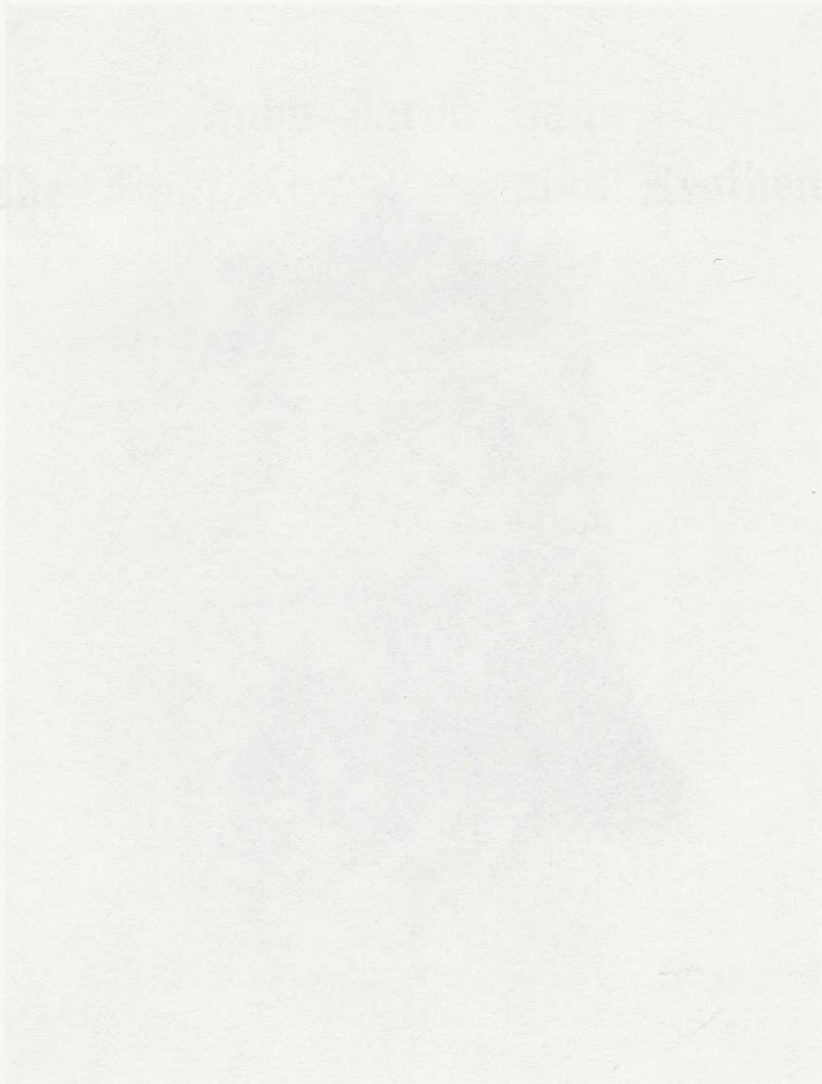


John Jacob Hays
The First Known Jewish Resident
of Fort Wayne

by

Joseph Levine

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Indiana Jewish Historical Society
Fort Wayne, Indiana
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FOREWORD

This is the first publication of the Indiana Jewish Historical Society, which was organized on September 1, 1972. We plan to publish other periodicals dealing with the history of the Jewish community of Indiana--a history of almost 200 years.

Jews have played prominent roles in the civic, economic, political, religious, and cultural life of our state. Whatever illuminates the Jewish experience in Indiana is of interest, concern, and value. It is the aim of the IJHS to devote itself to systematically gathering, preserving, and evaluating the records of synagogues and societies, personal papers, diaries, memoirs, governmental documents, newspaper clippings, photographs, and other memorabilia, even burial and cemetery records.

We are pleased to publish the story of John Jacob Hays, who was a member of a prominent Jewish family which arrived in America in 1720. One hundred years later, in 1820, John Jacob Hays came to Fort Wayne to serve as the Indian agent following his appointment by the President of the United States. It is a story which should be preserved and better known.

Max Einsteadig
President

Joseph Levine
Executive Director

1973

INTRODUCTION

Dismayed by international conflict and futile wars in distant lands, the critical historian may sometimes wonder whether the United States can still be ranked as the greatest of modern empires. Let there be no doubt; the time has not yet come for poets to write a new Recessional as a prelude to the decline of our great republic. The United States remains the dominant power in the world of the 1970's. The Jewry sheltered here is the largest that the world has ever known. They are 6, 000, 000 strong; it is questionable whether in its palmyest days Palestinian Jewry ever sheltered one-third as many. American Jewry is not important because of its size--it is influential and substantial because of its intelligence and generosity and because, despite its lack of an overall national organization, it is a well-coordinated group held together by a consensus compounded of kinship and a common messianic moral purpose.

