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THE SEPHARDIC CONGREGATION OF BALTIMORE.

BY BENJAMIN H. HARTOGENSIS, A. B.

Baltimore had a Sephardic congregation at the middle of the nineteenth century, and to it Rev. Isaac Leeser gave his solicitous care. It was important, not so much in itself, but because of its influence on the local Jewish community, in the establishment of religious schools and other organizations. The well-known Cohen family acted as its sponsors. When the widow of Israel I. Cohen in 1808 came up from Richmond, Va., her sons held services privately in their home according to the Sephardic *Minhag*; because the family had attended worship with the Spanish and Portuguese Jews in that city. So it happened that those three famous scions of this family, so rich in communal achievement, Jacob I. Cohen, Jr., Dr. Joshua I. Cohen, and Col. Mendes I. Cohen, formed the nucleus around which a congregation was to develop.

Leeser had long had a watchful eye on Baltimore¹ and its religious schools; later he began with the congregations. In September, 1845, he helped to dedicate the new synagogue of the Baltimore Hebrew Congregation (*Nidche Israel*) assisting together with Rev. Dr. Samuel M. Isaacs, of New York, and the local rabbis, Revs. Abraham Rice and A. Ansell (*The Occident*, vol. iii, p. 361). He took note of the dedication of the Friendship Hebrew Congregation of Fell's Point on the 15th day of September, 1848 (*ibid.*, vol. vi, p. 371). From *The Occident* (vol. xiv, pp. 354, 404) we learn that in 1856

¹ Hon. Mayer Sulzberger writes me on this point: "The interest of Mr. Leeser in all Jewish affairs everywhere is well known. His early years in America were passed in Richmond, Va., and he ever retained a warm, affectionate interest in the South and its affairs, civil, religious and Jewish."

steps were being taken to form a Portuguese Congregation at Baltimore, and that Mr. Leeser was deeply interested. Finally on invitation, he came to the city, two days before *Kippur* in 1856 in order to conduct the services according to the Portuguese *Minhag*. They were held in the hall of the Hebrew Young Men's Literary Association. Both the Lloyd Street and the Eden Street Congregation lent *Sepharim*. Philip Emmerich acted as *Shamas*. Mr. Leeser comments that this was the first time since the beginning of the century, except privately, that prayers had been said in Baltimore according to the Sephardic *Minhag*.²

A meeting was held for the purpose of organizing a Portuguese Hebrew Congregation and to found a free school for teaching Hebrew and English. A list was left by Leeser with Solomon N. Carvalho, soon to be the leading spirit in the movement. From *The American and Commercial Advertiser* of October 8, 1856, it appears that "Rev. Leeser, editor of the *Accident* (*sic*)," was to preach that night at the hall of the Jewish Literary Association at the corner of Gay and Fayette Streets.³

A letter to *The Occident* (vol. xiv, p. 448) signed "Israelite," says that on *Sabbath Bereshith*, 1856, services began regularly with the assistance of the two other local congregations, the *Torah* being read by Mr. Viele, a Hebrew teacher of the Lloyd Street Congregation, and that Rev. H. L. Jacobs, of Richmond, Va., was to preach on the 22d of the month.⁴

² Mr. Leeser writes that he preached before *Neilah*; and further that on the following Sunday afternoon, he addressed the Young Men's Literary Association, Solomon Brown, president.

³ *The Occident*, vol. xiv, p. 404. He left for home, Monday, October 13, 1856.

⁴ *The Occident* (September, 1857, vol. xv, p. 305) tells of the final organization being perfected, the rental of a hall with a seating capacity of 600, together with many details as to the building; also of the expectation of dedicating it on the 10th or 12th of September. Mr. Leeser adds: "Rev. Mr. Jacobs and myself have been invited for the purpose."

