
The Fidanques: Symbols of the Continuity of the Sephardic Tradition in America*

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Loyalty to family, faith in God, and pride in the Jewish community were the values of the family which surrounded me during my childhood. Long before I learned about the Fidancs of Saragossa (ca. 1279) or the Duarte-Rodríguez-Fidanques of Hamburg (ca. 1612),² I had a strong sense of connection with the past and with family history.

The family detective's work depends on identification by name. In truth, we place and understand ourselves best when we know not only the origins of our name but also the symbolism the name carries. The earliest records, dating from the thirteenth century in Saragossa, name us Fedanc. In seventeenth-century Hamburg, we appear as Fidanque, having at some point lost the appellation Duarte-Rodríguez that preceded it. It has not been possible to document the family's journey from Saragossa to Hamburg, nor to discover how the ancient name was transmuted to a new spelling. It is known, however, from testimony taken by the Spanish Inquisition that "they [the Fidanques] are baptized Christians and in said city of Hamburg had themselves circumcised and . . . continued in the synagogues of Hamburg to use the tallit and tefillin and to say the prayers of the *Shema* and *Amidah* and to perform the other ceremonies which the Jews are accustomed to perform."

*This article is dedicated to "Uncle Bill," Elias Alvin Fidanque (b. 1905).¹ For well over fifty years he has searched and researched the history of our family and created our first family tree. His correspondence with scholars all over the world is voluminous, his reading prolific. In fact, his efforts made it possible to write the story that follows.

I accepted the invitation to undertake this assignment with pride, and in the spirit of "successor" to our beloved uncle.

Another interesting fact concerning the family's religion during the years of persecution on the Iberian Peninsula was discovered by Herman P. Solomon in a document from the Lisbon Inquisition. It is the confession of one Gaspar Bocarro, who says that around 1631 he resided in Hamburg and "knew [David] Duarte-Rodríguez-Fidanque, born in this city, merchant, 60 years old, lives in Hamburg as a member of the Protestant congregation, having abandoned the Mosaic denomination which he was previously professing."³ In spite of David's change of heart, the sons and cousins who came after him present a more faithful story.

Through the centuries of forced conversion, expulsion, intermarriage, and even acceptance by the dominant societies in many different cultures, the descendants of our earliest known ancestor, Azmel Fidanque of medieval Aragon, time and again found their way back to the synagogue, tenaciously bound to God and the traditions of Jewish life.

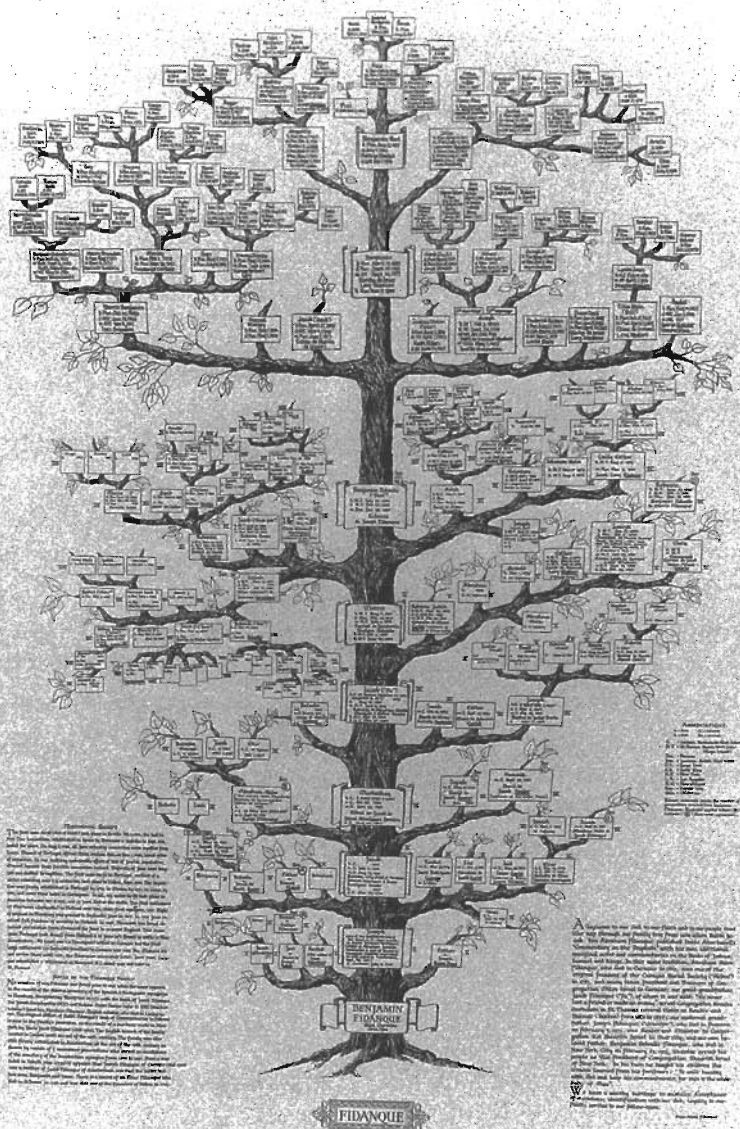
The name Fedanc, or Fedanch, appears to be an old Catalan-Aragonese derivative of the Latin *fidens*, denoting "a man of faith." For over six hundred years, despite numerous changes, the family's name has retained its root meaning. Through the generations, the members of the family have lived up to the spirit the name embodies, apparently sensing its meaning even though they lacked scholarly knowledge of its etymology.

* * *

Our large family circle was headed by my great-grandparents, Emma Fidanque (1850–1935) and Joseph Fidanque (1844–1933), whose memories of their parents took us as far back as the early nineteenth century. The stage was set for us to feel part of history.

As small children we learned about faraway places reached only by ocean voyages as we welcomed cousins of many degrees of kinship arriving from France, Germany, England, Cuba, Colombia, Venezuela, St. Thomas, Curaçao, and Jamaica. It seemed as if everyone in the communities of what Bill Fidanque calls "La Nacion"⁴ was related in some way. Our children's world was enriched and our horizons broadened by the seamless and seemingly endless connections with people all over the world.

The outstanding characteristics of our family have been faith in God, devotion to the synagogue, and a strong sense of duty and per-



sonal integrity. Perhaps these traits were honed from the family's total immersion for many centuries in the stylized worship of the *esnoga* (synagogue),⁵ where habits of decorum, dignity, courtesy, and gracious bearing were taught, practiced, and revered.

