

PROFILE OF RABBI JACOB JOSEPH PERES
SPIRITUAL LEADER
CONGREGATION CHILDREN OF ISRAEL 1858-1860

Rabbi Jacob Joseph Peres was the first spiritual leader of Congregation Children of Israel beginning in 1858 and serving until 1860.

He was born in Haarlem, Holland, on February 15, 1830, the son of Rabbi Joseph Peres. The Peres family were Sephardic Jews who had fled Spain during the Inquisition and had settled in Amsterdam.

Jacob was an ardent student and at the age of 14 received a diploma from high school. This event attracted the attention of King William II, and with the King's patronage he attended the Netherland's Israelitish Seminary where he graduated with highest honors. At 17 he entered the University of Leyden. While a student he published a book of proverbs in five languages and a Hebrew grammar. When Peres was 21 King William came to hear Peres' first rabbinical sermon. Eventually he would become fluent in many languages: French, Italian, Spanish, Dutch, German and Hebrew. He later taught the Greek, Latin, Syrian and Chaldaic Languages. At the time of his death in 1879 he was studying the language of the American Indians.

In 1854, at the age of 24, he married Eva Chuts. In 1857, he answered a summons from his brother in the United States to come, along with his wife and two children, to Philadelphia where he became professor of Oriental and modern languages.

In 1858 he and his family moved to Memphis to become the first spiritual leader of Congregation Children of Israel. His salary was \$50.00 a month.

With a family to support he needed additional income, and in 1859 he established a grocery brokerage business. He felt it was necessary to conduct business on Saturday, which was in conflict with Jewish law as proscribed in the Ten Commandments. Thus, he was dismissed from his rabbinical position with Congregation Children of Israel. He, along with many members of the Temple formed a new congregation, Beth El Emeth. Later, he sued the Congregation Children of Israel for salaries due him according to his contractual agreement. It was a lengthy process and he finally won the case. Peres also sued the congregation claiming slander. The suit was for \$20,000.00. There is no record of the outcome of the suit in the Temple Israel archives.

In the Memphis Appeal there appeared an article on April 4, 1861, that reported an attempt on the life of J.J. Peres by L. Helman. For this Mr. Helman was found guilty and was fined \$200.00 and "to suffer 3 months imprisonment."

Rabbi Peres also studied the law and practiced for a very short time under the firm name Peres and Micou. He was elected president of the Memphis City Schools and was the first Jew elected to public office in the city of Memphis.

In addition to his other scholastic achievements he wrote a children's text book, the "Arithmetic Exercise Book." It was used in schools in Memphis, Chicago and Arkansas.

He died on October 15, 1879, during the Yellow Fever epidemic. His wife survived him by only 6 months, leaving behind their four children: Hardwig, Sara, Bernard and Israel. Six children had predeceased their parents.