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# Father and Servant, Son and Slave: Judaism and Labor in Georgia, 1732-1809

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Father and Servant, Son and Slave:  
Judaism and Labor in Georgia, 1732-1809

by

Kylie Louise McCormick

Presented to the Faculty of  
The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska

In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements  
For the Degree of Master of Arts

Major: History

Under the Supervision of Professor  
William G. Thomas III

Lincoln, Nebraska  
May, 2016

Father and Servant, Son and Slave:  
Judaism and Labor in Georgia, 1732-1809

Kylie Louise McCormick, M.A.  
University of Nebraska, 2016

Advisor: William G. Thomas III

In 1732 a philanthropic trusteeship was granted the charter to Georgia with the lofty goals of bringing aid to the impoverished in the British Empire and the persecuted Protestants of Europe. Within these goals was an emphasis on using the labor of indentured white servants, an unofficial ban on slavery, and a reluctance to allow Jewish colonists. To understand how both slavery and Judaism took hold in Georgia, this two part study explores the changing labor institutions through the lives of Benjamin Sheftall and his youngest son Levi—the two men who maintained the first Vital Records for Savannah's Jewry. Benjamin's story dominates part one with a focus on indentured servants by highlighting Benjamin's advocacy for the German speaking colonists; cultural and religious interaction; as well as the ways in which slavery in the Atlantic world shaped attitudes and practices in Georgia. Part two follows Levi's life as the ban on slavery is lifted through the aftermath of the Revolutionary War, focusing on moments of cultural and religious interaction within the grander scheme of socioeconomics.

This study places Georgia's history of Judaism in the context of its geopolitical time. Often the narratives of Judaism in Georgia fail to address the labor institutions that dominated and shaped the everyday lived experience in the region. This study challenges the dominate theory held since 1961 that there were no appreciable differences between the slaveholding of Jewish and non-Jewish people by highlighting moments when the practice of Judaism impacted the lives of the enslaved. Among the significant differences, I highlight Levi's observance of

Jewish law and city Sabbatarian ordinances, which afforded some enslaved peoples two days to labor for themselves. This study contextualizes the lives of Benjamin and Levi while examining the uniquely Jewish aspects of their interactions with the labor institutions of servitude and slavery in colonial and post-Revolutionary War Georgia.

*Dedicated to my travelling companion and research assistant,  
Aunt Sherrie Kay*

## Acknowledgments

A large project like this one is often jokingly called a baby and just like the child it is compared to, it takes a village to raise it to completion. I am extremely grateful to my professors at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln who have given me advice and encouragement throughout my journey in graduate school. Thank you to my panel, William G. Thomas III, Jean Cahan, and James Coltrain for helping me to shape this project, reading this work, and providing me with your insights. A special thank you to Nancy and Charlie Coren who first suggested that I look into the congregation Mickve Israel. I would like to extend my thankfulness to the entire Lincoln Jewish Community, who provided me with home cooked meals, engaging conversations, and providing me with a space to share my research and shape my narrative.

This thesis would not have been possible without the dedication of many archivists and librarians. The people working at the Hargrett Rare Book & Manuscript Library at the University of Georgia-Athens went above and beyond their call of duty in assisting me, not only with my archival research but also travel arrangements and housing. Thank you to the archivists at the Georgia Historical Society, which was currently hosting the Savannah Jewish Archives, as well as, to the librarians at the Bull Street Library and the Research Library and Municipal Archives in Savannah's City Hall. The members of the congregation Mickve Israel were extremely gracious in sharing their personal knowledge and allowing me access to artifacts, especially Levi Sheftall's Amsterdam Haggadah.

I have been extremely blessed to have met several descendants of the original Jewish settlers in Georgia. A special thank you to Margaret and Bobby Minis, who opened their home to

me and introduced me to Kaye Kole and Rabbi Ruben. I am also extremely grateful to Joan Levy and her mother Marion Levy Mendel who spoke with me about the Sheftall family and shared many precious family heirlooms with me. Kaye Kole and Rabbi Ruben provided me with incredible insight to the community and personal encouragement. The work of these two excellent scholars laid the difficult ground work for this thesis by tracing the history of the congregation and its members.

Finally, I would like to thank my family. Without their support, reassurance, and love I would not have finished this project. Thank you to everyone who made this possible. I want to close with special acknowledgment of my historical subjects, Benjamin and Levi Sheftall, and the people they held in bondage including, London, Letty, Jack, Ben, Quash, Aby, Lucy, Venus, Abby, Ruth, Dick, Darby, Jim, Carolina, Israel, Pollydore, Tracey, Ruth, Rose, Polly, London, Prince, Lucenda, Clarissa, Rose, George, Jane, Joe and many more who remain unnamed.

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Father and Servant, Son and Slave:  
Judaism and Labor in Georgia, 1732-1809

Kylie Louise McCormick

מה נשתנה הלילה הזאת מכל הלילות?  
*Mah nishtanah halailah hazeh mikol haleilot?*  
*Why is this night different from all other nights?*

Being the youngest son, Levi Sheftall asked the Mah Nishtanah to his family all seated around the Pesach Seder table every year when colonial Savannah was blossoming with spring. Levi's prescribed question for the Pesach Seder was complimented with four observations of difference: eating only matzah and bitter herbs, all the while dipping twice and reclining—two symbols of slavery paired with two of freedom. The verse would have been sung in a Hebrew melody carried to Georgia in the mind of Levi's father Benjamin Sheftall, perhaps bearing some influences of the journey from Prussia. Benjamin may have cleared his throat before beginning his response,

עבדים היינו לפראה במצרים  
*Avodim hayinu l'pharaoh b'mitzrayim*  
*We were slaves to Pharaoh in Mitzrayim*

From a Jewish perspective, the rhetoric around Exodus is deeply personal. Jewish texts encourage worshippers to experience Pesach as though enslavement and liberation happened to each individual within their own life experiences. Haggadahs instruct worshippers to make repeated variations of the phrase, “It is because of what Adonai did for **me** when **I** went free out of Mitzrayim” (my emphasis).<sup>1</sup> Enslavement and liberation are central to Jewish identity. The narration of Exodus marks the creation of the Jewish people with the very foundations of culture such as the giving of the law and the Hebrew calendar. It is this significant personal narration of liberation out of bondage in Judaism that has made the subject of Jewish slaveholders in North America such an uncomfortable and untouched subject for most scholars. Today Jewish families

often associate their liberation narration with a condemnation of slavery and a call for universal emancipation but this is a fairly recent interpretation to an ancient text and festival as proven in the records of the Sheftall family in colonial and revolutionary era Georgia as well as many other American Jewish families. Many Rabbis and Jewish scholars have written on the transformation of the Pesach festival. Rabbis have noted the difficulties and various interpretations of some of the Haggadah commentary, namely the passage where Rav Nachman seemingly taunts his slave Daru found in the Gemara of the Babylonian Talmud.<sup>2</sup> Yet historians have, for the most part, shrugged off the topic of Jewish slaveholding in North America.

The current theory dominating the topic of Jewish slaveholding written by Bertram Wallace Korn in 1961 stated that Jewish slaveholders were basically no different from any other slaveholders. Korn's thesis reflected the treatment of slavery as a paternalistic institution as represented by Eugene Genovese who was writing during the same period. Korn's thesis has dominated the historical study of Judaism and slavery in America. The 2011 reader, *Jews and the Civil War* edited by Jonathan Sarna and Adam Mendelsohn included Korn's address as one of two articles on Judaism and Slavery. They rationalized including the 50 year old article because "Korn's basic conclusion... remains unchallenged. When it came to slavery, Jews 'were in no appreciable degree different from... their non-Jewish neighbors.'"<sup>3</sup> It certainly is true that Jewish people ran the spectrum of cruel to kind, slaveholder to abolitionist just as all Americans did, however, to leave analysis of Jewish slaveholding at that is to ignore the ways in which Jewish people adapted slavery into their lives. The lived-experience of early American Jewish people was intimately shaped by slave labor, but scholarship on the topic is stunted. Korn's thesis has turned slavery into a non-topic for scholars of American Judaism.

The topic of slavery has been marginalized in accounts of the Sheftall family, despite the fact that enslaved people played a key role in the Sheftall family's economic and religious successes. In 1989, Jacob Radar Marcus wrote that the Sheftall family "were ranchers as well as merchants. Mordecai Sheftall's brand was 5S because he had 5 youngsters. Mordecai's half-brother Levi was also a rancher—the L diamond S—but made his money as a butcher."<sup>4</sup> Marcus did not mention that Levi was purchasing "New Africans" and training them to be tanners and butchers in his business.<sup>5</sup> Mordecai and Levi's economic pursuits were built upon the labor of enslaved people, but Marcus did not mention that, instead moving on to other examples of Jewish economic pursuits in 18<sup>th</sup> century America. Slavery was integral to 18<sup>th</sup> century Atlantic world economics—how could Jewish interaction with this institution just be ignored in 1989?

Even after the Nation of Islam's slanted publications spurred historians of American Judaism to re-examine Judaism and slavery in the 1990s, the overall sentiment that Jewish participation in the institution was in no degree different persisted. Holly Snyder's excellent 2001 article, "A Tree with Two Different Fruits: The Jewish Encounter with German Pietists in the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic World" sleuthed out the relationship between Benjamin Sheftall and the "Salzburg Lutheran minister Johan Martin Boltzius."<sup>6</sup> Snyder proves to be an engaging and critical historian—yet labor and economics fall to the background in her account. Snyder presents the early labor exchange between Benjamin and the Salzburgers as reciprocal acts of kindness by analyzing the religious and cultural exchanges and misunderstandings without considering the economic implications. She presented Benjamin Sheftall as "a man of modest means and relatively few possessions" while footnoting the family of three people Benjamin held in bondage at the time of his death.<sup>7</sup> Snyder failed to mention that Benjamin's will gave instructions to split the enslaved family between his son Levi and his grandsons by Mordecai. In

another article, Snyder notes that Mordecai's wife Frances Hart Sheftall "had some assistance within the household from the family's Negro slaves" without any further examination as to what role enslaved people played in maintaining the Sheftall's kosher home. By asserting that there wasn't much different about Jewish slaveholding, Korn's thesis has done little in the way of encouraging scholars to dig into the slaveholding of their Jewish subjects—allowing them to instead mention slavery fleetingly, if at all, as though the added interpretation would give nothing to their analysis.

This study challenges Korn's thesis by examining the lives of Benjamin and his youngest son Levi Sheftall in the context of the world in which they lived. I emphasize labor and religion in recognition of the daily economic and cultural exchanges that built up the Sheftall's lived-experiences. By examining labor, I discovered significant differences between Jewish slaveholding and non-Jewish slaveholding. Jewish people adapted slavery into their lives and practice of Judaism. Jewish homes provided enslaved peoples with different opportunities to carry on African based traditions. Significantly, a slaveholder's observance of both Jewish law and city Sabbatarian ordinances afforded certain enslaved peoples nearly two days in which they could labor for themselves. This study places the Sheftall's lives within the framework of broader themes in early American history. Watson W. Jennison argued in *Cultivating Race*, the presence of Creek, Cherokee, and Seminole Indians in Georgia until their removal beginning in 1805 delayed Georgia in establishing the legal and social framework for a bifurcated racial system as seen developing in Virginia and elsewhere during the same period. This study begins with Benjamin in Prussia while the southern American Indian slave trade came to a bloody close and it ends with Levi Sheftall as a US Military Agent during the Georgia Land Lotteries. The study is chronological to emphasize the development of race and class. I open with examinations

of Benjamin's role as an advocate for German speaking servants and I close with the slaveholder's claim of benevolence in the context of Levi's runaway slaves.

Though Georgia was founded with a ban on slavery, the institution permeates throughout the entire study. Following in the footsteps of Betty Wood and Noeleen McIlvenna, I reconstruct early Georgia as a society defined by its absence of slavery and deeply divided by those who favored and opposed the slavery ban. Benjamin Sheftall was heavily invested in Georgia's alternate labor institution by employing servants in his home and working as a translator for German speaking indentured servants. The study follows Levi Sheftall after parliament lifted the ban on slavery in 1751, through the Revolutionary War and to his death in 1809. Slavery, when mentioned by scholars of American Judaism, is often represented as a stagnant institution by equating Jewish participation with Jewish assimilation.<sup>8</sup> My study recognizes slaving as an action, and slavery as something Jewish people adapted into their practice of Judaism, aligning it with other studies inspired by Joseph Miller's theory "of slavery as a means for marginalized insiders to appropriate outsiders and mobilize them in slavers' competition with predominant elites."<sup>9</sup> Levi's slaveholding provides the opportunity to examine unique cultural exchanges alongside the ubiquitous aspects of slavery such as the seizure of enslaved people for unpaid debts. Using Levi's legal and economic records in conjunction with local trends, I take the opportunity to talk about from where enslaved people were being imported into Georgia and how two cultures in diaspora may have interacted. Diaspora implies a violent dispersion of a people from an ancestral homeland and the culture that emerges from such migration. By 1733, Judaism had been in diaspora from Israel for well over a thousand years, meanwhile the removal of black people from Africa was ongoing. Historians of the African Atlantic have long used the concept of diaspora to describe the cultural impact of the trans-Atlantic slave trade and some like Paul

Gilroy have even drawn direct rhetorical comparison to Jewish diaspora—yet few if any have examined the actual interaction between the two peoples while in diaspora in the Atlantic World.<sup>10</sup> After Gilroy, diaspora became a popular lens to view the Black Atlantic. C.S. Monaco has argued that Jewish experience in the Atlantic World is better understood through the lens of diaspora rather than the exclusive concept of Port Jew. Even though Monaco mentioned the use of diaspora in Black Atlantic scholarship, when it came to exploring the slaveholding of his Jewish subjects with the opportunity to bridge the diaspora conversation, he was remarkably quiet.<sup>11</sup> This study briefly approaches the topic of diasporic exchanges within the broader narrative of Benjamin and Levi's lives. For example, evidence of Jewish ritual washing in Savannah combined with African testimony, and secondary sources on Jewish law and Black Atlantic religious practices come together to form a rough sketch of a diasporic exchange. While this thesis does not reach through antebellum period, it should be noted that much of the way Jewish Americans think about Pesach today has been shaped by the meanings and lived-experiences attached to Exodus by enslaved black Americans and solidified during the Civil War.<sup>12</sup> Benjamin and Levi were at the start of these diasporic exchanges in Georgia—their lives give a compelling framework within to explore the cultural economy in a portion of the Atlantic World from 1732 to 1809.

I am arguing that our understanding of the early American Jewish experience is incomplete because Jewish cultural economic experiences have been deemphasized. I seek to rectify this problem through narrative example with the Sheftall family. The lens of cultural economy recognizes that enslaved people carried more than monetary value. Enslaved and indentured labor was employed in intimate spaces—from the synagogue to the home—where cultural exchanges also took place. Employing a cultural economic lens I am able to examine the

food and labor exchange between the Georgia Dutch and Benjamin. Cultural economics also lends itself to a dynamic understanding of Levi's business and the enslaved people who learned his trade. Cultural economy has been employed by historians such as Sven Beckert, who used the lens to explore the ways in which cotton transformed world economics. Using this lens I seek to explore the unique and ubiquitous aspects of Judaism and labor in early America. My emphasis is on the Jewish experience, which is why I favor Hebraic transliterations over Anglicized variations, such as Pesach instead of Passover.

My sources range from official documents, such as colonial records or court room dockets, to personal papers including receipts, estate papers, wills, letters, and short narratives, to religious documents, books, and prayers. Many of these sources are located in Athens at the University of Georgia or in Savannah at the Historical Center, City Hall, and the synagogue Mickve Israel, while other sources still are in the possession of descendants of the Sheftall family. Many of the sources I used have not been readily available to the public until recently, and access for historical sources is growing. Mordecai Sheftall's papers are available online through the Center for Jewish History and the University of Georgia has digitized selections of Levi Sheftall's U.S. Military Agent papers. I have been able to access many colonial records through the digitization efforts of Google Books, the Hathi Trust Digital Library, and the Internet Archives. The virtual walk through of Jewish life in Frankfurt an der Oder sponsored by the university Viadrina provided essential information to Benjamin's Prussian biography. Digital projects from universities around the world are providing students and lay readers with easy access to quality information. While many of the digital sources used in this thesis are available to anyone with internet access, many more are subscriber based and only accessible through university libraries or personal subscriptions.

The Mah Nishtanah which began this thesis, is never answered directly in the Pesach Seder, instead it is followed by the narrative of Exodus. Truncated as such, mah nishtanah roughly translates into, what changed, a fitting question for any historian often answered best through narrative. The Mah Nishtanah opens the narrative portion of the Seder and every year the narrative is the same but each year we are different and we hear something new and different within its story. No one Jewish experience is the same as any other but we share a narrative. I explore the lives of the Sheftall family in search for an answer to my very own Mah Nishtanah: how are these slaveholders different from all other slaveholders?

## Part 1: Father and Servant

וַיָּקֹם מֶלֶךְ חָדֵשׁ עַל מִצְרָיִם אֲשֶׁר לֹא יֶדְעַת־יְוָסֵף

*A new king arose over Mitzrayim who did not know Joseph*



1703 depiction of a Polish Jewish man, wearing a prayer shawl and carrying a book.<sup>13</sup>

Benjamin Sheftall was born in 1692 in Frankfort an der Oder only four years into the rule of elector Friedrich I, who maintained the liberal policies of his father that had encouraged the growth of Jewish communities across Prussia.<sup>14</sup> One year later, half way across the world, Spanish Florida began following an official policy of manumission for all British slaves, many of whom joined the Spanish militia.<sup>15</sup> Though Georgia was founded in 1732 with a ban on slavery, adopted as law by parliament only two years later, it was not founded in a vacuum. As the last of Great Britain's American colonies, the creation and design of Georgia is inextricably linked to the history of slavery and international competition in the Americas. The history of Georgia's earliest colonists and the aspirations of its founders span the globe.

Frankfurt an der Oder was a city within the state of Brandenburg with an elector who was often also the king in Prussia. After 150 years of no Jewish presence in Frankfurt an der Oder, elector Friedrich Wilhelm gave ten wealthy Jewish families approval to reside there, as well as elsewhere resettling forty other Jewish families expelled from Vienna in 1670.<sup>16</sup> As the 1670s marked a renewal of the Jewish communities across Brandenburg, it also marked the beginnings of the Indian slave trade between the British and the Creek nations. Their partnership from 1670-1715 was defined by a mutual hatred of the Spanish and their allies.<sup>17</sup> The Creek nations also warred with French allies, the Choctaw, Chickasaw, and others. The British made this mutual hatred extremely profitable for the Creek slave raider. Thomas Nairne the South Carolina Indian Agent reported that “one slave brings a Gun, ammunition, horse, hatchet, and a suit of Cloathes”<sup>18</sup> This slave trade shaped the demographics of South Carolina’s enslaved labor force: from 1703-1708 there were more enslaved Indian laborers than enslaved black laborers.<sup>19</sup>

As the Indian slave trade between the Creek nations and the British grew, so did the Jewish community in Frankfurt an der Oder. By the time Benjamin was born, Frankfurt laid claim to twenty Jewish families residing with approval from elector Friedrich Wilhelm and around twenty three families who lacked approval from the state.<sup>20</sup> Jewish experience in Frankfurt an der Oder would have been much different than Jewish experience elsewhere. People had permission to practice Judaism in Frankfurt but were not permitted to establish a new synagogue, the first being destroyed in 1506 for the construction of the university Viadrina. Even without a permanent synagogue many different rabbis passed through Frankfurt either to serve the Jewish community for a time, to publish their writings, or to attend rabbinical conferences. Frankfurt laid claim to a profitable Hebrew printing press closely connected to Viadrina, which attracted many Jewish authors to the city. While elector Friedrich I was removing the economic

rights of Jewish residents in Berlin, he was expanding those same rights to Jewish residents in eastern provinces, such as Frankfurt.<sup>21</sup>

If Benjamin's family were Schutzjuden or protected Jews, they likely made their living as merchants, craftsmen, or printers. If they did not have their Schutzbrief or letters of protection from the elector or another prominent patron, they could only make a living in Frankfurt as dependent laborers.<sup>22</sup> Schutzbrief gave Jewish people the right to open shop and conduct business with Christians in larger towns with some limitations. The Jewish competition was often unwelcomed by the Christian majority as seen in 1688, when Christians in Frankfurt petitioned the elector for the removal of the renewed and thriving Jewish community.<sup>23</sup> The petition was mostly ignored because wealthy Jewish businessmen were beneficial to the state, paying a Schutzgeld, or protection fee, higher tax rates, and subject to the whims of the elector who could demand money to fund the military or for Jewish businesses to sell goods from the royal porcelain factory.<sup>24</sup> With or without Shutzbrief, living in Frankfurt the Sheftall family would have interacted much more with Christian Germans than 90% of the Jewish population in the German territories who lived in rural towns and villages, self-governed and semi-autonomous.<sup>25</sup> Benjamin is remembered as speaking good German by fellow German speakers in Georgia, while most of the Jewish population across Prussia spoke varying dialects of Yiddish and minimal German. Raised in Frankfurt and conducting business in town, Benjamin interacted with German Christians from birth. Benjamin experienced a change in the Frankfurt an der Oder of his youth, starting around 1714 with the rule of Friedrich Wilhelm I, around the time the British and Creek trade was reaching a tipping point.

