

ON THE HISTORY OF THE JEWS OF  
CHICAGO.

THE JEWISH CONGREGATION IN  
SURINAM.

A SERMON BY MOSES MENDELSSOHN,  
Printed in Philadelphia 130 Years ago.

BY

DR. B. FELSENTHAL,  
*Chicago, Ill.*

---

FROM THE PUBLICATIONS OF THE AMERICAN JEWISH HISTORICAL  
SOCIETY, No. 2, 1894.

**PRESS OF  
THE FRIEDENWALD COMPANY,  
BALTIMORE.**

# ON THE HISTORY OF THE JEWS OF CHICAGO.

BY DR. B. FESENTHAL, *Chicago, Ill.*

A full and thorough history of Jews and Judaism in Chicago must not be expected here. Such a history would, among other matters, also have to consider the inner life, the religious life of the Jews in Chicago, and would have to show how the so-called reform ideas germinated there, how they grew up and developed, how at one time they were retarded and obstructed, and at another promoted and quickened. Many of the persons who took an active part in making the history of Chicago Judaism are still among the living, and the Muse of History can therefore not yet sit in judgment over them, their endeavors and their doings.

I desire to give here only a few contributions to the work of a future historian of Chicago Judaism—mere dry, detached and, moreover, incomplete facts. My statements rest partly upon information which I gathered from some of the earliest Jewish immigrants who had settled there, and partly upon my own personal observations and experiences. Living in Chicago since April, 1858, I am in a position to speak as an eye-witness in regard to many things and happenings during the past thirty-five years.

It is very likely that some single Jewish individuals settled in Chicago, or attempted to settle there, between 1830 and 1840, for in this decade large numbers of German Jews had come to America, expecting to find here not only better prospects in their various pursuits of life, but also a refuge from the oppressive and exclusive laws under which the Jews still had to suffer at that time in the old fatherland. Here in the United States they found a new fatherland, granting

them full civil and political rights equally with the citizens of other denominations; and these newcomers, confessing the old Jewish faith, appreciated this and became warmly and sincerely attached to their new country.

A large number, of course, remained at first in the great cities on the Atlantic coast, in New York, Philadelphia, and Baltimore. But a considerable number soon found their way to the valley of the Ohio and to the prairies of the West.

The first considerable migration of Jews to Chicago, or, to be more exact, to Cook County, Illinois, was in 1843. A certain Mr. William Renau, a young and enthusiastic gentleman of the Jewish faith, then living in New York City, took measures for the establishment of a Jewish Colonization Society, and his labor was not in vain. A number of Jews entered into his plans and intentions and joined his society. After the organization had been sufficiently consummated, the society deputed a Mr. Meyer to go West, to select land for the members upon which they might settle, and to report the results of his investigations and researches to the society. Mr. Meyer accordingly went West, and after looking around for several weeks in different parts of the country, selected a piece of land comprising 160 acres, situated in the town of Schaumburg, Cook County, Illinois, which he purchased for himself, and on which he remained. His written report to the society in New York was very encouraging, and urged the members to migrate to this part of the country without hesitation, for—so he said substantially—“this is a land in which milk and honey is flowing, particularly for tillers of the soil; and this part of the land, especially the town of Chicago, opens furthermore a vista into a large commercial future.”

Thereupon the majority of the society set out for the West and came to Chicago. They there met Mr. Meyer, and from him they received more complete details.

After many consultations it was found that a large number of the members were not pleased with the plans laid out by

Mr. Meyer. The consequence was that they did not settle together in a body, as had been intended; but still determined to carry out the plan of farming, they scattered in different directions. Some bought farms already improved, others claimed government lands, and still others settled in villages and united farming with mercantile life.

The majority of these men, by their industry and by their frugal and economical habits, succeeded in acquiring a competency.

After the Illinois and Michigan Canal and the railroad from Chicago to Elgin had been completed, Chicago became quite a center of attraction for people inclined to trade, and Jewish families in comparatively large numbers came to make it their home. Two Jewish families had been residing here in the city somewhat previous to this time, and one of them, Mr. Benedict Schubert, had become quite wealthy. It was he who built the first brick house in Chicago. He had been a tailor by trade, and he was very poor when he came to live in that town, but by his industry he soon acquired sufficient means, and became in his day the only prominent merchant tailor in Chicago.