This is the Jewry whose support more than that of any other has facilitated the birth and development of the Israeli Republic. This Jewry has produced some of America's most notable scholars in the biological sciences, some of the country's leading writers, and a number of Nobel laureates. Only recently a social scientist of Jewish background served as president of the American Historical Association.

Even so, though a Son of Israel lived in the Massachusetts Bay Colony in a day when Miles Standish and John Aiden were still alive, no detailed, accurate, critical history of the American Jew exists as yet. It is high time that such a history be written and that its pages reflect the struggles of the grass-root pioneers and urban shopkeepers. The megalopolises

of the Atlantic and the Pacific coasts are vitally important--for that is where the Jewish masses live--but no history of Jewry in this land will be acceptable if it does not recount the tale of Jewish settlement in the Midwest and South and on the western stretches of the prairies and the plains. History is not merely the chronicle of great men living in great cities and responding to great crises. It is the story of "common" men at their humble tasks. History cannot look down from on high; it must be built up from the earth and the furrow and the peddler's pack.

Surely it is evident why the history of Indiana Jewry needs to be written. Indiana is an old well-established territory and state; it is an integral, significant part of these United States, and if some day a gifted writer recounts the odyssey of the Jew on these shores, he cannot but chronicle the fate of the Children of Israel on the broad lowlands of the Indiana commonwealth. Jews have wandered into these river bottoms ever since the 1790's; as early as 1840, a brilliant young Jewish lawyer from the East served as speaker in the Indiana House of Representatives.

Indiana Jewry has a story to tell. The Indiana Jewish Historical Society is beginning to tell it. We welcome this new organization into the republic of letters and voice the devout hope that it will always employ the most exacting criteria of the historian's craft, that it will avoid filiopietism and seek to shed light on the growth of the Hoosier State, and that through its scientific studies it will help make possible the writing of an objective history of the American Jewish experience.

Jacob R. Marcus

American Jewish Archives
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According to a Hays family tradition, six brothers, together with their families, servants, and implements of agriculture, arrived in their own boat from Holland in 1720 and settled in or about New York City. One hundred years later, on August 14, 1820, John Jacob Hays, the grandson of Solomon Hays, arrived in Fort Wayne to assume the post of Indian agent for the Potawatomi and Miamis in Northwestern Territory following his appointment by President Monroe.

Who was John Jacob Hays, the first Jew known to have lived in Fort Wayne and also the first known Jew to settle in what is now the state of Illinois? Why did this scion of one of the very prominent Jewish families in the East settle in what was then the wilds of America?

We know that members of the Hays family, the original settlers and their descendants, became distinguished Americans and occupy an honored place in the history of the American Jewish community. Among the original six brothers was Jacob Hays, who was one of the oldest members of Shearith Israel Congregation in New York City. He was naturalized in 1723. David Hays, Jr., son of Jacob, served under George Washington in the French and Indian War, and is said to have been present at Braddock's defeat. Among the descendants of David Hays, Jr. were three grandsons and two great-grandsons who served in the Union Ar-

my or Navy during the Civil War.

A later Jacob Hays (1772-1849) served as constable (chief of police) of New York City from 1802 to 1849. The records of Mikveh Israel Congregation in Philadelphia show that Samuel Hays was among the original members in 1782, and was married to Richa Graetz, sister of the famous Rebecca Graetz. Among the other famous members of the Hays family was Dr. Isaac Hays, son of Samuel Hays, who was born in Philadelphia in 1796 and died in that city in 1879. Dr. Hays received his MD degree from the University of Pennsylvania in 1820 and was one of the leading ophthalmologists in the country. For many years, Dr. Isaac Hays served as editor of the American Journal of the Medical Sciences. He was also one of the founders of the American Medical Association.

We know very little about the immediate family of John Jacob Hays, who came to Fort Wayne on August 14, 1820. In a letter written by his father, Barrak Hays, to the governor of Quebec on August 4, 1783, he mentions that "Your memorialist has a very large family to support." In the literature about the Barrak Hays family, there appears to be no mention about the brothers or sisters of John Jacob. Records show that Barrak was a stormy and controversial member of the Shearith Israel Congregation in New York. When John was six years old, Barrak (or Baruch) was one of 948 signers who pledged loyalty to Britain. For seven years the Tories of New York basked in the favor of the British. Barrak Hays and two other Tories were able to save the Shearith Israel Synagogue from desecration or confiscation. Later however, the tables were turned suddenly. Many Loyalists left with the British Army. Had Barrak remained, his lot could not have been very pleasant.