While the Indian slave trade with the British made the Creek nations some of the wealthiest Indian nations in the area, much of that wealth was extended to the Creek traders as

credit. Creek traders aggressively enslaved the surrounding Indian nations. After thirty years of trade most of the Creek's enemy nations had either been sold into the slave trade or relocated, leaving the Creek slave traders with increasing debts to the British. In 1708, Thomas Nairne reported that Creek traders were "obliged to goe down as farr as the point of Florida as the firm land will permit..." in order to enslave more people to meet the demands of their debts to the British.<sup>26</sup> Unsatisfied, British traders began collecting their debts by enslaving defaulters and their families. The murder of a kinsman of the influential Chief Brims in a trade disagreement and the added insult of South Carolina spies set off a bloody two year conflict in 1715. The Yamasee War effectively ended the slave trade between the British and the Creek nations, limited the British Empire to the territory north of the Savannah River, and began the Creek policy of neutrality among the European nations.<sup>27</sup> During the war with the British, the Creek had begun trading and holding peace talks with France and Spain, they maintained these connections to prevent a reoccurrence of the British monopoly that had persisted before 1715.<sup>28</sup> Even with the close of the war and the subsequent closing of a segment of the slave trade, the British colonial enterprises remained vulnerable internally and externally due to the system of slavery.

The Jewish policies of elector Friedrich Wilhelm I are defined by his economic desires and his anti-Jewish sentiment.<sup>29</sup> Wanting to keep only the wealthiest Jewish citizens invested in Prussian manufacturing, especially of silk, Friedrich Wilhelm I enacted contradictory policies intended to drive the rest of the Jewish population out of Prussia. Immediately in 1714 upon taking the crown, he raised Jewish taxes, imposed new fees and reformed the Shutzbrief by limiting the number of protected families and restricting the inheritance of the Shutzbrief to one son.<sup>30</sup> During Friedrich Wilhelm I's rule, Benjamin would have been the right age to marry and

start a family, however, with economics being a key factor in marital relations during this period, it is likely that the new elector's policies are what delayed Benjamin in seeking out a spouse.<sup>31</sup>

Benjamin stayed single in Frankfurt an der Oder, as Friedrich Wilhelm I uniformly enacted his anti-Jewish policies across Prussia, and is seen on the 1728 census.<sup>32</sup> Two years later, Benjamin found his economic opportunities squeezed even more, when Jewish merchants and craftsmen were no longer allowed to compete with Christian guilds, limiting Jewish crafts to seal engraving and gold embroidery, and the sale of second-hand clothes.<sup>33</sup> With the rising cost of Jewish inheritance tax, Benjamin perhaps saw his business in Frankfurt shut down with the new laws.

Whatever the cause, Benjamin left his home at the age of 38, a single man. Little is known about Benjamin's journey to London, on which it is presumed that he met and married his wife Perla.<sup>34</sup> Once in London, Benjamin joined the Sephardic Bevis Marks synagogue and their efforts to send Jewish colonists to Georgia. The Bevis Marks synagogue applied to raise money for the Georgia project in September 1732 to the Georgia Board of Trustees.<sup>35</sup>

*Non sibi sed aliis*  
*Not for self but for others*



*Georgia Trustee's Colonial Seal (1732-1752)*<sup>36</sup>

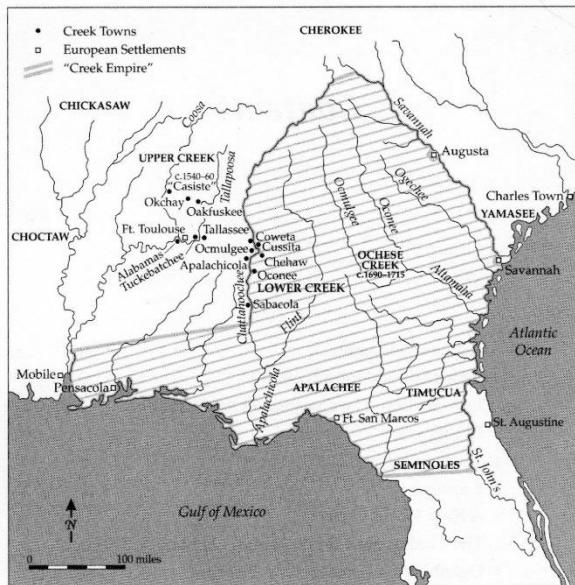
Between 1732 and 1752 the Georgia colony and its design was in the hands of a philanthropic Trusteeship. Around twenty or so men of wealth, influence, and nobility served together on the Common Council at any given point during the Trusteeship, with seventy one

different men serving in total throughout the period, many of whom remained Trustees after resigning from the council.<sup>37</sup> Barred from holding any land or official office in Georgia, the Trustees took on the motto, “Not for self, but for others” to describe their altruistic motivations for the new colony.<sup>38</sup> The plan of Georgia was said to cater to the dire needs of the British Empire—excess population, competition, and defense.<sup>39</sup> Preventing slavery in the new colony was the solution that emerged to answer each of these festering issues. The Georgia plan was approved to the tune of £155,000 in the form of annual allotments approved by the House of Commons, which made up roughly 90% of the funding from 1732-1752.<sup>40</sup>

By restricting land ownership and dedicating the Georgia colony to the production of silk, flax, hemp, wine, and potash, the Trustees hoped to cultivate a society of white skilled yeoman farmers reliant on a steady flow of Great Britain’s impoverished and Europe’s persecuted Protestants to serve as white servants and the driving labor force.<sup>41</sup> When a male servant’s indenture was finished, he was given 25 acres. The trustees rewarded the labor of female servants by giving 25 acres to their closest male relative. In part, this design was a pet project, particularly for two Trustees, James Oglethorpe and Viscount John Percival (eventually the first Earl of Egmont). Oglethorpe and Percival served together on the Gaol’s Committee mostly deciding the fate of debtors, which the two would do again under the guise of the Georgia Trusteeship. Oglethorpe and Percival hoped to give a second chance to “poor and honest industrious debtors” while alleviating England, Ireland, and Scotland from the strain of an unproductive growing population.<sup>42</sup> Slavery was forbidden, in part, because Oglethorpe believed that it made white men lazy and indulgent rather than productive, reformed debtors.<sup>43</sup> With the production of wine and silk the Trustees hoped that the colony would circumvent trade with

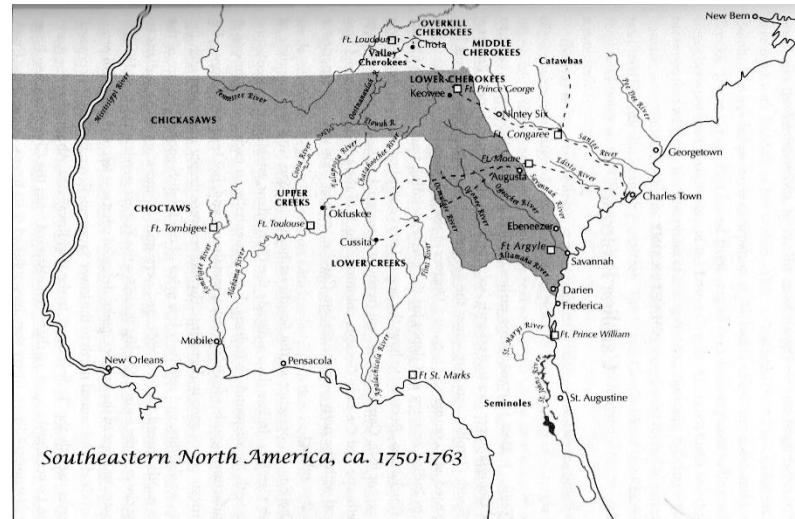
European competition—some same competition that would be pressed up against Georgia's western and southern border, France and Spain.<sup>44</sup>

Georgia was also an opportunity to provide a safe haven for Europe's persecuted Protestants, further undermining the Catholic Church in the ongoing holy war between the denominations.<sup>45</sup> Catholics were the only people expressly forbidden in the Georgia Charter.<sup>46</sup> In writing the 1732 charter the Trustees overlooked forbidding Judaism, despite the efforts of some to bar Jewish colonization in Georgia. It was fortuitous that Precival was away in Bath when the Trusteeship granted three deputations to Moses de Costa, Joseph Rodrigues Sequeria, and Jacob Israel Suasso to raise money for the Georgia project. When Percival discovered that Jewish people were raising money for the Georgia project, he began his campaign to revoke the deputations. He claimed that, "the report of our sending Jews has prevented several from subscribing to us."<sup>47</sup> While Percival actively voiced his concern over the loss of subscriptions from the inclusion of Jewish colonists in the project, he was unconcerned over the loss of subscriptions due to other issues, such as inheritance. Widows were given the same one thirds inheritance they could expect in England, but daughters could not inherit land for fear "the lands should not lie unpeopled and uncultivated, as they might be in case... [of] no son..."<sup>48</sup> With the threat of Jewish colonists looming and tensions already growing between the Trustees and the perspective Georgia colonists, the first group of settlers left for the western Atlantic coast in 1733.



Two maps showing the contested regions. The shaded area on the left is the area claimed by the Creek, shaded area below is area claimed in the 1732 Georgia charter.<sup>49</sup>

Georgia was established on land the Creek nations had won in the Yamasee War. After fifteen years, the defeat and loss of claimed territory had festered as evidenced by the second line in the 1732 Georgia Charter:



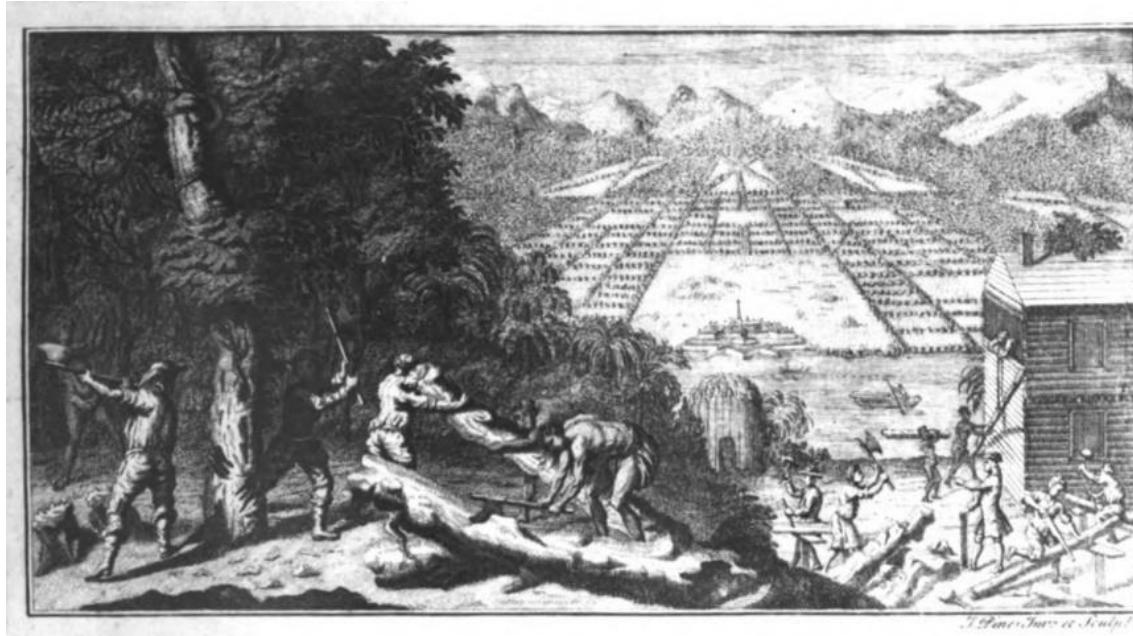
*And whereas our provinces in North America, have been frequently ravaged by Indian enemies, more especially that of South-Carolina, which in the late War, by the neighboring savages, was laid waste with fire and sword and great numbers of English inhabitants, miserably massacred, and our loving subjects who now inhabit them, by reason of the smallness of their numbers, will in case of a new war, be exposed to the late calamities; inasmuch as their whole southern frontier continueth unsettled, and lieth open to the said savages.<sup>50</sup>*

James Oglethorpe brought the first group of 114 colonists, landing in Charleston in January of 1733. He would be the only Trustee to travel to Georgia. With the help of South Carolina governor Robert Johnson and Mary Musgrove, Oglethorpe made an agreement with Tomochichi the chief of the Yamacraw nation by February and the treaty was confirmed by other Creek

chiefs in May. The Yamacraw people were relative newcomers to the area—Tomochichi hoped to establish himself and his nation within the larger Creek network of nations by negotiating the treaty with the British and traveling in 1734 to England. The biracial niece of Chief Brimms and the daughter-in-law to John Musgrove Sr. (two of the central figures in the Yamassee War), Mary Musgrove proved essential to the founding of Georgia and to maintaining peace between the Creek and British traders.

The 1733 treaty restricted the new colony to lands not in use by Creek nations, as well as, established trade rates between British colonists and Creek traders. The land restriction was determined by the Creek nations and not the British—demonstrating the power dynamics of the region. The treaty also included a clause on slavery, enlisting the aid of the Creek nations in capturing and returning fugitive slaves by offering incentives. Escaped slaves returned living brought a price of four blankets or two guns. If dead, the head of the slave could be given to any British trader in exchange for one blanket.<sup>51</sup> The colony of Georgia was not an attack on the institution of slavery used throughout the British Empire, rather, a form of defense to insulate slaveholding colonies from external threats and to police the border for escapees of the violent system. While cities, such as Ebenezer, helped stake the British claim in interior Georgia, the Creek nations controlled the region, the fate of escaped slaves traveling through the Georgia territory depended on the favor of the Creek, and the British were determined to tip the favor

their way. The Creek nations dominated the region in 1732 and the Georgia foothold was intended to weaken their claim.



The construction of Savannah as depicted by Benjamin Martyn.  
Take note of the Indian and black laborers hidden in the shadows or distances.<sup>52</sup>

Oglethorpe brought enslaved black men to Savannah along with him and the 114 colonists. Their labor loaned to the new colony by wealthy South Carolina plantation owners, these enslaved men helped the colonists clear forests, lay out the city, frame and construct houses and public buildings—while simultaneously giving the false impression to Georgia colonists that they would be able to employ slave labor.<sup>53</sup> Forty-two Jewish colonists arrived in Georgia July 11<sup>th</sup> 1733, while these enslaved men were still laboring in Savannah and before the collections raised by the Jewish leaders in London could be halted and seized. News of the arrival confirmed the Trustees' rumors when South Carolina Governor Robert Johnson wrote in his 1732 July letter, “We cannot fathom the Design of sending forty Jews to Georgia. They will never I believe make Planters, and if not Supported by their Friends in England must Starve...”<sup>54</sup> Robert

Johnson's bewilderment at the arrival of the Jewish colonists written in July—the same month as their arrival—must have made the Trustees in England all the more anxious to have James Oglethorpe's report, as the sole Trustee actually in Georgia.

Writing in August to the other Georgia Trustees in England, Oglethorpe had more pressing issues than the arrival of the Jewish colonists. "When I returned hither from [Charleston] I found the People were grown very mutinous and impatient of Labour and Discipline."<sup>55</sup> Oglethorpe blamed rum and slavery for the change in the once diligent colonists and, "to remedy the first I sent away the Negroes who Sawed for us, for so long as they continued here our men were encouraged in Idleness by their working for them."<sup>56</sup> His letter continued with his complaints about the prevalence of rum and accused the drink of causing a deadly epidemic. After prohibiting rum and giving every colonist a small ration of wine, Oglethorpe linked drinking rum at the Musgrove Trading post to disease when Thomas Milledge died from fever. Describing a contagious disease that sounds more like scarlet fever than alcohol poisoning, Oglethorpe depicted the dire situation of the colony so overrun with disease, "that we had neither Doctor, Surgeon nor Nurse, and about the 15<sup>th</sup> of July we had above 60 People sick, many of whose Lives were despaired of."<sup>57</sup> Prospects for the young colony dwindled as those who cared for the sick succumbed to the disease, as well as 20 other colonists.<sup>58</sup> This means at least 80 of the original 114 colonists fell ill in the first several months of being in Georgia with no immediate, feasible hope of recovery. Rescue came in the form of the unwanted Jewish colonists. Dr. Samuel Nunez Ribero put an end to the epidemic, saving dozens of lives "and refused to take any Pay for it."<sup>59</sup> Perhaps Ribero (who would soon truncate his last name to Nunez) thought payment enough was permission for the Jewish colonists to stay, and even receive land grants. Writing to the Trustees, Oglethorpe gave minimal esteem to the Jewish

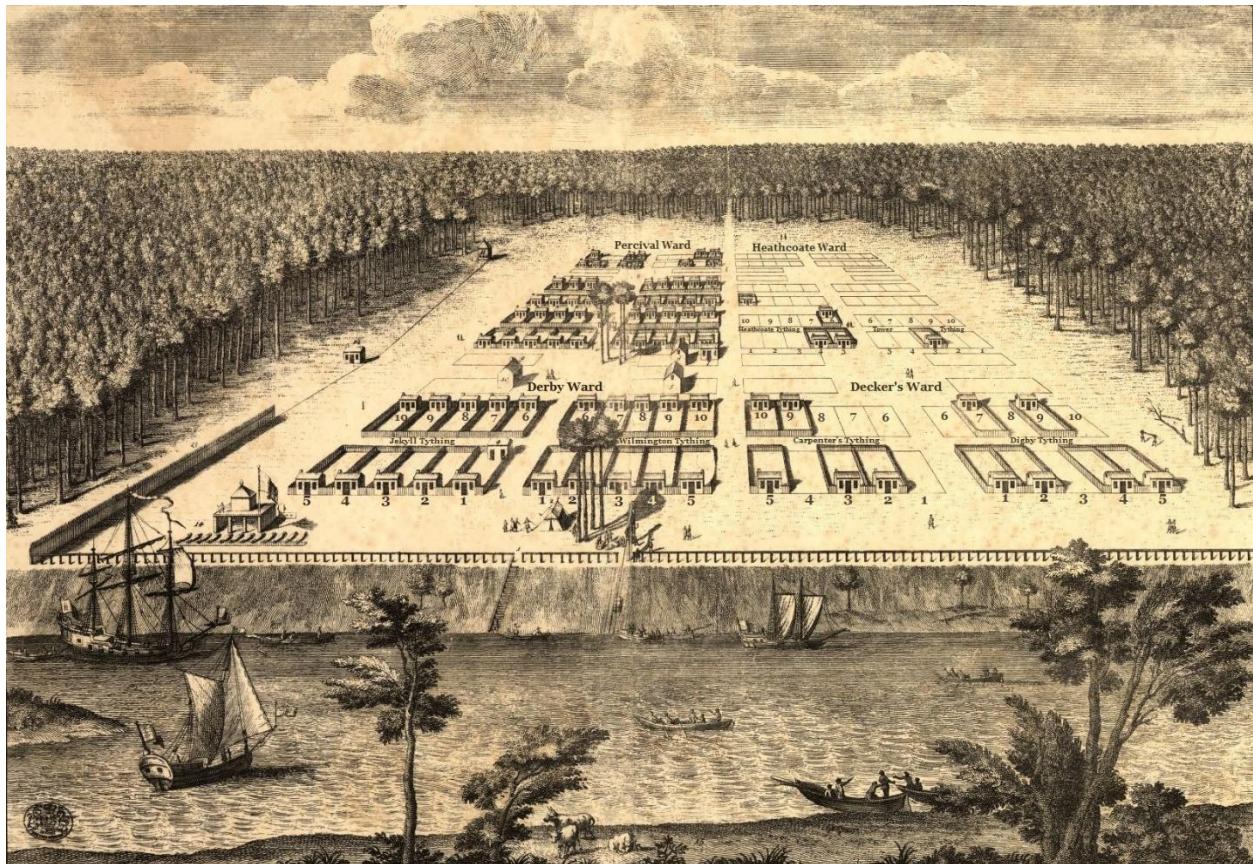
doctor, “the sick have recovered wonderfully and we have not lost one who would follow his Prescriptions,” before taking the credit, “I believe one of the greatest Occasions of the People’s Recovery has been, That by my constant watching of them I have restrained the Drinking of Rum.”<sup>60</sup> Oglethorpe did not write further of the Jewish colonists to the Trustees in his August letter, casting their arrival as a favorable turn of events among a series of other pressing concerns. Captain Hanson—the captain who brought the Jewish colonists to Georgia—claimed that Oglethorpe was dismayed at the arrival of the Jewish colonist and sought legal advice from Charleston before letting them stay and giving fourteen land grants to the community in December.<sup>61</sup>

The Trustees had endowed Oglethorpe with the authority to allot several thousand acres of land: when he included fourteen Jewish men among the original grantees—the other Trustees, especially Percival, may have regretted giving Oglethorpe so much authority.<sup>62</sup> When the Trustees interviewed Captain Hanson he accused the group of Jewish colonists of cheating him. Perhaps, he hoped the Trustees would pay his claimed damages by capitalizing on the anti-Jewish sentiment of the Trustees, as well as, the common stereotypes of Jewish people as criminal and miserly. Percival complained that in traveling to Georgia the Jewish colonists caused, “a great affront and injury... for many of them ran from their Christian creditors, and none of them would work when they came here.”<sup>63</sup> If the Jewish colonists were escaping debt, they were fulfilling the central philanthropic goal of the colony: Georgia was to be a new, fresh start for debtors and the impoverished. Georgia was designed for the “poor and honest industrious debtors,” but to the Trustees this excluded Jewish colonists, who by their very practice of religion blasphemed the ‘truth’ of Christianity. The image of parasitic Jews, feeding

off the charity of the colony is a sharp contrast from the reality of the industrious men and women who traveled aboard the *William and Sarah* to Georgia.

