

TOURO SYNAGOGUE IN NEWPORT, RHODE ISLAND



"I know histhry isn't thru, Hinnissy, because it ain't like what I see ivry day in Halsted Street. If any wan comes along with a histhry iv Greece or Rome that'll show me th' people fightin', gettin' dhrunk, makin' love, gettin' married, owin' th' grocery man an' bein' without hard coal, I'll believe they was a Greece or Rome, but not befur."



— Dunne, Finley Peter,
OBSERVATIONS BY MR. DOOLEY,
New York, 1902

**“NARRATIVE HISTORY” AMOUNTS TO FABULATION,
THE REAL STUFF BEING MERE CHRONOLOGY**



TOURO SYNAGOGUE

TOURO SYNAGOGUE

1647

May 19, Wednesday-21, Friday (Old Style): Although the Reverend [Roger Williams](#) had brought back from England a royal charter for a united “Providence Plantations and Rhode-Island” colony in 1644, based upon the legitimacy of his actually having obtained permission to settle there from the owners of the land, the native Americans (!), it had taken several years to work out a political alliance of the four previously independent settlements actually involved, to wit, [Providence](#), *Shawowmet* (later known as [Warwick](#)), [Newport](#), and



[Portsmouth](#). On this date the first meeting of the united colony took place in Portsmouth and an anchor was selected as the colonial brand.

READ EDWARD FIELD TEXT



TOURO SYNAGOGUE

TOURO SYNAGOGUE

Dr. [John Clarke](#) was assigned to write up a Code of Laws for the new colony, and asked [William Dyer](#) to assist him.



The document they would author would declare the freedom of the individual conscience. Dyer would become the Secretary of the Council and then the Attorney General of [Rhode Island and Providence Plantations](#), and eventually, during Henry Thoreau's lifetime, one of his descendants would become the governor of the state.

This code of laws they would draft, would conclude as follows:

These are the laws that concern all men, and these are the penalties for the transgressions thereof, which, by common consent, are ratified and established through the whole Colony. And otherwise than this (what is herein forbidden) all men may walk as their consciences persuade them, every one in the name of his GOD. AND LET THE LAMBS OF THE MOST HIGH WALK IN THIS COLONY WITHOUT MOLESTATION, IN THE NAME OF JEHOVAH THEIR GOD, FOR EVER AND EVER.



TOURO SYNAGOGUE

TOURO SYNAGOGUE

NOBODY COULD GUESS WHAT WOULD HAPPEN NEXT





TOURO SYNAGOGUE

TOURO SYNAGOGUE

1658

Spring (1657, Old Style): Family names such as Lopez, Rivera, Seixas, deToro (Touro), Gomez and Hays began to settle in [Newport](#) on [Rhode Island](#)'s [Aquidneck Island](#), and by the time of the American Revolution this population of Sephardic Jews would have grown to a prosperous community of several hundred souls. As international sugar traders from Brazil, the West Indies, Portugal, etc. they chose to maintain their headquarters on the island because it was a thriving peaceful commercial center with a major port.¹ For a long time they would hold *minyanim* in private homes. Their first public venture would be not the construction of a synagogue but the creation of a [Jewish](#) cemetery. (Only later, in 1763, would they be constructing the [Touro Synagogue of Congregation Jeshuat Israel](#).)²

1. Rabbi Theodore Lewis, M.A.S.T.D., has confidently asserted that these Jews came to Rhode Island “because of the assurance of freedom of religion and liberty of conscience promised by Governor [Roger Williams](#) to all who came within its borders.” To make a small point, the man was President of Rhode Island, not Governor, but the big point is to imagine how Rabbi Lewis can look right into people’s minds, people dead for centuries, and detect their true motives. This President Williams with an international reputation for religious openness who attracted the Jews to Rhode Island, I might point out, happens to be the same Reverend Williams who, we know, had pronounced his own wife, Mistress Mary Williams, and his own daughters, to be “unregenerate,” which meant that after Mary had prepared a meal for her family, she needed to take her daughters and be absent from the table while her husband blessed the meal and thanked God, alone. Then this tolerant man would allow his “unregenerate” family to return and break bread together and partake of the meal. (Although this practice would come to the attention of others who would chide the Reverend about it, remonstrances would be to no avail. Go figure.)

What is considerably more likely is that these immigrants had heard of the code of laws that had been enacted in [Rhode Island](#) in 1647, which concluded as follows:

These are the laws that concern all men, and these are the penalties for the transgressions thereof, which, by common consent, are ratified and established through the whole Colony. And otherwise than this (what is herein forbidden) all men may walk as their consciences persuade them, every one in the name of his GOD. AND LET THE LAMBS OF THE MOST HIGH WALK IN THIS COLONY WITHOUT MOLESTATION, IN THE NAME OF JEHOVAH THEIR GOD, FOR EVER AND EVER.

However, that code of laws had been written, not by the great Reverend Williams, but by [John Clarke](#) with the assistance of [William Dyer](#) (Friend Mary Dyer’s husband). Presumably Rabbi Lewis did not grasp that point, because he was supposing the code of laws to have been enacted in 1674, six years after the settlement, rather than as it actually was, in 1647, eleven years before the settlement!

[HDT](#)[WHAT?](#)[INDEX](#)

TOURO SYNAGOGUE

TOURO SYNAGOGUE

1675

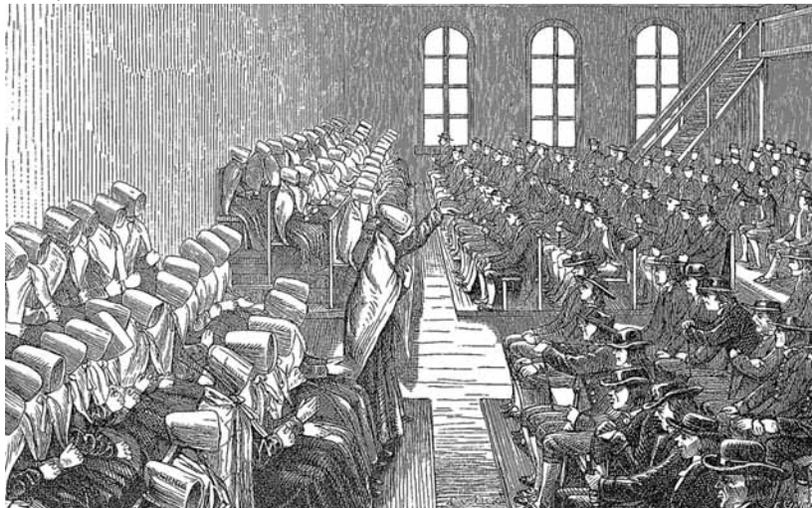
The Sephardi Synagogue was erected in Amsterdam. There are some similarities between this structure and the [Touro Synagogue](#) that would be erected in [Newport, Rhode Island](#), and we presume that would be because [Isaac Touro](#) as he was being educated in the Low Countries would have seen this synagogue in Holland, and would have influenced Peter Harrison's design for this new synagogue. (When I asked the tour guide at the Touro Synagogue whether the similarities between the two synagogue structures included a similar trap-door leading to a similar underground space, she didn't know — and I would have supposed, that would have been

2. Some of the members of this congregation, such as [Aaron Lopez](#), would, like some of their Christian neighbors, even some of the members of the [Religious Society of Friends](#), engage in the [international slave trade](#). After their synagogue building, in what had become the bad part of town, had been deconsecrated, the empty and dilapidated structure, under a caretaker who was a [Quaker](#), would find use occasionally, surreptitiously, for the harboring of escaping slaves as a station on the Underground Railroad. The edifice would be designated a national historical site in 1946.

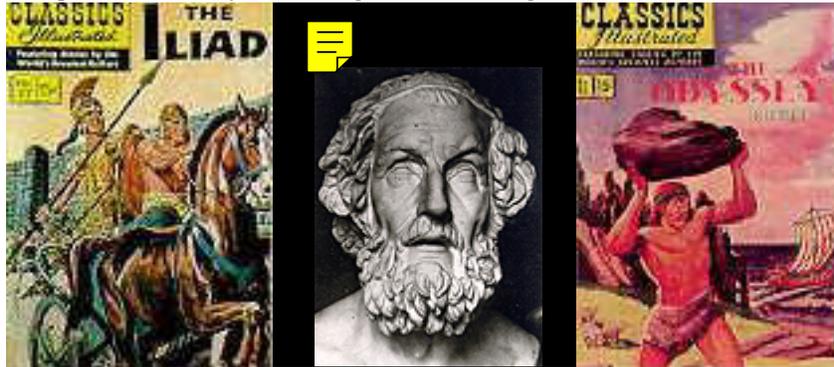


—When you visit, and are proudly shown the must-see “secret hiding hole” underneath the lectern, be polite, as I was, and do not complicate matters by inquiring whether Newport's Jews and Quakers participated in the international slave trade.

(When you visit the largest [Quaker](#) meetinghouse in the world, almost next door to this synagogue — ditto, do not inquire into the sensitive topic of why they avoid mentioning to the white tourists that this structure had for about half a century served as a segregated black dancehall!!)



one of the first questions that anyone dealing with the underground railroad would have asked.)



Having completed Homerus’s THE ILIADS AND ODYSSES in rhymed English quatrains (Thoreau would access this), Thomas Hobbes removed from London to reside with the Cavendish family at one of their seats in Derbyshire.

CONDUCT OF LIFE: Akin to the benefit of foreign travel, the aesthetic value of railroads is to unite the advantages of town and country life, neither of which we can spare. A man should live in or near a large town, because, let his own genius be what it may, it will repel quite as much of agreeable and valuable talent as it draws, and, in a city, the total attraction of all the citizens is sure to conquer, first or last, every repulsion, and drag the most improbable hermit within its walls some day in the year. In town, he can find the swimming-school, the gymnasium, the dancing-master, the shooting-gallery, opera, theatre, and panorama; the chemist’s shop, the museum of natural history; the gallery of fine arts; the national orators, in their turn; foreign travellers, the libraries, and his club. In the country, he can find solitude and reading, manly labor, cheap living, and his old shoes; moors for game, hills for geology, and groves for devotion. Aubrey writes, “I have heard Thomas Hobbes say, that, in the Earl of Devon’s house, in Derbyshire, there was a good library and books enough for him, and his lordship stored the library with what books he thought fit to be bought. But the want of good conversation was a very great inconvenience, and, though he conceived he could order his thinking as well as another, yet he found a great defect. In the country, in long time, for want of good conversation, one’s understanding and invention contract a moss on them, like an old paling in an orchard.”

JOHN AUBREY
THOS. HOBBS



TOURO SYNAGOGUE

TOURO SYNAGOGUE

1677

 Opening of the [Jewish](#) Cemetery on Bellevue Avenue in [Newport, Rhode Island](#). The names to be found there include Touro, Hays, Myers, Lopez, Hart, Seixas, and Rivera (the 1712 map of the Town of Newport would identify this cemetery as being located on “Jew Street”).

TOURO SYNAGOGUE

NO-ONE’S LIFE IS EVER NOT DRIVEN PRIMARILY BY HAPPENSTANCE





TOURO SYNAGOGUE

TOURO SYNAGOGUE

1748

Jacob Rodriguez Rivera, of a Marrano³ family of Seville, Spain, arrived in [Newport, Rhode Island](#) from Curacao to introduce the manufacture of spermaceti candles. His daughter Sarah Rivera would marry with his nephew [Aaron Lopez](#) and his son Jacob Rivera would build a grand mansion on the Parade (today the site is 8 Washington Square). Jacob Rodriguez Rivera would be second only to his son-in-law in the commercial, religious, and social life of Newport's [Jewish](#) community.

