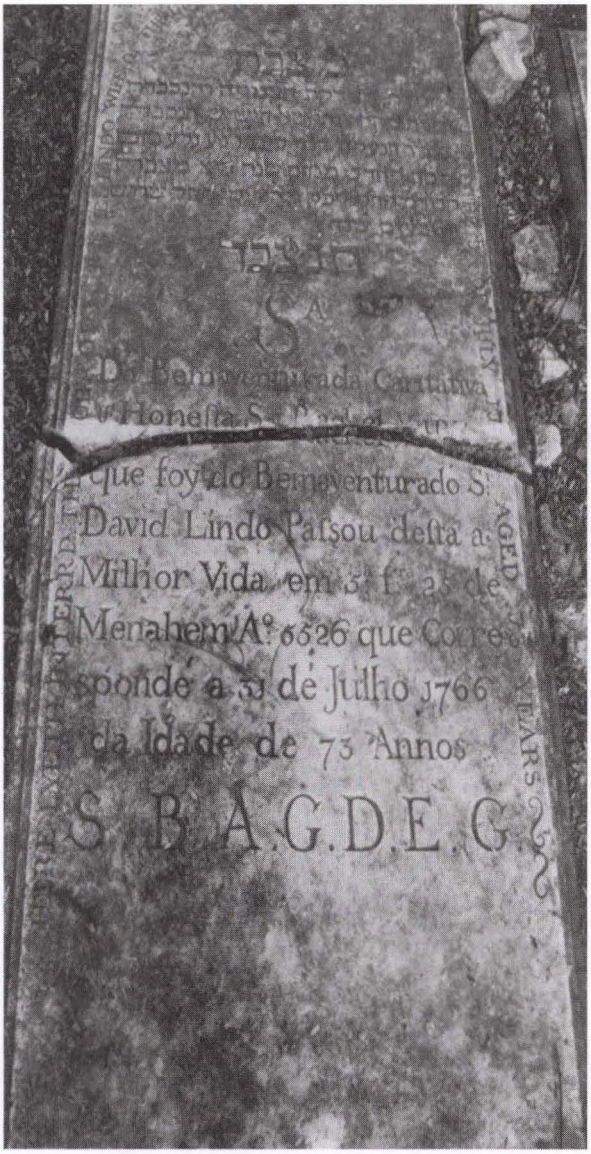
Synagogue Restoration,
Barbados - Established 1654

Barbados: 1987 Commemoration stamps showing interior and exterior of Nidhe Israel Synagogue and some of its artifacts.

Barbados: (top) Synagogue as seen from the graveyard.

bottom: The clock inside the Barbados Synagogue was manufactured in London in 1813.

Barbados: This old gravestone belongs to Meir Cohen Belifanti, the hazzan and *mohel* of the community. He died in 1752. At the top, the hands in priestly blessing symbolize his being a Cohen, or high priest. At the bottom, he is shown blowing a shofar, one of his duties as hazzan. His job as scribe is also commemorated, as are the tools of a mohel (circumciser), which he practiced. The gravestone is carved in Hebrew, Portuguese and English along the borders.



Barbados: Old gravestone damaged by earthquake. The letters SBAGDEG, which appear on many Caribbean gravestones, is Portuguese for *"Sua Bendita Alma Goze De Gloria."* (May his/her blessed soul enjoy glory.)

Nuñes Carvalho was also a pioneer in early American photography, a portrait painter, and an inventor and writer. When he lived in Baltimore, Maryland, he and his wife founded a short-lived Sephardic congregation and one of the first religious schools in that city.

His uncle Emanuel was hazzan (cantor) of *Nidhe Israel* in 1798 and his father, David Nuñes Carvalho was also active in synagogue affairs. There are several members of the Nuñes Carvalho family buried in the *Nidhe Israel* cemetery.[16]

Shilstone's dedication to his task and the publication of his book would have been enough to memorialize the role of the Jews in Barbados. But he did not stop there. Outflanked in his efforts to buy the property, Shilstone worked untiringly to have it put into the hands of the Barbados National Trust.

He hunted down and located objects once used in the old building, and had them placed in the island's museum. Finally, he lobbied for and got permission to allow modern burials in the cemetery, whose oldest stone dates to 1660. Some current burials include that of a World War II Holocaust survivor. Sorrowfully, Shilstone died in 1969, before he could see the synagogue restored.

There are approximately three hundred and seventy-five stones in three graveyards. There may have been as many as five graveyards. Two cemeteries probably were lost to commercial use in the surrounding area.

The efforts of this man, a Gentile who understood the historic beauty of the old building and its decaying cemetery as things to be preserved, testify to the good relations Caribbean Jews have had with their Christian neighbors.

Today, visitors to Bridgetown can see a newly restored synagogue with a preserved and well-kept cemetery. The outside stairway leads to the upper women's gallery, as is typical of old West Indian Sephardic synagogues.

The Barbados synagogue does not have sand on its floors, as do other old West Indian synagogues. Its black and white

checkerboard marble floor is the original set in at the 1833 construction. Enlargements of old photographs of the building were used in the restoration of *Nidhe Israel*, so that details of the interior could be faithfully reproduced.[17]

Nidhe Israel is open weekdays as a museum for visitors. On the Sabbath, it is given over to regular prayer. Because it has no air conditioning, during the summer months the congregation meets at "True Blue," formerly a private house in the suburbs, which for years was Barbados' only functioning synagogue. Known as *Shaare Tzedek*, it houses the community's religious school and library.

The Barbados Museum, in a 1942 publication, had the following to say about its early Jewish population: "The Jews of those days long ago, in spite of the disabilities imposed upon them, showed the Christians of the land how to succeed in the face of distressing odds. More than that, at a time when there was a slackness in living, and a weakness in morality, they, by their compact and organized manner of life, set a bright example of piety, of religious enthusiasm and of the security and sanctity of family life." [18]

Barbados has no rabbi. Approximately sixty Jewish adults and thirty children live in Barbados. The island's population is 225,000, making it one of the world's most densely populated countries.

Trinidad-Tobago

Under Spanish control, Jewish settlements in Trinidad-Tobago were naturally restricted because of Inquisitional courts. Both islands were under the Bishopric of Cuba. Yet Sephardim did live here, hiding their true identities. They must have become assimilated, since few, if any, Jews came forward after the English assumed control of Tobago in 1797 and Trinidad in 1818. This may be because Trinidad-Tobago fell to the British more than a century after most other Caribbean islands. While it remained in Spanish hands, Marranos were more likely to assimilate. Spanish is still spoken in Trinidad's mountain villages, however, attesting to the Hispanic influence that lingers on the island.

A small Jewish community did exist in Tobago late in the 17th century. Historians know that Daniel Levi de Barrios, the Poet Laureate of Amsterdam's Sephardic community, stopped at Tobago with a group of Jews on a colonizing trip to the Guyanas. It was here that his wife died from the ardors of the voyage.

Until the 20th century, there were no organized Jewish communities on either of these islands, which together total 1,979 square miles. The Barbados cemetery reveals, however, that at least one member of that community, Isaac Barber Isaacs, died in Tobago in 1864 and was returned for burial to Bridgetown.

By World War I, a small number of Middle Eastern Sephardim and Central European Ashkenazim made Trinidad

their home. Almost twenty years later, European turmoil brought approximately 2,000 Jews to the island seeking political and religious asylum. More Jews came during World War II. Because of its location just off the coast of Venezuela in the Southern Caribbean, Trinidad's importance as a military base brought American servicemen there.

During the late 1930s and the early World War II years, a formal congregation was founded. But with steady erosion of the Jewish population after the War, all hopes of constructing a permanent synagogue were abandoned.

There is a cemetery at Mucurapo called *Bet Olam*, which contains recent graves. A trust fund was established for their perpetual care.

One interesting note: a housing complex called New Yalta was assembled out of swampland by a Jewish real estate developer. It is laid out with streets named for Jewish leaders, such as Herzl, Ben Gurion, Weizmann, Einstein and Salk.

Very few Jews remain in Trinidad-Tobago today.

The Bahamas

Although it is not geographically part of the Caribbean, it is fitting that the island archipelago known as the Bahamas is included in this book. It was here that Columbus and his Jewish interpreter, Luis de Torres, made the first recorded landfall in the Western Hemisphere, on October 12, 1492.

Columbus, who named practically all the islands throughout the Caribbean, gave the name San Salvador to the first island he sighted. Today it is known as Watlings Island.

Two Jewish communities exist in the two main Bahamian cities of Nassau and Freeport. Nassau, situated on New Providence Island, is less than two hundred miles southeast of Miami. Freeport, on Grand Bahamas Island, is sixty-five miles east of Palm Beach.

Bahamian Jewish communities are all of recent origin, not having links to any Spanish and Portuguese immigration. There is, however, a small walled-off section of Jewish graves in Nassau's public cemetery, which go back to the 19th Century and contain Sephardic burial sites.[1]

Early settlement of these islands were sporadic and by English Jews, starting in the late 17th century, but with no establishments of any Jewish religious institutions. It was not until after World War II that Jews began settling in the Bahamas in significant numbers. The communities grew with the expansion of tourism. Two communities formed. One in Freeport, The Freeport Hebrew Congregation, follows the Reform ritual.

It has another fitting name: the Luis de Torres Synagogue. This congregation meets in rented quarters and depends on tourists to maintain regular services from High Holidays to Passover. It has about sixteen resident families.[2]

On New Providence Island, the city of Nassau is home to another small congregation. The original organized community was the Conservative Nassau Hebrew Congregation, which was founded in 1965 and met in space in a shopping center.[3] It gave way to a Reform Congregation and a new wave of Jewish families settling in the islands.

By the late 1980s and early 1990s, a new group of American residents began moving to the Bahamas. In 1996, they founded the Reform congregation known as the Bahamas Jewish Congregation.[4] This congregation grew from the needs of these newly settled young Americans who had migrated with their children, who required a Jewish education and preparation for Bar and Bat Mitzvah, including instruction in Hebrew. Their activity extends to the assistance of a student rabbi who makes monthly visits to Nassau to help the community with its religious needs. In 1999, the Bahamas Jewish Congregation celebrated its first Bar Mitzvah, that of Brent Jaffe who, with the assistance of the visiting rabbi, led the congregation in prayers, including his *parasha* (a reading of the weekly portion of the Torah.)[5]

The congregation banded together in 1997 to arrange for the release from a Bahamian detention camp of an Ukranian Jewish family of four. They raised sufficient sums to support the family while their petition to enter the United States was being processed.[6]

Some of the regular attendants at services are native Bahamians awaiting the opportunity to convert to Judaism.[7] Bahamians have long been interested in the Jewish religion. However, since there are no permanent rabbis in the islands, native Bahamians with a sincere interest in conversion must make the trip to Miami where they take instruction leading to

conversion.

The members of the Jewish community of the Bahamas are mostly professionals, business people and those involved in tourism. The population of the Bahamas is 290,000, of which there are approximately 250 Jews.[8]

THE DANISH AND AMERICAN CARIBBEAN:

ST. THOMAS

ST. CROIX

* Politically, Puerto Rico is part of the American Caribbean. Nevertheless, the greater part of the island's history is bound up with Spain. Thus, it is presented in the grouping called the Spanish Caribbean.

St. Thomas

This twenty-seven-square mile island located forty miles east of Puerto Rico is part of the U.S. Virgin Islands. Originally a Danish colony, it was sold to the United States in 1917, together with St. Croix and St. John. These three islands make up the United States Virgin Islands.

The Virgin Islands has had three Jewish governors during its history. It is the only West Indian island with that distinction. The first, from 1684-1686, was Garbiel Milan, a Marrano who was removed by the Danish king and hung for "irregularities."[1] Later governors appointed by U.S. presidents were Morris Fidanque de Castro and Ralph Paiewonsky. They held office during the 1950s and 1960s with greater distinction than their predecessor.[2]

With such Jewish connections, one could correctly surmise that this island has had a long Jewish history. The Recife diaspora brought a small, unorganized group of Marranos to St. Thomas. They were mostly shopkeepers. Later, another misfortune led to St. Thomas' first permanent and organized community. The Jews of St. Eustatius, never having recovered from losses inflicted by Admiral Rodney in 1781, began drifting to Curaçao and the North American mainland. In addition, a significant number came to St. Thomas. By 1796, a congregation called *Beracha V'Shalom* (Blessings and Peace) was flourishing. Early synagogues were located on Crystal Gade, which came to be known as "Synagogue Hill."[3]

A succession of synagogues was built on the same site on the hill as each preceding one was destroyed by natural disasters. In 1833, the congregation erected its current, now well known stone building, built to be both fire and hurricane proof. Soon, the Jews of St. Thomas accounted for approximately half of the island's European population.[4]

Cemeteries at Savan and Altona testify to the strong Jewish presence in St. Thomas for over two centuries. Some stones are so weatherworn they can no longer be read. Others, carved in Portuguese, Spanish, Hebrew, English and French, tell the tales of the movements of Sephardim from within the Caribbean to the United States, France, Holland, England, Denmark and Germany. A street near the old cemetery at Savan still bears the Danish name, Joden Gade (Jew Street), to remind us that Jews probably congregated in this neighborhood centuries ago.[5]

Much of the prosperity enjoyed by early Sephardim was connected with sugar cultivation, rum, shipping and trade. With the abolition of slavery, the decline of sugar and later, the eclipse of the sailing ship, St. Thomas became a seldom visited island. Its Jews left for the United States, Curaçao and fresh opportunities in Panama that arose from the newly constructed Canal. Among the families that left for Panama were the De Castros and the Sassos.

Despite the fact that few Jews remained in St. Thomas, its synagogue remained in use and was available for prayer every Sabbath. The community maintained a rabbi to perform regular religious services. Rabbi Moses Sasso, who acted as the community's spiritual leader during that time, is a legend in St. Thomas for the sixty-one years of service he rendered as the community's spiritual leader.[6]

St Thomas: The entrance to the St. Thomas Synagogue, *Beracha V'Shalom*, which is the oldest continuously used synagogue in the United States.

St Thomas: The first Sephardic cemetery in St. Thomas. The Hebrew dates, 5510-5596, correspond to 1749-1835. The man in the foreground is former St. Thomas Rabbi Joseph Karasic who, with the author, was recording gravestones in 1971.

In 1917, when Denmark sold its islands to the United States, there were barely one hundred Jews living in St. Thomas, a remarkable decline from the more than four hundred who lived on the island eighty years earlier. During World War II, their numbers dwindled to a precarious fifty.[7]

Thanks, however, to a vital tourist economy that has grown from 1960 to the present, as well as St. Thomas' status as a free port, Jews have returned to this beautiful island. Most of them have come from the United States.

They pray at *Beracha V'Shalom*, the oldest synagogue in continuous use under the United States flag. It follows the tradition of other Caribbean synagogues, with floors covered with sand. It also adheres to the Sephardic arrangement of Ark, *Bimah* and congregational seating.[8]

Unlike most Caribbean Sephardic synagogues however, *Beracha V'Shalom* is only one story high. During the years that it followed the Orthodox Sephardic ritual women sat apart from men, but on the same level. The Congregation now follows Reform ritual.[9]

Among its treasured religious objects are a menorah which dates back to Spain and is 900 years old, and its famous antique Chair of Elijah, used in the circumcision of newborn males. In addition, some of its Torahs are centuries old.

The Congregation maintains up to date social and educational facilities in a separate building across the narrow road from the Synagogue. Unfortunately, that facility was almost completely destroyed during Hurricane Marilyn in 1995. It has since been rebuilt, and functions once again as a social center for island Jewry.

Throughout its long history, the St. Thomas Jewish community has given leaders to both the United States and the world. It was here that Camille Pisarro was born and spent his childhood. Sent to be educated in France, he returned to St. Thomas but left once again to satisfy his love for painting and his attraction to Paris. Pisarro became not only a leading painter of the Impressionist School; he was a father figure and mentor to many of the great Impressionists. In 1996-97, the St. Thomas synagogue mounted an exhibit of early Pisarro art works, all of which had been executed in St. Thomas during the 1850s.[10]

David (Levy) Yulee, born in St. Thomas in 1810, was a Congressman and later United States Senator from Florida. Since Yulee became a convert and denied he was a Jew (he claimed to be the son of a Moroccan prince), the distinction of being the first Jewish Senator belongs to Judah P. Benjamin of

St. Croix, who was elected to the U.S. Senate from Louisiana in 1853. Neither Benjamin nor Yulee could escape their religious past. On at least one occasion, fellow Senator (later president) Andrew Johnson denounced them on the Senate floor for their Jewishness.[11]

During the 1860s, General Antonio Lopez de Santa Ana, once ruler of all Mexico, conqueror of the Alamo and Sam Houston's foe and adversary in the Texas War of Independence, spent one of his many exiles in St. Thomas. He would sit dockside and tell all who would listen of his exploits and about the famous battle in which he lost his leg. One wonders whether he chatted with the Sephardic *hidalgos* of St. Thomas in Spanish. Not only did they share a similar Spanish heritage but, at that moment of history, they had the same home in the middle of the Caribbean sea.[12]

Today, St. Thomas' Jews are found in all levels of the island's commerce and society. They are the proud custodians of their venerable synagogue and in 1996, celebrated the 200th anniversary of the establishment of their congregation. Approximately 65 Jewish families live in St. Thomas, down from 125 a decade ago. The depletion is the result of two devastating hurricanes: Hugo in 1989 and Marilyn in 1995. However, the congregation is committed to having the services of a rabbi.[13]

Once, in times past, Crystal Gade, or Synagogue Hill, was home to the families of La Nacion: the Mendez-Monsantos; de Mordechays; Mottas; Henriquez; Nuñez; d'Azevedos; Levy Maduros; Pardos; Hohebs, Cardozes, and others.[14] Today, about 150 tourists visit the synagogue on Crystal Gade daily, most of them arriving via cruise ship. Those who ask island residents for the location of the Synagogue will almost always be given directions, as it is a landmark known by most St. Thomians.