Industry often trumps bigotry: as members of the Jewish community began contributing to Georgia's interests, Georgia officials eased in their ill views of the non-Christian colonists. Even Percival, the leader of the charges against the Hebrew community, took delight in the works of the Jewish colonists. In his list of early settlers Percival noted several of the Jewish settlers as being idle but the efforts of some could not escape his praise, calling Abraham DeLyon and Jacob Miranda both industrious men.<sup>64</sup> Abraham DeLyon's knowledge of wine production was celebrated by the Trustees who allotted him £200 to invest in further cultivation of the desired commodity. With Jewish contributions in wine and silk production, the Trustees in England had much larger problems to stew over.

Much of the early history in the colony of Georgia was marked by the difference between the expectations set forth by the Trustees in England and the lived reality of the colonists in Georgia. As historian Betty Wood wrote, "The Trustees imagined an idyllic environment in which peaches, vines, white mulberries and other desirable plants grew to abundance, but many of the settlers found only malarial swamps and impenetrable forests."<sup>65</sup> The colonial experiences of Benjamin Sheftall reflect the Trustees' desires and fears, as well as the colonists' struggles and discord.

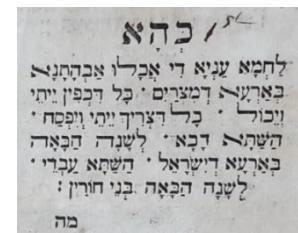


*A View of Savannah* by Peter Gordon, partially labeled to show layout of numbered lots.<sup>66</sup>

Benjamin was invested in Georgia. On the 21<sup>st</sup> of December 1733, five months after his arrival in Georgia, Benjamin was among the fourteen Jewish men to be included with the other 83 colonists as original grantees to a town and garden lot in Savannah. His lot was a short stroll from the shoreline, in the first row of “Heathcote Tything, Decker’s Ward.” While the Trustees could not draw direct economic benefit from the colony, they obviously hoped the Georgia project would secure their legacy, nearly all of the wards and tithings were named for one or more of the Trustees. The Sheftall lot was in the only ward named for a benefactor rather than a Trustee, Sr. Matthew Decker who donated £652 to the cause.<sup>67</sup> When Peter Gordon drew *A View of Savannah* as it looked on March 29<sup>th</sup> 1734, Benjamin’s house was built facing the river. Benjamin and Perla’s home served two functions, as a living space and an economic space. Perla

helped Benjamin run the store, a familiar practice from Prussia where Jewish women were often familiar with the family business and took charge of their family's economics while their husbands travelled.<sup>68</sup>

When the first transport of Protestants from Salzburg arrived on the 4<sup>th</sup> of March 1733/4<sup>x</sup> Benjamin had a store open and enough rice to invite the entire group to a breakfast of rice soup.<sup>69</sup> A pregnant Perla helped operate the store during this early period, serving as a clerk and having her first child on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of August 1734 named Sheftall Sheftall.<sup>70</sup> Eight days later, Benjamin brought his son into the Abrahamic convent with a quick and precise cut using the circumcision kit that arrived with the Jewish colonists in 1733.<sup>71</sup> Benjamin was trained as a mohel and he had the instruments needed to perform the ritual. He was not the only Jewish mohel in the British colonial world, there is evidence of mohels living in New York, Rhode Island, Barbadoes, and more.<sup>72</sup> Circumcision is evidence of Jewish investment in the colonial world.



During the Pesach Seder, the opening blessing over the matzah begins by describing matzah as the bread of affliction before offering to satiate all who are hungry. This invitation to food, even the shared food of affliction, at the beginning of the Pesach Seder, mirrors Benjamin

<sup>x</sup> Before 1752, the British Empire followed the Julian calendar, which put the New Year on March 25<sup>th</sup>. Most of the European world had already adopted the Gregorian calendar, however, due to the religious schism across Europe, Great Britain held onto the Julian calendar for hundreds of years. Years are double dated to show that British colonists understood the year to be 1733 until the end of the month, and by the standard of time we use today and was in use by other countries during that the time the year would have been 1734. Interestingly, the Julian calendar's New Year more closely aligns with the first month of the Hebrew Calendar—Nissan, which falls close to the Spring Equinox, generally in March. Confusion over the practice double-dating after the switch in 1752 is probably what led to Levi Sheftall double dating his birthdate, despite his being born in December.

and Perla's welcoming attitude to the German Protestants, fellow religious refugees in the Georgia colony. Benjamin quickly established himself as a friend to the German speaking colonists. The Salzburg Lutheran minister, Johann Martin Boltzius, remarked that Benjamin spoke “gut Deutsch” or “good German,” a skill which proved useful as the Trustees had sent 839 of Europe’s persecuted German speaking Protestants to Georgia making up 45.4% of the charity colonists.<sup>73</sup> The Trustees recognized that Europe’s persecuted Protestants wouldn’t be a homogenous group when they included a clause “that all such persons, except papists, shall have a free exercise of their religion” in the Georgia charter.<sup>74</sup> The October 1731 edict expelling the Protestants from Salzburg, brought German speaking Lutherans to the predominantly English speaking Anglican colony.<sup>75</sup> Also fleeing Catholic rule, the German speaking Moravian Brethren came to Georgia with the purpose of missionary work among the Indians in Georgia—the Trustees advanced the Moravians’ travel funds “which was some years honestly repaid by them.”<sup>76</sup> The Moravian Brethren played a significant role in the Great Awakening by ushering in new practices in Protestantism, such as love feasts and foot washing, which would become hallmarks of Methodism and Baptism during the Second Great Awakening.<sup>7</sup> The third group of German Protestants traveled as white servants to the Georgia Trust. A Catholic ruler inherited the County Palatine of the Rhine in 1685, by 1737 there were 319 charity colonists described as German speaking, Palatine Trust servants.<sup>77</sup> Known collectively as the Georgia Dutch, these German speaking groups had a profound impact on the Georgian colony.<sup>78</sup>

Fleeing religious persecution in Prussia, Benjamin likely felt a kinship with the German speaking Protestants. He and Perla greeted each new German arrival with food and offers of help. The Salzburgers received rice soup, the Moravians dined on raisin wine and “Easter cakes”

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<sup>7</sup> John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, traveled to Georgia with a group of Moravians in 1738.

most likely made of matzah for the ongoing Pesach holiday.<sup>79</sup> When one of the Moravians fell deathly ill, one of the Jewish colonists prepared a chicken dinner with healing properties, “God blessed him in him so much that he became entirely well.”<sup>80</sup> Another ill Moravian was brought a fish dinner, “well cooked and well prepared” by a Jewish colonist.<sup>81</sup> The Moravian Bishop remarked that such gifts of food, “often occurred.”<sup>82</sup> The Sheftall family proved to be gracious hosts, yet, if the gift of food was ever returned it was unlikely that the Sheftall family would have eaten. Benjamin and his family adhered to the rules of the Halacha. In following the Jewish dietary laws, the Sheftall family only ate meat from animals slaughtered by a shochet, someone trained to slaughter animals according to Halacha standards.<sup>83</sup> Benjamin was trained in the practice and likely taught his sons the trade as well. The Sheftall family provided kosher meat for the Jewish community during the early period of the colony, gladly sharing their kosher food with their new German Protestant neighbors. The food may have been familiar, using recipes and language that in all likelihood, reminded them of home. As many refugees can attest, being driven from home does not erase all sentiment tied to the culture of a former home country.

Boltzius recorded that Benjamin refused payment for his kindness toward the Salzburgers, prompting Boltzius, another minister, and some other Lutheran men to “cultivate his fields and to help clear out the trees in them so that he can regain what he has lost on their account.”<sup>84</sup> Perhaps, unable to respond in kind, Benjamin’s gracious gifts of food were met with this laborious response. For these Lutheran men to undertake the arduous task of clearing the trees from Benjamin’s land free of charge, either the food came to the rescue at dire times (such as it did for the ill Moravians) or Benjamin’s aid went beyond food. Benjamin Sheftall obviously felt a familiarity and kinship with the German speaking colonists, despite the fact that he had been persecuted by German speaking Calvinists in Prussia. Connecting over shared language, a

shared palate, relatable life experience, and mutual acts of kindness, Benjamin established himself as a reliable friend to the German colonists. Food and language carry a cultural currency that Benjamin and other Jewish colonists used to establish themselves in Georgia among non-Jewish colonists.

Some of the references to Jewish colonists by the Moravians may have been referring Abraham Minis, the head of the other Ashkenazi family in Georgia who did some business with the Moravians. There is no doubt that the businesses of the Jewish population prospered with the influx of new colonists. The Jewish community was too small to rely on Jewish customers alone to keep a Jewish business afloat, relationships between Christians and Jews were necessary if a Jewish colonist was going to secure economic stability in Georgia. Economic stability ensured food, clothing, and housing, necessities that cross religious and cultural boundaries. Abraham Minis befriended colonial authorities and began importing goods from New York for the Public Store, including non-Halacha products, such as pork.<sup>85</sup> Minis also became drinking companions with Trust employees such as the first bailiff, Mr. Parker and head of the public store, Thomas Causton. Minis was remembered as being their “Constant entertainer.”<sup>86</sup> Benjamin courted customers among the German colonists, going out of his way to be honest and trustworthy in each transaction. When Perla accidentally gave incorrect change to a Salzburg woman, the next day Benjamin walked 22 miles to the Salzburg settlement of Ebenezer to correct the error.<sup>87</sup> Benjamin’s fervent protection of his reputation may also be seen as his way to counter the oft life-threatening caricature of the “Jew.”

שלא אחד בלבד עמד עליינו לכלוחנו. אלא שככל-דור ודור  
עומדים עומדים עליינו לכלוחינו. והקדוש ברוך הוא מצלינו מידם.

*Shelo echad bilvad, amad Aleinu lechaloteinu. Ela sheb'chol dor vador, omdim Aleinu lechaloteinu. Vehakadosh Baruch hu matzileinu mi-yadam For not just one enemy has stood against us to wipe us out. But in every generation there have been those who have stood against us to wipe us out, and the Holy One Blessed Be He saves us from their hands.*

Attitudes toward the Jewish populations living across Europe have shifted with each new generation of rulers depending on the economic prosperity or lack thereof; international and internal conflict; and the dominate theology of any given nation. Religion dominated social rhetoric, where “Jew” was used as one of the ultimate insults throughout political, literary, and religious writings for centuries. When European attitudes shifted against Jewish populations, rhetoric often erupted into tangible violence and expulsion. The caricature of a Jew carried heavy and real consequences for the people practicing Judaism. Even when Benjamin left Prussia, he could not escape the caricature. Jonathan Sarna and Jacob Radar Marcus have noted that during the colonial period, “‘Jew’ was still a dirty word and it was hardly rare to see the Jews denigrated as such in the press.”<sup>88</sup> Perhaps the most popular lasting representation of Jewish caricature came in the form of William Shakespeare’s Shylock, first appearing in the 1605 performance of *The Merchant of Venice*. Shylock, a treacherous and greedy Jewish moneylender, drew on familiar Christian tropes of Jewish sins before completing the Christian narrative with Shylock’s conversion. Billed as a comedy with its happy ending of a conversion and a wedding, the *Merchant of Venice* presented a surprising plea for Jewish humanity to theatre goers. “If you prick us, do we not bleed?” Shylock provocatively asked the audience from the safety of familiar Jewish stereotypes.<sup>89</sup> Fifty years later, Judaism returned to British society as the 1290 expulsion of Britain’s Jewry was brought to an end. Shakespeare’s Shylock may well have been a cry for

justice in 1605, however, the lasting image was that of the treacherous, greedy Jewish moneylender a common Jewish trope across Europe. With the incorrect change heavy on his person, both body and conscious, Benjamin trekked to Ebenezer to correct the error and combat any preconceived cultural notions that had made the journey across the Atlantic with the German colonists.

There is possibly another motivation beyond economics and personal security for Benjamin's determination to correct Perla's error in change. It was unlikely that Benjamin spoke English when he left Prussia in 1730. Learning English in his journey across Europe and to London, Benjamin may have been taken advantage of by people capitalizing on any cultural confusion and his lack of lingual ability. Later in the 1750s, Benjamin is evidenced as reading a magazine whose editor frequently promoted English schools for German-speaking immigrants to Pennsylvania.<sup>90</sup> Benjamin saw the disadvantage German speakers faced in the English colony and invested himself in the protection of Germans in Georgia. Speaking for the Salzburgers, Boltzius remarked that the Sheftall family had "shown so much love and rendered so many services to us and the Salzburgers that no one could ask any more."<sup>91</sup> The Moravian bishop echoed these thoughts, "A Jew came to us and offered to serve us in every way, and he has really showed it and helped us with word and deed."<sup>92</sup> This was likely Benjamin offering his aid to the Moravians as Abraham Minis was born in London and if he spoke German he would be nowhere near as fluent as native speaker, Benjamin. Helping the German colonists in the English colony with word necessitated Benjamin's ability to translate. Benjamin soon became an advocate for the German community. By traveling 22 miles to fix a minor error on the same day of its discovery, Benjamin's message to the Salzburg community was, *trust me—I will go out of my*

*way to ensure you are treated fairly and see to that no injustices come your way do to lingual misunderstandings.*

**כל דצעריך ייתי ויפסה**  
*Kol deetzreech yeitei v'yeepesach*  
*All who are in need, let them come celebrate Pesach*

The Pesach opening blessing over the matzah continues with a spiritual invitation.

Beyond offering gifts of food and drumming up business, the Jewish colonists invited both the Salzburg and Moravian group to attend the Jewish religious services. Boltzius described the Jewish services as taking place in a “miserable hut”—the same place, called a synagogue by the Moravians, was actually a rented house in Savannah. In July 1735, Benjamin wrote, “The Jews meet together, and agreed to open a Synagouge which was done emediately named K.-K. Mickva Israel.”<sup>93</sup> Benjamin maintained the records of the congregation in Jüdische-Deutsch, the High German written with Hebrew script utilized by Jewish record keepers across Germany. Kal Kodesh Mickva Israel<sup>3</sup> was likely founded across the cultural lines by both Sephardic and Ashkenazic Jewish settlers. Services and religious rituals took place in a rented house using the “Safertora (**ספר תורה**) with two Cloaks and a Circumcision box...” that had made the journey across the Atlantic with the first 42 Jewish Georgia colonists.<sup>94</sup> Boltzius described Jewish worship in Savannah, Georgia to be the same as what he observed in Berlin. The Hazan singing Hebrew passages out of the deer skinned Torah from the bimah was described as a “young boy.”<sup>95</sup> During these first years of Jewish worship in Savanah the bimah was likely a humble

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<sup>3</sup>The name translates to Holy Congregation Hope of Israel. Later the name would be changed to K.K. Mickve Israel, dropping the Sephardic “a” for an Ashkenazi “e.” The Sephardic spelling combined with Benjamin’s notation is further evidence that when the congregation was first formed, the two different ethnic groups worshiped together.

wooden table, placed at the front of the rented room. Men were responsible for leading religious services which were done in Hebrew, however, regular Sabbath services could only occur with a minyan of ten men. Disagreements over the correct Hebrew pronunciation arose between the colonists, with the Sephardic colonists claiming to have the correct pronunciation. Women were separated from men during the public service and would not have publicly read from the Torah at the bimah. Anglican reverends also took note of Jewish worship, describing the Ashkenazi Jewish colonists, like Benjamin, to be “rigid observers of their law” compared to the relaxed practices of the Sephardic colonists. The Christian spectators can only give so much insight into the structure of Jewish worship in Savannah because much was done privately.

Benjamin probably found solace in the newly formed Jewish community as he faced two major life events. In December 1735, he and Perla welcomed another son to the Jewish community. Perhaps, with the congregation established, Mordecai’s circumcision was a public, communal affair. Reciting a prayer at the head of the congregation Benjamin would have slipped a small silver clip on Mordecai’s foreskin, shielding the organ below, before quickly removing the protruding flesh with one sweep of his sharp knife. Mordecai was welcomed into a small, but growing Jewish community. The birth of more colonists in these early years of Georgia was a sign of success for the Trustees: Percival made special note of the children born in the colony, including the two Sheftall boys. For Benjamin, starting his family at the age of 42 in the “mere wilderness” of Georgia, signified his hope for the future.<sup>96</sup> In Prussia, Benjamin faced economic, legal, and personal restrictions that pushed him to seek a life beyond the borders of his home country. With a home built, a plot of land, and the minyan of ten adult men needed to hold a Torah service—Benjamin would have been hopeful as he welcomed his son to Georgia and to Judaism. His good fortune would not last, Perla died eleven months after giving birth to

Mordecai. With the loss of his wife, Benjamin would have leaned on his religious community, needing the minyan of Jewish men to recite the Mourner's Kaddish and to sit shiva for his wife.

These two instances of religious practice concerning birth and death were public within the Jewish community but kept mostly private from the larger Christian community. The death of Jewish colonists led to the creation of the first Jewish cemetery, now a thin, bushy median on Bull Street and Oglethorpe Avenue. While Jewish mourning may have been deemed uninteresting to the non-Jewish colonists, certainly the removal of an infant's foreskin would have registered on those people writing letters and keeping daily records of the colony. Jewish colonists had good cause to keep circumcision private. Circumcision wouldn't become a wide spread practice outside of Judaism until the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In 1735, circumcision still distinguished Jewish men from men of other ethnic, cultural, and religious backgrounds. Any of the conversos, or Jewish converts to Catholicism living in the Iberian Peninsula, caught practicing Judaism faced capital punishment. Having a circumcision was a death sentence and most stopped the practice to save the lives of their secretly Jewish sons. Given their possible past experiences with the ritual, the Sephardic colonists in Georgia may have preferred to keep circumcision private from the larger Christian community. Both Ashkenazi and Sephardi colonists would have been familiar with the accusations of Blood Libel, which may have also influenced them to keep the circumcision ritual out of Christian view. Blood Libels—the accusation that Jews ritually tortured and murdered Christian boys—were prevalent across Europe from Portugal to Austria. Given the context and prevalence of Blood Libels in Europe, many Jewish people may have considered a Jewish man taking a knife to an infant among the worst possible scenes for a Christian in Georgia to witness.