TOURO SYNAGOGUE

**LIFE IS LIVED FORWARD BUT UNDERSTOOD BACKWARD?
— NO, THAT'S GIVING TOO MUCH TO THE HISTORIAN'S STORIES.
LIFE ISN'T TO BE UNDERSTOOD EITHER FORWARD OR BACKWARD.**

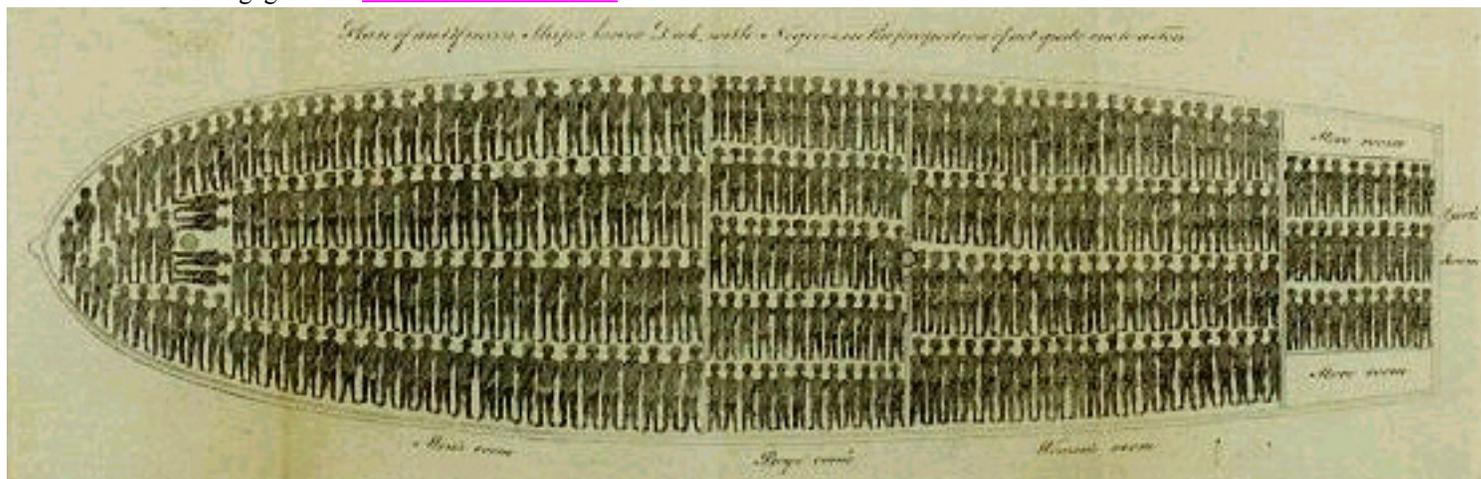


Jacobo C. Rivera

From the original painting by Gilbert Stuart

1750

A [Quaker](#) in [Newport](#), one of the two major [slave](#) importing centers of the USA, was put under dealing by the elders of his monthly meeting of the [Religious Society of Friends](#), on account of his firm's continuing to engage in the [international slave trade](#).⁴



[Aaron Lopez](#), who would be known as the “Merchant Prince” of early American commerce, and his family, at this point arrived in [Newport](#) from Lisbon, Portugal, where as a [Marrano](#)⁵ he had been being required to use the Christian name “Don Duarte Lopez.”

4. So, exactly **who, by name**, was this interesting Friend? We know that Friend [Abraham Redwood](#) needed to be dealt with by the elders of his meeting, on account of his refusal to give up the ownership of beaucoup black slaves on his sugar plantation in Antigua, but I have not heard that this Friend Abraham was engaged in any trade other than the sugar trade — so presumably this [Quaker](#) slavetrader of unspecified name was some **other** Newport Quaker. Below, for your interest, appears the rotting hulk of the slave ship *Jem*, as of the Year of Our Lord 1891 at Fort Adams near [Newport](#) on [Aquidneck Island](#):



5. Marrano = a Spanish or Portuguese Jew of the late Middle Ages who converted to Christianity, especially one forcibly converted but adhering secretly to [Judaism](#).



TOURO SYNAGOGUE

TOURO SYNAGOGUE

(Probably, the family came to the port of New-York first and then went on up to [Rhode Island](#).)



The father of the family immediately underwent ritual [circumcision](#). Within twenty years he would own or have interests in nearly a hundred sailing vessels. Aaron and his nephew Moses would wholly own 27 square-rigged vessels, including whale-ships — although they would lose nearly all of these during the Revolutionary War. Like the aforementioned Newport [Quaker](#), he would be heavily involved in the international slave trade. He would be one of the original founders of and contributors to [Touro Synagogue](#).

THE FUTURE IS MOST READILY PREDICTED IN RETROSPECT





TOURO SYNAGOGUE

TOURO SYNAGOGUE

1758

It was in about this year that [Isaac Touro](#) came to [Newport, Rhode Island](#) from Amsterdam, Holland.

THE FUTURE CAN BE EASILY PREDICTED IN RETROSPECT





TOURO SYNAGOGUE

TOURO SYNAGOGUE

1759

March 21, Wednesday: The Marrano Jews who had settled at [Newport, Rhode Island](#), wherever they had come from (perhaps Holland, perhaps New-York, more likely than not Curacao in the West Indies), had been on Aquidneck Island at this point for more than a century but had only for about five years been attempting to create for themselves a synagogue. The delay may have been due to the fact that a Marrano (I am instructed that, in Spanish, this means “pig,” and is thus a record of abusive treatment) is a Jew who has pretended to convert to Christianity, and is “passing,” in the manner in which a person with a black or red ancestor, if their skin is light enough, may “pass” as white and thus avoid certain life difficulties.

ANTISEMITISM

However, on this day they again circulated a letter asking for contributions, this time citing that it was toward the procurement of proper facilities for educational purposes. The Jews of New-York would in response be able to contribute £150, and there would be some money arriving from the Sephardic communities of Jamaica, Curaçao, Surinam, and London, so, finally, in 1763, the synagogue of K.K. Yeshuat Israel, the Holy Congregation of the Salvation of Israel, would be dedicated.

This was also the year during which [Isaac Touro](#) arrived in from Amsterdam via the West Indies at the age of 20, already trained in Holland for the [Jewish](#) ministry. He would reside at 42 Division Street. It would be he who would provide, from memory, for the construction of the [Touro Synagogue](#), elements of the design of the Sephardic Synagogue which had been built in 1675 in Amsterdam. The design of the structure was to render it appropriate not only for worship, but also for the education of the young in the traditions of the group. It is an open question whether the function of ceremonial worship or the function of appropriate education was intended at this point to be primary, and whether at first this young man Touro performed functions primarily as a rabbi, for all, or primarily as a teacher, for the young males.

June 30, Saturday: Colonel John Prideaux and Sir William Johnson left Fort Oswego by boat to prepare the invasion of [Fort Niagara](#).

The Marrano⁶ Jacob Rodrigues Rivera, and two Ashkenazi [Jews](#), Moses Levy and Isaac Hart, of [Newport](#), purchased a small parcel of land for £1500 in [Rhode Island](#) currency, on what was then Griffin Street, from Ebenezer Allen of Sandwich, Massachusetts.

TOURO SYNAGOGUE

6. Marrano = a Spanish or Portuguese Jew of the late Middle Ages who converted to Christianity, especially one forcibly converted but adhering secretly to Judaism.



TOURO SYNAGOGUE

TOURO SYNAGOGUE

1760

Naphtali Hart Myers donated a candelabrum that eventually would be used as one of a set of almost-matching four hanging in the [Touro Synagogue](#) of [Newport, Rhode Island](#).

DO I HAVE YOUR ATTENTION? GOOD.

[HDT](#)[WHAT?](#)[INDEX](#)

TOURO SYNAGOGUE

TOURO SYNAGOGUE

1763

December 2, Friday, Chanukah: Dedication of the 1st synagogue in New England, the [Touro Synagogue](#) of congregation K.K. Yeshuat Israel, the Holy Congregation of the Salvation of Israel, in [Newport, Rhode Island](#) (this congregation had actually been in existence on [Aquidneck Island](#) since 1658).⁷



The Reverend [Ezra Stiles](#) noticed that the only furniture in the place was the wainscoting, but that this was adequate seating since there were only about eighty in the congregation. Presumably by “wainscoting” the Congregational reverend was referring to the wooden bench structures built into the walls.



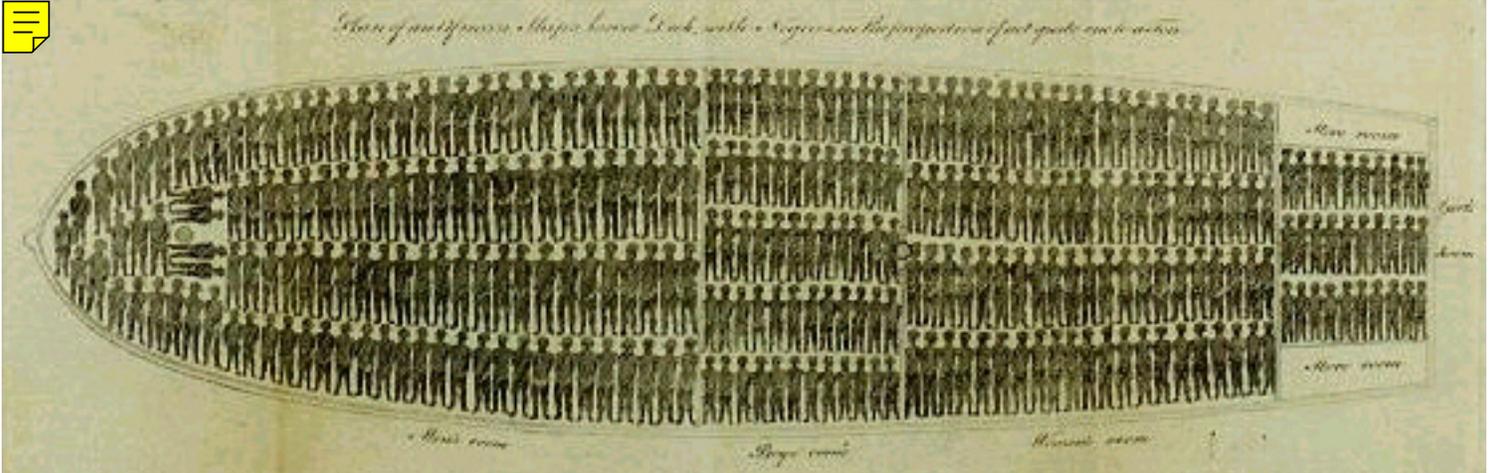
(Some of the Jews of this synagogue, like some of their Christian neighbors such as the [Quakers](#), next door up the hill, engaged in the [international slave trade](#). In general, in [Rhode Island](#) harbors as a whole during this year, it has been estimated by Alexander Boyd Hawes, some 17-20 vessels were being fitted out for the coast of Africa. For instance, Captain Ferguson arrived on that coast some time before September. If an average cargo of [slaves](#) was 109—as we have estimated on the basis of a number of known cargos—then a total of more than 1,850 souls were transported during this year in Rhode Island bottoms alone. Examples from this year include the Rhode Island snow *Adventure* carrying a cargo of 150 slaves, the brig *Diamond* carrying a cargo

7. It would not, until a much later timeframe, be referred to as the Touro Synagogue. After their synagogue building, in what had become the bad part of town, had been deconsecrated, the dilapidated empty structure, under a caretaker who was a [Quaker](#), would **perhaps** find use occasionally, surreptitiously, as free temporary accommodations for escaping slaves as a station on the Underground Railroad (the word “perhaps” is used because no evidence whatever has ever been produced and, most likely, this has been pious wishful thinking). The edifice would be designated a national historical site in 1946. —When you visit, and are proudly shown the must-see secret hiding hole underneath the lectern, try to be discrete and polite and do not complicate matters (Boo!) by inquiring about participation in the [international slave trade](#).

TOURO SYNAGOGUE

TOURO SYNAGOGUE

of 120, the schooner *Kitty* carrying 70, the schooner *Little Sally* carrying 60, the sloop *Salisbury* carrying 90, the sloop *Three Friends* carrying 78, the sloop *Wydah* carrying 60, a schooner of unknown name carrying 120, a schooner of unknown name carrying 72, a schooner of unknown name carrying 90, and a schooner of unknown name carrying 90.)



