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Henry S. and Benjamin H. Hartogensis

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Usually Jewish history books deal with those who have made their mark by doing extraordinary things. While such people obviously are important, there are those who may not have enjoyed much fame yet whose efforts and accomplishments were crucial to maintaining Yahadus in their community. Two such men are Henry S. Hartogensis and his son, Benjamin H. Hartogensis, who devoted their lives to the Jewish community of Baltimore.

Henry S. Hartogensis 1

Henry S. Hartogensis was born on the first day of Rosh Chodesh Cheshvan, October 27, 1829, in Hertogenbosch, the capital of Noord Brabant Province in the Catholic southeastern Netherlands. On his father's side he was descended from the distinguished Rabbi Aryeh Loeb ben Chaim (Breslau), whose authorization of the Rodelheim *Machzor* is printed on the back page of the Heidenheim edition. His father was a well-known philanthropist, scholar and banker, and was referred to as "Rabbi Samuel," despite the fact that he refused to let others consider him a rabbi. On his mother's side he was descended from the well-known Lewyt family.

Nineteen-year-old Henry immigrated in 1848 to Baltimore via New York City to "earn a living" and escape the "financial crash owing to the impending French revolution." He first started a stationery and printing firm and later owned a large sporting goods store on East Baltimore Street. In 1849 he married a fellow Hollander, Rachel de Wolff, daughter of Jacob who had arrived in the 1830s. In the 1850s Henry's younger brother Eleazar (Edward) joined the growing family and worked as a clothier. After marrying he moved to Washington, D.C., opened a "dry goods emporium," and established that branch of the family. In religion, the Hartogensis brothers were strictly Orthodox. Edward helped found the Adas Israel Congregation in Washington and taught in its religious school. Henry frequently officiated as hazan at Baltimore Hebrew [Congregation] until the majority espoused Reform in 1870. He led the minority to start the Chizuk Amuno Congregation in 1871 and served as secretary for twenty years. He also helped fund and erect its new synagogue in 1876, located on Lloyd Street only a few doors from its nemesis, Baltimore Hebrew. When Chizuk Amuno moved uptown in 1892, Hartogensis financed a new Ashkenazic synagogue, Zichron Jacob, located near his home on Baltimore Street, where he served as president, hazan, and "chief mainstay (financial and otherwise)." Earlier, in 1887 Congregation Oheb Shalom's Society for the Education of the Poor elected him as its secretary.

From 1904 until his death [in 1918], Hartogensis affiliated with Shearith Israel Congregation, which remained an ultra-Orthodox synagogue for a century. Again he served as reader at services and was much honored by the congregation.

Henry took an active part in communal and fraternal organizations, both Jewish and non-sectarian alike. For over 40 years he was involved with the Society for the Education of Poor and Orphaned Hebrew Children (Hebrew Education Society), serving at one time as its director and later as treasurer. He was the manager of the Hebrew Free Burial Society for a quarter of a century and in this capacity attended all funerals, and performed many acts of kindness to the living as well as the dead.

Following a lengthy vacation in the Netherlands in 1890, Hartogensis wrote a report for the Philadelphia Jewish Exponent extolling the virtues of Dutch religious Orthodoxy. Despite their achievements in the arts and literature, in sciences and statecraft, which “compares favorably with the best Israelites of other countries,” Hartogensis boasted, “nowhere have I seen ‘orthodoxy’ so triumphant.” The Dutch had no use for “modern innovations to devotion – viz. the family pew, the organ, the mixed choirs mainly composed of Christians, the mutilation of the prayer-book, and the desecration of the holidays. What we call ‘conservative’ congregations,” Hartogensis added, “are unknown to Holland Jews.” Despite the rising materialism of the young, he concluded with satisfaction, there “are not enough of them in the whole country to form a ‘Reform’ congregation.”

Henry S. Hartogensis passed away on December 25, 1918 leaving behind a wonderful shem tov.

Benjamin H. Hartogensis 2

Henry and Rachel Hartogensis had seven children, several of whom led prominent lives. The most notable of their offspring was Benjamin (April 19, 1865 – July 13, 1939).

Benjamin graduated Johns Hopkins University in 1886. He spent the following year doing graduate work at Hopkins and worked for a short time as an analytic chemist. In 1887 he became the associate editor of the Philadelphia Jewish Exponent, serving in this capacity for 12 years. From 1890 to 1896 he also served as one of the editors of the Baltimore American. While engaged in this work, Benjamin studied law at the University of Maryland from 1892 to 1893, earning a law degree.

In December 1893 he was admitted to the bar and three years later began to actively practice law. Benjamin was also the founder and president of the Baltimore branch of the Alliance Israelite Universelle and served as president of the Hebrew Education Society of Baltimore for a number of years. Furthermore, he took an avid interest in the Jewish history of Baltimore and wrote several articles that appeared in the Proceedings of the American Jewish Historical Society.

Staunch devotion to Judaism and Americanism characterized the life and works of Benjamin Henry Hartogensis. As an American, he trenchantly searched for deviations from religious liberty to set them aright. As a Jew, he vigorously maintained unswerving loyalty to the faith and traditions of his fathers, which he sought to perpetuate through education. Much of his painstaking legal and

historical research was centered upon the examination of attempts on the part of any dominant religious group to control everyday affairs through laws dangerous to civil rights. “Why not,” he asked, “have every man fight for religion in his church or by individual or collective endeavor without attempting to use the state and the law to enforce religious ideals?” The titles of several papers, delivered as lectures or printed as essays, indicate this special preoccupation.

No mere theoretical advocate of religious equality, he sought legislative exemption of Seventh Day observers from Sunday laws.

Benjamin was a frequent public speaker. His presentation “A History of Intolerance in Maryland” was published in the *Jewish Exponent* and “The Loyal Jew, the Best Patriot,” a Fourth of July address delivered in 1907, was later translated into French and published. His essay “Did the Jews or Romans Kill Jesus?” which appeared in the *Baltimore Sun* in 1909 attracted a great deal of attention and discussion.

In the distinctive field of Jewish research he made noteworthy contributions to the Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society, entitled “The Sephardic Congregation of Baltimore,” “The Russian Night School of Baltimore” and “Rhode Island and Consanguineous Jewish Marriages.”

Benjamin stands out among other historians of American Jewish history in that he came from a long line of Jewish religious traditionalists and maintained his commitment to Orthodoxy throughout his life. In his will he bequeathed more than \$50,000 for Jewish and public charities and educational institutions, including Johns Hopkins University.

1. All quotes in this section are from *The Forerunners: Dutch Jewry in the North American Diaspora* by Robert P. Swierenga, Wayne State University Press, Detroit, 1994.

2. All quotes in this section are from “*Benjamin Henry Hartogensis*” by Ezekiel J. Londow, *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society* (1893-1961); 1947; 37, AJHS Journal. This article is available online at www.ajhs.org/scholarship/adaje.cfm.

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