St. Croix

Settled before St. Thomas, St. Croix's Jews first banded together formally in the town of Christiansted in 1760. The former French island, with its racist Code Noir, would have been inhospitable to Jews but in 1733, the Danes took possession of St. Croix after purchasing it from the French.

Danish religious policy was more liberal than that of France and attracted Jewish settlers to the island. But the community was unable to prosper. They did have a synagogue, which has long disappeared. A small cemetery however, still remains in Christiansted, its stones spanning the period from 1779 to 1862. By the end of the 19th century, that early community was almost entirely disbanded.[1]

During its brief Jewish history, St. Croix was the birthplace of Judah P. Benjamin, one of America's greatest lawyers and a leader of the South during the Civil War. Benjamin was also Senator from Louisiana from 1853 to 1861. He was Attorney General and later Secretary of State and Secretary of War in Jefferson Davis' Confederate government; he was often called "the brains of the Confederacy." Benjamin's political career was probably the most active and powerful of any Jew in American history.[2]

The brilliant Benjamin escaped to England after the Civil War to start a new life. Assuming British citizenship, he became one of England's great barristers and authored "Benjamin on Sales," still a classic legal text.

Benjamin's Marrano family traces their ties to St. Eustatius, where his grandmother, Hanna Benjamin de Leon, was a well-known medical practitioner, dispensing folk medicine to islanders. Her house was used as a synagogue when *Honen Dalim* was damaged during the hurricane of 1772.[3] Her tombstone rests in the Jewish cemetery in St. Eustatius.[4]

The name Judah Benjamin appears as one of the St. Eustatius synagogue directors in 1772. This Benjamin was probably a close relative of Judah P. Benjamin of St. Croix, since Sephardim follow the tradition of perpetuating names from generation to generation, even among the living.[5]

According to folklore, one of St. Croix' Jewish community, Christina Levine, married the notorious pirate Jean Lafitte, and died aboard one of his ships in 1804. Lafitte himself appears to have been Jewish.[6]

Never as numerous nor as active as the Jews of St. Thomas, Cruzan Jews have, however, undergone a minor resurgence in recent years. They have their own synagogue and are occasionally served by the St. Thomas rabbi.

Approximately 30 Jewish families now reside in St. Croix. Their congregation is called *B'nai Or*. During summer months, when tourism abates, the congregation is forced to curtail its regular service.[7]

The Spanish Caribbean:

PUERTO RICO*

CUBA

THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

* Puerto Rico is a Freely Associated Commonwealth within the United States, but is listed as Spanish here because of its early and long history as a colony of Spain.

Puerto Rico

Although Puerto Rico, the fourth largest island in the Greater Antilles, is currently home to the largest Jewish population of any Caribbean island, it was not always so. The Recife diaspora of 1654, which enriched most Jewish life in the West Indies, had no affect on Puerto Rico.

Unlike Dutch, Danish and British islands that are rich with Jewish memories and monuments, Puerto Rico has no significant records of any settlements, synagogues or cemeteries existing before the 20th century. As a Spanish island until 1898, it was an inhospitable place for Jews because of Spain's laws banning Jewish settlement in her territories, and the establishment of Courts of Inquisition.

At the beginning of the 21st century, however, the Jewish population of Puerto Rico is approximately two thousand.[1] The island, one hundred ten miles long by forty-five miles wide and located at the southeastern end of the Greater Antilles, has a total population of almost four million and the most significant and active Jewish community in the Caribbean.

Three synagogues are maintained in Puerto Rico, all with full-time rabbis. Many Jewish support organizations from the American mainland have chapters on the island.

There are sparse records of some Jews having lived in Puerto Rico during the Spanish colonial period. From what historians have been able to ascertain, there were no organized Jewish settlements, just individual Sephardim with Spanish

family names, who were familiar with Hispanic culture and language. They came from Curaçao and Venezuela.

Sarah Nuñes Mercado died in Guayanilla in 1805; Elias de Sola lived in that same town in 1839. Isaac de Lima practiced medicine in Mayagüez in 1840; Solomon Senior died in Aguadilla in 1849 and was taken to Curaçao for burial. There is also a history of one Judah Cohen of Curaçao having been killed by Spaniards in Puerto Rico in 1723. Cohen appears to have been a merchant trading illegally in Spanish territory.[2]

It was not until 1898 that Jews came to Puerto Rico in significant numbers and without fear of running afoul of Spanish authorities. The United States had defeated Spain in the Spanish-American War, thereby gaining control of both Cuba and Puerto Rico. American Jewish servicemen and administrators soon arrived. No formal community arose, however, as servicemen remained only a short while and most administrators left after completing their tasks.

Jewish administrators did much to assist Puerto Rico form the establishment of the island's legal and fiscal codes, and create and staff its court system. Among them were Louis Sulzbacher, Adolph Wolf and Cecil Snyder, who became chief justice of Puerto Rico's high court.[3] Jewish public health officials began the process of ridding Puerto Rico of its tropical diseases. Among them were William Hoffman and Charles Weiss.

Not until the beginning of the First World War did large numbers of Jews return to the island. After that War, the island's Jewish population waned again. Then, during the late 1920s and early '30s, Jews from Central and Eastern Europe immigrated to Puerto Rico. American Jews came too, as representatives of mainland interests such as the Consolidated Tobacco Company.[4]

Early settlers engaged in business and merchandising. Aside from informal gatherings on religious holidays and other special occasions, there was no functioning Jewish community. In 1927, the tiny community numbered only twenty-seven families.[5]

Puerto Rico: Interior of Temple Beth Shalom, the Reform Jewish Congregation of Puerto Rico at Calle San Jorge. Local architect Tom Marvel maintained the Caribbean look for the sanctuary remodeled in the late 1980s.

It was during World War II that the Jewish community increased substantially. Servicemen arrived accompanied by military rabbis Lavy Becker and Bertran Pollans, who held regular services with civilians also attending and became actively involved with the community. At the close of World War II, the servicemen and rabbis left, but the War years had strengthened the permanent Jewish community and its resolve to grow.

The Jewish Community Center (JCC), as the congregation was first known, purchased a private home in 1953 and converted it into a synagogue. In 1959, Puerto Rico had two hundred Jewish families. By 1967, the JCC, also known as Congregation *Shaare Tzedek* (Gates of Mercy) had to enlarge its facilities. The basically American-oriented congregation had received an influx of Jewish exiles from Castro's revolution in Cuba. These refugees enriched the growing community not only with their numbers, but also with dedication to their religion.[6]

Today, successive generations of the Cuban families have given a Hispanic orientation to Shaare Tzedek's services, which are presided over by rabbis from South America.

Many congregants were executives and employees of Jewish owned businesses established on the island after "Operation Bootstrap" was inaugurated. "Operation Bootstrap" was a successful effort by the government to bring manufacturers to the island by granting tax and other economic incentives. Closely allied to the drafting and implementing of this plan was Max Goldman, a U.S. mainland attorney who relocated to San Juan during the 1950s. Jews fit well into Puerto Rican society.[7]

Another group of American Jews, many of them professionals, educators, managers and civil servants, formed a second congregation on the island with the assistance of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (UAHC) in New York. They became affiliated with the UAHC in 1967, under the name Reform Jewish Congregation of Puerto Rico. A few years later, the students in its religious school suggested the name by

which it is more commonly known today, Temple Beth Shalom (House of Peace.)

Worshipping at first in borrowed quarters, including a church and private homes, the congregation was finally able to rent a building across the street from Shaare Tzedek. Then, in 1971, they purchased their own home in the Condado section; a commercial building that once housed a bar. Only minimal funds were available for its conversion into a synagogue.[8]

During the 1980s, both congregations embarked upon extensive renovations of their respective buildings, emphasizing their strength and commitment to a Jewish future on the island.

Shaare Tzedek, in the Miramar section of San Juan, boasts lush grounds and a building with an historical past: It was originally designed by the prominent Puerto Rican architect Nicodemas in the early 1900s. Renovations have retained the character of the old building while adding space for the congregation's large religious school.

Beth Shalom's renovation, under the direction of well-known local architect Tom Marvel, has changed its former Spartan quarters - there were some who once referred to it as "the store-front congregation"- into a comfortable and comforting sanctuary, similar in mood to the famous *El Transito* synagogue in Toledo, Spain. Schoolrooms, offices, and a library on the upper floor, form part of the synagogue complex.

One feature of Beth Shalom's experience is the many Puerto Ricans claiming a Marrano heritage who attend services. Several Puerto Ricans, including whole families, have undergone conversion.[9]

Until 1996, the Temple's religious committee of lay leaders provided weekly services, bringing a rabbi from the U.S. mainland for High Holiday services and special events. Rabbi Albert Shulman was the first in 1967; Rabbi Gary Bretton-Granatoor conducted High Holiday services at Beth Shalom for ten years from 1985 to 1995, with Amy Dattner as cantor. She continues

in that role. Rabbi Mordechai Rotem, ordained in Israel, began his association with Beth Shalom in 2001.

Puerto Rico maintains three synagogues: Reform, Conservative and, since 1999, a Chabad Learning Center. There are only a few Sephardim among Puerto Rico's Jews, but the Spanish language is used by most of the community. Shaare Tzedek's services are conducted mostly in Spanish and Hebrew; Beth Shalom is beginning to accommodate its new Hispanic members by adding some Spanish to its English and Hebrew services.

Cuba

The island of Cuba is seven hundred and fifty miles long. It is the largest and most populous island in the Caribbean and spreads from close to the American mainland to the northwest corner of Haiti. It is like Puerto Rico, however, in that it does not have a rich history of Jewish connections.

Among Cuba's first European settlers was Luis de Torres, the Jewish interpreter who had been baptized just before sailing with Columbus. As interpreter on that first voyage of discovery, de Torres was sent by the Admiral into the island's interior to find the Grand Khan, leader of the Asians that Columbus was seeking. Instead, during his march inland de Torres met natives smoking tobacco. After his voyage with Columbus, de Torres returned to the island and became a tobacco farmer. It is said he also negotiated a treaty between Columbus and the natives.[1]

Under Spanish rule, Cuba was a hostile environment for Jewish colonization. To settle here, Jews would of necessity have had to conceal their true religion. Such intrepid settlers who tried to do that, however, were often caught and dealt with harshly by the Inquisition, which was well established in the New World, especially in Cuba, which was a Bishopric See and center for the Inquisition.

Until 1898, when the United States acquired Cuba as a result of the Spanish American War, no formal Jewish community existed on that island.[2] There were, however, some Jewish connections.

In his quest for his island's independence in the decades before 1898, the Cuban patriot José Marti sought and received help from Floridian Jews during his years of exile in the United States. When America took control of the island, these mainland Jews were among the first American settlers in Cuba. Shortly after the beginning of the 20th century, they organized the island's first synagogue, the Union Hebrew Congregation, which followed the Reform ritual.[2]

During the struggle for independence, at least one Jew, Carlos Roloff, maintained a position of prominence with Marti's revolutionaries. Roloff, a Polish-born naturalized American, found his way to Cuba to become one of Marti's trusted officers. He attained the rank of General, while living as a guerrilla in the Cuban forest. Upon achievement of Cuban independence, Roloff became Treasurer-General of Cuba and his name appeared as signatory on Cuba's one hundred peso bonds issued in 1905.[3]

After Cuba was granted independence by the United States, Sephardic Jews from Curaçao, Turkey, Syria and other Levantine countries came to Havana, attracted by Cuba's opportunities and common language. By the 1920s and early '30s, a wave of Ashkenazic Jews, escaping European anti-Semitism, enlarged the community.[4] On the eve of Castro's Revolution in 1959, Cuban Jewry numbered from 12,000 to 15,000, depending upon whose statistics were accepted. According to communal records the community was sixty-five percent Eastern European, twenty-five percent Sephardim and ten percent American.

Several facts about this island's Jewish community were significant: This was the largest Jewish population ever concentrated on any Caribbean island; There were more synagogues functioning than ever existed at one time on any island in the West Indies; and, the number of Jews in Cuba far exceeded the total amount throughout the West Indies at any one time in its history.

In order to have a clear idea of the full and varied Jewish life then existing in Cuba, one might go to the 1959 edition of World Jewry Today, published on the eve of the upheavals to come from the revolution. The book lists the presence of the following organizations in Havana:

- five active synagogues;
- a chapter of the World Zionist Organization;
- a Jewish Chamber of Commerce;
- a Jewish Women's Association;
- a B'nai Brith Lodge;
- a Club Israel;
- a Hebrew Union;
- a Hapoel Hamizrachi;
- a Zionist organization.

The community supported three schools, of which *Colegio Autonomo de Centro Israelita* was Havana's largest. This school was nationalized after the revolution as a grade school and renamed the Albert Einstein School.

The community also ran a bi-weekly newspaper and an annual publication called *Almanaque Hebreo Vida Habanera*. In addition to this flourishing activity focused in Havana, the towns of Matanza, Santa Clara, Camaguey, Santiago de Cuba and Manzanillo all maintained Jewish religious activities.[5]

Jewish life in Cuba reached a peak in 1959 that is as yet unequaled in the Caribbean. Unfortunately, the community became uprooted in the decades of the 1960s and '70s, not through anti-Semitism, but by the politics of the Cuban Revolution.

Jewish merchants and businessmen suffered along with the rest of the middle class, which the revolutionary government systematically destroyed. A new Jewish diaspora began. Just as Jews three hundred years earlier had left Brazil to settle throughout the West Indies, almost all of Cuban Jewry left, to

enrich Puerto Rico, Miami, New York, Boston and other cities in North and South America.

Some Jews, committed to the revolution, remained in Cuba and held positions of importance in the new government. They even arranged for broadcasts of Yiddish radio programs, where music, revolutionary propaganda and poems were read.[6] But the greater majority fled. Some even tried to return with the invasion force at the Bay of Pigs in 1960. For this, they spent many years in Cuban prisons.

Of the once active Jewish life evident from the numbers of synagogues and other communal organizations, only the *Patronata*, once the most influential synagogue in Havana (formed in 1953, shortly before Castro's revolution in 1959) and two other synagogues still remain. Yet even these congregations continue to struggle. There has not been a permanent rabbi in Cuba for almost four decades.[7]

Throughout these years nevertheless, the Cuban government has encouraged the continuance of its Jewish community and their synagogues. Jewish communists even attended Passover Seders. And there is no hostility toward Cuban Jews, despite Cuba's lack of relations with Israel and its support of the Palestinians since 1973.

Besides ensuring the presence of *matzot* (unleavened bread) for Passover, the Cuban government also allows a Kosher butcher to provide meat to the community on a for-profit basis. His was the only free enterprise establishment on the island during the years of its hard-line communism. The shochet (ritual slaughterer) is also the administrator of the Jewish cemetery.[8]

By 1964, five years after the revolution, Cuba was still home to the Caribbean's largest Jewish community, but it had shrunk dramatically to about 2,586, the majority of whom resided in Havana. In that year, figures compiled by the Zionist Union of Cuba, under the auspices of the Canadian Jewish Congress, revealed that the largest age group was between

twenty-five and sixty, and that the community was almost evenly divided between men and women.

Today, there are about 1800 Jews in Cuba, many of them of advanced age and living in Havana. It is the second largest community in the West Indies and is beginning to show signs of resurgence. The Jewish community outside Cuba has stepped up contacts with the island's Jews. And what is equally important, the young Jews of Cuba have shown an interest in restoring and maintaining the community. They have been active in religious study and resuming religious life in Cuba.

This new interest in Judaism has been steadily growing. In 1994, one young man, David Levy, left with Castro's blessings for New York City's Yeshiva University to study at college and then for the Rabbinate [9]

Visiting rabbis from Canada, Brazil, Argentina, Mexico and the United States have been performing marriages, conversions, bar mitzvah, and circumcisions. These vital rituals had not been conducted for decades, allowing Jewish life to slowly decay.[10]

Lay groups now regularly visit the Jewish community, bringing vital pharmaceutical products and food.[11] Medical specialists have assisted the Jewish community in setting up pharmacies and medical clinics. For all of this flurry of activity, the community maintains political neutrality, avoiding any position on the government's activities.[12]

Despite official support of the Palestinians, Castro's Cuba has not been repressive of its Jewish citizens. On the contrary, until 1973, Cuba recognized Israel. In that year it became the first government in the Western Hemisphere to recognize the Palestinian Liberation Organization.[13] Yet at home, things did not change for Cuban Jews. As late as 1999, Israeli and Cuban officials arranged for the movement of six hundred Cuban Jews to Israel. The Israelis called the movement of newcomers "Operation Cigar." As each new group arrived, immigration officials said they were accepting delivery of "cigars." It was understood between Israel and Cuba that there was to be no

Cuba: Stamps honoring Cuban-Jewish hero, Major General Carlos Roloff. When he was treasurer of Cuba, his signature appeared on Cuban bonds and other financial instruments.

publicity concerning this arrangement. But newspapers in South America soon discovered what was happening, almost jeopardizing aliyah.[14]

Despite all this activity, the community still suffers from its position outside the mainstream of world Jewry, its inability to hire a rabbi because it lacks funds and its loss of the younger generation to aliyah. Nevertheless, Cuban Jews maintain a strong will to survive. A Cuba open to the world in terms of politics and free trade seems to be the only hope for them.[15]

Jewish communities outside Havana have also shown resurgence. Defunct for decades, the communities in Santiago and Camaguey have been re-instituted, with establishment of synagogues.[16] Despite there being only eighteen hundred Jews on the island, a few hundred less than Puerto Rico (which has the largest Jewish community in the Antilles) Cuba is home to five synagogues, three in Havana and one each in Santiago and Camaguey. This is the largest number on any one island in the Caribbean Basin. Despite this activity, Cuba still has no permanent, resident rabbi.

