



**RHODE ISLAND
JEWISH HISTORICAL NOTES**

American Jewish Tercentenary Issue

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Photo courtesy Rhode Island Historical Society

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Photo courtesy Rhode Island Historical Society

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ROGER WILLIAMS AND THE JEWS

by DAVID C. ADELMAN

IN JANUARY of this year, the local press published an article¹ under the headline, "WILLIAMS, ROGER, MOVES OVER IN YEAR-BOOK FOR GREEK GODS." The article stated that the literary editor of a high school yearbook decided that "Roger Williams had been overworked in these parts," and that there should be a break with past traditions in favor of Greek mythology as their theme for the 1955 yearbook because "the Greek gods and goddesses symbolized what young people would like to be: Minerva, for wisdom and foresight; Janus, he of the two heads, so past accomplishments could be reviewed and future acts anticipated; Mercury for sports; and Cupid, for love, of course." After considerable argument there was a tie vote of six to six which was broken by a Jewish girl in favor of the Greek gods. This decision on the part of the high school class, while not of earth-shaking importance, raises the question whether our boys and girls really know the importance of Roger Williams in American history and his relationship to the events of our own day and points up the materialistic trend of our times.

Although many biographies of Williams have been written he is still a controversial figure. Professor Perry Miller of Harvard University published the last one in 1953, in which he states that "THE IRREPRES- SIBLE DEMOCRAT: ROGER WILLIAMS" by Samuel H. Brockunier, (New York 1940) is the best, although he characterizes it as a "sad example of the misrepresentation that comes when Williams is presented too easily in the language of 20th century thought." Miller's book analyzes Williams' writings and comes to the conclusion that Williams' thought was theologically motivated. Mr. Bradford F. Swan in his commendatory review² of Miller's book thinks that Professor Miller "fails to give sufficient weight to the common sense arguments of Williams who pointed out to Parliament arguments from 'religion, reason, experience.'" The writer as a layman must accept Professor Miller's theological arguments but at the same time agrees with Mr. Swan's criticism.

Although in his Epilogue, Professor Miller writes that "some great experience in the youth of a person is ever afterward a determinant in the development of his personality," he completely disregards the twenty-seven formative and important years of Williams' life during

¹ *Providence Journal*, January 24, 1955.

² *Rhode Island History*, vol. 13, no. 1, p. 23 January, 1954, Rhode Island Historical Society.

which he served as the secretary and law clerk for Sir Edward Coke, a great libertarian of his day, and during which Williams made the acquaintance and lasting friendship of the leading English political figures. While it is true that Williams was a theologian of theologians, he was also a linguist, a keen politician, logician, preacher, diplomat, philosopher, economist and shrewd trader. Professor Miller states that Williams argued that the "King of England had no title to the land of the Indians and so no right to issue a charter," because of his effort to impose separation on Massachusetts, or failing that, to force Salem to separate from the rest of Massachusetts. The writer submits that Williams' question of the title of the King could have sprung from "a universal perception, that justice is the supreme law of the universe" and that the Indian as the equal of the white man had equal right to the land and, by virtue of prior occupancy, had superior title. Similarly he displayed prophetic insight when he contended that the Irish were enraged and desperate and rose to cast off their yokes because of the laws against their consciences and worship.

Williams believed in the equality of all men as God's children and was opposed to the use of force. His weapons were those of persuasion, the mind, the pen and speech. He was a good man in the Biblical sense. The cast of his thought was political, social, legal and economic, as well as theological. If Americans have invested Williams with an "ill-fitting halo," that which Professor Miller would substitute is entirely too small.

Time and time again Williams referred to "Jews, Turks, Papists, Protestants and pagans," which some Jews consider as a dubious compliment. This attitude arises from the common fault of regarding the present in terms of the past. If we reverse the process and look at the past in terms of the present, Williams comes alive as the champion of the social outcast of his day and age. The position he took would be comparable to that of a Governor of one of our United States who would champion the rights of a "fifth amendment communist" today. Williams believed that Mohammedanism, Roman Catholicism, and Judaism were false religions. Nevertheless, he defended their rights to their own belief while hoping for their conversion.