A continuous record of the Fidanque family begins in Hamburg. This information came originally from the late David de Sola Poole, rabbi of K.K. Shearith Israel in New York City, who had a close friendship with the local branch of the Fidanque family. As early as 1923, he used his worldwide connections with Sephardic communities to find clues to our history. Our family archives include correspondence with such figures as Alfonso Cassuto (1928), who compiled a list of every Fidanque tomb in the cemetery in Altona, Haham Rabbi Solomon Gaon in London (1953), and Reverend I. Duque (1953) of Bevis Marks Synagogue in London. On a trip to England in 1938 Rabbi Poole wrote home to say, "By the way, I have been hunting for Fidanques, but with little success." In another note on his progress, he was slightly more optimistic: "If I live long enough we shall yet have the family history."

Bill Fidanque continued the search, and finally H. P. Solomon was able to obtain the minutes of the Portuguese Jewish Congregation Beth Israel, of Hamburg. We learn of three generations of Fidanques involved in congregational activities as *parnassim de hebra* (trustees charged with the care of the poor and sick), *gabbay de terra santa* (trustee in charge of Holy Land charities), and *parnas de Talmud Torah* (trustee in charge of education). The entries indicate honors bestowed (*Hatan Torah* and *Hatan Bereshit* on the festival of Simhat Torah) as well as fines levied for unruly behavior and public apologies demanded from the *teba* (the officiant's reading desk). In 1686, Rabbi Jacob de Abraham Fidanque (d. 1702) wrote a supercommentary on Abravanel's *Commentary on the Earlier Prophets*. We cannot claim to be direct descendants of the Rif, Ribi Ya'acob Fidanque, but we are certainly cousins.

In the last decade of the seventeenth century, many well-to-do Jewish merchants left Hamburg because of an economic decline in that city. Among them was Benjamin Fidanque (1635-1704), who emigrated to Amsterdam in 1694 with his three sons. Picking up stakes and establishing oneself elsewhere occurs quite often in our family, and, I

suspect, in many Sephardic families which found it easier to leave and look for opportunities in the general Western European culture rather than wait to be pursued.

In his foreword to *Beth Haim van Ouderkerk van de Amstel* ("Images of a Portuguese Jewish Cemetery in Holland") by the Queen's Commissioner for the Province of North Holland,⁶ Mr. F. J. Kranenburg wrote:

[Here] we see before us the striking encounter between a Holland in the process of liberating itself and striving ahead and the exiled Sephardim; an encounter which led to a unique, mutual, spiritual impregnation of both peoples. The Dutch . . . thirsted for spiritual elevation and culture. The . . . Sephardim . . . brought erudition, artistic sense and skill, and the colorful Mediterranean art of living. . . . In the midst of other Amsterdamers, there grew and flourished in the Portuguese Jewish community a group of merchants certainly, but also theologians, jurists, philosophers, physicians, and printers for whom the ideas of Amsterdam had already been common spiritual property for many generations.

Fidanques lived in Amsterdam and are recorded there until late in the nineteenth century when the male line ended with the death of David of Isaac (1857–1881).⁷ Our own direct forebear, Josseph Fidanque (ca. 1682–1748), left in 1698, bound for a real adventure. He was off to join his cousins who had settled in Curaçao, which had been seized from Spain by the Dutch republic. The island was rich in natural resources and was, of course, an excellent base in the Caribbean. By 1643, when Peter Stuyvesant was governor, the slave trade was flourishing and the Dutch West India Company needed more colonists to stabilize and build up the island. A proclamation was issued inviting groups from Holland to settle. The Amsterdam parnassim, who were loyal Hollanders, encouraged members of the Jewish community to answer the call and even financed their journeys. And so it was that in 1651 the first small group of Jewish settlers arrived in Curaçao under a contract made with Joao de Yllan.

When the Dutch were forced to abandon their attempt to take Brazil from Spain, in 1659, six hundred Jews retreated with them. We quote from Cecil Roth's *History of the Marranos*:

The reconquest of Brazil by the Portuguese and the consequent break-up of the local communities of Marranos returned to Judaism under Dutch protection

was an episode of the highest importance in Jewish history, a majority of the older American communities owing their origins to the minor dispersion that catastrophe brought about.⁸

When the Dutch government offered inducements to attract settlers to Curaçao. Isaac da Costa, one of the first Jewish settlers in Brazil, convinced several Amsterdam Jewish families to emigrate, "More than 70 souls, adults as well as children of our nation."⁹ They took with them a *Sefer Torah* lent by the parnassim of the Portuguese community.

The privileges granted to the da Costa group were far superior to those in earlier contracts. The local government committed itself to support the group's disciplinary measures against its members, granted the Jewish settlers the right to buy slaves directly and to build houses, and, most important, gave specific guarantees of religious freedom. However, the settlers were not granted citizenship.

Although the earlier settlers of 1651 had given their small community the name K(ahal) K(adosh) Mikve Israel ("Hope of Israel"), it is in fact the members of the da Costa group of 1659 who are considered the founders of Curaçao's Jewish community—families such as Cardozo, Aboab, Jesurun, DeLeon, Marchena, and de Castro. They wrote their own *hascamoth* (regulations) based on those of the Amsterdam community. Following are some of the interesting regulations they imposed:

- Arguing or holding forth on the street in the synagogue district is prohibited.

- It is absolutely forbidden to found another synagogue.

- It is forbidden to open another's mail.

- Members having a dispute among themselves shall be obliged to submit to arbitration by the Mahamed.

- Anyone writing verses, sonnets, or satires injurious to another shall pay 24 florins to the community.

And, to remind the congregation of their obligations,

- The *hascamoth* shall be read [in the synagogue] every six months.

They also chose a *haham* (lit. "sage"; title given to the rabbi of a Sephardic congregation). The *hascamoth* embraced almost every phase of behavior and minhag (custom). There had been a house of worship in the walled city of Willemstad since 1671. Now a proper synagogue

was built. A country synagogue was built for the convenience of the plantation owners who lived outside of the city. In addition, the community imported teachers, a cantor, and ritual slaughterers.¹⁰

By the time Josseph Fidanque arrived, the Jewish community was well established. The management of the community was entrusted to the Mahamad, a committee of three elected by the parnassim.

From all accounts Josseph was an aggressive businessman and entrepreneur who made and lost several fortunes. He is listed as a "merchant and licensed broker," a profession that would remain a family mainstay through the generations. Applying a verse in Genesis to Josseph, one of his contemporaries wrote of him, "His hand is on everyone, and the hand of everyone is on him"—similar, perhaps, to having a finger in every pie. He owned the sailing ship *Konigen Esther* and had interests in several others. From an agreement he made with one of his creditors after a substantial loss, we know that he owned slaves. His erratic career never daunted him, and he was proud enough to have ordered a special tombstone from Amsterdam many years before his death. (It can be seen today in the cemetery in Curaçao.) When the day arrived, his affairs were in good order and his widow, Sara Jesurun Henriquez Fidanque (d. 1768), was able to carry out his generous bequest to provide dowries for five orphan girls.¹¹

Josseph was very active in the affairs of the Jewish community. He served as treasurer and as parnas of Talmud Torah. He gave a Torah scroll to the synagogue with the condition that memorial prayers be said for him and his brother Jacob (d. ca. 1739). In an old manuscript found and translated by J. (Jossy) L. Maduro (1891–1964),¹² reference is made to the donation by Jahacob (Jacob Fidanque), a brother of Josseph who resided in Amsterdam, of a Torah scroll to Mikve Israel in Curaçao for two *escavoth* (memorial prayers), one for himself and one for his wife. It is not clear whether these different stories concern the same scroll; what is clear is that the ties between the Amsterdam family and the Curaçao branch were close and remained that way for generations.

