



The morning of July 30, 1902 witnessed a huge funeral procession following the casket of the chief rabbi.

Behind it stretched a line of 200 carriages bearing family members, local officials, wealthy merchants, and dozens of prominent rabbis from around the country. Standing before them on both sides of the street stretched a crowd of 50,000 to 100,000 mourners.

Weeping, wailing, and the chanting of Psalms filled the air as the massive entourage made its way to each of the main Orthodox synagogues. The crowds struggled and occasionally surged as particularly zealous mourners sought to touch the casket, but remarkably no serious incident occurred. Two hours later, after recitation of the final prayers, the last leg of the march to the ferry at the end of Grand Street (the cemetery was in Brooklyn) commenced. Turning east on Grand Street, the procession soon came upon a massive brick factory that housed the famed printing press manufacturing firm of R. H. Hoe and Co.<sup>[iv]</sup>

There, unbelievably, a full-fledged riot began. The chronology of the events that led to this riot is given below, presented in stages.

**Stage One:** As the procession began to pass the Hoe factory, some workers who had climbed onto the roof or gone to upper-story windows to get a better view of the procession, started throwing a variety of items including food, water, oily rags, and pieces of wood and metal at the mourners.

**Stage Two:** The mourners were outraged at such disrespect for so solemn an occasion. Some of them began throwing the missiles back at those who had tossed them; others burst into the factory in an effort to stop the assault.

**Stage Three:** The first-floor office workers were unaware of what was transpiring outside. Therefore, when the irate mourners, many of them screaming in Yiddish, burst into the first floor of the factory, they panicked. The police were called. In addition, in an attempt to "protect" themselves from what appeared to be an unruly mob, they turned on the fire hose and doused the "invaders." Some anti-Semitic remarks were shouted at the mourners, who were quickly expelled from the factory building.

**Stage Four:** Meanwhile, out in the street, a general melee ensued. The fire hose was aimed indiscriminately at those outside the building, whether they had been in the building or not. The mourners responded by hurling bricks, rocks and other items at the Hoe Building. Most of the building's windows were shattered. However, this situation did not persist for very long. Indeed, the scene outside the factory began to calm down by the time the head of the funeral procession began boarding the ferry to Brooklyn, located a half mile past the factory.

**Stage Five:** "A few minutes later, at 1:20 p.m., a squad of 200 policemen, summoned at the outbreak of hostilities by the Hoe employees, arrived on the scene under the leadership of Inspector Adam A. Cross. 'Without a word of warning or any request to disburse,' stated the report on the incident commissioned by the mayor, the police 'rushed upon the remnant of the gathering, some of them with great roughness of language and violence of manner.'<sup>[v]</sup>

In the end, hundreds of people were injured, primarily by the clubs and fists of the policemen. Eleven Jews were arrested. Nine were fined between five and ten dollars each and then released. The other two were held for \$1,000 bail for inciting a riot. Eventually, four employees of the Hoe Company were also arrested.

The Jewish community of New York was outraged. Charges of anti-Semitism were leveled at the workers of the Hoe Company as well as at police. In addition, the police were accused of treating as criminals people whose only "crime" was that they had peacefully participated in the chief rabbi's funeral procession.

Protest meetings were organized demanding that Mayor Seth Low, who had been elected a year earlier on a pledge to reform the police department, form an investigative committee to look into this incident.

Such a committee, consisting of notable reformers and including two prominent Jews, was indeed formed. It took testimony from many witnesses and issued a comprehensive report that condemned, in no uncertain terms, the brutal actions of the police. The police commissioner, Colonel Partridge, eventually stepped down. Two officers also resigned, and a number of others were transferred to precincts that did not include the Lower East Side.

The tragic story of Rabbi Jacob Joseph's tenure as chief rabbi of New York had concluded with an infamous anti-Semitic incident at his funeral. It marked the end of the attempt to establish a central rabbinical authority over New York's Jewish community.

The chief rabbi was survived by his wife, a son, and two daughters.

<sup>[i]</sup>"New York Chooses a Chief Rabbi" by Abraham J. Karp, Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society (1893-1961) Sep 1954-Jun 1955, 44. This article is available at <http://www.ajhs.org/reference/adaje.cfm>.

<sup>[ii]</sup>Ibid.

<sup>[iii]</sup> "Hibernians Versus Hebrews? A New Look at the 1902 Jacob Joseph Funeral Riot" by Edward T. O'Donnell, Journal Of The Gilded Age And Progressive Era, Volume 6, Number 2, April 2007, page 211.

[\[iv\]](#) Ibid., pages 211-212.

[\[v\]](#) Ibid., page 213.

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