While aspects of Jewish practice remained obscured from Christian colonists, the invitation for the Salzburg and Moravian Protestants to attend Jewish services demonstrates an openness with the Christian community that was also beginning in Europe. The European persecution that possibly motivated Jewish colonists to keep some practices private, may have also motivated the openness with other practices. Only someone unfamiliar with Jewish practice would believe a Blood Libel. By familiarizing their neighbors with Jewish religious practice, Savannah's Jewry was protecting itself from violence committed out of ignorant hatred.

Unlike the gift of food, which could not be reciprocal with Jewish dietary law, religious services were shared matters. The first service of the Salzburg Lutherans had Jewish attendees who were reported to "listen attentively" to the German service.<sup>97</sup> In comparing the Ashkenazi and Sephardi colonists, a Reverend of the Anglican Church in Savannah gave the example that the Ashkenazi would "rather starve" than eat non-Halacha meat, whereas at least one of the former crypto-Jews was often seen attending Anglican church services in the colony.<sup>98</sup> The sharing of religion and the open conversations on religion between Savannah's Jewry and the Protestant communities was understood differently by Jews and Christians. There was a distinct difference between the intent by which the Jewish community shared Judaism and the intent of the different Christian communities sharing Christianity.

For Benjamin and Boltzius, there was a shared language and understanding of religion's role in life. Benjamin held Boltzius in high regard as a pious man. Boltzius, was indeed a pious man, following the tenants of pietism. The advent of pietism in 1648 in Germany created a dialogue between Protestants and Jews.<sup>99</sup> Benjamin and Boltzius found common ground on the subject of piety, both considering themselves\*s to be devote worshippers and observers of religious law. Benjamin is recorded as having confided in Boltzius as to the fractures in the

Jewish community between the Ashkenazi and Sephardi colonists. The clearest difference between the two Jewish ethnic groups was in food, as Boltzius remarked that the Sephardic colonists ate “the beef that comes from the warehouse or that is sold anywhere else. The German Jews on the other hand, would rather starve than eat meat they do not slaughter themselves.”<sup>100</sup> Sharing a dedication to religious law and practice, as well as sharing a native tongue, made Benjamin feel close to Boltzius. Boltzius’ Lutheranism does not appear to have prevented Benjamin from holding Boltzius in high esteem, as a man of great faith.

The pietism movement in Germany had influenced the ways in which German Protestants approached possible converts from Judaism. With the same hopeful folly as Martin Luther, Protestants following thinkers of pietism believed that Jewish conversion would be brought about by “emphasizing Christian love toward Jews, an understanding of Jewish religious life, and close attention to one’s own Christian behavior.”<sup>101</sup> Jewish attendance at Lutheran services, gifts of food, and acts of kindness caused Boltzius to excitedly send for Yiddish conversion tracts. As historian Holly Snyder has suggested, Benjamin’s reaction to the conversation tracts was blasphemous in Boltzius’ eyes. After this exchange, Benjamin Sheftall is never mentioned by name again in the Salzburg documents, and all previous notations of his name were expunged from the official record published by Samuel Urlsperger. Boltzius became bitter toward Benjamin and the Jewish community when it became clear that religious conversation did not mean religious conversion, the same does not appear to have happened to Benjamin.<sup>102</sup>

Lutheran and Moravian officials shared their religions in hope that they would convert the Jewish colonists. While their exact motivation is impossible to state, it is certain that the Jewish colonists were not proselytizing. The Jewish colonists were unconcerned if Christians adhered to Judaism: for example, Abraham Minis procured pork, a non-Halacha food, for the

public store. In the ancient world, Judaism was a proselytizing faith—with “uncircumcised” carrying many of the same connotations as “Jew” in Christianity—and the sages promoted the forced circumcision of male servants and slaves.<sup>103</sup> Jewish proselytizing was, for the most part, a thing of the ancient world. There is no evidence of forced circumcision on servants or slaves in Georgia. Likely, Jewish colonists were encouraged by the respect for Judaism they found in Pietism and used the connection as an opportunity to promote understanding and acceptance of Jewish worship.

וַיֹּאמֶר מֶלֶךְ מִצְרָיִם כִּי בֵּרֶה הָעָם וַיַּהֲפֹךְ לְבֵב פְּרָעָה וְעַבְדֵּיו  
 אֶל הָעָם וַיֹּאמֶר מָה זֹאת עֲשֵׂינו כִּי שְׁלַחְנוּ אֶת-יִשְׂרָאֵל מִעֲבָדֵנו  
*When the King of Mitzrayim was told that the people had fled, Pharaoh and his courtiers had a change of heart about the people and said, “What is this we have done, releasing Israel from our service?”*

While Benjamin lost Boltzius to the bitterness of his failed conversion, he forged and maintained many other relationships with Christian members of the Georgia Dutch. Benjamin had likely maintained mutual respect for the Christians. It may have been after Perla’s death that Benjamin employed a woman to serve as a nurse in the home to care for his two young boys, probably one of the German colonists. As someone who had proved to be honest and trustworthy, as well as able to communicate in her natural tongue, Benjamin was an appealing employer for the German servant. Benjamin could afford servant labor in his home, as could many of the other Jewish settlers. Dr. Samuel Nunes Ribero and family had even traveled to Georgia with their own servant, a Jewish man named Shem Noah.<sup>104</sup> Jewish emigrants used servant labor in and out of the home, this was the case of Abraham DeLyon who had cultivated 4 acres of land in 1736 and complained about the cost and laziness of his white servants.<sup>105</sup>

Perhaps, Benjamin also began employing German servants early on in the colony to cultivate his land. Boltzius and Urlsperger knew that they were producing the official record on Salzburg activities in Georgia: news that Benjamin, a “Jew,” was actually employing Lutheran men to clear his field, instead of the Lutheran men volunteering their labor in a much grander scheme of conversion would not have gone over well. While it has been revealed that Urlsperger edited out the early mentions of Benjamin, there is no evidence either he or Boltzius lied about volunteering with other men to work for Benjamin, although the exchange of food for hard labor is somewhat suspicious. Notwithstanding the 1734 cultivation of his field, Benjamin did employ Christian servants. It is unclear how many servants Benjamin employed in his home, but at some point during the German Protestant emigration to Georgia, Benjamin put his communication skills to work and began placing Germanic speaking servants into homes to work, his own included. Being able to hire a servant to work in the home, meant that Benjamin was finding economic success in the colony. Beyond feeding and clothing servants, their employers also took on the travel debt incurred in coming to Georgia.

When Captain Thompson arrived on January 1737/8 with people traveling as indentured servants, none of the colonists seemed willing or could afford to take them on. Acting “without order” Thomas Causton took the debt on the Georgia Trust, this accounts for the 21 Trust servants found among the self-selected colonists.<sup>7</sup> Causton was in charge of the Public Store House operated by the Trustees, also serving as 1<sup>st</sup> Bailiff. In England, Percival did not seem pleased with Causton’s decision as he marked next to each of the servants that Causton had made the Trust “lyable to the charge.”<sup>106</sup> Any of the colonists willing to hire these servants, owed money to the Trust to pay for their passage to Georgia. Causton would not endear himself to the

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<sup>7</sup> See Chart 2. The 21 Trust servants account for 4% of the self-selected colonists.

colonists either—he appeared vindictive in his distribution of goods from the Public Store. One of the colonists who had his provisions cut off was a fellow employee of the Trust, William Bradley. Bradley was hired as an agricultural teacher for the colony and found in his charge the Palatine Trust servants—most of whom did not speak English. Benjamin worked with Bradley as an advocate for the German speaking servants. Benjamin spoke at least four languages—German, English, Hebrew, and Yiddish. With his relationship with the German settlers in Georgia, Benjamin found himself amidst the colonial Trustee politics of Bradley and Causton, undermining each other in a war over whom had the most authority over the Palatine servants. Bradley and Causton took turns complaining about each other in the journal of Trustee secretary William Stephens whose near audible sigh still groans off the page whenever the name of one or the other appears.

Servants largely made up of Irish, Scottish, and German emigrants were expected to do the hard labor of the colony. The Trustees were sorely mistaken if they presumed the reliance on servants would save Georgia from the pitfalls experienced with slave labor. Complaints about the servants were plentiful. Benjamin experienced some of his own heartache at the hands of his German servant when his son Sheftall “died very young ocationed by his nurse givin him acorns to eate, through her ignorance.”<sup>107</sup> Others using servant labor complained of laziness—arguing that white servants refused to do the difficult labor needed to clear land. The argument that white servants were sickly, requiring more medical care and more expensive provisions plagued the Trustees who were bombarded with requests for slave labor.<sup>108</sup> Some of the complaints lodged at white servants reflect resistance to the labor institution—servants refusing to be worked like the slaves doing similar labor across the British Empire. Slaves and servants both resisted their respective labor institutions in similar ways such as by stealing, running away, refusing to work,

insurrection, and other daily acts of disobedience. Servants caught deserting Georgia before the expiration of their term of service faced a punishment of 50 lashes.<sup>109</sup> Physical punishment was wrought to the extreme on both slave and servant with a legal system that favored the landed and wealthy. Being tried for a crime against a servant did not seem to impact the status nor wealth of the accused. Joseph Brown faced trial for the murder of his servant, “but by managmt. was cleared.”<sup>110</sup> Three years after his conviction of maltreatment for “not supplying his servants with necessarys” Patrick Houston was loaned £100 of the Trust money to buy provisions for the colony.<sup>111</sup>

Servants brought over by the Trustees had more mobility than servants who traveled to Georgia with the self-selected colonists. Servants made up 68% of the self-selected colonists and, for the most part, were stuck with the family who sponsored their journey. It might have been this lack of mobility that led to the Red String Plot. The would-be insurrectionists were, for the most part, Irish servants among the self-selected group, with some Irish freeholder conspirators among both the charity and self-selected colonists. The group identified each other by a red string tied about their wrist to protect each other in their plot to murder the men of Savannah and burn the town to the ground. A rumor spread that they were allied with local Yamacraw traders preying upon the racial fears of the young colony.

The red string in this thwarted insurrection echoes the Jewish practice of circumcision. The need for a visible identifying marker belies a lack of racial markers to distinguish the isolated population from the rest. Differences in speech, dress, and religion distinguished the Georgia colonists within the generally homogenous category of white. In Georgia, Irish conspirators donned a red string, designed to set them apart in their murderous plot. The visible comradesy of the Irish conspirators was ultimately their doom as authorities used the red string to

identify would-be insurrectionists. In Judaism, the practice of circumcision was a permanent, physical marker on Jewish men, privately distinguishing them from the larger Christian society, and bringing many men doom during the Spanish Inquisition. Circumcision also separated men from women in Judaism. No comparable service welcomed Jewish daughters into the world and into the Abrahamic covenant. Women did not physically, permanently mark Judaism into their bodies, nor the bodies of their daughters. Circumcision is a unique religious physical marker that distinguished Jewish men from Jewish women and non-Jewish people. In each case, a purposeful added visual marker distinguished one people from another. Added visual markers were unnecessary with slavery, a world system that by the 1730s had become predicated on race in which the only people enslaved were indigenous people of Africa and the Americas with a darker complexion than the European colonists.

Servants with the Trust had slightly more mobility, as demonstrated by the Palatine servants caught between the wills of Bradley and Causton. Causton, seemingly out of spite and nepotism, had taken a carpenter and other skilled German servants out from Bradley's service and assigned them to work for Mr. Williamson, Causton's nephew.<sup>112</sup> Soon Bradley realized his complaints to William Stephens of the reassignment bore no results and sought out the servants assigned to Williamson. In his journal, Stephens recounted his late night encounter with Bradley and a Palatine tailor. Bradley explained to Stephens that the German man wanted to quit his service of Williamson and return to his work with the Trust. Stephens cautioned the Trustees that while the tailor confirmed that the move was of his own seeking, "when I asked the Reason of it, he could find none of any Weight, only that he was allowed no Sugar to his Rice, and such idle Complaints..."<sup>113</sup> Stephens remained a neutral party in the exchange and allowed for the servant and others to move back to Bradley's supervision having not yet signed their indenture contracts

with Williamson. Lending to Stephens' suspicions that Bradley had his own interests at heart rather than those of the German tailor is the absence of Benjamin Sheftall in the late evening exchange with Stephens. The Palatine tailor had probably picked up very little English—having spent less than 3 months in the English colony. Without Benjamin to fully explain and question the servant on what his desires and intentions were, there is little doubt that Bradley was manipulating the situation.

It is certain that Bradley still relied on Benjamin for proper communication with his servants because Bradley had brought Benjamin in to attest to various abuses Causton inflicted upon the Trust servants just ten days earlier. Benjamin was questioned on two matters concerning the Palatine servants by Stephens, one of labor duties and another of treatment. Bradley accused Causton of reassigning Trust servants employed on Trust land, “which occasioned the Plough to stand still.”<sup>114</sup> He further accused Causton of distributing inferior cloth to the servants under his command, whereas finer cloth was provided to all the other servants. In a world where clothing reflected status and social position: the finer servants were dressed, the richer and more respected their employer seemed. By giving inferior cloth to Bradley’s servants, Causton was purposefully attacking Bradley’s role and prestige in the colony. To Causton and Bradley, the servants and the quality of their clothing were folly in their ongoing crusade against one another—not humans whose quality of life was held at the whims of their employers.

When questioned on the matters, Benjamin confirmed the story of inferior cloth adding that upon complaint the issue had been resolved with better cloth. It is likely that this conflict of cloth was solved by Benjamin going to the Public Store and clearing up the error, as Bradley seemed unaware or unconcerned with the solution to his complaints. As to the plough Benjamin “could say very little or nothing to.”<sup>115</sup> Benjamin’s absence of knowledge on the agricultural

matters reveals him not to be an overseer or taskmaster of the Palatine servants. He did not know the individual duties and assignments of each Trust servant. He did, however, know whether each had the proper cloth from the Public Store. Benjamin's testimony to Stephens reveals him to be an advocate for the German speaking servants.

As an advocate and translator, Benjamin was serving a role that did not exist in the institution of slavery. Benjamin was likely brought in by the German servants to help negotiate contracts and to serve as an advocate. The only contracts in slavery were those drawn between slaveholders who bought, sold, mortgaged, and put a price on human life. There was not a contract between slaves and slaveholders negotiating the terms of labor and compensation as there was between servants and their employers. Benjamin's role as an advocate makes his absence in the late evening scene with Bradley, Stephens, and the German tailor all the more inappropriate.

There are some possibilities for Benjamin's absence. Namely, his testimony did not show Bradley in a favorable light when he was brought to Stephens to second Bradley's story about Causton. Bradley must have known that Benjamin's loyalty was to the Palatine servants and not to Bradley. Beyond Bradley's personal feelings toward Benjamin or his intentions toward the tailor, Benjamin's absence may have reflected the biases of William Stephens and the Trustees. When Bradley brought Benjamin to William Stephens on the 1<sup>st</sup> of March 1737/8, he "desired [Stephens] would take particular Notice" that some of the servants had taken Jewish families as their employers.<sup>116</sup>

Bradley and Causton both saw their careers end due to racial politics. As Bradley became entrenched in debt, accusations of his misuse of Trust servants mounted. When Stephens recounted his delightful visit to Bradley's personal garden lot, Causton cautioned him that the

labor had been done by Trust servants while the Trust land lay idle and unproductive. Yet, Bradley had maintained and bettered his position as an employee of the Trust all the while facing charges that he had stolen and killed some of the Trustee cattle. It was not the complaints of corruption that ultimately ended Bradley's career with the Trust, but his backing of the colonists clamoring for slavery. While Bradley lost his position for his support of slavery and the racial beliefs held by many British colonists, Causton lost his due to his resistance of the very same belief structure. Causton, like Bradley, faced accusations of corruption, yet he fell out of favor once and for all with the Georgia colonists for his actions in a murder case. When white Anglican Indian trader Joseph Watson began drunkenly boasting about murdering an Indian man named Captain Skee and then became involved in the murder of Mary Musgrove's Indian slave Justice, other complaints of abuse by Watson came forth from the local Creek traders. Causton jailed Watson and put him on trial, facing harsh criticisms from the colonists, some of whom were fined for rioting during Watson's trial. The colonists complained that as a white man, Watson should not be punished for crimes against people deemed inferior. Causton was not ousted immediately after the trial, but many scholars agree that Watson's conviction was the nail in Causton's coffin of public opinion.<sup>117</sup> William Stephens, on the other hand, went on to become the first royal governor of Georgia at the loss of a relationship with his son Thomas who was an outspoken opponent of the Trustees' ban on slavery. The three men all experienced personal and professional loss and benefit at the hands of racial politics—when Benjamin Sheftall was brought to Stephens to attest to the ongoing toe-stomping between Causton and Bradley, he likewise became entrenched in the social and racial politics of the time.

In 1738 Judaism was not thought of as a different race, but it was well on its way in a world that was becoming increasingly racialized. Eugenics would not become a popular science

until the nineteenth century with the term antisemitism to represent the scientific racial hatred of Jewish people not being coined until the 1870s. In 1738 resentment toward Jewish people was, for the most part, based in religion. Certainly it was from a place of religion that caused William Stephens to be “shocked at it, to think of Christians becoming Bondmen to those Infidels.”<sup>118</sup> For a Christian to be subservient to a Jewish employer crossed long held social boundaries. “It would be licit, according to custom, to hold Jews, because of their crime in perpetual servitude,” wrote influential theologian St. Thomas Aquinas (1125-74).<sup>119</sup> The crime Jewish people were accused of was deicide—the murder of Jesus, a divine figure in Christianity. The punishment of deicide was for the people practicing Judaism were to be held in a state of perpetual servitude, at the whims of the state who, “may regard the possession of Jews as belonging to the state...” St. Aquinas promoted moderation in practice but this philosophy is at the root of what happened in Prussia to Benjamin, who fled the economic restraints and fines placed upon Jews by Friedrich Wilhelm I.<sup>120</sup> Anti-Jewish attitudes had long been a hallmark of Christianity and Stephens worried about the repercussions if news of Jewish homes employing Christian servants spread, “[fear] it would be ill looked on by every Body in the Communion of our Church.”<sup>121</sup> William Stephens may have also been concerned over how his bosses, the Trustees in England, would respond to the news given Percival’s fierce opposition to having Jewish colonists travel to Georgia in the first place.

It appears as though the shocking revelation that Christians were working as servants in Jewish homes was quickly overshadowed by the other cracks in the institution. By 1738, the demand for slavery was coupled with the growing dissatisfaction with the tail-male placed on land ownership and inheritance. The colonists clamoring for slavery quickly became known as malcontents, causing a major headache to the Trustees of Georgia. Likely the issue of Jewish

employers was dropped in favor of preserving the eroding façade of indentured servitude in Georgia.

The year 1738, disastrous for the Trustees, brought new life to the Sheftall family. Hannah Solomons, “a single young woman,” traveled to Savannah with Isaac Marks and his family in October 1738.<sup>122</sup> One month later she and Benjamin married. Amidst Benjamin’s nuptial bliss, brewed the complaints of the malcontents. Patrick Tailfer, a Scottish landholder, complied these complaints in a letter addressed to the Trustees dated December 8<sup>th</sup>, 1738, signed by 117 Georgia colonists. Unable to use land as security, nor to borrow off its value—colonists claimed the restrictions on ownership increased their interest rates and made it nearly impossible to join the international market. In requesting ownership of people, the authors of the letter were explicitly racial. They bemoaned the unsustainability and high cost of “White servants,” while begging for the “Use of Negroes.” They juxtaposed their situation with other ports located in South Carolina where slavery was legal, “...what should 'induce Persons to bring Ships here, when they can be loaded 'with one Half of the Expence so near us...”<sup>123</sup> In order to be competitive, the colonists demanded slave labor for the heavy burden of loading and unloading ships journeying along the trans-Atlantic market place. Tailfer was careful to request limited use of slave labor, using enslaved humans as beasts of burden in clearing and planting the land. He used this argument to woo the white craftsmen who feared their jobs being displaced by enslaved laborers.