The Dominican Republic

The Dominican Republic and Haiti share the island of Hispanola, the second largest island in the Caribbean.

Despite a similar colonial history as Cuba and Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic nevertheless broke away from Spain by its Declaration of Independence in 1844. After a short reconciliation, the Republic achieved final independence in 1865.

Caribbean Sephardim then settled there. By 1893, however, they all had been assimilated by this one-time jewel of Spain's West Indian empire. A descendant of that group was Francisco Henriquez y Carvajal, president of the Dominican Republic in 1916.[1]

The Dominican Republic has a history of hospitality to Jews. In 1882, General Gregorio Luperon sought unsuccessfully to establish Russian Jews in the Republic as part of an ambitious agricultural program. In the early 1920s another wave of Jewish immigrants came from Eastern Europe and engaged in commerce unmolested.

In 1938, Rafael Trujillo, the Dominican Republic's dictator, startled the world by opening his country's doors to up to one hundred thousand Jewish refugees from Europe's hostile political climate. To back up his offer, Trujillo eventually donated almost fifty-five thousand acres of his own personal land in Sosua, a small north coast town near the resort city of Puerto Plata.[2]

It was a time when Europe's Jews were scrambling for friendly havens yet, unbelievably, less than one thousand

accepted this offer.[3] Those who did come built an almost autonomous city with its own school, hospital, synagogue (which was upgraded and a small museum established in 1990,) and even a radio station. Much of this activity was helped by tax waivers for Sosua residents and Jewish agency grants for purchasing livestock and living quarters.[4]

Despite the disappointingly small numbers who came to the Republic, Trujillo ordered his diplomats to effectuate delivery of about four thousand Dominican visas to Jews still remaining in Germany. Their possession guaranteed safety from Nazi concentration camps.[5]

But the refugees who did come, most of them German, Austrian and Czechoslovakian, were professionals, civil servants and businessmen, not farmers. To them, Sosua was a backwater. The tropical heat, isolation and culture shock worked to discourage colonization. Lack of women in the predominately male colony created dissention. By 1946, more than six hundred of their numbers left for the United States and other places.[6]

Those who remained established cooperative agricultural enterprises, including high grade dairy products and sausage manufacturing. Today, Sousa Jews number less than one hundred fifty, but their influence is evident: they have made of Sousa a European enclave. Outdoor cafes serve Viennese and Hungarian treats. Guesthouses are reminiscent of Central Europe. Sosuan Jews integrated into Dominican society; one of their group, Alfredo Rosenzweig, was elected to the Dominican senate.[7]

The reluctance to Jewish immigration to Sousa has puzzled historians, since Jewish agencies actively sought its colonization. To help resettlement of Jewish refugees, the agencies even sent an engineer, Solomon Trone, to Lisbon in 1940 to enlist refugees for Sousa. He could only persuade one hundred men to volunteer.[8]

Some contemporary writers claim there were insufficient

vessels to transport people. That may be so, but it does not alter the fact that very few sought the refuge offered. Indeed, the history of Jamaica and Trinidad belied the transportation argument. Over four thousand Jewish refugees were transported to those islands before and during World War II.[9]

Trujillo's unusual concern for Jews did not end with Sosua and the transit visas he issued to German Jews. In 1957, he personally paid for a brand new synagogue for the Jewish community of Santo Domingo, and had it fitted with luxurious marble and mahogany. In that same year, Trujillo offered Egyptian Jews sanctuary after the Suez Canal War between Israel and Egypt. As a result of that conflict, Egypt dispossessed thousands of its Jews. Once again, Trujillo's offer was not accepted. It should be noted that by this time, the State of Israel had absorbed most Jewish refugees worldwide.[10]

Another point of interest in the Republic concerns Luis de Torres, Columbus' interpreter. De Torres' reputation extends beyond Cuba. The tree trunk to which he moored his boat when he landed in the Dominican Republic is a museum piece in Santo Domingo's main cathedral. It is in the same place where Columbus' remains are reputed to be resting.[11]

In 1992, the Dominican Republic inaugurated an ambitious monument commemorating Columbus' momentous voyage. Part of the display was dedicated to the Jewish people. A message from Israel's president, Chaim Herzog, states: "The Dominican Republic … occupies a seat of honor in the memory of the Jewish people and the State of Israel, of which Sosua is an unforgettable symbol."[12]

With communities in both Santo Domingo and Sosua, approximately three hundred and fifty Jews live in the Dominican Republic today. Less than fifty families make up the Santo Domingo colony, including Israelis in the Dominican Republic on technical aid missions. There is no rabbi, but services are held twice a month. The community has been losing members for the past decade.[13]

The French Caribbean:

MARTINIQUE

GUADELOUPE

HAITI

Martinique and Guadeloupe

The early Spanish and Portuguese settlers on France's West Indian possessions of Martinique and Guadeloupe found these islands less hospitable than the liberal Dutch, English and Danish islands. On the other hand, Jews could expect better treatment from the French than from the Spaniards and their relentless Inquisition.

The French called their Caribbean possessions, located in the Windward Islands about 1,250 miles southeast of Miami, Florida, *les isles du vent*. Before France acquired these islands in 1653, they belonged to Holland. Jews were already living there and already dominating the sugar and cocoa markets. Refugees from Recife, Brazil later joined them, in 1654.[1]

When Recifan refugees hopefully presented themselves to the island's Governor for permission to gain entry, Jesuit priests protested vehemently. Permission was never formally granted, but they settled anyway and seem not to have been troubled for lack of authority.[2]

Their influence must have been great, though their numbers were proportionately small. Priests, especially Antoine Biet, constantly complained of a powerful Jewish influence. They pointed out that Saturday, the traditional market day, was changed to Friday to accommodate Jews who dominated commerce, so that they could observe their Sabbath.

Martinique was not the only French island attracting Recifan refugees. Hundreds, including Jews, went to

Guadeloupe and smaller numbers settled in Cayenne on the South American mainland, as French Guiana was then known. By the end of the 1600s, French colonial officials and the clergy were regularly commenting to Paris that much of their island trade was in Jewish hands and that something should be done to curb their influence.

It was in Martinique, however, where Jesuits strongly opposed Jews, their activities and their presence, that colonial policy towards them was shaped. Efforts were made to curb Jewish influence of all sorts. Restrictive laws were passed. But practical island administrators, who were seeking profits and prosperity, largely ignored them. Closing the official eye was to become the colonial government's way of dealing with anti-Jewish laws.[3]

The French islands might have developed strong Jewish communities. But the Jesuits, who exercised strong control over colonial business activities, constantly harassed Jews. Father Antoine Biet noted that Jewish influence was far in excess of the community's numbers.

One special target of the Jesuits was Benjamin d'Acosta de Andrade. He owned two sugar refineries and was the first to process and manufacture cocoa in a French territory. He exported his product to France, calling it chocolate. D'Acosta de Andrade finally left Martinique in despair.

The Jewish community on the main island of Martinique supported a Sephardic synagogue by 1676. Amsterdam's Spanish and Portuguese congregation lent the congregation one of its Torahs, to be used during regular prayers.[4]

Guadeloupe's current capital, Point-a-Pitre, is supposed to have derived its name from an early Jewish refugee from Recife named Pietre, who built a fish processing plant on that site.[5]

Guadeloupe seems to have had no formal congregation, but there was constant movement between that island and Martinique, which are close to each other. Sephardim, maintained some presence on Bass-Terre, Guadeloupe's main settle-

ment.

The champion of a strong and permanent Jewish settlement in *les isles du vent* was Colbert, France's Controller-General. He was able to arrange the 1671 Charter of Liberties, which guaranteed Jewish civil rights. The Crown approved the Charter. But it all came to an end when Colbert died. After much lobbying by the Jesuits, the *Code Noir* [Black Code] was enacted in 1685 and the last positive guarantees that Colbert obtained were lost.

Written primarily as a guide to the conduct of slavery, Code Noir also contained provisions that proscribed Jews from settling in French territories.

The *Code Noir* promulgated by Louis XIV stated:

> "It is our wish, and We decree that the edict of the late King of glorious memory, our greatly honored Lord and father, dated April 23, 1615, be carried into effect in our islands and by these present, We command all our officers to chase out of our islands all Jews who have established their residence there whom as declared enemies of the Christian faith we command to get out in three months counting from the day of the publication of these results upon penalty of confiscation of their persons and property." [6]

This act was the only formal expulsion order ever issued by a government and directed against Jews in the West Indies.

At first, the decree was ignored, as were earlier anti-Jewish laws. But time was running out for the settlers. Discouraged by all the obstacles set before them, Jews began drifting to Dutch, British and Danish islands, to the dismay of administrators charged with overseeing profitable colonies.

Despite the onerous laws, notable exceptions to Code Noir

were still allowed. The powerful Sephardim of Bordeaux, Bayonne and Marseilles in France were permitted to send their sons to the colonies to protect their commercial interests - with government approval. The Gradis family, allied with the Mendes clan, ran six ships from *les isles du Vent*. The "Polly," "David," "Patriarch Abraham," "Le Parfait," *"L'Alliance"* and *"Le Vainquer"* made regular runs through the islands and to French Canada. [7]

Other families enjoyed similar privileges. They were called *"marchands portugais ou noveaux Christiens,"* (Portuguese traders or New Christians). Less powerful families were forced to suffer under a series of petty regulations continuously limiting Jewish life and commerce.

The French insistence on making Jewish settlement in its colonies difficult forced immigration to Dutch, Danish and British islands, where civil status was more certain. Thus, the Nassys, one of the founding families of Surinam Jewry, moved to that Dutch colony from Cayenne. So did the Martinique chocolate exporter and sugar grower, Benjamin d'Acosta De Andrade.

The strength of Jewish communities in French colonies slowly waned. Jews continued to move throughout *les Iles du Vent*, but sparingly and with caution.

Almost a century after passage of the *Code Noir*, the Crown still refused to give dwindling numbers of Jews living within its territories any legal standing. Code Noir was not repealed; the Crown, however, did state for the record that its provisions might be too stringent.[8]

Following the French Revolution, the civil status of the Jews was to change, both in metropolitan France and within her colonies throughout the world. It was, unfortunately, too late for the reconstruction of a Jewish community in the French Caribbean. Strong communities and deep roots had long been established in Curaçao, Jamaica, Barbados and other islands. Whatever lure the French West Indies may have possessed had

long since vanished, although small groups of unorganized Jews did live in the French Caribbean.

Today, there is a new wave of Jewish migration from France and North Africa bringing Jews to both islands. The 1998 edition of "Jewish Communities of the World," published by the World Jewish Congress, verifies the fact that both Guadeloupe and Martinique are beginning a new chapter in Jewish history for these islands.

Each of them now maintains a synagogue, *Talmud Torah* (religious school) and a kosher store. Over 800,000 people live on Guadeloupe and Martinique; of this number, some fifty Jews live in Guadeloupe and about four hundred in Martinique. The members of the Martinique community have created an attractive synagogue, Talmud Torah and mikve in the suburbs of Fort du France. They are led by a Parisian rabbi who belongs to the *Chabad* movement. This community has created the first synagogue in Martinique in over 300 years.[9]

Even French Guyana has benefited from new immigration. In the early 1990s, a small group of Jews from North Africa and Surinam settled in Cayenne, which is on the north coast of South America and neighbor of Surinam. The Chabad movement assists the approximately eighty Jews of Cayenne.

Haiti

Haiti, lying 700 miles southeast of Miami, Florida, today has over six million inhabitants living on its 10,714 square miles. The first Jew to set foot here was the interpreter Luis de Torres, as he must have done on most, if not all of the islands discovered by Columbus on his first voyage in 1492.

Haiti is a part of Hispaniola (Little Spain), the name Columbus gave the island. The Spanish ceded Haiti to France in 1697, and the entire island was then known by its French name, St. Dominigue. Today, the island is once again called Hispaniola, but is divided between Haiti, the only independent French-speaking republic in the Americas, and her western neighbor, the Spanish-speaking Dominican Republic.

Following the example of their colleagues on Martinique and Guadeloupe, Haiti's colonial administrators did not allow Code Noir to materially affect the Jewish population of this French colony.

Throughout the 1700s, Sephardim with names such as De Pas, Sarzedas, Soria, and Toussaint owned plantations and traded throughout French Haiti. The Gradis and Monsanto families engaged in international trade. The Monsantos maintained family ties in French New Orleans on the North American continent, in St. Thomas, Curaçao and other Caribbean islands. The Sarzedas family later settled in Charleston, South Carolina. Most Jews during this early colonial period however, seemed to have been in the employ of large plantation owners who came

from France and Curaçao.

The Black Revolt of 1790 affected Jews as well as other European colonists. All Europeans were forced to flee Haiti because of anti-white violence. The revolts brought an end to slavery and French domination, creating an independent Haiti. During the insurrection, some Jewish families managed to reach safety in a Haitian town called Jeremie. To this day, many Haitians from Jeremie claim Jewish ancestry.

Some of the Haitian landscape contains names of Jewish interest, attesting to the influence of early Jewish settlers. The town of Jeremie is named for the prophet Jeremiah. There are place names such as Point-a-Juifs and Ause-a-Juifs. Other influences may be found where Portuguese Jews once lived. Their family names such as Moron and Astruc still remain.[1]

Ancestors of former French Prime Minister Pierre Mendes-France lived in Jeremie before they moved to Bourdeaux in France. This branch of the renowned Sephardic Mendes family adopted the additional patronymic, France, distinguishing themselves as the Gallic arm of an important and powerful international family.[2]

Abraham and Sara Moise were also refugees from the Black Revolt. In 1791, they came to South Carolina. This couple founded a family that was to enrich American letters and add to the military traditions of the Confederate States of America.

Penina Moise, the daughter of Abraham and Sarah, was the first American woman to publish poetry and literature. Not recognized during her lifetime and unable to earn a living from her literary efforts, Moise nonetheless gained a reputation after her death both as a poetess and a Jewish activist, commenting on Jewish events during the first half of the 19th century. [3]

The rest of the Moise family lived and served in the South with great distinction. Edwin Warren Moise served as an officer in the Army of the Confederacy. While an officer in the Civil War, he commanded a company called Moises's Rangers, which was formed in May 1862. It was the only Company offi-

cially listed as named for a Jewish officer.[4] After the War, Moise ran for and won the office of Adjutant General of South Carolina.

There is no doubt that the Black Revolt destroyed such Jewish communities as may have existed. Jewish presence in Haiti never regained its vigor.

Before the Black Revolt in the 18th Century, the Jews of Haiti were well known. On August 18, 1782, members involved in the building of New York's Spanish and Portuguese synagogue wrote to the Jewish community of Cap Francois (now Cap Haitien) for their assistance. At that time, there were about thirty Jewish families in residence: Cap Haitien was then the capital of Haiti.

On another occasion, the American Jew Naphtali Hart appealed for help from his co-religionists in Cap Francois when his brig, the "Elizabeth," was seized in that port.

Some Syrian Jews immigrated to the capital city of Port-au-Prince following World War I. Eastern Europeans followed. Their numbers were small, and there was much intermarriage, dissolving whatever strength the community may have once had.

During the 1950s and '60s, services were held in the homes of various Jewish leaders. In 1969, the Jewish Yearbook stated that there were one hundred Jews in Haiti, and gave a street address near the port for tourists' reference.

Since the political upheavals following the death of the military leader "Papa Doc" Duvalier however, whatever community there was has been weakened considerably. There is no formally organized Jewish life in Haiti now, although Israel and Haiti enjoy full diplomatic relations.[5]

The Influence of Caribbean Jewry on Early America

West Indian Sephardim maintained their strength in the Caribbean until the beginning of the 20th century. In Jamaica and Curaçao, however, they still account for most of the Jewish population. Attracted by sugar and plantation economies, these European and Brazilian Sephardim built strong religious communities to which mainland Americans could look for guidance.

Early Caribbean Sephardim did not usually leave the West Indies. There were families who moved from the Caribbean to New York, Charleston, Savannah and New Orleans, but these were not normal trends. Sephardic Jews already resident in the Caribbean tended to shuttle between islands. When things got bad in St. Eustatius, they left for St. Thomas, St. Martin and Curaçao. If business was slow in Curaçao, they moved to Aruba, St. Thomas or Barbados.