Isaac Touro (“de Toro”) was officiating as Cantor.

He would be the first *rabbi*. It had been he, presumably, who had provided, from memory, the design of the Portuguese Sephardic Synagogue of Amsterdam. The structure had been faced so that the congregation as it turned toward the Aron Kodesh would be turning toward Mizrah. The main floor was for men and the gallery for women.

JUDAISM

**WHAT I’M WRITING IS TRUE BUT NEVER MIND
YOU CAN ALWAYS LIE TO YOURSELF**



TOURO SYNAGOGUE

TOURO SYNAGOGUE

1764

[Aaron Lopez](#), President (Parnas) of The Holy Congregation Dispersed Ones of Israel (Kahal Kodesh Nephutsay Israel) appealed for funds with which the [Jewish](#) congregation might pay off the mortgage and interest due for the building of their synagogue in [Newport, Rhode Island](#).



TOURO SYNAGOGUE

The structure had been created out of red brick imported from England.

CHANGE IS ETERNITY, STASIS A FIGMENT



TOURO SYNAGOGUE

TOURO SYNAGOGUE

1765

Naphtali Hart Myers had in 1760 donated a candelabrum that was being used in the [Touro Synagogue](#) of [Newport, Rhode Island](#). In this year Abraham Rodriguez Mendez donated two more, more or less like it, and Samuel Judah of New-York donated a Ner Tamid or Eternal Light, a wick lamp filled with oil.⁸

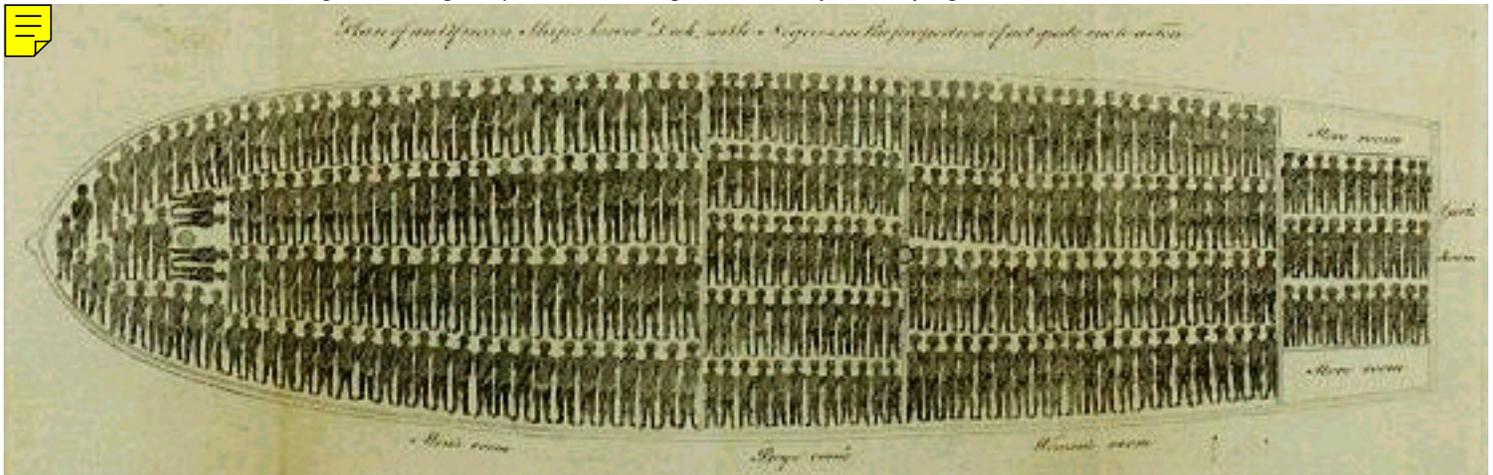
8. Electricity would come to [Newport](#) in 1882, and someone would soon insert a little low-wattage bulb into this Eternal Light so they wouldn't need to clean it and keep an eye on its oil level and continually trim its wick. We believe that the bulb in this lamp now is still the original bulb, not burned out even after it has glowed without interruption for quite a bit more than a century — low voltage can account for part of this longevity, and then, this bulb's filament has never been shocked by the electromagnetic pulses that we induce when we snap wall switches off and on.

1768

One member of the Jewish congregation in [Newport](#), [Aaron Lopez](#), owned some 30 oceangoing vessels and more than 100 coastal schooners. He had the honor of occupying the special raised President’s Seat at the side of the [Touro Synagogue](#), separate from the other worshipers inside a railing. He and his family involved themselves heavily in the molasses, rum and [slave](#) trade.⁹ The other major American hub of their trading ring was in Charleston, South Carolina.



In [Rhode Island](#) harbors in this year, it is estimated by Alexander Boyd Hawes, some 18 vessels were being fitted out for the [international slave trade](#). If an average cargo of slaves was 109 –as we have estimated on the basis of a number of known cargos– then a total of well over 1,950 souls were being transported in Rhode Island bottoms alone. Examples from this year include the Rhode Island brig *Hannah*, carrying a cargo of 165 slaves, the ship *King George*, carrying a cargo of 230, the sloop *Patty*, carrying 130, the brig *Polly*, carrying 154, and again the brig *Polly*, on another trip in the same year carrying 130.



Captain John Wilson, of General Gage’s 59th regiment in [Boston](#), attempted to incite [servile insurrection](#)
 9. We immediately recollect that in the BIBLE, this man’s namesake had led people **out of** slavery.



TOURO SYNAGOGUE

TOURO SYNAGOGUE

among some 300 black [slaves](#) in that metropolis by assuring them that the military had seized the port in an attempt to secure their freedom and that if they would fight for their freedom in conjunction with the military, “they would be able to drive the Liberty Boys to the devil.”



TOURO SYNAGOGUE

TOURO SYNAGOGUE

1769

Moses Michael Hays, a brother-in-law of Rabbi [Isaac Touro](#), was a merchant. It was he who would introduce the Scottish Rite Masonic Order to America. As the head of the only [Jewish](#) family in [Boston](#), he would be Grand Master of the Massachusetts Masonic Lodge that included Paul Revere, and a friend of [Thomas Paine](#). In this year he helped organized the King David Lodge.

Judah Jacobs of London, England provided a wall clock for the [Touro Synagogue](#) of [Newport, Rhode Island](#). (Or did this happen in 1767? The brass works of this clock still keep time, more or less. Here's a question: does a clock in a structure that is used for worship and for education primarily pertain to the structure's worship function, or to its educational function? — Is my guess correct, that such a clock would have been helpful to keep class times, rather than having a function in assistance to worship?) Jacob Pollock donated a central candelabrum with twelve branches for twelve candles. An interesting detail is that the four heads to be seen around its stem appear to represent not [Jewish](#) religious figures but instead Christian monks. (It is unlikely that whoever originally fabricated this piece would have been aware, that it would wind up as the central lighting fixture of a synagogue. The structure now has electric lighting of sorts — but its candelabra have not been altered.)

Moses Michael Hays and his wife Rachel relocated from New-York to [Newport, Rhode Island](#). Hays was the son of Judah Hays, one of the early Sephardic [Jews](#) to arrive in the New World via Holland. He would be one of the first to introduce Masonry (King David's Lodge) to Rhode Island and later Massachusetts. The Hays family would also be one of the original benefactors of Newport's [Touro Synagogue](#). Because of the British occupation during the Revolution, the family would remove first to Kingston, Jamaica and then to [Boston](#), where it would be joined by his widowed sister [Reyna Touro](#) and her young children [Abraham Touro](#), [Judah Touro](#), and [Rebecca Touro](#). This extended family of Hays and Touro would reside in the North end of [Boston](#) on fashionable Middle Street (now Hanover). [Judah](#) would be born in Newport while the Battle of Bunker Hill was raging. Judah's father, [Isaac Touro](#), died when he was eight and his Uncle Moses Michael Hays in [Boston](#) raised him. Hays raised his children, nephews and niece as practicing Jews even though they were the only Jewish family in all of [Boston](#) at the time. The Hays' [Boston](#) home also included close associations with Thomas Paine, Paul Revere, and future abolitionist leader Samuel J. May. Judah would relocate from [Boston](#) to New Orleans in 1801 to seek his fortune.



TOURO SYNAGOGUE

TOURO SYNAGOGUE

1770

In 1760 Naphtali Hart Myers had donated a candelabrum that was being used in the [Touro Synagogue](#) of [Newport, Rhode Island](#). In 1765 Abraham Rodriguez Mendez had donated two more, more or less like it. At this point the international slavetrader and commodity trader [Aaron Lopez](#), the President of the synagogue, donated a fourth candelabrum inscribed with his own name, making up an almost matching set of four.¹⁰

JUDAISM



(According to Samuel Greene Arnold's HISTORY OF RHODE ISLAND published in 1859, Volume II, pages 304, 321, and 337, during this year the legislature of Rhode Island considered, but rejected, a bill to prohibit importation of [slaves](#). Since such a bill would have substantially damaged the business activities of Aaron Lopez, it seems at least remotely possible that this fourth candelabrum was donated to the synagogue as a way of petitioning the Deity that the bill in the colonial legislature be defeated, or in expression of gratitude for the defeat of the bill. I interrogated the tour guide as to what would cause a person to donate something inscribed with his own name, to be placed on public view in a public place, and she responded that she simply couldn't speculate as to motives. —Actually, what I was doing was causing her to focus in on the inscribed name "Aaron Lopez," because I wanted to find out whether she would take advantage of an opportunity like that to segue into some remarks about the [international slave trade](#). It was my little good-cop interrogation trick — I wanting



10. Where did the money come from, with which to purchase this nice inscribed candelabrum? Was it blood money? In this year, it is estimated by Alexander Boyd Hawes, [Rhode Island](#) fitted out 16 [negreros](#) for the coast of the continent of Africa to obtain fresh bodies for the [international slave trade](#). Do I have information that any one of these 16 slave ships belonged to or was being fitted out by [Aaron Lopez](#) of [Newport](#)? I do not. It is very likely that not all 16 of these bottoms were owned by or were being fitted out by Rhode Island Jews. It is rather more than possible, that some of these 16 were owned by or were being fitted out by Rhode Island Quakers. We can estimate roughly that at least 1,700 black Africans were taken over the ocean on the dreaded Middle Passage in this year by these vessels.

to see what she would say and what she wouldn't.



She didn't seize this opportunity — which adequately answered the actual question I had been refraining from asking. —She and I agreed, however, that such a circumstance is quite different from the usual sort of inscription, in which something given as a memorial to a deceased loved one is inscribed with “in memory of,” followed by a name.)