Mr. Meyer, spoken of before, after having become advanced in years, and being without grown children old enough to be of any help to him, was among those who came to the city to live there. He had sold his farm and he invested all his funds in Chicago real estate. As a farseeing man of sound judgment in such matters, he advised all his friends and acquaintances to act similarly; at least he desired that they should do so with a part of their means. By many he was looked upon as eccentric. However, the result proved that he was right. Though his investments brought no immediate fruits to himself, yet to those who came after him and took his advice it was a rich mine of wealth.

Chicago had meanwhile become widely known, especially since it was rumored that it would be a great railroad center, and many Israelites were induced to select this place as their

home. Among the first who about that time came to Chicago were the brothers Kohn, Levi Rosenfeld, Jacob Rosenberg, the brothers Rubel, the brothers Greenebaum, Samuel Cole, Mayer Klein, M. M. Gerstley, Fuller, Weineman, Brunne-man, Clayburgh, Weigselbaum, Ziegler, etc.

We now proceed to speak of the origin of the Jewish religious organizations in Chicago. The first time the Chicago Jews entered into a religious organization was in 1845, and the first public act by which they demonstrated their existence as a body corporate was the purchase from the city of a piece of ground for a cemetery. This old Jewish cemetery had to be abandoned in 1856, the city having become meanwhile so extensive that the cemetery was within the city limits. At present it forms a part of Lincoln Park. Not long after this cemetery had been acquired, the society which owned it organized into a regular congregation. This was the first Jewish congregation in Chicago, and very likely of the whole Northwest. It was chartered in 1847 under the name *Kehillath Anshé Maarabh* (Congregation of the Men of the West). Its first services were held in a hall situated in the uppermost floor of an old frame building on the southwest corner of Lake and South Wells streets, and Ignaz Kunreuther was its first minister. After the congregation had become strong enough financially, they leased a lot on Clark street, between Quincy and Jackson streets, upon which they erected a synagogue. At the expiration of that lease they bought a lot on the northeast corner of Adams and Wells streets, where they built another synagogue. Here they remained for several years, until the house became too small for the congregation. They then sold this property and bought a church on the corner of Peck Court and Wabash Avenue, where they remained until the building was destroyed by the great fire of 1871. Afterwards they purchased a church on the corner of Twenty-sixth street and Indiana Avenue, and, after this building too had become insufficient for the growing congregation, a new and splendid

synagogue was erected on the corner of Indiana Avenue and Thirty-third street. It was dedicated June 11th, 1891.

Not exactly a congregation, but a society of a semi-religious character was also instituted at an early date by a number of young Israelites in Chicago, under the name of *The Hebrew Benevolent Society*. In its flourishing days it did a great deal of good in the field of charity. It purchased three acres of ground in the town of Lake View (a little south of Graceland Cemetery) and laid it out as a cemetery.

Later on other charitable societies came into existence and superseded the old Hebrew Benevolent Society. Nominally, however, it still exists, but merely as a burial association.

A second Jewish congregation was established in 1851 by a number of Israelites, mainly from the eastern provinces of Prussia, to which the founders gave the name *Kehillath Bené Shalom* (Congregation of the Sons of Peace). This congregation first rented a hall in a building on the southwest corner of Dearborn and Washington streets. Afterwards they occupied a hall in a building on Clark street near Jackson street, and in 1864 they dedicated their new synagogue on Harrison street near Fourth Avenue. On October 9, 1871, it fell a prey to the great conflagration. The congregation suffered greatly by the fire, but within a few years it rallied again and erected a new house of worship on Michigan Avenue between Fourteenth and Sixteenth streets. In 1891 the congregation sold this synagogue, and purchased from *Kehillath Anshé Maarabh* the synagogue on the corner of Twenty-sixth street and Indiana Avenue, which it still occupies.

The third Jewish congregation which was founded in Chicago is *Sinai Congregation*. Its first meeting for devotional purposes was held June 21, 1861, in an edifice situated on Monroe street, between Clark and LaSalle streets. Here the congregation continued to worship until April, 1865, at which time they consecrated their new temple on the

northwest corner of Van Buren street and Third Avenue. By the fire of 1871 this temple was laid in ashes. The congregation was then without a meeting-house of its own for several years, but in April, 1876, the members dedicated their new temple on the southwest corner of Twenty-first street and Indiana Avenue, an imposing structure which they still occupy.

