

Spanish Crypto-Jews Disappear in the American Colonies

Dr. Douglas Schar

On a recent tour of the Coming Street Cemetery, in Charleston, South Carolina, I walked through a veritable who's who of Colonial Sephardic Jews.

The families buried at Coming Street cemetery share a fantastic history. They were forced to convert in 1492 Spain and Portugal, lived there as Catholics for a century or more, they then left the Iberian Peninsula, and fully reclaimed their Jewish identity in London, Amsterdam, and the New World. The names found at this cemetery can be found in the colonial Jewish cemeteries in Barbados, Jamaica, Savannah, New York or New Port. Names like Cardozo, Carvalho, D'Costa, De la Motta, De Leon, Moise and more!

Lee Kamman, the docent giving us the tour of the cemetery had something very intriguing to say. He said he had given tours to families who had only recently discovered their colonial American ancestors were Jews. This got me thinking. How many Americans, with roots in the early American colonies, are unaware of their Jewish ancestry?

When you leaf through Malcom Stern's book "Early American Jewish Families" one thing becomes clear. Many colonial Jewish families disappeared into the Christian colonial world. Reviewing Sterns meticulously crafted family trees, quite often you see "Solomon Nunes Carvalho/Judith Henriques Pimentel married 1769 London" at the top of the family tree. By the time you get to the bottom of the tree, you see names like Baird, Jones, Peirce, Rollinson, and Walker living in any one of the 13 colonies. (1)

Today, do the Baird's and the Walkers know their ancestor's incredible Jewish history? My guess is probably not.

To quote Aviva Ben-Ur, in Sephardic Jews in America, A Diasporic History, "*Malcolm Stern's thorough genealogical research of the 1950's revealed so many Christian branches grafted onto the trunks of colonial Jewish family trees (some 40,000 individuals) that it made sense to title the first Edition of his book Americans of Jewish Descent.*"

That is a very thought-provoking statement!

Crypto-Judaic researchers have spent a lot of time studying the Sephardic Jews that disappeared in colonial Central America, Mexico, and South America. Crypto-Jews who disappeared into the American Southwest, Texas, New Mexico, and the Colorado valleys have gotten a lot of attention.

However, the Jews who disappeared in the first 13 American colonies have not received as much interest. After thinking on cemetery tour guide extraordinaire Lee Kamman's observation, I decided to investigate the phenomena of Jews disappearing into colonial American society.

And, it turns out, quite a few did. It's quite a story, filled with the twists and turns apropos of the Crypto-Judaic experience.

England: Mother of the American Colonies

To begin with, as the 13 American colonies were English owned and operated, many assume the colonists were FROM England WERE English. "English" colonial family names, like the Abel, Adam, Andrew, Byrd, Talbot, and Washington are presumed English. As it turns out, not all of the previously listed colonists were English.

In fact, all those above listed families were registered aliens (1502-1626) who lived in London and paid the alien tax to reside there. They came FROM England but were not English. (2) As an example, the Adams families were registered as aliens from "Spayne" and Holland and belonged to the French Reform Church. Not a lot of English going on with that particular colonial family.

It seems some of the basic assumptions we make about the "English" colonials is off the mark. Many of the presumed English colonists were not English and pertinent to this article, some of the presumed English colonists were in fact Sephardic or Italian/Sephardic or Italian Crypto-Jews. My research reveals the Crypto-Jews making their way to the English colonies, came in two distinct waves.

The first wave: The Seriously Secret Jews.

Between 1292 and 1656, Jews were not permitted to reside in England. No Jews in England would mean no early English Jewish colonists. However, there were Crypto-Jewish colonists in the early American colonies. They were just seriously secret Jews.

I recently created a database of all registered aliens who lived in England between 1350-1656. (Jews were re-admitted to England in 1656.) I carefully analyzed the 200,000 persons on the list, where they lived, where they went to "church", or didn't go to church, what they did for work, who they married, and where they were buried. Through this analysis, I concluded London was home to several Jewish communities throughout the 366-year ban on Jewish residence in England. They were by necessity secret Jews. And some of these secret Jews did make their way to the early American colonies.

The ban on Jewish residence in England (1290-1666) coincided with the expulsion and forced conversion of Jews in Spain and Portugal (1492). It corresponds to a time when a lot of Spanish Jews were moving out of the Iberian Peninsula. London, a booming trade center, with a large international business community, was an obvious place for them to go. Though they would have to live as secret Jews, adopting all manner of religions, at least they did not have to fear the Inquisition. Hiding out in London was a cake walk compared to the dangerous lives they lived in Spain and Portugal.

My research reveals “Spanyards and Portingales” (Jews) came to London in waves that lined up with troubling events befalling Iberian Jewry. A few came when the Jews were first expelled from Spain. More came when persecution of converted Jews began in Spain, Portugal, and their territories. The persecution of converted Jews happened in waves in Spain and Portugal. Not surprisingly, during periods of persecution, more Iberian Jews appear in London. When times were good, fewer Iberian Jews made their way to London.

