

A Jewish Calendar for Fifty Years

By: [Dr. Yitzchok Levine](#)

Published: December 4th, 2014

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

In 1854 Jacques Judah Lyons,[i] *chazzan* of Shearith Israel Synagogue, New York and Abraham de Sola,[ii] 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.[iii] 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.

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 might have had some idea of about what hour or half hour it was. This is reflected in the times the *Fifty Year Calendar* gives for candle lighting.

One might think to attribute the crudeness of the calendar to the fact that it was produced by a frontier community unable to calculate a more precise table. In fact, the schedule prepared by Joseph Jeshurun Pinto [iv] remained the standard one for all American Jews into the twentieth century.

According to the official history of Shearith Israel:

“The calendar by which to this day [1955] the congregation 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.”[v]

Scattered Jewish Communities

We 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.

LYNCHBURG, (Virginia.)

Public Worship on Rosh Shanah 5613.

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.

SAN DIEGO, (South portion of California.)

First Jewish Service, Rosh Shanah, 5612—1851.

TALBOTTON, (Georgia.)

Congregational Union. Hebrew Benevolent Society. President, Mr. Morris Selig.

VICKSBURG, (Mississippi.)

Organized Congregation.

WASHINGTON, (District of Columbia.)

The Washington Hebrew Congregation. President, Mr. J. Friedenwald.

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

[i] See “*Chazzan Jacques Judah Lyons* (1813 – 1877),” [The Jewish Press, September 3, 2010, pages 16 & 99.](#)

[ii] “Reverend Abraham de Sola (1825 – 1882),” [The Jewish Press, December 3, 2010, pages 26 & 92.](#)

[iii] 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.

[iv] 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.

[v] “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>.