Another congregation, the fourth one in chronological order, was established by Israelites residing in the west division of the city in 1864. It was chartered under the name *Zion Congregation*. Its first divine service was held on the eve of Rosh ha-Shanah 5625, *i. e.* September 30, 1864, and the first temple which the congregation occupied was situated on Desplaines street between Madison and Washington streets. In 1869 the congregation disposed of the temple which it then possessed, and erected a new structure in a more suitable location, on the southeast corner of Jackson and Sangamon streets. In the course of a few years this temple also proved to be too small, and in 1885 the Zion Congregation built a new temple, on the corner of Washington Boulevard and Ogden Avenue, facing Union Park. Here they still assemble for divine worship.

In 1867 *The North Side Hebrew Congregation* was established. Previous to the great fire this congregation had a temple on Ohio street near Wells street, but the fire destroyed it. In 1882 the congregation undertook to build a new temple on the corner of Rush street and Walton Place, but they did not finish the building. They sold the property afterwards, and they have recently purchased a lot on the corner of Lasalle Avenue and Goethe street, on which they will soon erect a new and spacious temple.

During the last twenty years a considerable number of other Jewish congregations have come into existence, and at present Chicago numbers more than twenty chartered Jewish congregations.



Before closing I beg to express the hope that some one else of Chicago will soon fill out the lacunæ in the above sketch, and will correct the errors which probably are contained therein. There are also quite other fields in the history of the Jews and of Judaism in Chicago which in the foregoing notes have not been touched upon at all, and which are waiting to be tilled by another chronicler or historian. Let me indicate some of these as yet untilled fields: The origin and the rise or decadence of the various philanthropic and other societies among the Chicago Jews; the history of the charitable institutions founded and maintained by them (for example, the Michael Reese Hospital, the Jewish Manual Training School, the Old People's Home); the several attempts at establishing Jewish periodicals in Chicago, and the final success of some of these attempts; the beginnings of the Russian colony there, its growth and its influence upon Chicago Judaism in general; the factors which were active in influencing the inner religious life of the Jews there, etc. But all this must be left to another pen.



# THE JEWISH CONGREGATION IN SURINAM.

BY DR. B. FELSENTHAL.

Among the existing Jewish congregations in America, that of Surinam, in Dutch Guiana, named *K. K. Berakhah we-Shalom* (Congregation of blessing and peace), is one of the oldest, if not *the* oldest. After the attempt to establish Jewish colonies on a large scale in Brazil had failed and the colonists had scattered, a number of them must have come to Surinam and must have founded there a congregation. By this congregation a splendid synagogue was built in 1685, and it was dedicated in that year soon after the fall holidays. On Wednesday, the 8th of Heshvan 5546 (October 12, 1785), the congregation joyfully celebrated the one hundredth anniversary of their synagogue's dedication.\* Subsequent to the erection of the synagogue, Rabbi David Pardo came from London to Surinam, and died there in

\*A description of this centennial celebration and a collection of the hymns then sung and of the prayers then recited are found in a book of 52 pages in quarto, partly in Hebrew, partly in Dutch, printed in Amsterdam, 1786. It bears the title :

זכר רב ושמחה וששון ליהודים . . . במלאת מאת שנה לחנוך בית הכנסת של ק"ק ספרדים ברכה ושלוש בקולוניא סורינאם . . . ביום ד' ח' לחדש חשון בשנת להיות עיניך פקוחות אל הבית הזה לפ"ק.

*Dutch title* :—Beschryving van de plechtigheden nevens de lof-dichten en gebeden . . . op het eerste jubelfeest van de Synagogue der Portugeesche Joodsche gemeente, op de Savane in de colonie Suriname . . . op den 12den van Wynmaand . . . 1785. Amsterdam, H. W. en C. Dronsberg.

A copy of this book is in the Rosenthal library (now a part of the library of the University in Amsterdam); see Roest's *Catalog der Hebraica und Judaica aus der L. Rosenthal'schen Bibliothek*, p. 738.

