

THE PORT JEWS OF CHARLOTTE AMALIA IN 1803

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Research Paper for the Caribbean Genealogy Library, February 2013

Starting at the end of the 18th century, the Atlantic Diaspora brought to Charlotte Amalia a fair number of merchants who were Jews, mostly Conversos (New Christians). They were Sephardim who were referred to as Port Jews, as opposed to Plantation Jews. During the Massacre of 1391, their ancestors in Spain were either executed or forcibly converted to Catholicism and herded into Portugal. About a century later, after the defeat and the expulsion of the Moors in 1492, Queen Isabella of Spain instituted the Holy Terror and burned at the stake all those Conversos suspected of secretly practicing the Jewish faith. This caused many Sephardim to flee to Mediterranean and west European ports, such as Genoa in Italy, Bayonne and Bordeaux in France, London in England, Amsterdam in the Netherlands, and Altona on the North Sea. Subsequently, in the course of the 17th century, the Sephardim immigrated across the Atlantic Ocean, first to Jamaica, Brazil, Surinam, Curaçao, New Amsterdam (New York), later to St. Eustatius, Barbados, Nevis, St. Domingue and, finally, to St. Thomas. Besides a maritime mercantile tradition, the Sephardic culture included the use of several languages: the Spanish language of the 15th century as a first language and Dutch, English and French as secondary languages. Additionally, depending upon the extent of their conversion to Catholicism, they followed in varying degrees the dictates of the Talmud and the Torah.

It should be added that the Sephardim were not the only Jews to migrate from Europe to the Americas. They were followed about a century later by smaller numbers of Ashkenazim, who were Port Jews of east European extraction, and who resided in north European ports such as Copenhagen, Altona, Bremen, Amsterdam, and London.

Around 1750, the small Jewish community in Charlotte Amalia invested in a plot of land in Savanne, Kronprindsens Quarter, to establish its own cemetery with the governor's approval. It is still in existence and is bordered by Jøde Gade, "Jew Street". In those early days, the Sabbath and Hebrew holidays were celebrated in a private residence, such as the home of Samuel and Benjamin HOHEB in the early 1790s. In 1796, the Port Jews were in such numbers that they needed their own place of worship and, therefore, petitioned King Christian to obtain a license to build a synagogue. On June 26, 1796, permission was granted and it must be assumed that,

shortly thereafter, a temporary wooden structure was erected on private land in town, since it is said to have burned down in the 1804 town fire and since no synagogue appears on the 1803 Tax List, unlike the Lutheran and the Dutch Reformed churches.

Until the turn of the 18th century, the Port Jews constituted a very small fraction of the Charlotte Amalia population. In 1790, according to the Tax List of Charlotte Amalia, there were only 17 Jewish surnames, 18 Jewish households and businesses, or 38 Jews (9%), out of a European population of 423 adults and children. By 1803, however, the town held 197 Jews (21%)—57 men, 49 women and 91 children—divided among 46 Jewish surnames and 76 households and businesses, out of a total of 956 taxed Europeans (Table I). This large proportional and absolute increase in the number of Port Jews within 13 years occurred while at least 29 Jewish surnames came and went (Table II). Among these surnames several would return to Charlotte Amalia in future years: FONSECA, GOODMAN, LINDO, MORON, MOTHA, MÜLLER, NIEVES, SENIOR, etc. There is good evidence that the European community included at least 50% more persons than appeared on the 1803 Tax List. These persons were Europeans who had recently arrived, who owned neither slave nor building in town, and who had not yet obtained their burgher brief to conduct business. If it is assumed that the same situation held true for the Jews, their true number should be closer to 300 than the 197 persons on the Tax List. In 1803, the majority of these Charlotte Amalia Port Jews were Sephardim but it is estimated from the spelling and origin of the Jewish surnames that 24% of the surnames, 24% of the households and businesses, and 25% of the Port Jews were of Ashkenazic origin.

