

EARLY JEWISH COLONY.

This sketch, which might more truthfully be termed a gathering of facts lying about in out-of-the-way corners, is necessarily fragmentary, because of the disappearance of many of our early county records. In my search through our county papers, particularly the early assessor lists, I have been unable to find any prior to 1751, and those which are there, by reason of their, in oft cases, illegibility and the natural similarity of the early German to the Jewish names, render it a difficult task to speak or write with positiveness in all cases.

Among the early Jewish settlements of the United States (of to-day's limits) Lancaster county has been reckoned as being the third. In Lancaster county's original limits there were three settlements—one at Schaefferstown (now in Lebanon county); the second in Lancaster city; the third, that of Hanover and York (both now in York county). The settlement in Schaefferstown is now being written up by a Philadelphia gentleman, formerly a resident of Schaefferstown. Lancaster was first written up by Henry Necarsulmer, Esq., of New York city, to whose paper I owe much of the compilation of the disconnected matter which I also had in my possession, and which is continued by the writer. The York settlement I respectfully offer for the consideration of some York county historian.

The earliest record we have is the settling in Schaefferstown of some Jewish traders in 1720, and the institution of a cemetery there in 1732. Of this settlement I shall quote Mr. J. F. Sachse later on.

In 1723 a number of Jews accompanied the Germans in their removal from Schoharie, N. Y., settling along the waters of Tulpehocken Creek, and of whom I have found no trace whatsoever.

As to Lancaster city proper, it is almost a certainty that there were Jewish traders here as early as 1735, and probably earlier. The earliest facts I have found are among the following:

The Rev. Richard Locke, a missionary of the Society for Propagating the Gospel in Foreign Parts, in letters of 1746-52, and writing more particularly under date of April 11, 1747, gives in part seven of "Notitis Parochialis," number of Heathen and Infidels:

"Here are less Quakers than in many other counties, and but very few Indians appear—here are ten families of Jews." (See Pennsylvania Historical Magazine article by Benj. F. Owen, 1901).

The following quaint card, published by Dr. Isaac Cohen in Lancaster, in 1747, is of interest in connection with the Lancaster settlement:

"Dr. Isaac Cohen, from Hamburg, Germany, who studied seven years in the City of Copenhagen, informs the public that he has lately arrived in Lancaster, where he intends to practice physic and the art of healing, at the house of John Hatz, inn keeper, at the sign of the Penn. Arms, North Queen street. N. B. Poor persons cured gratis if they can show a certificate from a clergyman that they are really poor. He expects letters addressed to him to be postpaid and those who live at a distance and desire his aid will please send a horse for him." (See Ellis & Evans' History of Lancaster County, p. 250).

As before noted, our earliest assessors' list is that of 1751. It contains the names of Isaac Noonis, Jos. Simon,

Jos. Solomon, Jacob Jacobs, Sampson Lazarus, Jacob Frank, Moses Hyman and Barnet Woolf.

The 1754 assessment includes Sampson Lazarus, Joseph Simon (opposite Simon Snyder, grandfather of Governor Snyder, on West King street, near Charlotte), Isaac Noness (mentioned for the last time), Joseph Solomon, Isaac Pew (Pugh), was a tenant of Levi and Frank, Frederick Ulman.

In 1757 we find Joseph Simon, Jos Solomon, Jacob Frank, Joseph Wild (?), Frederick Ulman and Jacob Lasar (or Leazar, see 1778). I think the latter was the rabbi of the Jewish settlement, as his name appears among the group of ministers and the "Roamen" priest.

In 1778 we find Eleazar Leon, Jacob Leazar, Peter Lazarus, Abraham Marque, Levi Solomon, Jacob and Michael Frank, Levy Marks (see Marshall's Diary), Myer Solomon, Joseph Simonds and Jacob Marks.

In Ellis & Evans' History, p. 61, I find Isaac Solomon mentioned as a sergeant of the guard in February and March, 1776. There are names of Jewish residents to be found in almost every list from 1754 to 1804, but a list of the same demanded too much time, at present, of the writer, and must be left for future research.

It is interesting to note that the finding of Isaac Noness', or Noonis', name in the rolls of 1751 and 1754 is the only evidence we have of his existence beyond his being named as trustee for the cemetery, in 1747. After 1754 he disappears entirely. Of Joseph Simon and Joseph Solomon (1751), we read more further on. Barnet Woolf, 1751, was in Lancaster in 1778. Jacob Frank likewise.