Spanish and Portuguese Jews developed a highly structured and religiously oriented society throughout the islands. It crossed political boundaries and was designed to perpetuate their cultural heritage, strengthen their religion and keep their families intact. Marriage was encouraged between members of *La Nacion*, even to uniting cousins. The strong Jewish communities created in the Caribbean may have been the ideal to which mainland America strived.[1]

In fact, Libo and Howe in their book, We Lived Here,Too, make the point about American Jews that:

> "In the history of the United States as a nation, these early Jewish settlers have only a modest importance. We can all remember from our school years the stories about Jewish merchants supplying Washington's hard-pressed armies; perhaps we may also remember that he had a loyal adjutant who was Jewish. But you could write a respectable history of the United States in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries without giving more than a few paragraphs to the Jews ... the Jews scattered across the colonies had no communal organizational binding them from Georgia to New England."[2]

The strong structural organization and wide influence of Caribbean Jews lacking in continental America, ran to every element of Jewish society in the West Indies. The fact that young men left an island to seek business opportunities elsewhere did not mean that family or community ties were severed. These emigrants formed satellite colonies of their home island.

In any marriage outside the religion, it was expected that the Jewish parent would raise the children within Judaism, and that a Christian wife would convert. This ideal was not always achieved. As a result, Jews and Catholics with the same family name exist side by side as family units throughout the Caribbean, Venezuela and Colombia.[3]

Because of these and other structured rules, Spanish and Portuguese Jews of the Caribbean maintained their cultural identity into the 20th century. Indeed, Jamaica, Curaçao and Surinam can still point to descendants of original settlers among their Jewish population.

Settlers on the American mainland did not construct such elaborate social rules, and very few Sephardim who trace their lineage to early colonial America have escaped assimilation or

intermarriage.[4]

It may also be that early West Indian Spanish and Portuguese Jews, many of whom were only a generation or so away from the Inquisition and the Recife diaspora, were well aware of the need to maintain their religion. They were determined to practice and nurture Judaism to the greatest extent possible. The political climate of the Caribbean went a long way to helping them to do so.

In 1678, Barbados was a community less than thirty years old, with three hundred souls, yet they brought a rabbi from Amsterdam to minister to them. They had built and prayed in a synagogue even before their rabbi arrived. Less than a century after its founding, tiny Barbados had two synagogues.

The St. Eustatius community built its synagogue less than twenty years after its beginning and enjoyed the ministry of two rabbis between 1775 and 1790.

Curaçao summoned its first rabbi, Josiao Pardo, (the first in the West Indies and North America)[5] and built its original religious structure in 1675, just twenty years after its first significant settlement. Two other synagogues were built as the congregation grew: the first in 1692, another in 1703.

Jamaica followed the same pattern. Curaçao's rabbi, Josaio Pardo, moved to Jamaica in 1683. A synagogue already existed on this island at Port Royal.[6]

And when the Jews of St. Eustatius moved to St. Thomas in 1796, they did a characteristic thing: they almost immediately built a synagogue. By 1833, they had built several on the same spot to replace those destroyed by fire and hurricane.

Compare this to mainland colonial America. Although also founded in 1654 by refugees from the Recife diaspora, New York's first Spanish and Portuguese synagogue was not erected until 1729, seventy-five years later. The Sephardic ritual was maintained in New York although by this time Ashkenazim outnumbered Sephardim. A second synagogue was not built in the city of New York until 1825.[7]

Philadelphia's first permanent Jewish settlement dates back to 1737, although small pockets of Jews lived there before then. A rented building that was used as a synagogue dates back to 1761. Not until 1782 was Philadelphia Jewry to consecrate its own building. No American city had two synagogues functioning concurrently until 1802, when Rodeph Shalom opened its doors in Philadelphia. The city's Jewish population at that time may have been under five hundred.[8]

Jewish literature of early America is filled with depressing descriptions of negative religious conditions besetting mainland Jews. Their lack of religious observance, violations of religious obligations and other problems were regularly documented in the Jewish press and in letters between religious leaders.

One must look hard to find similar problems in the Caribbean although assuredly there were some. The only serious issues that seem to have arisen were the way some West Indian rabbis performed their services, as modernization or liberalization of some services created dissention within a community. Rabbi Benjamin Cohen Carillion of St. Thomas wanted to change the order of his service, confirm girls, and add Reform practices to the Sephardic ritual in the early 1800s. He had to leave St. Thomas.[9]

Although there were learned Jews in the United States, many of whom had studied for the rabbinate in Europe, no ordained rabbi had a congregation in any American synagogue until 1840.[10]

In 1772, Rabbi Haim Carigal had preached in Spanish to the Newport, Rhode Island congregation, yet was not offered a pulpit. Congregation member Aaron Lopez and his family, lately from Spain, could have welcomed a Spanish-speaking rabbi: In 1772, Lopez was the wealthiest Jew in the American colonies.[11]

In 1840, Rabbi Abram Reiss, who later changed his name to Abraham Rice, migrated from Bavaria to become the first ordained rabbi with a congregation in the United States. He took a pulpit in Baltimore, a city at time with only two hundred

Jewish families.[12]

The United States was then home to fifteen thousand Jews, seventy-five hundred of who were resident in New York City. It took another five years for America's second ordained rabbi to come to the United States. Synagogues of the West Indies, however, were at this time regularly attended by rabbis. They had no trouble finding pulpits throughout the Caribbean. As we have seen, Rabbi Pardo moved from Curaçao to Jamaica. St. Thomas' rabbi, Cohen Carillon, after antagonizing his congregants, left there to lead another Jamaican synagogue at Montego Bay. Other West Indian rabbis tended to remain with their congregations for long periods, perhaps because they were part of the island family. The extreme examples are Rabbis David Cardoze and Moses Sasso. Between them, they logged one hundred and one years of continuous service in St. Thomas, beginning in 1864 and ending with Rabbi Sasso's retirement in 1965.[13]

Rabbi Meir A. Cohen Belifante serviced Barbados from 1730 to 1752, his office ending upon his death. Jamaica and Curaçao had similar experiences. [14]

Caribbean congregations were also sending rabbis to the United States mainland on a regular basis. Abraham Pereira Mendes, the Jamaican rabbi who succeeded Rabbi Carillon at Montego Bay, saw his two sons, Henry and Frederick, go on to become outstanding American rabbis. Frederick served at *Shaarey Tefillah* in New York for forty-seven years until 1920. He was also on the editorial board of the Jewish Publication Society and an editor of the Jewish Encyclopedia. Henry was *hazzan* and later rabbi, at New York's Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue from 1877 to 1923. He was one of the founders of the Union of Orthodox Congregations of America and a staunch Zionist. Abraham, their father, had his final pulpit at Newport, Rhode Island.[15]

Other religious leaders have come to the United States from Surinam and Curaçao. Religious leaders also made the move

from the United States to better opportunities in the Caribbean. In 1736, Moses Lopez Da Fonseca, *hazzan* at New York's Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue, moved to Curaçao.

Thus, from 1654 until 1840, the only ordained rabbis in the Western Hemisphere held pulpits in the West Indies and Surinam. Perhaps no North American congregation could afford a rabbi; maybe rabbis did not wish to live on the American frontier or in some wilderness community. But during those years, Philadelphia, New York and Charleston were certainly cities of culture and amenities at least equal to the Caribbean.

There may be another more practical reason for Caribbean Jewry's fervor in maintaining their religion. All islands were isolated and the Europeans on them were greatly outnumbered by slaves. Often, early European populations were no more than a few thousand, with slaves from four to five times their numbers. Under such conditions it was logical for Jews to look to their religious institutions to satisfy social needs. Unlike mainland Jews who lived in larger population centers with easy access to the other cities and greater social opportunities, West Indian Jewry lacked such options. The synagogue, its school and adult study were probably the only social outlets for Jews. For while they maintained good business and other relations with their Christian neighbors, house visiting and other close socializing between Christians and Jews were not common in early island societies.

Another area of influence Caribbean Jews exerted on the mainland was in trade. Mainland American mercantile houses doing business with the Caribbean had clerks who spoke Spanish and Portuguese. In addition to using these languages in their synagogues, Sephardim used them between themselves, at home, and in business. In order to take advantage of the lucrative Caribbean trade with Sephardim, American counting houses had to be proficient in these languages.

Even visiting rabbis, who preached in American syna-

gogues, did so in Spanish. Haim Carigal, the well-known rabbi from Palestine who finally settled in Barbados, traveled from Palestine to the Caribbean and the American mainland. He preached as a guest minister at the Newport Synagogue, in Spanish, in 1773. Carigal was a great influence on Ezra Stiles, President of Yale University. Through Carigal, Stiles was impelled to add Hebrew to Yale's curriculum.[16]

So the power and prestige of Caribbean Jews was formidable during the two centuries following the Recife diaspora. They erected synagogues, employed rabbis, were active and important in North American trade. They kept the Jewish religion alive and vital in the dark periods following the Expulsion from the Iberian Peninsula.

Their contributions do not end there. All the rights we take for granted now and accept as part of our heritage as citizens of the Western Hemisphere, did not come without a struggle, for which we must remember the Jews of the Caribbean. For during this period:

> "Colonial [American] Jews were steadily subject to the threat of disenfranchisement at the whim of colonial authorities who, in day-to-day affairs pretty much held all the power in their hands. One can speak of the liberality of spirit in the colonies only with some discounts and qualifications…
>
> "As they came here [the colonial American mainland] the Jews must have been struck by the fact that some of the leading political figures, those soon to become the founding fathers of the Young Republic, were espousing a doctrine of universal liberty and religious toleration. This doctrine was of course violated in practice, as all such doctrines are: Negroes were enslaved and Jews and Catholics suffered discrimination in several colonies."[17]

The Caribbean Jews worked hard as early civil rights

activists. They became property owners and assumed the burden of serving in island militias. They used their influence to secure personal and religious liberties for all Jews in the New World, by insisting on their right to vote, hold religious services, erect synagogues and pray in them. They led the way for us all.

The Jewish Caribbean: Today and Tomorrow

In an article appearing on September 18, 1970 in The Jewish Post and Opinion, headlined, "Slow Demise Seen for Caribbean Jewry," a grim future was predicted for the Western Hemisphere's oldest Jewish communities.

In 1969, riots broke out in Curaçao, which while not anti-Semitic, caused heavy damage to the Jewish community. At the same time, Black Power activists caused concern not only for Jews but all Caucasians in Trinidad and other islands.

The passage of three decades has proven the article wrong. Jamaica and Curaçao have seen assimilation and movement of its young people to the United States and Europe, but those remaining are aware of their heritage and work hard to perpetuate it.

Since the writing of that article, extensive restorations of historic structures have taken place in Surinam, Barbados and Nevis. Such work is presently planned in St. Thomas and St. Eustatius. All this activity is jointly Jewish and governmental. There is a deep understanding of the Jewish presence and its contribution in the West Indies, not only by Jews, but also by non-Jews. Much of the restoration work could not have been done without the assistance of private and government help and funds; the local Jewish population does much of the actual work.

The community of St. Croix has been enlarged with the acquisition of its own building. A small Jewish community has taken root in Sint Maarten. St. Thomas is strong and shows no sign of weakening.

Puerto Rico, the Caribbean's largest community, continues strong after having suffered losses due to economic changes. Both the Reform and Conservative congregations have strengthened and are definitely institutions that will continue well into this 21st century. A third presence in the form of the *Chabad* Learning Center makes Puerto Rico the only island with representation in all major branches of Judaism.

At the writing of the article in 1970, the Jewish community of Santo Domingo was smaller than it was today.

One must remember that even at their peaks, Caribbean Jewish communities were relatively small. Curaçao's community was probably never greater than 2,000 at its most influential. Compare that to Cuba's 12,000 in 1960.

While Cuban Jews continue to struggle, as does the rest of the island, the community is awakening. The synagogues of Santiago and Camaguey have reopened; a young Cuban has gone to New York to study at Yeshiva and he hopes to return to Havana to minister to the Jews of that City.

For the first time in almost 300 years, the island of Martinique is home to a Jewish community with a synagogue, *mikveh*, school and rabbi.

In order to realize the impact of Jews in the Caribbean, one must understand the region's history. There were never more Caucasians than Africans on any island with a plantation economy. Since slaves had no influence in the social and commercial life of an island, Jewish influence was particularly strong, especially when they represented twenty-five to fifty percent of all Europeans. Upon slavery's abolition, Caucasians were immediately a political minority on any island: reduced to three to five percent of the overall population.

True, the decline of Sephardic families able to trace their ancestry to the Recife diaspora has been steady. But Sephardim have disappeared in most regions worldwide, where they once were influential. In the Caribbean, there is an awareness of their antecedents among non-Jewish families who have intermarried

with the Sephardim. They take pride in their roots. These are feelings one rarely finds elsewhere, except, perhaps, in Spain. These descendants have contributed to the life of the region both culturally and politically.

Jews from Russia, Poland, the United States and other places have taken the place of the old Spanish and Portuguese families. They have instilled new vigor into old communities.

The future should bode well for Caribbean Jewry. The power Castro exerts over an exhausted Cuba will soon come to an end. There is no reason to doubt that a free and enterprising Cuba will again attract Jews. Perhaps Cuba will regain its once numerous community, perhaps not, but it will certainly rise again to add vitality to Jewish life in the West Indies.

Epilogue

On July 15, 1834, the Queen Mother Maria Christina of Spain abolished the Spanish Inquisition. For 363 years, it had spread malevolence against anything other than Roman Catholic orthodoxy. And despite its end, the centuries had laid down a layer of inhospitability to non-Catholics that continued for decades afterwards.

Only when Spain lost Cuba and Puerto Rico to the United States in 1898, did Jews feel they could settle on these Hispanic islands. But Spain did eventually throw off its anti-Semitic attitudes. By World War I, a small Jewish colony had grown in Spain. The government was aware of its existence, but chose to ignore it. By 1932, Spain's prime minister, Primo de Rivera, sponsored legislation that encouraged the return of Sephardic Jews to that country: a Sephardic Law of Return. During World War II, Primo de Rivera's law saved some European Sephardic, who were granted Spanish protection from Nazi concentration camps. Portugal, too, was neutral during the War and both were minimally hospitable to Jewish refugees, granting them asylum until they could arrange for passage to safe havens.

By the 1960s, Jews were openly praying in synagogues all over the Iberian Peninsula, from Lisbon to Madrid and Marbella to Barcelona. The wheel came full circle when King Juan Carlos of Spain, openly sympathetic to the Jews of his country, attended a Madrid synagogue in 1992, wearing the traditional *keppah* (skullcap) on his head.

In his speech, the King acknowledged the injustice of the Inquisition and apologized for its excesses.

In 1992, Spain and the Jewish people were fully reconciled. The events of 1492 and the long period of alienation between them were over, as Spain's five hundred year observance, "Sepharad '92," celebrated Sephardic Jewry.

It is expected that the Jews of Spain may once again raise the term Sepharad to its original brilliance.

APPENDICES

OVERVIEW OF JEWISH CARIBBEAN SETTLEMENTS

Island	Year	By Whom	Last Presence
Surinam	1536	Secret Portuguese Jews, English, then Dutch Sephardim, 1639-1652, followed by French and Italian Sephardim. Central European Jews followed in the 1700s.	Jews still live there; it is the oldest permanent Jewish community in the Western Hemisphere and remains active.
Aruba	1563; 1754	First settlers unknown secret Jews. Later Dutch Sephardim. Not significant until early 20th century. Then Balkan, Central European and Dutch Jews Settled here.	Jews still live here with an active community.
St. Martin	1791	Refuges from St. Eustatius	Small community at present.
	20th Cent.	Dutch Sephardim; Dutch Jews of the Caribbean, United States and Jews of Central Europe.	
Curaçao	1651	Dutch Sephardim; regular migrations from other Caribbean islands, Holland, Turkey, and Europe for 4 centuries. At one time the largest and most powerful Jewish community in the New World.	Active Sephardic/ Ashkenazic community still exists.
St. Eustatius	1722	Dutch and English Sephardim. European Ashkenazic. The center of trade in the Northern Hemisphere until the end of the American Revolution.	Last Jews in 1850.
Jamaica	16th Cent.	First settled by secret Spanish Jews. Conquered by England in 1655; Jews came into the open. Sephardic and Later European Jews settled here. Once England's greatest New World colony, Jews played an important role in Jamaican history.	Jews still active. Sephardim and Ashkenazim hold services together.
Barbados	1654	Settled by Recifan Jews who were Dutch Sephardim. Later settled by English Sephardim and other Jews of the Caribbean. Important in the development of sugar, rum and molasses. Community disappeared early 20th Cent. By 1930s, European, English, United States and Canadian Jews returned.	Small congregation of American, English and Canadians.