1713.\* He was, without doubt, the most distinguished Rabbi the Surinam congregation has ever had. While he was still in Europe, he published the *Sepher Shulchan Tahor* (containing extracts from the first and second part of the *Shulchan 'Aruch*), Amsterdam, 1686, several editions of which were afterwards printed (see Benjacob, *Thesaurus*, p. 584).†

\*See H. J. Michael's *Or ha-Hayyim*, Frankfurt, 1891, p. 342, where the author says that this is stated as a fact by Rabbi David Nieto in a letter, of which he, Michael, possessed a copy. David Nieto is a reliable witness. He may have known D. Pardo personally; if not, he certainly knew of him and of his life through mutual friends. For David Pardo was a Hazzan in London before he went to Surinam. See Hananel Nepi in his *Zekher Zaddikim li-Bhrakhah* (contained in Ghironi's *Toledoth Gedolê Yisraël*), p. 83; see also title-page of *Shulchan Tahor*, where, too, mention is made of the fact that Pardo was a cantor in London. R. D. Nieto was his cotemporary and was likewise living in London during the last 27 years of his life. He had been a rabbi in Legnorn, Italy, but was called to the rabbinical chair in London, where he arrived in Elul 5461 (September 1701), and died there on the 28th of Tebheth 5488 (10th January 1728); see *Or ha-Hayyim*, p. 342.

† Ye'hiël Heilprin names one Baer London as being the author of the *Shulchan Tahor*; see *Seder ha-Doroth*, III. (ed. Warsaw, 1882, pp. 8 and 98). Heilprin's Baer London is due to a very curious misunderstanding. If a future Isaac Disraeli should write "The Curiosities of Hebrew Literature," he could well speak of the curiosity before us. On the title-page of the *editio princeps* of the *Shulchan Tahor*, the author, David Pardo, is designated as Hazzan בעיר לונדון (in the city of London). And these words בעיר לונדון (*be'Er London*) were read by Heilprin as בער לונדון (*Baer London*). And Baer London, a man who never existed, is made immortal by Heilprin, who places him in his list of authors!

In this connection it may be proper to add another remark. Isaac Aboab, one of the Amsterdam Rabbis, went in 1642 with a number of Jewish emigrants from Holland to Brazil, and while there he was their spiritual head. After the Jewish settlements in Brazil had broken up, Aboab returned to Amsterdam, in 1654, and there he again entered the Board of Rabbis. David Pardo's *Shulchan Tahor* (Amsterdam, 1686) contains the approbations (*Haskamoth*) of several Amsterdam Rabbis, and among them appears Isaac Aboab's name as that of one of the signers.

# A SERMON BY MOSES MENDELSSOHN, PRINTED IN PHILADELPHIA 130 YEARS AGO.

BY DR. B. FELSENTHAL.

The discovery made by Prof. Jastrow, in the Philadelphia Library, of the Thanksgiving Sermon, printed in Philadelphia, 1763,\* was one of great value. This find is the more interesting, as the German original was written by Moses Mendelssohn. The Sage of Berlin probably never in his lifetime heard of the fact that a sermon written by him when he was 28 years old was translated into English, and that this translation was printed in a city of the distant American colonies.

Mendelssohn's name does not appear on the title-page, but the fact is well known that at the request of the officers of the Berlin Jewish Congregation, Moses Mendelssohn several times composed German sermons, which were then delivered by the rabbi of the congregation.†

The original of the English Thanksgiving Sermon, which Professor Jastrow has discovered and dug out from the grave of oblivion, was undoubtedly the very first Jewish sermon ever composed in grammatically correct and pure German and printed in German type; and the Philadelphia translation of the same was also undoubtedly the very first translation of any of Mendelssohn's writings into a foreign language. That sermon was delivered, as stated on the title-page, by Rabbi David Hirsch Fränkel. This David Hirsch Fränkel was none other than Rabbi David ben Naphtali

\* See Publications of the A. J. H. S., No. 1, p. 63.

† Dr. M. Kayserling: Moses Mendelssohn, sein Leben und seine Werke, first edition, p. 145.

Hirsch Fränkel, the author of *Korban ha-Edah*, who, while he was yet Rabbi in Dessau, had been young Moses Mendelssohn's first instructor in the Talmud. A very learned rabbi he was, but a sermon in grammatically correct German he was not able to write. His former pupil had to do this for him.

The Thanksgiving Sermon under consideration was delivered after a victory had been won by Frederick the Great over the Austrian forces, on December 5, 1757. If this date, which we copy from the title-page of the English translation of that sermon, be correct, then it must have been the victory won on that day by the Prussians in the battle of Leuthen, which gave occasion to the delivery of the sermon, and not, as Dr. Kayserling said, the victory won in the battle of Rossbach. For the battle of Rossbach was fought a month earlier, on November 5, 1757. Fürst, too, in his *Bibl. Jud.*, II., 363, commits the error of saying Rossbach instead of Leuthen.