

Glimpses Into American Jewish History (Part --)

Henry Solomon Hendricks

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*Note: Unless otherwise indicated, all quotes are from **Necrology Henry S. Hendricks (1892 – 1959)** by David de Sola Pool, Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society (1893 -1961); Sep 1959 - Jun 1960; 49, 1-4 AJHS Journal. This article is available online at <http://www.ajhs.org/scholarship/adaje.cfm>*

Introduction

The sad fact is that within a few generations virtually all of the descendents of the Jews who came to America before the Revolution assimilated. An exception was Henry Solomon Hendricks, whose ancestors arrived in America at the beginning of the 18th century and perhaps even earlier. His great, great, great, great, great grandfather, Abraham Haim de Lucena, is first mentioned in New York City records in 1701. “Though we have no verifying documentary evidence, it is at least very probable that this Abraham Haim de Lucena was either descended from or was close of kin with Abraham de Lucena who came to New Amsterdam in 1655 and who is regarded as one of the most important founders of the historic Congregation Shearith Israel and the American Jewish community.”

Abraham Haim became a freeman on July 6, 1708. “He was an importer and exporter of such goods as wheat, wine, other varied provisions, and ‘Jewish beef.’ In 1705 he joined with sixty-five other merchants of the city in a petition concerning fair valuation of foreign coins. In 1711, in Queen Anne’s War he was one of those who supplied the American expedition against Canada with flour, bread, butter, and peas. It was in that year also that he contributed £ 1 toward building the steeple of Trinity Church.”¹

Abraham Haim de Lucena served as “Minister” (Chazzan) of Congregation Shearith Israel in New York from 1703 until his passing on August 4, 1725.

Sketch of Hendricks’ Life

Henry Solomon Hendricks was born on August 25, 1892 to Edgar (1857 – 1895) and Lillian Henry (1858-1925) Hendricks in New York.

His father died two years later. With deep religious perception his devoted mother brought him up, though he was an only child, with standards of rare simplicity and selflessness. He graduated from the Collegiate School in New York in 1910,

attended Williams College from 1910 to 1912, then transferred to Columbia University from which he graduated with the degree of Bachelor of Arts in February 1914. He then went with his mother on an educational tour of half a year to countries in Europe and to Egypt and Palestine. On returning he re-entered Columbia University, this time in its Department of Law, from which he graduated with the degree of Bachelor of Laws in 1917. He was then admitted to the bar, and he spent his professional life as a lawyer. He was with the firm of Cardozo and Nathan from 1917 to 1926, in his own office to 1938, with the firm of Hendricks, Robbins and Bittenwieser from 1938 to 1947, and thereafter again in his own office. He was a member of the American Bar Association, the New York State Bar Association, the Bar Association of the City of New York, and the New York County Lawyers Association.

His hobby was sailing to which he had taken as a lad at the age of twelve. He became so skilled in it that on one occasion he joined in a sail boat race from New London to Bermuda. He was a member of the Knickerbocker Yacht Club.

When the United States entered the First World War he enlisted in the Navy and served as an Ensign from 1917 to 1918. Thereafter he was a member of the United States Naval Reserve. In the Second World War he became a member of the Coast Guard Auxiliary, and he gave service as an appeal agent in implementing the Selective Service Act. Throughout his life he was moved by an intense and meaningful American patriotism.

In 1916, he married Rosalie Gomez Nathan, daughter of Edgar Joshua Nathan and Sara Solis. Their strong and beautiful union was blessed with two daughters, Ruth [Mrs. Hyman A. Schulson] and Sally [Mrs. Robert Weber], and five grandchildren.

Involvement with Congregation Shearith Israel

Henry Hendricks' love of and service to his country were based on the fact that many of his and his wife's ancestors had played key roles in America's history for almost 200 years. The same was true of his outstanding dedication to Congregation Shearith Israel of New York. His family had been involved in the congregation essentially from its inception.

We have records of the congregation for forty-seven years preceding the Revolution. In nineteen of those years no less than seven members of the Gomez family from which he was descended served as President of the congregation. At that time this also meant serving as President of New York's Jewish community. His great, great, great grandfather, Uriah Hendricks, who was *Parnas Presidente* of the congregation in 1791, owned one of the synagogue's scrolls of the Torah that was violated by British soldiers during the Revolution.

His great, great grandfather had contributed a substantial sum that materially furthered the erection of Shearith Israel's Second Mill Street Synagogue that was consecrated in 1818. And, of course, as mentioned above, his ancestor, Abraham Haim de Lucena, had served "Minister" (Chazzan) of the Congregation.

As a youth he [Henry] was active in Shearith Israel's Junior League. He became a Trustee of the congregation in 1923, while still a young man, and because of the able service he was always ready to give with tireless devotion he rose to be its President. He served in that capacity from 1927 to 1930, 1934 to 1935, and from 1939 to 1951. He was Honorary President from 1952 to his death.

However, his efforts were not limited to Shearith Israel.

He translated the principle of *noblesse oblige* into heightened social service. Among his many communal interests, he gave outstanding constructive leadership in the religious and social organization and integration into American life of the Sephardim who came to this country from the Balkans, Turkey and the Levant in the first three decades of this century. At 133 Eldridge Street in the neighborhood where very many of these newcomers first settled, the Sisterhood of the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue Shearith Israel conducted a settlement house in which Henry S. Hendricks helped organize a synagogue, Berith Shalom. Besides leading a club in that neighborhood house, he showed a special interest in that downtown congregation. Its members elected him President, a remarkable testimony both to the appreciation of him shown by the members of the congregation and to his personal identification with the newcomers. This office he filled for some years. When Smyrna was devastated by fire in 1921, Mr. Hendricks was among those who organized an emergency Jewish relief committee in New York, and from this there developed the first Sephardic Jewish Community of New York. He served as its Treasurer, and his generosity materially helped the congregation to acquire in Harlem the building that became the center of organized Sephardic life in the city. Later when Sephardim were moving away from Harlem, his openhandedness materially furthered the initial development of organized Sephardic religious life in the Bronx.

Henry was actively involved in the Union of Sephardic Congregations from its inception in 1929. In 1936 he sponsored the printing of the *Daily and Sabbath Prayer Book* which the Union published.

Henry S. Hendricks was tirelessly busy with his religious, communal, social welfare and professional interests, yet he always had time for his family and friends and for acts of personal kindness. His sterling worth, his innate nobility, his constructive generosity, his thoughtful leadership, his selfless dedication and his unswerving loyalty, made him a precious influence in the life of many. He never sought reward or personal recognition. From his childhood he had been steeped in traditional Jewish living, and his loyalty to Jewish traditions,

observances and ideals never wavered. He indeflectibly maintained his religious standards. For him Judaism was both a faith and a way of life.

His Judaism and Americanism, and his traditionalism and modernity, made an harmonious whole. With deep roots in early pioneering settlement in this country he identified himself with the newest comers to these shores who brought with them unifying loyalty to their religious tradition and a deep yearning for freedom. He lived by the highest principles of Judaism. His was a dynamic faith that flowered in blessing for his fellow men.

¹ **An Old Faith in the New World, Portrait of Shearith Israel 1654 – 1954** by David and Tamar De Sola Pool, Columbia University Press, New York 1955, page 160.