Nevis	1684	English and Dutch Sephardim	No Jews at present.
Trinidad-	16th Cent.	Secret Spanish Jews here during Spain's occupation. England took possession in 1818. Caribbean Sephardim and later English and European Jews settled here in 20th Century.	Small, unorganized community.
St. Thomas	1684	Small initial settlement of Sephardim from Recife.	Strong, active community.
	1791	Later Sephardim from St. Eustatius. Third Wave from U.S., 20th Century.	
St. Croix	1760	French	Small community.
Puerto Rico	1898	Some secret Jews lived here during Spanish rule. Not until 1898 when U.S. took over from Spain did Jews openly settle. Mostly U.S. Ashkenazim and Cubans. Jews from Europe and Asia followed.	Active community with three rabbis.
Cuba	1898	Secret Jews lived here, but no formal settlement until 1898. First U.S. Jews and Curaçaoans came. Then Europeans Sephardim and Askenazim migrated. Once by far the largest Jewish community in the history of West Indies, (15,000) it is now second to Puerto Rico with approximately 1,000.	Active community
Dominican Republic	1865	Sephardim from Curaçao, Venezuela and Colombia.	Small groups in Santo Domingo and Sosua.
	1939	Europeans refugee colony in Sousua	
Martinique Guadeloupe	1654	Dutch Sephardim, refugees from Recife	Organized communities
		All Jews were expelled from French possessions in the New World in 1685. While there have been sporadic Jewish communities, none had been permanent or significant until recently.	
Haiti	17th Cent.	Settled by Dutch and French Sephardim who left during so-called "Black Revolt."	No significant Jewish presence today.
	20th Cent.	Syrian and European Jews, who left in 1970s and '80s during political unrest.	

HISTORIC SYNAGOGUES AND CEMETERIES IN THE CARIBBEAN

Often, writers have made contradictory and erroneous claims about which Jewish community, synagogue or cemetery is the oldest in the Americas. To set confusion aside, I researched the origins of every known synagogue and cemetery in the West Indies. Written records for this region being what they are, dates can often only be approximated. Wherever possible, I used dates set by the communities themselves. I believe them to be more accurate than other sources, since the communities are the custodians of their own records.

Cemeteries are more difficult to document than synagogues. The gravestones of early settlers were often made of soft materials, which have since crumbled, the dust blown away. The assaults of constant heat, humidity, sun and the sea salt peculiar to the islands have, over the centuries, combined to wear down the remaining stones, often making them illegible.

Because one cemetery may contain older gravestones than another does not necessarily testify to its antiquity. It may only prove that some stones have greater durability, and surviving markers are the starting points with which we try to determine a cemetery's age. It should be remembered that Recife, which predates all Jewish settlements in the Western Hemisphere (1630-1654), also had two cemeteries. There are no surviving stones of which we are aware, since the Portuguese erased all traces of the Jewish community upon Recife's reconquest.

Curaçao, one of the largest and most important repositories of 17th, 18th and 19th century headstones and monuments in

the Americas, sustained serious damage from the fumes of the island's oil refineries. Other cemeteries also suffer from the effects of modern pollutants, such as hydrocarbons, industrial soot, coal particles and sulfuric acid. Caribbean cemeteries are in constant danger of being overgrown by vegetation and by neglect.

Barbados may once have had five different cemetery sites, one of which was dedicated to the burial of suicides and Christian spouses. It has been lost to posterity. At present, only three sites remain. Many of the remaining stones are broken, the result of earthquakes and other natural causes.

The cemeteries of Surinam, Jamaica and the older St. Thomas plot at Savan are subject to constant encroachment by heavy tropical foliage, making them inaccessible and prone to serious deterioration. Attempts have been made in the past to clear the cemeteries, but the tropics and its vegetation always reclaims the land from the cemeteries.

Here, then, based upon the current state of information and my own personal investigations, is a listing of the known historic synagogues and cemeteries extant in the West Indies. They are all deserving of preservation as monuments of a unique and fascinating community in Jewish history, the first in the New World. If they are not saved, they will be lost forever.

Surinam
Synagogue: *Beracha Ve Shalom*
Constructed: 1685
Location: 35 miles south west of the main city of Paramaribo, in the area known as the Joden Savanna.

Presently in the jungle and overgrown with thick vegetation, it is the oldest synagogue structure still standing in the Western Hemisphere, and may probably be the first in the Caribbean. Again, records being what they are, as we inspect the next synagogue at Nevis, there is a possibility that the structure known as "The Jews' School" predates *Beracha Ve*

Shalom, or that a synagogue structure may have predated *Beracha Ve Shalom* and no longer exists.

Located in the overgrown Joden Savanna, two cemeteries belonging to the original settlers of the oldest continuous Jewish community in the New World lay beneath a heavy tropical tangle. The cemeteries have been cleared of brush several times in the past decades, but have again been reclaimed by the jungle.

Synagogue: *Tzedek V Shalom*
Constructed: 1736
Location: Paramaribo

Tzedek V Shalom was built on land ceded to the Sephardic community by the Dutch government. The authorities mediated a settlement between the contentious *Sephardim* and *Ashkenazim*. As part of the settlement, the Sephardim deeded *Neve Shalom*, built in 1734, to the *Ashkenazim*.

Tzedek V Shalom no longer exists as a synagogue in Surinam; it has a new life in Israel. After a dwindling community could no longer support two synagogues, *Tzedek V Shalom* sat idle. In 1999, the Jewish Museum in Israel negotiated with the government of Surinam for the entire contents of the synagogue. It is considered a "long-term loan." The building still stands in Surinam, devoid of its religious effects.

Tzedek V Shalom was classical Caribbean Sephardic, with a second story woman's gallery and sand on the floors.

Synagogue: *Neve Shalom*
Constructed: 1734
Location: Paramaribo

The original Sephardic synagogue of Paramaribo was constructed on a plot donated by the Dutch government after the residents of the Joden Savanna began experiencing an exodus

to the city. Jews used the old *Bracha V Shalom* with less frequency. When Sephardim and Ashkenazim fell to quarreling in the first decades of the 1700s, it ended in a settlement that ceded *Neve Shalom* to the Ashkenazim. The new owners made a promise to continue using the Sephardic ritual. That promise has been kept. The entire Jewish community of Paramaribo, Ashkenazim and Sephardim alike, pray at this synagogue. The community is fortunate to have a dynamic representative, René Fernandes who, in 1992, planned an ambitious ceremony on the 500th anniversary of the Spanish Expulsion.

Nevis

Synagogue: Name unrecorded
Constructed: 1684 ?
Location: Charlestown

Formerly a two-story building constructed of brick, now reduced to a single level, this structure may have been at one time the Nevis Synagogue. It is still known among islanders as "The Jews' School." Whether or not it is the structure referred to in the Amsterdam records of the Spanish and Portuguese synagogue in 1684 has yet to be established. This is the building in which the Revolutionary patriot Alexander Hamilton received his early education - including the study of the Hebrew language.

The building is currently used by the Nevis government as an oil storage facility for its power plant. In 1971, I was permitted to enter the building and observed a niche on the wall facing east, which could easily have housed an ark. (Such a niche also exists in the ruins of the St. Eustatius synagogue.) I photographed the remnants of an outside stairway leading to what was obviously at one time a second story.

Archeologists from Brandeis University are currently excavating this and the surrounding sites, one of which is believed to be a *mikvah*. If this building is not older than

Surinam's *Beracha V Shalom*, and if it is indeed a synagogue (which I personally believe it to be) then it at least qualifies as the oldest synagogue structure still in some use in the Western Hemisphere.

The Georgetown cemetery in Nevis was once overgrown, as are many other historic Caribbean cemeteries. This site was restored in 1971 through the efforts of Rabbi Malcolm Stern and Robert and Florence Abrahams (who maintained a winter home in Nevis.) The old graveyard was reconsecrated on February 25, 1972.

This writer was present to observe the importance the island government ascribed to the event. The Prime Minister and other notables attended and spoke at length of the significance of the Jewish presence in Nevis' history.

A stone wall and iron gate were erected to surround the restored site. Rabbi Stern was able to decipher seventeen stones and part of an eighteenth. The earliest stone dates to 1684 and belongs to Bathsheba Abundiente.

See the section on Nevis in this book for a listing of the stones in this cemetery. The government of Nevis maintains the cemetery in excellent condition to this day.

St. Eustatius

Synagogue: *Honen Dalim*
Location: Oranjasted
Constructed 1734

The street upon which the synagogue ruins still stand is called, "Jews Way." The island government does its best to maintain the structure (which is now only the remaining outer walls and a stairway to a long lost second floor) in good condition. It has even erected a well-maintained, whitewashed picket fence around the old synagogue.

In Orangestad, about half a mile from the ruins of *Honen*

Dalim, the old cemetery in St. Eustatius is notable for several reasons. Of all of the burial places where a Jewish community no longer exists, this is the only one that has never been overgrown by vegetation. The people of St. Eustatius have, to their credit, traditionally taken care of the gravestones.

The graveyard and stones are in good condition, compared to other gravesites I have seen in the Caribbean. Two fine iron gates surround the cemetery, with metal work depictions of the Ten Commandments and the year of the cemetery's consecration, 1739, worked into them.

The earliest decipherable grave is dated 1742 and belongs to Abraham Hisquiau de la Motta, who died May 10 of that year. Twenty-one legible gravestones are contained here.

Another interesting feature is the cistern nearby, which is purported to have been the community's mikvah. Piping extends from water accumulated in the trough of an extinct volcano leading to this facility.

Sint Maarten

Synagogue: name undocumented
Location: Philipsburg, Aacherstratt
Constructed: circa 1783

The Jewish community of Sint Maarten petitioned Dutch authorities for permission to build a house of worship in 1783. It is not certain that the ruins in back of the West Indian Tavern on Aacherstraat are actually those of the synagogue. They are on the spot where a synagogue was once located. All that remains are part of a brick wall. By 1828, there were reports that the building had fallen to ruin.

Although no formal evidence exists of a Jewish cemetery on this island, whatever proof can be mustered arises from some facts that are known: In Philipsburg, on the far end of

Aacherstraat (Front Street) where the synagogue was constructed, a plot of land was acquired for a cemetery. Some children's' graves, believed to have been those of Jewish youths, have been found in this area and the path along this area is still called, "Jewish Cemetery Alley."

Curaçao

Synagogue: *Mikve-Israe*l
Location: Willemstad
Constructed: 1732

The oldest synagogue structure in the Americas still offering regular religious services - since 1732. Originally following the Sephardic ritual of the Spanish and Portuguese, with those languages incorporated in its service. In 1964, Mikve Israel merged with Temple Emanuel, a Reform congregation, and adopted the Reconstructionist ritual. The synagogue maintains a Jewish museum and a restored *mikvah*.

This distinguished congregation was the premier congregation of the Americas, "Queen Mother of the Caribbean."

Synagogue: Temple Emanuel
Location: Willemstad
Constructed: 1864

This structure is no longer used as a synagogue. It still stands in the city and is regularly used as a meeting place. The land on which it stands was donated by the Dutch government. Temple Emanuel is the Caribbean's first Reform synagogue.

The most famous Jewish cemetery in the Caribbean is located at Blenheim. Its oldest gravestone is dated 1668 and belongs to Jeudith Nunes da Fonseca. (It is not, however, the oldest continuously used Jewish cemetery in the Americas for which

we have records. That distinction belongs to Barbados, whose first recorded grave dates to 1660.)

Threatened with deterioration by Shell Oil refinery's fumes during the years following World War II, the community worked to prevent further ravaging with the application of protective chemicals.

It is a wealth of knowledge for historians and an interesting collection of beautifully sculpted marble depicting a deceased's life's work and other religious scenes. It is estimated that there are between 5,200 to 5,500 graves at this site. Unfortunately, less than half have decipherable inscriptions.

At Berg Altena, a newer cemetery opened in 1864 and is in current use.

Barbados

Synagogue: *Nidhe Israel*
Constructed: 1833
Location: Bridgetown

There was always a synagogue on the site of *Nidhe Israel* (the first c. 1679) on Synagogue Lane. The present synagogue is a faithful restoration of one that itself was built in 1833, replacing another wrecked by a hurricane. Funds for the present restoration were raised through private subscription by Jews throughout the world.

The building had not been used as a synagogue since 1929, when it was sold to an entrepreneur. Fifty-eight years later, on December 18, 1987, the newly reconsecrated synagogue was once again open for Jewish prayers.

Three cemeteries flank the path leading directly to the synagogue in Bridgetown. Synagogue and cemeteries are all contained within a walled compound just off Synagogue Lane and Magazine Lane.

As the visitor enters the gate, there is a sign on the stone

wall on Synagogue Lane advising Cohens (who, by Jewish law, are not permitted contact with the dead) that they may avoid passing the graveyards by using the back entrance.

There may have originally been a series of five separate graveyards in the compound, including one for suicides and Christian spouses. Only three sites now remain.

The earliest burial is documented in the year 1660, which makes Barbados the oldest Jewish cemetery in continuous use in the Americas: twelve years earlier than Jamaica and eight years before Curaçao. The stone belongs to Aaron de Mercado and is catalogued as tombstone No. 230, in Eustace Shilstone's work on the Barbados cemeteries.

The tiny Jewish community of Barbados is presently restoring the cemeteries, which contain many broken and undecipherable stones.

St Thomas, U.S.V. I.

Synagogue: *Beracha V'Shalom*
Constructed: 1833
Location: Charlotte Amalie

Beracha V'Shalom is the oldest synagogue in continuous use under the American flag. The oldest synagogue structure in the United States is the Touro Synagogue at Newport, Rhode Island, constructed in 1759, seventy-five years before *Beracha V'Shalom*. However, for at least three periods during its history, Touro Synagogue was used for purposes other than a house of worship. It currently offers services to an established congregation.

St. Thomas' two cemeteries, Savan, located on the outskirts of Charlotte Amalie and Altona, in Charlotte Amalie, are each filled with history of the Caribbean and the world. Here are the remains of David Levy Yulee's family. Yulee was the first Jew to sit in the U.S. Senate. Also, the family of

Camille Pissaro is interred here. Pissaro, the world famous Impressionist, was born in St. Thomas.

Savan, the older of the two, has over the years become overgrown. The cover of this book shows Rabbi Joseph Karasick walking through the old cemetery in 1971. He and I spent that warm day beneath the tropical sun, armed with machetes of the type used by sugar-cane cutters, chopping away the tropical tangle to reveal historic stones. But the persistent underbrush reclaimed the cemetery shortly thereafter.

The Hebrew dates on the wrought iron gate correspond to 1749-1835. The St. Thomas congregation has undertaken to restore and clean up Savan, as it does Altona, which has the distinction of being both historic and in current use.
Altona is located just outside the town of Charlotte Amalie. The community cleans this area on a regular basis. I would often walk through the cemetery on my frequent visits to St. Thomas. Recently, however, the community felt it necessary to lock the entry gate. On my last visit I was unable to go in because the keeper of the keys was off island.

Altona dates from the close of Savan to the present time. Other cemeteries, of the Moravians and other religions, surround it. Even if you cannot gain entry, you can look through the gate and over the wall to get an idea of what Caribbean cemeteries look like.

See also Margolinsky's 299 Epitaphs on the Jewish Community in St. Thomas, W.I., 1837-1916; I. Paiewonsky's Jewish Historical Development in the Virgin Island, particularly the entry under 1957 for cemetery notes; the Bulletin of the St. Thomas Jewish Congregation for April 1994, which contains information regarding volunteer groups cleaning up both Altona and Savan. Among some of the implements the volunteers were told to bring were: "Clorox, laundry soap, soft bristled scrub brush, one or two old toothbrushes, five gallons of water (per grave,) rags, drinking water and gloves, (optional)."

Those who could not attend could sponsor an alternate for $25. It is interesting to note that the Altona Cemetery "Grave Wash," as it was called, mentioned that the stones "are quite dark from airborne dust and pollution."

Jamaica

Synagogue: *Shaare Shalom* (also known as the Duke St. Synagogue and the United Congregation of Israelites.)
Constructed: 1885
Location: Kingston

This synagogue is the last of the historic classical Sephardic style synagogues built in the Caribbean. It was damaged by earthquake and fire in 1907 and repaired. In 1911, the Ashkenazi community joined with the Sephardim, thus the name "United Congregation of Israelites." *Shaare Shalom* still offers services. It has abandoned the Sephardic ritual in favor of the English Liberal service, similar to Reform.

Synagogue: *Neveh Shalom*
Constructed: 1704
Location: Spanish Town - Kingston

This synagogue was constructed in 1704 after the infamous earthquake that destroyed the city of Port Royal and its one synagogue. Remains of *Neve Shalom* still exist.

Synagogue: *Beth Yankakob*
Constructed: 1844
Location: Montego Bay

This congregation had an interesting history. From this place, the Periera Mendeses, father and two sons, all rabbis,

were to enrich American Jewry with their presence. A flight of stone steps is the only remains of the wooden synagogue that was destroyed in 1912 by a storm.

Jamaica is notable because of the many cemeteries existing throughout the entire island. The most significant of the cemeteries and the first one established in Jamaica is located at Hunts Bay, Kingston. It's earliest legible stone is dated 1672 and belongs to Abraham Gabay. In 1968, the Jamaica National Heritage Trust assumed ownership of this treasure in order to preserve it. Unfortunately, the cemetery has fallen into disuse.

Aside from Hunts Bay, other cemeteries exist in Kingston, one on Orange Street and the other on Elleston Road.

Historic Jewish cemeteries exist in Sav-La-Mar, Lucea, Falmouth, Brown's Town, St. Ann's Bay, Port Maria, Alligator Pond, Manchester, Morant Bay, St. Thomas, Lacovia, St. Elizabeth, Luistead, Annotto Bay, Old Harbour and Montego Bay. Many have only a handful of stones.

Jamaicans have been in the habit of transferring graves from these smaller cemeteries to larger sites in Kingston, making even the newer ones interesting from an historical standpoint.

No other Caribbean island has the historic wealth of grave locations as Jamaica.

St. Croix

Located in the suburbs of Christiansted, a small Jewish cemetery of a few graves is all that remains to remind us of this short-lived community. The first grave is dated 1779 and the last, 1862.