For a time, Antwerp, a Spanish possession, became a haven and magnet city for Conversos (1392-1567). The operative word being for a time. That golden age came to an end when the Duke of Alba, at the instruction of King Philip II, was sent to clear these Spanish lands of “heretics”. In 1567, Alba established the “Counsel of Troubles” or as it was more popularly known, the “Court of Blood”. Thousands of Conversos, protestants, and Conversos who had become protestants, were killed and even more ran for their lives.

At about the same time, the Portuguese King Sebastian, ran into financial difficulties (1577) and began allowing new Christians to leave Portugal for a fee. As you will see, these historical events effected the number of “Spanyard and Portingale” immigrants to London.

Here is a sample of registered London alien “Spanyards” and “Portingales” by year. Notice that the years the Duke of Alba was killing his way through the Iberians in Antwerp, they appear in big numbers in London. When the King of Portugal let Crypto-Jews buy their way out of Portugal, they appear in big numbers. Coincidence? I think not.

1564: 130
1567: 323
1668: 1493
1577: 1992
1582: 523

Allowed or not, Spanish and Portuguese Jews made their way to London. Sometimes more, sometimes less. They registered themselves as members of the French Church, the Italian Church, the Dutch Church, or of “No Church”. Not surprisingly, they displayed no allegiance to any of these churches and flipped between them. They baptized some children and forgot to baptize others. They worked as musicians, goldsmiths, precious stone cutters, physicians, and merchants. They lived in the East End of London with all the other foreigners. Often in the Tower Hamlets Ward, in Stepney, Bethnal Green, and Shoreditch. They did business amongst themselves and married amongst themselves. Banned or not, they were in London. And their descendants went on to populate the early English colonies. (2)

The Nation Concept

To fully understand the how the super-secret Crypto-Jews of Tudor England operated, it would help to have some historical background.

In the 14th century, international trade swelled in Bruges and it became a European mercantile capital. As a result, foreign merchants came from all over Europe. These foreign merchants were organized by the city from whence they came into what was termed a “nation”. A nation was a group of merchants from the same city who lived together, worked together, socialized together, prayed together, and married together. And importantly, they did not fraternize with other “nations”. They had a home base where they met usually with an attached warehouse. Brugge was home to several Italian nations, Genoa, Florence, Lucca, Milan, and Venice; two Spanish nations, Castilian and Catalan; a Portuguese nation, the Scottish and English nations, and the Hanseatic Nation. These nations were autonomous. Almost like the modern concept of an embassy. They each had a consul, or head, and a cabinet who supported the consul. The consul mediated between members of the nation and communicated with the local authorities. Their key point is they were fully self-governing and autonomous.

Thus, the autonomous “nation” operating in a foreign country was born in Bruges. However, the concept would be replicated elsewhere. The super-secret Crypto-Jews of Tudor England, in my opinion, operated much like the nations of Bruges.

To the casual English observer, these super secret Crypto-Jews might appear like random Italians, Spaniards, or Portugals, living in the same London wards and parishes. But, on closer inspection, they formed an interconnected web of related people who worked together, acted together, married together, and were buried together.

The London-Italian Church

As it was illegal for Jews to reside in London, most of the Crypto-Jews belonged to a church. Some were so bold to be recorded as being of “no church” but most belonged to a church of some sort. Though these secret Jews belonged to the Dutch, French, and English church, their favorite was the London-Italian church. To put it mildly, it was a very odd institution. For one thing, it always lacked Italian membership. Only 25% of the church’s parishioners were Italian. Many of them were Iberian Jews or Iberian Jews who may have sojourned in Antwerp for a time.

“In 1568 the real Italians made up only one fourth of the Italian congregation... A small but interesting group of members of the London-Italian church formed the Marranos. It should be noted that the first minister of the London-Italian Church, Michaelangelo Florio, belonged to a family of baptized Jews. Several members of this church did have Jewish roots, either in Italy or in Spain or in Portugal, where they or their ancestors were forced to leave by the Royal Edict of 1492. The Bassano family, for instance, which moved to London in 1539 to serve as musicians at Henry VIII’s court, was probably Jewish. Two of them, Agastino and Ludovico, are recorded members of the London-Italian Church in 1582. At some time the Venetian violin players Ambrosio, Joseph, and Peter Lupo belonged also to its congregation, as did Innocent Commy(de Coimbra) of Cremona and Francis “Kennythe(Kellim) of Venice. Perhaps Guiglio Borgarucci, physician of Leicester and Queen Elizabeth, also had a Jewish background. In 1567 he lived in the same house as Ambrosio and Joseph Lupo in Cripplegate Ward”(7)

If the London-Italian church raises some questions, its first pastor, Michael Angelo Florio, raises even more. In Frances Yates biography, "John Florio, The Life of an Italian in Shakespeare's England" we read lines that tell us much of the secret Jews of Tudor London.

"The richest in biographical information of Michael Angelo Florio's books is his Apologia which he published in 1557 to defend himself from an attack which had been made on him by one Bernadino Spada, a Franciscan Friar. The greatest part of this rare book is taken up with a rather angry theology, but as Spada's had been a personal attack, Florio is obliged to speak sometimes of himself in his defense and some interesting points emerge.