Sampson Lazarus, 1754, was probably the father of Brandley Lazarus, married in Lancaster in 1781, although there was a Peter Lazarus there in

1778, but I think he was a son of Sampson Lazarus. The others mentioned in the 1778 list were merchants or traders.

A directory of (the town of) Lancaster in 1780, compiled from the assessment roll of that year, contains the following names, which appear to be those of Jews:

Among shopkeepers—Barnard Jacob, Samson Lazarus, Andrew Levy, Aaron Levy, Meyer Solomon, Joseph Simon. (See Ellis & Evans' History of Lancaster County, pp. 369, 370).

Among other Hebrews referred to as residing at Lancaster at about that time are Levy Marks and Simon & Solomon, shopkeepers. (See Christopher Marshall's Diary in Philadelphia and Lancaster during the American Revolution, 1774-1781; edited by William Duent, Albany, 1877, at p. 204 under November 8, 1778, and at p. 208, under December 24, 1778.

In the list of 1797 I find the names of Joseph Simons, Peter Lazarus and Solomon Kaufman. The early Jewish community seems to be drawing towards its close.

An early record of the Jewish settlement at Lancaster, Pennsylvania, is that of a deed dated the 3d day of February, 1747, from Thomas Cooksen, County Registrar and first Burgess of the borough of Lancaster, to Isaac Nunus Ricus and Joseph Simons (which name should read Simon), conveying a half-acre of land, in the township of Lancaster, to said grantees, "In trust for the Society of Jews settled in and about Lancaster, to have and use the same as a buryingground." The original deed is recorded in Recorder's Office, Lancaster county, in Record Book B, pp. 441, etc., June 29th or 30th, 1747.

The leading figure in the Lancaster settlement was unquestionably that of Joseph Simon, one of the above-named

trustees of the cemetery, who has frequently been referred to in various publications. He was born probably in England, whence came his wife, Rosa Bunn, niece of Samson Myers (or Mears), who came to this country about 1730. He married her about 1748. The first child was born January 21st, 1750.

He came to Lancaster about 1735, according to Markens' "The Hebrews in America," 1888, and about 1740, according to Ellis & Evans' History of Lancaster county, p. 18, and soon became one of the most prominent Indian traders and merchants, and one of the largest land-holders in Pennsylvania, in fact, in America, at that time, his enterprises extending not only over Pennsylvania, but to Ohio and Illinois, and to the Mississippi river.

In the Indian country he had an interest in stores, in connection with Barnard and Michael Gratz, David Franks, Levy Andrew Levy, S. Etting, Robert Challender, William Trent, Alexander Lowry and others. He was one of the twenty-two traders attacked by the Indians at Bloody Run, in 1763, and lost a large amount of goods.

In November, 1759, Joseph Simon was one of the subscribers to the Lancaster Library Company, subsequently the Julianna Library.

Joseph Simons was an incorporator of the Union Fire Company, on August 25, 1764. Myer Solomon and Solomon Etting were members of the same on February 26, 1791.

The American Jewish Historical Society records contain letters from 1766-73 from Levy Andrew Levy and Joseph Simon to Ephraim Blaine, an ancestor of James G. Blaine.

When the Revolution came on we find Levy Andrew Levy delivered for Joseph Simons two quarter casks of powder and 200 pounds of lead to the

committee appointed to collect the same. It was only the first item of many furnished during that war, and of which mention is made further on. Joseph Simon was one of the commissioners appointed in 1789 by Lancaster county concerning the canal navigation.

"Simon's store was the largest in Lancaster and was situated in Penn Square, in the centre of the town. Levy Andrew Levy was a partner in this store for many years and his (Simon's) sons-in-law, Levi Phillips, Solomon M. Cohen, Simon (which should, according to Vol. 1, American Jewish Historical Society Pub., p. 122, read Michael) Gratz and Solomon Etting, 1784, who had previously lived in York, Pennsylvania (Markens p. 30), were also at various periods associated with him. Another son-in-law was Dr. Nicholas Schuyler, of Albany, a surgeon in the Revolutionary Army." Michael Gratz was a commissary in General Wilkins' expedition to Kaskaskia, Ills., in 1765. He afterwards moved to Frankfort, Kentucky, where his descendants still live.

In partnership with William Henry, Joseph Simon supplied the Continental army with rifles, ammunition, drums, blankets, provisions and supplies.