Aruba

Synagogue: Beth Israel
Constructed: 1962
Location: Oranjestad
In 1992, the Jewish community in Oranjestad cleaned up the small cemetery on Boerhavenstraat. Mrs. Martha E. Lichtenstein, secretary of the Board of Directors of Beth Israel of Aruba, reminded us in a letter dated June 17, 1993, that it is "the only landmark of Jewish presence in past centuries." Rabbi I. Emmanauel, author of History of the Jews of the Netherlands Antilles copied only two epitaphs in 1940. They are dated 1857 and 1883. There were only a few other nameless graves, he reported.

Nassau, Bahamas

In a walled section of the public section of the Nassau cemetery, there are stones of 19th century Sephardim.

Jewish Communities in the Caribbean Not Historically Associated With the Spanish and Portuguese Jews

For a region with relatively few Jews, the West Indies has many communities scattered from Cuba to Surinam. Here is a list of known Jewish communities throughout the region that have no historic connections with the early Spanish and Portuguese settlements:

Cuba:

Shevet Ahim: founded 1914, Sephardic, Havana
Adath Israel: founded 1925, Orthodox, Havana
La Patronata: founded 1953, Conservative, Havana

Closed during the 1980s was the Reform Hebrew Union congregation, Cuba's first synagogue founded in 1904, and Beth El, another Sephardic congregation.

Two congregations have reopened: Union Israelita de Oriente is in Santiago de Cuba and Centro Israelita de Camaguey is in Camaguey.

Dominican Republic:

Sosua Jewish Congregation, founded 1940, Orthodox, Sosua
Centro Israelita, founded 1956, Orthodox, Santo Domingo

Puerto Rico:

Shaare Tzedek, founded 1954, Conservative, San Juan
Beth Shalom, founded 1967, Reform, San Juan
Chabad Learning Center, founded 1999, Ultra Orthodox, San Juan

Sint Maarten:

Small Jewish community in Phillipsburg, no building, no affiliation

Martinique:

Cong. *Kanef Haaretz*, synagogue consecrated 1997, Sephardic Orthodox *, Fort de France

*Martinique and Guadaloupe are the 3rd and 4th Sephardic Orthodox congregations founded in the 20th century; the first two were founded in Cuba.

Guadaloupe:

Cong. *Or Sameah*, founded 1988, Orthodox, Point-a-Pitre

Aruba:

Cong. *Beth Israel*, founded 1962, Liberal, Oranjasted

Barbados:

Shaare Tzedek, synagogue consecrated 1969, Conservative, Bridgetown (Congregation existed prior to that date without permanent synagogue.) This is the congregation that restored *Nidhe Israel* (1832), which they use during the winter.

Congregation of Zion, founded 1976, Orthodox,

Bridgetown.

Curaçao:

Shaare Tzedek, founded 1926, synagogue consecrated 1959, Orthodox, Willemstad

St Croix:

Bnai Or, founded 1978, unaffiliated, Fredrikstad

Bahamas:

Bahamas Jewish Cong., founded 1996, Reform, Nassau

Freeport Jewish Congregation (Luis de Torres Synagogue), founded 1970, Reform, Freeport

NOTES

Abbreviations Used:

AJHS: American Jewish Historical Society
CCJR: Amler, Christopher Columbus' Jewish Roots
CC: Kayserling, Christopher Columbus and the Participation of the Jews in the Spanish and Portuguese Discoveries
EJ: Encyclopedia Judaica
FR: Scharfman, The First Rabbi
HJNA: Emmanuel, I. & S, A History of the Jews of the Netherlands' Antilles
HM: Roth, History of the Marranos
HPN: Bodian, Hebrews of the Portuguese Nation
JCW: Jewish Communities of the World
JPB: Evans, Judah P. Benjamin: The Jewish Confederate
JPP: Friedman, Jewish Pioneers and Patriots
JRT: Tartakower & Grossman, The Jewish Refugee Today
MIJS: Shilstone, Monumental Inscriptions in the Jewish Synagogue of Bridgetown, Barbados
PSJC: Emmanuel, Precious Stones of the Jews of Curaçao
RJCNY: Grinstein, The Rise of the Jewish Community of New York 1654-1860
SA: Cohen, Sephardim in the Americas
SCA: Dubiez, The Sephardic Community of Amsterdam
SI: Roth, The Spanish Inquisition
SPJPS: Arbell, The Spanish and Portuguese Jews in the Postage Stamps
TFS: Tuchman, The First Salute
TGJC: Postal, B. and Stern, M. Tourists Guide to Jewish History in the Caribbean
TSC: Karner, The Sephardics of Curaçao
TTTS: Tolkowsky, They Took to the Sea
VF: Wischnitzer, Visas to Freedom
WLT: Libo and Howe, We Lived There Too

Preface to the Second Edition

1. In A Short History of the Hebrew Congregation of St. Thomas, p. 11. An earlier member of the Wolff family appears as president of the Jewish Congregation at St. Thomas. He is listed as giving, in 1833, the largest cash contribution towards the reconstruction of the now historic synagogue. Wolffs lived on several islands in the Caribbean, including St. Eustatius. In HJNA, p. 105, Emmanuel notes the marriage of Mozes Wolff of Breslof, Germany, to Rebecca Robles in 1794. The couple later moved to St. Thomas. Also, J. Margolinsky, in his monograph 299 Epitaphs on the Jewish Cemetery in St. Thomas, W.I., notes the headstones of 10 Wolffs in St. Thomas' Altona cemetery.

2. Letter from Jill Tattersall, Roadtown, Tortola, British Virgin Islands, 1998.

3. SPJPS, p. 30. Mendes Belisario also painted a famous watercolor of London's Spanish and Portuguese synagogue. See Roth, The Life of Manasseh Ben Israel, Jewish Publication Soc.,Philadelphia, 1945, p. 49.

4. Ibid. p. 11

5. Ibid. p. 47

6. HJNA Vol. II p. 882; also "Interim Chief of State Installed In Panama," New York Times, April 8, 1968 (no byline.) Panama has had two Jewish presidents, the only country in the world apart from Israel with that distinction. (Eric DelValle Maduro was president in 1987-1988). The basis of this information stems from a question posed to me by a friend, Rabbi Bernard Zlotowitz, who asked, "Was there ever a Jewish president in Panama?" He said when he was officiating at Yom Kippur services in Panama City as a visiting rabbi, he was eager to proceed with the traditional Kol Nidre service, since night was falling. "Wait," he was told more than once, "The president is not here yet." Finally, Panama's president Omar Torrijos entered the sanctuary, sat on a bench set aside for him, and the service began. After Kol Nidre, Torrijos left. Zlotowitz was puzzled. I explained that since Torrijos was not Jewish, the tradition must have started with Shalom Delvalle, Panama's first Jewish president.

7. Conversations with Rabbi Gary Bretton-Granatoor of the Stephen Wise Free Synagogue, New York City, following his mission to Cuba in the year 2000.

8. Conversations with and notes made by James & Sue Klau of Temple Beth Shalom, San Juan, Puerto Rico, following their mission to Cuba in the year 2001, together with the report prepared by them.

A New Diaspora, Spain 1492

1. **SI**, p. 23

2. **HM**, p. 27-28

3. Ibid, p. 44-52

4. **CCJR** p. 111

5. **SI**, p. 2

6. ibid p.133

7. **CCJR**, p. 105-116

8. **HM** p. 8. Rabbi Abraham Senior was the intermediary in the marriage between Ferdinand and Isabela. After his conversion, he took the name Fernando Perez Coronel.

9. **CCJR**, p. 25

10. Congress Monthly, Sept/Oct. 1992, "Return to Toledo." Zacuto recorded his sad exile. He fled to Portugal where he helped Vasco da Gama, as he had for Columbus, with astronomical charts. He then fled Portugal for Tunis. The Inquisition followed him there, also. He moved to Damascus and then Jerusalem. In his absence from Iberia, he wrote Sefer Yuhasin, the Book of Generations, a tale of the sweet and bitter history that befell the Jewish people.

11. **HM**, p. 54. See also CC, p. 46-51

100 Years of Hiding in the Caribbean

1. **HM**, p.272. Roth states that de Torres "was, as a matter of fact, the first European to set foot in the new land." Amler, in **CCJR**, states at p. 157 that de Torres went ashore with several men, including Martin Pinzon, second in command after Columbus. Who touched shore first is in my opinion an open question. Undoubtedly, de Torres was at least among the very first. Columbus himself failed to mention de Torres at this historic point in his journal: see Jane, Cecil, (translator), The Journals of Christopher Columbus. Nor does Dr. Kayserling (**CC**, p. 93.) Certainly de Torres was at least one of the first as they went from island to island, for it was he who had been deputized to translate. What we do know is that de Torres became one of the first colonizers of Cuba; the first Jewish planter in the New World; and the first commercial cultivator of tobacco. CC p. 94-95; **HM** p. 272; **CCJR**, p. 217.

2. **CC**, p. 90. In 1658, Moses Nehemiah, a Sephardi from Barbados, brought the Caribbean tobacco culture to Virginia. A Brief History of the Jewish Settlement in Barbados. [no author; no date.] Barbados Tourist Board, p. 9.

3. **HM**, p. 272. In fact, crewmember Alfonso de la Caballeria was a relative of Gabriel Sanchez, one of the Marranos at the royal court. According to Roth, another crew member, Alonso de la Calle, whose name (of the street) indicates a name of Jewish origin, was probably also of Jewish descent.

4. **CCJR**, p. 218

5. **SA**, p. 211

6. **TSC**, p. 16-18

7. **SCA**: My copy of this monograph has no pagination, no date of publication and no publisher. However, this work is cited in the bibliography of "Our Snoa" at p. 79.

8. ibid

9. **MIJS**, P. x of the book's preface.

10. **JPP**. Chapter 24 of Friedman's book The Gideons, is a fascinating review of the Anglicization of a Portuguese Jewish family, the Gideon-Abundientes. Friedman traces the family from Europe to the Caribbean, then colonial America, and finally back to England. Some of this family became titled members of the English establishment. See also HM, p. 314-315 and p. 396.

11. For the tombstone inscription of Batsheva Abundiente, see this book's section on Nevis which sets forth the 18 decipherable stones in the graveyard.

12. **HPN**, p. 58 and **SCA**

13. **TTTS**, p. 208-209

14. **HPN**, p. 54-56

15. Bogen, David S., "Mathias de Sousa: Maryland's First Colonist of African Descent," Maryland Historical Magazine, Spring, 2001, p. 68. Bogen traces the arrival to Maryland of the mulatto de Sousa, who had non-African ancestors and was exposed to a European culture. Bogen advances the theory that it is likely de Sousa had a Spanish or Portuguese ancestor. "...the name is also found in Spain among Spanish and Portuguese Jews."

Recife: the Cradle of Caribbean Jewry; Rock of Israel

1. Lewin, "The Crypto Jews Who Colonized Brazil," Jewish Digest, 1970.
2. **AJHS**, "The First Rabbi in the New World"
3. **HM**, p. 286
4. Lewin
5. **AJHS**,
6. Lewin
7. Rohter, Larry, "A Brazilian City Resurrects its Buried Jewish Past," New York Times International Edition, May 19, 2000.

The Dutch Caribbean: Surinam

1. The first permanent settlement in Surinam dates to 1639, predating Curaçao by twelve years. See Surinam Jewish Community Information Bulletin, 1991. Although the Recife Jewish settlement predates Surinam's by almost a decade, it no longer exists. It is, however, the first formal Jewish community in the New World.
2. "Surinam to Join Caribbean Community," San Juan Star, May 26, 1993
3. Surinam Jewish Community Bulletin, 1991.
4. Luxner, Larry, "Tropical Sanctuary," National Jewish Monthly, July/August 1994
5. **HM**, p. 292
6. Luxner, Larry, "Reclaiming Joden Savanna," Americas, 1995.
7. **SA**, p. 142
8. Ibid., p. 143
9. Ronnen, Meir, "Israel Museum Receives 18th Century Surinam Synagogue," Jerusalem Post, Sept. 10, 1999
10. Surinam Jewish Community Bulletin, 1999

11. Luxner, Larry, "Tropical Sanctuary."

12. French, Howard W., "In a Surinam Jumble; the Quest for Identity," New York Times International Edition, October 23, 1990. Also Luxner's "Reclaiming Joden Savanna,"

13. Letter from René Fernandes, President, Surinam Sephardic Community, 1992. Also Brooks, A.A., "A Jungle Journey," Reform Judaism, N.Y., Spring 1999.

14. "In A Surinam Jumble"; "Reclaiming Joden Savanna;" "Tropical Sanctuary;" "A Jungle Journey." Also Farah, Douglas, "The Ruins of Jewish Savannah," Washington Post, October 31, 1997.

The Dutch Caribbean: Curaçao

1. "Our 'Snoa,' 5492-5742 Cong. Mikve-Israel," p. 12. Joao d'Yilan or Juan Ilian, envisioned an agricultural community. Because of lack of ground water and arable soil, this venture failed.

2. **SA**, p. 147. Da Costa's second attempt at Jewish colonization focused upon commerce, which was the touchstone to the outstanding success of the Jewish community of Curaçao.

3. "Our 'Snoa', 5492-5742," p. 42-44

4. ibid p. 30

5. Synagogue Guidebook, Cong. Mikve Israel-Emanuel, Curaçao, , 1964, p. 11. See also A Short History of the Hebrew Congregation of St. Thomas (including a forward by former St. Thomas resident Herman Wouk,) 1983 (unpaginated,) and The United Congregation of Israelites, Shaare Shalom, Kingston Jamaica, (circa 1968.) It is a fact that all synagogues of Sephardic origin in the colonial Caribbean had or have sand on their floors. These include synagogues in current use in Jamaica, St. Thomas, Curaçao, and Surinam. The Barbados synagogue originally had sand covering its black and white marble checkerboard floors. When it was rebuilt in 1832 after a hurricane damaged the building, sand was not replaced (Paul Altman of Barbados.) Thus, what today's congregant sees is the original floor existing after1832.

   The existing synagogues of Havana, Cuba, all of the 20th century, one of which is Sephardic, have no sand. The three synagogues of Puerto Rico, all of which have Ashkenazic roots, have no sand, nor do the synagogues

in Aruba and the Dominican Republic, all of recent origin. Note, too, that the synagogue of Martinique erected in 1997 is North African Sephardic, not following Spanish and Portuguese rituals and history, and has no sand on its floors.

While Maslin states the sand represents the desert through which Moses led the children of Israel, he suggests another reason is to keep the sanctuary quiet. Other sources I set out here give other reasons: the sand represents the numerous children of Israel, "You shall be as numerous as the sands of the sea," (Genesis: 22:17) or that the sand deadened the footfalls of the congregants to keep them from the prying Inquisition. Rabbi Emmanuel states that aside from emulating the tabernacle of the Israelites in the desert, Portuguese Jews used sand to muffle their footsteps. This included a mixture of sand imported from Jerusalem. (**HJNA** P. 23.) I personally subscribe to the latter interpretation.

The reader should note that all synagogues in the colonial West Indies and colonial America, including Montreal (and Bevis Marks Synagogue of London) follow the architectural design of "the Mother Synagogue" of Amsterdam, the first great synagogue, constructed in Western Europe in 1675 by Marranos escaping from Spain and Portugal. The West Indies is the only place, however, where sand is spread over sanctuary floors.

6. **HJNA**, p. 231.

The reader should not be surprised that the Dutch government became involved with synagogue procedure and deportment. Throughout the history of this enlightened country, Dutch officials have resolved disputes between Sephardim and Ashkenazim in Surinam and Curaçao and elsewhere. Here are only a few examples: They gave Sephardim a tract of land in Paramaribo, Surinam's main city, to build a second synagogue, ending a community quarrel between Sephardim and Ashkenazim. Surinam Jewish Community Bulletin, 1991.

In 1865, the colonial government of Curaçao donated to the Dutch Jewish Reform Synagogue (Temple Emanuel) a plot of land 40 by 50 meters to construct their place of Worship. **HJNA**. p 387. See also p.207, where the Chief of Police of Willemstadt, Curaçao interceded in a community quarrel; colonial officials also kept peace among Sephardim and Ashkenzim in St. Eustatius.

7. Technically speaking, while the St. Thomas synagogue does not have an upper gallery, its arrangements on one floor include a section one step higher than the rest of the seating. It was here, when St. Thomas followed the Orthodox Sephardic rituals, that women sat - apart from men. In a section of the newsletter for the St. Thomas Congregation, March

1993, David Stanley Sasso, who billed himself as "the second male eldest Sephardic Jew on St. Thomas," wrote an article called "St. Thomas of Yesteryear." In the article, Sasso recalls that as a youth, "Jews and Jewesses were forbidden to sit together ... men sat on the lower benches, while women sat on the above benches." This occurred before the Congregation adopted Reform Judaism.

8. **HJNA** p. 180. The statement was made by David Aboab, a visiting Talmudic student from Holland.

9. Ibid, p. 165.

10. **RJCNY**, p. 407

11. **TSC**, p. 29

12. Ibid. p 36-38

13. Maslin, Rabbi Simon. "Curaçao," National Jewish Monthly, September, 1964

14. **HJNA**, P. 295-301

15. **PSJC**, page 34; also SA, article titled "Stones of Memory: Revelations from a Cemetery in Curaçao," p. 81-140 by Rochelle Weinstein.

