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This is the fourth time that Touro Synagogue has appeared on our cover.

# RHODE ISLAND JEWISH HISTORICAL NOTES

VOLUME 7, NUMBER 1

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RHODE ISLAND JEWISH HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

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## LIBERTY OR EQUALITY?

by JEROME A. BARRON\*

### I.

Thomas Wolfe said that you can't go home again and this is true in the sense that it is impossible to make a journey to one's past. Yet it is possible for memory to operate more sharply when one is once again upon the scene, as commercial television describes it, of "Happy Days." The first time I spoke here I spoke from the pulpit at my bar mitzvah. At that time I was little more than eye level to the top of the pulpit. So it is good to speak here at last and really be able to see the audience.

There are few other buildings on this continent which so exemplify Jewish life in America and religious freedom in America. Those of us who have been, or are, part of this community are aware that this building has had great personal meaning for us in our own lives.

Nearly thirty years ago I was bar mitzvah in this synagogue, and nearly twenty-five years ago I was a guide here. The symbolic role in Jewish and American history of this synagogue was underscored for me that summer I was a guide when I saw the enthusiasm of the visitors to the building, no matter what their faith. But I did not need a summer as a guide to teach me the significance of the fact that the man who became the first president of the United States, George Washington, had so warmly, generously, and liberally greeted the Jewish community of this city in the letter the anniversary of which we celebrate today. The words George Washington used in his famous letter, that this country gave "to bigotry no sanction and to persecution no assistance", have been matched by performance in the intervening centuries. As a result historians have justly referred to American Jewish history as history without tears. It is easy, of course, to see why. Although Jews have lived on the continent of Europe since Roman times, still recent horrors remind us that few synagogues in Europe even two hundred years of age still stand.

To me as a boy what was important was not only the visible symbol of religious freedom in America which this synagogue represented, but equally the significance of this synagogue as a reminder of the continuity of Jewish experience in America. It is of course true that the

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Read at the George Washington Letter Ceremonies in Touro Synagogue, Newport, R. I. on October 12, 1975.

\*Professor of Law, George Washington University.

largest wave of Jewish immigration to this country came in the late nineteenth century. Indeed, for most of the nineteenth century there was no Jewish community in this city.

But it is also true, and it meant a great deal to me, that in the youth of this republic, in the American genesis as it were, people of Jewish faith helped to build and defend the nation that became the United States of America. Indeed, on the whole so devoted to the revolutionary cause was the Jewish community of eighteenth century Newport that its most distinguished member, Aaron Lopez, had to flee to Massachusetts to escape the British. The visible and evident commitment of the Jewish people to American liberty at the formative period of growth of the United States was very precious to me, a boy growing up in a community which consisted essentially of the children or grandchildren of recent immigrants. It was precious because Hitler's propaganda was attempting to destroy the image of Jewry throughout the world including the United States. One of its principal themes was that Jews were aliens in the United States and had not participated in the American tradition. But the plaques on the buildings of downtown Newport bearing the names of colonial Jewish settlers, such as Jacob Rodriguez Rivera, combined with the living reality of this synagogue, eloquently contradicted these calumnies.

It seems strange even to me now that in free America I needed this assurance. But when I reflect that I was born in 1933 and bar mitzvah in 1946, I realized that that period, the Hitler era, was probably the darkest period of Jewish history since the destruction of the temple by the Romans.

The reality of this synagogue was not the only evidence in the Newport of my boyhood of the continuous vitality of the democratic idea in this city. For a Newport boyhood gave witness everywhere to the continuing devotion to the part of American experience which was pledged to human freedom. After all, Newport in the nineteenth century was as faithful to the values of human liberty as it was in the eighteenth century. Here lived Julia Ward Howe, the eloquent abolitionist and author of the Battle Hymn of the Republic, the tune which became the marching song of redemption for black people in bondage.

Thus far in these remarks I have spoken to you of boyhood memories of this synagogue, town, and community. But you have asked me here today I think not only to speak to you of the past, but also to discuss some of the contemporary issues that currently perplex American constitutional law. It is in my opinion not too great a leap from the New-

port world of Touro Synagogue and Julia Ward Howe to the current problems of liberty and equality in America.

## II.

Let me give you an example. Recently the Supreme Court of the United States was presented with a case of great difficulty and of great importance. The facts of the case were basically simple. A young man of Sephardic Jewish ancestry, Marco De Funis, applied to his state university law school. He was denied admission although the state university law school granted admission to minority students whose credentials were less impressive than his.

In the case of which I am speaking, however, the young law school applicant asserted that he had been discriminated against. Let me give you some of the flavor of the issues that were raised by this case.

The Supreme Court of Washington sustained the university's position and not that of Marco De Funis. The state supreme court accepted the contention that, where the factor of race was used to benefit those minority groups, Blacks, Chicanos, Filipinos, and American Indians who had suffered from past discrimination, such discrimination should be considered benign. The state court conceded that "the minority admissions policy is certainly not benign with respect to minority students who are displaced by it." Nevertheless, the Washington Supreme Court concluded that on a balancing of interests the interest of the minority student should prevail. The state supreme court supported its reasoning as follows:

It can hardly be gainsaid that the minorities have been, and are, grossly underrepresented in the law schools — and consequently in the legal profession — of this state and this nation. We believe the state has an overriding interest in promoting integration in public education. In light of the serious underrepresentation of minority groups in the law schools, and considering that minority groups participate on an equal basis in the tax support of the law schools, we find the state interest in eliminating racial imbalance within public legal education to be compelling. *82 Wash. 2d 11, 507 P.2d 1169 (1973)*.

The arguments recited above are powerful ones. But as is the case with most troublesome problems that beset a free society, the arguments of Marco De Funis to the contrary are also powerful. In an amicus brief for De Funis to the United States Supreme Court on behalf of B'nai B'rith, Philip Kurland, and the late distinguished scholar and teacher, Alexander Bickel, the arguments for De Funis were set forth:

It is our position that a racial classification that takes the form of a racial quota, as in this case, is unconstitutional *vel non*, because racial quotas are anathema to the concept of individual freedom. \* \* \* A racial quota is derogatory to those whom it is intended to benefit and depriving of those from whom is taken what is 'given' to the minority. A beneficent quota is as invidious as it is patronizing.

The issues raised by the *De Funis* case are profoundly difficult ones. For the fact is that for many in this country history has not been history without tears. For members of such groups the harsh heritage of the past still cripples opportunities for the future. To what extent may the state act today to make amends for the wrongs it has done in the past? And to what extent, if at all, may those who had no part in past injustice be made to pay the price today for remedying that injustice? Finally, there is the ultimate tension provoking problem: Can racism however benign in motive ever be used as a tool to eliminate racism?

Can we compensate for past inequalities that were justified on the basis of race without creating new injustices? Is it true as Professors Kurland and Bickel phrased it that: "So-called affirmative action programs that are not circumscribed in terms consistent with the Equal Protection Clause collapse into the very evil they seek to cure"?

Jewish organizations were deeply divided by the *De Funis* case. The Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith, the American Jewish Congress, and the Jewish Rights Council all filed amici curiae briefs for *De Funis*. On the other hand, the National Council of Jewish Women represented by veteran civil liberties lawyer, Joseph L. Rauh, Jr., appeared against *De Funis*.

It is little wonder that such division occurred. There is support in the law both for and against approaching constitutional rights as a matter of group status.

As many of you know, the Supreme Court did not choose to resolve the claims of competing demands for liberty and equality raised by the *De Funis* case. Since *De Funis* would complete his studies no matter what the resolution of the case by the Supreme Court, the Supreme Court declined to decide whether the University of Washington's admission program implemented or violated the guarantee of the equal protection of the law of the Fourteenth Amendment.\*

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\*See *Defunis v. Odegaard*, 416 U. S. 312 (1974).

It is interesting that in a dissent to the Court's refusal to decide the case, a dissent which contained some ideas not necessarily helpful to De Funis's cause, Mr. Justice Douglas did express himself clearly on the broad question I discuss with you today: Should our constitutional rights be dependent on occasion on the group to which we belong or should our constitutional rights arise solely from our status as individuals? On this point, Justice Douglas said:

There is no constitutional right for any race to be preferred.  
\* \* \* A De Funis who is white is entitled to no advantage by reason of that fact; nor is he subject to any disability, no matter his race or color. Whatever his race, he had a constitutional right to have his application considered on its *individual merit* in a racially neutral way. 416 U. S. 312 at 336-337.

There have been times when the Supreme Court in fact has recognized that one's status as a member of a group is in fact intimately related to one's ability to enjoy the liberties conferred by the constitution.

In 1952, in a case which the Supreme Court has subsequently criticized but not reversed, Mr. Justice Frankfurter speaking for the court in a 5-4 decision, upheld an Illinois criminal libel statute punishing among other things publications which exposed citizens of any race, color, or creed to contempt or derision. Mr. Justice Frankfurter justified the validity of the Illinois group defamation law on the following grounds:

It is not within our competence to confirm or deny claims of social scientists as to the dependence of the individual on the position of his racial or religious group in the community. It would, however, be arrant dogmatism, quite outside the scope of our authority in passing on the powers of a State, for us to deny that the Illinois legislature may warrantably believe that a man's job and his educational opportunities and the dignity accorded him may depend as much on the reputation of the racial and religious group to which he willy-nilly belongs, as it does on his own merits. This being so, we are precluded from saying that speech concededly punishable when immediately directed at individuals cannot be outlawed if directed at groups with whose position and esteem in society the affiliated individual may be inextricably involved. *Beauharnais v. Illinois*, 343 U. S. 250 at 263 (1952).