Spada had evidently accused him of being a Jew and in his rambling reply to this charge he admits that he is Hebrew in blood but not in faith. "I was never a Jew nor son of a Jew but born of a father and mother baptized as Papists like yourself; and if you should say that my ancestors were Hebrews before baptism, this I will not deny".

Michael Angelo Florio or Paolo Antonio Flores, was, like many Conversos, in the employ of the Catholic church. He was a Franciscan Friar. However, like many Conversos, when he came into contact with reform Christianity, he found it a more comfortable fit. The reform movement abolished idol worship, focused on the Old Testament, abhorred the Catholic church, and often referred to the Pope as whore of the Apocalypse. The reform church was pretty appealing to a people whose lives and culture had been decimated by the Roman Catholic church.

A later pastor, Antonio del Corro(1527-1593) came from Seville, carried a Spanish Jewish surname, and preached in Spanish. A Converso preacher preaching to a Converso congregation in Spanish? If you review the membership of the London-Italian church, it is clear many members were of "Hebrew blood". Whether they were just hiding out, or were true believers, we will never know.

Following some of the members from the time Jews were banned from residing in England, to a time when Jews were permitted to live in England, its membership went in different directions. Some families returned to Judaism. The names Boaz, Lupo, Palma, Pavia, Sarazin, Tallofere(Talavera), and Trento, members of the London-Italian church, later appear as Jews in London, Amsterdam, and in colonial Caribbean. Some of them became Anglican and stayed in England. Some of them became Protestant colonists in the American colonies.

In this paper, I will focus on one slice of the secret Crypto-Jews of London, the musicians. However, connected to the musicians were the Crypto-Jewish physicians, merchants, goldsmiths, jewelers, and weavers. They were all a part of the greater web of seriously Crypto-Jews that lived in London.

The "Italian" Court Musicians

Henry the 8th demanded the best musicians in Europe be recruited to provide music for his court, in advance of his fourth marriage to Anne of Cleves. (January 1540). These musicians

stayed and continued to provide music for Queen Elizabeth I(1558-1602), and James IV(1602-1626). My research indicates most of these musicians were Spanish Jews whose families had made their way to Italy and once there, re-invented themselves as “Italian” musicians. Or were just Spanish Jews who took Italian names. Either way, a group of Jewish musicians made, played, and traded musical instruments in London during the Tudor period.

The London musical families names include Anthony Antonia (alias Antonio Moyses), Bassano, Comy(Comes,Coimbra), Lanier, Lupo(alias Abimelech, Lux), Maiohn(Majon, Minorca), Maria(alias Cossin, Cuson, Cusin, Cassin, Albert,), Segar, Tedesco, Vicenza(alias Kellim, Kenneth, Hithcoke), and Vator. They lived with each other, married amongst themselves, acted as witnesses to each other wills, and tended to their widows and orphans. (3) These families became musical dynasties, sons replacing fathers in the court ensembles.

One of the most telling features of these secretly Jewish London aliens was their use of aliases. Crypto-Jews functioned using a series of aliases. Generally speaking, they had one they used in the Christian world, one they used in commerce, and one they used amongst other Jews.

How I know of their aliases is interesting.

Aliens were accounted for and taxed periodically. Records of their payments and whereabouts were written onto scrolls and the scrolls were then rolled up. Because the census/tax collectors changed from decade to decade, and the previous records had been rolled up, the alien tax collector of 1540 did not know what the alien had said about him or herself in the 1530 census. This resulted in aliens providing different names and information about themselves over the decades they paid the alien tax. These tax rolls were unrolled in 1908 by the Huguenot Society of Great Britain and Ireland and turned into books. My project involved entering all the registered aliens into a spread sheet, and then tracking them from year to year. In this way become possible to cross check what the aliens had said about themselves over the years. The spread sheets revealed the musicians ever changing names, choice of church, and country of origin. As they say, you cannot see a tapestry until it is unrolled.

The Tale of Two Violinists and 15 Names!

Frances of Vicenza came to London in 1543 to replace Romano of Milan. Romano of Milan was a Crypto-Jewish violinist who was jailed in the Tower of London for being a Jew, and perished either in jail or under strange circumstances after he got out of jail. One way or the other, Frances of Vincenza was the Crypto-Jewish violinist imported to take the place of a now dead Crypto-Jewish violinist.

Frances of Vicenza changed his name from census to census. His aliases included Frances Kellim, Fraunces Kellem, Frances Kener, Francis Kenneyt, Francis Kenneth, Francis Francisco, and finally Francis Hithcoke. Kinnor is the Hebrew word for stringed instrument. Kellem is the Hebrew word for instruments in general. Frances of Vicenza not only played the viol, but he

also made them, and sold them. The name Hitchoke seems completely random, but it may not be. Hithcoke was the English version of Yitzchaq or Isaac. (3)

Ambrose Lupo, another viol playing London Crypto Jew had quite a list of aliases. He began as Ambrose of Milan but by 1559 he became Ambrose Lupo. As the executor of the Crypto-Jewish court musician Anthony Moyses will, the clerk recorded him as Ambrosius Deomaleyex, or de Almaliach. Almaliach is a version of Elmaleh, a well-known Spanish Jewish family found around the Mediterranean after the 1492 Expulsion (2) (Elmaliah, Elmalih, Elmalech, Almaliach). (3) Add Ambrose Almaliach to his list of aliases! Between 1567 and 1576, he went by Ambrose Luck, Lucki, Lux, and Lucksor.(2)

The Tale of six Violinists: The Bassanos

One cannot discuss the music producing Crypto-Jews of 16th Century London without mentioning the Venetian Bassano family.