Leeser's fond hopes now materialized and on Wednesday, September 16, 1857, with great *eclat*, he assisted in dedicating the Sephardic Synagogue, *Beth Israel*, at Red Men's Hall, 24 North Paca Street. *The Baltimore American* had a long, detailed account of the imposing ceremony held in the presence of 500 persons, including public dignitaries, members of Congress, and not a few Christians. Rev. Solomon Jacobs, of Philadelphia, assisted Mr. Leeser and preached the principal sermon. He also demanded the opening of the door. The bearers of the *Sepharim* were Rev. H. Hochheimer and Dr. Aaron Ginsburg, of the Eden Street Congregation, Rev. L. Heilner, *chazan* of the Lloyd Street Congregation, Rev. A. Lisner, *chazan* of the Gay Street, now Eutaw Place, Congregation, Hirsh Preiss, *Parnass* of the Lloyd Street Congregation and Messrs. Leeser and Jacob M. DeSola, the last named "at present engaged as *chazan*." The musical program was of an elaborate character, a symphony being performed on a melodeon lent for the occasion by Mr. Gaehle, the manufacturer.*

Solomon N. Carvalho composed a special hymn for the occasion. The *American* reported that one feature in this synagogue is worthy of mention, "the discourses preached will be in the English language, whilst the congregation consists largely of persons born in this country."*

The officers of the new congregation were S. Etting,¹ Presi-

* Under the leadership of Prof. J. F. Petri (of the Cathedral Choir) the leading numbers were sung by a choir consisting of Miss Josephine Etting, Miss Karthaus, and others of acknowledged talent.

* A full account, based on the above, adding some details, also appeared in *The Occident*, vol. xv, p. 355, and a less reliable account in *The Baltimore Sun*, September 17, 1857.

¹ This was Samuel Etting, father of Miss Josephine Etting, *infra*. *The Israelite* (vol. iv, p. 84) mentions the name of Friedenwald as one of the officers. This must have meant Jonas Friedenwald; but it is hardly likely because he was at the time closely identified

dent; David Judah, Vice-President; Jacob I. Cohen, and David N. Carvalho.

A *Succah* was erected, according to *The Occident*, in the yard of the synagogue, the first public one ever erected in the City of Baltimore. "Israelite," the Baltimore correspondent of *The Occident*, mentioned above, says at this time (1856) there were in the city 8000 Jewish souls.⁸ Thanks to Mr. Leeser's tireless energy, the first fruits of Sephardic activity in Baltimore were the establishment, mainly through the ladies of a Hebrew Sunday school after the model of the one at Philadelphia. The editor notes that there was a religious school conducted by Dr. Aaron Ginsburg and that he had sent over a collection of school-books such as were in use in Philadelphia. Mrs. Carvalho had taught there in the school established by Rebecca Gratz.

A school for the study of Hebrew and English subjects had been opened in 1851⁹ by Rev. Solomon Jacobs, and it had 53 pupils in 1853. In December, 1856, a regular Sunday school was organized and commenced regular exercises with 72 scholars. Rev. Isaac Leeser came over and made an address at Philomathean Hall,¹⁰ on Lexington Street. The *American* (December 6, 1856) spoke of it as being under the supervision of "lady volunteers."¹¹

with the affairs of the Baltimore Hebrew Congregation and lived with his family, far away from the new synagogue.

Carvalho was an artist of great celebrity as a portrait painter.

⁸ *The Occident*, vol. xiv, p. 448.

⁹ Greenstone, "Jewish Education in the United States" in *American Jewish Year Book*, 5676; see *The Occident*, vol. x, p. 171.

¹⁰ Mr. Jacob I. Cohen, who kindly read this proof, said that this must have been Morrison's Hall, a pretentious school building, entered by a wide alley at the side of Cowman's store, and then used by Jews for Sunday school purposes. The site is now covered by the Fidelity Building. Mr. Cohen added that Philomathean Hall was at the northeast corner of Fayette Street and Crooked Lane.

