

Glimpses Into American Jewish History (Part --)

A Jewish Calendar for Fifty Years

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Note: Unless otherwise noted all quotes are from **A Jewish Calendar for Fifty Years**, by Jacques J. Lyons and Abraham de Sola, The Bloch Publishing and Printing Company, 1854. This calendar may be downloaded at no cost from <http://www.archive.org/details/jewishcalendarfo00lyonrich> .

Introduction

In 1854 Jacques Judah Lyons,¹ Chazzan of Shearith Israel Synagogue, New York and Abraham de Sola,² Minister of Congregation Shearith Israel Synagogue, Montreal, published **A Jewish Calendar for Fifty Years - containing detailed tables of the Sabbaths, new moons, festivals and fasts, the portions of the Law proper to them, and the corresponding Christian dates, from A.M.³ 5614 till A.M. 5664.**

This calendar contains “An Introductory Essay on the Jewish Calendar System and Tables for the continuation of the Calendar till the year 5776, A. M., being for a period of six lunar cycles containing 114 years with Tables of the Parashiot and Haphtarot as read by both the Portuguese and German Israelites, etc.” Beginning on page 148 until the end of the book, this calendar gives a “List of Jewish Institutions, Religious, Charitable, &C” that provides little known information about Jewish organizations and synagogues that existed in the Western Hemisphere during the middle of the nineteenth century.

Candle Lighting

Today we know with precision the various Zemanim associated with any given day. One can find the time of *Netz HaChama* (dawn) or *Shkia* (sunset) anywhere in the world to the minute and even to the second, if need be. We are used to looking at a calendar and seeing that the time to light candles is a such and such an hour and so many minutes. However, this was not the situation in the nineteenth century. Many people apparently could not determine the time of day with much precision. At best they may have had some idea of about what hour or half hour it was. This is reflected in the times that the **Fifty Year Calendar** gives for candle lighting.

Page 161 of the Fifty Year Calendar gives the following times for “Commencing the Sabbath” in New York.

Synagogue, Crosby Street between Spring and Broome Streets
 Minister, Rev. J. J. Lyons. President, Mr. Benjn. Nathan.

TIME FOR COMMENCING SABBATH.

FROM	TILL	AT	FROM	TILL	AT
Jan. 22	Feb. 22	$\frac{1}{2}$ past 4.	July 22	Aug. 22	$\frac{1}{2}$ past 6.
Feb. 22	March 15	5.	Aug. 22	Sept. 15	6
March 15	April 8	$\frac{1}{2}$ past 5.	Sept. 15	Oct. 8	$\frac{1}{2}$ past 5.
April 8	May 1	6.	Oct. 8	Nov. 1	5
May 1	May 15	$\frac{1}{2}$ past 6.	Nov. 1	Nov. 22	$\frac{1}{2}$ past 4.
May 15	July 22	7.	Nov. 22	Jan. 22	4.

This calculation was made by the Rev. Joseph Jeshurun Pinto, in 5519—1759, for the meridian of New York, and confirmed by an Ascama of the Trustees of K. K. Shearith Israel. It may, with a slight variation, be made to answer for all the Northern States.

One might be tempted to conclude that the crudeness of the calendar is due to the fact that it was produced by a frontier community whose members were incapable of calculating a more precise table. In fact, the schedule prepared by [Joseph Jeshurun] Pinto⁴ remained the standard one for all American Jews—Sephardim, Central Europeans and East Europeans alike—into the twentieth century.

According to the “official” history of Shearith Israel:

“The calendar by which to this day [1955!] the congregation [Shearith Israel] sets the time of its Sabbath eve services was drawn up by him in an approximate adaptation of the calendar used in the parent congregation in Amsterdam. He was neither an astronomer, however, nor even a geographer, and the times set in his calendar not infrequently vary rather widely from the times of sunset in New York.”⁵

Scattered Jewish Communities

It was mentioned above that **The Fifty Year Calendar** gives a listing of synagogues that existed in the middle of the nineteenth century in the Western Hemisphere. Besides the cities with relatively large Jewish communities such as New York, Philadelphia, New Orleans, Charleston, and Cincinnati, a number of “out of the way” Jewish communities are listed. Below is a sampling taken from the alphabetical synagogue listings.

AUGUSTA, (Georgia.) K. K. BENAI ISRAEL.

Polish Minhag, organized 5607—1846. Synagogue, corner of Green and Jackson Streets. Burial place adjoining the Christian Cemetery. Minister, Revd. I. Schatz. President, Mr. Lewis Levy. The Congregation numbers 26 members. Sabbath commences half an hour later than in New York.