16. **SWT**, p. 72-77. Also **HJNA**. The Emmanuels documented 225 Jewish ship's captains from 1699 to 1881. There are over 1,000 Jewish ship owners for the corresponding period.

17. ibid, p. 74; also PSJC, p. 123-129.

18. Ibid. Emmanuel devotes almost all of this book to the epitaphs and photographs of the famous *Bet Haim* (graveyard) at Blenheim.

19. Letter from I. Grynzstein, Cong. *Shaare Tzedek* (The Ashkenazic congregation of Curaçao.), Curaçao, 1992. The community was founded in 1926, augmenting Ashkenazim that preceded them. By 1959, they had put together two buildings to erect their synagogue. **HJNA**, p. 497. Also Perry, Dan, "Congregation Shrinks at Historic Synagogue," Associated Press, May 2, 1999.

20. Rolnick, Josh. "Jewish Paradise in the Caribbean?" Moment, Washington, D.C. August 2001.

The Dutch Caribbean - St. Eustatius

1. **HJNA**, p. 518

2. ibid, p. 519. Jews living on Dutch islands petitioned the authorities through the Spanish and Portuguese synagogue of Amsterdam, which in turn went through the Dutch West India Company. The Danish Virgin Islands operated through the Great Synagogue at Copenhagen. English colonists petitioned Bevis Marks synagogue in London. These three synagogues, all of Spanish and Portuguese origins, maintain the records of West Indian synagogues to this day. When communities were established during the early settlement periods, European mother synagogues often gave torahs and other ritual items to new congregations. This tradition continued even to the 20th Century. When the Barbados synagogue was sold in 1929, it was London's Bevis Marks that arranged for the sale and for the return to England of the holy scrolls and other artifacts. Bevis Marks also arranged for the perpetuation of the Barbados cemeteries. These arrangements even extend to the United States. New York's Shearith Israel, (The Spanish and Portuguese synagogue), America's first Jewish congregation, maintains title to the Touro Synagogue in Newport, Rhode Island, this country's oldest synagogue structure.

   Even courts recognize this relationship. When Ashkenazic worshippers wished to use the old Touro Synagogue in the late 1800s, Shearith Israel acceded as long as they used a Sephardic hazzan. Years later, the worshippers challenged the procedure and sued in court to wrest control from Shearith Israel. The court upheld Shearith Israel, which is why services are still held in the Sephardic ritual. See SA, p. 162.

3. Ezratty, H., "Konmemorasion en Statia," Aki Yerushalayim, Kol Israel, Jerusalem, #48, 1993.

4. **TFS**, p. 19

5. "Statia's Historic Salute," Bulletin of the Government of St. Eustatius

6. "Konmemorasion en Statia"

7. **TFS**, p. 97

8. ibid, p. 96

9. **HJNA**, p. 523-526

10. **TFS**, p. 103

11. Schappes, M. U., Documentary History of the Jews of the U.S., 1654-1875, p. 63.

12. **HJNA**, p. 521

13. Letter to the author from Jane and Ed Berkowitz. The Berkowitz's retired during the winters to Sint Maarten and then Puerto Rico. It was during their years in Sint. Maarten that they were instrumental in lending the torah for use by a Bar Mitzvah group in St. Eustatius.

14. The colonial government not only provided our group with chairs, a podium, and a sound system, but they also fed us with an outdoor buffet in a shaded, tree-lined square. Later, we were treated to the presence of government officials who addressed us. We were told that the government was aware of the contributions Jews had made to this island in its early history and hoped that Jews would return to establish themselves once again. The address was essentially the same one I had heard over 20 years earlier at the re-consecration of the cemetery at Charlestown, Nevis. The islands are aware that for many of them, their greatest period of prosperity and economic security coincided with the presence of a Jewish community.

15. Conversations with Gay McAllister, St. Eustatius' resident historian. I was impressed with the respect residents of this island give to the synagogue and cemetery. Their library, a wonderful facility considering it serves less than 2,000 people, has a scale model of Honen Dalim looking as it must have in its heyday. Next to the model is a box requesting donations for restoration of this symbol of the Jewish people's quest for the right to pray and live in peace. As the members of our group passed by, we all dropped coins and bills into the box. When I compared photographs I took of the old synagogue walls in 1993 with those of a decade or two earlier, it is easy to see that despite the care taken of Honen Dalim, there is a degree of deterioration exacting its toll on this monument.

The Dutch Caribbean - Sint Maarten

1. Hartog, Dr. J., History of Sint Maarten and St. Martin, Jaycees Sint Maarten, Philipsburg, (no date), p. 118

2. Bulletin of the St. Maarten National Heritage Foundation titled "Synagogue," contains floor plans of the synagogue and possible *mikve* with a detailed description of the remaining walls and its location. This synagogue, walkway and cemetery arrangement is similar to the one in Georgetown, Nevis. See chapter on Nevis in "The British Caribbean."

3. Letter from Jane and Ed Berkowitz to the author dated 1994.

4. Conversations February 2001 with Ms. Shaw, a member of the Sint Maarten Jewish community.

The Dutch Caribbean - Aruba

1. Berkey, Barry and Velma, "The Jewish Presence in Aruba," Washington Jewish Week; also, Dec. 17,1998, letter from Martha E. Lichtenstein, community secretary, to author.

2. **HJNA**, p. 529. Also TGJC, p. 11.

3. History of the First Jewish Settlers in Aruba, a bulletin provided by Beth Israel of Aruba, undated and unpaginated, circa 1993.

4. **HJNA**, p. 532. The Emmanuels detail the mining of gold and phosphate on p. 531.

5. Berkey, B. & V., "Jewish presence in Aruba." Also letter from Martha E. Lichtenstein to author.

6. Ibid.

7. **HJNA**, p. 531 N.64. Rabbi Emmanuel found only eleven stones in the Aruba cemetery, the oldest belonging to Joel de Jacob Moreno, who died in 1857. See also Aruba Jewish Community Bulletin. The members of the Jewish community of Aruba have become active in preserving cemetery stones, as have other Caribbean communities.

The British Caribbean - Jamaica

1. **HM**, p. 289

2. Silverman, Rabbi Henry P. "Jamaica Blends Ancient and Modern Judaism," London Jewish Chronicle, London. Undated (circa 1966)

3. Hooker, Rabbi Bernard, "United Congregation of Israelites," unpaginated (c. 1963)

4. De Souza, Ernest H., "Pictorial: Some Aspects of Jamaican Jewry," p. 6

5. "Jamaica Blends.."

6. "United Congregation…"

7. ibid

8. **EJ**, 1978 ed. Vol V., p. 1455. Not only a founder of Jamaica's leading newspaper, Jacob de Cordova was also a Texas pioneer. He and another French Sephardic Jew, Henry "Tex" Castro, were active in encouraging settlers to come to Texas after the war of Texas independence. Jacob and his brother founded two publications, the Texas Herald and Southwestern America. Jacob De Cordova became a member of the Texas House of Representatives after Texas entered the union. Born in 1808, Jacob de Cordova died in 1868.

9. "Jamaican Jewry Has Few Prospects," (no byline), London Jewish Chronicle, 3/20/1970. Not only was Sir Neville Jamaica's first Ambassador to the United States, he was a prominent businessman, a direct descendant of the de Cordovas, and major owner of the Daily Gleaner. TGJC, page 53

10. Hooker, Rabbi Bernard, "Pulpit in the Sun," London Jewish Chronicle, date unknown.

11. "Pictorial …", pages 4 through 6

12. **JRT**, p. 437, 450-451. Also **VF** p. 184

13. De Souza, E.H. Letter written to author.

The British Islands - Nevis

1. Address by the Hon. R.I. Bradshaw, J.P. Prime Minister of St. Christopher, Nevis, Anguilla. 25 Feburary , 1971, at the re-consecration of the Jews' Burial Ground, Charlestown, Nevis. Bradshaw quoted a West Indian writer who states that in 1724, "Jews were still estimated to be a quarter of the population and doing more than their fair share of trade." Mr. Bradshaw expressed a hope that Jews would return to Nevis to the benefit of that island.

2. Marsden-Smedley, H., "The Jews of Nevis," London Jewish Chronicle, Aug. 15, 1969.

3. Ezratty, H. "Old Sephardic Cemetery Re-Consecrated in Nevis," Journal of Sephardic Studies, Yeshiva Univ., Vol V., N.Y. 1971

4. "The Jews of Nevis..."

5. Conversations with Hester Marsden-Smedley whom I had the pleasure to meet when she attended the ceremonies in Nevis. Marsden-Smedley is a lineal descendant of 18th century plantation owners. Her family has maintained contacts with the island through interest and property ownership. She has written much about Nevis, some of which I had read before we met.

6. When I first saw the building, I had the distinct feeling this was a synagogue. There is a niche on the eastern wall, which could have contained an ark. The building once contained an upper floor that could have been a woman's galley. The overgrown tropical path called "Jews Walk" led from the cemetery to this building still called the "Jews School." Perhaps it never was a synagogue but merely a communal building or a school. But it belonged to the Jews, of that I have no doubt. In 1998, what may be a mikve was found near the building. Serviss, Naomi, "Reclaiming Jewish Past in Nevis," Latitudes, 1998.

7. "Old Sephardic Cemetery..."

8. Conversations and correspondence with Prof. Robert N. Zeitlin, Department of Anthropology, Brandeis University, Waltham, Mass., 1993

9. This is based upon my investigation of the synagogues of the West Indies. See Appendices on Synagogues and cemeteries in this book. Also Boyd, Ellsworth, "Letter from Nevis," Forward, March 19, 1999."

The British Islands - Barbados

1. **SA**, p 144.

2. **TGJC**, p. 19.

3. **SA**, p. 144. The Speightstown synagogue was destroyed by fire in 1739, during an apparently anti-Semitic riot due to a misunderstanding. It was never replaced. I do not consider this as anything more than an isolated incident, rare in West Indian history and certainly not state-sponsored bigotry.

4. **HM**, p. 290

5. A Brief History of the Jewish Settlement in Barbados, no author, no date but predates final dedication of Nidhe Israel in 1987, Barbados Tourist Board, p. 3

6. ibid., p. 3

7. Bulletin, "The Barbados Jewish Community," Shaare Tzedek, Bridgetown, 1992, unpaginated.

8. Brief History..., p. 9

9. **MIJS**, p. xxix-xxxii, (introduction)

10. Conversations with Paul Altman, community leader.

11. Conversation with Marshall Oran, at the time president of Nidhe Israel. Oran related to me that Nidhe Israel assisted this congregation in matters such as arranging for Matzot for Passover. In the May 1993 copy of "The Visitor," a tourist publication, a full page is listed for the island's religious institutions, In the section marked "Jewish," beneath Nidhe Israel appears the following listing: (I produce it exactly as it appears) "The Congregation of Zion House of Israel Congzhi, Neils Road, Haggatt Hall at St. Michaels. Saturday services. Shacrith service 11 a.m. every fourth shabbath. Mincham at 4 p.m. All feasts are observed. Call 429-2534 or 429-3020." Each time I have been in Barbados, I have been unable to attend a service there.

12. Brief History ... p. 10

13. Conversations with both Marshall Oran and Paul Altman, who were among the moving forces behind the restoration. Much of the old furnishings were scattered throughout Barbados, many of them winding up in the Barbados Museum. Some of the original artifacts were returned. The handsome colonial chandeliers wound up in the Dupont Museum at Winterthur in Delaware. The Museum would not return the chandeliers. It would, however, permit artisans to take photographs and measurements, in order to duplicate them. The Oran family donated the reproduced chandeliers to the synagogue.

14. Strouse, Samuel S., "He Learned Hebrew From Tombstone Inscriptions," The Jewish Digest, July 1970.

15. **RHIC**

16. **MIJS**, p 101. Tombstone #256: Shilstone lists this historic tombstone as broken in five pieces. In SA, p. 145, Malcolm Stern states that many stones were removed from the ground and mounted on walls, to be lost forever. In MIJS, Carvalhos and Nuñes Carvalhos are listed with inscriptions (in alphabetical order) p. 72, 4, 299, 51, 67, 142, 85, 309, 305, 139. See also Sturhan, Joan, Carvalho: Portrait of A Forgotten American,

Richwood Publishing Co., N.Y. 1976; and Ezratty, H., They Led the Way: The Creators of Jewish America, Omni Arts, Baltimore, Md. 1999, p. 89-100.

17. Conversations with Marshall Oran and Paul Altman. From photographs existing prior to its run down state, 20th century technology was able to identify all of the ritual objects so that they could be properly duplicated. Items such as the chandelier, *bimah*, ark and congregant's benches were all faithfully reproduced.

18. A Brief History..., p. 11

The British Islands - Trinidad-Tobago

1. **TGJC**. Much information regarding this island was gleaned from this book by Postal and Stern.

   See also Roth's **HM**, p. 290 and pages 333-334 and the story of Daniel Levi de Barrios, who escaped from Portugal's inquisition and married Deborah Vaez in 1660. They sailed from Livorno (Leghorn), Italy to the Caribbean. Shortly after arriving at Tobago, Deborah died. Downhearted, de Barrios sailed back to the Continent, where he apparently returned to Christianity. He became a Captain in the Spanish Army and at the same time, a writer and poet and later a eulogist for the Amsterdam community, having been restored to Judaism.

   Arbell, M., "Daniel Levi de Barrios, poeta, dramaturgo i istoriador," **Aki Yerushalayim**, Kol Israel, Jerusalem, #15, special edition, 1994.

The British Islands - The Bahamas

1. **TGJHC**, p. 14.

2. Letter of Jack Turner, President of Freeport Jewish Community, 1993.

3. Rose, Harry, "The Bahamas Jewish Community," Jewish Ledger, July 17, 1970.

4. Conversations with Suzanne Jaffe Esfakis, resident of Nassau from 1991 to 2000.

5. "Bahamas Jewish Congregation Celebrates First Bar Mitzvah," article, Nassau Guardian, December 1999.

6. Newsletters, 7/28/77; 8/21/77

7. "The Bahamas Jewish Community"

8. Suzanne Jaffe Esfakis; Faith Fovil, "Bahamas Jewish Congregation: Experience a Sense of Kehilah," Nassau Guardian, October 10, 1997.

The Danish and American Islands - St. Thomas

1. Relkin & Abrams, A Short History of the Hebrew Congregation of St. Thomas, p. 22. Although Milan was a member of influential Marrano families, (da Costa and de Castro), he was apparently a rogue of the first order. Charged with consorting with pirates, he was recalled to Denmark for trial and subsequently executed. See also SA, p. 153.

2. Paiewonsky, I., Jewish Historical Development in the Virgin Islands, 1665-1959. unpaginated [see calendar entry for 1950.] Fidanque de Castro, born in Panama in 1902, and registered in St. Thomas (at that time still a Danish colony) was appointed Governor by Harry Truman in 1950.

   A Short History... p. 30. Ralph Paiewonsky was appointed governor of the Virgin Islands by John F. Kennedy in 1961 and served until 1969.

3. Woods, Edith de Jongh, The Royal Three Quarters of the Town of Charlotte Amalie, MapesMondes Ltd. U.S.V. I., 1992, p. 64.

4. Jewish Historical Development, p. 19 and 24

5. Margolinsky, J., 299 Epitaphs in the Jewish Cemetery in St. Thomas W.I.: The Royal Three Quarters, p. 133.

6. **TGJC**,p. 70

7. ibid, p. 70

8. "La Nacion," The Spanish and Portuguese Jews in the Caribbean, Museum of the Jewish Diaspora, Tel Aviv, unpaginated.

9. "St. Thomas of Yesteryear," letter of David Stanley Sasso, congregant, St. Thomas Congregation's Newsletter, March 1993

10. The St. Thomas Jewish community mounted a Pissaro exhibit in 1996 of watercolors executed by the artist after he returned from school in Paris and before his final return to France.

11. **JPB**, p. 261; Rosen, R., The Jewish Confederates. Univ. of South Carolina Press, 2000. See chapter 2, titled "Two Sephardic Senators," which details the lives of these two West Indian-born Jews who were influential in the South and were prominent in the Southern secession. Moses Levy, Yulee's father, may at one time have been a partner with Judah P. Benjamin's father in the Virgin Islands. Moses Levy, a religious Jew, was one of the first to colonize Florida. His goal was to create a Jewish haven. Much of the acreage he purchased was later the power base for the political ambitions of David Levy Yulee and for his dreams of a commercial empire complete with a railroad line and steamship company.

12. Michner, James, The Eagle & The Raven, T. Douherty, N.Y., 1990 p. 185

13. Conversations with current (2001) Rabbi Jay Heyman

14. The Royal Three Quarters, p. 51

The Danish and American Islands: St. Croix

1. **TGJC**, p. 68

2. **JPB**, p. xi (prologue)

3. ibid, p. 3.

4. **HJNA**, p. 1059. The inscription of Hannah Benjamin De Leon's head-stone is set forth as it appears in the St. Eustatius cemetery.