W.E. Burghardt Du Bois: In 1652 Rhode Island passed a law designed to prohibit life slavery in the colony. It declared that “Whereas, there is a common course practised amongst English men to buy negers, to that end they may have them for service or slaves forever; for the preventing of such practices among us, let it be ordered, that no blacke mankind or white being forced by covenant bond, or otherwise, to serve any man or his assignes longer than ten yeares, or untill they come to bee twentie four yeares of age, if they bee taken in under fourteen, from the time of their cominge within the liberties of this Collonie. And at the end or terme of ten yeares to sett them free, as the manner is with the English servants. And that man that will not let them goe free, or shall sell them away elsewhere, to that end that they may bee enslaved to others for a long time, hee or they shall forfeit to the Collonie forty pounds.”¹¹

This law was for a time enforced,¹² but by the beginning of the

11. RHODE ISLAND COLONIAL RECORD, I. 240.

12. Cf. letter written in 1681: NEW ENGLAND REGISTER, XXXI. 75-6. Cf. also Arnold, HISTORY OF RHODE ISLAND, I. 240.



TOURO SYNAGOGUE

TOURO SYNAGOGUE

eighteenth century it had either been repealed or become a dead letter; for the Act of 1708 recognized perpetual slavery, and laid an impost of £3 on Negroes imported.¹³ This duty was really a tax on the transport trade, and produced a steady income for twenty years.¹⁴ From the year 1700 on, the citizens of this State engaged more and more in the carrying trade, until Rhode Island became the greatest slave-trader in America. Although she did not import many slaves for her own use, she became the clearing-house for the trade of other colonies. Governor Cranston, as early as 1708, reported that between 1698 and 1708 one hundred and three vessels were built in the State, all of which were trading to the West Indies and the Southern colonies.¹⁵ They took out lumber and brought back molasses, in most cases making a slave voyage in between. From this, the trade grew. Samuel Hopkins, about 1770, was shocked at the state of the trade: more than thirty distilleries were running in the colony, and one hundred and fifty vessels were in the slave-trade.¹⁶ "Rhode Island," said he, "has been more deeply interested in the slave-trade, and has enslaved more Africans than any other colony in New England." Later, in 1787, he wrote: "The inhabitants of Rhode Island, especially those of Newport, have had by far the greater share in this traffic, of all these United States. This trade in human species has been the first wheel of commerce in Newport, on which every other movement in business has chiefly depended. That town has been built up, and flourished in times past, at the expense of the blood, the liberty, and happiness of the poor Africans; and the inhabitants have lived on this, and by it have gotten most of their wealth and riches."¹⁷

The Act of 1708 was poorly enforced. The "good intentions" of its framers "were wholly frustrated" by the clandestine "hiding and conveying said negroes out of the town [Newport] into the country, where they lie concealed."¹⁸ The act was accordingly strengthened by the Acts of 1712 and 1715, and made to apply to importations by land as well as by sea.¹⁹ The Act of 1715, however, favored the trade by admitting African Negroes free of duty. The chaotic state of Rhode Island did not allow England often to review her legislation; but as soon as the Act of 1712 came to notice it was disallowed, and accordingly repealed in 1732.²⁰ Whether the Act of 1715 remained, or whether any other duty act was passed, is not clear.

While the foreign trade was flourishing, the influence of the Friends and of other causes eventually led to a movement against slavery as a local institution. Abolition societies multiplied, and in 1770 an abolition bill was ordered by the Assembly, but

13. The text of this act is lost (COLONIAL RECORD, IV. 34; Arnold, HISTORY OF RHODE ISLAND, II. 31). The Acts of Rhode Island were not well preserved, the first being published in Boston in 1719. Perhaps other whole acts are lost.

14. E.g., it was expended to pave the streets of Newport, to build bridges, etc.: RHODE ISLAND COLONIAL RECORD, IV. 191-3, 225.

15. RHODE ISLAND COLONIAL RECORD, IV. 55-60.

16. Patten, REMINISCENCES OF SAMUEL HOPKINS (1843), page 80.

17. Hopkins, WORKS (1854), II. 615.

18. Preamble of the Act of 1712.

19. RHODE ISLAND COLONIAL RECORD, IV. 131-5, 138, 143, 191-3.

20. RHODE ISLAND COLONIAL RECORD, IV. 471.



TOURO SYNAGOGUE

TOURO SYNAGOGUE

it was never passed.²¹ Four years later the city of Providence resolved that "as personal liberty is an essential part of the natural rights of mankind," the importation of slaves and the system of slavery should cease in the colony.²² This movement finally resulted, in 1774, in an act "prohibiting the importation of Negroes into this Colony," – a law which curiously illustrated the attitude of Rhode Island toward the slave-trade. The preamble of the act declared: "Whereas, the inhabitants of America are generally engaged in the preservation of their own rights and liberties, among which, that of personal freedom must be considered as the greatest; as those who are desirous of enjoying all the advantages of liberty themselves, should be willing to extend personal liberty to others; – Therefore," etc. The statute then proceeded to enact "that for the future, no negro or mulatto slave shall be brought into this colony; and in case any slave shall hereafter be brought in, he or she shall be, and are hereby, rendered immediately free...." The logical ending of such an act would have been a clause prohibiting the participation of Rhode Island citizens in the slave-trade. Not only was such a clause omitted, but the following was inserted instead: "Provided, also, that nothing in this act shall extend, or be deemed to extend, to any negro or mulatto slave brought from the coast of Africa, into the West Indies, on board any vessel belonging to this colony, and which negro or mulatto slave could not be disposed of in the West Indies, but shall be brought into this colony. Provided, that the owner of such negro or mulatto slave give bond ... that such negro or mulatto slave shall be exported out of the colony, within one year from the date of such bond; if such negro or mulatto be alive, and in a condition to be removed."²³ In 1779 an act to prevent the sale of slaves out of the State was passed,²⁴ and in 1784, an act gradually to abolish slavery.²⁵ Not until 1787 did an act pass to forbid participation in the slave-trade. This law laid a penalty of £100 for every slave transported and £1000 for every vessel so engaged.²⁶

21. Arnold, HISTORY OF RHODE ISLAND, II. 304, 321, 337. For a probable copy of the bill, see NARRAGANSETT HISTORICAL REGISTER, II. 299.

22. A man dying intestate left slaves, who became thus the property of the city; they were freed, and the town made the above resolve, May 17, 1774, in town meeting: Staples, ANNALS OF PROVIDENCE (1843), page 236.

23. RHODE ISLAND COLONIAL RECORD, VII. 251-2.

24. BARTLETT'S INDEX, page 329; Arnold, HISTORY OF RHODE ISLAND, II. 444; RHODE ISLAND COLONIAL RECORD, VIII. 618.

25. RHODE ISLAND COLONIAL RECORD, X. 7-8; Arnold, HISTORY OF RHODE ISLAND, II. 506.

26. BARTLETT'S INDEX, page 333; NARRAGANSETT HISTORICAL REGISTER, II. 298-9. The number of slaves in Rhode Island has been estimated as follows: –

In 1708, 426. RHODE ISLAND COLONIAL RECORD, IV. 59.

In 1730, 1,648. RHODE ISLAND HISTORICAL TRACTS, No. 19, pt. 2, page 99.

In 1749, 3,077. Williams, HISTORY OF THE NEGRO RACE IN AMERICA, I. 281.

In 1756, 4,697. Williams, HISTORY OF THE NEGRO RACE IN AMERICA, I. 281.

In 1774, 3,761. RHODE ISLAND COLONIAL RECORD, VII. 253.



TOURO SYNAGOGUE

TOURO SYNAGOGUE

1773

Pentecost: Rabbi Isaac Karigal, a visitor from Hebron, Palestine, delivered a sermon in the [Touro Synagogue](#) that was then printed in [Newport](#). This is to our knowledge the first instance of a sermon delivered in a synagogue in America being printed.

[RHODE ISLAND](#)
[JUDAISM](#)



TOURO SYNAGOGUE

TOURO SYNAGOGUE

1781

During a visit by General [George Washington](#) to [Newport, Rhode Island](#), a town meeting was held in the [Touro Synagogue](#).



JUDAISM

1781. Gen. Washington visited [Providence](#). His arrival was announced by a salute from the artillery. He was conducted to the house of Hon. Jabez Bowen (now Manufacturer's Hotel,) and the town was illuminated at night. Next day he dined with the citizens in the Court House, and in the evening attended a splendid ball. A formal address was presented to him by a committee of the most distinguished citizens, to which he made a felicitous reply, and expressed much gratification at the respectful attentions he received.



TOURO SYNAGOGUE

TOURO SYNAGOGUE

1788

If you have seen allegations concerning [antisemitic](#) remarks supposedly made by [George Washington](#) and [Benjamin Franklin](#) at the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia in 1787, warning all Americans against the insidious influence of the [Jews](#), please take into consideration that the primary authoritative source at present for the proceedings, Max Farrand (ed.) RECORDS OF THE FEDERAL CONVENTION, rev. ed., 4 volumes (New Haven and London, 1966, 1987) makes no reference to such antisemitic remarks by either the rural [slaveholder](#) Washington or the urban [slaveholder](#) Franklin. Washington's tolerant attitude toward Jews is evidenced by a letter he would write to the leader of the [Touro Synagogue](#) of [Newport, Rhode Island](#) on August 17, 1790, in which he would say that the government of the US "gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance," and requires only that those who live under the protection of the government "demean [which is to say, conduct] themselves as good citizens" (Edwin Gaustad, A RELIGIOUS HISTORY OF AMERICA [NY, 1966], page 125). (Since this congregation of Jews was, among other things, investing in the [international slave trade](#), here the definition of what constituted demeaning oneself as a good citizen was a quite lax one, involving merely the generation of profits.) As for Franklin's attitude toward American Jews in 1787, in this very next year he contributed to a fund to help pay off the debt of the Jewish Congregation Mikveh Israel in Philadelphia. The "text" of Franklin's alleged remarks originated in a magazine [Liberation](#) on February 3, 1934 and then began to be reprinted by any number of Nazi and antisemitic groups. Charles A. Beard, in the [Jewish Frontier](#) for March 1935, demonstrated this to have been a fabrication. The matter was further investigated by Julian P. Boyd, in the [Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography](#), [LXI](#) (1937), 233-234, and he concurred that the text was an entire fabrication. For a more recent treatment, refer to Claude-Anne Lopez's "Franklin, Hitler, Mussolini, and the Internet" as part of her MY LIFE WITH BENJAMIN FRANKLIN (Yale UP, 2000, pages 3-16).



TOURO SYNAGOGUE

TOURO SYNAGOGUE

1790

At some point during the first part of this year, President [George Washington](#) paid another visit to [Newport](#) and its synagogue (it was not then known as the "[Touro Synagogue](#)"). He sat with the synagogue's President (Parnas) in the place of honor on the raised platform at the side, inside a rail and separate from the congregation. While there, a Jewish inventor named Jacob Isaacs presented the President with a bottle of water which he represented to be drinking water converted by a special secret process from sea water. Sampling this bottle of water, the President expressed himself highly satisfied with the result.²⁷

The primary purpose of the great white father, however, in visiting [Rhode Island](#) at this point, was to lean on local politicians to get the federal [Constitution](#) ratified:

1790. A State convention at Newport, in May, voted, to adopt the Federal Constitution; and this State came into the Union, the last of the original thirteen; and the event was commemorated by great public demonstrations of joy. The population of the town was 6380. President Washington again visited this town [[Providence](#)], with several distinguished public men in his suite. His arrival was announced by a discharge of artillery and the ringing of bells. A procession of citizens was formed, and he was conducted to the Golden Ball Inn, kept by Henry Rice, now the Mansion House. He was complimented by a public dinner, at which three hundred citizens attended. A very respectful and cordial address was made to him by a Committee appointed by the town, to which he suitably replied, and departed in the evening.

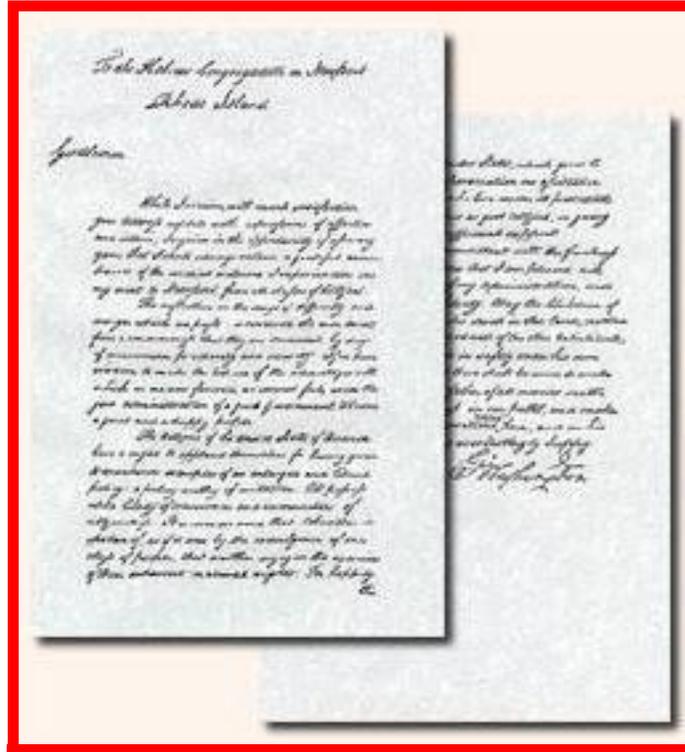
August 17, Tuesday: Il genio poetico appagato, a cantata by Giovanni Paisiello to words of Pagliuca was performed for the initial time, in San Ferdinando, [Naples](#).