BARBADOES, (British West Indies.) K. K. NIDHAY ISRAEL,

Portuguese Minhag. First Settlement of Jews, said to be in 5388 —1628. The oldest tombstone (to all appearance, the first placed in the Beth Haim,) bears date 5418—1658, There is no earlier record of Jewish settlement in Barbadoes. Synagogue in Bridgetown, Acting Minister, Ephraim Polack. President, Mr. Michael B. Isaacs. A Sunday School was established in January, 1844.

BERLIN, (Marquette County, Wisconsin.)
First Service on Kipoor, 5612—1851, at the residence of Mr. Kusel.

BOLIVAR, (Tennessee.)
First Service on Rosh Shanah, 5612—1851, in a private house.

CLARBORNE, (Alabama.)
The Clarborne Jewish Congregation. Organized, 5613—1853. Minister, Revd. Leopold Maas. President, Mr. Sol. Levy.

CLINTON, (Mississippi.) Organized Congregation.

COLLUMA, (California, on the Yuba River.)
Organized Congregation, 5610—1850.

LAFAYETTE, (Indiana.) K. K. AHABAT AHIM
German Minhag, organized February, 5611-1851. Temporary Synagogue. Burial place, one mile from the City. The congregation numbers 30 members. Minister, Rev. L. Emmrich. President, Mr. M. Hallstein.

LANCASTER, (Pensylvania)[sic]
Congregational union in 1847.

LYNCHBURG, (Virginia.)
Public Worship on Rosh Shanah 5613.

MARYVILLE, (California.)
Temporary Synagogue. Hebrew Benevolent Society organized 5613-1853
President Mr. F. M. Rinehart.

MEMPHIS, (Tennessee.)
Hebrew Congregation. Acting Minister, Rev. Jonas Levy. President, Mr. M. Simon. Hebrew Benevolent Society possessing a Beth Haim, founded 5611-1851. President, Mr. B. Emanuel.

MONTEGO BAY, (Jamaica.) K. K. BETH JACOB
Portuguese Minhag, Minister, Rev. A. C. Henriques, President, S. G. Corinaldi

MONTGOMERY, (Alabama.) K. K. MEBAKAB HOLIM

Congregation organized 5607-1847 German Minhag. Temporary Synagogue in Court Street. Minister, Rev. S. Myer, President, Henry Weil. Burial place out of the City limits.

NEW HAVEN, (Connecticut.) K. K. MISHKAN ISRAEL
Minister, Rev. L. Sternheimer, 5612.

NEWPORT, (Rhode Island.) K. K. TESHUAT ISRAEL.
Synagogue and Burial Ground are both located in Touro Street, and are kept in repairs by the bequests of the late Mr. Abraham Touro and his brother, the late Judah Touro of New Orleans, sons of the Rev. Isaac Touro. Organized, 5418-1658. Minhag Portuguese. Synagogue consecrated on the first day of Hanucah [sic] 5524—1763.

SCRAMENTO [sic], (California.)
Organized congregation, 5614—1853. First Hebrew Benevolent Society Organized, 6610—1860, possessing a Beth Haim.

SAN DIEGO, (South portion of California.)
First Jewish Service, Rosh Shanah, 5612—1851.

TALBOTTON, (Georgia.)
Congregational Union. Hebrew Benevolent Society. President, Mr. Morris Selig.

TORONTO, (Canada West.)
Organized Congregation.

UTICA, (New York.)
Organized Congregation. Synagogue in Hotel Street. Minister Rev. P. Rosenthal.

VICKSBURG, (Mississippi.)
Organized Congregation.

WASHINGTON, (District of Columbia.)
The Washington Hebrew Congregation. President, Mr. J. Friedenwald.

In total there are 76 cities in Canada, the United States and the Caribbean Islands with at least one Jewish congregation listed. Clearly, the nation of Israel was indeed dispersed throughout the Western Hemisphere by the middle of the nineteenth century.

¹ See **Chazzan Jacques Judah Lyons (1813 – 1877)** Glimpses Into American Jewish History, **The Jewish Press**, -----, 2010 page

² **Reverend Abraham de Sola (1825 – 1882)** Glimpses Into American Jewish History, **The Jewish Press**, -----, 2010 page

³ **Anno Mundi** (Latin: "in the year of the world") abbreviated as **AM** or **A.M.**, refers to a Calendar era counting from the Biblical creation of the world.

⁴ Joseph Jessurun [Jeshurun] Pinto served as the Chazzan of Congregation Shearith Israel in New York from 1758 to 1766. He was born in Amsterdam in 1729.

⁵ **How Did Jewish Women Know When To Light Shabbat Candles in the 18th C.?** Lion of Zion Blog
<http://agmk.blogspot.com/2008/02/how-18th-c-jewish-women-knew-when-to.html>