### III.

Should the law's treatment of individuals be affected by the group to which the individuals belong? We celebrate George Washington's

letter to the Jews of Newport because among other reasons it contains the idea that one class of people do not enjoy their natural rights through the "indulgence of another." It is not a transitory indulgence for the group to which we belong which wins for us the blessings of liberty. Under the doctrine of natural rights of which Washington spoke in his letter, it is the right of each citizen, by virtue of his individuality and his humanity, to claim the blessings of liberty. As Washington put it, all the government of the United States requires of those who live under its protection is that they "should demean themselves as good citizens." The understanding of liberty proclaimed in Washington's letter is that each individual lays claim to liberty not by virtue of the group to which he belongs but as a matter of individual right.

To press the point, our rights to liberty as Washington perceived them and as I think, in large part the American constitutional tradition has conceived them, has been to think of rights and duties as flowing to individuals as individuals rather than as members of a group. But the single great rebuttal, of course, to the existence of this tradition is the fact of slavery. That is of course the great contradiction to the general principle of dignity and equality of each individual. It is the harsh legacy of slavery that makes insistence upon an individual approach today to the problem of achieving contemporary racial justice and equality so incomplete and unacceptable a solution to so many.

In the *De Funis* case our nation grapples with the force and accuracy of Jefferson's observation on slavery: "I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just."

You have been patient with me as I have set forth the issues and the problems raised by the great case I have been describing. But surely you are asking yourselves at this point: Well, where should we take our stand? For or against *De Funis*? Should we choose the view that the right to pursue a career to the limit of aspiration and ability is the very essence of liberty? Or should we choose the view that the legacy first of slavery and then of discrimination cannot be overcome by a mere pledge of free entry to the competitive race based on merit? I hope you will not be too impatient with me if I tell you that I find the competing claims for individual liberty and for group equality each so just that I cannot choose between them. Although it is almost a professional obligation for a constitutional law teacher to disagree with the Supreme Court, I cannot say that in this case that their response was an unwise one.

The Court by saying the case was moot avoided the necessity of subordinating liberty to equality, of placing group status before individual right. Whichever of these precious values was chosen in this context over the other, justice would suffer. Instead, the Court left the nation with the task of struggling between these values, between now moving in one direction and now in another. At least for the interim this may be the wisest course. The original impulse in the universities to begin a minority admissions program, first fed by a feeling of ethical duty in the aftermath of the slaying of Martin Luther King, is not what it was. If in addition to declining ethical impulse such programs had to bear the burden of either a declaration of unconstitutionality or of constitutionality, I am doubtful that such a development would aid the cause of minority admissions.

The problem of the *De Funis* case reminds me of the ancient riddle of the Hebrew sage, Hillel:

If I am not for myself, who will be?

If I am only for myself, what am I?

And if not now, when?

Constitutionally, as well as ethically, all of us have a right to be for ourselves, but we also have a duty to think of others. If there is a conflict between that right and that duty, when do we resolve it? The Supreme Court in *De Funis* said in essence: "Not now." But, in the words of Hillel: If not now, when?

Our society is not yet ready to reconcile the important but conflicting values at stake in the *De Funis* case. Our society must first work at the pursuit of liberty with respect for equality and in the quest for equality with due respect for liberty. Then, if we are lucky, no final weighting of these values will be necessary, because the accommodation that our society will have reached between them will be both tolerable and just.

In the meantime, as a spur we must keep all of Hillel's questions before us, because they are America's questions also.

## THE JEWISH MERCHANTS OF NEWPORT

1740-1790

by MARILYN KAPLAN, M.A.

The rise and decline of the Jewish community in Newport coincided with fluctuations in that seaport's economy. From this fact filiopietistic historians have concluded that Jewish merchants were responsible for Newport's commercial growth. However, contrary evidence indicates that the Jews did not cause, but responded to the changing economic situation. Newport's commercial growth preceded the mid-century arrival of the Jews. Jewish businessmen who came to Newport from 1740 to 1770 were attracted by the economic opportunities of a growing seaport. Many of them were energetic businessmen whose mercantile efforts were enhanced by the friendly cooperation of fellow co-religionists in other ports. Their successes contributed to Newport's commercial growth.

The American Revolution scattered the Jewish community and devastated Newport's commercial life. Those Jews who remained in Newport, or returned after the revolution, worked to revive trade. It was only after it became apparent that Newport was destined to remain a second-rate port that the Jewish community dispersed. The departure of the Jews did not cause Newport's commercial decline. The Jewish community gradually disappeared as the older men died and the younger men left in quest of improved economic opportunities.

### ARRIVAL OF JEWISH MERCHANTS IN NEWPORT

Existing evidence indicates that at least nine Jewish merchants came to live in Newport during the 1740s. Abraham and Naphtali Hart, Jacob Judah, Moses Lopez, Moses Levy, Isaac Seixas, Isaack Polock, and Jacob Rodriguez Rivera all came directly from New York. Initially they continued their affiliations with the Shearith Israel Synagogue in New York and maintained dual residency in New York and Newport<sup>1</sup>. These ambitious tradesmen regarded their move to Newport as an exploratory business venture. By the 1750s their faith in the commercial opportunities of this vigorous young port had been justified. All of the nine dropped their New York residencies and synagogue memberships as their Rhode Island businesses became more active. Proof of their confidence in Newport's future is the arrival of additional members of their families. In the 1750s Isaac, Benjamin, and Jacob Hart joined Abraham and Naphtali Hart. David and Aaron Lopez came directly from Portugal to join their brother Moses<sup>2</sup>.

Few ambitious merchants had been attracted to seventeenth century Rhode Island. The opportunities were limited because there was no

direct trade between England and Rhode Island and almost all English imports came to Rhode Island through the port of Boston. However, despite the colony's dependence on Massachusetts for the importation of most manufactured goods, Rhode Island did begin some direct trade with the West Indies. Peleg Sanford of Newport, one of Rhode Island's most important seventeenth century merchants, was an employee of the Boston Hutchinson family. Sanford managed the Hutchinson's Rhode Island cattle farms and exported their horses and provisions directly to Barbados. In the West Indies, with the aid of his brother in Barbados, he acquired goods which he exchanged with merchants from Massachusetts and Connecticut.<sup>3</sup> Although Peleg did not conduct any direct trade with England, he did act independently in the conduct of his West Indian trade<sup>4</sup>. In the seventeenth century Rhode Island's foreign trade was limited to the West Indies, and the West Indies trade remained light<sup>5</sup>. It was the growth of this West Indies trade that eventually brought prosperity to eighteenth century Newport.

According to the late Bruce Bigelow's definitive, but unpublished account of the "Colonial Merchants of Rhode Island", the stage was set for the great age of Newport commerce in the Middle Period from 1733 to 1756. Bigelow shows that during this period Rhode Island trade was "expanding and flourishing" mainly due to the trade with the French West Indies<sup>6</sup>. The prohibitive duties placed on sugar, non-English molasses, spirits, and rum by the Molasses Act of 1733 were not enforced. Colonists freely violated the Act, and Newport continued to expand its trade with the French, Dutch, and Spanish West Indies. During King George's War with France (1744-1748), Newport became a center for privateering activity<sup>7</sup>. The newly arrived Jewish merchants joined in, but did not initiate this profitable trade. When the privateering ship "Pearl" was seized in Rhode Island, Abraham Hart appeared in court to represent the two West Indian Jews found aboard the ship. Hart asked for the freedom of Emanuel Alvares Correa and Moses Cardozo. He offered a sum twice the value of the ship, its cargo, and court costs and guaranteed the lawful sailing of the vessel if it were turned over to him<sup>8</sup>. Members of the Jewish community in the West Indies acted for Hart and others in arranging illicit trade with the French islands. Newport's shipping prospered during the war as most merchants became involved in privateering.

#### WEST INDIES TRADE

In the years of peace immediately following King George's War, Newport's trade with the West Indies and the Dutch colony of Surinam continued to grow and prosper. Rhode Island merchants continued to

smuggle foreign sugar and molasses in violation of the loosely enforced Molasses Act. Newport's major exports to the Caribbean were horses, lumber, beef, pork, candles, cheese, and wool. Heavy imports of sugar and molasses were needed for the growing production of rum.<sup>9</sup> Newport's Jewish merchants possessed a special advantage in the Caribbean trade. Most of them had close and reliable contacts in the extensive Jewish mercantile communities of Jamaica, Curaçao, and Surinam. Later, when the Newport Jews were attempting to gather enough funds to build a synagogue, their Caribbean friends were most generous<sup>10</sup>.

With the outbreak of the French and Indian War in 1755, Newport's illicit trade once again became trade with the enemy. A parliamentary act of 1756 declared, to no avail, that "a trade closed in time of peace could not be opened in war."<sup>11</sup> In 1757 the Rhode Island legislature passed an act forbidding trade with the enemy. Nevertheless, Rhode Island merchants continued to trade with the French islands, and within one year the 1757 act was repealed<sup>12</sup>. Although most merchants supported the English cause, trade was their primary concern, and they needed French molasses, sugar, and rum. Consequently, Rhode Islanders continued to follow the same general course of trade as they had in peace, adjusting it somewhat to fit into a war situation. Merchants involved in the West Indies trade coveted French prisoners. Ships returning prisoners to French ports were entitled to fly the flags of truce, which enabled them easily to smuggle cargo in and out of the French West Indies. In 1758 Henry Collins, a Newport trader, was accused of buying and selling French prisoners for the use of merchant-shippers<sup>13</sup>. During the course of the war John and William Tweedy, the firm of Richards and Coddington, Joseph Wanton, and others engaged in the purchase and sale of flag truce permits<sup>14</sup>. One prominent merchant, Christopher Champlin, sent out at least ten vessels to enemy ports from 1758 to 1760 alone<sup>15</sup>.