Josseph's will indicates that he was survived by eight children, one of whom was Yacob (1717–1791). During Yacob's life, several Jewish communities were established in the American colonies.¹³ When the British took over New Amsterdam in 1664, renaming it New York,

the Jews there, who had arrived from Brazil in 1660 and had been permitted, under Dutch rule, to have their own cemetery but not the right to build a synagogue, were now given permission by the British to do so. In 1730, Shearith Israel ("The Remnant of Israel") built its first synagogue with financial help from the Curaçao community. So it was also in Newport, where the Curaçaoans also responded generously to the request from a settlement of Jewish families who named themselves K.K. Yeshu'ath Israel. In 1740 a third congregation in the colonies with ties to Curaçao was established in Charleston, South Carolina, K.K. Beth Elohim. The families were mainly immigrants from Curaçao and Jamaica. The liturgy they used was in Hebrew, but the selection for synagogue honors was conducted in Spanish.

In 1733(?) forty Jews of Spanish-Portuguese ancestry arrived in Savannah, Georgia. They had fled Portugal by way of London. The Sheftall diaries tell of constant movement between the families of Savannah and Curaçao, Jamaica and St. Croix.¹⁴ The first Jewish congregation founded in Philadelphia appealed in 1782 to their "brethren" in the West Indies for assistance in building a synagogue.

The social and familial records of the colonial congregations and those of the islands reveal many close connections. Sons and daughters were betrothed to cousins, marriages were arranged, and in this manner the purity of the Sephardic families was maintained. Business ties were also strong. Among the first Marranos in Portugal, the phrase *E dos nossos* ("He is one of us") was like a pledge of mutual trust. Centuries later this trust bound together the early Jewish settlers in the New World.

A picture of Jacob Fidanque (1717–1791) emerges from the pages of the appendices compiled by Isaac and Suzanne Emmanuel in volume 2 of their monumental *History of the Jews of the Netherlands Antilles*. Jacob was a licensed broker in Curaçao, as was his father.

During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Sephardic Jewish brokers (called "Portuguese"), with their worldwide family connections, were in a most favorable position to advise their clients on the best investments in goods or money or on the risks involved. They had the reputation of having a fine sense of business, diplomacy, and experience in international trade. In many cases a foreign government was the client. The broker was also a merchant's agent, a judge

of merchandise, an appraiser of ships, a real-estate agent, and, always, a financial adviser. In Curaçao at that time, Jewish brokers outnumbered others by four or five to one. Although Yacob's son was the last Fidanque broker in Curaçao, his descendants through the years remained interested in international trade, representing businesses on many continents.

Yacob's name also appears on the list of slaveowners drawn up by the Emmanuels for the year 1764. Slaves were not permitted to work on the Sabbath or the holy days. Yacob's wife, Bathsheba Jesurun Henriquez (1727–1772), inherited a large estate from her parents. Yacob's financial standing declined after her death, and he was no longer able to maintain his son-in-law and daughter, Sara, as he had agreed to, and as was the custom in those days. Yacob served as *parnas* and as treasurer of the congregation. He signed the *hascamoth* of 1671 after a bitter conflict within the congregation. Yacob and Bathsheba were evidently pillars of the congregation; her tombstone, with a Portuguese inscription, praises her for "heroic deeds and virtuous works. . . . I hope she will rejoice in life eternal, reserved by God for those who fear Him."¹⁵ We know of four children who survived: Sara, Hannah, Abraham Haim, and Mordechay, the fourth generation in this line of Fidanques.

Mordechay Fidanque (1760–1826) lived during the years of revolution in the New World and in France. This upheaval did not bypass the small and hospitable island the Fidanques called home. In fact, the Jews of Curaçao were very much involved—sometimes by choice and at other times by the force of events. When French revolutionary forces conquered Holland in 1795, the French government sent an agent to govern Curaçao. The islanders resented this interference, however, and resisted the French takeover attempt. In 1796 they formed a National Guard for defense, and the merchants, who were mostly Jews, were taxed repeatedly for local government loans. The local forces successfully repulsed the first French naval attack, and during the second attack, one month later, English ships appeared to help turn back the French. The English then seized the island for themselves. After an occupation of some two years, it was returned to the Dutch by the Treaty of Amiens (1802), only to be attacked again by the English. The National Guard bravely defended their territory

but could not repel a second surprise attack in 1807. The second English occupation lasted nine years and ended only through local government action. Since the Jews were the most successful merchants, they not only made the largest contributions but also suffered the largest losses from the interruption of trade.

During the American Revolution, Curaçao and St. Eustatius, also under Dutch control, were centers for the shipment of arms and provisions to the revolutionaries. Many Jewish Curaçaoan shipowners participated in this potentially very profitable enterprise. However, the risk was quite great, for ship and cargo could be lost if intercepted by English warships, and life as well, since the owners often accompanied their cargoes. Trade of this type came to an end with the English seizure of St. Eustatius in 1780.

During these years, the conflict among nations was echoed by ever-present conflicts between families in the synagogue, new regulations adopted by the *parnassim*, and constant appeals to the Amsterdam *parnassim* for rulings.¹⁶

The conflicts, for the most part, revolved around the question of the power of the local *parnassim* and their interpretation of the *hascamoth*. For example: Could a young couple who had premarital relations be refused a proper marriage ceremony? Could the *parnassim* banish or excommunicate a member of the community (or refuse him synagogue honors or a Jewish burial) for so-called unruly behavior or disturbing the peace? On one hand the governor, who represented the Dutch West India Company, could be asked to settle the dispute; or the *parnassim* of Amsterdam, which represented a higher religious authority, could hear the appeal. In some cases, the disputes reached the court of the States General of Holland. By 1783, the orders and decisions of the *parnassim* were so continually challenged that qualified men did not want to be elected to these positions. Because of this problem, the *hascamoth* were amended to allow for the fining of anyone who refused to serve, defied the *parnassim*, did not attend the general meeting, or was insubordinate in any way. Very strong measures taken in an age of revolution!

At first glance it may seem strange that Mordechay's name appears only in the marriage records of Mikve Israel. The answer might be that Abraham Haim was the *bekhor*, the firstborn son, who,

in the Jewish tradition, often received special privileges. However, in this case he earned his privileged position as well. Abraham Haim was the last Fidanque to be listed as a broker in Curaçao. In addition, he was president of the congregation, a cantor, and a teacher—all told, a most important and accomplished person in the community.