Too late, Williams recognized the Achilles' heel in the government of Providence Plantations which he founded. He lived to see a self-perpetuating corporation monopolize the land and the vote which went with it. After his death the control of the government became ever more highly concentrated in the hands of a few, with the result that the richest Jew in the colony was denied even naturalization in 1761 and no Jew

in the colony was ever admitted as a freeman. Since the question of the naturalization of Aaron Lopez was considered (in the last issue of these Notes) additional research discloses that the Chief Justice of the Superior Court of Judicature of Newport, which handed down the decision against the naturalization, was Samuel Ward of Westerly, the political enemy of Stephen Hopkins of Providence, the close political ally of the Browns of Providence with whom Aaron Lopez was closely associated. Ordinarily a large body of water is a barrier between the opposite shores, but such was not the case in 1761 because shipping was then at its height and Narragansett Bay was a bridge between the Sabbatarians of Westerly and Newport.

The first reason which the Superior Court of Newport gave for denying naturalization in 1762 was that the Act of Parliament was wisely designed for increasing the number of inhabitants in the plantations, "but this Colony being all ready so full of people that many of his majesty's good subjects, born within the same have removed & settled in Nova Scotia & other Places, cannot come within the Intention of the said Act." Samuel Greene Arnold seized upon this argument as "absurd" because the petitioners were already residents and their naturalization would not affect the population one way or the other. Arnold's reasoning is correct, but he should have disclosed (if he knew) that at that time it was official opinion that the Colony was full, if not too full. Historians have blindly followed Arnold to the discredit of the Court.

A recent article by Robert N. Cool in the *Providence Journal*³ discloses that the reason for Rhode Islanders migrating to Nova Scotia were the inducements offered them to fill the vacuum created by the expulsion of the Huguenots.

Nova Scotia sent her agents⁴ into Rhode Island because she knew that officials of the Colony of Rhode Island felt that the Colony had residents to spare. As a result a large number emigrated.

Therefore, the reason given by the Court for denying naturalization to Aaron Lopez, namely, that the colony was already too full, was not a tongue-in-cheek decision nor one of outright political dishonesty.

Dr. Jacob Rader Marcus, occupant of the Adolph S. Ochs Chair of History at the Hebrew Union College and Director of American-Jewish Archives in Cincinnati, Ohio, has written "Early American Jewry," and in the first volume (p. 17) writes, "Others, like Roger Williams, looked with tolerance if not with favor on God's Chosen People.

³ *Providence Journal*, Sunday, February 27, 1955.

⁴ Ray Greene Huling, *Rhode Island Emigration to Nova Scotia, Narragansett Historical Register VII*, 2 p. 89, Providence, R. I., April 1889.

"... Cromwell, the Protector, was far more sympathetic. He had dealings with individuals among them and was prejudiced in their favor."

Without disparaging Cromwell, the writer calls attention to the fact that it was Williams who interceded for the readmission of the Jews into England and never lost an opportunity while in England to plead their cause as will appear from a reading of quotations from his writings hereto appended. Dr. Marcus in another place (p. 117) writes "While full political and civil rights universally applicable seem explicit in Roger Williams' teachings, it is questionable if Williams was in reality willing to go that far," and goes on to quote the phrase 'true Christian faith' from the royal charter of 1663 which he denominates the "Rhode Island" charter, and continuing mentions the exclusion of "the most enterprising Newport Jewish merchant from naturalization almost a century later" (p. 117). The writer can not accept this judgment and believes that the weight of the evidence as revealed by Williams' teachings, writing, and life lead to a contrary conclusion.

Aaron Lopez and Isaac Elizer were not the only Jews to feel the whip-lash of scorn, as Rhode Island retrogressed from the principles of Williams. Ninety years later Governor Philip Allen (Nov. 1852) issued a Thanksgiving Proclamation addressed to Christians and believers in the Saviour, excluding Jews from the observance. Lewis Lewisson, a pioneer Jewish merchant in Providence responded with a Thanksgiving Proclamation of his own (See *R. I. J. H. Notes* I, 2, p. 121) in which he invited "all poor people indiscriminately of religion" to share his bounty. Between the hours of 7:30 and 10 in the morning of Thanksgiving Day, Lewisson gave away to widows of Providence, 1200 pounds of meat and 500 loaves of bread.⁵ Like Lopez, he too was held in the highest esteem by his Christian neighbors. "Eternal vigilance is [still] the price of liberty."

Williams founded Rhode Island in love and upon the basis of liberty and equality, both in land and government. He did not believe that "some men are more equal than others." No Jew was ever warned out of Rhode Island.