By 1760 Newport had become a notable port, dispatching more ships than New York. Rhode Island's merchant marine, which was primarily centered in Newport, consisted of 184 vessels in addition to 342 small coasters<sup>16</sup>. The town had more than twenty distilleries, and more than half of the merchant marine was engaged in the triangular rum-slave trade. Commercial prosperity, accelerated by the French wars, is reflected in the port's population growth. In 1730 the population was estimated to be about 4,640. In 1748, at the end of King George's War, the population had grown by about 2,000 to 6,508. In the peaceful years that followed, the population was increased by only some 200 to 6,753 in 1755<sup>17</sup>. There was another spurt of population growth with

the outbreak of the French and Indian War until by 1760 the population had grown to 7,500<sup>18</sup>.

#### RISE OF JEWISH POPULATION

A small part of the population increase is attributable to the Jewish businessmen attracted by Newport's booming shipping industry in the late 1750s and early 1760s. By 1760 there were about twelve Jewish families living in Newport. Ezra Stiles counted fifteen to twenty Jewish families living in Newport in 1764 and about twenty-five families in 1769<sup>19</sup>. The new arrivals in the 1760s were Isaac Elizer; Joshua and Moses Isaacks; Joseph Jacob, Hiam, Moses, and Benjamin Levy; Judah and Moses Michael Hays; Francis, Jacob, and Issachar Pollock; Abraham Mendes Pereira; and Isaac Touro. Most of these men were New York businessmen joining other members of their families or independently seeking improved economic opportunities.

In 1770 Stiles estimated the Jewish population at about thirty families.<sup>20</sup> The official census taken by order of the General Assembly on June 1, 1774 indicates that there were about twenty-five Jewish families, amounting to about 200 people in Newport.<sup>21</sup> Stiles's estimate is approximate, and census data are limited in value because the census counted only those who were actually at home at the time the census was taken,<sup>22</sup> and because some Jews declined to be counted for religious reasons<sup>23</sup>. Nevertheless, these figures clearly indicate that the Jewish population reached its peak and remained stable during the first half of the 1770s. At this time about 25 per cent of the Jews in the colonies were living in New England, with virtually all the New England Jews settled in Newport<sup>24</sup>. These Jews constituted about two per cent of Newport's total population but about ten per cent of Newport's substantial merchants<sup>25</sup>.

The New York Jews who came to Newport between 1740 and 1770 were a select group consisting principally of businessmen seeking improved economic opportunities in a developing young port. They also hoped to establish a New England foothold for the North American Jewish trading community. Newport was a more likely choice than Boston because opportunities were limited in the older, established port. Newport was also a likely choice because of its more liberal religious tradition. Newport's tolerant atmosphere attracted a community of Jews from Barbados as early as 1678. There is no indication that any religious difficulties precipitated the dispersal of this original community in 1685.

Although religious reasons may have entered into the decision to settle in Newport as opposed to Boston, it is clear that the Jews did not leave New York in search of religious freedom or improved political opportunities. Most of those who came to Newport had been naturalized in New York. They were freemen of the city, enjoying complete religious freedom and limited political recognition. In Newport the Jews, although free to worship as they chose, faced political restrictions. The Rhode Island courts denied naturalization to Aaron Lopez and Isaac Elizer in 1763. Lopez, one of Newport's most prominent citizens, temporarily established residence in Massachusetts in order to become a naturalized Englishman. Once naturalized, he returned to Rhode Island to pursue his business interests.

#### PREEMINENT FAMILIES

During the 1760s five Jewish families attained a position of pre-eminence in the Newport commercial community. They were the Lopez, Rivera, Levy, Hart and Pollock families. Aaron Lopez, who was to become the wealthiest and most successful of all the Jewish merchants, was involved in many new ventures during the 1760s. Although he was heavily in debt most of the time, his courage and ingenuity, combined with the patience and fortitude of his creditors, eventually led him to colossal success. Aaron worked closely with his brother Moses until 1867. After Moses's death, Aaron was frequently allied with his father-in-law, the prominent and powerful merchant, Jacob Rodriguez Rivera.

Isaac Hart was another prominent merchant and a major contributor to the construction of the synagogue. Hart, one of the more successful privateers, frequently combined with his brothers, particularly Naphtali. Naphtali realized a substantial profit selling clothing to the British army. Occasionally the Harts combined forces with Benjamin and Moses Levy, members of another successful family. Myer Pollock, a prominent shipbuilder and trader did not move from New York to Newport until the late 1760s. Pollock's immediate success drew Moses Michael Hays from New York to join him in the shipbuilding industry. All of these men were leaders not only in the Jewish community, but also in the larger merchant community. All of them, but Lopez particularly, helped to create Newport's "Golden Age" of commerce, just prior to the Revolution.

Not all of the Jews who were drawn to Newport in the 1750s and 1760s received the financial rewards they expected. Bruce Bigelow claims that, despite the apparent boom atmosphere during the French and Indian War, privateering ventures were a failure for most Rhode

Islanders. Newport vessels were frequently captured by English and French privateers and men of war. Merchants shared the risks of these voyages by providing insurance for each other. Eighteen assurers, including Issachar Pollock, insured a voyage by Christopher Champlin in January of 1759. Those captains who succeeded in reaching French ports frequently found the markets glutted and had to sell their goods at a low price<sup>26</sup>. Newport's population and commerce had grown during the war years, but the profits were concentrated in the hands of a few of the more ingenious and venturesome traders.

The end of the war aggravated Rhode Island's economic problems. The colony had always been bothered by a shortage of hard money. Rhode Island's severely limited hinterland and lack of important staple products meant that the colony had few items to export for cash. One object of the West Indian trade was to obtain enough money to pay for English manufactured goods. The shortage of hard money made it almost impossible to maintain the value of paper money in the colony. In 1740 the Rhode Island legislature had attempted to correct the impossible inflation of its "Old Tenor" by issuing "New Tenor" lawful money which was to be issued sparingly to prevent depreciation. During the war the issue of "New Tenor" was greatly increased as the colony was forced to help finance the war. By the end of the war the colony was accumulating a debt and experiencing a further depreciation in values.<sup>27</sup> In 1774 the courts made an attempt to stabilize the monetary situation by fixing the ratio of Old Tenor to lawful money, or New Tenor<sup>28</sup>. This band-aid measure did little to stem the tide of post-war inflation.

#### ECONOMIC DECLINE

The "Sugar" Act of 1764 was an additional blow to the postwar economy. This measure, which replaced the weakly enforced Molasses Act, lowered the duty on foreign molasses to an enforceable level. It also raised the tariff on refined sugar and put a tax on certain textiles, wines, coffee, and pimentos, unless these were shipped to the colonies via England. Serious attempts to enforce this new measure cut into the major source of supply for the molasses and sugar needed in the production of rum. There were more than twenty distilleries in Newport alone, and rum was one of New England's major exports. An angry and determined British ministry was making it virtually impossible for Rhode Island merchants to obtain the hard cash needed to purchase essential manufactured goods from England. The Rhode Island General Assembly in the Remonstrance of January 1764 informed

the Board of Trade that the colony could not continue to exist without the foreign West Indian trade<sup>29</sup>. Meanwhile the large number of merchants petitioning for insolvency in 1764 bears witness to the unsettled state of the colony's economy<sup>30</sup>.

On March 26, 1764, the *Newport Mercury* carried the following notice: Myer Benjamin of Newport in Obedience to a vote of the General Assembly held at East Greenwich on the last Monday in February last hereby Notifies all his Creditors to appear at the next Session of said Assembly, to be held at Newport on the first Wednesday of May next and shew cause, if any they have, why a Petition, preferred by the said Myer Benjamin, to have the Benefit of an Insolvent Act, upon delivering up his whole Estate, should not be granted unto him.<sup>31</sup>

Benjamin, an Hungarian who had arrived in New York about 1758 and in Newport about 1761, was the only Jew to declare bankruptcy during the difficult decade of the 1760s. It is probable that he arrived in Newport with very little capital, since in 1761, shortly after his arrival, he was employed as steward for the newly organized Jewish social club. After Benjamin's business failure, members of the Jewish community rallied to his support. In accordance with a long-standing Jewish concern for the needy in their own community, members of the congregation employed him as *shammos* (sexton) and *shohet* (ritual slaughterer) of the new synagogue.<sup>32</sup> All of the other Jewish merchants survived this difficult period financially, and some became quite successful.

#### AARON LOPEZ

Perhaps the best way to gain an understanding of the activities of the Jewish merchants in Newport of the 1760s is to take a closer look at the early career of Aaron Lopez, the most successful of them all. More is known about Lopez than most of the other Jews, not only because of his preeminence, but also because of the vast quantity of his business records which is still preserved in the vaults of the Newport Historical Society. Lopez brought his wife, daughter, and brother directly from Portugal to Newport in 1752. Aaron's brother Moses had emigrated to New York around 1730. After naturalization and some success as a New York merchant, Moses moved his family to Newport. By the time Aaron had arrived in Newport, Moses was a member of Newport's two-year-old Redwood Library Company, had been exempted from civil duties and personal taxes in recognition of his service translating Spanish documents for the colony's administration, and had been granted a ten-year monopoly in the manufacturing of potash<sup>33</sup>. Moses

was in a position to help his twenty-one year old brother begin his business career.