Our Mordechay married Rebecca Henriquez Fereyra (ca. 1777–1845). They had two daughters and two sons. The eldest son was Jacob, born in 1801 in Curaçao (d. 1885). He is the subject of our next portrait.

Jacob emigrated to St. Thomas as a young man. His motives for leaving Curaçao, the island that had been home to four generations of Fidanques, were, we assume, due to two very different causes—economics and uncomfortable Jewish communal conflicts. In the early years of the nineteenth century Curaçao suffered consecutive disasters: a devastating drought, a severe hurricane, three yellow fever epidemics, and a smallpox epidemic. Though certainly secondary to the human suffering caused by these events, their confluence had a devastating effect on the island's economy.

Between 1807 and 1816, controlled at the time by the English, Curaçao's port was completely paralyzed. When war broke out in 1812, it fell victim to the conflict between America and England and was bypassed by shippers in favor of St. Thomas, a free and open port. The Sephardic Jews of the United States also suffered from the war because of the loss of the reciprocal overseas market in the Caribbean.

Moreover, the Curaçao Jewish community was divided by a conflict surrounding Hazzan Joshua Piza (1772–1850), who had been sent from Amsterdam, with recommendations from the Dutch parnassim, to serve Mikve Israel. The trouble started when Piza was reprimanded for disobeying the regulations. The Amsterdam parnassim wrote to him warning that he was not to make innovations when reading the Torah. The next complaint was that he mispronounced the word *hagufefen* when blessing the wine. He said *hagafen*, as was the custom in Amsterdam. It appears that the parnassim resented his "independence," which, according to family lore, was really stubbornness.

There is no doubt that Piza was another victim of the authoritarianism of the parnassim. The conflict pitted the parnassim against the "separatists" for six long years. Many families were divided by quar-

rels between supporters of the two sides. We know that there were Fidanques in both camps. As for Joshua Piza, who had been accused of being "hoarse, deaf and unpleasant," the community asked the government to mediate. Prevailed upon to resign, he received a monetary settlement and left to become hazzan in St. Thomas.¹⁷ (There is an interesting aside to this story which shows how events shape local idioms. In Papiamentu, the Creole dialect of Curaçao, the phrase *Bo ta parnas* [lit. "you are like a parnas"] came to mean, "you are stubborn and unbending.")¹⁸

After these events many Jewish families decided to leave Curaçao for other areas of the Caribbean where they had connections. Some went to Jamaica, Cartagena, Caracas, or Santo Domingo. Like many others, however, Jacob Fidanque headed for St. Thomas.

Founded in 1665 as a Danish Lutheran colony, St. Thomas became a free port in 1764. The first settlers included immigrants from many nations and a large number of slaves. In time the Danish language gave way to Dutch, Negro Dutch Creole, and, after the second English invasion, English became the language of trade. In the first half of the nineteenth century, "the golden age of the Danish islands, St. Thomas became the commercial emporium of the Antilles and one of the great ports of the world."¹⁹

Denmark proclaimed religious tolerance for Jews and Catholics as early as 1685. The first Jewish birth recorded was in 1794. At that time many Jews had fled to St. Thomas from St. Eustatius after it was sacked by the British. Congregation B'racha v' Shalom, which still exists today, was formed in 1796.

Jacob moved to the bustling town of Charlotte Amalie in 1825. By that time the Jewish population of St. Thomas was made up largely of Curaçaoans. He established his own business, selling "dry-goods and earthenware," and in 1830 married Rebecca Mendes-Monsanto (1810–1863), whose parents had lived in Curaçao for generations. Jacob and Rebecca, who was fifteen years his junior, had eight children; only four survived.

St. Thomas records show that the largest number of births to Jewish parents occurred in 1831, the year of Morris's birth (d. 1915). (Two of the sons of Jacob and Rebecca, Morris, the eldest, and Joseph, were great-grandfathers of mine.) In that year the congregation's third

wooden synagogue was burned to the ground in a devastating fire. Two years later, a beautiful new sanctuary built of stone and brick was dedicated and consecrated with appropriate ceremony. This lovely building, designed by a French architect, with mahogany benches, lamps with Baccarat crystal hurricane shades, ancient scrolls, and original furniture, was restored by the congregation in 1973.²⁰

In 1851 the congregation had grown to number almost four hundred. Ten years before, an anonymous English author wrote the following about the Jews of St. Thomas: "The flock of Israel's fold is thick and fares well at this place."²¹ The Danish government proclaimed emancipation for all "Colored" in 1848 and free compulsory education for every child. This was twenty years before President Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation. While the Danish government issued liberal decrees and Jewish communities in the United States were beginning to free themselves from what Max I. Dimont describes as "blind observances of ceremonial law,"²² the Jews of St. Thomas prospered and multiplied and continued to observe the Sephardic rituals of their ancestors. They did so without the controlling and all-encompassing rules of the Curaçao *parnassim*, which remained the root of the constant quarrels at Mikve Israel.

Jacob Fidanque became one of the leading merchants in Charlotte Amalie. He served as honorary reader of the congregation for ten years. His son Joseph wrote of him, "It can be said that he never lost a friend or made an enemy."²³ He and Rebecca, his accomplished and beautiful wife, owned a home on Crystal Gade, known even today as Synagogue Hill. There, at the top of the hill, where legend has it that the most important people lived, they raised their family in a community admired and respected by its Christian neighbors. On Jacob's seventieth anniversary he received a testimonial scroll from the congregation. The scroll states in part: "The number of signatures attached will evince in some measure, the estimation in which you are held by us."

Our family's oldest mementos are the portraits of Jacob and Rebecca that hang in the home of Vito (Vivian Joshua) Fidanque (b. 1896) of New York City, who also is the custodian of four *Parassah* volumes (books containing the weekly Torah readings) and a Rosh Hashanah prayerbook published in 1770. The books are inscribed with the name

J. Monsanto, which was used by Jacob. The prayerbook includes a prayer in Portuguese for "the State of Holland and West Vrieland . . .

St. Thomas, 1st January 1835.

M

Dear Sir,

*I beg to inform you that I have this day established a Commercial House in the city of Panama, Vb. P. C., and admitted my sons **J. M.** and **B. D. Fidanque** as partners thereof, under the style of*

M. Fidanque & Sons.

Soliciting for the new firm a continuance of the confidence which my establishment in this Island has enjoyed for the past twenty-nine years, and requesting your attention to the respective signatures at foot,

I remain,

Dear Sir,

Your Obedt. Servt.,

M. Fidanque.

M. Fidanque will sign *M. Fidanque & Sons*

J. M. Fidanque

B. D. Fidanque

A letter informing the recipient of the establishment of a Fidanque business presence in Panama. (Courtesy of Emma Fidanque Levy)

and high and serene Prince William, Prince of Orange and Nassau . . . and the venerable Burgomeisters and Magistrates of the city of Amsterdam."

