

From the Old World to a New Beginning: Jewish Migration and Community in Colonial Georgia

GUIDING QUESTION: What global factors influenced Jewish immigration to and within British North America in the eighteenth century? How did Jewish immigrants adapt to their new communities while maintaining their religious practices and cultural identity?

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OVERVIEW

In this lesson, students will use primary and secondary sources from eighteenth-century Savannah, Georgia, to explore Jewish immigration to early America (1733–1791). Students will map immigrant families' journeys across the Atlantic and examine the global factors influencing Jewish migration to and experiences in colonial Georgia.

OBJECTIVES

At the conclusion of this activity, students will be able to

- › Describe the factors that led Jews to migrate to and within British North America during the colonial era; and
- › Compare and contrast how Jewish immigrants adapted to their new communities while maintaining their religious practices and cultural identities.

DOCUMENTS USED

PRIMARY SOURCES

Account, Johann Boltzius, March 20, 1734 (excerpt)

Printed in [*Detailed Reports on the Salzburger Emigrants Who Settled in America: Volume 1: 1733-1734*], University of Georgia Press

<https://ugapress.manifoldapp.org/read/detailed-reports-on-the-salzburger-emigrants-who-settled-in-america-edited-by-samuel-urslperger-volume-one-1733-1734/section/c60719cd-bdb4-4765-b7ab-60ab52aa9977>

Account, Johann Boltzius, July 3, 1739 (excerpt)

Printed in Leon Hühner, "The Jews of Georgia in Colonial Times," 1902 *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society*

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/43059664>

Correspondence, James Oglethorpe, August 12, 1733 (excerpt)

Colonial Records of the State of Georgia

<https://ugapress.manifoldapp.org/system/actioncallout/0/8/8/088b1b0f-2d34-4747-a4d0-078f3c8f72ca/attachment/7809c39b5a3073d7fb6c6e2c0e401bd3.pdf>

Journal entry, John Wesley, April 4, 1737 (excerpt)

Evans Early American Imprint Collection, University of Michigan Library

<https://name.umdl.umich.edu/N22587.0001.001>

Land grant, John Reynolds, May 15, 1756 (excerpt)

Printed in [*Colonial Records of the State of Georgia: Volume 27: Original Papers of Governor John Reynolds, 1754-1756*], University of Georgia Press

<https://ugapress.manifoldapp.org/projects/colonial-records-of-the-state-of-georgia>

Proclamation, James Oglethorpe, “A Thanksgiving for Victory,” 1742 (excerpt)

Publications of James Edward Oglethorpe

<https://ugapress.manifoldapp.org/system/actioncallout/2/e/d/2ed96dc5-5822-4026-9e7e-0be5a8ec839c/attachment/8f5aad999fe30973525e765535a090f.pdf>

TEACHER-CREATED MATERIALS

- › Mapping Immigration handout
- › Nunes Family Source Collection
- › Sheftall Family Source Collection

ACTIVITY PREPARATION

- › Preview all materials and review unfamiliar vocabulary in the glossary.
- › Make one copy of the Mapping Immigration handout for each student.
- › Make copies of the Nunes Family Source Collection and Sheftall Family Source Collection so that each group has one collection.
- › Organize students into groups of three to five students each.
- › Arrange the classroom for group work.
- › Read the article “American Jewish History in a Global Context” by Hasia Diner for background information.

PROCEDURE

ACTIVITY ONE: INTRODUCTION (15 MINUTES)

- › Remind students that the vast majority of Americans are not indigenous to North America and that American immigration began with European colonization. Additionally, remind students that people of all different cultural, religious, ethnic, and racial backgrounds have come to the Americas (some by choice and others by force) since the seventeenth century.
- › Summarize for students key facts about Jewish immigration to the Americas, including:
 - » Jewish people arrived as immigrants in the colonial era
 - » Many colonial-era settlers came from the Netherlands or the Caribbean
- › Lead a brief discussion to solidify student understanding of the basic push and pull factors for seventeenth-century immigrants to British North America. Discuss how these factors could be different for Jewish immigrants depending on their cultural, ethnic, and geographic backgrounds.

ACTIVITY TWO: MAPPING JEWISH IMMIGRATION TO EIGHTEENTH CENTURY GEORGIA (30 MINUTES)

- › Organize students into an even number of groups of three to five students each.
- › Distribute one copy of the Mapping Immigration handout to each student.
- › Distribute one source packet to each group. Half of the groups should receive the Nunes Family Source Collection and half, the Sheftall Family Source Collection.
- › Explain to students they will be assigned to learn about a family of early Jewish immigrants to colonial Georgia and mapping the journey of their respective families using primary and secondary sources.
- › Review the instructions and give students time to read and discuss the secondary source for each family.
 - » **Teacher Tip:** Use a classroom map to help students identify the approximate locations of Prussia, Great Britain, Spain, Portugal in Europe, and Savannah, Charleston, and New York City in the American colonies.
- › Direct students to divide the primary sources. They should read and analyze each primary source, and work together to summarize the source in one of the four boxes of the map. Once they summarize, they should draw lines and add labels as needed to show the location of where these events happened.
- › Circulate and assist as needed.