Among the taxed Port Jews of 1803, the gender ratio of 1.2 man per woman was closer to the ideal of 1.0 and the number of children per woman, 1.9, was higher than for any other social or ethnic group in Charlotte Amalia, thereby indicating that the family unit was important to the Port Jews. Out of 73 Jewish households, 33 (45%) were headed by a husband and a wife rearing 64 children; 23 (31%) were headed by a man alone rearing 6 children; 16 (23%) were headed by a woman alone, widows, rearing 20 children; and one household consisted of one orphaned child. Clearly, many households had few or no children and were headed by widows and widowers, thereby betraying a high mortality in Charlotte Amalia in 1803 (Table I).

Tracing the geographical origin of the Port Jews is problematic because they moved often in search of favorable political and economic conditions and Port Jew family members were often spread among several

different New World and Old World ports to keep international trade in the hands of extended family members. Nevertheless, an attempt has been made to trace the origins of 46 Jewish surnames, 76 households and businesses, or a total of 197 Port Jews, as provided by the Tax List of 1803 for Charlotte Amalia (Table I). The first immigration wave of Jewish merchants from St. Eustatius is often thought to have been in 1782, following the sacking of the island by English Admiral George Bridges RODNEY. However, the Charlotte Amalia Slave Head Tax List of 1782 reveals the presence of only six Jewish merchants out of about one hundred present on St. Eustatius before RODNEY's attack: Salomon BENJAMIN, Isaac and Jacob de SOLAS, Jacob ROBLES, Samuel HOHEB and Isaac WELCOME. Furthermore, the 1783 Slave Head Tax List shows that only Salomon BENJAMIN remained at Charlotte Amalia a year later. The fact is that RODNEY left St. Eustatius with his five million pound booty in March 1781 and the French recaptured the island from an English garrison of about 800 men in November of the same year to help restart trade with the American colonies. Thus, St. Eustatius resumed supplying Washington's army until 1784, when the Treaty of Versailles was signed and when Britain finally recognized the independence of the United States of America.

The permanent economic decline of St. Eustatius and the consequent migration of its population started later in the 1790s. It was caused by the turmoil of the French Revolution that had reached the French and the Dutch Antilles. Specifically, it was caused by a British blockade started in 1793, the return of a French occupation force in 1795, a declared abolition of slavery and the imposition of onerous taxes. Accordingly, the free-colored census of 1803 of Charlotte Amalia shows that the St. Eustatius free-coloreds migrated to that port primarily between 1793 and 1799 with peak arrivals in 1795 and 1797-1798. Since the free-coloreds were in the trades providing services to the merchants and living with them in a symbiotic relation, it may be assumed that the St. Eustatius Port Jews and free-coloreds came to Charlotte Amalia at the same time. Much further away to the southwest, also in the 1790s, Curaçao was suffering under the same political and economic unfavorable conditions as prevailed on St. Eustatius. Since these two Dutch islands had large Port Jewish communities with close commercial and familial ties, it should not be surprising that the Port Jews of Curaçao followed those of St. Eustatius by migrating to Charlotte Amalia. Again, the census of 1803, shows that there was a large migration movement of free-colored from Curaçao to Charlotte Amalia starting in 1793 and culminating in 1800-1801, until the first British occupation of the Danish Islands, which is three years after the peak immigration from St. Eustatius.

Again, it is only logical to assume that the Curaçao Port Jews came to Charlotte Amalia at the same time as the free-coloreds. An indication of the latest time of arrival at Charlotte Amalia of the 76 Port Jewish households and businesses of 1803 can be obtained by noting the year of their first appearance on the Tax List (Table I). However, that year may only be used as an outside limit of arrival since households were present for some time before being included in the annual Tax List.