The generosity of some Jewish merchants in New York enabled Aaron to establish himself in business as a shop-keeper almost immediately. Aaron received liberal credit for the purchase of goods for his local retail business. He quickly built his small local business into a large-scale retail and wholesale trade involving shipments throughout the colonies and abroad. His success entitled him to be recognized as a merchant, a man of consequence in eighteenth century America. In order to earn the title of merchant a businessman had to be more than a retailer or small wholesaler. A merchant traded in bulk at a distance, and his business was regional, interprovincial, and even transatlantic. By 1755 Aaron Lopez was already an established merchant, buying and selling throughout Rhode Island, and exchanging goods with agents in Boston and New York.

Lopez's trading interests were diverse, but he was particularly interested in the spermaceti candle trade. Spermaceti is the waxlike substance extracted from the headmatter of the sperm whale. Abraham Rodriguez Rivera, Lopez's future father-in-law, supposedly brought the secrets of the manufacture of spermaceti candles from Portugal. The first colonial candle manufactory was built by a man named Benjamin Crabb in Rehoboth, Massachusetts. When the original building was destroyed by fire, Obadiah Brown of Providence built a new plant and hired Crabb as manager<sup>34</sup>. Brown's success inspired Aaron Lopez to establish a similar plant in Newport in 1756. By 1760 there were 12 similar factories in New England, although only three or four were needed to process all the spermaceti supplied by the whalers. Demand for head matter far exceeded the limited supply, and whalers were able to command high prices for their product.

#### THE SPERMACETI TRUST

In an attempt to exercise some control over the cost of the raw material, the spermaceti candle manufacturers formed one of America's first trusts. On November 5, 1761 the United Company of Spermaceti Chandlers was established to control the cost and distribution of head matter<sup>35</sup>. Nine firms signed the agreement. Two of the first firms were completely Jewish (Naphtali Hart & Co and Aaron Lopez and Company) and one was a partnership of a Jew and a non-Jew (Collins and Rivera). The agreement was less than nine months old when the above-mentioned firms complained that some of the trust members had violated the articles of agreement by purchasing head matter at ex-

cessive prices. In a letter to Richard Cranch of Boston, the founder of the trust, they complained:

We have certain information that most of the Factors at Nantucket have procur'd all the Head Matt'r they possibly cou'd, at an advanc'd price . . . we have Reason to believe they have no other Method to dispose of it, but to their former Employers. . . . We have frankly told them our Opinion, that this is a manifest Breach of the Articles.<sup>36</sup>

Despite their dissatisfaction with the functioning of the agreement, these critics joined in the renewal and expansion of the organization in April, 1764. The new agreement stipulated that every hundred barrels of North American head matter was to be apportioned as follows: Nicholas Brown & Co., twenty barrels; Joseph Palmer and Co., fourteen; Thomas Robinson and Company, thirteen; Aaron Lopez, eleven; Jacob Rivera and Company, eleven; Isaac Stelle and Company, nine; Naphtali Hart and Company, nine; 'the Philadelphians', seven; Edward Langdon and Son, four; and Moses Lopez, two. Jacob Rodriguez Rivera assumed a position of leadership in attempting to enforce the new agreement. In 1769, when it became apparent that the price agreement was being violated, Rodriguez wrote to William Rotch of Nantucket. He asked for Rotch's assistance in identifying the guilty purchaser, claiming that, "I cannot persuade myself, its for any of the Manufacturers of the Contract, and if it was, its very Necessary they should be pointed out . . ." <sup>37</sup> Rivera also wrote to Nicholas Brown in Providence proposing action against those who "have joined together, in order, if possible, to raise the price."<sup>38</sup> Rivera was a respected leader, but he could not force the association to maintain a ceiling on the price of head matter. After 1769 the number of manufacturers more than doubled, placing an additional strain on the limited supply of head matter. In 1774 there were twenty-four manufactories, thirteen in Newport alone.<sup>39</sup>

It is obvious from the 1763 allotment of head matter that Aaron Lopez was a major manufacturer. Only three firms had larger allotments than Aaron's eleven per cent proportion, and only Rivera was allotted as much. As a merchant seeking to expand his trade, Lopez was constantly in quest of goods for export. Until years later, when the market became glutted, candles were an excellent commodity for exchange. During the early and middle 1760s invoices for candles always appeared in his coastwise shipping to ports like Boston, New York, Philadelphia, and Charlestown. His sales of spermaceti candles amounted to 3,150 pounds local (non-sterling) currency in the month of February 1763 alone.<sup>40</sup>

THE GUINEA TRADE

Until about 1765 Lopez was primarily interested in coastal shipping to American ports and traded mainly in spermaceti. However, in 1763 he also became interested in transatlantic trade. Transatlantic ventures required greater capital investments than the young Lopez could afford. After Aaron's marriage to the daughter of Jacob Rodriguez Rivera in 1763, Lopez and Rivera frequently pooled their resources to finance long voyages. In the next few years they sent a ship to Lisbon, one to the Canary Islands, and several others to join in the African slave trade.<sup>41</sup> Lopez and Rivera were neither the first nor the only Newport Jews to engage in the slave trade. In October of 1762 Isaac Elizer and his partner Samuel Moses sent the sloop *Prince George* to Africa to pick up slaves for sale in the Bahamas.<sup>42</sup> Lopez and Rivera dispatched their first ship to Africa in the same year. The brigantine *Greyhound* brought 134 Negroes from the Guinea coast to Charlestown, South Carolina. Two years later the sloop *Spry* exchanged a cargo consisting primarily of rum for a shipload of Negroes to be delivered to Jamaica. The following year two more of their vessels made the triangular trip from Newport to the Guinea coast and Jamaica. Lopez and Rivera had discovered a good source of bills of exchange on England. Undisturbed by the moral issues involved in the slave trade, they continued to underwrite about two African voyages each year until 1776.

Although he explored new opportunities, Lopez was still primarily concerned with the colonial coastal trade in the early 1760s. The Sugar Act and the subsequent failure of merchants engaged in the West Indian trade discouraged his interest in the Caribbean trade. He made a few exploratory ventures in the transatlantic London trade, but feared becoming heavily indebted to a London mercantile firm. Then Lopez and Henry Cruger, a merchant in Bristol, England, concluded that American merchants were incurring debts because the London market was saturated with American goods and the prices the Americans received for their exports couldn't pay for their imports. Lopez and Cruger decided to tap the unexplored Bristol market, and Cruger agreed to furnish Lopez with the capital necessary to build this trade.

In 1765 Lopez began to construct new ships to be sold in England with their cargoes. Cruger agreed to obtain insurance for the vessels and to allow Lopez to draw bills of exchange on him even before the ships left Newport. He also arranged to provide Lopez with English goods on twelve month credit.<sup>43</sup> According to Bruce Bigelow, sending five ventures to a new port at a time of postwar depression was one of the most daring plans Lopez ever followed.<sup>44</sup> This may be true, but

it was a far more daring venture for Cruger, who was financing the entire adventure. Neither man anticipated the Stamp Act and the power of the Americans' threats of non-importation. As a result of the depression in England, the vessels and many of the goods sent to Bristol either remained unsold or sold for very low prices. The venture was a failure for Lopez and a disaster for Cruger. By 1767 Lopez owed Cruger more than 10,000 pounds sterling and was continuing to draw bills of exchange on him in accordance with their original agreement. Cruger plaintively wrote Lopez, "If I am not paid, how can I pay?"—but to no avail. In March of 1768 the debt exceeded 11,000 pounds sterling, and Cruger wrote:

To get money by the execution of orders is my business, but yet I must pay some attention to the reproaches of people whom I cannot pay in a reasonable time. . . . For these considerations forgive me, sir, for not executing your orders. The ballance of your account must be reduced before I can be happy. . . .<sup>45</sup>

A less creative and persevering businessman might have succumbed to the burden of such a heavy debt. Instead, Lopez sought new markets where he could acquire the hard cash needed to pay off his debt. Anxious to recoup his losses Cruger helped Lopez to establish himself in the West Indies trade. Unfortunately Lopez initially sent his incompetent young son-in-law Abraham Mendes to act as his factor in Jamaica. It was only after Mendes had been replaced by a more reliable factor that Lopez's Jamaica trade began to realize a profit. Gradually Lopez extricated himself from his financial difficulties and emerged as one of the most successful merchants in Newport.

#### FINANCIAL DIFFICULTIES

The financial difficulties experienced by Aaron Lopez during the 1760s were typical of those suffered by the entire merchant community. His ability to survive the difficulties, recoup his losses, and prosper was unique. By 1772 a number of prominent Jewish merchants had failed. On September 3, 1770 Nathaniel Wheatley wrote the firm of Hays and Pollock:

It was with great pleasure I see yours of 8 June last, as you then seemed to have great desire to make a speedy settlement . . . but from your late silence, I have reason to think you intend to put off the payment until I shall recover it in the Law.<sup>46</sup>

On September 30, 1771 Hays and Pollock petitioned for insolvency. Their petition was granted on September 30, 1771.<sup>47</sup> Moses Michael Hays opened a small shop when he was released from debtors prison.<sup>48</sup>

In later years, after the Revolution, Hays re-established himself as a merchant in Boston.

The insolvency petition of Isaac Elizer was granted in December 1771,<sup>49</sup> and that of Naphtali and Isaac Hart was granted in January 1772.<sup>50</sup> The combined tax lists for 1772 and 1775 indicate that few Jewish merchants were prospering. Of the twenty-seven names listed, nineteen paid rates under 2 pounds, and three of them paid rates between 2 pounds and 5 pounds. Moses Levy paid 6.18.3 pounds, Jacob Rodriguez Rivera 9.4.4 pounds, and Jacob Pollock 10.3.0 pounds. The only Jewish merchant whose tax rate indicated true prosperity was Aaron Lopez, who paid 32.9.10 pounds, the highest tax rate in Newport.<sup>51</sup> However, his success was unique, and clearly this was not a Golden Age for everyone.