It is possible that Benjamin Sheftall would have signed the petition if he had been able. As a merchant, Benjamin Sheftall stood to benefit from the introduction of slave labor: the arguments in the letter would have resounded with his economic situation. He and his family were already in a position to hire the services of others. However, Benjamin’s investment in the

Georgia Dutch indentured servants may have caused him to stand ardently against the malcontents as did Bolztius and the group of Highland Scots living north of Savannah. The Salzburger reverend argued against slave labor, in hopes of protecting the economic interests of his flock, while the Highland Scots articulated a moving argument against the perpetual enslavement of a fellow human being.<sup>124</sup> It is unknown where Benjamin stood on the debate but what is known is that Benjamin Sheftall did not sign the petition in part because he and the other Jewish colonists were not allowed, “The Jews applied for Liberty to sign with us; but we did not think it proper to join them in any of our Measures.”<sup>125</sup>

The request for slavery was tempered by the common and local fears of the institution, with the trustees’ economic interests. Colonists argued that the labor intensive production and exportation of timber was necessary in clearing the land for the two products the trustees were heavily invested in: wine and silk. The complaint of harsh labor echoed back to the male slaves hired out of South Carolina for the difficult task of building Savannah. The malcontent colonists suggested limitations on ownership, such as so many slaves per “white Man” or so many slaves to however many acres of land.<sup>126</sup> Limiting the enslaved population, the colonists clamoring for slavery hoped to avoid the tense situation felt in South Carolina. The following September 1739 in Stono, South Carolina a slave insurrection resulted in the deaths of 44 black slaves and 21 white slaveholders—the fears of the Trustees and colonists realized.

Levi Sheftall was born amidst the struggle between the malcontents and the Trustees, on the 12<sup>th</sup> of December 1739. Benjamin began the formal education of his sons at the age of five, Mordecai first joining the Savannah school in 1740. Four years later 1744, Levi joined his brother. Levi began school only two years after Oglethorpe led a small British militia to victory against the Spanish in the Battle of the Bloody Marsh. With the Spanish no longer providing a

destination enticing enslaved persons toward self-emancipation, the debate on slavery escalated. The 1740s brought more malcontent publications, railing against the policies of Georgia and the Trustees. The Trustees searched for an answer, even going so far as to have a lawyer inspect the Act of 1735 to see if it was possible to hire free black people in Georgia as a response to the claim that black people were better suited to labor in the muggy Georgia climate. Their lawyer found that the Act of 1735 did not just bar slave labor, but black labor and black people altogether and quickly the proposal of free black labor in Georgia was dropped.<sup>127</sup>

Levi remembered Savannah during this time as being a “mere wilderness” with “...few inhabitants, the town nothing but Logs in the streets, not having sufficient number of people in town to clear the trees away.”<sup>128</sup> Though trade continued with the Creek Nations, the relationship was tense. “Every kinde of ferocious beast used to come into town, take away what ever was left unsecured, with the trepidations committed by the above beasts and the Indians the inhabitants were continually on there guard...”<sup>129</sup> The Creek territory was marked off with boards painted red, as to prevent lumber production on Creek land.

Sheftall’s teacher was John Dobble, the third teacher in Savannah earning ten pounds a year. Afraid he had fallen out of favor with his bosses in 1744, Dobble wrote to the Trustees to assure them he had not joined the ranks of malcontents. His experience educating at minimum two Jewish children, did not stop him from comparing the malcontents to Herodians and Pharisees, wishing “they speed no better than those Jews did.”<sup>130</sup> Levi’s education ended in 1746, when the dwindling population caused his school to diminish.<sup>131</sup> According to the malcontent colonists, the exodus out of Georgia was due to the lack of economic opportunities, tied intimately with slaveholding and land ownership. Many Jewish colonists of Sephardic descent moved permanently and temporarily to South Carolina due to fear of Spanish

encroachment during the Seven Years War. The exodus of Jewish settlers meant that when the accoutrements needed for Mordecai's bar mitzvah finally arrived after being delayed in the war, there was no minyan in Savannah to perform the service. Mordecai and Levi both appear on the founding records of the congregation in Charleston, but neither man lived there for an extended period of time. It is possible that the two brothers went to Charleston have their bar mitzvahs with a congregation.

Benjamin Sheftall invested himself and his family into the colony of Georgia. He planted mulberry trees, received his stipend for silk, and mediated between indentured Georgia Dutch servants and the Georgia Trust English employees. He educated two of his children in Savannah and buried two other children and wife in the Georgia soil. As a founding member of the Savannah congregation, Benjamin provided kosher meat for the Jewish community as well as maintaining the vital records of Jewish life in Savannah. Benjamin invested himself in secular communal life as well, being a founding member of the interfaith Union Society in 1750.<sup>132</sup> Benjamin's interfaith community involvement would lead to economic connections for his sons later on. He made food and shared goodwill to all who shared his mother's tongue of German. Benjamin Sheftall was committed to his religion and to the colony of Georgia. As the ban on slavery lifted in 1751, his commitment did not waver as Benjamin Sheftall slowly replaced his German speaking white servants with enslaved black men and women.

## Part 2: Son and Slave



An image of Moses murdering an Egyptian slave driver from Levi Sheftall's Haggadah<sup>133</sup>

Levi Sheftall did not remark on his time in Charleston in the autobiography he wrote for his children later in life, nor his bar mitzvah but he does detail his economic coming of age. The same year Levi turned 13, the crown officially took over the governing of Georgia and Levi entered into the economic world. He set off to make some money by taking a loan from his father, purchasing deerskins, then dressing them in the fashion of Indian dresses. “I found the work very hard and disagreeable but the money I thought was a full compensation for the hard labour.”<sup>134</sup> His first batch of deerskins in 1752 made him a 5 shilling profit. That same year 149,000 pounds of deerskins were sent from Augusta down the Savannah River; 5,000 of those skins were sold in Savannah, the rest on to ports along the North American coast and across the Atlantic World.<sup>135</sup> Sheftall’s five shilling profit was his share in this massive global trade. In two years, he made 20 pounds sterling. Levi’s small profit was just enough to modestly support a

single man in England, while an English gentleman needed 300 pounds sterling to maintain his lifestyle.<sup>136</sup>

In 1756-57, Captain John Milledge was called to raise a company of rangers in Savannah by order of the King, in the struggle to claim the sole loyalty of the Creek Nations from the French and the Choctaws.<sup>137</sup> Levi recorded, that in 1758 Milledge, who was always “fond of [Levi] from a child” advised him to take up the butcher trade. With his father’s agreement, Levi entered into a yearlong partnership with Seven Mellen. The two men found “eager hands to work” for them.<sup>138</sup> It is possible that these eager hands were free white poor men, feeling displaced by the steady increase of slave labor. Whether the laborers were free or enslaved, Levi was working alongside them. He reported working double time and saving his money by not spending it on luxury items, such as fruit.<sup>139</sup> Sheftall and Mellen likely provided the meat rations for Milledge’s rangers. Starting with a large order and loyal costumer, “butching,” as Levi called it, was fifteen times more profitable than dressing deerskins. In a year, Levi had made a 150 pound sterling profit. Around this time, Levi Sheftall purchased his first slave—a man named London.

Slavery when introduced in 1751 by the trustees “placed constraints on the institution’s growth and regulated white’s behavior.”<sup>140</sup> The 1755 changes under the royal government increased the permissible ratio from four slaves to twenty per one white man. The 1755 codes increased regulation on the economic and physical mobility of enslaved laborers, while increasing the protections of slaveholders. Levi Sheftall began taking part in the institution of slavery during the period in which it was rapidly expanding and slaveholders were gaining new legal rights. During the years in which Levi began accumulating his human property in 1758-1762, most of the imported slaves in Georgia were from the West Indies on ships carrying ten to

twenty captives.<sup>141</sup> London was likely born into slavery in the West Indies before being sold to Levi in Georgia. His name, London, was probably given to him by the slaveholder who claimed his mother when she gave birth. If his mother gave him a different name, it was only known between them. London's knowledge of Africa and freedom was secondhand from the song, dance, stories, and ritual practices he witnessed in his youth from other enslaved people. He would have been the carrier of first generation diasporic culture, learning Africa while on the opposite shores of the Atlantic. Levi's knowledge of Israel was also shared through song, dance, story, and ritual—although Levi showed the signs of a thousand, six hundred years' worth of diaspora, reflecting his Prussian roots in each of his memories of Israel. While a memory of ancient slavery intimately shaped Levi's perspective, the lived reality of slavery was shaping African culture in diaspora.

Levi Sheftall's autobiography is helpful in understanding Levi's economic mindset and how he viewed the slavery in the world around him. For instance, Levi does not say how large of a loan he took from his father, whether he was charged interest, nor many deer skins he first purchased and from whom. Levi recorded only his profit again when talking about his partnership with Stephen Mellen, not how much money he invested into the business. Levi boasts of working hard, being frugal, while also accumulating property. Continuing as a butcher, Levi wrote "Sill my Self my & man London doing double work in order to Save money this we did for 3 years, I never spending one penny which few people can Say as much, I then found my Self possessed of Some property."<sup>142</sup> Levi claims to have never spent any of his earnings, yet he accumulates property—including the property rights to people like London. Levi considered slaves an investment and writes that he owned "6 or 8 Good Slaves" in 1762. London and the other men or women held in bondage by Levi would have been priced anywhere from 30 to 50

pounds individually.<sup>143</sup> With a single enslaved woman costing Levi three years' worth of profit in dressing deer skins, he was only able to afford investing in human property by taking up the butcher trade.

Purchasing slaves was a means of increasing personal productivity. Levi worked himself double time the first year of his partnership—he did not require Mellen to work overtime, nor did he explicitly state that any of their employees were required to work beyond their normal workload. When Levi acquired London, he treated London's labor as though it was his personal labor, increasing his personal productivity by working both himself and London double time. Besides a man named Joe who belonged to Mordecai, London is the only enslaved person belonging to Levi who is named and mentioned throughout Levi's autobiography. As Levi purchased more people, his relationships to his enslaved workers became less personal despite considering them his personal property. Labor had been a shared experience with London, it isn't clear that Levi continued to share the hard physical labor as he accumulated more people in bondage. By 1762 Levi also had a signed grant to 100 acres adjoining Benjamin's land and a grant for a town lot 69 in Hardwick on the great Ogeechee.<sup>144</sup> Levi likely split up his enslaved labor force: he may have continued working alongside London as a butcher while other enslaved people cleared his land and framed & boarded the house Levi had moved onto his lot in January of 1762. Looking back at this time in his life, Levi couldn't remember whether he had six or eight people laboring for his benefit but with the comfort their labor afforded he "had a good inclination to settle my Self with a companion for life."

Amidst his financial success, Levi sought out to start his family with the notion that it would be "very pleasing to my good parents," but he found the task easier said than done. His first love interest rejected him, causing Levi to nearly kill himself—"a foolish thing for a young

man to give way to.”<sup>145</sup> He wrote, “her Reason was best known to herself, She Shall be nameless here but this much I will Say She has paid Severely Since in her choice.”<sup>146</sup> It is notable that in his autobiography, all the women remained nameless, including his “good aged mother” and wife. Images of a woman in a bad marriage come to mind with Levi’s ominous hint at the consequences his unnamed heartbreaker paid for her choice but it is more likely that the woman who rejected Levi didn’t marry at all.

Abraham and Abigail Minis built a life in Georgia, raising their six children in Savannah. The three youngest Minis daughters were some of the only Ashkenazi women in Savannah and with each being born after Levi and given the close relations between the Minis and Sheftall families, it is possible that either Judith, Hannah, or Sarah Minis could have been the first woman to break Levi’s heart. It is doubtful that any of the three women would paint their choice in rejecting Levi as bleakly as he did in his autobiography, although only one of the three married. Hannah, at the age of 54, married David Leion in 1798. In the *Vital Records of Savannah Jewry* Levi wrote, “it being sometime so singular that I could not help but take notice of it—that is—they parted from each other under writings on the 22<sup>nd</sup> day of August 1799. No instance of the kinde ever happend here before amongst people of our profession.” Kaye Kole, genealogist of the Minis family, has argued that Hannah and David possibly lived separately without divorcing as the *Vital Records* seems to suggest. In 1762 one of the Minis sisters rejected Levi’s proposal to marriage, possibly encouraged to do so after seeing their mother’s growing economic successes after the death of their father in 1757.

Abigail, one of the original colonists to arrive in 1733, increased her property holdings after her husband Abraham’s death in 1757, something only made possible by the transition to royal rule. Abraham Minis had moderate success in his life that was increased by his wife. Upon

his death, Abigail petitioned for more land, opened a tavern, and continued to raise cattle. In the year of husband's death, she owned 1 slave, ten years later, she owned around 19.<sup>147</sup> She even managed to secure her land and slave holdings through the Revolutionary War. The Minis daughters did have some mobility to court outside of Savannah, during the Revolutionary War they lived in Charleston with their mother who also held economic interests there.<sup>148</sup> Abigail was 93 years old at the time of her death on October 11, 1795. When Levi and his wife had their thirteenth and last child on February 20<sup>th</sup>, 1796, she was named Abigail Minis Sheftall "at the particular request of Miss Leah Minis and her sisters."<sup>149</sup> Despite having a niece already bearing their mother's namesake born in 1775, the five unmarried Minis daughters, asked Levi and wife to pass on the namesake of their mother to the youngest Sheftall daughter unable to do so themselves. In asking, they perhaps revealed a tinge of regret at one of the women turning down Levi all those years ago, or the women were simply mourning their mother and saw an opportunity with the Sheftall pregnancy to honor her memory. The daughters would have been unable to pass anything else of their mother's onto the youngest Sheftall woman, as their inheritance from their wealthy mother was to be divided among her grandchildren upon her daughters' deaths.

It took Levi three years after his broken heart to become engaged to another woman in Charleston. During those three years, Levi lost £1500 on a bad investment he was convinced to buy into while collecting payment on a debt from a man in a tavern, who first convinced Levi to drink and then to invest.<sup>150</sup> Levi had likely begun loaning out money as another means of investment to increase his wealth. Levi had restored his wealth by 1765, but not his fortune in love. He broke off an engagement in 1765 with a woman in Charleston after an incident with the woman's "(tyrant) Aunt."<sup>151</sup> Benjamin passed away in October of that year, having never seen

his youngest son marry. At his death Benjamin owned three people, a woman named Letty and her two sons Jack and Ben. In his will Benjamin split the enslaved family, leaving Letty with his wife Hannah, her sons Jack and Ben to be separated, Ben going to Levi and Jack to be split between Mordecai's two children, Sheftall and Perla. After their father's death Mordecai and Levi applied for joint ownership of Benjamin's Savannah town lot, which seems to have blossomed into a partnership between the two brothers, who loaned out money together.

As slavery increased in Georgia, so too did the frequency of cargo ships carrying enslaved people, by the mid-1760s ships arrived in Georgia directly from Africa carrying hundreds of people.<sup>152</sup> On the 24<sup>th</sup> of July 1766, Levi purchased a man named Quash with two women named Aby and Lucy. Levi described Quash as a “new negro” for £34-10-0, employing Mr. Watson to train Quash in the tanner’s trade.<sup>153</sup> Diaspora is a culture of memory, which leads to many conflicting arguments of authenticity within the diasporic community, as seen in the many liturgical disputes between the Sephardi and Ashkenazi colonists that prevented them from constructing a synagogue in Savannah until 1820.<sup>154</sup> It is probable that if London was born into slavery in the West Indies, he may have had conflicting interpretations of traditional African practices than Quash who came directly from Africa. The problem of authenticity within diaspora caused some scholars of the black Atlantic to turn away from the lens, claiming it to be a stagnate concept reliant on a legitimacy that springs from an imagined homeland, causing an ignorance of the continued cultural exchanges happening around the rim of the Atlantic. Yet, C.S. Monaco claims the lens of diaspora as an inclusive concept, with wide applications in understanding Jewish history; as such it can be used to describe Jewish experience and ethnic background anywhere in the world, save Israel. By opening diaspora up to the experiences of all the people and their descendants who were violently removed from Africa, the problem of

authenticity and legitimacy disappear because the concept legitimizes the individual's experiences with the attached weight of history. London, Quash, and the other men and women who found themselves enslaved to Levi Sheftall each had a different memory of Africa but they were all experiencing diaspora together. The combination of memory and shared experience are at the foundations of a diasporic culture.

Olaudah Equiano, who purchased his freedom from Savannah trader Robert King in 1766, often signed his letters, "Gustavus Vassa, The African," using a name he associated with his Christianity and a distinction of identity. Equiano's Christian name, Gustavus Vassa, is intimately tied to his slavery as it was given to him by his slaveholder Michael Henry Pascal who purchased him in Virginia, when he was around the age of 11. The circumstances of his secondary naming is why most scholars refer to him by his given African name, but in life he nearly always referred to himself in public and private as Gustavus Vassa, a name that carried his personal experiences of diaspora. Gustavus Vassa's name is hard for scholars to use because it intimately carries his painful experiences in slavery as the name given to him by Pascal who took all of Vassa's earnings in the Seven Years War then sold Vassa after promising to free him. Diaspora also implies a carried nationhood. Jewish diaspora is the persistent observance of the laws of Israel outside of its boarders. Equiano certainly called himself "The African" with the same reverence a Jewish man or woman during the same period would refer to themselves as an Israelite. Appearance and behavior often made the distinctions of African and Israelite plain to the Christian traders around the Atlantic, however, self-distinction contains a much deeper sentiment. Israelite and African became origin stories that carried the weight of violent expulsion and removal.

“Next year in Jerusalem,” Levi would proclaim at the close of every Pesach Seder, throughout his entire life. Levi Sheftall had never been to Israel, yet it is probable that he felt a deep and close connection to the land he prayed to each year. Israel is featured prominently in Judaism through daily prayer, weekly services, special festivals and feasts. Jewish removal from Israel is also recalled at even the highest moments of joy within Jewish tradition, such as weddings. The destruction of the second temple may have been a fasting day for the Orthodox Sheftall men, who would have spent the day in prayer and mourning. While Israel has remained a constant theme within Jewish practice, diasporic culture absorbs traditions and practices from the cultural exchanges happening outside of Israel. For the Sheftall family Hanukkah was not only a fond memory of the Maccabees marvelous victories or a miracle of oil, but also a recollection of Prussian traditions from frying latkes to spinning dreidels. The men and women held in bondage by Levi had much fresher memories of Africa than Levi did of Israel, but they also had to negotiate them differently. Some Jewish traditions, such as circumcision, were more covert than others but, for the most part, Levi and the other settlers were able to practice Judaism freely and openly in Georgia. As enslaved people, London, Quash, Aby, and Lucy all faced legal restrictions on all of their travel; public and personal gatherings; and economic participation. Every Jewish person negotiates their Judaism into their desired lifestyle, and within the harsh limitations set upon them, enslaved Americans did the same. With a Jewish slaveholder, the people enslaved by Levi had unique options to negotiate their traditions through than they would have under the employ of a Christian slaveholder.

Olaudah Equiano remarked on his memories and depiction of life in Africa, “I cannot forbear suggesting what has long struck me very forcibly, namely, the strong analogy which even appears to prevail in the manners and customs of my countrymen, and those of the Jews...”<sup>155</sup>

Equiano drew direct comparisons between Jewish practice and Igbo customs on circumcision and ritual bathing. Circumcision wasn't the only means of permanent physical markings practiced "in a charming fruitful vale, named Essaka" where Equiano was born in 1745.<sup>156</sup> Facial scars were purposefully created along the brow line to distinguish men who held high social positions, serving as judges or senators in Equiano's community. Scarification in African nations communicated social position instantaneously, just as visual markers such as the prayer shawls can distinguished Jewish people and the red strings tied around the wrists of would be insurrectionists marked their comradery. While some remnants of body altering African practices—such as tattooing and piercings—were carried with some of the people sold into Atlantic slavery, others practices were not carried over due to the loss of meaning: social status facial scars lost their meaning and power once out of the context of Africa.<sup>157</sup> The violence of slavery gave scarification a darker meaning with scars caused by whip or a hot branding iron often yielded by cruel overseers, slave drivers, and slaveholders. Scarification had its meaning transformed away from the positive visual language of social accomplishment and into the painful evidence of the abusive labor institution. Under the extreme demand of physical labor, scarification also became dangerous in a world where people were literally worked to death. Stopping scarification as a matter of safety echoes the Jewish families hiding their identities in the Iberian world who did not circumcise their sons as a matter of protections.

Equiano was not marked because he was kidnapped at the age of eleven. If kidnaped when he was older or if he was first sold into slavery in Africa for committing a crime, Quash may have carried scars from his home country that would have told his fellow countrymen his social position and family line. He would have endured a journey across the Atlantic, maybe with some people from his nation who would have shared his visual language and with other

fellow captives from different African nations who could only place his nationality by his scars, all transported by men who only saw gross deformations. Not all nations in Africa practiced scarification and it is just as likely that Quash did not carry a distinctly African visual language upon his body. Nevertheless Quash's name carried Africa with him being the word Edward Long noted in 1774 Jamaica as being a common African word for Sunday.<sup>158</sup> Levi, a man who had been circumcised at birth, did not change Quash's name as Pascal baptized Equiano into Vassa. Nor did Levi write on any aspect of Quash's physical appearance including mention of any scars, almost always referring to Quash as a "negro", a "tanner" or "a negro man a tanner by trade."