President [George Washington](#) had received a communication from Moses Seixas, warden (*shamash*) of the [Touro Synagogue](#) which he had visited in 1781, in [Newport, Rhode Island](#), rejoicing in the religious liberty afforded by the United States.²⁸ In reply the president sent the famous letter "To the Hebrew Congregation in Newport, R.I." which since has been taken as the classical expression of religious liberty in America. In this response Washington politely observed "*For happily the Government of the United States, which gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance requires only that they who live under its protection should demean [which is to say, conduct] themselves as good citizens in giving it on all occasions their effectual support*" (Edwin Gaustad, A RELIGIOUS HISTORY OF AMERICA. NY, 1966, page 125 — this letter is preserved

27. The first record of anyone trying a desalting process is actually to be found in Pentateuch. When Moses and the people of Israel came upon the waters of Marah, which were bitter, "the Lord shewed him a tree, which when he had cast unto the waters, the waters were made sweet." The earliest interest in desalination processes arose from the danger of dying of thirst on the open sea. The US would become involved in 1791 when a technical report would be presented by President [George Washington](#)'s Secretary of State [Thomas Jefferson](#), describing the results of a simple distillation process. Jefferson as head of the Board of Arts would call in a panel of chemists to test the submitted device and, when it could not be made to function as expected, he would deny the application for patent. Later, when desalination of small quantities of water would become feasible, information on the procedure to be followed would be printed on the back of all the papers on board American vessels so that a source of fresh water might be obtained in an emergency. Then, in a later timeframe, conversion units would begin to be manufactured so that steam ships would not need to fill cargo bays with casks of fresh water with which to refill their boilers.

28. It was Moses Seixas who officiated at the Covenant of Circumcision (B'rith Milah), removing the foreskin of the male infant.

at the B'ai B'righ Building in [Washington DC](#)).



RHODE ISLAND RELIGION

Note: If you have seen allegations concerning anti-Semitic remarks supposedly made by this politician general and by the politician printer [Benjamin Franklin](#) at the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia in 1787, warning all Americans against the insidious influence of the Jews, please take into consideration that the primary authoritative source at present for the proceedings at this convention, Max Farrand (ed.) RECORDS OF THE FEDERAL CONVENTION (Revised Edition, 4 volumes, New Haven and London, 1966; 1987) makes no reference to any such remarks by either individual.

ANTISEMITISM

As for Franklin's attitude toward American Jews in 1787, in the very next year he contributed to a fund to help pay off the debt of the Jewish Congregation Mikveh Israel in Philadelphia. The "text" of Franklin's alleged remarks originated in a magazine [Liberation](#) on February 3, 1934 and then began to be reprinted by any number of Nazi and anti-Semitic groups. Charles A. Beard, in the [Jewish Frontier](#) for March 1935, demonstrated that this had to have been a fabrication. The matter was further investigated by Julian P. Boyd in the [Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography](#), LXI (1937), 233-234, who has concurred that the text was an entire fabrication.

JUDAISM



TOURO SYNAGOGUE

TOURO SYNAGOGUE

1792

The Moses Levy and Moses Seixas families lived together in a mansion at 29 Touro Street, near the [Touro Synagogue](#). Moses Levy, a merchant and trader of New-York and [Newport](#), was one of several Ashkenazi families in the town at that time. Moses Seixas was Cashier of the Bank of Rhode Island. He was also a founding member of the nation's oldest Jewish Masonic Lodge, King David in Newport, and Grand Master of the Masonic Order of [Rhode Island](#). In this year Moses Levy died, willing his interest in the mansion at 29 Touro Street to Moses Seixas.

HDT

WHAT?

INDEX

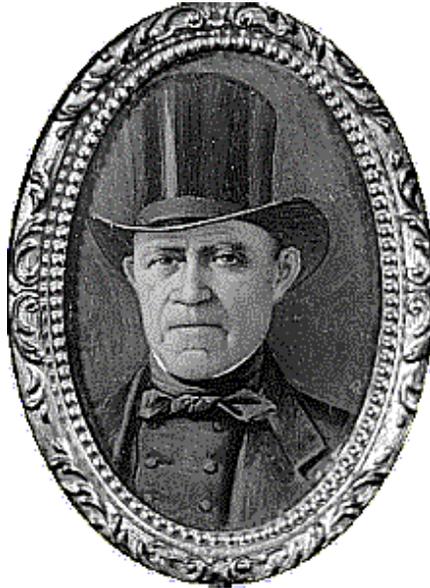
TOURO SYNAGOGUE

TOURO SYNAGOGUE

1800



Since services were no longer being held at the [Touro Synagogue](#), at this point the sacred scrolls were being kept safe in the home of Moses Seixas, the synagogue's warden (*shamash*). However, at about this point [Judah Touro](#), one of the rabbi's sons, moved back from [Boston](#) to [Newport, Rhode Island](#).





TOURO SYNAGOGUE

TOURO SYNAGOGUE

1806



THE NEW-ENGLAND [ALMANACK](#) FOR 1806. By Isaac Bickerstaff. [Providence](#), [Rhode Island](#): John Carter.

THE RHODE-ISLAND [ALMANAC](#) FOR 1806. By Benjamin West. [Newport](#) Oliver Farnsworth.

THE COLUMBIAN CALENDAR OR [ALMANAC](#) FOR 1806. By Remington Southwick. [Newport](#). Printed for the author.

A [LUNAR CALENDAR](#) FOR A. M. 5566. (1806) By [Moses Lopez](#). [Newport](#): Newport Mercury (a copy is preserved at the [Touro Synagogue](#)).

This Almanac was calculated for the Jews who at this time had a very prosperous colony in Newport.



TOURO SYNAGOGUE

TOURO SYNAGOGUE

1816



March: [Abraham Touro](#) moved to [Boston](#).

JUDAISM
TOURO SYNAGOGUE



TOURO SYNAGOGUE

TOURO SYNAGOGUE

1822



When Moses Lopez, the last Jew in [Newport, Rhode Island](#) moved to New-York, care of the [Touro Synagogue](#) was taken over by Nathan H. Gould, a Christian.²⁹ The ownership of the synagogue would devolve on the Shearith Israel Congregation in New-York. Abraham Touro died, bequeathing important sums of money for the maintenance of the abandoned synagogue structure “left to the bats and moles and to the occasional invasion, through its porches and windows, of boys who took pleasure in examining the furniture scattered about,” at which his father had once officiated while there had still been Jews living in the vicinity.

(The synagogue would later benefit also by a much larger bequest for its upkeep, \$10,000, sent by [Judah Touro](#), another son of the former rabbi, who would accumulate a fortune in New Orleans.)

29. I don't know what relation Nathan H. Gould was to Stephen Wanton Gould, but it is likely that they were related, not only because of the similarity in names but also because Moses Lopez and Stephen Wanton Gould were close friends. The [Newport](#) government roster for 1856 would list William C. Thurston, a carpenter who lived at 8 Cross Street, as “Keeper of Jews’ Synagogue.”



TOURO SYNAGOGUE

TOURO SYNAGOGUE

1827



June 20, Wednesday: Friend [Stephen Wanton Gould](#) wrote in his journal:

4th day 20 of 6th M 1827 / Been very buisy all day in attending to my old friend & acquaintance [Moses Lopez](#) who has been here on a visit to his old friends in [Newport](#) & departed this Afternoon in the Steam Boat for his home in NYork.-

RELIGIOUS SOCIETY OF FRIENDS

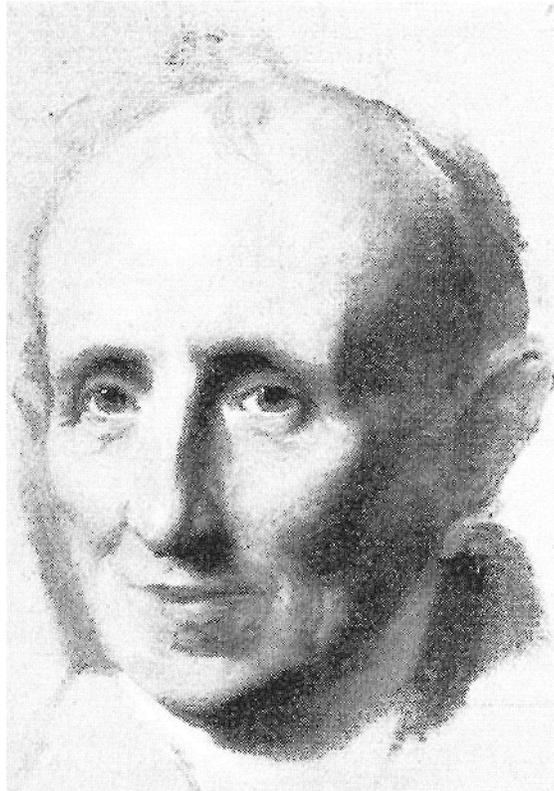


TOURO SYNAGOGUE

TOURO SYNAGOGUE

1828

 July 9, Wednesday: Gilbert Stuart died in Boston with his portrait of Nathaniel Bowditch still unfinished.

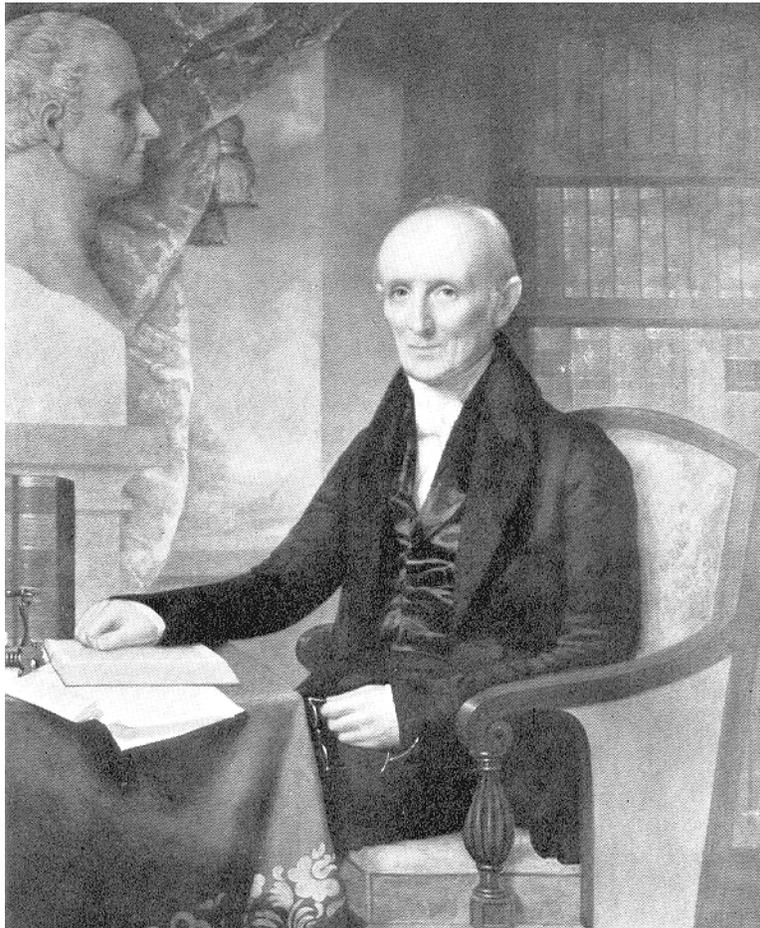


The East India Marine Society of Salem, which had commissioned this painting, would refuse to accept it in that condition, so Bowditch himself sprang for the cost and hung the portrait, the best one of him ever made, in a hall on the second floor of his home: The East India Marine Society would offer its cash instead to the painter Charles Osgood, and the portrait of Bowditch would be completed in 1835 or 1836:



TOURO SYNAGOGUE

TOURO SYNAGOGUE



Friend [Stephen Wanton Gould](#) wrote in his journal:

*4th day 9th of 7 M / Samuel Rodman was in town from [New Bedford](#)
- I had buisness with him on acct of [Moses Lopez](#), which brought
us together, & he called & set the evening with us a sociable
way. - the time passed on pleasant subjects & not a word on
disputable points. - but Oh the secret silent lamentation that
pervaded my heart on acct of the loss he has sustained in a
separation from the Society of which he was once a useful &
ornamental Member. -*

RELIGIOUS SOCIETY OF FRIENDS



TOURO SYNAGOGUE

TOURO SYNAGOGUE



October 1, Wednesday: Founding of the University of London on Gower Street in London (afterward, this would be known as University College). [Professor George Long](#) of the University of Virginia had returned to England to become professor of Greek there (until 1831, when he would become editor of the [Quarterly Journal of Education](#)). The Long family would reside in Jacksons Lane, Highgate, to the west of Hornsey and would have three female servants, a coachman, and a gardener. With them from America they had brought one of the family slaves, Jacob Walker, who in England would be assigned the role “M.S.” (male servant), and it is not known whether it was Jacob who was that coachman, or that gardener.