Joseph Simon died at the age of ninety-two years, on January 24th, 1804. Over his grave in the cemetery at Lancaster there is a tombstone, bearing inscriptions in both Hebrew and English. Of the former a verbatim copy is given in Ellis & Evans' History of Lancaster County (p. 471), as follows:

"And Joseph gave up the ghost
and died in a good old age
An old man, and full of years
and was gathered to his people."

"Joseph Simon

Departed this life

the 12th day of the month Shebet, in the

year 5565, corresponding with the 24th day of January, 1804, aged 92 years, in a good old age.

“ ‘And he walked with God, and he was not, for God took him.’ ”

The same work (p. 471) contains the following abstract from the tombstone of Rosa Simon (nee Bunn), the wife of Joseph Simon:

“The Body of Mrs. Rosa Simon,
wife to
Mr. Joseph Simon,
who departed this life
the 3rd day of May, 1796, in
the 69th year of her age.”

Near by is a slab marking the remains of Rachel Etting,” wife of Solomon Etting, already referred to, who departed this life on January 14, 1790. (Ib. p. 477).

Solomon Etting is probably the same person referred to by Morais (p. 393) as born at York, Pennsylvania, in 1764, and as being “mentioned among the representative citizens who signed an address expressing disapproval of a proposed treaty with Great Britain.” Later he “removed to Baltimore and took a considerable part in its municipal offices, occupying different positions, among them that of a member of its City Council in 1825, and later on President of that body. He died in Baltimore in 1847.”

Ellis & Evans' History of Lancaster County contains the following note on Solomon Etting:

“Lodge 43, F. and A. M., of Lancaster, was granted a warrant April 21, 1785. The Lodge was installed by Solomon Etting, a charter member, who was at the time a Past Worshipful Master of some other lodge. He was also its first treasurer, and was Worshipful Master of the Lodge from June, 1790, to June, 1791.” The date of Solomon Etting's birth must be wrong, as he could not have installed the lodge when he was barely twenty-one years old.

Markens states (at p. 80) that "On July 5, 1773, the different tribes of the Indian nations in Illinois conveyed to twenty-two residents of Lancaster and of the surrounding country a tract of land, which now embraces the southern half of Illinois. Eight Hebrews were interested in its purchase. They were Moses Franks, Jacob Franks, David Franks, Barnard Gratz, Michael Gratz, Moses Franks, Jr., Joseph Simon, Levy Andrew Levy."

The writer of this paper has found no mention elsewhere than in the above statement of Markens that either Moses Franks, David Franks, Moses Franks, Jr., or Barnard Gratz ever resided in or near Lancaster.

Statements in other records seem, on the other hand, to indicate their residence in New York, Philadelphia and elsewhere. See, however, a letter dated Lancaster, Pa., September 12, 1777, signed by Barnard Gratz, Joseph Simon, Levy Andrew Levy, Levy Marks and Myer Solomon, "subscribing towards a messenger service to Washington's army from Lancaster," published by the American Jewish Historical Society, p. 146.

Moreover, on account of the vast extent of Joseph Simon's enterprises, it is more likely that his associates, or some of them, had settled elsewhere than in Lancaster.

Michael Gratz was a brother of Barnard Gratz, who settled in Philadelphia. Michael Gratz was born in Langenbach, Upper Silesia, Germany, in 1740. He resided at different times in Lancaster and in Philadelphia, eventually removing to the latter place, where he was, in 1791, in partnership with his brother, Barnard. (See Morais, p. 25).

He married Miriam, daughter of Joseph Simon, of Lancaster, on June 20, 1769. Some of their children took prominent positions in Philadelphia.

Levy Andrew Levy's interest in Joseph Simon's business ceased (according to Markens, page 80) in 1778, when he and Susanna Simons, his wife, conveyed it to Aaron Levy, also a storekeeper in Lancaster.

Aaron Levy was born in Amsterdam, Holland, about 1742. About 1760 he came to America, where he became a prominent land speculator and Indian trader, taking up his residence in the town of Northumberland, Pa. His name also appears as a shopkeeper in Lancaster, in the directory of 1780, compiled from the assessment roll of that year. At that time he was a partner of Joseph Simon. He laid out the town of Aaronsburg, Centre county, Pa.

During the Revolution Aaron Levy loaned large sums of money to the American Colonists. (See Morais, page 50, note 65, and page 23.) In 1782 he removed to Philadelphia, where he died, without leaving any issue, February 23, 1815.