Of the 46 Jewish surnames in Charlotte Amalia in 1803, 9 surnames, 24 households and businesses, representing 69 persons, can be traced to St. Eustatius through the Rodney census of 1781 (Table I). Curaçao is believed to be the next most important origin of the Port Jews with 12 surnames, 21 households and businesses including 54 persons. The French Antilles, except St. Domingue, held essentially no Sephardim but the ports of Bayonne and especially Bordeaux in France had large Sephardim communities engaged in trade with the Antilles, which became severely restricted in the 1790s. As the French Revolution and the Anglo-French war were raging in St. Domingue, a few Jewish merchants in St. Domingue escaped to Charlotte Amalia where they were joined by family members of Jewish merchants in France and resumed the Antillean trade. This would explain the presence in the port in 1803 of the Simon Abraham CAPPÉ, Moses R. FORTADE, Louis LOPES-DUBEC, and Marguerite PETIT families from southern France, as well as the Abraham JULIEN, the Moses M. POMIÉ and the Bartholomé and P. C. LANGE (cited as one of 43 Jewish families subject to an exceptional tax by Governor general d'Estaing of St. Domingue in 1765) families from St. Domingue, with a total of 21 persons.

Perhaps it was the British occupation in 1801 which brought the fourth largest number of Jewish immigrants to Charlotte Amalia—six households or seventeen persons. They were Jacob KAPPELL and the MEYERs, Doctor and Jacob Albrecht, probably originally from Germany. Also included were the Widow Helena COHEN, Jacob FAUDELL and David Henriquez PRETTO. The port of Coro, facing Curaçao on the north coast of Venezuela, had also a sizeable Sephardic community, which probably originated from Curaçao. It should therefore be expected that some of the Coro Sephardim migrated to Charlotte Amalia at the same time as those of Curaçao. It is believed that the SIMMOND and the CURIEL families belonged to that group and represented eleven persons. Because trade with Europe was so disrupted in the 1790s, and the new independent United States of America was nominally neutral, trade between the Caribbean and America became increasingly important. Thus, three trading

Jewish families came from the east coast of America—two from Newport, Rhode Island, Rachel CARDOSO and Isaac HART, as well as one from New Amsterdam (New York), Abraham de MEZA, for a total of nine persons.

Finally, it is believed that from Hungary came the Israel ZAPPERT family—a husband and a wife; from Altona, Germany, came the A. A. LION family—husband, wife and two children; from Barbados, came the MASSIAH family—a widow; from Amsterdam, Netherlands, came the Isaac SALZEDO family with three persons—father, mother and child; from northern Brazil came Moses VIEIRA; from Surinam came Joseph de JONA; and from Morocco came the wealthiest Port Jew in Charlotte Amalia, Elias SARQUY. Yet, Elias SARQUY started out in life as a poor bonded servant in the employ of the famous Jewish merchant Elijah LEVY-YULY, vizier of the sultan of Morocco, Muhammed Ben Abd-Allah. In 1790, upon the sultan's death, his son intended to kill LEVY-YULY, who had no choice but to flee to Gibraltar and seek the protection of the British. His successful escape was owed to none other than his faithful servant, Elias SARQUY, who was given his freedom as a reward. It must be surmised that he was also given a substantial sum of money which allowed him to travel for three years in search of the port with the best business opportunities and to choose to settle at Charlotte Amalia where ten years later he owned five slaves and the largest store or warehouse in the port.

The free-colored census of 1803, reveals the presence in Charlotte Amalia of 19 single adults with Jewish surnames—6 men and 13 women with 17 children—presumably bearing the same surname as their five mothers (Table III). It is interesting to note that the most common place of birth for these free-coloreds was Curaçao with eight adults; then came St. Thomas with five adults and St. Domingue with two adults. Of the 19 surnames, only two, CALISTRO and MOTHA, do not appear in the European Tax List of 1803. Also, it may be noted that the first names of these free-colored adults are not of Hebrew origin, except for two: Rachel de LION and Jacob JESURUN. This suggests that these free-coloreds were baptized as Christians rather than Jews. This is in accord with the Jewish rule prevailing in 1803, whereby children of non-Jewish and unwed mothers could not be baptized in the synagogue.