<sup>159</sup>Levi rarely uses Quash's name in his legal paperwork and never in his personal papers.

By 1768 Mordecai and Levi collected 600 acres in payment for unpaid debts. Their partnership continued as Levi accompanied their ship *Two Brothers* trading in the West Indies, possibly carrying the lumber cleared by enslaved laborers on their shared tracts of land. While trading in St. Croix, 28 year old Levi met and married 14 year old Sephardi Sarah De La Motta on May 25<sup>th</sup>, 1768.<sup>160</sup> She moved back to Savannah with him the following 22<sup>nd</sup> of September 1768.<sup>161</sup> Sometime after their marriage, her parents and other family members moved to Charleston. Levi's marriage to Sarah De La Motta was typical of Jewish relationships forming around the Atlantic World. While tensions remained between the Sephardi and Ashkenazi colonists, marriages like Levi and Sarah's helped to ease tensions between the two ethnic groups. Jonathan Sarna argued for an open definition of Port Jew to acknowledge relationships that blended Jewish ethnic groups like Levi's and Sarah's, existing in port cities around the Atlantic.<sup>162</sup> While the concept of Port Jew recognizes the unique trading situation Jewish people found themselves in around the Atlantic World, it does not raise the critical questions raised by the lens of diaspora. The ability of diaspora to describe the situation of Jewish people and the

people displaced by the transatlantic slave trade, creates a dynamic understanding of how these two groups interacted on the outskirts of the mainstream culture they existed in.



An image of a servant washing the patriarch's hands from Levi Sheftall's Haggadah<sup>163</sup>

While many African and Jewish practices have been suppressed or dropped in the process of diaspora by symbols or customs losing their meaning, value, or as a matter of safety—other practices have been negotiated in response to the individual circumstances each person faced. Opportunities to practice ritual washings may have been more readily available to enslaved people belonging to Levi and other Jewish slaveholders, than Anglicized slaveholders whose ritual washings such as baptisms only occurred in churches or were conducted by church officials. Equiano attested, “I have before remarked, that the natives of this part of Africa are extremely cleanly. This necessary habit of decency was with us a part of religion, and therefore we had many purifications and washings; indeed almost as many, and used on the same occasions, if my recollection does not fail me, the Jews.”<sup>164</sup> A prime example of ritual washing is displayed in Levi’s Haggadah, depicting the head of the household assisted by a servant to wash his hands at the start of the Pesach Seder. The scene could have easily been described by Equaino’s description of washing customs in Essaka, “Before we taste food, we always wash our hands: indeed our cleanliness on all occasions is extreme; but on this it is an indispensable ceremony.”<sup>165</sup>

Most ritual washing would fall under the family purity laws usually known as niddah presented opportunities and restrictions unknown in a Christian household. Sarah Sheftall taking hold of Levi's home in September 1768 may have given enslaved women like Aby and Lucy and opportunity to practice ritual purifications they remembered from Africa.<sup>166</sup> After their marriage, the religious purity of Levi hinged on Sarah's menstrual cycle and her role in maintaining Halacha in the home. Each month Sarah would watch for seven clean days after her menses before visiting the mikvah, or ritual bathhouse, established in April of 1738.<sup>167</sup> Benjamin did not include the mikvah's location when he remarked on its opening in the *Vital Records*, perhaps because, like circumcision, ritual bathing was something the Jewish community preferred to keep an extremely private affair. The mikvah was likely dug into the ground and must have been built by water to allow the immersion pool to be filled with "living" waters, possibly with a separate bathing area that would allow people to wash themselves according to Halacha standards before immersing themselves to be cleansed spiritually. Equiano described a similar purification ritual for women in Essaka by recounting a time when he was so inseparable from his mother he was set off alongside her and then was purified with her after she finished her bleeding.<sup>168</sup> If Levi had ever touched his mother during her cycle growing up, he would have had a similar experience as Equiano by going to the mikvah to be purified. If Aby, Lucy, or the other enslaved women accompanied Sarah to the mikvah, it was likely that they were not permitted access into the holy space unless to clean or perform routine maintenance on the building. Given the mikvah's necessary location by a body of natural water combined the time Sarah would have spent performing her monthly ritual cleansing, enslaved women may have found the time and space to perform their own monthly rituals.

With opportunities, also came restrictions. Rabbi Isaac ben Haninia wrote that if a married woman had four servants, “She may lounge in an easy chair” but must provide intimate labor for her husband by filling his cup; washing his face, hands, and feet; and making his bed.<sup>169</sup> This intimate labor was supposed to stop as was sexual relations while Sarah was on her menses. Rashi took the stance that impurity was could not be passed on by touching items a menstruating woman handled, which would making it easier for menstruating servants to preform household duties. It is unclear, beyond the presence of a mikvah, how Jewish households handled niddah and the menses of enslaved women. Sarah may have policed the menses of the enslaved women working in her home, feeling her obligation to maintain Halacha within her household. Enslaved women likely worked through their menses, but not in service positions. Jewish homes may have employed men and children as dining room servers instead of women to avoid the possibility of a menstruating woman waiting on a Jewish man. Unlike Levi, Sarah was surrounded by slavery from birth in St. Croix and likely learned how to manage household affairs from her mother. Managing a Jewish household included everything from ensuring her own personal purity to strict separation between meat and dairy products in the kitchen. Writing on the dietary laws alone, Holly Snyder commented that Jewish women faced “complications the likes of which were unknown in the households of her Christian contemporaries.”<sup>170</sup> These complications in maintaining a Jewish household were felt expressly by the enslaved laborers who at times found themselves with expanded opportunities to practice African rituals and at other times felt their entire body and bodily functions policed.

Levi requested 300 acres in 1769, claiming his ownership of 15 enslaved laborers and 600 acres as evidence of his ability to manage the additional acreage. With the additional acreage, Levi added substantially to his enslaved workforce claiming to own 44 enslaved

laborers at the eve of the Revolutionary War. As tensions escalated across the British colonies, Levi Sheftall was trying his hand at running a plantation. Georgia averaged 25,000 barrels of rice in annual exports leading to the Declaration of Independence, and investing enslaved labor into a plantation hints that Levi wanted to take his share of the global trade.<sup>171</sup> Just as Levi could not have purchased London until butchering opened that economic possibility, Levi would not have been able to invest in a rice plantation until he reached this bracket of wealth in the 1770s. Levi had built a successful career out of butchering for the British militia, tanning hides, trading lumber in the West Indies, and loaning money on credit. As Watson W. Jennison put it, “Rice planting was a particularly expensive endeavor, thus rendering it an occupation undertaken exclusively by the rich.”<sup>172</sup> Levi’s investment in rice would have been minimal by even the lowest standard set by Jennison’s examples, “William G. DeBrahm estimated that it required at least £2,476 to purchase the two hundred acres of land, to buy the forty slaves, and to cover the other expenses needed to start production.”<sup>173</sup> Levi must have been cultivating a smaller tract, such as his 100 acres in St. Andrew’s parish. While he claims to have owned 44 people, many of those people were employed elsewhere in Levi’s diverse investments: Quash trained to be a tanner; London likely continued butchering. Given the timing of his investment in rice, Levi probably sought out enslaved laborers from Senegambia and Sierra Leon who would be familiar with cultivating the crop.<sup>174</sup>

The more enslaved people Levi purchased, the higher risk his investment in slavery became. St. Andrew’s Parish saw violence in 1774 when several of enslaved men of Captain Morris revolted and killed their overseer, Morris’ wife, and an enslaved child before having Agnus M’Intosh’s enslaved man join their ranks and continue the violence onto another plantation before being captured and burned alive.<sup>175</sup> Levi and London had a shared experience

of working alongside each other, which Levi did not have more and more as he grew his enslaved labor force, combined with Levi's propensity to work himself and the people he enslaved double time put him at a high risk for a slave revolt—a risk that inched higher with each new person he purchased. Levi took the risk because he could not cultivate rice without the knowledge enslaved people carried across the Atlantic. Even with expertise from African rice planters, Levi's return in a trade that would have been as minimal as his 5 shilling profit was amidst the massive trade of deer skins. Levi did not stay in the plantation business long enough to see many returns if any at all, he writes that with "the war breaking out in 1775 I Sold and was cheated out of my property."<sup>176</sup>

At the eve of the Revolutionary War, Levi was nearing on 36 years and in the 23 years of his working life he had lost and recovered a small fortune. His success was largely available to him after he could afford to buy slave labor through his employment with a family friend. Levi's accumulation of land and human property was made possible by the royal government. Georgia was the youngest of Britain's mainland colonies and much of the revolutionary spirit in the colony had lifted alongside the ban on slavery and land ownership restrictions. Jennison argues that Georgia's reluctance to join the revolution sprung from concerns over safety and economics. Georgia was exposure on its south and west boarders, the growing enslaved population, and tensions with Indian nations made Georgians reluctant to forgo the protection from the British army. Economically, Georgians were dependent on the market of the British West Indies for their rice and lumber. By all means, Levi Sheftall's best economic interests aligned with the crown and many other wealthy Georgians who were reluctant join the cause for independence. Despite this, Levi and his brother Mordecai were some of the earliest revolutionaries in the state.

Mordecai's numerous contributions to the American cause as the commissary general for Georgia's militia made him the highest ranking Jewish official in the Revolutionary War.

Mordecai's role in the war has been well documented by official and familial records continually utilized by historians and journalists alike. Few have written about Levi's war record as it is not as well documented as Mordecai's record. Levi and Mordecai's early support for the war starting in 1774 was unusual for wealthy Georgians. It could be the brothers' reaction to the impact the Sugar Act of April 1764, which hurt the Sheftall lumber business by forcing lumber shippers to be liable for double the value of each shipment. The Sugar Act promised to cut into the profits of the brothers, who also must have taken stock of their experience as Jewish men in Georgia before deciding to join the rebellion. Early on, Benjamin must have instilled in his sons a feeling that life was better in Georgia for Jewish people than elsewhere in the world. Familial and trade networks connected the Sheftall brothers to the rest of the Atlantic world, making them well aware that life in Georgia and the other American colonies offered them expanded opportunities to worship and trade closed to them elsewhere in the British empire due to their Judaism. Levi had witnessed firsthand the legal restrictions Jewish people faced elsewhere in the Atlantic World. C. S. Monaco writes that Jewish people in British controlled Jamaica faced higher taxes and were designated as a pariah class.<sup>177</sup> Sarah Sheftall's family left St. Croix and settled in Savannah and Charleston to take advantage of the expanded economic opportunities as much as to be closer to their daughter as she started having children. In the context of Jewish rights elsewhere in the British Empire and the Atlantic World, it stands to reason that two successful Jewish brothers would support the revolutionary cause for independence.

Levi did not write much about his Revolutionary War experience in the history of his life he wrote for his children making the excuse, "Every Accur[ance] you have been aquanted with,

therefore it [would] be useless to mention any more.”<sup>178</sup> Levi instead wrote down colorful anecdotes from his life, such as when he nearly drowned but was saved miraculously by a nearsighted man. Levi’s memories of the war came out of order as sparse statements compared to his detail elsewhere. Levi’s wartime experience is filled in somewhat by official documents from rebel governments, revealing things such as Levi’s attendance to the 13<sup>th</sup> of June 1775 meeting at the house of Mrs. Cuyler’s with thirty-three other business men and religious leaders of Savannah.<sup>179</sup> Levi was the only Jewish person present at the Friday meeting. Breaking his Sabbath, Levi joined the men in drafting five resolutions presented to the Provincial Congress.

War disrupts religion and economic routines. Levi recounted that he spent much of the war in North Carolina and Virginia, while his receipts often put him in Charleston. Levi was in Charleston during the oft retold December 1778 capture of Mordecai and his son Sheftall Sheftall by the British during their occupation of Savannah. As a prisoner of war Mordecai bent his kosher laws, not receiving the standard pork ration but eating boiled beef he did not slaughter.<sup>180</sup> Also a prisoner of war, military Chaplin Moses Allen recalled that when given a portion of pork, “the Jews Mr. Sheftall & son refused to eat their pieces & their knives and forks were ordered to be greased in it.”<sup>181</sup> Frances began working in Charleston to feed her family and pay for rent, but she still did not write her husband on the Sabbath.<sup>182</sup> Mordecai was still a prisoner to the British when Philip Minis and Levi helped design the failed attempt by French troops under the command of Count D’Estang and American forces led by Benjamin Lincoln to reclaim Savannah in September 1779. Levi and Philip specified the landing place for the French forces and promised insider knowledge of the woods surrounding Savannah as two sons of its soil. French records remarked that Levi and Philip would “conduct the force of men whenever ordered to do so.”<sup>183</sup> Levi and Philip’s lack of specific instructions as to the day or time of attack

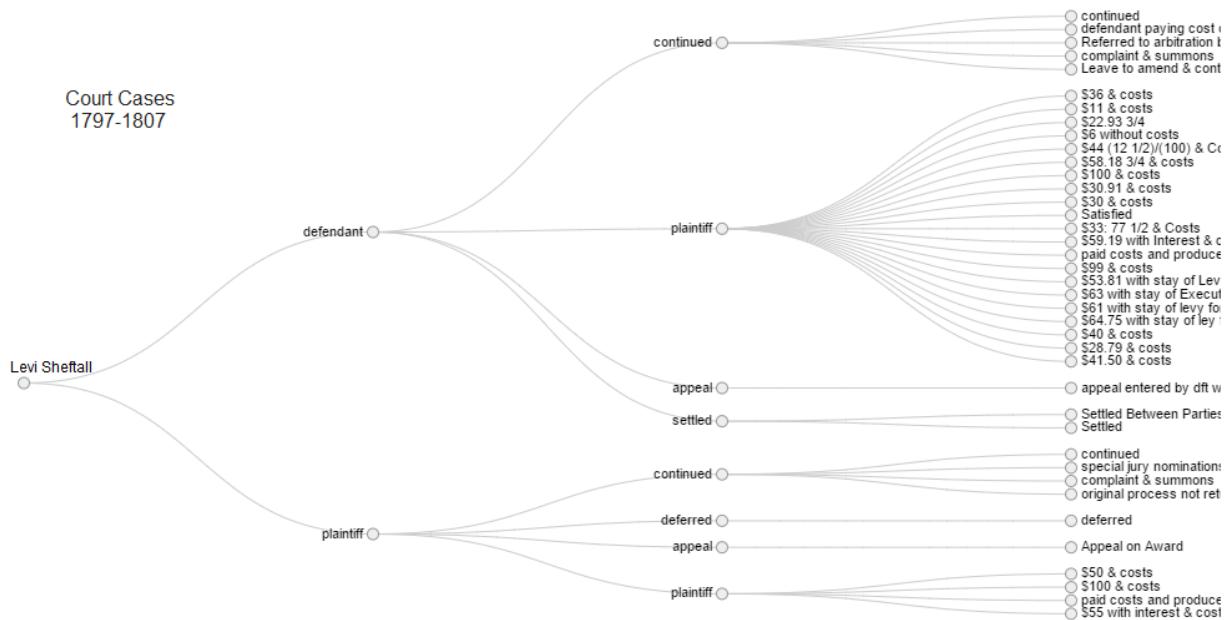
reveals the major fault line within the plot to recapture Savannah. The lack of coordination between the French and American troops gave the British plenty of opportunity to prepare for the disorganized waves of attacks.

Levi wrote around the dangers he faced in the war, “to mention the circumstances of the war [would] be use[less] it is in history—but this I will say during that [time I] had Several guns Loaded & Cocked ready to fire [at] my breast—but my god was pleased at Every danger [to rescue] me.”<sup>184</sup> Levi survived battles of the revolution, fighting mostly outside of Savannah. By 1782, Levi appears to be back in his home on one of his properties in the Savannah woods under a sort of house arrest. When Levi expressed his pro-American sentiments to three British soldiers claiming to be Americans in March 1782, he was indicted as a traitor to the crown—an indictment that would haunt him well after the close of the war. It is possible that it is during this time that Levi was jailed for 73 days for being a rebel before signing a loyalty pledge to the British Empire to avoid the punishment of treason. Before the war ended in 1783, Levi faced banishment from Georgia and confiscation of all his property with other loyalists, despite the fact that Levi had risked his life for American independence.<sup>185</sup> Mordecai headed a campaign to appeal the act and allow Levi back into Savannah. Eventually in 1785 his banishment was lifted followed by regaining his political rights in 1787.<sup>186</sup> Levi was not the only person wrongly accused of being a loyalist but the tone of his accusations took on an anti-Jewish tone. As members of a migrant, dispersed nation Jewish people have been accused of split loyalties throughout the history of their diaspora. When an anti-Jewish pamphlet was distributed in Savannah, Levi quickly retorted his claims by turning the accusation of traitor onto the pamphlet writer. “He says he has traveled, with the Jews through a wilderness of History, it has been much better for him, had he traveld as far to the northward, as some of them has done, and partook his

share of the sufferings...”<sup>187</sup> Fighting in Virginia and North Carolina against the British only to be forced to sign his loyalty to the crown and facing an uphill battle to clear his name of the accusation made Levi particularly sensitive to the anti-Jewish claims of the anonymous pamphlet.

Levi estimated his personal losses from the war to be 10,000 pounds sterling.<sup>188</sup> Among Levi’s losses were several enslaved laborers. Quash, Aby, and Lucy were repossessed by Edward Telfair in the middle of the war 1780 as payment for Levi’s defaulted debts. Levi contested the seizure of his valuable workforce nearly twenty years after Telfair’s repossession. Levi bitterly described Telfair selling Quash for “the very Large Sum of ten pounds one shilling & four pence”, around twenty pounds less than Levi had purchased him for in 1766 and forty pounds less than he estimated Quash to be worth as a trained tanner. News of Aby and Lucy never reached Levi, perhaps they had managed to escape in the midst of the war. War opened pathways to freedom for many people who joined the ranks of the British army. An enslaved man named Sampson is credited with supplying the British with information about Savannah’s defenses and proved to be a more successful guide for the British than Levi and Philip were for the Americans. Levi and Philip faced 300 formerly enslaved people who helped the British occupy Savannah. The British did not emancipate all of the slaves of Georgia, using enslaved people as rewards for loyalists and fortifying the city with slave labor. While Levi was losing most of his enslaved labor force, he was also purchasing a woman Venus with her daughter Abby from his mother-in-law in 1781.<sup>189</sup> Slaveholders, loyalist and rebel alike, took their human property with them when leaving Savannah. Other people fled slavery for a life of freedom in Africa, London, or some other city. Altogether, as many as 8,000 black people left Savannah in 1782. Amid the chaos, London remained with Levi.

Levi used an enslaved child during the war to pass messages and run errands while he was under house arrest in 1782. London may have stayed with Levi's property in Savannah, attended to Sarah, or fought alongside Levi. Georgia officials rejected the proposal to free black soldiers and pay their former slaveholders \$1,000. The promise of emancipation and a fear that it would undermine slavery caused white Georgians to reject the much needed soldiers, something unusual for the time as black soldiers had been used throughout colonial conflicts.<sup>190</sup> London is the first person Levi mentioned in his autobiography after his first notation of the war. Scrunched onto the page underneath his estimated losses, Levi wrote, "London & my Self worked together."<sup>191</sup> Labor was again a shared experience between London and Levi in the aftermath of the war—the two men forged a bond.



