

Jewish financier Haym Solomon is born, April 7, 1740

On this day in history, April 7, 1740, Jewish financier Haym Solomon is born. Solomon was a Portuguese Jew born in Poland. He traveled throughout Europe as a young man, learned to speak multiple languages and learned the trade of finance.

Solomon emigrated to America in the early 1770s and started a financial brokerage in New York City, where he acted as the middleman between merchants and their overseas trading partners, in much the same way a house is purchased by using an escrow agent today. In such a transaction, the money from the purchaser and the deed from the seller are given to the escrow agent who verifies that both are good and then delivers them to the appropriate party. Solomon performed a similar service for merchants who took the risk of dealing with overseas partners.

In the years leading up to the American Revolution, Solomon became a close friend of Alexander McDougall, one of the leading members of the Sons of Liberty in New York City, putting him squarely in the middle of the growing anti-British sentiment. When New York was invaded, Solomon was arrested for spying. He spent 18 months in squalid British prison facilities, but was eventually released on the condition that he act as a translator for the hired Hessian troops working for the British.

Solomon agreed to this, but used the position to arrange the escapes of American prisoners and to encourage as many Hessians as he could to switch sides. In 1778, Solomon was arrested again and sentenced to death, but this time he escaped, possibly with the help of McDougall and the Sons of Liberty. He made his way to Philadelphia and re-established himself in business. He soon became the paymaster for French troops in America (meaning he acted as the agent of exchange between the French government and the Americans). While

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in Philadelphia, Solomon became a business associate of Robert Morris, a signer of the Declaration of Independence and member of the Continental Congress.

In 1781, with Congress out of money and the Continental Army about to break apart for lack of funds, Morris was appointed Superintendent of Finances for Congress. His job was to raise money and oversee the expenditures. Morris turned to Haym Solomon who acted as an agent for Congress by selling bonds to buyers and quickly raised \$20,000. This money was then used to fund the Yorktown campaign which ended the war. Solomon continued in this role for several years and raised over \$600,000 for Congress, keeping the government afloat and earning Solomon the title "Financier of the Revolution."

Although Solomon's role has been somewhat exaggerated, he was nonetheless a critical person in keeping Congress in business during a pivotal period. He personally made loans to leading members of Congress at low rates of interest and never asked for money that was owed to him by Congress. Solomon continued successfully in business after the war, but by the time he died at the age of 45 in 1785, he left his family deeply in debt. His son tried to get Congress to pay the family money owed to Solomon, but was never successful.

Solomon became active in the Jewish community in Philadelphia and became known nationally for defending Jews from the typical anti-Semitic slanders of the day. He also helped reverse a Pennsylvania law that forbade non-Christians from serving in public office. Solomon's role in the Revolution has taken on an almost mythic status partly because he was one of the few Jews in America at the time and later American Jews placed particular focus on him in order to have a Jewish hero from the Revolution.