In 1803, except for a few government buildings, all town buildings, residential and commercial, were wooden and numbered 730 taxable building complexes. Just as the other residents of Charlotte Amalia, the Port Jews generally resided and conducted business in the same building. They occupied 76 buildings, three of which were used strictly for commercial and

non-residential purposes. Of these 76 buildings, 52 were rented and only 24 were owned by the Port Jews. This situation is a reflection of the fact that, in 1803, the real estate market in town was booming with inflated prices and rents. The surface area of the Port Jews' buildings varied from 645ft² to 21,256ft² with a median area of 4,200 ft². This median surface area is quite large even for a building serving as both a residence and a place of business. This is because the Charlotte Amalia places of business were not conventional retail stores. They were mostly warehouses large enough for the storage of shiploads of goods from Europe and the Americas. The largest building was a commercial non-residential building, which belonged to Elias SARQUY, who presumably resided with his family outside the town limits. The next three largest buildings, 13,855ft², 11,506ft² and 10,650ft², were owned by Isaac LOPES, A. A. LION, and Madame ABENDANONE, respectively. Additionally, in 1803, to help run their households and especially their businesses, the Jews of Charlotte Amalia employed 238 slaves, or 3 slaves per household or business. These slaves were mostly men, 194, a few women, 40, and only four children. The biggest slave owner was Elias de PINHA, who owned six slave men and four slave women. Elias de PINHA might have had a need to employ his ten slaves to manage a large household with a wife and seven children, as well as a store, all in a 6,000 ft² building (Table I).

Besides owning residences, stores, warehouses and slaves in Charlotte Amalia, the Port Jews owned and sailed schooners and sloops involved mostly in inter-island trade. Sixteen boat captains and/or owners with Jewish surnames were found to operate in 1803 (Table IV). It is probable that the captains were junior and/or colored members of the Port Jew families. From 1793 to 1801, when the French and the British were in conflict, while Denmark and the Danish islands kept their neutrality, the merchants of Charlotte Amalia found it profitable to sail, under the protection of the Danish flag, to the blockaded French and Dutch Antilles to purchase tropical products in exchange for European goods and supplies. According to Johan Peter NISSEN, the best-known and the most successful sea captain was Jacob JESURUN, who sailed the schooner *Helena*. He was a Mulatto native of Port-au-Prince, St. Domingue, with a Sephardic ancestry. He might have been related to or acquainted with the younger (ten to twenty years) notorious privateer Jean LAFFITE, who was also born at Port-au-Prince of Sephardic origin. Captain Jacob JESURUN was able to sail safely to any port in the Caribbean, although (unlike Jean LAFFITE) he did not study navigation. He was never caught by British privateers and claimed that he eluded them by "hiding at night between two cliffs (?)"

Table I
The Port Jews of Charlotte Amalia in 1803

Households & Businesses	Family Memb.	Slaves	Prop. feet²	Origin	Appear. Year
ABENDANONE, Haïm Jr.	M	M	----	Statia	1795
ABENDANONE, David	M	M	----	Statia	1795
ABENDANONE, Simon	M	3M	1286	Statia	1800
ABENDANONE, Rebecca	W	M	----	Statia	1795
ABENDANONE, Madame	M,C	5M,3W	10650	Statia	1803
AZEVEDO, Moses	M,W,C	2M	----	Statia	1802
BENJAMIN, Judah	M,W,3C	6M	6010	Statia	1796
CAPPÉ, Simon Abraham	M,W,3C	4M	----	France?	1795
CARDOSO, Rachel	M,W	M	----	Newport	1800
CASTRO, Joseph de	M	2M	----	Curaçao	1803
CASTRO, Samuel de	M	2M	----	Curaçao	1802
CHARIE, Aaron Widow	W	2M	645	?	1783
COHEN, Helena	W,2C	M	----	England	1802
CURIEL, Rachel	M,W,C	M,W	----	Coro	1800
DINEÿRA, Jacob	M	2M	----	Curaçao	1802
FORTADE, M. R.	M,W	--	713	France	1794
FAUDELL, Jacob	M,W,3C	4M,2W	----	England	1803
GOMEZ	M	4M,3W	8686	Statia	1790
HART, Isaac	M,C	4M,3W	899	Newport	1798
HOHEB, Isaac	M,W	M,W	----	Statia	1803
HOHEB, Samuel	M	M	----	Statia	1795
HOHEB, Benjamin	M,W,9C	5M	----	Statia	1796
JONA, Joseph de	M	2M	----	Surinam?	1803
JULIEN, Abraham	M,W,3C	4M,3W	5496	St. Dom.	1794
KAPPELL, Jacob	M,W	M	----	Germ./Eng.	1802
LANGE, Bartholoméo	M,W,C	12M	4402	St. Dom.	1794
LANGE, P. C.	M	M	----	St. Dom.	1803
LEON, Esther de	W	5M,C	2511	Statia	1791
LEON, Leale de	W,4C	5M	1052	Statia	1795
LEON, Salomon de	M,W,4C	5M,2W	----	Statia	1798
LEON, Jacob de	M,W	2M,2W,C	----	Statia	1798
LEON, Marie Anne de	W	2M	----	Statia	1794
LEVY, Joseph Sr.	M,W,5C	2M	----	Statia	1790
LEVY, Joseph Jr. (Ref.)	M,W	2M	5586	Statia	1791
LEVY, Doctor	M,W,2C	4M,C	----	Statia	1798
LEVY, Salomon Widow	W,4C	2M,W	----	Statia	1798
LEVY, Simmons	W	M	----	Statia	1803
LION, A. A.	M,W,2C	4M,C	11506	Altona	1803
LOPES, Isaac	M	3M	13855	Curaçao?	1782
LOPES-DUBEC, Louis	M	2M	----	France	1803
LOPES & GOMEZ	--	2M	----	Curaçao	1798