Quotations from Writings of Roger Williams

a)

"There goes many a ship to sea with many hundred souls in one ship, whose weal and woe is common, and is a true picture of a commonwealth, or a human combination of society. It hath fallen out some times, that both papists and protestants, Jews and Turks, may be embarked in one ship;

⁵ *The Asmonean* VII, 11, p. 125, Dec. 31, 1852.

upon which supposal I affirm, that all the liberty of conscience, that ever I pleaded for, turns upon these two hinges—that none of the papists, protestants, Jews or Turks, be forced to come to the ship's prayers or worship, nor compelled from their own particular prayers or worship, if they practice any." Letter to The Town of Providence 1655

"The letters of Roger Williams," *Publications of the Narragansett Club VI* 278-9, Providence 1874.

b)

"Whether it be not the duty of the Magistrate to permit the Jews, whose conversion we look for, to live freely and peaceably amongst us?"

"I humbly conceive it to be the Duty of the Civil Magistrate to break down that superstitious wall of separation (as to Civil things) between us Gentiles and the Jews, and freely (without this asking) to make way for their free and peaceable Habitation amongst us.

"As other Nations, so this especially, and the Kings thereof have had just cause to fear, that the unchristian oppressions, incivilities and inhumanities of this Nation against the Jews, have cried to Heaven against this Nation and the Kings and Princes of it.

"What horrible oppressions and horrible slaughters have the Jews suffered from the Kings and peoples of this Nation, in the Reigns of Henry 2, K. John, Richard 1, and Edward 1. Concerning which not only we, but the Jews themselves keep Chronicles."

Major Butler's Fourth Paper 3, 18, 19, London 1652
Clarence Saunders Brigham, Providence, R. I. 1903

c)

"By the merciful assistance of the Most High, I have desired to labor in Europe, in America, with English, with Barbarians, yea, and also, I have longed after some trading with Jews themselves (for whose hard measure, I fear the nations and England hath yet a score to pay)."

The Hireling Ministry 13, London 1652

"I desire not that liberty to myself which I would not freely and impartially weigh out to all the consciences of the world besides. (Page 19) All these consciences (yea, the very consciences of the Papists, Jews, &c., as I have proved at large in my answer to Master Cotton's washings ought freely and impartially to be permitted their several respective worships, their ministers of worship, and what way of maintaining them, they freely choose."

Ibid, page 27

d)

"Is there not more danger (in all matters of trust in this world) from an hypocrite, a dissembler, a turncoat in his religion (from the fear or favor

of men), than from a resolved Jew, Turk or Papist, who holds firm unto his principles?"

e)

"The straining of men's consciences by civil power is so far from making men faithful to God or man, that it is the ready way to render a man false to both."

f)

"True civility and christianity may both flourish in a state or kingdom, notwithstanding the permission of divers and contrary consciences, either of Jews or Gentiles."

g)

"I commend that man, whether Jew or Turk, or Papist, or whoever, that steers no otherwise than his conscience dares, 'till his conscience tells him that God gives him a greater latitude."

The Roger Williams Calendar, John O. Austin, Providence 1897

FOOTNOTES

In 1897, the American Jewish Historical Society published a paper by Max J. Kohler, entitled "The Jews in Newport" (Publications A.J.H.S. VI, 68) in which he made the statement that "Abraham Campanall, probably a son of Mordecai Campanall, was licensed as a freeman" and gave as his authority *Records of the Colony of Rhode Island* by John R. Bartlett (III p. 243). Bartlett published a list of "Persons Lyncensed", but omitted the purpose for which they were licensed. Kohler was in New York. The original record was in Newport. Excuses may be made for the addition of the words "as a freeman" by Kohler but certainly none for those who perpetuated the error by relying upon him as an authority instead of examining the original document. (See *Rhode Island Jewish Historical Notes* I, 2, p. 107.)

In 1936, Bloch Publishing Co. published "The Story of the Jews of Newport" by Morris A. Gutstein, who wrote (p. 43) "... the verdict of the court in the Dyre suit gave the Jews more privileges. They were permitted to hold property and become freemen. On the first Thursday in September 1688, we find Abraham Campanall among the 'Persons Lyncensed' as a freeman." Gutstein cites *Records of the General Court of Trials, 1671-1724*, p. 146, and *Publ. A.J.H.A. VI*, 68 as his authorities.

The court record was in Newport and so was Gutstein but it is obvious that he did not examine it but relied upon Kohler. The word "freeman" does not appear anywhere in the original. Nor did the Dyre case have anything to do with "freemen."

In the same book, upon the authority of Bartlett's records there appears (p. 56) the statement, "Moses Lopez was naturalized in 1750."

Bartlett, in two paragraphs recites the gratuitous services which Lopez rendered as translator of Spanish and the action of the General Assembly in granting him exemption from all personal duties. "Naturalization" is not mentioned.