ACTIVITY THREE: COMPARING IMMIGRATION STORIES (15 MINUTES)

- › Pair up groups to speak with a group who studied the opposite family.
- › Ask students to review their findings and share with the other group.
- › Once students have finished presenting their maps, lead a brief concluding discussion:
 - » *What do these sources tell us about the American Jewish immigration experience?*
 - » *What similarities did you notice between the two families' experiences?*
 - » *What differences did you notice between the two families' experiences?*
 - » *How are these experiences similar or different from other groups of people who immigrated to the colonies in the colonial era?*
 - » *What information is missing from these sources? What questions do these sources generate?*
- › **Teacher Tip:** Use this discussion as an opportunity to practice new vocabulary and reinforce to students that Jewish identity is not a monolith—Jews come to North America from all over the world with unique cultures, religious traditions, and languages.

ASSESSMENT OPTIONS

- › Teachers can assess the maps or listen as groups share with another group.
- › Teachers can require each student to write a brief exit ticket about the family they traced or the one they heard about.
- › Students can do the mapping activity about a different immigrant group and make comparisons between groups of people over time. Lead a brief discussion to solidify student understanding of the basic push and pull factors for seventeenth-century immigrants to British North America. Discuss how these factors could be different for Jewish immigrants depending on their cultural, ethnic, and geographic backgrounds.

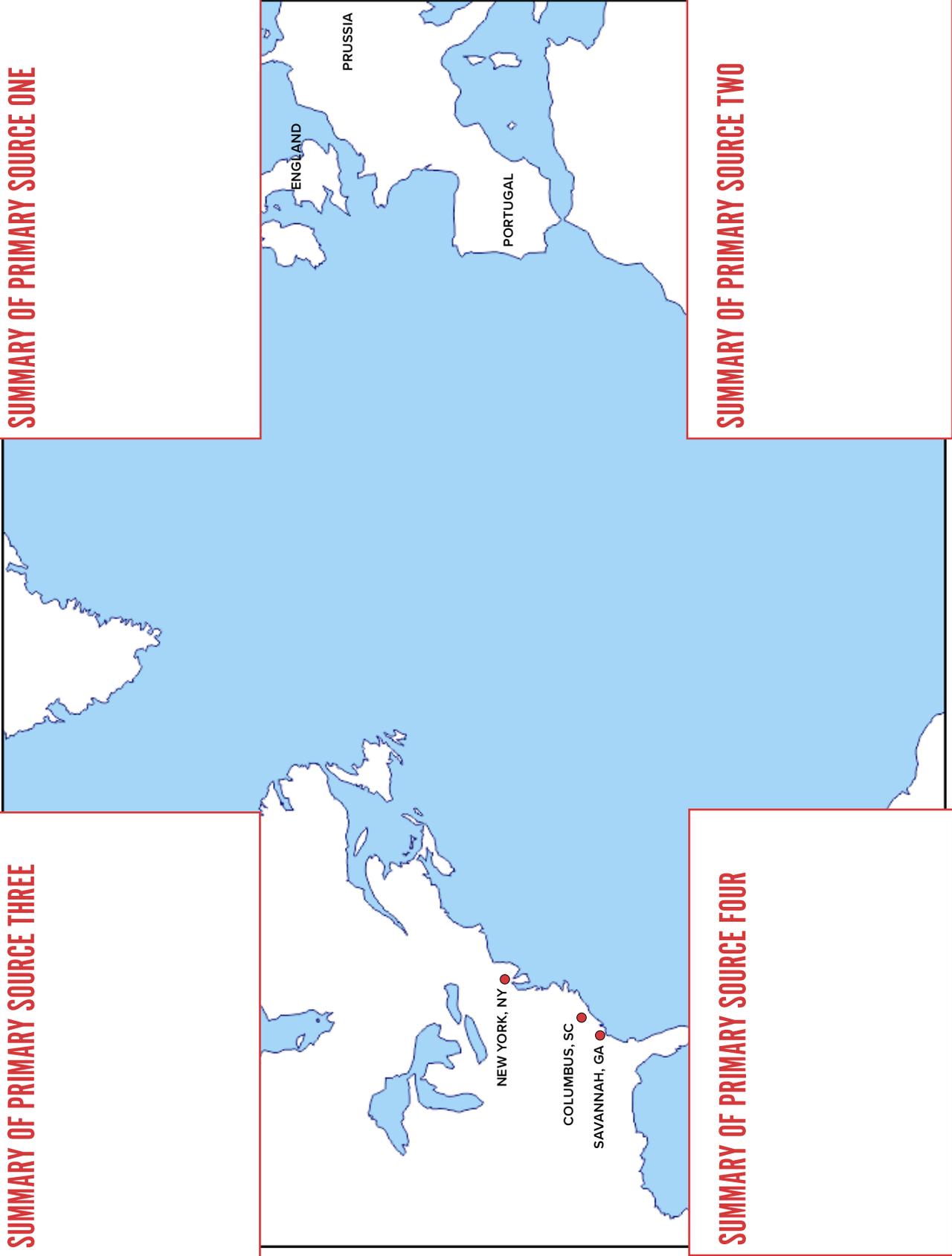
Students interested in this topic might be interested in researching the following for an NHD project:

- › **The Spanish Inquisition or the Portuguese Inquisition**
- › **James Oglethorpe and Colonial Georgia**
- › **Jewish women in the Colonial Era**
- › **The Naturalization Act of 1790**
- › **George Washington's letters to the Hebrew Congregation in Newport, Rhode Island (August 18, 1790)**

MAPPING IMMIGRATION HANDOUT

SUMMARY OF PRIMARY SOURCE THREE

SUMMARY OF PRIMARY SOURCE ONE



SUMMARY OF PRIMARY SOURCE FOUR

SUMMARY OF PRIMARY SOURCE TWO

NUNES FAMILY SOURCE COLLECTION

On July 11, 1733, 42 Jews aboard the *William and Sarah* arrived in colonial Georgia in spite of the Council of Trustees' attempts to bar their entry. Leaders of the Bevis Marks **Synagogue**, an affluent Spanish-Jewish congregation in London, sent this group of mostly **Sephardi** (Jewish people from Spain or Portugal) and some **Ashkenazi** (Jewish people from Central or Eastern Europe) settlers, hoping that they would positively contribute to the new colony of "industrious poor." This group would form the foundation of the oldest Jewish community in the present-day American South.¹

Today, you will be a historian of the Nunes family and map the family's journey to colonial Georgia to gain a better understanding of the experiences of Savannah's early Jewish immigrants.

DIRECTIONS

As a group, you will:

- › Read a secondary source to set the family's story in historical context.
- › Explore four primary sources and summarize the sources to tell the story of the family's immigration.
- › Write a short summary of the primary source and explain how it relates to the family's journey.
- › Draw a line (or lines) connecting your summary to the relevant location(s) on the map.

¹ Mark Greenberg, "One Religion, Different Worlds: Sephardic and Ashkenazic Immigrants in Eighteenth-Century Savannah" in *Jewish Roots in Southern Soil* (Brandeis University Press, 2006), 27–28.

NUNES FAMILY SOURCE COLLECTION (CONT.)

SECONDARY SOURCE

SAMUEL NUNES²

Samuel Nunes (also spelled Nunez), a physician, was one of the first Jewish immigrants to the Georgia colony in 1733. He provided vital medical aid, which helped the settlement survive its first year of existence.

Born Diogo Nunes Ribeiro in Portugal, in 1667 or 1668, into a respected medical family, Samuel Nunes married Gracia Caetana da Veiga in June 1699. They had several children, and their youngest daughter, Sipra (also spelled “Zipra” or “Zipporah”), lived to be 86 years old.

In Lisbon, Portugal, Nunes was a well-known physician who treated local Catholic leaders. This was the time of the Portuguese Inquisition, an era when the government was actively working to force its residents to convert to and practice Christianity. Nunes and his family were considered **“crypto-Jews,”** or people who complied with the Spanish and Portuguese orders to convert to Christianity but maintained Jewish traditions in secret.

In 1703, the Portuguese government arrested Nunes. Officials claimed he was a Jew and encouraged others to reject Christianity. Despite support from some religious leaders, he was prosecuted and tortured, and eventually confessed. His family lost most of their wealth and status.

Between 1700 and 1735 at least 1,500 Portuguese Jews fled to Great Britain and the Netherlands. London’s Bevis Marks Synagogue offered funds to sea captains who transported immigrants to London.

In the mid-1720s, Nunes and his wife, children, and other family members fled Portugal.

Once in London, Nunes and his family took different names that reflected their Jewish heritage. Nunes assumed the name Samuel, and his wife became known as Rebecca. Life in London was difficult. The family spoke little English and faced economic hardship. Nunes briefly served as physician to the poor of the Bevis Marks congregation to provide extra money for his family.