Because of his loyalist sympathies, Barrak Hays found it expedient to emigrate to Canada at the

conclusion of the Revolutionary War. There he joined his brother Andrew who was among the first Jews to set foot on Canadian soil.

A letter written by Barrak to the governor of Quebec, dated August 4, 1783, attests to his straitened financial condition:

. . . his fidelity and attachment to the person and government of His Majesty, the King of Great Britain, and His Excellency, General Clinton, was pleased to appoint your memorialist as an officer for which employment he was allowed five shillings a day. . . . After the peace was settled your memorialist from his loyalty to the best of Sovereigns was obliged to leave New York and to retire to some place where he might remain in business with his family.

Your memoralist has a very large family to support, would be glad if your Excellency would be pleased to allow his pay to continue or give him some appointment in Montreal.

It is understandable that Barrak's son John chose to make his living in a location far away from New York City where the Tory family skeleton was well known.

A number of articles claim that John Jacob Hays was born in New York in 1770. However, J. Solis-Cohen, Jr., in an article "Barrak Hays: Controversial Figure, " based on interviews with descendants of the Hays family, writes that the son, John, was born in 1766. John was in his late teens when he left the settled security of his native New York for the wilds of the great Northwest Territory. Harry Simonoff, in Jewish Notables in America, reports that Hays "bypassed what Daniel Boone called 'the dark and bloody ground' of Kentucky, crossed the Ohio and

Wabash, and entered a no-man's land through which the red natives roared in search of good hunting. Straggling Frenchmen in scattered outposts called this wilderness by an Indian name with a Gaelic spelling. Forever after, this prairie would be known as Illinois."

The adventuresome career of John Jacob Hays is ably depicted by his life-long friend, Governor John Reynolds of Illinois, in his Pioneer History of Illinois as follows:

In the year 1793 John Hays emigrated to Cahokia and remained there, and in the vicinity, during life. He was born in the city of New York, in the year 1770, and when quite a youth, entered the Indian trade in the

Northwest. He was a clerk to a wealthy house in Canada, and was sent first to Mackinaw, and afterwards, towards the Lake of the Woods and the sources of the Mississippi. It was towards the headwaters of Red River, of Silkers' Settlement, that he and two Canadians were caught out in a snowstorm in the prairie and were compelled to lie under the snow for three days and nights, during the storm. They had a scanty supply of dried meat to eat, and thin blankets to cover

them. The storm raged with such violence that they were not able to travel in the open prairie, and were forced to remain under the snow to preserve their lives. It snowed in the meantime, to a considerable depth. No one who has not experienced the hardships in the Indian trade of the Northwest can realize it. The want of water under the snow was that which incommoded them most.

He returned safe from this storm, and afterwards he made arrangement with Messrs. Todd and Hay, who had formed an extensive commercial partnership, to act as the agent and clerk in their business. He settled in Cahokia, in the employ of the company of Todd

and Hay. But Todd dying, and the company dissolving, forced Hays out again on his own resources. He turned his attention, as many others did, to the Indian trade. At times, he also kept a small assortment of goods in Cahokia. His boats, either with himself or agent, generally made a voyage once a year to Prairie du Chien, with articles for the Indian trade, and returned sometimes the same fall, and sometimes in the spring. With a due regard to economy, he made money in this commerce.

According to Simonoff, "Living alone in the wilderness could be quite monotonous." Many backwoodsmen or Indian traders lived with squaws. There was hardly a Jewish family within a range of 800 miles. In 1801 Hays married Marie Louise Brouillet in Vincennes, Indiana. His friend Reynolds informs us that Hays "married a lady in Vincennes of excellent family, and what is still better, of sound good sense." She was probably French, and their three daughters were no doubt reared in the Christian faith. Yet Hays never appears to have abandoned his Judaism. Governor Reynolds states that Mr. Hays possessed "a moral and honest character, and that his morality throughout his life was exemplary. He was not a member of any Christian church, but observed the precepts contained in the word, with due respect and devotion." Simonoff reports that Mrs. Eliza Brouillet of Dallas, Texas, wrote in 1904 to the lawyer historian Max J. Kohler that she still had in her possession "a family Hebrew Bible" (probably a prayer book) "and other evidences of her grandfather's Jewish faith" (perhaps a talith and tephilin).

It is interesting to note that, according to family records, John Hays was presented with his marriage license by his old friend, General William Harrison, then commanding the troops of the Northern

States against the great Indian Chief Tecumseh. Harrison became president of the United States in 1840.