In 1856 Morris, then twenty-five years old, established the second Fidanque firm in St. Thomas, the first being that of his father, Jacob, which still flourished at the time, importing "dry-goods and earthenware." Morris called his firm M. Fidanque and Brothers, importers and exporters. That same year he married Rachel Delvalle (1837-1882), the daughter of Benjamin Shalom Delvalle (1811-1896), who had served as hazzan and parnas in the Curaçao congregation. He too emigrated to St. Thomas to avoid the constant communal quarrels.

Benjamin Shalom served as honorary hazzan in St. Thomas for several years. Family legend has it that he died on Yom Kippur at the very hour of the *Minha* service at which he had always officiated. Morris and Rachel had ten children, eight of whom survived.

In 1867 a devastating hurricane and earthquake struck St. Thomas. In the years that followed, as steam replaced sail, other islands became the main service ports for ships plying the Caribbean, and the economy of St. Thomas declined rapidly. By 1884 Morris decided to send his two eldest sons to establish a branch of his business in Panama. This coincided with the plans of French financiers who, having gained a concession from Colombia, were attempting to build a canal across the isthmus.

Several Sephardic Jewish families from St. Thomas, and some others from Jamaica and Curaçao, had already settled in Panama. Evidence shows that a burial society (Kol Shearith Israel) had been formed and a Jewish cemetery consecrated.²⁴ Joseph, the seventh child of Jacob and Rebecca Fidanque, married Emma Levy Maduro in 1867. Emma's father, Samuel Levy Maduro (1780-1867), another hazzan who was dismissed from his position in Curaçao, had taken the position in St. Thomas.

When Jacob retired, Joseph took over the business, naming it J. Fidanque & Co. It was not long before he too decided that future success depended on a move to Panama. And so we find, in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, Joseph and his two nephews in separate firms in Colón, the Atlantic port of the isthmus of Panama. And in 1887, Rebecca (1868-1947), the only child of Joseph and Emma

Fidanque, married her cousin Benjamin Delvalle (1863–1937), son of Morris and Rachel.

Panama has always held a unique position in world commerce. A narrow neck of land situated between the two great American continents, it serves as the shortest land distance between the Caribbean and the Pacific Ocean. In the fifteenth century, when Columbus was searching for a route to India, he explored the Caribbean coast of Panama to find a way across. In the days of the Conquistadors, as treasure from Peru, Chile, and Mexico was transported to ships bound for Spain, the cities on both coasts of Panama prospered. "Gold and silver bars were piled up like firewood in the Royal Treasury Building."²⁵

When the nationalist-revolutionary movement started in South America, Panama was part of Spanish Nueva Granada, which included present-day Colombia, Venezuela, and Ecuador. In 1821 Panama declared its independence from Spain and became part of La Gran Colombia. During the next eighty-two years, colorful and sometimes fanciful schemes and plans for routes across the isthmus figured importantly as it became the transshipment point for gold and for people. In 1885 the Panama Railroad, built by the United States, was opened—a somewhat more secure and efficient way to cross the isthmus.

Then followed the failed attempts by the French to build a canal across the neck. The United States government stepped in to negotiate a treaty with Colombia which would have permitted the conclusion of the project. By 1903 it was apparent that no treaty would be negotiated, propelling Panama to declare her independence from Colombia and sign the Hay–Bunau–Varilla Treaty, which gave the United States the right to construct a canal. My grandfather Benjamin Delvalle Fidanque (1863–1937) at that time represented Belgium as consul. Belgium was one of the first countries to recognize Panama as an independent nation. The next ten years of canal construction brought great advantages to the country and in particular to the port cities, as sewers were built, streets paved, and yellow fever eradicated. The canal was opened in 1913.

As the country prospered, so did the Jewish community. The story of Congregation Kol Shearith Israel is the story of the families who have nurtured it for the last 114 years. The Fidanques, Maduros, Car-

dozes, de Castros, and many others who left St. Thomas to settle in Panama were looking for a better life in a new homeland—similar to their ancestors who had left the Iberian Peninsula, then western Europe, for the Caribbean. In St. Thomas they had practiced their Judaism in an atmosphere of openness and confidence, no longer dependent on the *hascamoth* of Curaçao, no longer under the dominion of the *parnassim* of Amsterdam. The winds of change and of self-determination were in the air.

Among the emigrants were readers and elders of the St. Thomas congregation and offspring of the Curaçao *hazzanim*. Bill Fidanque posits the theory that the majority of the members of Kol Shearith Israel in 1976 were descendants of the four Curaçao–St. Thomas *hazzanim*: Joshua Piza, Samuel Levy Maduro, Benjamin Shalom Delvalle, and David Cardoze, Jr. (1824–1914).

In every generation Fidanque men and women have been among the most eminent and supportive members of the congregation, not only with their financial resources but, more important, through their leadership. The commemoration of one hundred years of Jewish life in Panama held in 1976 testifies to the devotion of this small and loyal offshoot of the people Israel. They had moved from one country to another, indeed, crossing the ocean between continents, for over four hundred years, yet they always found the voice (or way) “to sing Adonai’s song in a strange land.”

During its first fifty years, the original Kol Shearith Israel Benevolent and Burial Society became an organized religious community with “a clearly defined congregational dignity, pride and self-reliance that are its distinguishing characteristics.”²⁶ Functioning without the formal structure of the Curaçaoan model, the members held and conducted worship services, performed life-cycle events, assisted members in need, contributed to appeals from the larger community, helped travelers, answered appeals from Palestine for support of Jewish institutions, and also prepared their sons to become Bar Mitzvah. Readers will recall that the tradition of help for Israel goes back to Hamburg in the seventeenth century where a *gabbay de terra santa* was in charge of “Holy Land charities.”

In 1918 the congregation rented a large second-story hall in a building in downtown Panama City. The expense was shared by the

YMHA, which had set up a Panama branch to serve Jewish military personnel stationed in the Canal Zone.

Soon thereafter a special meeting was called to consider changing the Sephardi traditional rite to a more modern form of worship. The proponents of change stated that since most of the members did not understand Hebrew, sections of the service should be conducted in English. The decision was made to retain the Hebrew reading of the Torah and the traditional Curaçaoan chants and hymns, but that as much as possible should be read from the Reform *Union Prayer Book*.

Before the time when mixed seating was approved in the 1930s, I remember as a small child sitting with my father in the men's section looking across the aisle to my mother as she sang in the separate women's choir.

During the second fifty years our first rabbi, ordained by the Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, arrived to serve the congregation.²⁷ In the fall of 1932, Bill Fidanque, president of the congregation, had proposed that Rabbi Norman Feldheym (1906–1985) be invited to serve for a three-month trial period. Happily for the group, Norman Feldheym accepted the modest offer of \$350 plus his steamship fare! In a letter setting forth the terms, Bill Fidanque wrote,

... we use the Union Prayer Book exclusively except for *Yom Kippur* when we also read from the Orthodox ritual and we like our minister to wear a cap and gown and to call up certain members to the Law each Saturday. Also there are a few other picturesque Spanish and Portuguese forms and chants we still adhere to.