Further on, we read (p. 159) that "Lopez and Elizer . . . applied for naturalization in 1762. At first the Superior Court referred the matter to the General Assembly. They in turn sent it back to the Court," citing "Itineraries of Ezra Stiles." The application was first made to the Court in 1761. The unfavorable decision of the Court in 1762 was on the third petition. Gutstein suppresses the fact that a second petition was filed in the General Assembly upon which the Lower House acted favorably and the Upper House admitted their right to naturalization but disclaimed jurisdiction (of the Assembly) and referred them to the Court.

The author discusses the Court decision and asks (p. 161) "if the colony was founded for the sole 'enjoyment of the Christian religion,' why was Abraham Campanall made a freeman in 1688?"

That question should have sent the inquirer to the original source where he would have learned that he need not have asked it. Campanall who was granted a license to conduct a tavern was not thereby made a freeman.

On the same page, he continues "Why were Moses Lopez and James Lucena naturalized without question in 1753 and 1761 respectively? They too were Jews and confessed the Jewish faith openly."

Only one, Moses Lopez, was a professing Jew. Lucena appeared before the General Assembly on February 23, 1761, as a Portuguese, applying for the exclusive right to manufacture Castile soap. Three days later, February 26th, he applied for naturalization, presumably upon legal or political advice or both. In any event both petitions were granted on February 27th, and Lucena took the oath, upon the true faith of a Christian, a week later. (See *Rhode Island Jewish Historical Notes* I, 2, p. 109.)

"Without question," Moses Lopez was not naturalized in 1753 but was granted the right to manufacture potash. The author's note refers to Bartlett's *Records of the Colony* (V, 375) which has nothing to do with naturalization.

The reader's attention is directed to the fact that Gutstein claims that Lopez was naturalized in 1750 (p. 56) and in 1753 (p. 161).

The facts are that Lopez was excused from personal duties (1750) and was granted the right to manufacture potash (1753). None of the authorities cited support the statement that he was naturalized. Lucena, who did not represent himself as "a person professing the Jewish religion" but as a Portuguese and took the oath as a Christian, cannot historically be charged to the General Assembly as a Jew.

Samuel H. Brockunier, the author of "The Irrepressible Democrat: Roger Williams," (published by The Ronald Press Company 1940) writes, "And several years later Abraham Campanall was licensed as a freeman," citing Kohler but the reference is to page 38, which should read 68. Nevertheless, we regard this work as the best on Roger Williams, without qualification.

Abram Vossen Goodman in "American Overture, Jewish Rights in Colonial Times" (1947) referring to the Dyre case, writes (p. 43), "A sequel to this incident has no little significance . . . Abraham Campanall . . . was licensed as a freeman by the Court which held its sitting at Rochester. So far as we know, he was the only Jew admitted to this privilege in all the history of colonial Rhode Island." Goodman relies on the authority of Bartlett's *Records of the Colony* (III, 243)

repeating Kohler's error of 1897 without mentioning him, nor the fact that "Rochester" was the name given to the town of Wickford by the usurper Andros.

On page 53, Goodman gives the date of the naturalization of Lucena as "December 1760." His note refers the reader to "Records of the Colony of Rhode Island XV, 262, 267." Since the records consist of only ten volumes recourse must be had to Bartlett's Index which indicates that the correct reference should be to VI, 262, 267. On page 262 Bartlett appends a list of acts passed, the last one the naturalization of Lucena (December). Examination of the Acts and Resolves, as well as the original petition proves Bartlett to be in error. The General Assembly adjourned in October 1760 until the last Wednesday in February 1761, when it was to meet (as it did) in East Greenwich. However, the Governor did call a special session which was held on December 31, 1760, which passed bills dealing with lotteries and soldiers' pay.

Goodman continues "When Aaron Lopez and Isaac Elizer sought to do the same *the following year*, conditions had radically changed." The Lucena naturalization petition to the General Assembly is dated February 26, 1761, the first Lopez petition to the Superior Court of Newport is dated March 1761 and the petition to the General Assembly is dated October 30, 1761. These dates are important because of the juxtaposition of historians of the Lucena petition to that of Lopez and Elizer. The lapse of time was not more than a week between the Lucena petition and the first Lopez petition and eight months between the Lucena petition and the second Lopez petition which went to the General Assembly. The only change in "conditions" was an annual election in May.