[Thomas Bell](#) was made a fellow of the Royal Society of London.

In [Newport, Rhode Island](#), Friend [Stephen Wanton Gould](#) wrote in his journal:

4th day 1st 10th M 1828 / Today Joseph S Tillinghast from N Bedford on his way to NYork Hudson &c called & dined with us & took letters for John whom he expects to see next first day. – he went in the Steam Boat Connecticut this Afternoon. –

RELIGIOUS SOCIETY OF FRIENDS

There's a sketchy painting above the case that holds the Torah scrolls at the [Touro Synagogue](#) in [Newport](#). It is a painting of the short names used, in the Hebrew language, for the Ten Commandments that Moses received from YHWH on Mount Sinai. I don't have any better photo of the crude painting in question, which also depicts three golden crowns, than this one, for your edification,



TOURO SYNAGOGUE

TOURO SYNAGOGUE

but here is a modern representation of the Hebrew characters in question. Read them from right to left:



One of the stories that grew up in Newport over the years had to do with those three golden crowns we can see so nicely depicted at the top of that painting. The story was that the synagogue building had been saved from being trashed during the occupation of the town in Revolutionary War years, when so many of the buildings in the abandoned town were being stripped for kindling to keep the occupying British soldiers warm, because the soldiers presumed that this building must have something to do with the King of England.

Another of the stories that grew up was that this painting, since it is, allegedly, “so fine,” must have been by the famous painter Gilbert Stuart, who resided in nearby [North Kingstown](#). However, it is not listed as one of his known works, nor do we know that he ever painted anything even remotely like this.

As anyone who reads Hebrew who now visits this Newport [tourist trap](#) can look up and plainly see, the



TOURO SYNAGOGUE

TOURO SYNAGOGUE

character that is shown in this painting as the third letter, in the captions of the 7th, 8th, 9th, and 10th Commandments in the left column, is not correct! Four of the ten labels have been reduced to nonsense! If that painting had been hanging up there above the case of Torahs while the building was being used for Jewish worship services during the 18th Century, why would it have been that none of the members of this congregation, and none of the honored Jewish visitors to this synagogue, ever informed anyone of this error in the painting, and why would it have been that nobody went and fetched a ladder and some oil paint and climbed up there and touched over the linguistic error with a few simple dabs? This is what the character does look like \aleph (the artist did get the character right when he painted it in the 6th Commandment, at the top of the left column!), and this is what it might have been made to look like with a few more dabs of paint, had anyone known to correct that painting: \aleph

Granted, the Marranos³⁰ who created this synagogue had been living a submerged life as pretend Christians³¹ since the Inquisition in Spain in Portugal, and granted, they had only just gotten back into the process of recovering their cultural roots — but surely some of them must have known enough Hebrew to be able to recite the Ten Commandments! So, why didn't they correct this painting?

We discover in the records of the General Assembly of Rhode Island, that on this date the sum of \$12.⁰⁰ was paid to the clerk for the town of Newport, Benjamin Baker Howland, who was treasurer of the Newport Savings Bank and a local historian and artist, as reimbursement for a painting of the captions in Hebrew of the Ten Commandments.³² Clearly, Mr. Howland had as little actual knowledge of Hebrew as any other deacon of the local 1st Baptist Church. This painting of his had been created as a mere piece of esoterica, only marking this structure as having formerly been in use as a synagogue, and there would be no opportunity to discover and correct its error — since in point of fact, during the decades of the 1830s, 1840s, and 1850s, there would be no religious services whatever in the structure — since in point of fact, there were no longer any Jews residing in Newport.

JUDAISM

Maybe, as a deacon in the 1st [Baptist](#) Church, this Howland should have stuck to designing Christian T-shirts

30. Marrano = a Spanish or Portuguese Jew of the late Middle Ages who converted to Christianity, especially one forcibly converted but adhering secretly to Judaism.

31. For instance, for the first twenty or so years of his life, the President of this congregation, [Aaron Lopez](#), had been living in Portugal as a Christian by the name of Duarte Lopez. He had been under such deep cover that he and his wife, who was always called "Anna" in Portugal, had had their wedding ceremony in a Catholic church. It was only after they were safely in Rhode Island that they were able to live openly under their given names Aaron and Abigail.

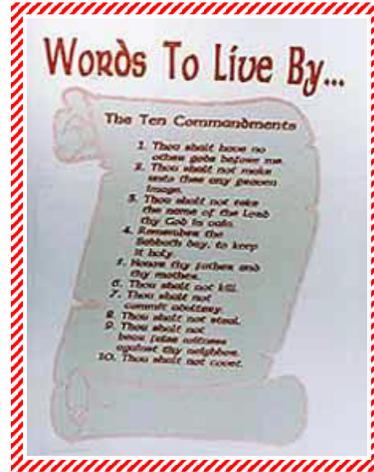
32. This is a "Mayflower" family and as you might imagine, there have been any number of Benjamin Howlands. A Benjamin Howland (1755-1821), had been a Democratic legislator in Rhode Island legislature, and had from 1804 to 1809, as a Jeffersonian Republican, served as one of the US Senators from Rhode Island. This clerk Benjamin Baker Howland of 1828 was not the son of this Senator Benjamin Howland who died in 1821. He was, instead, the son of Henry Howland and Susan Baker Howland, and had been born in Newport on December 11, 1787. At an early age he had been thrown upon his own resources, and having a taste for drawing and painting, had begun the study of portraiture under Robert Feke. In September 1825 he had succeeded Charles Gyles as town clerk of Newport, and soon afterwards became probate clerk. For many years he would be reelected without opposition, and he would serve his community as clerk until 1875. He died on October 20, 1877 and there is now a portrait of him in the mayor's office.



TOURO SYNAGOGUE

TOURO SYNAGOGUE

for sale to the summer tourists:



So it is clearly false, that the British troops of occupation spared the wood in this building because they saw those three golden crowns and thought of their monarch. The painting in question wouldn't come into existence for another two human generations! More probably, the reason why this building was spared was that some British officer came along and said to himself "Now here's a nice brick building, neat and spacious, with a raised platform at one end of a columned hall, to properly set off my desk and chair — I think this is the one I'll have for my headquarters."

And Gilbert Stewart? Give me a break, take a close look at the actual painting and recognize that a child could have painted something like this on the basis of a paint-by-the-numbers kit purchased at the K-Mart.

The preposterous stories that once circulated about this synagogue painting present an interesting example of the dangers posed by pseudohistorical accretion tendencies.



TOURO SYNAGOGUE

TOURO SYNAGOGUE

1830



During the decades of the 1830s, 1840s, and 1850s, religious services in the [Touro Synagogue](#) in [Newport](#), on [Rhode Island](#)'s [Aquidneck Island](#), having been long since discontinued, and the emptied building allegedly placed under the care of a Friend, that conveniently situated empty structure, which had originally been built for reasons unclear to us now over some sort of root cellar, may have been made available for use as a station on the [Underground Railroad](#).

JUDAISM



According to the [ProJo](#) (our local excuse for a newspaper):

Newport ... has the distinction of being the home of several stops on the Underground Railroad.... Newport's Touro Synagogue was a stop along the way.... By the early 1800s, regular services stopped and the synagogue's doors were closed. There would not be another Jewish congregation there until 1883. But from the 1830s through the 1850s, the building's [Quaker](#) caretaker offered the use of the empty structure to the free Africans living in Newport. ...it was conveniently located in the center of the free black community. Just how large that community was can be learned from the 1770 census, which reported that nearly a third of the Newport population of 9,000, or 2,800, was of African heritage, and most were free. (The Rhode Island legislature outlawed the importation of [slaves](#) to the colony in 1774, though censuses still found more than 300 slaves in Newport County alone in 1790.) ... Over the years, the story has grown that a trap door in the *bimah*, the platform where the rabbi stands to lead the service, was installed as part of the Underground Railroad. Not so. The trap door has been there from the building's beginning. "We feel it was put in by the builders of the synagogue as a symbol of their past persecution," says B. Schlessinger Ross, director of The Society of Friends of Touro Synagogue. Similar trap doors have been found in synagogues in Spain and Portugal and, Ross says, perhaps in those countries they were used as a means of escape from the Catholic church's persecution of Jews during the Inquisition.... At 54 Williams Street, at the corner of Thomas Street, is the Rice family home,



TOURO SYNAGOGUE

TOURO SYNAGOGUE

Newport's third documented stop on the Underground Railroad. The house was built in the mid-1800s by free black Isaac Rice, whom Charles L. Blockson, author of *The Hippocrene Guide to The Underground Railroad*, calls "the most prominent African-American in the state of Rhode Island." Blockson calls Rice's home "a haven" for runaway slaves. Rice was a gardener for Governor William C. Gibbs and planted trees that still grow in Touro Park. Rice was born in Providence in 1794, and his family moved to Newport when he was young. His home was visited by Frederick Douglass and Harriet Tubman.

Note: This structure would not be referred to as the "Touro Synagogue" until, at about the midpoint of the century, [Abraham Touro](#) and [Judah Touro](#), sons of the first rabbi [Isaac Touro](#) who had moved to New-York and made their fortunes, would donate the exceedingly large sum of \$20,000 toward its reconstruction, renovation, and maintenance. (For comparative purposes, the sum of money donated by Nicholas Brown in September 1804 to the College of Rhode Island, which had caused the renaming of that school as "[Brown University](#)," had been \$5,000.) At this point the structure that is now so lovely was just a decrepit almost-abandoned building that, after the general destruction brought to the island during its Revolutionary War occupation by the British Army, had served not only as a synagogue but also as a Rhode Island Supreme Court building, as a Rhode Island General Assembly building, and as a Newport town meeting hall — and the name "Touro" had been in no way associated with it.

We need to bear in mind that although this was a part of the world from which Jews were generally absent, this was not a part of the world from which [Antisemitism](#) was absent. This phenomenon can only be understood in terms of the blatant Antisemitism which the early Christian church had embedded into the gospels according to Mark and then according to Matthew, especially Matthew 27:25. Although this poem by [Jones Very](#) had not yet been created, I will employ it here for purposes of illustration of that sad fact:

The Jew

Thou art more deadly than the Jew of old,
Thou hast his weapons hidden in thy speech;
And though thy hand from me thou dost withhold,
They pierce where sword and spear could never reach.
Thou hast me fenced about with thorny talk,
To pierce my soul with anguish while I hear;
And while amid thy populous streets I walk,
I feel at every step the entering spear;³³
Go, cleanse thy lying mouth of all its guile
That from the will within thee ever flows;
Go, cleanse the temple thou dost now defile,
Then shall I cease to feel thy heavy blows;
And come and tread with me the path of peace,

33. Bear in mind that it is not the poet who is the speaker, but the Jew who experienced on the cross the "entering spear."



TOURO SYNAGOGUE

TOURO SYNAGOGUE

And from thy brother's harm forever cease.