As indicating the support of the American cause by Jewish residents, it is interesting to note that one, Joshua Isaacs, took the oath of allegiance at Lancaster, as shown by the subjoined copy of the certificate to that effect:

Lancaster County: I do hereby certify that Joshua Isaacs, late an inhabitant of the Island of Granada, hath voluntarily taken and subscribed the Oath of Allegiance and Fidelity, as directed by an Act of General Assembly, Passed the Thirteenth Day of June, 1777, and a further Supplement to the same, Passed the fifth day of December, 1778. WITNESS my Hand and Seal, this Twentieth Day of February, Anno Domini 1781.

PAUL ZANTZINGER.

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Isaacs, Esq., the grandson of said Joshua Isaacs.

Joshua Isaacs was a descendant of one of the early Portuguese Jewish settlers in this county, his father having also been born on this continent. Joshua Isaacs married Brandly Lazarus, at Lancaster, on March 26, 1781. Their first child, Frances, was born at Lancaster June 9th, 1783, and subsequently married Harmon Hendricks, at New York city, to which place Joshua Isaacs had removed shortly after 1783.

I have been unable thus far to find any records showing the existence of a regular Synagogue or of a regular Jewish congregational organization at Lancaster at the time of its early settlement. Nor does there appear to be any tradition of the existence of any such building or congregation immediately in Lancaster, though there is no doubt the regular religious services were held in a sort of private synagogue maintained in the house of Joseph Simon. A portion of the ark used in this private synagogue has recently been presented to the American Jewish Historical Society by the Misses Mordecai, great-great-granddaughters of Joseph Simon.

The will of Joseph Simon, of Lancaster, contains a clause providing the "silver plate used for religious worship" in his family and two scroll of the law were to remain in the family of the testator's son-in-law and executor, Levy Phillips, during the latter's lifetime, after which they were bequeathed to the Philadelphia Synagogue. (See Markens, page 82).

It is extremely unlikely that this residuary bequest would have been made to the Philadelphia Synagogue had there been a house of worship in Lancaster at that time.

The fact that many of the Jews of Lancaster were among the supporters

of the congregation Mickve Israel, of Philadelphia, is also an indication that they had no local synagogue. Nor is there any mention of a synagogue at Lancaster in the lists of houses of worship at the time of which we speak.

However, it is proper to mention that in the "Statistics of the Jews of the United States," published by the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, September, 1880, there is a statement that in 1776 a congregation was organized at Lancaster, Pa.

It has already been pointed out that none of the five sons-in-law of Joseph Simon took up a permanent residence in Lancaster. It is more than likely that their families had already removed from there before Joseph Simon's demise. Markens has it that after the latter event these five families removed to Philadelphia (p. 82). The two and only sons left by Joseph Simon appear to have been weak-minded.

It is stated in Markens on p. 82 (See also Ellis & Evans' History of Lancaster County) that no interment took place in the Jewish cemetery in Lancaster, after 1804, until 1855, shortly before which latter date a new Jewish influx to Lancaster took place, giving rise to the present flourishing Jewish community of Lancaster.

It thus seems that the early Jewish settlement of Lancaster, after an existence of more than half a century, disappeared as a community, leaving no known official records other than the above-mentioned cemetery deed.

Besides the three tombstones of Joseph Simon, of Rosa Simon, his wife, and of Rachel Etting, their daughter, already adverted to Ellis & Evans mention but two others—one, a small slab, bearing a Hebrew inscription; the other, a large one, which "bears an inscription apparently in Hebrew, but indecipherable."

One of these tombstones marks the remains of Joseph Solomon, who died February 9, 1779, aged sixty-nine years.

"In a list of persons that have entitled themselves to the benefit of the act (13 Geo. 11) for naturalizing such foreign Protestants, and others therein mentioned, as are settled, or shall settle, in any of His Majesty's Colonies in America," appear the following names:

"Pennsylvania, March 26, 1749.

"Joseph Simon, a Jew, Lancaster County." Vol. 1, fol. 227.

"Joseph Solomon, Lancaster, a Jew, sworn on the Old Testament." Vol. 1, fol. 230. (See V., published by the American Jewish Historical Society, 11, 117).

Ellis & Evans' History of Lancaster County, p. 383, says Joseph Solomon was a charter member of the Friendship Fire Company, on December 10th, 1763.

In the list of attorneys of Lancaster county, contained in "American Authentic History of Lancaster County, in the State of Pennsylvania," by J. J. Mombert, D.D. (published by J. E. Barr, Lancaster, 1869), there appear the names of Sampson Levy, admitted to the Bar in 1787; Joseph Simon Cohen, admitted in 1813.