Goodman states in a note, "Stiles is our *only* source for these facts (*Itineraries of Ezra Stiles*, 52). The original documents in the Archives of the State of Rhode Island and in the Superior Court in Newport are primary, and therefore, better sources and are conclusive as to the evidence therein contained.

On page 131, Goodman refers to the Jewish colonization of the Ohio and Mississippi valleys as probably more significant and more romantic than the colorful operations of the widely publicized "*Jewish counting houses* by the Newport waterfront."

The use of the phrase "counting house" as descriptive of the introduction and manufacture of potash, spermaceti candles, and Castile soap as well as the development of a large merchant marine is a narrow and prejudiced view which flows naturally from the attempt to offset the predominant role which the Jews of Newport played in the whaling industry which the author discloses.

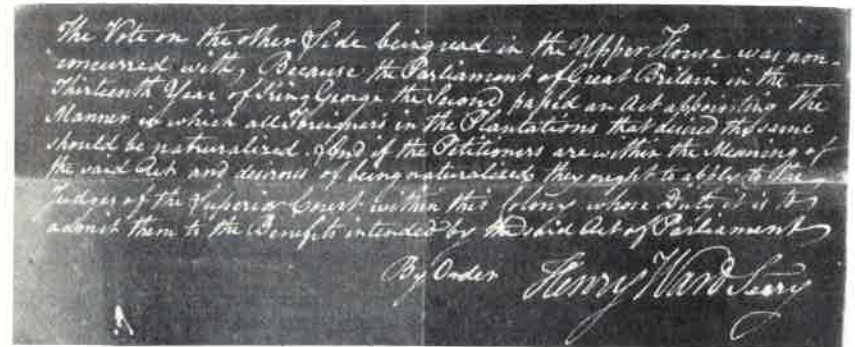
Dr. Jacob Rader Marcus in *Early American Jewry* (1951) page 128, writes:

"Sometime in 1761 Isaac Elizer and Aaron Lopez had applied for naturalization. . . . Although only the year before James Lucena had been granted a similar request, the Rhode Island Lower House, the Assembly, denied their petition on the ground that they were Jews, declaring that no member of that religion had the right to hold any office or to vote in choosing others. The Upper House averred that foreigners in the Plantations were entitled to naturalization but blandly referred them to the judges of the Superior Court."

This paragraph contains a number of errors. The position of the names should be reversed to read Aaron Lopez and Isaac Elizer who described themselves as "persons professing the Jewish Religion," in contrast to James Lucena who de-

scribed himself as a Portuguese and took the oath "upon the true faith of a Christian." Lopez and Elizer filed not one but three petitions, the first in March of 1761 about two weeks after Lucena had presented his petition to the Assembly and about the time it was granted. Their first petition was presented to Superior Court of Newport which referred them to the General Assembly on the ground that the act of Parliament referred to in their petition was not in Court nor did they have an authentic copy and that therefore the General Assembly of the Colony alone "have naturalized all Foreigners." Thereupon, Lopez and Elizer not "sometime in 1761" but on October 30, 1761, filed their second petition with the General Assembly eight months after the Assembly had granted the Lucena petition.

Dr. Marcus states that "Lucena was naturalized by the General Assembly on the last day of December 1760" (II, p. 321) and so he uses the phrase "although only the year before James Lucena . . ." (p. 128.) The facts are that James Lucena also filed two petitions, both with the General Assembly. The first was on February 23, 1761, in which he sought a monopoly for the "making of Castile soap" and the second on February 26, 1761, praying for naturalization, both of which were granted by both Houses on February 27th, and Lucena took the oath as a Christian the first week in March. Dr. Marcus states (II p. 321) that Lucena was a cousin of Aaron Lopez. That being so, and Lucena having been successful in obtaining naturalization from the General Assembly, the question naturally arises why did Lopez avoid the General Assembly and go to the Superior Court in the first instance. (See *Rhode Island Jewish Historical Notes* I, 2, p. 110, Dec. 1954.)



Dr. Marcus has confused the actions of the Lower House and the Upper House. The populous body (72 members) granted the petition, the Upper House (10 members) denied jurisdiction and "blandly referred them to the judges of the Superior Court." Lopez and Elizer reappeared before the Superior Court of Newport at its March term 1762, when the Court under Chief Justice Samuel Ward handed down its decision denying the third petition. Ward was elected Governor of the State at the election which followed in May.

If historical interpretation is to be meaningful, it must be based upon facts, which, with the passage of time, become elusive. Their pursuit is a painstaking, laborious process, for historical research does not lend itself to the assembly line and mass production methods of industry.

D.C.A.