Bruce Bigelow, the first and only person to make a comprehensive study of Newport's commerce prior to the American Revolution, called the period between the Peace of Paris (1763) and the opening of the American Revolution the "Golden Period" in Rhode Island trade. Bigelow admitted that from 1764 to 1768 the commercial situation was somewhat dull. It was in fact seriously depressed, with most businessmen struggling for survival. Bigelow stated that after 1768 there was a definite boom in Newport's commercial activities, as evidenced by a considerable increase in shipping, new slave markets in the Carolinas and Virginia, a new West Indies frontier in Hispaniola, and the development of a Rhode Island whaling industry.<sup>52</sup> Undoubtedly, business conditions did improve after 1768, but many businessmen were still in serious financial difficulties. Even Aaron Lopez had not yet begun to extricate himself from his heavy debts. It is false and misleading to label the years prior to 1769 as "golden".

#### RECOVERY

Economic conditions began to improve significantly in 1769. The late James B. Hedges, noted historian of the Brown family of Providence, observed that from 1769 to 1775, the Rhode Island economy experienced a "gradual recovery from the postwar depression of the sixties, from the stagnation which the Sugar Act had accentuated, and from the monetary stringency of the early years. The early seventies were years of relative political tranquillity, and economic prosperity."<sup>53</sup> By the end of 1769 Newport's population had expanded to more than 11,000. The port had nearly 200 vessels engaged in foreign commerce and some 300 to 400 craft engaged in domestic trade.<sup>54</sup> Most evidence supports Bigelow's contention that this was truly Newport's Golden

Age. However, even in this apparently Golden Age the insolvency petitions continued to appear. Some businessmen never recovered from the postwar depression. Poverty and failure in the midst of prosperity and success argues against easy generalizations about this unstable prerevolutionary era. Bigelow's work broke important new ground. What is needed is a more complete and up-to-date study of the commerce of this period. Before generalizations can be made, a careful study, including the use of shipping invoices, the abundant existing business records, tax lists, and insolvency notices, must be undertaken. Meanwhile, it is wise to avoid references to Newport's Golden Age.

#### WIDESPREAD ACTIVITIES OF LOPEZ

Aaron Lopez was one of the Newport merchants who enjoyed enormous prosperity during the early 1770s. By 1774 he had completely paid off his debt to Henry Cruger, although he still owed some money to his London agents, Hayley and Hopkins.<sup>55</sup> The secret of his success lay in the diversity of his activities. Although he became deeply involved in the West Indies trade, he continued to pursue the coastal trade and transatlantic voyages. His specialty was, not whaling, candles, Caribbean traffic, or transoceanic commerce, but "business as a genre."<sup>56</sup> By 1772 he was becoming an industrialist as well as a shipper. As a manufacturer he produced spermaceti candles, ships, rum, freshly ground chocolate, and wooden barrels. In addition, he contracted for the production of textiles, clothing, shoes, hats, bottles, sulkies, and even prefabricated bungalows. By 1774 he had an interest in more than thirty vessels, and his commerce was sufficiently diversified so that a set-back in one quarter did not mean complete failure.

Lopez and his fellow Newport merchants occasionally prospered at the expense of merchants in other colonies. In 1769 Rhode Island and New Hampshire were the only colonies that failed to use non-importation as a weapon in opposing British trade regulations. Even after a Providence town meeting pledged not to import or purchase British goods, the merchants of Newport remained indifferent. Newport reluctantly agreed to participate only after the Merchant's Committee at Philadelphia threatened to discontinue trade with the port. After the partial repeal of the Townshend duties, Newport prematurely repudiated the non-importation agreements and resumed trade with England. Angered by the Newport merchants' willingness to profit from the distress and self-sacrifice of their neighbors, eight provinces placed a temporary embargo upon Newport. This time Newport merchants reluctantly participated in non-importation until the total repeal of the Townshend Act of 1770.

The "Continental Association", organized in 1774 to prevent any kind of economic intercourse with England, forced compliance. Local committees in all the colonies supported the Association and used every means of persuasion to enforce the boycott. The enforcement of the boycott drastically reduced Newport's trade. The Newport committee wrote to Philadelphia in 1775: "So far as we can learn the Association hath been strictly adhered to by the merchants of this colony."<sup>57</sup> Undoubtedly, as the business papers of Aaron Lopez attest, there were some violations of the boycott. However, its general success severely harmed Newport's economy.

#### BRITISH OCCUPATION

As Bruce Bigelow accurately observed, 1775 was the "beginning of the town's commercial death, as it was also the beginning of the end for many Newport merchant houses. . . . Business had come almost to a standstill, and money was tight in Newport, Jamaica, and London."<sup>58</sup> By October of 1775 the British fleet was moored in full view of Newport's harbor. Trade was devastated, and people lived in fear of imminent destruction. Large-scale evacuation had begun, and in November the legislature appropriated 200 pounds to help the poor people leave and to assist those who were forced to remain under adverse conditions.<sup>59</sup> By December 8, 1776, when the British troops landed in Newport with little opposition, most people loyal to the colonial cause had fled. The city's population dropped from 11,000 in 1775 to 5,299 in 1776<sup>60</sup> in anticipation of the occupation. Those who remained were indifferent, incapacitated, or Loyalist.

Aaron Lopez moved his business to Portsmouth, Rhode Island early in 1776 and then to Providence after the occupation. In the summer of 1777 he again moved, this time to Boston, and then finally to Leicester, Massachusetts, to a spot, "where I could place my family secured from sudden alarms and the cruel ravages of an enraged enemy . . . (and move) in the same Sphere of Business I have been used to follow, which, altho much more contracted, it has fully answered my wishes. . . ."<sup>61</sup> The Lopez family was joined in Leicester by the families of Jacob Rod. Rivera and Abraham Mendes. Lopez set up a shop in Leicester and did some shipping from Salem and Boston. Much of his time was spent in traveling, trying to straighten out his tangled accounts and attempting to free those of his vessels that had been seized by American cruisers. Lopez's losses as a result of the war were monumental. Nevertheless, he persevered in his business. Had he not accidentally drowned in 1782, he undoubtedly would have returned to Newport and attempted to rebuild his trading empire.

The census of 1782 indicates the presence of only six Jewish families in Newport.<sup>67</sup> Those listed are Moses Isaacks, Abigail Polock, Moses Seixas, Moses Levy, Isaac Elizer, and Jacob Isaacks. The Lopez, Rivera, and Mendes families were still in Leicester. The Hart brothers remained in Newport during the British occupation but were forced to flee because of their Loyalist activities when the British withdrew in 1780. Isaac Hart was shot by Continental soldiers while seeking refuge on Long Island. Benjamin Meyer died in 1776, and his Loyalist wife fled to New York in 1780. Meyer Polock was dead, but his widow Abigail remained on the census rolls. Moses Michael Hays fled to South Kingstown, Rhode Island with the British occupation, returned briefly to Newport in 1780, and then settled in Boston.

#### POSTWAR DEPRESSION

The town rates for July 31, 1783 indicate the continuing presence of all of those Jews counted in the 1782 census, in addition to Abraham Mendes and the Lopez families. In spite of the postwar depression the most prominent merchant in Newport paid a tax of 4,000 pounds. The two most prosperous Jews were Moses Levy and Joseph Lopez, who each paid taxes of 15,000 pounds.<sup>63</sup> The state tax rate for June 1786 indicates that Jacob Rod. Rivera returned to Newport and was again in business. The firm of Rivera, Seixas and Co. was assessed 2,500 pounds. The only other Jew paying substantial taxes was Joseph Lopez, who paid 2,800 pounds as compared to Christopher Champlin's 3,000 pounds.<sup>64</sup>

Those merchants who attempted to restore Newport's commercial prosperity after the revolution were severely handicapped. According to one observer, William Ellery, when the British left Newport five hundred buildings had been burned and considerable property carried off. Ellery estimated the damage at 124,798 pounds and noted that in his absence "All the destructible property I had there was utterly destroyed."<sup>65</sup> Joseph Hadfield, a British visitor to Newport observed in 1785 that as a result of the "devastations of war . . . the poverty of the inhabitants will be an insuperable barrier at least for some time."<sup>66</sup> Merchants attempting to restore trade were not only faced with the complete destruction of the Long Wharf, including most of their warehouses and stores, but also the loss of most of Newport's merchant fleet. Hadfield observed only twenty vessels in the foreign trade and thirty additional small vessels in the coastal trade. This fleet was smaller than those owned by each of the great merchants

prior to the war. Hadfield noted: "The trade of Newport is not great. There are few persons of consequence in the mercantile line here."<sup>67</sup>

Merchants in post-revolutionary America were forced to realize that the nature of trade had changed. Those merchants who attempted to cling to the old trade routes and the old products failed. They found that much of the West Indian trade was closed to them by new British laws restricting foreign trade with their islands. Merchants who attempted to resume large importations of British manufactured goods soon found themselves heavily in debt to British mercantile firms. Foreign ships carried most of America's imports and exports. The future belonged to merchant families like the Browns of Providence, who realized that the way to prosperity involved increased American manufacturing. Manufactured goods were needed for domestic use and for export to help pay for imports. Merchants creative enough to find new markets, such as China, prospered. Before the old merchants learned to survive in this new economic world and won government protection for American trade, most of them suffered severely. The merchants and shipowners of Baltimore expressed a common grievance when in 1789 they complained that:

for want of national protection and encouragement, our shipping that great source of strength and riches, has fallen into decay and involved thousands in the utmost distress.<sup>68</sup>

#### NEWPORT ECLIPSED BY PROVIDENCE

In the 1780s Newport merchants were suffering the effects of the postwar depression of trade while attempting to overcome the great property losses they had experienced during the British occupation. Newport's postwar recovery problems were aggravated by the increasing competition from Providence merchants. By 1775 the Browns of Providence had become the peers of the Newport businessmen and were beginning to overtake some areas of Newport's trade.<sup>69</sup> While Newport was suffering from the British occupation, the Providence merchants were able to solidify their control of Rhode Island commerce. Once Providence merchants gained commercial control of the Rhode Island hinterland, Newport was forever doomed to a secondary position in Rhode Island trade. Geographically, Newport, located on the tip of an island well removed from most of the mainland of Rhode Island, could never have remained a major trading post once overland trade routes were improved. However, the fact that Newport was destined to play a lesser role than Providence does not mean that the port was doomed to immediate and total eclipse.