Reingold-Tilford Tree representation of Levi Sheftall's court cases from 1797-1807<sup>192</sup>

Levi and his brother had both lost their fortunes. Levi described the change, "Still I had Something left to Support my family have done to this present time with Credit."<sup>193</sup> If profit defined Levi's economic experience before the war, court cases and debt defined economics after

the war. Between 1797 and 1807, Levi appeared 61 times in Savannah courts, 50 appearances as a defendant and 11 as the plaintiff. In ten years, Levi was awarded \$205, while he had \$1,253.45 found against him, not counting court fees.<sup>194</sup> Levi maintained his family's lifestyle but he never restored his former wealth. He continued to invest in slave labor, purchasing people like 38 year old Ruth with her two sons Dick and eighteen month old Darby from Francis H. Godfrey. By 1809, Dick was being hired out and Darby was employed in the Sheftall home.<sup>195</sup> The institution was Levi's first threshold of economic successes and he hoped to build his wealth again utilizing slavery to his benefit. Levi purchased people on borrowed money, then hired those people out for a fee.<sup>196</sup> Levi's slave hire fee was cheaper than free white labor, making slavery affordable for people who could not afford to outright buy another human, or supplementing an enslaved workforce with more laborers during peak seasons. His investments in slave labor took on the added risk of buying on credit. Quash, Aby, and Lucy were seized by Edward Telfair as payment for a five year old debt—buying enslaved laborers with credit put these people at risk of being put on the auction block. Levi's mother-in-law Sarah De La Motta, was aware of the risks Levi was taking when she gifted a girl to her daughter in 1796. Sarah stipulated that the child and her future increase were for "Sarah Sheftall's Use, but not to be subject, to any debts of, or the control of her said Husband, but to be her own absolute property."<sup>197</sup>

Supporting his family's lifestyle on credit also put Levi in danger of being put in debtors' prison, as Mordecai was in May of 1796 for defaulting on a loan for Clay, Telfair, & Co.<sup>198</sup> Mordecai and Levi started their careers off with a loan from their father, who expected a return on his investment. Part of Mordecai's inheritance from Benjamin was having his outstanding loans forgiven.<sup>199</sup> With their successes in beef, lumber, and land the brothers loaned out money and collected returns. After the war, the business partnerships between the two brothers soured.

Misunderstandings caused Levi to be liable for Mordecai's debts and Levi's attempts to shirk liability landed Mordecai as a prisoner.<sup>200</sup> Financial strife continued between the two brothers through disagreements between Levi and his nephew Moses.<sup>201</sup> Levi appeared in court against his nephews, brother-in-law, and fellow congregation members. Yet, he managed to conduct amicable business with people, even after settling seemingly messy lawsuits.<sup>202</sup> The war had transformed Levi from a money lender to a debtor.

The change in Levi's portfolio did not hurt his public standing. Levi took an active role in his local government. He served as Alderman three times (1799-1801, 1802-03, 1804-05); twice as fire chief (1801-02, 1805-06); and once as the commissioner of the market (1801-1802).<sup>203</sup> Levi also served his religious community as the first President of the reestablished and incorporated K.K. Mickva Israel starting in August 1790.<sup>204</sup> Levi hired his carpenters and sold his lumber to work on various building projects on the synagogue that would never be.<sup>205</sup> Levi also hired one of his slaves to serve as a "Shammas" for \$18, which was "due the 1<sup>st</sup> day of Roshashona."<sup>206</sup> The Shammas was intended to be a paid position filled by a member of the congregation, but without anyone willing to take on the task it was given to an enslaved man. As a Shammas, the enslaved man was responsible for ritual objects and their care during services, as well as the maintenance of the building. Just as slaves could be found in churches, working to keep a fire going or cleaning, they were also found doing similar tasks in synagogues. It is significant that the debt would be paid on Rosh Hashanah, which started the High Holy Days. Theologically, Rosh Hashanah is the best choice of Jewish days to pay down debts and settle unfinished business before the welcoming of a new year with Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement.

K.K. Mickva Israel established rules for the congregation, punishable by fine and excommunication. Isaac Polock, the eventual founder of the Jewish congregation in Washington, D.C., received a harsh letter for having his business open on the Sabbath in 1793.<sup>207</sup> Restrictions were soon lifted, when Polock explained that the incident had happened without his knowledge when a Captain delivering goods from Charleston commanded his clerk to store the items.<sup>208</sup> Other Jewish people in Savannah rebelled against the organized practice of Judaism and the restrictions the congregations attempted to place on them. Samuel Benedix and Moses Simon refused to denounce their modified Yom Kippur service that involved using a non-Kosher conch shell for a shofar in replace of the prescribed ram's horn, causing both men to leave the congregation.<sup>209</sup>

With the strict Sabbatarian laws of his congregation, Levi would not have conducted public business from sundown Friday to sundown Saturday, giving a slight reprieve to some his enslaved laborers on Saturday. The labor of the people Levi held in bondage, just as the labor of Polock's clerk, was a reflection of his own personal labor. It is a safe assumption that Levi did not force people to work on his Sabbath, however, some work would be unavoidable. People working in the home probably felt added pressure to cook and serve a special meal every week, making the day of reprieve for some, a day of added stress for others. Levi attempted to make up for Saturday's loss of labor by working on Sunday on at least one occasion in 1808. This instance is recorded because he was called into City Hall to face the Mayor and Aldermen for breaking city ordinances by "doing public business on the Sabbath."<sup>210</sup> Between the Sabbatarian ordinances of his congregation and those of his city, the bonded people of Levi Sheftall had two days of "rest." At the close of the Haitian Revolution in 1804, revolutionaries refused to work on Saturday as to draw some difference between slavery and freedom.<sup>211</sup> Enslaved people

usually took Sunday to work for themselves by tending their personal crops, trapping animals, or fishing. Sunday activities likely expanded to Saturday for most of the people working under Levi. Some slaveholders with large plantations offered Christian services to the people enslaved there and on the neighboring tracts. Black people, free and enslaved, petitioned for the right of assembly on the 19<sup>th</sup> of March 1790, creating the First African Baptist Church. One of their founders was named Adam Sheftall, who is listed as a butcher in the Free Persons of Color records.<sup>212</sup> It is possible that Adam once belonged to Levi as Levi was in the butching trade. Adam's wages would have been lower than Levi's, but it is likely his skill in butchering that afforded him his freedom. Mordecai Sheftall argued in favor of their appeal to allow worshipping between sunrise and sundown on Sunday, reasoning, "I think all men have a right to worship God in theire owne way, Especially as no possible danger Can arise to the Community from theire meeting in the day time."<sup>213</sup> Mordecai's plea toward religious liberty reflected his own status as a religious outsider in Savannah, while his closing reasoning appealed to the fearful nature of slaveholding.

The 1791 marked the outbreak of war on Santo Domingo. Fear of importing the Haitian Revolution to Savannah shores was tempered with the economic opportunity to become the premier slave port due to Charleston's reactionary ban on all imports of slaves from the West Indies and Africa. The city council of Savannah enacted restrictions against all "seasoned" slaves imported from the West Indies in 1795, but the economic interests of the state overruled the safety concerns of the low country planter elite. Jenninson notes that the language surrounding slavery in Georgia became increasingly patriarchal as a response to the Haitian Revolution in order to justify the institution in the face of neighboring revolutions inspired by the United States example.

Levi worked as a United States Military Agent during the last years of his life. He contracted labor to strengthen fortifications and supplies to fulfill Indian annuities. The words “negro hire” appear frequently on his receipts. Enslaved people bore the brunt of the heavy labor from agriculture to military work. Levi did personal business with Jewish and non-Jewish people alike, a practice he expanded as a Military Agent, often hiring enslaved people from fellow congregants. Levi hired twelve enslaved carpenters to construct the Barracks of Savannah, including Israel Sheftall, a man valued at \$400 in Levi’s estate.<sup>214</sup> Occasionally, Levi hired people he claimed like Israel Sheftall to build fortifications, but more often he relied on the slave labor belonging to others. Levi’s work fulfilling annuities had roots in his first career as a butcher for the colonial militia and his experience as a merchant. Both of these early lines of work would have brought Levi into contact with Indian nations. Many of these colonial interactions would have been tinged with the racial tensions that plagued the career of Thomas Causton when he jailed a white man, Joseph Watson, for the murder of two Indian men, Captain Skee and Justice. Levi’s reply to the anti-Jewish pamphlet after the war contained accusations that the pamphleteer was a friend of the Creeks and had purchased enslaved people stolen by Johnny Carnard, a half Indian man. Levi’s accusations reflected the position the Creek nations took during the Revolutionary War. Creek nations struggled to keep their 1718 policy of neutrality as the British gained dominance as the Spanish withdrew from the southern frontier. In the war for American independence, the Creek nations clearly favored a British victory. The Creek and the British had been contentious and profitable trade partners for over one hundred years and to many of the white British subjects on American soil Creek nations increasingly appeared as competitors in trade and obstructions to western expansion. Toward the beginning of Levi’s autobiography, he remembers trees on the outskirts of Savannah painted red to restrict

colonists from stealing lumber that belonged to the Yamacraw nation, soon followed by his memory of dressing deer skins and taking part in an Indian dominated trade. The youthful anecdotes contain two of the most powerful forces of the revolution—the push for Indian land and the struggle of Indian competition.

More than just an insinuation that the pamphleteer was a rebel, Levi's accusation of Creek friendship contained racial overtones, "no doubt he has it in view but that, at some future day he will be able to prove that red is white and then hold some of those honest Gotten negroes to his plantation as the reward of friendship."<sup>215</sup> One of the most striking components of this statement is Levi's assumption of whiteness, holding inferiority of Indians as self-evident while he referred to black people as though they were rustled cattle. Levi mocked the friendly relations between the pamphleteer and the "half Breed Indian" because they broke with the dominant view that Indians were inferior, savages compared to civilized, superior, white men. Levi held racial hierarchy as a truth in the face of his personal interactions with people of the Creek nations and people who frustrated the racial hierarchy by being both white and Indian.

In 1737 Georgia officials fined six people when they rioted during Watson's trial because they felt insulted at the punishment of a white man for crimes against Indians.<sup>216</sup> By the nineteenth century, the racial outrage of Watson's rioters was commonplace. In the compact of 1802 Georgia exchanged its claims to Alabama and Mississippi for \$1.25 million and the promise to remove the Creek nations from Georgia's borders. Removal of Indians was punctuated with Land Lotteries. Lotteries in 1805 and 1807 put Creek land into the hands of people like Levi's children and nephews who participated in the Land Lotteries. Removal of Indians via lottery opened the door for more Georgians to become slaveholders and furthered the developing racial hierarchy.

Levi spent ten days sick in bed upstairs before he died in the early morning on the 20<sup>th</sup> of January 1809, he was “aged 69 years, 1 month and 14 days.”<sup>217</sup> With Levi confined in bed, a woman named Polly, valued in his estate at \$350 made her escape. Levi sold Polly for \$200 while she was hiding in the woods.<sup>218</sup> Enslaved people often took what opportunities they could to abscond, as seen demonstrated by the people who used the war of independence to liberate themselves from slavery. Polydore saw a freedom opportunity in his porter’s tickets no. 16 and 17 after Levi hired him out as a porter in January 1785.<sup>219</sup> Polydore was recognizable from his work around town and his crooked knee, proving to be his down fall as someone collected the posted \$3 reward. Levi’s estate valued Polydore at \$400, he was sold at auction as Poladore to Levi’s daughters for \$300. Few people were as successful at escaping as Jim who was purchased by Levi for \$365 from Christian A. Fisher in June 1780. Jim was described in the indenture as “about Thirty Two years of age and five feet Ten Inches high, sound and healthy.”<sup>220</sup> Levi’s estate papers listed Jim as a runaway who had “never been caught.”<sup>221</sup> Perhaps the difference between Jim and Polydore was a crooked knee. Levi likely thought of himself as a benevolent slaveholder despite the people absconding from his bondage. In his instructions for his burial Levi wrote that he did not want to be rushed into the ground, instead of the traditional Jewish custom of a quick burial, Levi preferred to wait for a coffin to be built by his carpenters.<sup>222</sup> His selling of Polly while she was hiding in the woods was reminiscent of the slaveholder Olaudah Equiano described as “charitable and humane. If any of his slaves behaved amiss, he did not beat or use them ill, but parted with them. This made them afraid of disobliging him...”<sup>223</sup> Even under the best circumstances with the kindest slaveholders, slavery was an institution of manipulation and violence. Selling enslaved people instead of whipping them as punishment saved only the conscience of the slaveholder.

Levi Sheftall embarked on his economic journey the same year Georgia allowed for the use of slave labor. At the start of his working career he could not afford a single female slave, at end of his life he claimed the lives of twenty six people, five who were dead and two runaways. Levi's economic interests very much reflect the interests of other white Georgians. His racial attitudes toward Indian and black people had its roots in the Malcontent movement of the Trustee period. His slaveholding record could just as easily belong to a Christian man living in Savannah during the same period, however, Levi's religion created different experiences of slavery for the people he held in bondage. Levi's adherence to the rules of a Jewish congregation and city ordinances, gave enslaved people nearly two days without forced labor. Differences between Levi and other slaveholders are subtle, but they are there and offer insight into early American Jewish life when explored.

## Conclusion:

Upon Levi's death Mordecai Sr. wrote of his father, "As a friend he was peculiarly sincere, as a member of civilized society, obedient, as a man of business, upright and punctual, and as a master, kind, indulgent & benevolent."<sup>224</sup> Most people want their loved ones to be seen in the best light, especially after death, with this in mind Mordecai Sr. described Levi as a friend, citizen, businessman, and slaveholder. Levi was proud of his slaveholding and the economic success his enslaved workforce represented. Pride in slaveholding has turned to shame over the years but Levi Sheftall's slaveholding deserves to be remembered, as does the slaveholding of other Jewish Americans.

Slavery has always been a contentious topic and there is no denying that it has been downplayed by historians of American Judaism. As a historian who frequently studies slavery, I have had people from all walks of life tell me, "We should stop talking about slavery. It only dredges up hurt feelings and makes things worse." Quite the opposite, I believe it is time that we talked about slavery more. Slaveholders and state laws routinely stripped enslaved people of their humanity, let's not continue to do so in death. Levi's life accomplishments were made possible through the labor of people like London. We must talk about slavery because when we don't, we lose the histories of the enslaved not the histories of slaveholders. The Sheftalls are not at risk of disappearing from history anytime soon as a prominent family in American Jewish history, often described in glowing terms and held up as patriotic heroes. The 26 people listed on Levi's estate papers, on the other hand, are not named in any of the histories of the Sheftalls.

While in Savannah researching, I spoke with Rabbi Rubin who told me with tears in his eyes that he could not write the economic history of his congregation because slavery pained him too much. I spoke to some of the descendants of the original Jewish settlers, most of whom were

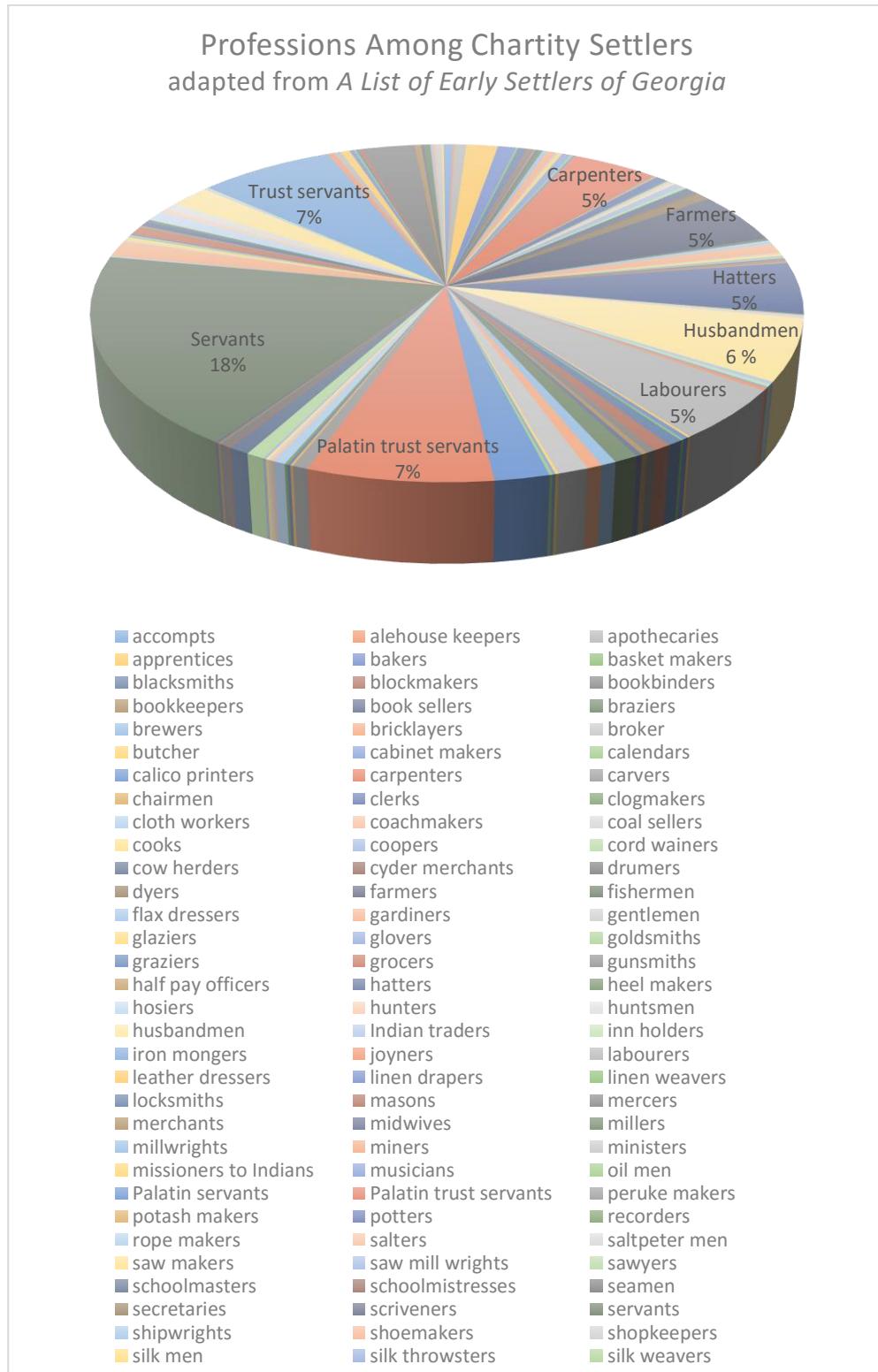
eager to see what I would find, except for one descendant of Mordecai Sheftall who refused to believe he owned slaves. This is the first history of slaveholders I have written, knowing that their families would read its contents, yet, I cannot stop thinking about the descendants of the enslaved people. The breaking up of slave families, as Benjamin did upon his death, remains an ongoing tragedy for black Americans who struggle to trace their ancestry. Did Jim make it to freedom and if he did, would his descendants know him by what little information Levi's records provided? While the digitization of records like the *Free Persons of Color Registry in Savannah* by Ancestry.com have made it easier for black Americans to take part in tracing their genealogy most of the records they would need are not widely available. Digitization efforts like *Civil War Washington and O, Say Can You See*, both at the University of Nebraska, have made a wealth of knowledge available to black genealogists. Reparation work should begin with public digitization of slavery's records, in an effort to reunite descendants with as many families separated by the violent system as possible.

Jewish history is filled with difficult topics, but historians have not shied away from writing about Blood Libels or the Holocaust. It is uncomfortable to think about people celebrating Pesach with a dinner prepared by enslaved chefs, but it is necessary if we want to understand Jewish successes in early America. B.H. Levy wrote about Mordecai's enslaved people as though they were figures on a page representing wealth, not active participants whose labor amassed a fortune for Mordecai—all of which he spent supporting the Revolutionary War.<sup>225</sup> The issue with minimizing slavery is that it minimizes the people who did much of the hard work behind the successes of slaveholders.

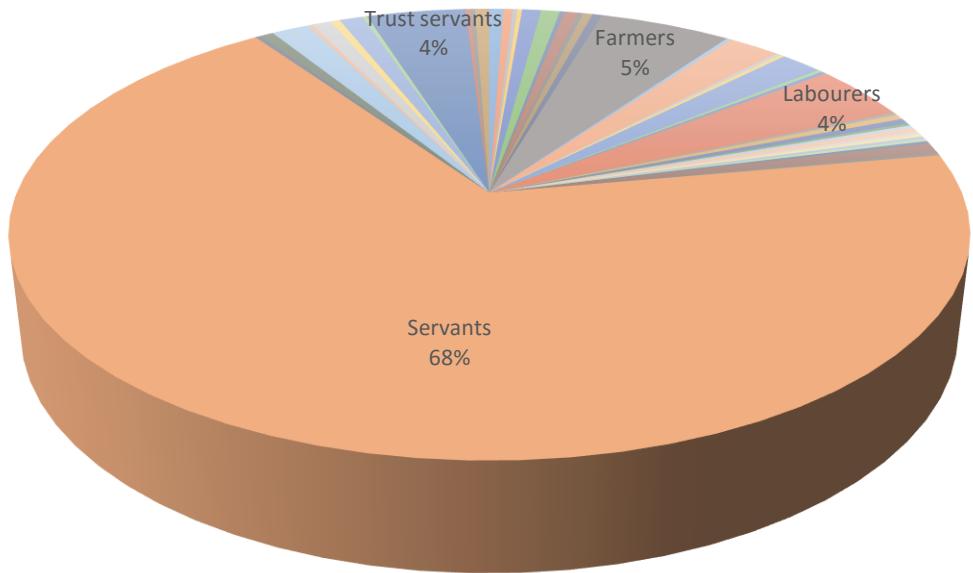
Benjamin and Levi's lives offered a narrative structure to explore Judaism and labor in Georgia from 1732-1809. In the process, I challenged a fifty year old thesis by drawing attention

to the unique aspects of Jewish slaveholding alongside the ubiquitous. There is much more to be explored in the lives of Jewish slaveholders, who should be reexamined with a focus on their labor and religion. Throughout early American history, labor and religion were among the most powerful forces in a person's life, defining their lived experiences. Incorporating the history of slavery into analyses of early American Judaism promises to contribute to our understanding of slavery, as well as, American Judaism.

