

Haym Salomon - the Jew who Saved America

A Chronology of His Life

Born April 7, 1740, in Leszno, Poland (at the time Polish Lithuanian Commonwealth), which had been established by Protestants fleeing the persecution of Catholics, thus they were open to Jews coming who had also been fleeing persecution.

His father was a rabbi in Poland, who originally came from Portugal.

As a Polish-born American businessman, he would become the principal financier of the fledgling American republic and the armies of the Revolutionary War

Died January 6, 1785, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania – age 44.

Buried – Mikveh Israel Cemetery, Philadelphia – unmarked grave; memorial marker is nearby.

1760. Fled Poland, likely because of his revolutionary activities for Polish liberty.

1760-1772. Traveled Western Europe, learning finance, business, and several languages, became highly connected to the banking house of the day, and well known by Jewish families around Europe

Was not only an economic genius, but he learned eight languages: Polish, German, French, Italian, Russian, English, Hebrew and Yiddish, and possibly two more, Dutch and Spanish, for a total of 10 languages. This was inexplicable given the fact that Jews at that time in much of Europe were prohibited from attending university.

1772. Arrived in New York, where he became a highly respected commission merchant, at age 32.

New York population was approximately 25,000 at the time. There were only 300 Jews in New York City, about 200 in Philadelphia, and only 2,500 Jews in all of the 13 Colonies which had a population of 2,500,000.

In New York, became a member of the freedom loving 'Liberty Boys' and 'Sons of Liberty'. He arranged for arms to be shipped into the colonies from a Dutch island, fighting against the British.

Became the most significant financier of the American Revolution, supporting the Patriotic cause

1776. The British, who controlled New York City, charged Salomon with espionage; Arrested him; Was imprisoned at the "Old Sugar House," a warehouse, for being a spy. While there in prison, contacted tuberculosis, which caused his death in 1785, at age 44.

Prisons were both on boats and on land; Horrific conditions; More died in prisons than in combat.

While in prison, British used him to translate and conduct business for them.
British did not know he was functioning as a spy, getting British intel to the Patriots.

British did not know that he was persuading the German speaking Hessian mercenary soldiers to defect, leave the British, to desert, as a way of supporting the Patriots.

1777. Married Rachel Franks in January. The Franks family was highly respected and well connected in the colonies. Given Haym's incredible network across Europe with the major banking houses, his relationships with Jewish businessmen in the Old World, his knowledge of eight languages, his genius for understanding economics and creating innovative financial tools, along with the connections afforded him in the New World through the Franks family, he was trusted and highly respected, for good reason.

1778. His first child, Ezekiel, was born in July.

1778. Arrested again on more serious charges, this time for his pro-rebel activities. Prison conditions were horrific for most, with more dying in British prisons than by British bullets.

1778. Tortured and sentenced to death by hanging by the British, set for Aug. 11, 1778.

1778. Escaped and went to Philadelphia, likely by bribing a guard. Had to leave his wife and family behind, until he could get them to Philadelphia later

Fought for religious liberty. Was key leader in Philadelphia's Mikveh Israel Synagogue

1782. Made largest individual donation to building synagogue.

1783. Helped get Pennsylvania Council of Censors to remove religious test for holding office.

When antisemitism rose, Salomon answered the slander by stating: "I am a Jew; it is my own nation; I do not despair that we shall obtain every other privilege that we aspire to enjoy along with our fellow-citizens." (*Remember – Jews were subject to special extra taxes in the New World.*)

Established a brokerage office and acted without salary as the financial agent of the French, doing all in his power to facilitate France's alliance, along with other nations, with 13 colonies

Subscribed heavily to government loans, endorsed notes

Gave generously to soldiers and equipped several military units with his own money.

Helped convert loans from other countries into hard currency by selling bills of exchange.

Brokered sizeable donations to the Patriot cause.

1781. Made the critical \$20,000 loan in 1781 that enabled General George Washington to win the decisive Battle at Yorktown, which was the turning point of the American Revolutionary War. He used his own fortune of 600,000 sterling pounds, then when that was used, he secured funds from other Jewish communities.

1781 to 1784. Appointed by Rober Morris, superintendent of finance, as the broker in his office. Helped provide over \$650,000 (well over \$15 million in today's dollars). He was an official broker, converting bills of exchange and foreign government notes (primarily France & Holland), into spendable cash. Often working out of the "London Coffee House" in Philadelphia, he acted as a broker for the Office of Finance.

Made private loans, charging no interest, to James Madison, Thomas Jefferson, James Monroe, Alexander Hamilton and others.

Gen. George Washington knew he could always count on Haym Salomon to secure money to keep the Continental Army running.

1785. According to some reports, the government owed Salomon more than \$650,000 in 1785 dollars, though the exact amount is unknown.

1785. Despite donating his entire fortune to the Continental Army and several of the key Founding Fathers of our nation, he died penniless in Philadelphia due to the failure of government officials and private lenders to repay the debt they owed him.