¹¹ The United Hebrew Select School was founded, according to *The Occident* (vol. xi, p. 235), by 22 gentlemen, the commencement

In January, 1857, the Baltimore Hebrew Sunday School Association was organized with the following officers: president, Sarah N. Carvalho; vice-president, Josephine Etting; 2d vice-president, Mrs. S. Grinsfelder; treasurer, Miss Julia N. Carvalho; secretary, Rachel E. Cohen; directors, Miss Richea G. Etting, Mrs. Rosa Stern, Catharine Cohen, Mrs. L. Hammerslough, Mrs. Israel Cohen, and Sarah Heilbrun. Mr. Edward Cohen was the corresponding secretary.²²

This Sunday school did much for the Jews in Baltimore; thus, many leaders of the last generation in the German Jewish community (not a few of them still alive and active in 1914) were among its pupils and some of them became its teachers. It will be noted, too, that Mrs. S. Grinsfelder, the vice-president, was president of the Hebrew Ladies' Sewing Society. She died recently (1914) after more than 50 years of activity. Miss Josephine Etting, another vice-president and the kinswoman of Rebecca Gratz, died recently (1914) and was buried at Philadelphia in the Gratz family-plot. Jacob I. Cohen, Esq., a pupil, later taught at the school; and Moses R. Walter, Esq., once a pupil, was later on with others in charge of an important Sunday school of their own.

Leeser reports that the Sephardic Congregation at the out-

taking place on September 20, 1852. Each paid \$5 annually. There were teachers of English, Hebrew and religion, and apparently it was a parochial school. A. Rippey taught English and Rev. A. Brown, Hebrew, each receiving an annual salary of \$400. Miss Slocry took charge of the female classes. At the beginning there were 39 pupils; at the time the note was written there were 70 pupils, of whom 40 were boys between the ages of 7 and 13 years, each of whom paid \$1.50 per month, and, in addition thereto, 12½ cents for books and stationery.

²² It was chartered on May 14, 1857, by Mrs. Carvalho, Mrs. Harriet Cohen, and the Misses Josephine Etting, Rachel E. Cohen, Sarah Heilbrun, Catharine Cohen and Miriam Cohen. See Charter Records, E. D. 3, p. 198, *The Occident*, vol. xiv, p. 493. Mrs. Harriet Cohen was the widow of David I. Cohen, and the mother of Miss Bertha and Mendes and Jacob I. Cohen, still (1914) alive.

set took a three years' lease of its building. Its hold was never very strong, principally because there were not enough *Sephardim* at Baltimore to maintain it. The Cohens never discontinued family worship at their residence on North Charles Street; the congregation frequently had to procure its *minyan* from German Jews who lived or conducted shops in the neighborhood. It never took out articles of incorporation from the state.¹³ Later on there came dissension mainly with Mr. Viele, who read from the *Torah*. He was followed in this office by Henry S. Hartogensis, an *Ashkenazi*, who recently (1914) celebrated his 85th birthday anniversary at Baltimore. Mr. S. N. Carvalho continued to be *chazan* and the leading spirit in the congregation. When he left to take up his residence at New York City, the congregation expired.¹⁴

¹³ Under the General Act of Assembly of 1852, this was easily arranged for and at a small cost; yet I have searched the records in vain for a charter for the new congregation. Many other Jewish organizations took out articles of incorporation at that time, among them Rodeph Scholem Congregation of Baltimore City, chartered October 8, 1857 (E. D. 3, p. 79) with M. Bonheim as president, other incorporators being Abraham Breslauer, Louis Waisenbach, Abraham Myer, M. S. Wolf, Myer Alexander, B. Rose and I. L. Wasserman. This congregation passed out of existence without leaving a mark; another organization like in character, and also ephemeral, was the Young Men's Hebrew Association of that day.

¹⁴ The congregation lasted from 1857 to 1860 according to Henrietta Szold in "The Jewish Encyclopedia," vol. II, p. 480. It was commonly supposed that the congregation had its own cemetery. There are two such private cemeteries pointed out: that of the Etting family, on West North Avenue, near Pennsylvania Avenue, and that of the Cohen family, on Saratoga Street, near Carey Street.