Norman Feldheym more than lived up to his recommendation by the president of the Hebrew Union College as "a wonderful human being." He was a man of great abilities, unusually resourceful, sincere, a sound thinker, and a fine preacher. He remained in Panama for five years.

During that time, a sanctuary and community hall was built and dedicated. The formation of a sisterhood followed, an important step which allowed the women of the congregation to participate more fully in every phase of congregational life. Because of the persistence of the first president of sisterhood, women of the congregation gained the right to vote on congregational matters.

It was also during these years that the Kol Shearith Benevolent and Burial Society officially took its name as Congregation Kol Shearith Israel. Jewish community organizations were formed, and two more groups established synagogues.²⁸ The Albert Einstein Hebrew Day School was started as a joint venture.

Today the fourth generation of Fidanques and related families continue to enjoy the esteemed respect of the dominant Catholic community in Panama, a framework beautifully built and nurtured by their great-grandparents in the early days before and since the republic was formed.

Our grandparents, Benjamin Delvalle and Rebecca, were the proud parents of nine sons and one daughter, all of them born in Panama, with the exception of their second son, Joseph (1890–1970), who was born in St. Thomas during a visit there by his parents. One son, Stanley, died at the age of thirteen. The Fidanque firm in 1906 included Morris, Joseph (who had joined his agencies to those of his brother), and Morris's two sons, Benjamin Delvalle and Jacob. They represented several European shipping companies. They also imported needed goods and exported timber, tortoise shell, and fruit.

As the country enjoyed economic and cultural progress, the firm prospered. Family letters indicate that the older generation did quite a bit of traveling—Paris and Hamburg and “watering spas” in Europe seemed to be favorite destinations. However, skepticism about the effectiveness of the “cures” was expressed, as in the following letter:

I have often thought of Ben Delv's anticipated trip to Europe to reduce flesh and this is a mistaken idea as it is not sustained after return inasmuch as the old habit of indulgence will be continued and no privations of any sort be maintained after those heavy sacrifices of money.²⁹

Jacob (1858–1942) moved to New York City with his wife and opened a new branch of the business. He acted as the purchasing and forwarding agent for the Panama office. As the eldest son, Jacob was given advantages that his brothers and sisters never enjoyed. At the age of sixteen, he was sent from St. Thomas to attend school in Brussels and later at Dr. Kayserling's Academy in Hanover. From correspondence we learn that he and Rufus Daniel Isaacs were “good

friends & pals" at Dr. Kayserling's. (Rufus Daniel Isaacs was later to be a prominent British politician, viceroy of India, and first marquess of Reading.)

"Uncle," as we called him, was considered the arbiter of good taste in the family. He wrote rather florid poetry for special family occasions and loved opera. He took upon himself the position of patriarch of the family, trying, with success at times, to control the personal relations and business activities of Delvalle's large family. He and his wife, Rebecca Sasso (ca. 1865–1919), had no children of their own, but they acted as surrogate parents to Delvalle's older sons as each was sent to New York to complete his education. It was to him also that his father opened his heart in old age. We quote from a poignant letter written by Morris a few years before his death:

I cannot grow satisfied to live and end my days in this hot country [Panama] and its strange surroundings. . . . solely my religious belief & trust in All Merciful Heavenly Father supports me. . . . If only I would have my former affiliates for more companionship & enjoy the devotion of my heart in God's Temple!

We believe he meant Mikve Israel in Curaçao, where he had lived for some years before moving to Panama.

In 1913 Benjamin Delvalle and Rebecca moved to New York with their three younger children. In New York, the Fidanques joined K.K. Shearith Israel and were warmly welcomed. Although they were not related to the early New York families, there were enough strong Sephardic ties to make them completely acceptable. My grandmother, Rebecca, also joined Congregation Shaaray Tefila, a Reform congregation, where she preferred to pray.

Within seven years Delvalle was elected a trustee of Shearith Israel. He served as *segen* (vice-president) for twelve years and as president for a few months of that time. We quote here a part of the resolution adopted by the trustees at his death:

Resolved that the Board of Trustees expresses & records the profound grief at the demise of Benjamin Fidanque. . . . Esteemed and respected . . . he was the exemplar of the finest type of American Hebrew. A faithful son of Israel passionately loyal to the religious traditions of this ancient synagogue, he stood unmoved amid the swirling passion for change, defending the ideals of his Faith and culture of his generations. Resolved: that the name of our late Vice-Presi-

dent be entered upon the Roll of *Perpetual Hashcaboith* [memorial prayers], that the Banca [seat of honor] which he occupied in the Synagogue be turned to the wall and draped in Mourning for a period of thirty days according to custom.³⁰

In the community building of Shearith Israel there is a Benjamin D. Fidanque social room. The room was dedicated in his memory by my grandmother.

Before attempting to write about their sons (my father and my uncles) and their families, it seems appropriate to copy some lines of a printed letter written by Uncle (Jacob Fidanque) to his nephews, whom he addresses as "My Beloved Sons."

The closing hours of nineteen-hundred-and-twenty-three recall the epochal year of eighteen-hundred-and-eighty-three, forty years ago: When jointly with your devoted father we laid the cornerstone of a co-partnership. . . . *Undaunted and unassisted we persevered—never ceasing to maintain in its integrity the name we inherited from our Sires, which was magical wherever and whenever we had to invoke it for assistance in our perilous climb* [emphasis added]. . . . I ask you to pledge yourselves to maintain the house we have reared—by clinging together at any cost: and sacrifice and disregard differences which may and will arise at times. I ask you to pledge yourselves again, to pass on the blazing torch one to the other of solidarity, unification and responsibility.

Uncle's romantic exhortation had the desired effect for many years, but in time it proved to be unrealistic. Eight different temperaments would never fit into one mold. In actual fact, their different personalities were an asset in making it possible for each brother to find a place in the business.

As eldest brother, Morris (1888–1966) was expected to be a model. It was a role which he took very seriously and one at which he excelled. He married Inez Brandon (b. 1892) in 1911. Inez's father, David Henry Brandon (1855–1903), an American by birth, was, in fact, descended from one of the Sephardic groups from Jamaica. He and his brother were in business in Panama with their uncle. Inez's mother, Judith Maduro (1862–1940), was a granddaughter of two of our hazzanim from St. Thomas.