Loaned to countless others; Example: Bodo Otto – elderly medical doctor who served during the war, establishing the hospital in Valley Forge

History books emphasize that the French funded the war. They fail to mention that Amsterdam, that is Holland, and all the other countries who supported the war through the credibility and sacrifice of one man: Haym Salomon

Salomon and his descendants were never repaid. Not one cent. His descendants tried to be repaid, at least seven times (maybe more):

1. Haym Salomon's widow Rachel petitioned Congress to pay what had been owed them in 1785. Son Ezekiel was 11, took over the business.
2. A second attempt occurred in 1800.
3. A third attempt was done by Haym Salomon's son Ezekial in 1827.
4. A fourth attempt occurred in 1848.
5. A fifth attempt occurred in 1864.
6. A sixth attempt occurred in 1893.
7. In 2008, the descendants of Haym Salomon presented a claim to the U.S. government, seeking \$6,500,000 in reparations, arguing that that was what was owed on the loans Salomon had made to the American colonies. The issue, like all the years before, was not resolved, leaving it open-ended.

Some attempted to honor him:

1893. A bill was presented before the 52nd U.S. Congress ordering a gold medal be struck in recognition of Salomon's contributions to America. The Committee on the Library recommended that Congress pass a bill to strike a gold medal in recognition of his service. Congress never passed it.

1911. Madison C. Peters wrote *Haym Salomon, the Financier Of The Revolution: An Unwritten Chapter in American History*.

1920 or perhaps 1926 (Date uncertain) There was a proposal by Ohio Congressman Charles Mooney that Congress erect a statue in his honor, possibly in 1926, 100 years ago. They did not. (*Confusion over the date: Records say 1926, however Mooney was out of office in 1921, so uncertain of exact year.*)

1930. Charles Edward Russell wrote *Haym Salomon and the Revolution*.

1936-1941. Statue honoring him was begun in 1936 in Chicago on Wacker Drive. When Sculptor Lorado Taft died, it was completed by Leonard Crunelle, Nellie Walker and Fred Dorrey in 1941. On September 15, 1971, it was designated a Chicago Landmark. This monuments places George Washington in the middle with Robert Morris on one side of Washington and Haym Salomon on the other side.

1939. A film titled *Sons of Liberty* was released by Warner Bros, with actor Claud Rains playing the role of Haym Salomon.

In 1941, Howard Fast wrote a book titled *Haym Salomon, Son of Liberty*.

1943. On May 17, 1943, during World War II, a "Liberty ship" was named in honor of Haym Salomon. After the war, it was sold for private use in 1947 and scrapped in 1971. It has been stated that one of the reasons for naming a ship in Salomon's honor at that time was to challenge Nazi racial theories during the season of intense Jew-hatred.

1975. The U.S. Government honored Haym Salomon with a stamp in 1975. This was part of a "Contributors to the Cause" series. It was printed on both sides, including the side with glue. On that side, it stated, "Financial Hero – Businessman and broker Haym Salomon was responsible for raising most of the money needed to finance the American Revolution and later to save the new nation from collapse." (*NOTE: In turn, Israel honored President Harry S. Truman with a stamp since he was the first President to recognize the State of Israel.*)

1975. In *The Congressional Record* of March 25, 1975, it states: "When Morris was appointed Superintendent of Finance, he turned to Salomon for help in raising the money needed to carry on the war and later to save the emerging nation from financial collapse. Salomon advanced direct loans to the government and also gave generously of his own resources to pay the salaries of government officials and army officers. With frequent entries of 'I sent for Haym Salomon,' Morris' diary for the years 1781–84 records some 75 transactions between the two men."

1979. Shirley Milgrim (Illustrated by Richard Fish) wrote *Haym Salomon, Liberty's Son*.

2007. David Allen Lewis wrote *Forgotten Patriot: The Story of Haym Salomon*.

2025. T.J. Allen wrote *Haym Salomon and the Creation of America*.

There are some other institutions commemorating him:

- Haym Salomon Square is located in Kew Gardens Hills, Queens, New York City.
- Haym Salomon Memorial Park, a Jewish cemetery, located in Frazer, Pennsylvania, in suburban Philadelphia. (*This is not where Salomon is buried.*)
- The Haym Salomon Center is located in Northbrook, Illinois.
- The Haym Salomon Nursing Home is located in Brooklyn, New York.
- Stan Klos established www.HaymSalomon.org

What we not asking:

- Our concern is not for reparations. We are not asking for that.
- We do believe he merits a gold medal to be struck in his honor, and to be awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor, however we are not even asking for that.

What we are asking:

- We are simply asking that the U.S. Congress support and fund a statue of appropriate size and strategic location to honor him in Washington, DC.

Reasons:

- This is the 250th birthday of our nation, a time we focus on the American Revolution and the Founding Fathers.
- Congress (and others) have attempted to have him properly honored for more than a couple centuries.
- In an era of antisemitism (or more correctly called Jew-hatred), how fitting it would be for us to properly honor and acknowledge “the Jew who saved America.”