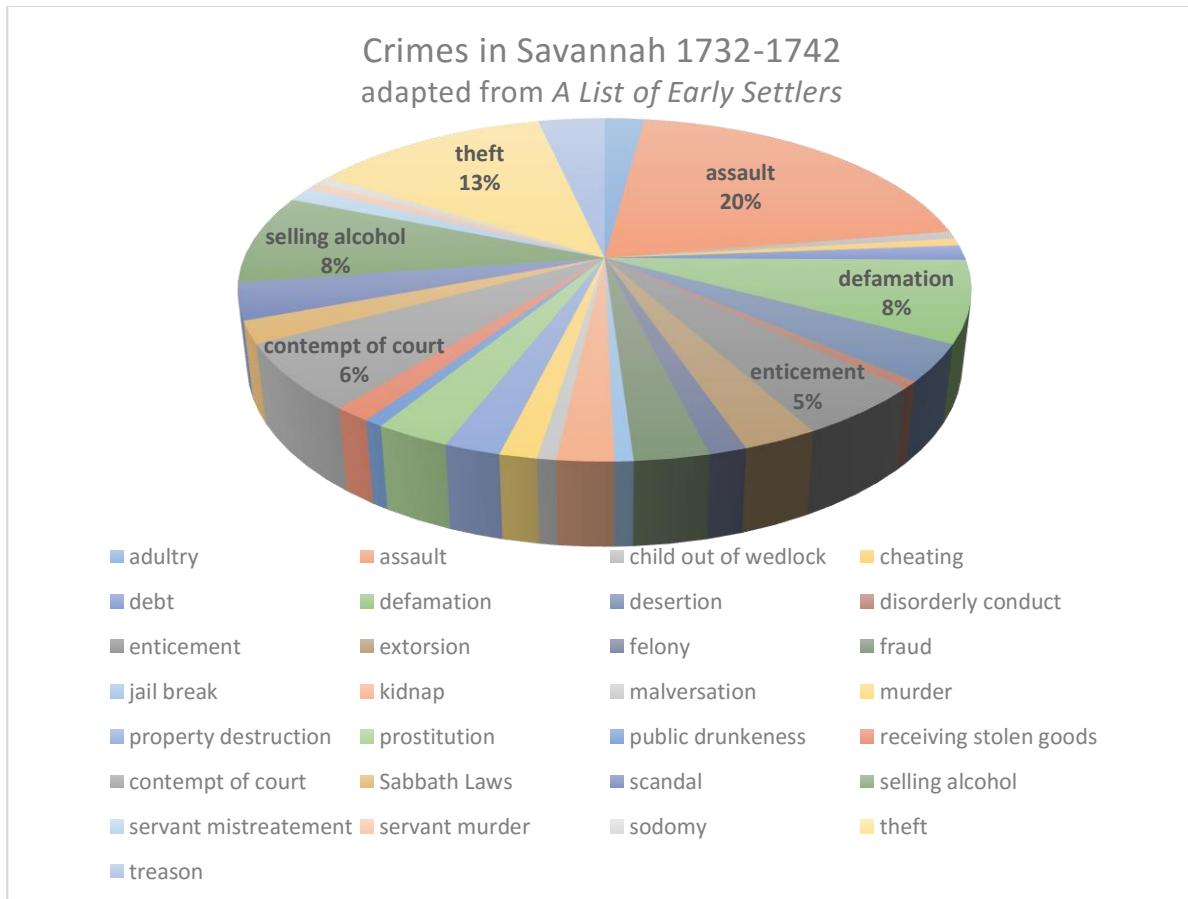
## Appendix

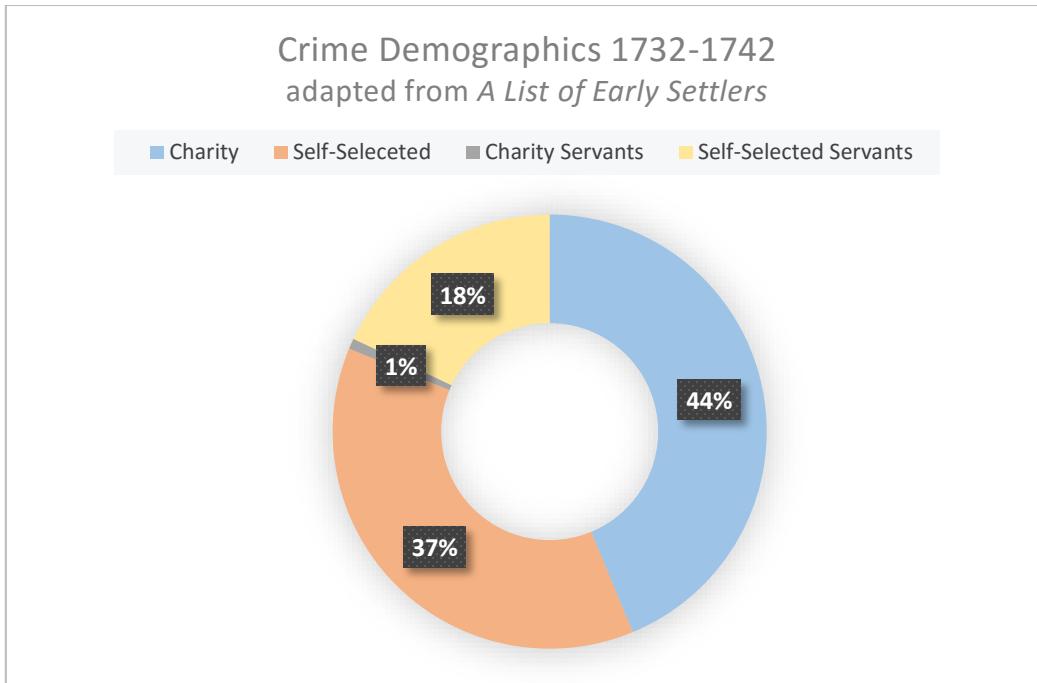


**Professions Among Self-Selected Settlers**  
 adapted from *A List of Early Settlers of Georgia*



- |   |   |
|---|---|
| apothecaries<br>bailiffs<br>blacksmiths<br>butchers<br>cheesemongers<br>coopers<br>fort employees<br>haberdashers<br>Indian traders<br>joiners<br>masons<br>masters of scout boat<br>millers<br>periagua employees<br>plasterers<br>pylots<br>sawyers<br>shipwrights<br>soldiers<br>storekeepers<br>taylors | attorneys<br>bakers<br>bricklayers<br>carpenters<br>clerks<br>farmers<br>gentlemen<br>Indian interpreters<br>engineers and surveyors of the land<br>labourers<br>masters of periagua<br>merchants<br>ministers<br>planters<br>potters<br>sailors<br>servants<br>shoemakers<br>speakers<br>surgeons<br>tinkers |
|---|---|





<sup>1</sup> Michael Strassfeld, ed. *A Passover Haggadah* (The Rabbinical Assembly, 1979): p. 14.

<sup>2</sup> T'ruah: The Rabbinic Call for Human Rights, *The Other Side of the Sea: A Haggadah on Fighting Modern Day Slavery*.

<sup>3</sup> Jonathan Sarna, Adam Mendelsohn, ed. *Jews and the Civil War: A Reader*, (New York: New York University Press, 2010): p. 49

<sup>4</sup> Jacob Rader Marcus, *United States Jewry, 1776-1985*, vol. 1, (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1989) p. 32

<sup>5</sup> *Sheftall v. Telfair*, Keith M. Read collection, MS 921. Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of Georgia Libraries.

<sup>6</sup> Holly Snyder, "A Tree With Two Fruits: The Jewish Encounter with German Pietists in the Eighteenth Century Atlantic World" *William and Mary Quarterly* third series ], vol. 58 no. 4 (Oct., 2001) 855

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. p. 864

<sup>8</sup> Mark Greenberg, "Becoming Southern: The Jews of Savannah, Georgia, 1830-1870." *American Jewish History* 86.1 (1998): pp. 55-75.

<sup>9</sup> Anthony E. Kay, "The Problem of Slavery as History: a Global Approach," *Journal of Southern History* 80.3 (August 2014).

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- <sup>10</sup> See Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic* (United Kingdom: Verso, 1993); Linda M. Heywood, ed. *Central Africans and Cultural Transformations in the American Diaspora*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Jason R. Young, *Rituals of Resistance*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana Press, 2007): pp. 15-18.
- <sup>11</sup> C.S. Monaco, "Port Jews or a People of the Diaspora? A Critique of the Port Jew Concept," *Jewish Social Studies: History, Culture, Society* vol. 15.2 (Winter 2009).
- <sup>12</sup> T'ruah: The Rabbinic Call for Human Rights, *The Other Side of the Sea: A Haggadah on Fighting Modern Day Slavery*.
- <sup>13</sup> Caspar Luyken, Christoph Weigel, *Neu-eröffnete Welt-Galleria* (Nürnberg, 1703): p. 151, <http://diglib.hab.de/drucke/wt-4f-93/start.htm>
- <sup>14</sup> B.H. Levy, *Mordecai Sheftall: Jewish Revolutionary Patriot*, (Savannah: Georgia Historical Society, 1999): pp. 3, 111; Snyder, "Jewish Encounter", p. 874
- <sup>15</sup> Jason R. Young, *Rituals of Resistance*, p. 69
- <sup>16</sup> *Jüdische Geschichte Vor Ot: Ein Virtueller Stadtspaziergang Frankfurt (Oder) Und Słubice*. (Institute for Applied History e.V. at the European University Viadrina Frankfurt, Oder: [http://www.juedischesfrankfurtvirtuell.de/en/projektvorstellung\\_en.php](http://www.juedischesfrankfurtvirtuell.de/en/projektvorstellung_en.php))
- <sup>17</sup> Steven C. Hahn, *The Invention of the Creek Nation, 1670-1763*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004) pp. 48-80
- <sup>18</sup> Kathryn E. Holland Braund, *Deerskin & Duffels: The Creek Indian Trade with Anglo-America, 1685-1815*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1993): p. 33.
- <sup>19</sup> Rodney M. Baine, "Indian Slavery in Colonial Georgia" *The Georgia Historical Quarterly*, vol. 79 no. 2, (Summer 1995): p. 419
- <sup>20</sup> Gotthard Deutsch, M. Seligsohn, Joseph Jacobs, "Frankfort-On-The-Oder" *The Unedited Full-text of the 1906 Jewish Encyclopedia*, (JewishEncyclopedia.com, <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/>)
- <sup>21</sup> Leo Baeck Institute *German Jewish History in Modern Times 1600-1945 brochure* (New York: Columbia University Press) p. 8
- <sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 9
- <sup>23</sup> Deutsch, "Frankfort-On-The-Oder" *1906 Jewish Encyclopedia*
- <sup>24</sup> *In and Out of the Ghetto: Jewish-Gentile Relations in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe* p. 225
- <sup>25</sup> Leo Baeck Institute, *German Jewish History*, p. 10
- <sup>26</sup> Braund, *Deerskin & Duffels*, p. 33.
- <sup>27</sup> Steven C. Hahn, *The Invention of the Creek Nation, 1670-1763*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004) pp. 94-107.
- <sup>28</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>29</sup> Edicts from the Leo Baeck Institute have been digitized and made available online by the Center for Jewish History and the Leo Baeck Institute. (<http://digital.cjh.org/> and <https://www.lbi.org>) Others have been made available through the German History in Documents and Images project by the German Historical Institute, (<http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/index.cfm>). A comprehensive overview of the edicts issued by Frederick William I is on the Jewish Virtual Library, (<http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/vjw/Prussia.html>).
- <sup>30</sup> Constance Harris, *The Way Jews Lived: Five Hundred Years of Printed Words and Images*, (North Carolina: McFarlan & Company, Inc., 2009) p. 130
- <sup>31</sup> Marion A. Kaplan, *Jewish Daily Life in Germany, 1618-1945* (Oxford University Press, 2005) p. 30
- <sup>32</sup> B.H. Levy, *Mordecai Sheftall*, pp. 2-3.
- <sup>33</sup> Harris, *The Way Jews Lived*, p. 130
- <sup>34</sup> Malcolm H. Stern, "Growing Up In Pioneer Savannah: The Unfinished Memoir of Levi Sheftall (1739-1809) *On the History of the Jews in the Diaspora* (1975): p. 16
- <sup>35</sup> John Perceval, *Manuscripts of the Earl of Egmont. Diary of Viscount vol. 1* (London: H.M. Stationery off., 1920-23) p. 313
- <sup>36</sup> William J. Morton, *The Story of Georgia's Boundaries: A Meeting of History and Geography* (Georgia: Georgia History Press, 2009): p. 23.
- <sup>37</sup> Betty Wood, *Slavery in Colonial Georgia*, p. 2
- <sup>38</sup> Morton, *Georgia's Boundaries*, p. 23.

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<sup>39</sup>Benjamin Martyn, *Reasons for establishing the colony of Georgia, with regard to the trade of Great Britain, the increase of our people, and the employment and support it will afford to great numbers of our own poor, as well as foreign persecuted Protestants. With some account of the country, and the design of the trustees.*(London, W. Meadows, 1733) pp. 15

<sup>40</sup> Allen D. Candler, *Colonial Records of the state of Georgia, vol. 6,* (Atlanta: Franklin Printing and Pub. Co., 1904) p. 45,

<sup>41</sup> Benjamin Martyn, *Reasons for Georgia*, pp. 3-4,

<sup>42</sup> John Perceval, *Manuscripts of the Earl of Egmont. Diary of Viscount vol. 1 ()*: p. 90, 272-273, Benjamin Martyn, *Reasons for Georgia*, pp. 18-21

<sup>43</sup> CRG Vol. 20, p. 28

<sup>44</sup> Perceval, *Manuscripts*, p. 130-131, Percival writes about Turkish silk being imported through France and into Ireland at more favorable rates than English cloth; p. 131-132, Percival discusses the Spanish attacks on British merchants in America; Benjamin Martyn, *Reasons for Georgia*, pp. 3-4, 14,

<sup>45</sup> Perceval, *Manuscripts*, pp. 373-374, Benjamin Martyn, *Reasons for Georgia*, pp. 18, 31-35

<sup>46</sup> Albert B. Saye (ed.), *Georgia's Charter of 1732.* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1942.)

<sup>47</sup> Precival v. 1 p. 313

<sup>48</sup> Perceval, *Manuscripts*, p. 309

<sup>49</sup> Hahn, *Invention of Creek Nation*, p. iii, "Based on a map previously published in Braund, *Deerskins and Duffels*, 10; John T. Juricek, *Colonial Georgia and the Creeks: Anglo-Indian Diplomacy on the Southern Frontier, 1733-1763*, (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2010) p. 15, "Sources: Larry E. Ivers, *British Drums on the Southern Frontier*, 210; Tom Hatley, *The Dividing Paths*, fig. ; and John H. Goff, "The Path to Oakfuskee," following p. 4. The shaded area depicts Georgia's official boundaries according to the 1732 royal charter. The dashes represent major trading paths. Drawn by Wendy Giminski, Research Media, University of Georgia.

<sup>50</sup> Saye (ed.), *Georgia's Charter of 1732.*

<sup>51</sup> John T. Juricek, "Georgia Treaties, 1733-1763, Vol. XI," *Early American Indian Documents: Treaties and Laws, 1607-1789* (Frederick: University Publications of America, 1989) p 15-17

<sup>52</sup> Benjamin Martyn, *Reasons for Georgia*, facsimile

<sup>53</sup> CRG Vol. 20, p. 24

<sup>54</sup> CRG Vol. 20, p. 27

<sup>55</sup> CRG Vol. 20, p. 27

<sup>56</sup> CRG Vol. 20, p. 28

<sup>57</sup> CRG Vol. 20, p. 29

<sup>58</sup> *Manuscripts of the Earl of Egmont* v.1 p. 440

<sup>59</sup> CRG Vol. 20, p. 29

<sup>60</sup> CRG Vol. 20, p. 29

<sup>61</sup> *Manuscripts of the Earl of Egmont* v.1 p. 464

<sup>62</sup> CRG vol. 1

<sup>63</sup> *Manuscripts of the Earl of Egmont* v.1 p. 464

<sup>64</sup> E. Merton Coulter, Albert B. Saye, ed. *A List of Early Settlers of Georgia*, (Athens, The University of Georgia Press, 1949), available online through the Digital Library of Georgia (<http://dlg.galileo.usg.edu/?Welcome>)

<sup>65</sup> Wood, *Slavery in Colonial Georgia*, p. 11

<sup>66</sup> Peter Gordon, *View of Savannah* (1734); Self-labeled

<sup>67</sup> CRG, vol. 1 pp. 68, 70, 76, 81.

<sup>68</sup> Marion A. Kaplan, *Jewish Daily Life in Germany, 1618-1945* (Oxford University Press, 2005) p. 22

<sup>69</sup> George Fenwick Jones, *The Georgia Dutch: From the Rhine and Danube to the Savannah, 1733-1783* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1992): p. 35; B.H. Levy, *Mordecai Sheftall*, pp.

<sup>70</sup> George Fenwick Jones, "Jewish Settlers in Colonial Georgia," *The Georgia Historical Quarterly*, vol. 85 no. 4 (Winter 2001): p. 521.

<sup>71</sup> Rubin, *Third to None*, p. 4

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- <sup>72</sup> Jacob Rader Marcus, *United States Jewry, 1775-1985*, vol. 1 (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1989) p. 37; Jonathan Schorsch, *Jews and Blacks in the Early Modern World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009) p. 224
- <sup>73</sup> Data compiled from *A List of Early Settlers*.
- <sup>74</sup> Saye (ed.), *Georgia's Charter of 1732*
- <sup>75</sup> George Fenwick Jones, *The Georgia Dutch: From the Rhine to the Savannah, 1733-1783*, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1992) p. 14.
- <sup>76</sup> *A List of Early Settlers*, p. 3
- <sup>77</sup> *The Encyclopedia Britannica: A Dictionary of Arts, Sciences ... , Volume 20*, p. 595; *A List of Early Settlers*, p. X; *The Georgia Dutch* p. 8
- <sup>78</sup> Jones, *The Georgia Dutch*
- <sup>79</sup> Snyder, "Jewish Encounters", pp. 870-871
- <sup>80</sup> George Fenwick Jones and Paul Martin Peucher, ""We Have Come to Georgia With Pure Intentions": Moravian Bishop August Gottlieb Spangenberg's Letters From Savannah, 1735", *The Georgia Historical Quarterly*, vol. 82 no. 1 (Spring, 1998): p. 104
- <sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 105
- <sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>83</sup> *Necessarie*, private collection Marion Levy Mendel; Lottie Corbin, "Betty Allen" *The Magazine of History with Notes and Queries*, (DAR, 1954): pp. 191-202; Snyder, "Jewish Encounter," p. 865
- <sup>84</sup> Holly Snyder, "Jewish Encounters," p. 880
- <sup>85</sup> Abraham Minis appears frequently in *CRG* vol. 2 as a supplier to the general store.
- <sup>86</sup> *CRG Vol. 22 pt. 2*, pp. 397-403
- <sup>87</sup> George Fenwick Jones, "Jewish Settlers in Colonial Georgia," *The Georgia Historical Quarterly*, vol. 85 no. 4 (Winter 2001): p. 521.
- <sup>88</sup> David Berger, ed. Jonathan Sarna, "American Anti-Semitism," *History and Hate: The Dimensions of Anti-Semitism*. (Philadelphia : Jewish Publication Society. 1997): p. 118.
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