

Jewish Heroes in the Revolutionary War

by Justice Robert E. Gordon

When the American colonies broke away from England, there were approximately 2,500 Jewish families living in the colonies. Many of them were wealthy merchants and businessmen. Some of them supported the British, while others became involved with the American cause.

Mordecai Sheftall was an Orthodox Jew who lived in pre-revolutionary Savannah, Georgia, and history reveals that he was one of the first colonists to publicly call for a rebellion against British rule. He helped organize America's revolutionary armies, paying for uniforms and rations. He organized and was head of the local revolutionary committee, and the Continental Congress made him Deputy Commissary General of Issues for Georgia.

History further reveals that approximately 100 Jews fought in the Continental Army. The first Jew to die fighting for American independence was ironically also the first Jew elected to public office in the colonies: Francis Salvador, a member of South Carolina's Provincial Congress.

At this time in history, many colonists who were Jewish hid their religious belief or upbringing. Most patriotic Jews served as blockade-runners, civilian contractors who supplied the clothing, gunpowder, lead, or other needed equipment, or helped finance the Revolutionary War.

Haym Salomon was the most significant financier of the Revolution, and the Continental Congress named him Treasurer of the Army in America. He was a Polish-born Sephardic Jew who descended from Spanish immigrants. He provided interest-free loans to the Continental Government, as well as loans to James Madison, Thomas Jefferson, James Wilson, Edmund Randolph, and Generals Friedrich Von Steuben and Arthur St. Clair. When George Washington needed money to finance and continue the battle, he called for Salomon, who put his heart and soul into finding money to win the war. When he died at age 42 in 1785, he was penniless and had \$638,000 in debt and was never repaid by the government. He founded the first synagogue in Philadelphia, Mikveh Israel.

Colonel David Salisbury Franks was a rebel and part of the military who participated in many battles and is considered to be a military hero. However, he was General Benedict Arnold's aide-de-camp at the time of the infamous treason, although there is no evidence he had any knowledge of Arnold's intentions.

Colonel Solomon Bush was the Adjutant General of the Pennsylvania militia and was involved in many victorious battles to help the American cause and is also considered to be an American hero in the Revolutionary War.

Dr. Philip Moses Russell was General Washington's surgeon and endured the hardships of Valley Forge.

Isaac Moses, Aaron Lopez, Michael Gratz, and Joseph Simon were wealthy financiers who saw their fortunes ruined by aiding the American cause. They were international businessmen who gave large sums of money to General Washington, only to see their ships and goods destroyed by the British and their loans never repaid.

The Jewish people as a whole have always been involved with and supportive of democracy and America's quest to keep America safe and free for all its people.

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