People like to debate whether the Bassano's were Jews, but I believe the facts speak for themselves. Nineteen Bassano's appear in the old Jewish cemetery in Venice (San Nicolo on the Lido) as de Bassan, Bassano, Bassani, and Basan. In Spain, the name was Jewish and appears as Basan or Bassano. Confirmed Sephardic Bassano's can be found in Tunisia, Greece, Egypt, Syria, Turkey. (4)

In David Lasocki and Roger Prior's book, "The Bassanos. Venetian Musicians and Instrument Makers in England, 1531-1665", we read the following,

"To sum up, all the circumstantial evidence suggests that Jeronimo Bassano I and his six sons were Sephardic Jewish refugees from the town of that name who settled in Venice at the beginning of the sixteenth Century. In Venice they may have been Christian converts or nominal Christians. But the sons were clearly disenchanted with their situation there, for they came to England in 1531 and again in 1538-1540, so anxious to leave Venice that they lost their employment and risked permanent banishment. The five sons who remained in England seem to have practiced Christianity. But they associated with Jews, and it took the family at least a generation to forget their Jewish heritage".

The first Bassano's in London were the sons of Jeronimo Bassano, a Venetian Jewish physician, teacher, author-heretic, and musician. The heretic part may be the reason the sons, Gasparo(Jaspar)(1508-1577), Alvisse(1510-1554), Anthony(1511-1574), Zuane(1512-1579), Giacomo(1518-1566), and Giambaptista(Baptista)(1511-1576) permanently moved from Venice to London in 1539. They were absolutely recruited to come to the English court, but the invitation may have come at a good time.

Once there, they became the most prominent musical family in the Tudor period and married into other secretly Jewish musical families. Their story is long and worthy of an entire article,

but suffice it to say, while they may have been buried around churches in east end of London, the Bassano's were not always baptized and usually married other Crypto-Jews. (5)

From Court Musician to Colonist

The court musician Ludovico Bassano (1542-1593) married Elizabeth Damano(1572). Ludovico was the eldest son of Alvisè Bassano. Elizabeth Damano was the daughter of Guigièlmo Damano. Guigièlmo Damano was another Crypto-Jewish musician with a lot of aliases, William Daman, De Man, De Ammano, Amman, Man, Della Man included.

The marriage produced daughter Elizabeth Damano Bassano (1593-1630). Elizabeth Bassano married Albiano Lupo(1574-1626) in 1616. Albiano Lupo was the grandson of Ambrose Lupo(Alimaliach). The pair had something in common: Elizabeth Bassano's great grandfather was Ambrose Lupo! They were uncle and niece.

And this is a big tell. Sephardic Jews had a habit marrying their nieces. A prime example would be the famous Dona Gracia married her uncle Francisco Mendes. The Catholic church forbade marriage within 7 degrees of relation, in other words, you could not marry anyone who was more than a 7th cousin for a long time. Then it was modified to three degrees of separation. So, marrying your niece would have been a big no-no. If you see Uncle-niece marriages in a family tree, you are probably looking at a Sephardic Jewish family. And here we have one.

Meanwhile, London Life could not have been all strawberries in cream for these music making Crypto-Jews. Because Albiano Lupo and Elizabeth Bassano traded their life in the English court for the untamed Virginia colony in the early 1600's.

Records indicate Albiano arrived at Virginia on a ship called the Swann in 1610. Elizabeth followed him six years later. Albiano was granted 350 acres by the crown and Elizabeth was granted 50 acres. The crown gave immigrants 50 acres for every indentured servant they brought with them and Albiano brought five. All of Albiano's indentured servants' surnames appear as registered aliens. Albiano and Elizabeth may have had the children, Elinor, Temperance, John, Robert, William, and Elizabeth. What became of them is unknown.

In the blue book of Virginia families, "Genealogies of Virginia Families", one finds the Bassano-Lupos mentioned. *"Lieutenant Albino (Albiano) Lupo, born in 1584, came to Virginia in 1610: his wife Elizabeth born in 1597, came over in 1616. For their own adventure and transporting out of England five servants, John Hayden, John Hayes, Hester Wheeler, David Palmer, and Elizabeth Hayden, they received patents for 450 acres of land east of the John Bush tract. Only 59 acres of the Celeys seem to have come out of the Lupo grant. This front included Riverview, where in recent years there still lived Negroes name Luper". (6)*

Albiano died in 1626, and the widow Lupo married John Chandler (1599-1658) shortly thereafter. Records indicate she had a "civil" marriage to John Chandler in 1627. This was a win for Chandler who gained control of Elizabeth's 450 acres of land. Elizabeth bore Chandler at

least three children, Robert William Chandler, John Chandler II, and Mary Chandler. Elizabeth Bassano Lupo Chandler was buried at St. Johns Church Cemetery, Hampton, Virginia in 1635.