Now, in regard to that trap door leading down into an underground room: this was an all-seasons building, with a wood furnace. The wood furnace was located in this underground room, along with the cords of wood that were needed to keep the building heated while it was being used for divine worship. It is as simple as that. In modern times, for fire-insurance purposes, the heating plant for the building has been modernized, and relocated to underneath a slab in the lawn. Therefore, the underground room now stands empty. However, it was never intended to serve as a place of refuge, and in point of fact, there is no evidence whatever that it ever served such a function. That is not to say that this structure never, during its antebellum period of abandonment, when a [Quaker](#) caretaker had custody of the key, while it was in the middle of the firmly black district of Newport, served as a rent-free haven for black families in need — it is merely to say that, to all intents and purposes, this stuff about the underground room being a part of the Underground Railroad is nothing but stuff and nonsense. There are root cellars all over America with quite as good, or as poor, credentials.

By contrast with this Newport fantasy stuff, we do know that an active [Underground Railroad](#), one of the 1st in the country, would be quietly operated by Paumanok Long Island Quakers, although we do not know the date on which this activity began. They were helping slaves escape through Long Island and upstate New York. The Parsons family were particularly active in this endeavor. Friend Samuel Bowne Parsons, a member of Flushing Monthly Meeting, was later said to be able to brag that he had assisted more [slaves](#) to freedom than any other man in Queens County. A number of Quakers associated with that Meeting were both influential and wealthy. Merchants Robert Murray and his son, John Murray, Jr., (married to Friend Catherine Bowne), helped found The New York Society for the Manumission of Slaves and the Free School Society. The Free School Society provided the first public school instruction in New York City. Friend John Murray, Jr. was also known for his acts of benevolence. Both of these men are buried in the graveyard in back of the Flushing meetinghouse. Murray's brother, Friend Lindley Murray, was a well known grammarian whose publishing business was extremely successful. The Parsons family developed a thriving nursery which introduced a number of plants to America, including the Japanese Maple, the flowering dog-wood and the Weeping Beech. Friend Samuel Parsons, Jr., a partner of Calvert Vaux, became the Landscape Architect for the City of New York and provided many of the plantings for Central Park and Prospect Park. He also helped design many important parks and common areas in New York City and across seventeen states.





TOURO SYNAGOGUE

TOURO SYNAGOGUE

1843

The fences and curbing around the [Touro Synagogue](#) in [Newport, Rhode Island](#) were designed by Isaiah Rogers of Boston and paid for through a bequest from Abraham Touro.

Republication of the Reverend John Callender's 1739 account, AN HISTORICAL DISCOURSE, ON THE CIVIL AND RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS OF THE COLONY OF [RHODE ISLAND](#) AND PROVIDENCE PLANTATIONS, IN NEW-ENGLAND, IN AMERICA, FROM THE FIRST SETTLEMENT, 1638, TO THE END OF THE FIRST CENTURY.

CENTENNIAL DISCOURSE



TOURO SYNAGOGUE

TOURO SYNAGOGUE

1850

August 2, Saturday: Documentation of the [international slave trade](#), per W.E. Burghardt Du Bois: “Message from the President ... relative to the searching of American vessels by British ships of war.” –SENATE EXECUTIVE DOCUMENT, 31 Cong. 1 sess. XIV. No. 66.

A secular town meeting had been held in the vacant synagogue building in [Newport](#) in 1781, and until 1784 [Rhode Island](#) had had its General Assembly there and the state’s Supreme Court had met there, and then the building had stood vacant and dilapidated under a [Quaker](#) caretaker who may possibly have used it as a waystation in the [Underground Railroad](#), which is to say, as affordable (free) temporary housing for persons in transit (nope, we’re not talking about folks hiding in the basement here, underneath that famous trap door where obviously the Jews had kept their firewood and their wood stove, we’re just talking about folks living there for awhile, in this dilapidated black district of the town where they were reasonably safe). On this day, after extensive refurbishment by use of the funds supplied by the Touro brothers of New-York (successful sons of the first rabbi of the synagogue), “[Touro Synagogue](#)” was reconsecrated for religious services.



JUDAISM



TOURO SYNAGOGUE

TOURO SYNAGOGUE

1852

July: Until September, [Henry Wadsworth Longfellow](#) would be renting Charles T. Hazard's very spacious "Cliff House" (it no longer exists) at [Newport](#) on [Aquidneck Island](#) in [Rhode Island](#) and there played host to, among others, Julia Ward and his wife Frances's brother Thomas Gold Appleton.³⁴

Here we are, in the clover-fields on the cliff, at Hazard's house; near the beach, with the glorious sea unrolling its changing billows before us. Here, in truth, the sea speaks Italian; at Nahant it speaks Norse. Went this morning into the Jewish burying-ground, with a polite old gentleman who keeps the key. It is a shady nook, at the corner of two dusty, frequented streets, with an iron fence and a granite gateway, ... Over one of the graves grows a weeping willow, - a grandchild of the willow over Napoleon's grave in St. Helena.

After the described visit to the Jewish Cemetery at the intersection of Kay Street, Touro Street, and Bellevue Avenue, opened in 1677, the oldest Jewish burial ground in the USA, he began a poem that would appear in [Putnam's Monthly Magazine](#) for July 1854:

[on following screen]

34. Late June through Labor Day would become the "summer visiting season" for the rows of "cottages" along Belmont Avenue in [Newport](#).



The Jewish Cemetery at [Newport](#)

How strange it seems! These Hebrews in their graves,
Close by the street of this fair seaport town,
Silent beside the never-silent waves,
At rest in all this moving up and down!

The trees are white with dust, that o'er their sleep
Wave their broad curtains in the southwind's breath,
While underneath these leafy tents they keep
The long, mysterious Exodus of Death.

And these sepulchral stones, so old and brown,
That pave with level flags their burial-place,
Seem like the tablets of the Law, thrown down
And broken by Moses at the mountain's base.

The very names recorded here are strange,
Of foreign accent, and of different climes;
Alvares and Rivera interchange
With Abraham and Jacob of old times.

“Blessed be God! for he created Death!”
The mourner said, “and Death is rest and peace!”
Then added, in the certainty of faith,
“And giveth Life that nevermore shall cease.”

Closed are the portals of their Synagogue,
No Psalms of David now the silence break,
No Rabbi reads the ancient Decalogue
In the grand dialect the Prophets spake.

Gone are the living, but the dead remain,
And not neglected; for a hand unseen,
Scattering its bounty, like a summer rain,
Still keeps their graves and their remembrance green.

How came they here? What burst of Christian hate,
What persecution, merciless and blind,
Drove o'er the sea -that desert desolate -
These Ishmaels and Hagars of mankind?

They lived in narrow streets and lanes obscure,
Ghetto and Judenstrass, in mirk and mire;
Taught in the school of patience to endure
The life of anguish and the death of fire.

All their lives long, with the unleavened bread
And bitter herbs of exile and its fears,
The wasting famine of the heart they fed,
And slaked its thirst with marah of their tears.

Anathema maranatha! was the cry
That rang from town to town, from street to street:
At every gate the accursed Mordecai
Was mocked and jeered, and spurned by Christian feet.

Pride and humiliation hand in hand
Walked with them through the world where'er they went;
Trampled and beaten were they as the sand,
And yet unshaken as the continent.



TOURO SYNAGOGUE

TOURO SYNAGOGUE

For in the background figures vague and vast
Of patriarchs and of prophets rose sublime,
And all the great traditions of the Past
They saw reflected in the coming time.

And thus forever with reverted look
The mystic volume of the world they read,
Spelling it backward, like a Hebrew book,
Till life became a Legend of the Dead.

But ah! what once has been shall be no more!
The groaning earth in travail and in pain
Brings forth its races, but does not restore,
And the dead nations never rise again.

TOURO SYNAGOGUE

[HDT](#)[WHAT?](#)[INDEX](#)

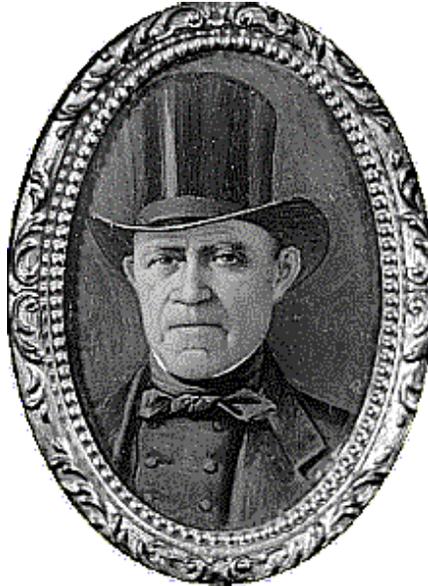
TOURO SYNAGOGUE

TOURO SYNAGOGUE

1854

[Judah Touro](#) died, leaving more than half a million dollars to various [Catholic](#), Protestant, and [Jewish](#) charities (half a million dollars was serious money in those days). His will established, also, a Ministerial Fund for the empty synagogue in [Newport, Rhode Island](#) at which his father had once officiated while there were still Jews living in that town.

[TOURO SYNAGOGUE](#)





TOURO SYNAGOGUE

TOURO SYNAGOGUE

1855

[Judah Touro](#), youngest son of Rabbi [Isaac Touro](#), had relocated to New Orleans in his early twenties and had accumulated a considerable fortune there in the Deep South as a merchant/trader. At the time of his death his estate totaled nearly \$1,000,000, most of which was designated in his will to charitable organizations, orphanages, religious institutions, and towards good works in various cities including the place of his birth, [Newport, Rhode Island](#). His bequest would provide a public park, and preserve the historic Old Stone Mill.

In [Providence](#), the [Quakers](#) were not doing nearly so well. The [Yearly Meeting School](#) was forced to send its young scholars home and shut its doors due to bills that could not be paid. To correct this situation, steps needed to be taken to reduce the debt from more than \$8,000 to about \$3,000 — steps such as re-engaging the principals Joseph and Gertrude W. Cartland on a contract system. After five months the school was able to reopen its doors. This crisis would lead to some easement of school regulations. In addition, in the future there were to be graduation ceremonies during which the graduating scholars were to be handed diplomas.³⁵

35. This matter referred to above, the re-engagement of the school's principals on "a contract system" in 1855, deserves some comment. As a historian, to do a good job, I should be able to establish the crossover point, at which the school transited from being a religious school, a school offering a religious education to young members of a religion — to being the sort of hoighty-toighty Ivy League preparatory academy for all and sundry families of the Providence rising classes which as we are all profoundly aware, it has by now become. For the first five years or so of my investigation of the records of this school, I had been presuming that probably I was going to discover this crossover point at which Quakerism became mere lip service to Quakerism to have been reached just prior to the middle of the 20th Century, as this institution made its transition from being a boarding school attracting Quaker youth from all over New England, into being a day school catering to the middleclass families of Providence's toney East Side (plus, incidentally, whatever few Quaker youth happened to reside within daily commuting distance who could afford the high fees or could secure a scholarship). When I discovered, in the records of the school, however, these records of incentive compensation for its headmasters, this caused me to recognize that the crossover into disingenuity may have already been well in the past, by that late point at which the boarding-school aspect of the school's function had disintegrated beyond repair. Incentive compensation is utterly incompatible with charter — one simply cannot allow a person to run an institution and divert half its annual surplus into his own pocket, and anticipate that that person will behave in any manner other than to maximize the income flowing into his own pocket. This is the sort of situation which is described, in economics, and described quite properly, as "moral hazard." At this point, the school's charter to provide an environment guarded from the lay world in which a Quaker education might best be conveyed to Quaker youth, was inevitably abandoned — abandoned because the headmaster's incentive compensation was henceforth to be based not upon fulfilling that charge, but instead upon implementing a contrary agenda of puffing up the school's enrollment and the school's charges and the school's cash flow, while holding down expenditures, in such manner as to maximize a flow into his own pocket. Under such a "contract system" the eventual result, that after a period of evolutionary adjustment and accommodation this Quaker school would be effectively a lay school, and that this Quaker endowment would no longer be being used for Quaker education, should have been anticipatable. For it has always been well understood that:

²⁴ No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.