Samson Levy is very interestingly described in Morais' "Jews of Philadelphia" (p. 39). He was a younger brother of Moses Levy, a leader of the Bar of his time. Both brothers appear to have practiced law in Philadelphia, where they achieved great prominence. Samson Levy, who is described as a very eccentric personage, became a convert to the Protestant Episcopal Church.

Joseph Simon Cohen is referred to by Morais (Ib., pp. 412, 432) as having been born between 1788 and 1790. He was a grandson of Joseph Simon, of Lancaster. He was a graduate of the University of Pennsylvania. On May

24th, 1813, he was admitted to the Bar in Philadelphia. From 1840 to 1853 he was Prothonotary of the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania. He died in Philadelphia, February 3, 1858.

In a recent work by J. F. Sachse, Esq., entitled "The German Sectarians of Pennsylvania, 1708-1742," a critical and legendary history of the Ephrata cloister of the Dunkers (Philadelphia, 1899), in chapter 60, a potent influence on the religious rites and customs of the New Dunkers of the Conestoga, a regular corporate body of the German Baptist Brethren, from December, 1724, in the vicinity of Lancaster, is ascribed to the Jewish settlements, including that of which we have been speaking.

It is well known that religious discussions were rife among the German Christian settlers in Pennsylvania. The leader of the New Dunkers was Conrad Beissel. One of the customs of this sect was the observance of the seventh day as the Sabbath. From this custom it was argued that if it was proper to follow the Scriptures in this regard, they should be followed in general, and so many of these sectarians refused to eat pork, or to eat other food which had been cooked in vessels in which pork had ever been kept; and otherwise insisted on obedience to the Mosaic law, giving rise to the report that Beissel and his adherents were really attempting to revive Judaism.

Mr. Sachse does not ascribe this return to Jewish custom to a reading of the Scriptures alone, but to contact of the German Christian settlers, "where reason was almost dethroned by religious excitement," with the Jewish Indian traders, "who had sojourned in the vicinity of Schaefferstown (about twenty miles north of Lancaster) as far back as 1720."

Mr. Sachse does not state whence

these Jewish traders came, but expresses the belief that the pioneers came without their families, with no intention of settling, but merely to barter, and that they were not numerous enough to form a distinctive settlement or congregation, until some time later, when some Jewish traders, married and settled down, are found.

Mr. Sachse goes on to state (Ib., p. 117) that as a result of the intercourse with these Jewish settlers, "several German (Christian) families in the old township of Heidelberg actually returned to the old dispensation, and with these accessions quite a Jewish community was formed in Lancaster county. It was not long before a house of prayer was built on the old Indian trail leading from the Conestoga to the Swatara. The place where this synagogue stood—the first in Pennsylvania—is still pointed out by old residents. It was a rude log house, locally known as the Schul." The site of the Schul is now occupied by a modern house. An ancient log house is still pointed out as having been the home of the Hazen, or reader, of what Mr. J. F. Sachse refers to as "at one time the most distinctive and populous congregation of the ancient faith in the Colonies."

To continue quoting from Mr. Sachse's interesting work, pages 117 and 118:

"The claim that this Jewish congregation was recruited from among the early settlers is strengthened by the fact that but few Jewish names—such as Isaac Miranda—(he was a French Huguenot) appear among those of the settlers in the vicinity. Nor do either the Ephrata records or those sent to Holland by Boehm make reference to any number of Jews in the vicinity. The same is true of the Lutheran and Reformed reports. They all, however, make reference to the fact that

Judaizing influences were rampant among the early settlers (Vide Muhlenberg, Hallische Nachrichten).

“Then, again, a majority of names, whose owners are known to have been members of the congregation, and rest upon the hill, were originally of the Jewish faith.”

Traces of the above-mentioned Jewish customs are still found among the families of old settlers in Berks, Lebanon and Lancaster counties. (Ib., page 118.)

The old Jewish Cemetery, established about 1732, near Schaefferstown (now in Heidelberg township, Lebanon county, but originally in Lancaster county), is now almost, if not completely, obliterated.” (Ib., page 118.)

The substantial stone wall which surrounded this cemetery, a plot 60x30 feet in size, was, according to Chas. M. Zerbe, Esq., of Schaefferstown, still standing as late as 1863. The evidence of the existence of a synagogue at Schaefferstown appears to be altogether traditional.

The Schaefferstown settlement is also referred to in Ruff's “History of Berks and Lebanon Counties,” published in 1844.

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