5. ibid, p. 520,1058

6. Saul, M., "Pirates I Korsarios Djudios" Aki Yerushalayim, Jan. 2000 #62, p. 17.
   Saul maintains that the Lafitte brothers were Jewish. After having devised an ingenious plan in league with the Spanish navy, the brothers then double-crossed them. Later, Lafitte issued orders not to attack American shipping in the Gulf of Mexico, only Spanish. Saul claims Lafitte had a vengeance against the Spaniards, *"en una sierta nuzira, de los ke avian kavzado a su pueblo tantas sufriensas"* [with certain satisfaction against those who caused his people so much suffering]. One of

Lafitte's biographers, Lyle Saxon, in Lafitte the Pirate, Pelican Pub. Co., Gretna (reprint) 1989, p. 68, 282-283, states that Lafitte had a lifelong vendetta and hatred for the Spaniards because they mistreated him during his imprisonment. P. 286. (Note that the article written by Saul is not in Spanish, but in Ladino, the language of the Sephardic diaspora.)

7. Conversations with Alan Bronstein, president of Cong. B'nai Or, St. Croix, U.S.V.I.

The Spanish Caribbean - Puerto Rico

1. Over the past 32 years, the Jewish community has tried to verify the actual number of Jews on the island. Members of *Shaare Tzedek* (Conservative) number approximately 225 families, which means around 1,000 individuals. Members of *Beth Shalom* (Reform) number approximately 85 families, or 350 individuals. The rest of the numbers, which have never been substantiated, come from unafilliated Jews who are well known in the tourist industry, manufacturing, transportation, educators at the universities, civil servants, etc., and Jews around the island who have intermarried and only make their presence known during High Holidays, crises such as the 1967 and 1973 Israeli Wars, or respond to island wide requests for fund raising. Included in this grouping are Israelis engaged in agriculture outside San Juan who are for the most part unaffiliated. Another unaffiliated group are the many "snowbirds," Jews from the mainland who spend the winter season in Puerto Rico.

   The presence of more Jews on the island surfaces when a Christian spouse seeks a Jewish burial for a dead partner or someone calls to request a Jewish wedding for his or her child entering into an interfaith marriage.

   Based on educated guesses, it is variously estimated that there are between 2,000 to 2,250 Jews currently living in Puerto Rico.

2. **HJNA**, p. 83, 347, 835.

3. Acosta, Velarde, Federico, El Primer Tribunal Supremo de Puerto Rico, San Juan, Puerto Rico, 1940, p. 26; Carrion, A., Puerto Rico: A Political and Cultural History, W.W. Norton & Co., N.Y. 1983, p. 235, 264

   The legal profession in Puerto Rico has been enriched by the presence of members of the Jewish faith. Max Goldman, product of a religious education in New York, came to the island at the behest of the legendary Governor, Luis Muñoz Marin. Muñoz spearheaded "Operation Bootstrap" and Goldman was closely associated with the island's tax

exemption law, which spurred the arrival to the island during the 1950s and 1960s of manufacturers and managers (including many Jews.)

One of Puerto Rico's outstanding trial lawyers, Harvey Nachman, a native of Saratoga Springs, New York, flew with the Israeli Air Force during the War of Independence in 1948. Everyone, Christian and Jew, knew Harvey to be an indefatigable collector of money for Israel. His strong impact on the legal profession was recognized by his colleagues: Harvey Nachman was the quintessential model for Puerto Rican lawyers for almost four decades. When he died, the law library in the Federal District Court was dedicated to Nachman's memory. At his funeral, judges, lawyers, clients and friends of all religions paid their respects. His coffin was draped with three flags: those of the United States, Israel and Puerto Rico. (author)

4. **TGJC**, p. 60-61

5. Ezratty, Barbara Tasch, Puerto Rico Changing Flags: An Oral History 1898-1950, Omni Arts, Baltimore, MD., 1986. p. 185

6. ibid., p. 186; Staub, M. "Puerto Rican Jews: A Cultural Melange," Sun-Sentinel, May 1, 1998.

7. Arrieta, R., *"Boricuas de Adopcion,"* El Nuevo Dia, San Juan, P.R., Feb. 13, 1996; also Harrison, D.H., "Jewish in Puerto Rico," San Diego Jewish Press Heritage, May 16, 2001.

8. Temple Beth Shalom's building was purchased in 1971 from the estate of a deceased businessman. The present location of the sanctuary was once a bar called "The Tenth Inning Lounge," owned by Rudy Hernandez, a one-time pitcher for the old Washington Senators. The rest of the building was given over to a pastry shop, a store selling woman's lingerie, and a soda shop. The second floor was occupied by tenants in four apartments. The author was assigned the task of handling negotiations with others, for the purchase of the building and eviction of the commercial tenants, all of who had stopped paying rent to the estate. Needless to say, lengthy litigation ensued, during which the commercial tenants refused to pay rent to the new owner.

   By 1973, the Congregation moved into its new home after minimal renovations. Within two decades, it completed extensive renovations, including the removal of two apartments on the second floor to heighten the ceiling in the sanctuary (see photo in this section.)

   When the congregation was first formed, its leased quarters were inadequate for the numbers wishing to attend High Holiday services. The

Union Church graciously offered the use of their building without rent. The church also permitted a pulley system that dropped a cloth to cover a crucifix approximately six to eight feet high on the wall where the congregation placed its portable Ark.

9. The conversion of many Puerto Ricans, including whole families, is a phenomenon that has occurred during the past few years. Some families allege a Jewish past, together with remembrances of elderly relatives lighting candles on Friday evenings.

The Spanish Caribbean - Cuba

1. **CC**, p. 93-94

2. The Union Hebrew Congregation, following the Reform ritual, was the first synagogue established in Cuba in 1904. It was founded by Americans and no longer exists, having closed its doors during the 1980s.

3. Millis, W., The Martial Spirit, Literary Guild of America, N.Y. 1931, p. 31. See also this chapter, Postage stamp honoring Roloff.

4. **JRT**, p. 92, 97, 206 (detailing the curtailing of Jewish immigration on April 24, 1942.) Cuba also lumped Jews with enemy nationals based upon their place of birth. This was positive in a way: Jews were not singled out by religion but by citizenship. As far as Jews are concerned, one black mark history gives to modern Cuba is the affair of the St. Louis. Nine hundred and seven Jewish refugees reached Cuba aboard the passenger liner *St. Louis*, on May 15, 1939 and were turned away by island authorities. After much political maneuvering involving the United States, the vessel returned to Europe. EJ, Vol. V, p. 1148. This incident was later recounted by Katherine Anne Porter in her novel, Ship of Fools. See also Collie, Tom, "Restoring A Vision," Sun-Sentinel, Florida, August 10, 1997; and AJHS, Ch. 67, "Tragedy of the St. Louis," and JRT, p. 90, 320.

5. Federbush, Simon, World Jewry Today. T. Yosseloff, N.Y., 1959, p. 418-421.

6. **TGJC**, p. 29

7. Aron, Bill, "Cuba 1978," Pucker/Safrai Gallery, Boston, 1978, unpaginated. In 1978, photographer Bill Aron made a trip to Cuba. His photographs were exhibited at the Pucker/Safrai Gallery, together with a 12-page catalogue containing photos and commentary. Aron traveled to

Cuba on that government's invitation to visit the Jewish community. Aron's comments "reflect my experiences both on the streets of Havana and with members of the Jewish Community."

What Aron found he detailed in one-half of his catalogue entitled, "The Jewish Community of Havana." The most interesting differences I found from comparing his 1978 photos to current ones is clothing: in 1978 Jews seem better dressed, wearing suits, ties and fedoras and fashionable dresses. Today's photos show almost everyone in open collared sport shirts and plain dresses.

In 1978, there were five synagogues in Havana: *Shevet Ahim*, (Sephardic,) which still exists; the Union Hebrew Congregation, (Reform,) and Cuba's first synagogue which no longer exists; *Adath Israel*, (Orthodox,) still in existence; *La Patronata*, the last synagogue constructed before Castro, still in existence and most influential of the remaining synagogues. Another Sephardic synagogue existing in 1978, is now defunct.

Aron also photographed two cemeteries on the outskirts of Havana. While the community cares for them, they are reported to be deteriorating and are seldom visited. Ramirez, Deborah, "Judaism Reborn in Cuba." Sunday Sun Sentinel, South Florida Section, August 3, 1997.

8. "Community's Freedom in Cuba Praised," London Jewish Chronicle, no byline, April 23, 1971. In 1971 while Castro still maintained relations with Israel, the keeping of *kashruth* was permitted with government assistance. There were at that time two ritual slaughterers paid for by the government. To the present time, Jews are permitted a higher ration of kosher meat than the rest of the population. Until recent economic changes in Cuba, the *shochet* (ritual kosherer) was the only free enterprise establishment permitted on the island. For information on kosher food, see Fishkoff, Sue, "A Revolution of Faith", Jerusalem Post, International edition, October 23, 1993.

9. Ungaro, Joe, "Becoming Cuba's Only Native Born Rabbi," Associated Press, October 13, 1994. Levy was sponsored by New Orleans businessman Barry Katz, for his study program. The Cuban community hopes he will return to minister to them. Patron, Eugene, "The Cuban Jews the Rest of the World Forgot," Forward, New York, October 4, 1994; Ramirez, Deborah, "Judaism Reborn in Cuba," Sunday Sun-Sentinel, South Florida edition, August 3, 1997. Rivera, John, "Cuban Jews Persevere," Baltimore Sun, Jan. 20, 1998. Rivera reports that David Levy expects to return to Cuba. He conducts services during academic breaks while he continues his studies for the rabbinate.

10. Conversations with and monograph prepared by James and Sue Klau of Temple Beth Shalom, of San Juan, Puerto Rico, June 2001, and Rabbi Gary Bretton Granatoor, spiritual leader of Stephen Wise Free Synagogue, New York City, 2000.

11. Luxner, Larry, "Cuban Jews Wait for a Miracle," San Juan Star, Sunday Magazine, March 28, 1993; Luxner, Larry, "Castro's Jews," National Jewish Monthly, December 1992/January 1993.

12. ibid

13. Arnold, Michael, "Castro Plays his Jewish Card," Jerusalem Post, October 22, 1999

14. Conversations with James and Sue Klau, Temple Beth Shalom, San Juan, Puerto Rico, June 2001.

15. Goering, Laurie, "Cuba's Jews Fight Isolation," Baltimore Sun, Sunday Perspective, August 5, 2001.

16. Ramirez, Deborah, "Judaism Reborn in Cuba," Sunday Sun-Sentinel, South Florida edition, August 3, 1997

The Spanish Caribbean - The Dominican Republic

1. **SPJPS**, p. 47.

2. **TGJC**, p. 39. The authors claim Trujillo donated the land. Jack Robertiello in his article "Dominican Chutzpah, The Story of Sosua," Americas, 1993, states, "Trujillo publicly declared the land a gift from the government but he secretly held ownership and was paid."

   In an anonymous article titled, "Hundreds of Refugees Find Haven in Republic," in the London Jewish Chronicle, June 5, 1958, it was stated that the land was purchased by Trujillo from the United Fruit Company and that it was his personal contribution to the community.

   There is some evidence to indicate that Trujillo was hoping that Jews would intermarry with Dominicans so that he could "whiten" his race. See Sue Fishkoff's "Trujillo's Jews," Jerusalem Post International Edition, January 25, 1995; Laura Randall's "Golden Cage," Latitudes South, Winter 1995; an untitled article by Abraham Rabinovich in the Jerusalem Post on December 23, 1965; and Jack Robertielli's "Dominican Chutzpah: the Story of Sosua," Americas, 1993.

From 1930 until he was assassinated in 1961, Trujillo was one of the most brutal and cynical dictators in the Western Hemisphere. Despite his reputation as a murderer (he was, among other things, responsible for the massacre of 25,000 Haitians) he nevertheless made good on his promises to the immigrants. As we shall later see, he financed the Santo Domingo synagogue with his own funds. He was a paradox, of that there is no doubt.

3. Fishkoff, Sue, "Trujillo's Jews," Jerusalem Post, International Edition, January 21, 1995

4. Robertiello, Jack, "Dominican Chutzpah: The Story of Sosua."

5. "Dominican Jewry Undeterred," London Jewish Chronicle, November 19, 1965; Robertiello, Jack, "Dominican Chutzpah: The Story of Sosua."

6. Untitled article by Abraham Rabinovich, Jerusalem Post, December 23, 1965.

7. **TGJC**, p. 40.

8. In a letter titled, "We didn't Turn our Back," written to the Jerusalem Post, June 7, 1997, Dominican Ambassador to Israel, Alfonso Lockward, disputed an American official's statement that "... no country including the United States..." helped Jews [during World War II]. Lockward verifies that the Republic issued visas to help Jews flee Europe. He then goes on to say, "The size of this program [settlement to Sosua] was reduced due to decisions of the Jewish institutions responsible for its implementation."

   Lockward points out that as early as 1882, General Gregorio Luperon advised Jewish groups that he would offer refuge to Jews, stating "the Dominican Republic wants to transform itself into a refuge for all persecuted Jews from other parts of the world." Mark Wischnitzer, in his book, **VF**, page 184, states that when Solomon Trone went to Lisbon to get volunteers for Sosua, he returned with only one hundred men. Tartakower and Grossman, in their book, **JRT**, page 318, state that the Brookings Institute found the Republic could not accommodate 100,000 refugees as Trujillo had hoped, but only 3,000 to 5,000. The authors dismissed Trujillo's effort as "negligible except for the good example it sets for other nations." But they failed to explain why even the 3,000 to 5,000 refugee figure was never achieved. See also **AJHS**, chapter 137, "Sousa[sic]: An American Jewish Experiment."

9. **TGJC**, p. 55 and 92.

10. "Hundreds of Refugees Find Haven in Republic," no byline, New York Herald Tribune, June 8, 1958.

11. **TGJC**, p. 41.

12. Robertielli, Jack, "Dominican Chutzpah; the Story of Sosua." Inset in the article by Larry Luxner.

13. Letter to author from Isaac Rudman, *Centro Israelita*, Santo Domingo.

The French Caribbean - Martinique and Guadualoupe

1. **HM**, p. 290

2. Arbell, Mordehay, *"La Istoria de los Sefaradis en las Islas de Martinique i Guadeloupe," Aki Yerushalayim*, #49, 1995, p. 20

3. **JPP**, p. 84.

4. *"La Istoria..."*

5. **JCW**, p. 45

6. **JPP**, p. 44

7. **TGJC**, p. 78

8. **TTTS**, p. 249; also JPP, p. 90.

9. The Martinique Community maintains a beautiful synagogue in the outskirts of Fort de France, with all the adjuncts necessary for synagogue life; conversations with Elie Ilouz, *parnass* (caretaker) of the synagogue.

The French Caribbean - Haiti

1. Loker, Zvi, "Jewish Typonomies in Haiti," Jewish Social Studies, Vol X., NY 1978

2. **SPJPS**, p. 65.

3. **JCW**, p. 45

4. Rosen, Robert, "The Jewish Confederates," Univ. of S. Carolina Press,

2000. p. 116,224-225, 347

5. **AJHS**, chapter 112, "Penina Moises Day in the Sun."

The Influence of Caribbean Jewry on Early America

1. **TSC**, p. 40-49. The family structure of colonial Sephardim was highly sophisticated. The purpose basically was to keep the family unit together. This was not limited to Curaçao's Sephardim, but was a feature of all the early Spanish and Portuguese Jews wherever they settled. In 1853, Uriah Phillips Levy, America's first Jewish Commodore, married his niece, (his sister's daughter) Virginia Lopez. At the time, Levy was 61 and his niece 21. Virginia was born into a wealthy Jamaican family. Her father suffered business reverses and then died after emigrating to New York City. He left Virginia in difficult circumstances. Levy's biographers state "Uriah undoubtedly married his niece to protect her and give her a home - an act not only permissible by Jewish custom, but considered almost a duty." Fitzpatrick & Saphire, Navy Maverick: Uriah Phillips Levy, p. 196.

   When Levy died in 1862, his widow was 28 years old. Under ancient Jewish law, the eldest brother of the widow's husband is obligated to marry the widow. A *chalitzah* is a release of this obligation. Jonas Phillips Levy, Uriah's brother, performed this ritual release. Thus, Virginia Lopez Levy, who died in 1925 at the age of 90, had been free to marry any man of her choice. (Sharfman, The First Rabbi, p. 263, see also pages 308-312 for detailed discussion on chalitzah.

2. **WLT**, p. 20.

3. **TSC**, p. 44.

4. **HM**, p. 290

5. **HJNA**, p. 518-519

6. De Souza, E., Pictorial: Featuring Some Aspects of Jamaican Jewry, p. 11; Silverman, B., United Congregation of Israelites.

7. **RJCNY**, p. 32.

8. **FR**, p. 143-146

9. Paiewonsky, Isador, Jewish Historical Development in the Virgin Islands, 1655-1959.

10. **FR**, p. 74

11. **RHIC,** p. 14; **AJHS**, "How Hebrew Came to Yale."

12. **FR**, p. 81

13. Jewish Historical Development in the Virgin Islands, 1655-1959, see entries for 1869 and 1914; *WLT*, p. 21.

14. **MIJS**, p 141-143

15. DeSouza, Pictorial: Some Aspects of Jamaican Jewry, p. 19.

16. **RHIC**, p. 2.

17. **WLT**, p. 33

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These are the islands that attracted the Spanish and Portuguese Jews who left Europe and later, Brazil, to escape the Spanish Inquisition of the 15th to 19th centuries.

The history of their sojourn in the Caribbean Basin honors the Jewish people, for it is there that they paved the way for freedoms now taken for granted by all Jews of the Western Hemisphere.