On May 3, 1809, John Hays was appointed sheriff of the County of St. Clair in Illinois Territory, and held this office for twenty-five years.

On November 8, 1813, Hays was appointed Collector of Internal Revenue for Illinois Territory by President James Madison. This did not add appreciably to his income, but it did widen his political acquaintance and strengthen his reputation as a good public servant. About that time Cahokia's century-old glories began to fade, and it sank gradually to the status of a slack river town noted only for the roistering weekly balls of its French-Canadian voyageurs. By 1820 the occasional travelers through the area spoke of Cahokia with pity or distaste.

It is possible that a generous salary of \$1, 200 a year lured Hays from his home and family in Cahokia, Illinois, to Fort Wayne, then a rude little village at the junction of the St. Mary's, St. Joseph's, and Maumee rivers. Fort Wayne at that time consisted of eighteen or twenty cabins, a boat landing where the busy fur trade was centered, and the fort itself, which had been erected five years earlier near the site of the original one built by General Anthony Wayne.

Nellie A . Robertson, in her article "John Hays and the Fort Wayne Indiana Agency," gives an excellently documented and detailed account of the three years Hays spent in Fort Wayne after his arrival on August 14, 1820. He carried in his effects the letter from Secretary of War John C. Calhoun which appointed him to succeed Dr. William Turner as Indian agent for the territory covering nearly all of northeastern Indiana.

In one of the village cabins, Samuel Hanna and his partner, James Barnett, kept a little store as an adjunct to their fur trading operations; another was

the headquarters for Frances Comparet, agent of the American Fur Company and his partner, Alexis Coquillard; but most of the population was as "impermanent and improvident" as the Indians off whom they lived.

The garrison of United States troops had departed the year before, and the fort was now being used to house both the Indian agency and a school for Indian children run by a Baptist preacher and missionary, Isaac McCoy, and his wife. McCoy promptly introduced himself to the new agent and asked permission for his school to remain. Hays, "impressed by the abilities of the twenty-six little Potawatomi and Miami, leavened with a sprinkling of Shawnee, Chippewa, and Mohegans . . . granted his request cheerfully, not foreseeing the results. Within a year the number of students had doubled; in their free moments they raced about the stockade like trapped woods creatures and caused an amount of damage that nearly drove the agent to distraction." Another problem which would plague the new agent, but which was not apparent during the dry days of August, was the leaky condition of the fort's roof. Fort Wayne, built of hewn logs with its outer walls rising to a height of thirty-five feet, looked substantial enough to withstand all hostile elements; but, as Hays later discovered, it was not impervious to the assaults of rain, snow and children.

As Indian agent, John Hays was responsible for disbursing government money to the Indians in payment for lands already ceded. These were sizable sums—over \$18,000 annually being paid to the Miamis alone--and necessitated Hays' posting of a \$30,000 security bond. The need for an agent who possessed intelligence and tact was stressed in a letter to Calhoun from Lewis Cass, the governor of Michigan who was also serving ex-officio as Superintendent of Indi-

ana Affairs, and, in his latter capacity, was Hays' immediate superior. "The Miami and Potawatomi who frequented the area of Fort Wayne, sometimes in throngs of three or four thousand, still had large landholdings in Indiana; and it was certain that the government would soon be urged to secure further cessions." It would be Hays' duty to maintain the confidence of the Indians so that more land could be acquired peaceably. This would not be easy. During his eighteen-day journey from Cahokia to Fort Wayne, Hays had encountered the Eel River Miami and found them to be dissatisfied with the agency administration and with their principal chief, Jean Baptiste Richardville. Until Hays took over the duties of Indian agent, the annual payment had been given to Richardville to distribute to the tribes under his jurisdiction as he saw fit. Hays initiated a new method. The money was still given to Richardville, but he was required to divide it "on the spot, one silver dollar at a time to each member of the watching circle of tribesmen."

Late in November, 1820, Hays journeyed to Cahokia to see his family. He was not happy at Fort Wayne. His health had suffered in the five months since he left home, and he begrudged the months away from his family and his business affairs. He was alarmed by "the uncontrollable temper of the Miami and their mad passion for whisky and revolted by the grasping attitude of the traders who furnished the liquor."

On March 3, 1821, the United States Senate confirmed the appointment of Hays, who in the meantime had indicated that he might resign the position. In May, 1821, Hays felt obliged to return to Fort Wayne. He collapsed after the first fifteen miles. Several weeks later he started out again, with one of his daughters to look after him.