Attempts were made to restore Newport's commerce. Christopher Champlin returned immediately after the war and revived his trade with London, Lisbon, Dunkirk, Dublin, and Amsterdam. Joseph Lopez and Jacob Rodriguez Rivera restored some of their transatlantic and West Indian trade, and Moses Seixas engaged in some trade with the West Indies. It is evident that there was a limited post-revolutionary resurgence of trade in Newport. A study of furniture shipments from Newport indicates that commerce resumed on a more limited basis after the war. Although there were a few transatlantic voyages and occasional trips to the West Indies, most of the trade was with domestic coastal ports. The bulk of the furniture was shipped to New York.<sup>70</sup> Much work remains to be done in the study of public documents and private business records before the extent of this commercial revival can be determined. In the absence of sufficient studies of the problem, it appears that the revival of Newport's trade was hampered by the absence of the kind of creative bold leadership exercised by Aaron Lopez in the 1770s. One can only speculate upon the possibility that Aaron Lopez would have found new markets and expanded his manufacturing interests if he were in Newport in the 1780s. Although Lopez could not have reversed Newport's secondary position in the Rhode Island economy, he might have brought about a temporary resurgence of commercial prosperity. This was still the age of the individual entrepreneur. Lopez was largely responsible for Newport's prosperity in the 1770s, and the Browns were responsible for the ascent of Providence. Perhaps Aaron Lopez's presence in postwar Newport would have made a difference.

#### DECLINE OF NEWPORT

By the mid 1780s it was apparent, despite Newport's limited trade revival, that better business opportunities were available elsewhere. All of the younger ambitious members of the Lopez family left Newport for New York and Boston prior to 1790. Jacob Rodriguez Rivera was old and tired. He continued to trade from Newport until his death in 1789. Gradually, the remaining Jews of the younger generation drifted off to New York, Boston, and Charleston, seeking new opportunities. The 1790 census list shows seven Jewish families remaining in Newport. These were the families of Abigail Pollock, Jacob Isaacks, Sarah Lopez (Aaron's widow), Judah Hillel, Moses Seixas, and Isaac Elizer.<sup>71</sup> Jacob Isaacks died in Newport in 1798. Judah Hillel left in 1790, and Isaac Elizer left about the same time. Moses Seixas died in Newport in 1809. In 1822 Moses Lopez, the last remaining Jew in Newport, left for New York.

The Jews drawn to Newport in the middle of the eighteenth century were a select group lured by the prospects for economic expansion. Newport's commercial growth preceded their arrival. Although the Jewish community cannot be credited with Newport's prosperity, a few members of the community did help to accelerate the port's economic growth while fulfilling their own economic aspirations. The majority of the Jewish traders, however, met with only marginal success or failure.

After the Revolution, when it became apparent that Newport's economic opportunities had narrowed, the younger members of the Jewish community as well as many non-Jews scattered in search of greener pastures. The businessmen who left Newport were victims of the port's commercial decline. The absence of the Jewish merchant community was a very minor factor in the ultimate eclipse of Newport. If Aaron Lopez had lived, he might have stimulated a temporary revival. However, no amount of individual entrepreneurial activity could have altered the fact that Newport would never again be a major seaport.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Jacob R. Marcus, *The Colonial American Jews*, 3 vols. (Detroit: Wayne State, 1970) p. 318.

<sup>2</sup>Stanley F. Chyet, *Lopez of Newport: Colonial American Merchant Prince*, (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1970), p. 16.

<sup>3</sup>Bernard Bailyn, *The New England Merchants in the Seventeenth Century*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1955) p. 89.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup>Bruce Bigelow, "The Commerce of Rhode Island With the West Indies Before the American Revolution," Ph.D. dissertation, Brown University, 1930, Part I, Chapter III, pp. 2-18.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, Part I, Chapter V, p. 4.

<sup>7</sup>Carl Bridenbaugh, *Cities In Revolt: Urban Life in America, 1743-46*, (New York: Oxford University, 1955), pp. 65-66.

<sup>8</sup>S. Broches, *Jews In New England, Six Monographs*, (New York: n.p., 1942) p. 11.

<sup>9</sup>James B. Hcdges, *The Browns of Providence Plantations: Colonial Years*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1952), p. xv.

<sup>10</sup>Marcus, p. 635.

<sup>11</sup>Bigelow, Part I, Chapter VI, p. 24.

<sup>12</sup>Bigelow, Part I, Chapter VI, pp. 25-27.

<sup>13</sup>Bridenbaugh, p. 67.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup>Bigelow, Part I, Chapter VI, p. 28.

<sup>16</sup>Chyet, p. 67.

<sup>17</sup>Bigelow, Part I, Chapter V, p. 5.

<sup>18</sup>Bridenbaugh, p. 216.

<sup>19</sup>Ezra Stiles, *Literary Diary of Ezra Stiles*, ed. by F. B. Dexter (New York, 1901), vol. I, pp. 6-11.

- <sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*
- <sup>21</sup>*Census of the Inhabitants of the Colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations*, Taken by the Order of the General Assembly in the Year 1774. Arranged by John R. Bartlett, (Providence: n.p., 1858).
- <sup>22</sup>Samuel Greene Arnold, *History of the State of Rhode Island*, (New York: D. Appleton & Company, 1878), vol. II, p. 333, footnote 1.
- <sup>23</sup>Morris A. Gutstein, *The Story of the Jews of Newport*, (New York: Block Publishing Company, 1936), p. 115.
- <sup>24</sup>Marcus, p. 392.
- <sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 549.
- <sup>26</sup>Bigelow, Part I, Chapter VI, pp. 62-64.
- <sup>27</sup>Hedges, p. 26.
- <sup>28</sup>*Ibid.*
- <sup>29</sup>Bigelow, Chapter VII, pp. 4-6.
- <sup>30</sup>Arnold, vol. II, p. 251.
- <sup>31</sup>*Newport Mercury*, March 26, 1764.
- <sup>32</sup>Malcolm Stern. *Americans of Jewish Descent, A Compendium of Genealogy*, (New York: Ktav Publishing House, Inc., 1971) p. 134.
- <sup>33</sup>Chyet, pp. 21-22.
- <sup>34</sup>Hedges, p. 89.
- <sup>35</sup>Chyet, p. 44.
- <sup>36</sup>Jacob R. Marcus, *Early American Jewry*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1951 and 1953), vol. I, p. 132.
- <sup>37</sup>Broches, p. 18.
- <sup>38</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 54.
- <sup>39</sup>Hedges, p. 112.
- <sup>40</sup>Chyet, p. 51.
- <sup>41</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 64.
- <sup>42</sup>*Ibid.* p. 67.
- <sup>43</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 84-85.
- <sup>44</sup>Bigelow, Part I, Chapter VII, p. 17.
- <sup>45</sup>Chyet, p. 88.
- <sup>46</sup>Letter from Nathaniel Wheatley to Hays & Pollock, September 3, 1770. Letters of Myer Pollock, Newport Historical Society.
- <sup>47</sup>*Newport Mercury*, September 30, 1771 and May 11, 1772.
- <sup>48</sup>Jacob R. Marcus, *Early American Jewry*, p. 154.
- <sup>49</sup>*Newport Mercury*, May 11, 1772.
- <sup>50</sup>*Ibid.*, January 7, 1772.
- <sup>51</sup>Broches, p. 75.
- <sup>52</sup>Bigelow, Part I, Chapter VII, p. 1.
- <sup>53</sup>Hedges, p. 114.
- <sup>54</sup>Arnold, p. 300.
- <sup>55</sup>Chyet, p. 122.
- <sup>56</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 128.
- <sup>57</sup>Arthur Meir Schlesinger, *The Colonial Merchants and the American Revolution 1763-1776*, (New York: Facsimile Library, Inc., 1939), p. 485.
- <sup>58</sup>Bigelow, Part I, Chapter VII, p. 50.
- <sup>59</sup>Arnold, p. 360.
- <sup>60</sup>Bridenbaugh, p. 216.
- <sup>61</sup>Aaron Lopez to Joseph Anthony, February 3, 1779, in *Commerce of Rhode Island*, vol. 2, (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1915), p. 51.

<sup>62</sup>*Census Records of the State of Rhode Island for 1782*. Typed from Original Manuscript, Rhode Island Historical Society.

<sup>63</sup>Newport taxes, town rate, July 31, 1783, Miscellaneous Manuscripts, Rhode Island Historical Society.

<sup>64</sup>*Ibid.*, Town Rate, June 1785.

<sup>65</sup>William M. Fowler, Jr., *William Ellery: A Rhode Island Politico and Lord of Admiralty*, (Metuchen: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1973), p. 131.

<sup>66</sup>Douglas S. Robertson. *An Englishman In America 1785 Being the Diary of Joseph Hadfield*, (Toronto: Hunter-Rose Co., 1933), p. 216.