— MATTHEW

6:24 [MATTHEW 6:24](#)



TOURO SYNAGOGUE

TOURO SYNAGOGUE

1856

In [Newport, Rhode Island](#) a carpenter who lived at 8 Cross Street, William C. Thurston, was functioning as the “Keeper of Jews’ Synagogue.” (If anybody has any idea that these perennial wide-eyed tales about the empty [Touro Synagogue](#) being used in antebellum years as a station on the [Underground Railroad](#) might possibly have some grain of truth to them — why, dude, this is the guy to put under your microscope. Was this William C. Thurston perchance a Quaker abolitionist?)

Having been while a Whig a volunteer counsel for the [Underground Railroad](#), [Rutherford B. Hayes](#) helped found the [Ohio](#) Republican party.



TOURO SYNAGOGUE

TOURO SYNAGOGUE

1865

August 18, Friday: Since the synagogue in [Newport, Rhode Island](#) had been restored with ample funding from the [Touro](#) family, and a ministerial fund created, worship in that once-neglected building had been resumed. However, there does seem occasionally to have been something of a problem in collecting together the minimum number of Jews, ten, necessary for a proper public worship. Hence the following notice, of this date:

Should the 10th man ever be wanted please address M. Miranda,
219 North Main Street, [Providence](#), R.I. Happy to come any time.

JUDAISM



TOURO SYNAGOGUE

TOURO SYNAGOGUE

1881

[Touro Synagogue](#) had remained closed until this point, except for occasional services conducted by summer visitors. However, at this point, new Jewish inhabitants, people unconnected to the previous group of Marranos,³⁶ petitioned the city council of [Newport, Rhode Island](#), which had been acting as trustee for the Judah Touro fund, for permission to use the synagogue and the income on a regular basis. When the rights to the building would be transferred to this new Congregation Shearith Israel, it would proceed to make provision for Sephardic services to be held there on high holy days.

JUDAISM

36. Marrano = a Spanish or Portuguese Jew of the late Middle Ages who converted to Christianity, especially one forcibly converted but adhering secretly to Judaism.



TOURO SYNAGOGUE

TOURO SYNAGOGUE

1883

Spring: During this year, [Touro Synagogue](#) was reconsecrated, the services being led by Abraham Pereira Mendes and his two sons. The last person to maintain the tenuous thread of Marrano³⁷ tradition in [Newport, Rhode Island](#) would be Henry S. Morais. After his death, a modified service would be instituted, such as switching to the Ashkenazi pronunciation of Hebrew, although services in the synagogue's original Sephardic rite would continue to be conducted by visiting rabbis.

JUDAISM

37. Marrano = a Spanish or Portuguese Jew of the late Middle Ages who converted to Christianity, especially one forcibly converted but adhering secretly to Judaism.

JUDAISM



TOURO SYNAGOGUE

TOURO SYNAGOGUE

1900

In the [Touro Synagogue](#), to supplement the seats around the walls of the room, pews were installed.

NEWPORT
RHODE ISLAND



TOURO SYNAGOGUE

TOURO SYNAGOGUE

1946

At the [Moses Brown School](#) in [Providence, Rhode Island](#), significant contributions were being made to the American Friends Service Committee.

Under “La Loi Mile. Marthe Richard,” the brothels of Paris were shut down and regulated medical examination of sex workers abandoned — such establishments had come to be regarded as venues of [slavery](#), although prostitution itself was quite OK and the demimondaines remained free to work the streets (the eponymous Mile. Richard was a member of the French Assembly).

In [Newport](#), dedication of the structure that had housed the 1st synagogue in what is now the United States of America, [Touro Synagogue](#) of Congregation Jeshuat Israel, as a national historical site.³⁸



Affixed to the south side of the exterior wall is a plaque with the following inscription:

**NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE
TOURO SYNAGOGUE
JESHUAT ISRAEL CONGREGATION
FOUNDED 1658 THIS OLDEST SYNAGOGUE BUILDING IN THE
UNITED STATES WAS DESIGNED BY PETER HARRISON. GROUND
WAS BROKEN AUGUST 1, 1759. IT WAS DEDICATED ON DECEMBER
2, 1763. HERE 1781-84 THE RHODE ISLAND GENERAL ASSEMBLY
MET, AND DURING WASHINGTON’S VISIT TO NEWPORT IN 1781 A
TOWN MEETING WAS HELD HERE. THE STATE SUPREME COURT
HELD SESSIONS HERE AT THAT PERIOD. THE BUILDING WAS**

38. Some of the Jews of this synagogue, like some of their Christian neighbors, such as the [Quakers](#) next door up the hill, had engaged in the [international slave trade](#). After their synagogue building, in what had become the bad part of town, had been deconsecrated, the empty structure, under a caretaker who was a Quaker, would find use occasionally, surreptitiously, for the harboring of escaping [slaves](#) as a station on the Underground Railroad, or so ’tis persistently said although I have never seen a scintilla of evidence to back up such claims (we all know that the way to make something true is to repeat it any number of times). —When you visit, and are proudly shown the must-see “secret hidey hole” beneath the lectern, for Heaven’s sake be polite and do not complicate matters by inquiring about participation in the international slave trade. Remember that the international slave trade wasn’t just for Jews.



TOURO SYNAGOGUE

TOURO SYNAGOGUE

**REOPENED FOR RELIGIOUS SERVICES ON AUGUST 2, 1850. IN
1790 GEORGE WASHINGTON WROTE TO THIS CONGREGATION THAT
... “HAPPILY THE GOVERNMENT OF THE UNITED STATES...
GIVES TO BIGOTRY NO SANCTION, TO PERSECUTION NO ASSISTANCE.”**



TOURO SYNAGOGUE

TOURO SYNAGOGUE

1954

A Restoration Committee undertook the refurbishing of the [Touro Synagogue](#) in [Newport, Rhode Island](#). For one thing, the rows of pews which had been installed in 1900 were discarded. The clock that Judah Jacobs of London, England had presented to the Congregation in 1769 (1767?) was restored. Its brass works still keep approximate time.



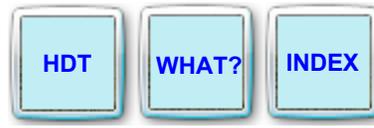
TOURO SYNAGOGUE

TOURO SYNAGOGUE

1963

December 15, Hanukkah: Rededication of the [Touro Synagogue](#).

NEWPORT
RHODE ISLAND



TOURO SYNAGOGUE

TOURO SYNAGOGUE

1974

At the [Moses Brown School](#) of the [Religious Society of Friends](#) in [Providence, Rhode Island](#), construction work began on a new building for the Lower School.

Publication by the school of William Paxton's MOSES BROWN SCHOOL: A HISTORY OF ITS THIRD HALF-CENTURY, 1919-1969 (Paxton was head of the school's English Department and this was billed as a "Continuation of Rayner W. Kelsey's Centennial History of Moses Brown School, 1819-1919").

The fences and curbing designed by Isaiah Rogers of Boston, that had been put in place in 1842 around the Jewish Cemetery on Bellevue Avenue as part of the bequest by [Judah Touro](#), and that had been put in place in 1843 around the [Touro Synagogue](#) as part of the bequest by [Abraham Touro](#), were renovated.

1982

February 22, Monday: On the 250th anniversary of the birth of President [George Washington](#), a 22¢ stamp was issued to commemorate the [Touro Synagogue](#) which he had visited in [Newport, Rhode Island](#), the expression their warden (*shamash*) Moses Seixas used in addressing Washington, “to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance,” and the letter by which Washington had responded to them, acknowledging them by repeating warden Moses Seixas’s phrase back to them:





TOURO SYNAGOGUE

TOURO SYNAGOGUE

1995

January 5, Thursday: Americans who were, ostensibly, Christians, such as the good Baptist [John Brown](#) of [Providence](#),



[Rhode Island](#), had in antebellum years been much more heavily involved in the [international slave trade](#) than Jews such as those of the [Touro Synagogue](#) in [Newport](#). Nevertheless, [antisemitic](#) black militants had begun to identify American Jews with slave trading — as if Jews had been primarily or solely responsible. Therefore the American Historical Association passed a resolution: “The AHA ... condemns as false any statement alleging that Jews played a disproportionate role in the exploitation of slave labor or in the Atlantic slave trade.” A Jewish source has pointed out that:³⁹

39. The figure of 1,275 persons listed as having been imported by Jews or by partnerships including Jews is entirely made up of individuals imported to the USA by the one [Newport, Rhode Island](#) businessman, President of the congregation of [Touro Synagogue](#), [Aaron Lopez](#):



This individual admittedly funded some 200 ventures at sea, approximately 20 of which were slaving ventures. No other such businessman was cited in this study despite the fact that Lopez was most definitely not acting alone in Newport, and despite the fact that the firm with which he was affiliated had another major North American office, in the port of Charlestown SC. To arrive at such a statistic, slaves delivered to other destinations went uncounted. The quote is per Eli Faber’s SLAVERY AND THE JEWS: A HISTORICAL INQUIRY, in the “Occasional Paper Series” funded by Anne Bass Schneider and Dr. Louis Schneider of Fort Wayne IN for the Jewish Studies Program of Hunter College.



TOURO SYNAGOGUE

TOURO SYNAGOGUE

In all, 934 [Rhode Island](#) vessels are known to have transported slaves to the western hemisphere between 1709 and 1807. A total of 925 owners have been identified for these ships, of whom only 42, or 4.5%, were Jewish. Furthermore, only a minute fraction of [slaves](#) were carried on ships owned by Jewish merchants. Shipowners whose religion is identifiable are known to have transported a total of 64,708 slaves to the New World. Of these, only 1,275 slaves, or 1.9%, traveled on vessels owned by Jews and non-Jews in partnership. In contrast, 62,829 of the slaves, or 97 percent, were transported on ships owned exclusively by Rhode Island's non-Jewish merchants.

Lest there be any doubt about it: the [Quakers](#) of [Providence](#) want you to know that there were Quakers also who were involved in the [international slave trade](#) out of [Newport, Rhode Island](#). We know this, not because we know the names of all of the offending families –our researches, which have produced names such as Wanton, are as yet far from complete– but because we know that our meetings had to struggle with such persons, whoever they were, mired in their livelihood, in order to clear them and our association of this fault. This was a process which involved a good deal of time and a good deal of soul-searching, and was then covered over in a good deal of forgetting and self-satisfaction.

“MAGISTERIAL HISTORY” IS FANTASIZING: HISTORY IS CHRONOLOGY



TOURO SYNAGOGUE

TOURO SYNAGOGUE



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"It's all now you see. Yesterday won't be over until tomorrow and tomorrow began ten thousand years ago."

- Remark by character "Garin Stevens"
in William Faulkner's INTRUDER IN THE DUST



Prepared: April 30, 2015



TOURO SYNAGOGUE

TOURO SYNAGOGUE

ARRGH AUTOMATED RESEARCH REPORT

GENERATION HOTLINE



This stuff presumably looks to you as if it were generated by a human. Such is not the case. Instead, someone has requested that we pull it out of the hat of a pirate who has grown out of the shoulder of our pet parrot "Laura" (as above). What these chronological lists are: they are research reports compiled by ARRGH algorithms out of a database of modules which we term the Kouroo Contexture (this is data mining). To respond to such a request for information we merely push a button.



TOURO SYNAGOGUE

TOURO SYNAGOGUE

Commonly, the first output of the algorithm has obvious deficiencies and we need to go back into the modules stored in the contexture and do a minor amount of tweaking, and then we need to punch that button again and recompile the chronology – but there is nothing here that remotely resembles the ordinary “writerly” process you know and love. As the contents of this originating contexture improve, and as the programming improves, and as funding becomes available (to date no funding whatever has been needed in the creation of this facility, the entire operation being run out of pocket change) we expect a diminished need to do such tweaking and recompiling, and we fully expect to achieve a simulation of a generous and untiring robotic research librarian. Onward and upward in this brave new world.

First come first serve. There is no charge.
Place requests with <Kouroo@kouroo.info>. Arrgh.