Her son, Robert William Chandler I(1627-1669) was born in Elizabeth City, Hampton, Virginia, and married Elizabeth Davis (1629-1661). Davis itself is a English Crypto-Jewish surname. The couple had upwards of 8 children who populated the Virginia colony with Christian Chandlers. Some of their children included Mary, Francis, William, John, Robert II, and Joseph.

Crypto Jews do have the habit of marrying other Crypto-Jews. Robert Chandler III(1700-1764) married Sarah Billeboe(1700-1766). Sarah Billeboe was the daughter of a Crypto-Jewish "Huguenot" settler of Manakin Town, Virginia, Jean-Jacques Billbeau(1675-1735). The name was spelled Billeboe, Bilbeau, Bilibo and was likely derived from Bilboa. This marriage produced 7 Anglican children, Joseph, Nancy Ann, John, William, Joel, James, and Elisha, who would furtherly people the Virginia colony.

There is more. Philip Lupo(1582-1668), the goldsmith brother of Albiano, arrived in Virginia in 1621 aboard the George. However, he came alone. He left behind his wife, Mary Comes, and his children. The Comes were also Crypto-Jewish court musicians with aliases including Comey, Comes, Coomes, Combe, Combre, Coimbra. The founders of this musical dynasty were George and Innocent de Combre, two royal string players whose origins were Coimbra, Portugal. The fact Phillip did not bring his family suggests he did not plan to stay, and he did not. He went back to London in 1624.

However, Phillip Lupo and Mary Comes son Phillip Lupo II (1605-1670) did return to Virginia and established a family. His daughter, Marie Lupo(1625-1689) married Thomas Royal(1611-1709). Thomas's parents were Thomas Ryall (de Real) (1595-1645) and Eleanor Falcon (1606). His wife's parents both bore Sephardic names found on the London Alien list! The Lupo family can still be found living in Virginia as Christians.

The Lanier Family

The American Lanier family story begins when Antonio Bassano(1511-1576) son of Geronimo Bassano married Elena de Nasi(1515-1571). They married in Venice and came to England with their first child, Angelica. Nasi is, beyond any shadow of a doubt, an Italian Jewish surname. Nasi meaning prince in biblical Hebrew. This union provided London's 16th century Crypto-Jewish community with 10 children: Angelica, Isabella, Elizabeth, Mark Anthony, Arthur, Nicholas, Edward, Andrea, and Lucretia.

Their youngest daughter Lucretia (1556-1632) married Nicholas Lanier (1544-1610), another court musician and artist. Lucretia became the mother of Alfonse, Innocent, Ellen, Katherine, Andrea, Jerome, and Clement. Most of the children became court musicians, like the other Bassano family members.

Clement Bassano Lanier (1590-1661) married Hannah Rebecca Collett (1610-1653) and they had 10 or more children, including Hannah, Susanna, Lucretia, and John Thomas. John Thomas Lanier (1631-1719) moved to the Virginia colonies. The extent to which these families assimilated into the Virginia colonial families can be seen in the fact John Thomas Lanier's grandson, Robert Lanier (1678-1744) married Priscilla Washington (1699-1764), granddaughter of the founder of the American Washington family, John Washington (1633). This family would of course include George Washington, the first American president.

Some historians believe the Lanier's married into a Washington family unrelated to the first presidents' family. But, as the Washingtons were registered aliens in London, and it appears all Washingtons came from London, one would think they were all related to some extent.

The Violets

There is saying that floats around the Jewish world. Beware the Apostate. In other words, when some Jews become Christian, they become Jews worst enemies. Sadly, the Crypto-Jewish Violet family produced a dangerous apostate in their ranks.

Sarah Damano(1570) was the sister of the Elizabeth Damano who was the mother of the Virginian colonist Elizabeth Damano Bassano. Sarah Damano married Pierre Vyolet (1570) an Antwerp born musician in 1594. Peters father was Raphael Vyolett. Some accounts state Sarah and Peter met and married in Stepney, London. Other accounts state they married in Antwerp. Either way, they lived in the Creechurch Lane neighborhood of London. This neighborhood was favored by Crypto-Jews and home first legal synagogue in London.

Their son, Thomas Violet (1609-1662), a goldsmith, fraudster and all-around bad guy, would become one of London's biggest antisemites. He actively campaigned against the Cromwell's proposal to re-admit Jews into England. Whether or not Jews should be allowed to "return" to England was hotly debated in the mid 1600's. At the helm of the "never let them in" campaign Thomas Violet, a relative to many Jews living secretly in London! As if this was not bad enough, Thomas devised numerous plans to entrap members of the secret Jewish community in coin clipping schemes, report them, take possession of their property as a reward, and then see them deported.