<sup>67</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 217.

<sup>68</sup>Winthrop L. Marvin, *The American Merchant Marine*, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1902), p. 37.

<sup>69</sup>Hedges, p. xviii.

<sup>70</sup>Joseph K. Ott, "Rhode Island Furniture Exports: 1783-1795," in *Antiques Magazine*, May 1974.

<sup>71</sup>*Heads of Families, First Census of the United States: 1790*, State of Rhode Island.

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THE JEWS' SYNAGOGUE IN NEWPORT, RHODE ISLAND  
IN 1759

by REVEREND ANDREW BURNABY

This town is situated upon a small island, about twelve miles in length, and five or six in breadth, called Rhode Island, from whence the province takes its name. It is the capital city, and contains about 800, or 1000 houses, chiefly built of wood; and 6 or 7000 inhabitants. There are few buildings in it worthy of notice. The court-house is indeed handsome, and of brick; and there is a public library, built in the form of a Grecian temple, by no means inelegant. It is of the Doric order, and has a portico in front with four pillars, supporting a pediment; but the whole is spoilt by two small wings, which are annexed to it. . . . The places of public worship, except the Jews synagogue, are all of wood; and not one of them is worth looking at. They consist chiefly of a church, two presbyterian meeting-houses, one quakers ditto, three anabaptists ditto, one Moravian ditto, and the synagogue above-mentioned. This building was designed, as indeed were several of the others, by a Mr. Harrison, an ingenious English gentleman who lives here. It will be extremely elegant within when completed: but the outside is totally spoilt by a school, which the Jews insisted on having annexed to it for the education of their children.

. . . The government of this province is entirely democratical; every officer, except the collector of the customs, being appointed, I believe, either immediately by the people, or by the general assembly. . . . There is no established form of religion here; but church of England men, independents, quakers, anabaptists, Moravians, Jews, and all other sects whatever, have liberty to exercise their several professions. The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel sends only four missionaries.

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NOTE

Extracted from *Pictures of Rhode Island in the Past by Travelers and Observers*. Ed. by Gertrude Selwyn Kimball, Providence, R. I., Preston and Rounds Co., 1900, pp. 56-59. Ms. Kimball gave the following background information:

"Burnaby (1734c.-1812) was an English clergyman, who made extended journeys in America, chiefly in the Middle States, in 1759 and 1760.

"His observations show good judgment and are interesting. He is careful to avoid any allusion to the political events of the time. The extract given is taken from his *Travels through the Middle Settlements in North America*, p. 67 *et seq.* London, 1775."

## THE JEWS IN LEICESTER, MASSACHUSETTS

by EMORY WASHBURN

### I

Perhaps no more proper connection than the present\* will present itself in which to introduce an interesting episode in the history of the town,—the residence here, for some years, of several families of Jews. It has not, however, any thing properly to do with the ecclesiastical affairs of the town; though these families brought with them, and scrupulously maintained while here, their peculiar forms of faith and worship.

They came here from Newport, in 1777, to find a refuge from the invasion of the island by the British troops, as did several other families from the same neighborhood; this being regarded a retired and healthy locality, where they might find a safe and hospitable retreat. I have heard the late venerable Thomas Rotch, jun., of New Bedford,—whose wife, then a young woman, had removed with her family from Newport to Leicester,—speak with an interest, which nearly seventy years had not subdued, of the character of the town for hospitality and public spirit during the period of which I am speaking, and during which he more than once visited it. He spoke in terms of affectionate recollection of families with whom he then became acquainted, whose names, even, have now become matters of history only; but to some of whom I shall have occasion to allude again, when I come to speak of the general history of the town.

Including their servants and slaves, of whom I have spoken in another place, the number of persons embraced in these families of Jews was about seventy. They were of Portuguese descent, as might be inferred from their names,—Lopez, Rivera, and Mendez.

Abraham Mendez lived, a part of the time, in the house opposite to where Mrs. Samuel Newhall now lives; and a part of the time in the old house which stood at the foot of the Meeting-house Hill, where the house of the late Capt. Joshua Sprague now stands.

Jacob Rod Rivera lived in the house, which forms a part of the Hotel, opposite the Meeting-house.\*\* He purchased this estate, consisting of thirty-one acres of land, of Nathan Waite, in September, 1777; and, in his deed, is described as a merchant.

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\*As part of the ecclesiastical history of the town, written in 1860. Ed.

\*\*Washburn wrote elsewhere (pp. 168-169): "The house opposite the Meeting-house, which was long kept as a hotel, was built for that purpose by Nathan Waite in 1776. The following year, he removed to the place where he afterwards lived and sold the estate to Jacob Rivera. Mr. Rivera traded there until his removal to Newport in 1783." Ed.

Five of the number bore the name of Lopez. The principal and head of the families of this name was Aaron Lopez, a man universally esteemed and respected by a wide circle of personal and business friends. He was a merchant of great wealth, and engaged extensively in trade while he resided in Leicester. He purchased the estate, afterwards occupied by the [Leicester] Academy, of Henry Bass of Boston, and Joseph Allen, Esq., of Leicester, Feb. 1, 1777; and erected thereon what was called in that day "a large and elegant mansion," designed for a store as well as a dwelling-house. His stock of goods on hand, at the time of his death, exceeded twelve thousand dollars; while his entire estate was valued at more than a hundred thousand dollars.

I give the boundaries of his estate, which are described in his deed, as partly depicting the condition then of that portion of the village. It is said to be "on the north side of the Country Road, eastward of and near to the Meeting-house: bounded southerly by the Country Road, six rods; eastwardly, to a heap of stones; then by the land of the Rev. Benjamin Conklin, &c., to a heap of stones on a rock; then turning, &c., to a stake, and heap of stones, by the *lane* leading from the Meeting-house to the *remains* of a house formerly possessed by Israel Parsons, deceased; from thence bounded westerly by said lane in part, and partly by the *training-field*, to the south-east corner of the place whereon the *old* schoolhouse stood,—and containeth half an acre by measure, together with a dwelling-house and shop situate thereon." He afterwards added a half-acre adjoining it, upon the east; and these two constituted the estate which Col. Crafts and Col. Jacob Davis afterwards purchased, and gave to the Academy.

Mr. Lopez also owned other lands in Leicester; but none of these families engaged in agriculture as a business. Mendez and Rivera, as well as Aaron Lopez, were traders, though to a much smaller extent. Moses Lopez and Jacob Lopez were clerks of Aaron; as well as Joseph, his son, who was also a member of his family.

Though without a place of assembling for worship here, they rigidly observed the rites and requirements of their own laws, keeping Saturday as holy time; but, out of regard to the sentiments of the people among whom they were settled, carefully keeping their stores closed from Friday evening until Monday morning of each week.\*

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\*I cannot forbear noticing a very small, though rather important, typographical mistake of the printer, in publishing a brief history of the town in 1826. The writer had spoken of the return of these families of Jews to Newport, and of their synagogue *there* being unoccupied, &c. By some accident, the "t" was dropped from the word *there*, so as to fix the locality of the synagogue "*here*;" and inquiries have often been made by the curious to ascertain in what part of Leicester it was to be found.

Though differing from their neighbors in matters of religious faith, they won the confidence and esteem of all by their upright and honorable dealing, the kindness and courtesy of their intercourse, and the liberality and public spirit which they evinced as citizens.

They remained here until the ratification of peace in 1783; when, with the exception of Mr. Lopez, they returned to Newport, carrying with them the respect and kind regard of a community with which they had been intimately associated for six years.

No one of their contemporaries here survives; but their residence was always spoken of, by such as had personally known them, as a matter of pleasant memory, which it is believed was reciprocated by those who had found here a pleasant home.\*

The fate of Mr. Aaron Lopez was a melancholy one. I have spoken of him as a man of wealth and liberal views. He had been one of the merchant-princes of Newport, when that city commanded the foreign commerce of the country. After his removal to Leicester, his style of living was generous and hospitable; and the furniture of his house, the plate upon his table, and the retinue of his servants, wore an air of magnificence among his less-endowed neighbors: but the cordiality of his manners and his liberal hospitality disarmed all cavil and envy of their part.

On the 20th May, 1782, he started with his wife and some members of his family for Providence. His family were in a carriage; he in a "sulky," driven, of course, by himself. In Smithfield [Rhode Island], the road passed close by the edge of Scott's Pond, so called, the shore of which is very abrupt, and the water, at a short distance, deep. Mr. Lopez, probably being unaware of the fact, allowed his horse to enter the water in order to drink; but, perceiving he was getting beyond his depth, sprung from the sulky into the water, and, being unable to swim, sank and perished, in view of his agonized and affrighted wife and children.

The following just tribute I copy from a paper of the day; which, after noticing the circumstances of his death, adds, "He was a merchant of eminence, of polite and amiable manners. Hospitality and benevolence were his true characteristics. An ornament and a valuable pillar in the Jewish society of which he was a member. His knowledge in commerce was unbounded; and his integrity, irreproachable. Thus he lived, and thus he died; much regretted, esteemed, and loved by all."

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\*Mr. Rivera died at Newport in February, 1789.

NOTE

Extracted from *Historical Sketches of the Town of Leicester, Massachusetts During the First Century from Its Settlement*. By Emory Washburn. Boston: Printed by John Wilson and Son, 22 School Street, 1860, pp. 120-124.

II

Leicester Academy owes its origin to the efforts and generosity of Ebenezer Crafts, of Sturbridge, and Jacob Davis, of Charlton. . . .

Neither of them had local pride to gratify, or property to enhance in value by selecting Leicester as the seat of such an institution.