IMMIGRATION TO THE GEORGIA COLONY

Increases in immigration of Jewish people from Spain, Portugal, and the German states during the early 1700s caused prominent Jews of London to worry that such a large number of new arrivals would reduce funds available to care for them. In 1732, three leaders of the Bevis Marks congregation, Francis Salvador, Alvaro Lopes Suasso, and Antonio da Costa, helped raise money to transport about 40 Jews aboard a ship named the *William and Sarah* to the new colony of Georgia. A hazardous journey followed, during which the ship nearly wrecked off the coast of North Carolina. When the exhausted immigrants arrived in Georgia in July 1733, they found a colony barely five months old with settlers suffering from an intestinal ailment and fever. William Cox, the colony’s physician, had died from the disease, as had more than 20 settlers.

² Adapted from Carol Ebel, “Samuel Nunes,” New Georgia Encyclopedia, last modified Jan 5, 2017. [georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/history-archaeology/samuel-nunes-ca-1667-ca-1741/](https://www.encyclopedia.com/georgia/encyclopedia/articles/history-archaeology/samuel-nunes-ca-1667-ca-1741/).

NUNES FAMILY SOURCE COLLECTION (CONT.)

At first, James Edward Oglethorpe, the colony's leader, did not know what to do about the Jewish immigrants. Jews and Catholics were excluded from the colony's promise of religious liberty.

After consulting a lawyer, who ruled that the charter guaranteed religious freedom for all non-Catholics, Oglethorpe admitted the *William and Sarah* passengers. He wrote that Nunes assisted many of the ill colonists and helped many of them survive. Oglethorpe recommended that Nunes be employed as the colony's physician.

The Trustees of the colony agreed to pay Nunes for his work; at the same time, they tried to deny permanent residency to other Jewish immigrants. They feared that Georgia would become a haven for European Jews. Oglethorpe ignored their instructions and in December 1733 permitted 14 Jews, including Nunes, to acquire land. The immigrants soon established Congregation Mickve Israel, which has survived as the oldest Jewish congregation in the South.

Nunes and his family experienced success and difficulties in Georgia. Cultural, religious, and language differences between different groups of Jews hindered efforts to build a synagogue.

When Great Britain and Spain went to war in the War of Jenkins' Ear (1739–1748), **Sephardic Jews** (from Spain) feared punishment if the colony came under Spanish control. Most Jewish settlers left the colony. Nunes (then in his seventies) and some of his family moved to Charleston, South Carolina in August 1740. Soon after, he moved to New York with his daughter Sipra and likely died there. In time, two of Nunes's sons, Daniel and Moses, returned to Georgia, and became wealthy landowners and respected citizens.

NUNES FAMILY SOURCE COLLECTION (CONT.)

PRIMARY SOURCE ONE

Correspondence, James Oglethorpe, August 12, 1733 (excerpt)

Colonial Records of the State of Georgia

<https://ugapress.manifoldapp.org/system/actioncallout/0/8/8/088b1b0f-2d34-4747-a4d0-078f3c8f72ca/attachment/7809c39b5a3073d7fb6c6e2c0e401bd3.pdf>

“Gentlemen . . . Thomas Millidge our best Carpenter is dead of a burning Feaver [fever] which on his Deathbed he confessed he contracted at the Indian Trading House; he drank there Rum Punch on the Wednesday, on Thursday was taken ill of a burning Feaver and on the seventh day, the Crisis of that Distemper, dyed. Poor Overend who was recommended by Mr. Laroche is also dead with Rum; to which most of the rest owe their Deaths. But the Illness being once frequent became contagious. It appeared chiefly in burning Feavers or else in bloody Fluxes attended by Convulsions and other terrible Symptoms. Dr. Cox being dead [Noble] Jones look’d after the Sick. The Indian Root Dioscordium, Rhubarb, Laudinum and all other Applications usually used on that Occasion were of no Effect. Almost every one that was taken ill at first dyed. Jones himself fell sick and some of the Women (most handy about the Sick) dyed; So that we had neither Doctor, Surgeon nor Nurse, and about the 15th of July we had above 60 People sick, many of whose Lives we despaired of. At which time Capt. Hanton arrived here with some Jews and amongst them a Doctor of Physick [Dr. Samuel Nunis] who immediately undertook our People and refused to take any Pay for it. He proceeded by cold Baths, cooling Drinks and other cooling Applications. Since which the Sick have wonderfully recovered, and we have not lost one who would follow his Prescriptions. Next to the Blessing of God and this new Regimen 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.”