David Brandon is a hero to the people of Panama. He was an educated man of action who lived by the highest Jewish moral values. During the years he lived in Panama, his impact on the city was quite strong. He was a successful businessman and a great humanitarian,

respected and loved by everyone who knew him. After a terrible fire almost destroyed the city, he accepted the challenge to modernize the fire department and, in effect, created a new corps of firefighters. He was named its commander-in-chief and, sadly, died within the year while supervising the work of providing catchment basins for proper waterpower. It is said that the church bells tolled the day he died. His obituary stated: "... from the day he first arrived on these shores he served its people . . . he practiced goodness with the sincerity of a Rabbi."³¹ The Republic of Panama issued a stamp with his portrait in 1937. His memory is honored as well by a bronze plaque in the central fire station, Plaza de los Bomberos, in Panama City.

Inez recalls her childhood in Panama during those days, the death of her father, and her mother's return to New York with twelve children. Returning to Panama as the nineteen-year-old bride of Morris, Inez found a city with streets still unpaved and very few of the modern conveniences of New York in 1911.

Morris enjoyed a superior and unblemished reputation among his business associates. He was offered a position in a company which the firm represented, but rejected it without hesitation because he had never contemplated working in anything other than the family business. He served the congregation as reader, as treasurer for many years, and as president. In suburban New York after his retirement, he became a trustee of the Central Synagogue in Nassau County. Assigned to write to members with problems or in need on behalf of the trustees, his notes became such an integral part of the synagogue's communication that they were called "Fidanques." Today, some twenty-five years later, the congregants still use the term "Fidanque" to describe a message of concern.

Inez inherited from her father a love of culture and natural leadership traits. Appalled by the lack of reading material and music in Panama, she managed to have books sent to her and to have a piano placed in her home. She went beyond the confines of the Jewish community, participating in cultural activities with American women in the Canal Zone. She was the founder of the sisterhood, serving as its president for ten years. Through her efforts other women in the congregation were trained to assume leadership positions.

The Anniversary Volume contains an article which Inez wrote entitled, "I Remember Panama." The article closes with the following paragraph:

When I remember Panama, I recall with gratification the part that Morris played in the building of the Synagogue and in the development of a strong and significant Jewish community. We lived in Panama for thirty-eight years in many sections of the city, but no matter where our home was situated, we were always part of one community, that of *Kol Shearith Israel*.

Morris made one of her fondest dreams come true when they moved to the United States, first to suburban New York and then to New York City, where she now lives—on the very same street where she was born ninety-eight years ago! Morris and Inez had five children: Benjamin Delvalle (b. 1912), also known as Val, Henry Brandon (b. 1914), Stanley (b. 1918) Emma (Emita), (b. 1920), and Ines (1923–1941), who died at eighteen.

When Delvalle and Rebecca moved to New York, the firm was left in the capable hands of Morris, Joe (Joseph), and Ben (Benjamin), (1893–1981). Joe had begun to work at age sixteen. His forte was salesmanship. In the firm, he managed the fire-insurance business and the steamship lines. Two years after Morris's marriage he married Sybil Maduro (1883–197?), a first cousin of Inez. The contrast between these two brothers was enormous, yet they worked together for thirty-eight years. Joe and Sybil had two sons, Jack (b. 1914) and Nelson (1917–1977). Joe remarried in 1937 to Lucille Wallenstein (b. ca. 1915) and had another son, Joe Jr. (b. 1940).

Ben joined the Panama firm at eighteen, having spent a year in Europe and another year in the New York office. In an interview recorded by his daughter Zelia (b. 1921) in 1974, he recalled working in the office at age ten, counting Colombian money into \$1,000 bags. He also recalled the primitive facilities in his home when he was a child, as well as the cobblestone streets and the difficult time his parents had supporting such a large family. Ben's talent was in the accounting field. In 1917 he married Bertha Toledano (b. 1899), whose grandparents were also St. Thomas people. Ben and Bertha were "pillars of the congregation," a status she still holds. Ben served as congregational president three different times.

Bertha served the sisterhood in many different positions. Devoted as they were to the Jewish people and to humanitarian work, their special cause was the Albert Einstein Institute, the Jewish day school established under the aegis of the three congregations. Unlike Morris and Joe, when Ben retired he remained in Panama, using his desk in the office for his variety of interests. Ben and Bertha had three children, Benjamin Earle (b. 1918), Zelia, and Jacqueline (b. 1928).

These three brothers, their ten children, and their grandparents, Emma and Joseph, were a strong, close family unit. The family also included Cecil (1898–1985) and his wife, Gladys Toledano (1901–1973), who was Bertha's sister, and Bill and his wife, Elaine Maduro (1909–1987).

This history would not be complete without some words about Emma and Joseph, an extraordinary couple. In 1932 they celebrated their sixty-fifth wedding anniversary. The celebration was a Thanksgiving service. Rabbi Norman Feldheim addressed them as follows:

The art of this blessed couple has been living, and the medium of expression has been life. . . . we are here to pay homage to your art woven out of the spirit, out of life. That art we find unparalleled, more, even unexcelled.

"Uncle Joe" and "Aunt Emma," as they were called by everyone, became the core, perhaps the heart, of the congregation and of their family. His optimistic view of life is demonstrated in this quotation from an autobiography he was asked to write: "On October 10, 1917, I consecrated the concrete Bungalow in Bella Vista as a home which I erected and presented to my wife on our Golden Wedding."

Cecil, the fourth partner in the Panama office, was not a leader, yet he added another dimension to the group. He did his work in a quiet way. He and Gladys had no children but lavished their affection on their nieces and nephews. His devotion to Judaism was characterized by his mitzvot.

Although Bill (Elias Alvin) spent most of his life in New York, he chose Panama when it came time for him to join the firm. Despite the fact that the differences between him and his older bothers were not perceived by them as assets, he successfully introduced innovative ideas and enlarged the scope of the partnership.

Bill was president of the congregation when the synagogue was built, and he was for many years the "search committee" charged with finding a rabbi. Even during the years he spent away, he maintained contact and remained very much at the center of Jewish activity in Panama. Today he has replaced his grandfather Joe as the person at the core of the congregation. Bill and his wife, Elaine, were so close in age to their nieces and nephews that they seemed more like a brother and sister to us. Their daughter, Lynda (b. 1936), is of course considered one of the *younger* cousins.

In New York, son Jack (Jacob) (1891–1948) succeeded his father and uncle as senior partner. His driving ambition was not in the tradition of most of his brothers. Perhaps he was more like our first Josseph rather than other family members who believed that hard work and a good name alone would inevitably lead to success. Jack was the treasurer of Shearith Israel in New York for twenty years. In addition he served as chair of many committees, as his interests included many Jewish causes other than the synagogue. He and his wife, Celina de Castro (1888–1984), had no children.



Six of the eight Fidanque brothers. Left to Right: Joe, Ben, Cecil, Morris, Jack, and Alvin. (1929). (Courtesy of Emma Fidanque Levy)

Fred (Frederick Reuben) (1901–1985) and Vito (Joshua Vivian) were the younger partners in New York. Vito, who succeeded Jack as treasurer of Shearith Israel, was the last family member who worked in the firm's New York office—an obligation he fulfilled for many years. He and his wife, Ruth Allen (1916–1964) had no children.