MADURO, Mordecay & LEVY	M,W,6C	M	----	Curaçao	1802
MADURO, BRANEN & LEVY	M,W,2C	M	----	Curaçao	1803
MASSIAH, Widow	W	M	----	Barbados	1802
MENDES, David	M,W	4M,2W	4004	Curaçao	1795
MEZA, Abraham de	M,W,3C	2M,W	----	New Amster.	1800
MEYER, Doctor	M	2M,W	----	England	1803
MEYER, Jacob Albrecht	M,W	M	----	England	1803
MONSANTO, J. MENDES	M	M	----	Curaçao	1802
MONSANTO, J. M. Widow	W,C	2M	----	Curaçao	1803
NAAR, Joshua	2M,W,2C	6M,W	4797	Curaçao	1796
PEREIRA, Adrienne	W	M	----	Curaçao	1794
PEREIRA, Moses de, Child.	--	2M,W	----	Curaçao	1802
PEREIRA, Widow	W,6C	2M,W	----	Curaçao	1794
PETIT, Margareta	W,2C	W	----	France	1803
PHILLIPS & LEVY	M	2M	----	Statia?	1803
PINHA, Elias de	M,W,7C	6M,4W	6264	Curaçao	1802
PINNA, Joseph de	M	M	----	Curaçao	1802
POMIÉ, Moses Monsanto	M,2C	2M	4606	St. Dom.	1798
PRETTO, David Henriquez	M,W,2C	2M,W	852	England	1800
SALOMON, Hannah	W	4M,W	----	Statia	1794
SALZEDO, Isaac	M,W,C	2M	----	Amsterdam	1802
SARQUY, Elias	--	5M	21256	Morocco	1798
SASSO, Mordecay	C	M	----	Curaçao	1803
SASSO, Rebecca	W,C	4M	----	Curaçao	1803
SIMMONDS, Jacob	M,W,C	3M	3740	Coro	1802
SIMMONDS, Jan J.	M,W,C	2M	----	Coro	1800
SIMMONDS, Benjamin	M,W	M	----	Coro	1802
SOLAS, Joshua de	M,2C	3M	----	Curaçao	1796
SOLAS, Jean Pierre de	M	M	----	Curaçao	1803
SOLAS, Judah de (Ref.)	M,W,C	M,W	----	Curaçao	1796
VIEIRA, Moses	M	2M	1900	Brazil	1798
WELCOME, B. D.	M	M	1031	Statia	1803
WELCOME, Benjamin Jr.	M,W,C	3M,3W	1777	Statia	1796
WELCOME, Sara	W	3M,W	----	Statia	1802
ZAPPERT, Israel (Ref.)	M,W	6M	----	Hungary	1798

Abbreviation: Ref. = Reference given by free-coloreds to vouch for good conduct; M = Man; W = Woman; C = Child; Germ./Eng. = Germany/England; New Amster. = New Amsterdam (New York); Statia = St. Eustatius; St. Dom. = St. Domingue.