PRIMARY SOURCE TWO

Journal entry, John Wesley, April 4, 1737

Evans Early American Imprint Collection, University of Michigan Library

<https://name.umdl.umich.edu/N22587.0001.001>

Historical Context: John Wesley was a Christian preacher credited as the founder of the Methodist religion. He was born in England and studied at Christ Church in Oxford. Wesley and his brother, Charles, were invited by James Oglethorpe to come to Georgia to serve as a minister to the settlers and preach Christianity to Native Americans. Wesley fled Georgia in 1737. He eventually returned to Europe and founded the Methodist religion.

[April 4, 1737]

“I began learning Spanish, in order to converse with my Jewish Parishioners: some of whom seem nearer the mind that was in Christ, than many of those who call him Lord.”

NUNES FAMILY SOURCE COLLECTION (CONT.)

PRIMARY SOURCE THREE

Account, Johann Boltzius, July 3, 1739 (excerpt)

Printed in Leon Hühner, "The Jews of Georgia in Colonial Times," 1902 *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society*

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/43059664>

Historical Context: Johann Boltzius was a German Lutheran minister who came to the Georgia colony in 1734 with a group of Protestant immigrants from Salzburg (in present-day Austria). He helped lead and organize the settlement of Ebenezer, a town near Savannah. Boltzius wrote letters and reports about life in Georgia, including information about other groups who immigrated there, including Jewish settlers.

"We are close to the Spaniards and on account of such dangerous proximity, care is taken to keep down negro slaves and the Roman Catholics. With these exceptions all sects and all kinds of people are tolerated and are permitted to enjoy all manner of liberty like native English-men. Even the Jews of whom several families are here already, enjoy all privileges the same as other Colonists. Some call themselves Spanish and Portuguese, others call themselves German Jews. The latter speak High German and differ from the former in their religious services and to some extent in other matters as well, as the former do not seem to take it so particular in regard to the dietary laws and other Jewish ceremonies. They have no Synagogue, which is their own fault; the one element hindering the other in this regard. The German Jews believe themselves entitled to build a Synagogue and are willing to allow the Spanish Jews to use it with them in common, the latter, however, reject any such arrangement and demand the preference for themselves."

NUNES FAMILY SOURCE COLLECTION (CONT.)

PRIMARY SOURCE FOUR

Proclamation, James Oglethorpe, *A Thanksgiving for Victory*, 1742 (excerpt)

Publications of James Edward Oglethorpe

<https://ugapress.manifoldapp.org/read/the-publications-of-james-edward-oglethorpe/section/504390a1-4122-4c92-8792-b26436349fc1#ch16>.

Historical Context: James Oglethorpe, the leader of the Georgia colony, posted a message of thanksgiving when he learned that the Spanish were defeated by the British and would not threaten their colony. This message was read aloud and later published in several newspapers in other colonies, including the *Boston Evening-Post* and Benjamin Franklin's *Pennsylvania Gazette*.

“Almighty GOD hath in all Ages shewn his Power and Mercy in the miraculous and gracious Deliverance of his Church, and in the Protection of righteous and religious Kings and States professing his holy and eternal Truths, from the open Invasions, wicked Conspiracies and malicious Practices of all the Enemies thereof. He hath by the manifestation of his Providence, delivered us from the Hands of the Spaniards, They with 14 sail of small Gallies and other Craft, came into Cumberland Sound, but Terror and Fear from the Lord came upon them, and they fled. The Spaniards also with another mighty Fleet of 36 Ships and Vessels came into Jekyl Sound, and after a sharp Fight became Masters thereof, we having only four Vessels to oppose their whole Strength, and God was the Shield of our People, since in so unequal a Fight, which was stoutly maintain'd for the Space of four Hours, not one of ours was kill'd, tho' many of theirs perish'd, and five were kill'd by one Shot only. They landed 4500 Men upon this Island, according to the Accounts of the Prisoners, and even of Englishmen who escaped from them. The first Party march'd up thro' the Woods to this Town, and was within Sight thereof, when God deliver'd them into the Hands of a few of ours, they fought and were dispersed and fled. . .

“Twenty eight sail attack'd Fort William, in which were only fifty Men, and after three Hours fight went away and left the Province, they having been pursued as far as St. John's; so that by this whole Expedition and great Armament, no more than two of ours were taken and three kill'd. Therefore with Truth we may say, the Lord hath done great Things for us, who hath delivered us out of the Hands of our numerous Enemies, who had already swallowed us up in their Thoughts, and boasted that they would torture and burn us; but the Lord was our Shield, and we of a Truth may say, that it was not our Strength nor Might that deliver'd us, but that it was the Lord; therefore it is meet and fitting that we should return Thanks to GOD, our Deliverer.