The object they had at heart was to found an academy. Its locality became rather a matter of favorable accident than any original design on their part.

The conception of such a work, as well as the first steps towards accomplishing it, belonged to Colonel Crafts. . . .

Various plans for effecting this purpose suggested themselves to his mind. At one time, he thought seriously of attempting to establish an academy in Sturbridge, where he resided. But the need of suitable buildings, and the original expense of erecting such, seemed to offer an impediment to the enterprise too serious for him to surmount.

While his mind was thus exercised how to accomplish the plan he had conceived, the death of Aaron Lopez, and the removal of the families of Jews from Leicester, to which place they had resorted from Newport to escape the hostilities which the English waged upon that town, opened to Colonel Crafts the means of carrying forward his favorite scheme.

Mr. Lopez was one of the merchant princes of his day. He was, at one time, extensively engaged in commerce, and possessed of great wealth. He was distinguished for hospitality and benevolence, and his fine gentlemanly manners, united with a character of irreproachable integrity, secured him the respect and esteem of all who knew him.\*

His place of business before the Revolution had been Newport, then the commercial emporium of New England. In the summer of 1777, I believe, he, together with several other families of Jews, removed to Leicester, where they purchased and occupied estates, and Mr. Lopez resumed, to a limited extent, his mercantile pursuits.

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\*The inventory of his estate shows a property of nearly \$100,000, including a stock in trade of more than \$12,000, and indicating, by the character of the furniture, and family stores on hand, a style of living not common, at that day, in the country.

To accommodate these, and to provide for his family a suitable residence, he erected what was then regarded as a spacious and commodious dwelling-house, containing a large centre room for the purposes of a store. I shall have occasion to speak more particularly of this estate in another connection.

On the 20th day of May, 1782, Mr. Lopez started, with his family, to visit Providence, they in a carriage, and himself in a gig drawn by one horse. In passing Scott's pond, in Smithfield, on his way, he drove his horse into the water, as was supposed, to drink, when, by some means he got beyond his depth, upset the gig, and Mr. Lopez was drowned in the very presence of his family, who could render him no assistance.

This circumstance, together with the return of peace, induced these families to return to Newport, leaving, however, among the inhabitants of Leicester, a grateful remembrance of their residence here, which was cordially reciprocated.

This train of events rendered it necessary to sell the estate of Mr. Lopez, and the same was offered at auction. Colonel Crafts regarded it as a favorable opportunity to obtain a suitable building for an academy upon reasonable terms, and proposed to Colonel Davis to join with him in the purchase.

There had not, however, been any previous concert between them, nor had the idea of purchasing the estate occurred to either, till they came together on the day of the sale, with great numbers of people from the neighboring towns, which the occasion attracted.

Colonel Davis, at once, came into the views of Colonel Crafts, and the estate was bid off to Colonel Crafts, Colonel Davis, and Asa Sprague, for the sum of five hundred and fifteen pounds. . . .

The original deed of the estate bears date May 7th, 1783, and, on the fourth of July following, Colonel Crafts, with his accustomed energy and promptness, commenced proceedings which resulted in the accomplishment of his original design.

He addressed a petition to the legislature, of which the following is a copy:

To the Honorable, etc.: The Petition of Ebenezer Crafts, of Sturbridge, in the county of Worcester, humbly sheweth, that he, the said Ebenezer, together with Jacob Davis, of Charlton, Esquire, and Asa Sprague, of Spencer, Gentleman, both in said

county, some time in the month of April last past, purchased a large and commodious building, with about one acre of land, late the property of Aaron Lopez, deceased, lying and being in the town of Leicester, in the county, etc., with intent and design to promote the public benefit in the education of youth, as the said buildings are exceedingly well calculated for an academy. . . .

July 4th, 1783.

EBENEZER CRAFTS.

In the Spy of the 6th November, 1783, it was announced that "there would soon be opened at Leicester an academy for the purpose of promoting the sciences, etc." . . .

It was further stated, that "This academy will be opened in that large and elegant house lately occupied by Mr. Aaron Lopez, a situation peculiarly advantageous for this purpose." . . .

. . . on the 23d March, 1784, a bill for incorporating the academy was passed [by the Legislature].

The preamble to the act recites the views of the legislature, and the circumstances under which the act was passed:

Whereas the encouragement of literature in the rising generation has ever been considered, by the wise and good, as an object worthy of the most serious attention, as the safety and happiness of a free people ultimately depend upon the advantages arising from a pious, virtuous and liberal education: Whereas it appears that Ebenezer Crafts, of Sturbridge, in the county of Worcester, and Jacob Davis, of Charlton, in said county, Esquires, for the purpose of promoting piety and learning, have generously given the large and commodious house, lands and appurtenances, in Leicester, lately occupied by Aaron Lopez, deceased. . . .

In order to compare with the standard of our own day, what was so often spoken of as the "large and elegant structure,"—"the large and commodious mansion house," which was thus dedicated to the purposes of an academy, I shall endeavor to describe, partly from recollection and partly from the information of others, its dimensions and position.

The house was two stories high, having six rooms upon the lower story, three in front, and three in rear. The middle room in front had been used by Mr. Lopez, for a store room, and occupied more space in length, than the other two rooms in the south-east and south-west corners of the house. It stood near the road fronting toward the south, and was surmounted by a kind of cupola, in which hung a bell, the gift, I believe, of Mr. Stickney of Leicester.

Upon the front of the building, were two outer doors, over which were porches, supported by two pillars with corresponding pilasters, to which it had been attempted to give something like architectural proportions though without much success. This was the only attempt at architectural ornament upon the exterior of the building, whose front might have been perhaps seventy-five feet in length. The stories were not probably more than from seven to seven and one-half feet in height. Its windows were made of panes of glass, six by eight inches in size—and its general appearance and effect corresponded with what might be expected in a building of such proportions, devoid of ornament, and thus lighted.

Dr. Pierce, in his address before the academy in 1847, speaks of the appearance of the building in 1793 as follows. "It was an oblong, barrack-looking building, erected by Jews who had migrated from Newport, Rhode Island, and raised this rough looking structure for mercantile uses."

And yet, according to the standard of architectural taste of the day, it was an imposing structure. Mr. Lopez was a man of refined taste, ample fortune and liberal habits; and can hardly be supposed to have intentionally spared any reasonable expense, in constructing a mansion house for himself.

The east and west wings or end of this building remain, having been removed and fitted up as dwelling-houses upon the road leading to Charlton, within the present village of Leicester, and it is only necessary to compare these with the proportions and style of exterior finish of the better class of dwelling-houses of our own day, to judge something of the progress that has been made in the arts, both in respect to convenience and luxury, during the last seventy-five years, in our country.

The building stood in front of the present academy, but more westerly, and close by the road, and, at the time of which I am speaking, there was, I believe, no dwelling-house upon either side of the street east of it, except one occupied by the Rev. Mr. Conklin, which stood upon the site of the house now of the Rev. Mr. May. While towards the west, at the distance of about a dozen rods, stood an old, dilapidated, ill-proportioned meeting-house, with diamond shaped windows, but without either porch or belfry. . . .

#### NOTE

Extracted from *Brief Sketch of the History of Leicester Academy*, Part I. By Emory Washburn. Boston: Phillips, Sampson and Company, No. 13 Winter Street, 1855, pp. 6-14. Bound with *Historical Sketches of the Town of Leicester, etc.*

APPENDIX

On February 3, 1779, Aaron Lopez wrote as follows:

"Since we left our Island [Newport] my principal object was to look out for a spot where I could place my family, secured from sudden alarms and the cruel ravages of an enraged enemy. Such a one I have hitherto found in the small inland township of Leicester, in the Massachusetts Bay, *where* I pitch'd my tent, erecting a proportionable one to the extent of my numerous family on the summit of an high healthy hill, where we have experienc'd the civilities and hospitality of a kind neighbourhood; and moved in the same sphere of business I have been used to follow, which, altho much more contracted, it has fully answer'd my wishes. And you know, my friend, when that is the case, it never fails of constituting real happiness. Add to this the satisfaction of having for a next door neighbour your truly well wishing friend, my father-in-law, Mr. Rivera, who with his family I left in good health, spending in peace the fruits of his last summer's labour on a small farm. The old gentleman [now sixty-two years of age] improves with much the same *farming faculties* you tell me you cultivate yours, and I can farther inform you that while his hands have been employ'd in that usefull art, his agitated mind has uniformly accompanied yours to poor Newport where I do still hope, we shall soon have the pleasure of meeting each other again and re-enjoy those injur'd habitations, we have so long been deprived of, with all satisfaction.

"By this week's post, Mrs. Lopez has inform'd me that the Widow Lee, who had the liberty of going down from Providence in a flag [of truce] to Newport, after staying there some days, she had the indulgency of returning to Providence, and being engaged to nurse my daughter, Mrs. Mendez (who I have the consolation to tell you leaves [lives] also near me and next door to our good neighbour, Capt. Jno. Lyon, formerly of Newport). This Mrs. Lee, coming directly on her return into our family, inform'd Mrs. Lopez that the poor inhabitants of that town have been very much distress'd this winter for the want of fewell and provisions, those individuals of my society [Jews] in particular, who, she said, had not tasted any meat but once in two months. Fish there was none at this season of the year and they were reduced to the alternative of leaving [living] upon chocolate and coffe. These and many other callamities and insults the wretched inhabitants experience ought to excite our thanks to that Great Being who gave us resolution to exchange at so early a period that melancholy spot for that we now are enjoying."

NOTE

Quoted from letter written by Aaron Lopez to his friend Josiah Hewes. From *Early American Jewry*. By Jacob Rader Marcus, Vol. I. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1951, pp. 182-185.