In "A Second Jewish Community in Tudor London", by Roger Prior, we read this of Thomas,

"The new information also casts an ironic sidelight on the events surrounding re-admission of 1656. One of the most virulent opponents of that re-admission was the anti-Semitic pamphleteer Thomas Violet, the first recorded visitor of the Creechurch Lane synagogue. We now know that Violet himself was the grandson of one of the royal musicians, William Daman, a wind player and composer of the psalms. Daman came from Liege, and is said to have been born there, but he was clearly of Italian parentage. He belonged to the Italian Church, identified himself as Italian and called himself Gulielmo. His surname, which is also written de man and de Ammanno, is close to the Italian Jewish names Amman, Mann, and della Mann. Daman was a

colleague and friend of the Bassanos. After his death his daughter Elizabeth married the royal musician Lodovico Bassano, and Lodovico seems to have taken responsibility for Daman's widow and family. Taken together, these facts suggest Daman was, like the Bassanos, of Italian Jewish origin. If so, Thomas Violet's intense dislike of Jews, reflecting also an intense interest in them, may have derived from his knowledge of his own Jewish descent, for his mother Sara was William Daman's daughter." (3)

A fellow criminal and partner in crime of Thomas Violet, was testifying in court and his testimony survives. He remarked that when he and Thomas went to the Cree Church lane synagogue, Thomas was known to congregants and vice versa. They were there in one of Thomas's many attempts to rob and entrap members of the Jewish community.

Thomas Violet's biographer, Amos Tubb, in "Thomas Violet, A Sly and Dangerous Fellow", had this to say about Thomas's origin, "As the child of a Dutch musician and an Italian mother so dark skinned that acquaintances wondered if she was African, Violet would have always been an outsider, even in relatively cosmopolitan London. While seventeenth century Britons had not yet developed the racist attitudes of the eighteenth century, they certainly noticed differences in skin color. Violet's childhood was likely marked by taunts about his foreign parents and particularly his "Moorish" mother. If being insulted about his parentage was not enough to make him feel like an outsider, London's busy streets would have provided constant reminders of his poverty." (8)

It seems odd that the daughter of a known Crypto-Jew, William Daman, could be mistaken as African. However, it may not be as strange as it seems. We know nothing of William Daman's wife. Through her mother, Sarah could have been dark skinned and of African descent. In the 16th century, Portuguese New Christians flooded to Cape Verde, an African archipelago, and there a society of Euro-African Crypto-Jews were born. Also, in Amsterdam, Sephardic Crypto-Jews arrived with African slaves some of whom had been converted to Judaism. Also creating a group of Euro-African Crypto-Jews. The mother of Elizabeth and Sarah Daman could have been a Euro-African Crypto-Jew.

Perhaps Thomas Violet's rabid antisemitism was rooted in being stigmatized as a child. Or it could just be another case of a dangerous apostate. Or maybe he was just a bad egg. One way or the other he was a wretched human who ultimately took his own life. An acquaintance said this of him, "Thomas Violet has a name too sweet for so foul a carcass."

Sarah Damano and Pierre Vyolet had another son, Pierre-Peter Viollett II(1620-?) who lived a less vile life. Their grandson Peter Villett III (1652-1739) immigrated to the Maryland colony as an indentured servant. There he married another London alien, Cecelia Barber. This marriage produced many children including Peter Villett IV(1697-1748). The family name eventually became Willett, a name renowned throughout the southern United States.

Concluding the first wave

The first wave of London Crypto Jews to make their way to the English colonies had good reason. At a minimum, in London, they faced discrimination as aliens and were taxed. At a maximum, they risked their lives if their ancestry was discovered. America, with its offer of free land and the end of an alien status, was a good option.

The Second Wave: The Legal Immigrants

The second wave of Crypto-Jewish immigration to the American colonies was radically different than the earlier wave. Though only separated by 50 years. These colonists were the descendants of Jews who stayed in Spain and Portugal after the Edict of Expulsion (1492) and converted. They adopted an outward Catholic lifestyle for a time. Then, they made their way to Bordeaux, Amsterdam, and London and fully returned to the religion of their ancestors. When it became legal for Jews to reside in England (1656), a steady stream of Sephardic Jews came.

In London, they set up businesses and helped open a major Synagogue (Bevis Marks). Very quickly they sent family members to the other English colonies in the America's. Barbados first, followed by Jamaica, and then the other 13 American colonies.

Some Conversos become openly practicing Jews and English subjects in England. Others became English subjects and practicing Jews by moving directly to the English colonies. Here are a few examples.

In Jamaica, on Tuesday, the 25th of November 1740 the following Sephardic Jews became English citizens.

JACOB MENDES GUTTERES.
BENJAMIN BRAVO.
ABRAHAM RIBIERO.
MOSES LOPES HENERIQUES (HENRIQUES).
JACOB PINTO BRANDON.
DAVID BRAVO.
ISAAC FUERTADO (FEURTADO).
MOSES MARTINS.
DEL. Mz. DA COSTA.
ISAAC RAMALHO.
MOSES COHEN DELARA.
AARON LAMERA. (9)

In New York, between the 1st of June 1740, and the 1st of June 1741 the following Sephardic Jews became English citizens.