“Having taken the Premises into Consideration, I do hereby Order, that Sunday the 25th Instant be observed as a Day of publick Thanksgiving to Almighty GOD, for his great Deliverance in having put an End to the Spanish Invasion, and that all Persons do solemnize the same in a Christian and Religious Manner, and abstain from Drunkenness and any other wicked and dissolute Testimonies of Joy. Given under my Hand and Seal this 24th Day of July, at Frederica, in Georgia, Annoque Domini, 1742. JAMES OGLETHORPE.”

SHEFTALL FAMILY SOURCE COLLECTION

On July 11, 1733, 42 Jews aboard the *William and Sarah* arrived in colonial Georgia in spite of the Council of Trustees' attempts to bar their entry. Leaders of the Bevis Marks **Synagogue**, an affluent Spanish-Jewish congregation in London, sent this group of mostly **Sephardi** (Jewish people from Spain or Portugal) and some **Ashkenazi** (Jewish people from central or Eastern Europe) settlers, hoping that they would positively contribute to the new colony of "industrious poor." This group would form the foundation of the oldest Jewish community in the present-day American South.¹

Today, you will be a historian of the Sheftall family and map their journey to colonial Georgia to gain a better understanding of the experiences of Savannah's early Jewish immigrants.

DIRECTIONS

As a group, you will:

- › Read a secondary source to set the family's story in historical context.
- › Explore four primary sources and summarize the sources to tell the story of the family's immigration.
- › Write a short summary of the primary source and explain how it relates to the family's journey.
- › Draw a line (or lines) connecting your summary to the relevant location(s) on the map.

¹ Mark Greenberg, "One Religion, Different Worlds: Sephardic and Ashkenazic Immigrants in Eighteenth-Century Savannah" in *Jewish Roots in Southern Soil* (Brandeis University Press, 2006), 27–28.

SHEFTALL FAMILY SOURCE COLLECTION (CONT.)

SECONDARY SOURCE

BENJAMIN SHEFTALL, 1692–1765

Benjamin Sheftall was one of the first Jewish immigrants to Savannah, Georgia, in 1733. His family became one of the leading Jewish families in colonial Georgia.

LIFE IN EUROPE

Sheftall immigrated to London from the Prussian city of Frankfurt an der Oder around 1730. The Prussian city, like many in central Europe, had been plagued by economic, social, and political conflict. Jews, who had endured centuries of antisemitism and second-class citizenship in central Europe, became particularly vulnerable during periods of upheaval. Searching for new economic opportunities and religious tolerance, a group of German Jews, including Sheftall, departed for London.²

IMMIGRATION TO THE GEORGIA COLONY

Increases in immigration of Jewish people from Spain, Portugal, and the German states during the early 1700s caused prominent Jews of London to worry that such a large number of new arrivals would reduce funds available to care for them. In 1732, three leaders of the Bevis Marks congregation, Francis Salvador, Alvaro Lopes Suasso, and Antonio da Costa, helped raise money to transport about 40 Jews aboard a ship named the *William and Sarah* to the new colony of Georgia. A hazardous journey followed, during which the ship nearly wrecked off the coast of North Carolina. When the exhausted immigrants arrived in Georgia in July 1733, they found a colony barely five months old with settlers suffering from an intestinal ailment and fever. William Cox, the colony's physician, had died from the disease, as had more than 20 settlers.³

At first, James Edward Oglethorpe, the colony's leader, did not know what to do about the Jewish immigrants. Jews and Catholics were excluded from the colony's promise of religious liberty. After consulting a lawyer, who ruled that the charter guaranteed religious freedom for all non-Catholics, Oglethorpe admitted the *William and Sarah* passengers.

EARLY YEARS IN COLONIAL GEORGIA (1733–1741)

The immigrants began gathering informally for worship shortly after their arrival. They formally established Congregation Mickve Israel in 1735, which has survived as the oldest Jewish congregation in the South.⁴

Benjamin Sheftall and his family experienced success and difficulties in Georgia. His first wife, Perla, gave birth to their eldest child, Mordecai, in 1735, but she passed away in 1736. He remarried Hannah Solomons in 1738 and they had two children, Levi and Sheftall.⁵

² Adapted from Mark Greenberg, "One Religion, Different Worlds: Sephardic and Ashkenazic Immigrants in Eighteenth-Century Savannah" in *Jewish Roots in Southern Soil* (Brandeis University Press, 2006), 32.

³ Adapted from Carol Ebel, "Samuel Nunes," *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, last modified Jan 5, 2017. georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/history-archaeology/samuel-nunes-ca-1667-ca-1741/.

⁴ Greenberg, "One Religion, Different Worlds," 34.

⁵ David T. Morgan, "The Sheftalls of Savannah," *American Jewish Historical Quarterly* 62, no. 4 (1973): 349. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23878075>.