Hays had many disappointments and frustra-

tions in his difficult job. There was trouble in implementing rules set in Washington. Other difficulties included his attempts to curb the sale of liquor to the Indians. Further trouble included great difficulty with the Potawatomi, who were more numerous than the Miami. In her article, Nellie Robertson explains these difficulties in more detail. Hays was able to interest the Miami in farming. "One band asked for plows and harness and rails enough to fence a communal field, agreeing to pay for tools and labor out of their annuity." This request, coming from the truculent Miami, gave Hays almost his first feeling of accomplishment to balance against his frustrations.

Later Hays again thought of resigning, but new orders from Washington thwarted him. Hays received orders to proceed to Vincennes and take over the records of the Wea and Kickapoo Indians on the Wabash above Vincennes, who had recently ceded their lands, most of them then moving beyond the Mississippi. When he reached Vincennes, the retiring agent, William Prince, was not ready to make the transfer. Hays went on to Cahokia, where he was stricken with an illness that kept him bedfast through the winter.

In May, 1822, Hays returned to Vincennes where he faced a ticklish problem involving payment of money to some of the Wea and Kickapoo who had not left earlier. Secretary Calhoun gave Hays the hopeless task of cajoling the Indians into going West.

Upon his return to Fort Wayne in 1822, Hays found more old and new problems. He found the agency funds in a deplorable state. The government was two full quarters behind in its allowance, and the clamor of creditors was loud and angry. There were no easy solutions. Hays did not receive enough funds. He tried new ways of paying the Indians through their chiefs. The Indians were not satisfied, and they assembled at the fort late in September and stayed for

ten days. Other problems involved liquor, and there were six murders.

Nellie Robertson reports that:

A more cheerful aspect of the payment was the willingness with which the Miami paid their debts for farming equipment and asked for more. "I have succeeded in getting that Tribe ... to cultivate the Earth," Hays wrote with satisfaction, and listed the villages where fencing had been begun and a few log houses built--Turtle Town, on Eel River; the Forks of the Wabash; and White Racoon's Village. "At this village, " said Hays, "they have twenty head of Cattle, and some Hogs, and they raise corn sufficient to accommodate Travellers that may pass the road, they can give a good breakfast or Dinner, they make butter &c. and raise numbers of chickens. I expect ere long many will follow their example, and be Industrious."

Hays stayed through the winter of 1823 and then resigned. Rheumatism and fevers had depleted his strength; he could no longer endure the fatiguing journeys to and from Cahokia, and he hoped for an appointment nearer home. In a friendly letter expressing regret at Hays' resignation, Secretary Calhoun asked him to stay until after the Miami annuity payment. But Hays was in a frankly rebellious mood: "It certainly would be one of the hardest cases in a free government like ours was I compelled to remain at Fort Wayne until August, through the most oppressive heat of Summer, and most sickly season. I certainly might bid a final adieu to ever seeing my family ... as the last summer I Experienced severe Indisposition, and . . . should I attempt to remain at Fort Wayne the present summer ... I should not be able to get Home."

John Tipton reached Fort Wayne by May 16 and waited impatiently for Hays to complete his duties. As Cass had surmised would be the case, the Indians were busy in the cornfields and took their own time about coming to the fort. Stragglers hung about for days, whisky flowed plentifully, and the usual number of tomahawkings made Hays glad that his connection with the agency was nearly over. In the first week of June he completed the payment and relinquished his office to Tipton.

For three years he had lived in an atmosphere of squalor and trickery and sudden death. He had conducted the Fort Wayne agency with notable integrity in a period reeking with scandals of misappropriated funds and ugly deals between agents and traders. His superiors lamented the resignation of a man who had served them "honourably, faithfully and disinterestedly." What had he accomplished toward the solution of the Indian problem? Almost every incident of his life at Fort Wayne was colored by the drama of danger or privation, but the sum total was significant only as the efforts of one battalion are significant in the course of a total war.

He turned his face homeward to Cahokia the day after transferring the agency to Tipton, and there he spent his remaining years in the cultivation of his extensive lands and in the quiet happiness of association with his family and friends. John Jacob Hays died in February, 1836.

Thus we close the story of the grandson of Samuel Hays, who came to America in 1720. This first known Jewish resident of Fort Wayne was truly an American pioneer who served his country well. What he did brought credit to his name and family.

In the Ethics of the Fathers, Rabbi Simeon says, "There are three crowns: the crown of Royalty, the crown of Priesthood, and the crown of Torah

(learning), but the crown of a good name excels them all." More Americans should know that John Jacob Hays wore the crown of a good name--and there can be no greater compliment paid to any man.

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