DAVID GOMEZ.
MORDECAI GOMEZ.
DANIEL GOMEZ.
JACOB TERRO
SAMUEL LEVY.

SAMUEL MYERS COHEN.
ABRAHAM MYERS COHEN.
ABRAHAM ISAACS.
ISAAC LEVY.
SOLOMON MYERS.
JOSEPH SIMSON.
SOLOMON BARES.
DAVID HUY.
ABRM. RODRIGUES DE RIVERES.
DANLL. RODRIGUES VINERA.
MOSES LOPEZ.
JUDAH HAYES.
LEVY SAMUEL.
(9)

These Crypto-Jews arrived at the colonies as practicing Jews. Not just practicing Jews, practicing Jews who belonged what was known as the Nation or the Nacao. This nation may have had its conceptual roots in the nation system of Bruges. But, more than that, it was rooted in Iberian Jewish history. Iberian Converted Jews were referred to as New Christians or members of the Hebrew Nation, or the Nation. Once outside the Iberian Peninsula, these people with a shared history, with roots deep in Iberian life, formed a new interconnected united web. That they called the Nation. The Nation had leaders and a rigid set of rules all members of the Nation were meant to obey. Failure to oblige yourself of the rules could and did result in expulsion from the "Nation" and being ostracized from business circles.

The Hays-Touro family

Two of the more famous Sephardic families in the English colonies would be the Touro and Hays families. Indeed, the first synagogue in America, the Touro Synagogue, was named after its first rabbi, Isaac Touro (1738-1783). An Amsterdam born Sephardic Jew; Isaac married Reyna (Malka) Hays (1743-1768) in 1773. The couple were married in an elaborate Jewish ceremony at the New Port synagogue and officiated by Rabbi Isaac Karigal, the first rabbi to visit the American colonies. So, in a sense, their marriage might have been the first legit Jewish marriage in America! This colonial couple had four children, Abraham, Rebecca, Judah and Nathan.

Meanwhile in New York, Moses Michael Hays (1739-1805), Reyna's brother, married Rachel Myers (1738-1810) and had six children, Judah, Judith, Sarah (Sally), Rebecca, Catherine, and Slowey.

And this is where things get complicated. Their daughter Judith Hays (1767-1844) married her first cousin, Samuel Myers(1755-1836). At the same time, there other daughter Sarah Hays (1772-1832) married Samuel's brother, Moses Mears Myers (1771-1860). So, two sisters married two brothers. All cousins.

Then four of the New York Hays children, Judith, Sarah, Catherine, and Slowey move from New York to Richmond, Virginia. The unmarried sisters (Catherine and Slowey) and the two married sisters (Judith and Sarah) maintained homes in close proximity to one another. That's three Richmond households filled with Hays children.

Gustavus Adolphus Myers (1801-1869), son of Judith Hays and Samuel Myers, met a free woman of color working in the house of his aunt, Sarah Hays. The woman was named Nellie Forrester (1800-1873). The two had a romantic liaison and on February 1, 1823, their son was born. Richard Gustavus Forrester. He was given his father's name as a middle name, and his mother's surname. The extended Sephardic family raised Richard as their own child. Eventually, Gustavus sent Nellie and Richard to Canada so his son might receive the education denied mixed race children in the slave south.

Catherine Hays maintained a close friendship with her cousin Judah Touro (1775-1854). Judah had moved from New Port to New Orleans to expand the families import export business. And expand it he did. He became a very wealthy man.

Though he lived in a slave state, Judah had a reputation for being kindly to the enslaved. He was known to purchase slaves with the sole intent of setting them free. He opened a hospital that tended to white and black patients, the Touro Infirmary. And, he had a common law marriage with a free woman of color, Ellen Wilson (1800-?). The union produced a daughter, Narcissa (1822-1883). In 1830, Judah sent Narcissa to be raised by his good friend and maiden cousin Catherine Hays in Richmond. Judah wanted Narcissa to be closer to a larger Jewish community than what existed in New Orleans. When Judah died, he left Ellen Wilson a house and a substantial amount of money so that she might live comfortably.

In 1836, Nellie and Richard Gustavus Forrester returned to Richmond and lived with his great aunts, Slowey and Catherine Hays. In 1840, a marriage was arranged between the cousins Richard Gustavus Forrester (Hays) and Narcissa Wilson (Touro). It is unclear where they were married. As they were Jewish, Christian, and interracial, so it's anyone's guess.

In 1806, it had become illegal for free persons of color or freed slaves to remain in Virginia for more than a year. So that the Richard and Narcissa might remain in Richmond with their Jewish family, Catherine and Slowey reported them as household servants to the census taker.