SHEFTALL FAMILY SOURCE COLLECTION (CONT.)

Sheftall was deeply religious and, in spite of challenges, worked hard to adhere strictly to Jewish law, procuring ritual objects from London and purchasing land for a Jewish cemetery to bury his family according to religious custom.⁶

Sheftall and other German-speaking Jews struggled to connect with their Portuguese- and Spanish-speaking Jewish neighbors. Cultural, religious, linguistic, and liturgical differences caused heated arguments over the look and function of a synagogue, which hindered efforts to build a synagogue in the late 1730s. Disagreements in the community became obsolete in 1741 when Savannah's Jewish population nearly disintegrated. Fearing Spanish invasion and subsequent religious persecution during the War of Jenkins' Ear (1739–1748), Portuguese Jews, along with some German Jews, fled to cities like New York and Charleston, South Carolina. By the end of the year, only the Sheftall family and one other Jewish family remained in Savannah. They would be the only Jewish families in Savannah for several decades.⁷

DECADES PRECEDING THE WAR FOR AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE (1741–1775)

Several members of the Sheftall family became prosperous entrepreneurs in the years preceding the American Revolution and took leading parts in the war itself. Benjamin Sheftall was one of the founders of the Union Society, the oldest charitable society in the state. His sons Mordecai, a large landowner and merchant, and Levi, a flourishing tannery owner, joined their father in the influential Savannah Parochial Committee. This group, mostly merchants and artisans, sympathized with the patriot cause and participated in local government. Some of Savannah's Jews lent considerable sums of money to the war effort, and some were appointed to military positions. Mordecai Sheftall became the highest-ranking Jewish officer on the American side, appointed deputy commissary general of issues to the Continental troops in South Carolina and Georgia.⁸

⁶ Greenberg, "One Religion, Different Worlds," 33–35; Marcie Cohen-Ferris, *Matzoh Ball Gumbo: Culinary Tales of the Jewish South* (University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 32–33.

⁷ Greenberg, "One Religion, Different Worlds," 35.

⁸ Adapted from Elizabeth Cooksey, "Judaism and Jews," *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, last modified Aug 12, 2020. georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/arts-culture/judaism-and-jews/.

SHEFTALL FAMILY SOURCE COLLECTION (CONT.)

PRIMARY SOURCE ONE

Correspondence, James Oglethorpe, August 12, 1733 (excerpt)
Colonial Records of the State of Georgia

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“Gentlemen . . . Thomas Millidge our best Carpenter is dead of a burning Feaver [fever] which on his Deathbed he confessed he contracted at the Indian Trading House; he drank there Rum Punch on the Wednesday, on Thursday was taken ill of a burning Feaver and on the seventh day, the Crisis of that Distemper, dyed. Poor Overend who was recommended by Mr. Laroche is also dead with Rum; to which most of the rest owe their Deaths. But the Illness being once frequent became contagious. It appeared chiefly in burning Feavers or else in bloody Fluxes attended by Convulsions and other terrible Symptoms. Dr. Cox being dead [Noble] Jones look’d after the Sick. The Indian Root Dioscordium, Rhubarb, Laudinum and all other Applications usually used on that Occasion were of no Effect. Almost every one that was taken ill at first dyed. Jones himself fell sick and some of the Women (most handy about the Sick) dyed; So that we had neither Doctor, Surgeon nor Nurse, and about the 15th of July we had above 60 People sick, many of whose Lives we despaired of. At which time Capt. Hanton arrived here with some Jews and amongst them a Doctor of Physick [Dr. Samuel Nunis] who immediately undertook our People and refused to take any Pay for it. He proceeded by cold Baths, cooling Drinks and other cooling Applications. Since which the Sick have wonderfully recovered, and we have not lost one who would follow his Prescriptions. Next to the Blessing of God and this new Regimen 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.”

PRIMARY SOURCE TWO

Land grant, John Reynolds, May 15, 1756 (excerpt)

Printed in [*Colonial Records of the State of Georgia: Volume 27: Original Papers of Governor John Reynolds, 1754-1756*], University of Georgia Press

<https://ugapress.manifoldapp.org/projects/colonial-records-of-the-state-of-georgia>

Historical Context: John Reynolds, a captain in the British Royal Navy, served as Georgia’s first royal governor from late 1754 to early 1757.

Grant Dated 15th May 1756

To Benjamin Sheftal for a Lot in the Town of Savannah No. 4 in Heathcott Tything and Deckers Ward and 50 Acres of Land in said Tything and Ward Registered 5th July 1756.

Alotted to him by the Late President and Assistants.

SHEFTALL FAMILY SOURCE COLLECTION (CONT.)