Table II
Jewish Surnames Appearing in the Charlotte Amalia
Tax Lists from 1790 to 1802

Appear. Years	Names
1794–1800	ABBEL, Jan
1790–1792	ABOAB, Abraham Mordecay
1794–1798	ALMEIDA, David
1796–1800	ASTREUX, Jacob
1790–1792	BENTZON, Jacob
1790–1796	BLUNDER, Salomon
1800	CARDOSH, Rachel
1802	CARLISES, Isaac
1795	CAVALLIE, Jacob Thomas
1798	CEANE, Jacob de
1798	CHAILON, Jacob Elder
1791–1798	CHAVES, Jacob de
1795	ENOE, Jacob
1796–1798	FONSEQUE, Salomon
1796–1802	GOODMANN, Samuel
1800	HELM, Abraham
1800	JAANS, Widow Jacob Simon
1790–1792	JOUZOME, Isaac
1800–1802	LINDO, Benjamin
1798	MORON, Abraham de
1794–1798	MOTHA, Peter
1796	Müller, Widow Abraham
1795	NIEVEZ, David Leon
1790–1791	RENGER, Abraham
1802	RONBECK, Isaac
1800	SENIOR, Isaac
1795–1796	SIEBEN, Elias
1796	ZAZUE, Abraham
1790–1795	ZEEBY

Table III
The Charlotte Amalia Free-Coloreds with Jewish Surnames in 1803

Name	Age	Place of Birth	Occupation
BEJAMIN, Charles	19	Cap François, St. Dom.	Carpenter
CALISTRO, Anthony	29	Curaçao	Shoemaker
CASTRO, Alban de	39	Curaçao	Vendor

CASTRO, Marie Rose de	28	Curaçao	Seamstress
CASTRO, Rosa de	36	Curaçao	Vendor
COHEN, Maretje	22	Curaçao	Seamstress
COHEN, Maria	20	Curaçao	Seamstress
COHEN, Martine	16	Curaçao	Seamstress
JESURUN, Anna	26	Martinique	Seamstress
JESURUN, Catherine	45	St. Thomas	Seamstress
JESURUN, Dominga	40	St. Thomas	Seamstress
JESURUN, Jacob	48	St. Thomas	Seaman
LEON, Henrich de	52	St. Christopher	Tailor
LION, Nancy de	35	Tortola	Seamstress
LION, Rachel de	22	St. Thomas	Seamstress
LOPEZ, Louis	18	Cap François, St. Dom.	Servant
MOTHA, Clara	42	Curaçao	Seamstress
SALOMON, Adrienne	44	St. Thomas	Seamstress
SALOMON, Catherine	50	Guadeloupe	Laundress

Legend: St. Dom. = St. Domingue

Table IV
Jewish Vessel Captains & Owners

Captain and/or Owner	Ports of Call
BENJAMIN	Porto Rico
*JESURUN, Jacob	St. Domingue, Curaçao, Guadeloupe, Martinique, & New York
*JACOB, Henrich	Curaçao
JOSEPH	St. Eustatius, Trinidad, & Cap François
LA MOTTA, Jacob de	St. Croix
LEVY, Michel	St. Domingue
LION	Martinique
LOPEZ, Joseph	Aruba, Curaçao & St. Lucia
MEYER, David	St. Croix
MEYER, Jacob	Curaçao
MONSANTO, Wilhelm	Curaçao
*MOTHA, Louis	St. Barthélemy & St. Domingue
PETIT	Guadeloupe
POMIÉ, Moses	Guadeloupe & St. Domingue
SIMMONDS, Henri	St. Croix
*SIMONS, Thomas	Porto Rico & St. Eustatius
SOLA, Juda de	Curaçao & Porto Rico

*Free-Colored

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