This clan of Sephardic Jews did not condone slavery and gamed the system in every manner known to keep Richard and Narcissa and their subsequent children safe. A double house was built by Richards grandfather, Samuel Myers, to accommodate the spinsters and the Forrester family. The house was located on the very fashionable Broad Street, one block away from Monument Avenue. And what a family it was! Narcisse and Richard Forrester were parents to 23 children:

Lucretia Wells(1843-1873)

Richard Henry (1844-1930)
Richard Gil (1844-1909)
Ruhan (1843-)
William Manning Taylor(1847-1910)
James Stephen(1848-1906)
Amelia(1849- ?)
Mary Ann Adams (1850- ?)
Alexander(1852-1890)
Charles N(1854- ?)
Exey(1855-?)
John P (1858-1921)
Sarah C (1859- ?)
Katherine Walton(1860-1943)
Robert S (1864-1907)
Melissa E (1866-1927)
Eleazar S (1867-1920)
Lee S (1868-1930)
Ella Coleman(1872-?)
Arthur Gratton(1873-1909)
George T(1873-1951)
Leona (1875-?)
Julia F(1879-?)

Richard and Narcissa had a house to live in and ample money. When their elderly aunts, Catherine and Slowey, died, they left their fortunes to Richard and Narcissa. What became of these 23 mixed race Sephardic children? Based on available records, Lucretia, Richard Henry, Richard Gil, William Manning Taylor, Katherine, and Arthur Gratton, lived as people of color, were classified as Mulatto on the census, and married persons of color. Thus, members of the African American community can trace their ancestry back to these two notable colonial American Sephardic families.

What happened to the remaining 16 children? Unknown. After the civil war, Richmond became a difficult place for people of color to live and many left. While some of Richard and Narcissa's children chose to live in the African American world, some may have chosen to live in the white Christian world, or the Jewish world.

There is a wonderful website, www.eyesofglory.com that traces the African American Hays-Touros from 1760 to present through Narcissa and Richards third son, Richard Gil Forrester.

In the incredible book, "Once We Were Slaves", written by Laura Arnold Leibman, we how things played out in another mixed race Sephardic family. In this case, we see an example of descendants enslaved people and Sephardic Jews, becoming members of the early American Sephardic elite. The book tells the story of the brother and sister, Sarah Rodrigues-Brandon (1799-1828) and Isaac Lopes-Brandon (1792-1855). They were born into slavery to a Sephardic

father, Abraham Rodrigues Brandon and an enslaved Afro-Caribbean mother, Sarah Esther Lopes-Gil(1780) in Barbados. The siblings travelled to Suriname, officially converted, and joined the “Nation”. The siblings would leave their African ancestry and slave status behind them, moving into the Elite Sephardic world in Suriname, London, Philadelphia, and New York.

Sarah Rodrigues-Brandon married another Sephardic Jew, Joshua Moses (1780-1837) at the Bevis Marks Synagogue in London. They had nine children that lived as Jews. In 1824, her brother, Isaac Rodrigues-Brandon married Joshua’s sister, Lavinia Moses (1786-1828) in New York at the Portuguese Synagogue, Congregation Shearith Israel. Rabbi Moses Peixotto officiated. They had one child, Abraham Rodrigues Brandon. The siblings children and grandchildren would join the New York Sephardic Grandees, the Brandon, Gill, Lopes, Moses and Seixas families included. (10)

Interestingly, at a point, the Richmond Hays-Touro family intersect with the Barbados Rodrigues-Brandon family. Isaac Lopes Brandon and his mother, Sarah Esther Lopes-Gil, moved from Barbados to Philadelphia in 1820, and joined the Mikveh Israel Synagogue. The Mahamad, who decided who could and could not become members of the synagogue, was made up of Benjamin J Phillips, Levy Phillips, Samuel Hays, Simon Gratz, and Benjamin Nones. Samuel Hays and the Richmond Hays family were all direct descendants of the American progenitor of the Hays family, Michael (Jechial) Hays. The mixed-race mother and her mixed-race son were accepted by the synagogue. Indeed, Sarah and Isaacs mother, Sarah Esther Lopes Gil, appears in the synagogue records as Mrs. Abraham R. Brandon.

The second wave of colonial Crypto-Jews, publicly practicing Jews, ended up in all manner of colonial families. Some married white Christians and entered the white colonial Christian world. Some married African Americans and entered into the African American Christian colonial world. Some married White and African Americans Christians and their children entered the Jewish colonial world. Though, Malcolm Stearns family trees of early American Jewish families indicate most disappeared into east coast white or black Christian families.

We end where we began. Today, people, white and black, Christian, and Jewish, with roots in the early American colonies, descend from seriously secretly Crypto-Jewish ancestors. Some descend from Crypto-Jews who arrived as practicing Jews. But as the centuries have passed most of these early colonial Jewish ancestors have disappeared into the general population. Many people do not know their colonial ancestors were “Hebrews”.

However, it seems like some of them are figuring it out. In the first instance, Comings Street cemetery docent Lee Kammn is giving some of them tours. In the second instance, I am getting more and more contacts from people with deep roots in colonial America, white and black, who have taken ancestry DNA tests, and discovered they have Jewish ancestry. Many of them express interest in knowing more about their Jewish heritage. A certain number report always having felt an inexplicable pull towards Judaism.

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