PRIMARY SOURCE THREE

Account, Johann Boltzius, March 20, 1734 (excerpt)

Printed in [*Detailed Reports on the Salzburger Emigrants Who Settled in America: Volume 1: 1733-1734*], University of Georgia Press

<https://ugapress.manifoldapp.org/projects/detailed-reports-on-the-salzburger-emigrants-who-settled-in-america>

Historical Context: Johann Boltzius was a German Lutheran minister who came to the Georgia colony in 1734 with a group of Protestant immigrants from Salzburg (in present-day Austria). He helped lead and organize the settlement of Ebenezer, a town near Savannah. Boltzius wrote letters and reports about life in Georgia, including information about other groups who immigrated there, including Jewish settlers.

“The previously mentioned Jew [Benjamin Sheftall] and his wife are proving very eager to be of service to us and to the Saltzburgers; and he shows an honesty and righteousness the like of which one might seek in vain in others of his race and even in many Christians. This is illustrated by the following example, among others. By mistake, and while it was dark, the Jew’s wife had taken from a Saltzburger woman a whole crown instead of a half crown because, in her ignorance, the Saltzburger woman gave it to her for a half crown. When the Jew saw the money the next day and learned that it had been taken for something worth only half as much, he came to the Saltzburgers’ tent and asked for the woman who had not received enough change and gave her back a half crown with the words that God should keep him from having unjust property in his house since it could not bring any blessing. His wife had not taken it knowingly and deliberately, etc. This made a deep impression on the Saltzburgers. Since these two Jews love us very much and promise to visit us often at our settlement, we hope we will be able to preach the Gospel of Christ to these people also with good results. They are both from Germany and speak good German. What we have told them so far has been well received. . .

SHEFTALL FAMILY SOURCE COLLECTION (CONT.)

PRIMARY SOURCE FOUR

Proclamation, James Oglethorpe, *A Thanksgiving for Victory*, 1742 (excerpt)

Publications of James Edward Oglethorpe

<https://ugapress.manifoldapp.org/read/the-publications-of-james-edward-oglethorpe/section/504390a1-4122-4c92-8792-b26436349fc1#ch16>

Historical Context: James Oglethorpe, the leader of the Georgia colony, posted a message of thanksgiving when he learned that the Spanish were defeated by the British and would not threaten their colony. This message was read aloud and later published in several newspapers in other colonies, including the *Boston Evening-Post* and Benjamin Franklin's *Pennsylvania Gazette*.

“Almighty GOD hath in all Ages shewn his Power and Mercy in the miraculous and gracious Deliverance of his Church, and in the Protection of righteous and religious Kings and States professing his holy and eternal Truths, from the open Invasions, wicked Conspiracies and malicious Practices of all the Enemies thereof. He hath by the manifestation of his Providence, delivered us from the Hands of the Spaniards, They with 14 sail of small Gallies and other Craft, came into Cumberland Sound, but Terror and Fear from the Lord came upon them, and they fled. The Spaniards also with another mighty Fleet of 36 Ships and Vessels came into Jekyl Sound, and after a sharp Fight became Masters thereof, we having only four Vessels to oppose their whole Strength, and God was the Shield of our People, since in so unequal a Fight, which was stoutly maintain'd for the Space of four Hours, not one of ours was kill'd, tho' many of theirs perish'd, and five were kill'd by one Shot only. They landed 4500 Men upon this Island, according to the Accounts of the Prisoners, and even of Englishmen who escaped from them. The first Party march'd up thro' the Woods to this Town, and was within Sight thereof, when God deliver'd them into the Hands of a few of ours, they fought and were dispersed and fled. . .

“Twenty eight sail attack'd Fort William, in which were only fifty Men, and after three Hours fight went away and left the Province, they having been pursued as far as St. John's; so that by this whole Expedition and great Armament, no more than two of ours were taken and three kill'd. Therefore with Truth we may say, the Lord hath done great Things for us, who hath delivered us out of the Hands of our numerous Enemies, who had already swallowed us up in their Thoughts, and boasted that they would torture and burn us; but the Lord was our Shield, and we of a Truth may say, that it was not our Strength nor Might that deliver'd us, but that it was the Lord; therefore it is meet and fitting that we should return Thanks to GOD, our Deliverer.

“Having taken the Premises into Consideration, I do hereby Order, that Sunday the 25th Instant be observed as a Day of publick Thanksgiving to Almighty GOD, for his great Deliverance in having put an End to the Spanish Invasion, and that all Persons do solemnize the same in a Christian and Religious Manner, and abstain from Drunkenness and any other wicked and dissolute Testimonies of Joy. Given under my Hand and Seal this 24th Day of July, at Frederica, in Georgia, Annoque Domini, 1742. JAMES OGLETHORPE.”