It seems impossible, but it is true that Rae (Rachel) (1907–1946), the last child and only daughter, was able to break the tradition of this conservative household by choosing as her husband George Himmelblau (1900–1976), an Ashkenazi Jew from an Eastern European background.

The years between World War I and World War II were very productive for the Fidanque brothers, joined in the last years by some of their sons. It was a time when the family was at the peak of its performance. It moved along with the times imaginatively, diversified its interests, and in spite of the depression of the 1930s was able to pass on a goodly heritage to the next generation (and, I can hear it being said, "With God's help!").

The years that followed brought additional changes. Some sons joined the firm, some chose different careers, some moved away, and the "seniors" began to retire. One hundred years after Morris Fidanque established his business in Panama, our cousin Joe Fidanque, Jr., now sole owner of the firm, celebrated the continuity.³²

* * *

It remains for a family historian of another time to write with perspective about my generation. I know something about our achievements and our failures, of our love of Judaism—and our leaving it—of our loyalty to one another and our concern about the distances that divide us.

Our generation, once dispersed, chose their mates from a variety of backgrounds and cultures. Three of eleven cousins have married into Panama-related families. Four married Ashkenazi Jews, one married an Eastern Sephardic Jew, and three have intermarried. In spite of the fact that some family members have distanced themselves from the Jewish community, there is a core of commitment to Jewish life. Fidanques, their spouses, and their children continue to make an impact in the Jewish community and in the larger community where we have chosen to live.

As active participants in the Reform movement, we have been supporters of Reform synagogues from Panama to San Francisco to New York; from the suburbs of Pittsburgh to suburban New York. We can say with pride that we continue to be faithful to the synagogue in the tradition of our mothers and fathers.

In the process of writing this story, I discovered that certain family characteristics are repeated to this day. There have been leaders and followers, rebels and peacemakers, conservatives and liberals. My narrative has followed the paternal lineage of our particular branch of the Fidanque family tree.³³

The Fidanques were a pure Sephardic family for six generations after our first Josseph left the European continent to come to the Western Hemisphere. At the present time, however, the three generations born in this century cannot be considered Sephardic. I believe that outcome was inevitable, indeed it was fostered by our parents. Jews cannot afford to be divided by place of origin any longer. Today, we and our children are scattered throughout the world; we are part of *K'lal Israel*, and we delight in melding our unique traditions with those of all other cultures found in the Diaspora and in Israel.

If the stories of our past generations have added richness to Jewish life, then our exploration goes beyond family pride and is a celebration. For the Fidanques, a Jewish family in the Western Hemisphere, I believe that the legacy of the past will continue to influence further generations. To paraphrase Leo Baeck, Jewish life is largely centered in the subconscious, in the memories and clues of past generations which are carefully handed down to each new generation, as land and more tangible reminders are among other ethnic groups. We are, after all, the people of the Book, and the stories of our forebears are our most precious legacy. The reminders of this legacy are contained in our family archives.

Notes

1. Bill is the youngest of the nine sons of Rebecca and Benjamin Delvalle Fidanque, and a direct descendant of Josseph Fidanque, who emigrated from Amsterdam to Curaçao in 1698.

2. H. P. Salomon, "The Fidanques: Hídalgos of Faith," *American Sephardi* 4, nos. 1-2 (Autumn 1970): 15-29. This article is the source for information on the Fidanque family in Spain, Hamburg, and Amsterdam.

3. I am grateful to Herman Salomon for this additional information.
4. Bill uses this appellation for the Caribbean Portuguese groups. In official Dutch documents they were always referred to as the "Portuguese Nation."
5. For this and other terms, see H. P. Salomon, "Sephardi Terminology," *American Sephardi* 3, nos. 1-2 (September 1969): 88, 103-105.
6. L. Alvares Vega, *Beth Haim van Ouderkerk* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1979).
7. David of Isaac Fidanque served as administrator of the cemetery from 1857 to 1881. During that time he worked with David Henriquez de Castro on the restoration of the cemetery, which was established in 1614. Gravestones which had sunk under the ground were raised. Today many of these beautiful monuments can be seen in the meticulously cared for cemetery. A foundation jointly funded by the Portuguese Jewish community (Amsterdam), the state (Holland), the province, and the municipality (Ouder-Amstel) is in charge of this work.
8. Cecil Roth, *A History of the Marranos*, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1941), pp. 288-289.
9. Isaac S. Emmanuel and Suzanne A. Emmanuel, *History of the Jews of the Netherlands Antilles*, vol. 1 (Cincinnati: American Jewish Archives, 1970), p. 46.
10. *Ibid.*, pp. 48-50.
11. Isaac S. Emmanuel, *Precious Stones of the Jews of Curaçao: Curaçaoan Jewry, 1656-1957* (New York: Bloch, 1957), biography 91, pp. 288-291.
12. Jossy M. L. Maduro (1891-1964) was a philanthropist, historian, and genealogist of the Jews of Curaçao.
13. E. Alvin Fidanque, "Early Sephardic Jewish Settlers in North America and the Caribbean," *Journal of Reform Judaism*, Fall 1978, pp. 77-82.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 78; Sheftall Diaries, *Publication of the American Jewish Historical Society*, March 1965.
15. Emmanuel, *Precious Stones*, biography 127, p. 363. The monument reads: "Da Yncortada Honesta / Virtuosa aritativa / Matrona Dona Batseba / Hana Mulher de Yacob / Fidanque que de 45 Annos / Transportou Para Milhor / Vida Em 18 De Adar Seni / AO 5532 Que Comresponde / Em 23 De Marco A O 1772 Que / Por Suas Accoems Eroicas / Y, Obras Virtuosas Espero / QueEstara Viva Gozando / No Lugar Tem D S / Reservado Para/Seus Tementes."
16. Emmanuel and Emmanuel, *History of the Jews of the Netherlands Antilles*, 1:283-303.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 306.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 482. "The dominant element [of the Papiamento dialect] is Portuguese due to the influence of the Portuguese Jews who spoke, preached, and wrote their epitaphs in that tongue . . . it has in it also, Spanish, Dutch, French English, African and a little Hebrew. Thus: BO (corruption of Portuguese VOS) = YOU / TA (African) = ARE / UN (Spanish) = A / PARNAS (Hebrew) = PARNAS."
19. Jens Larsen, *Virgin Island Story* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press), p. 144.
20. Stanley T. Relkin, ed., *Short History of the Hebrew Congregation of St. Thomas*, 1983.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 27.
22. Max I. Dimont. *The Jews in America* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1978), p. 96.
23. This and other quotations from members of the Fidanque family are taken from the collection of family documents of E. A. Fidanque which he has shared with me.
24. E. Alvin (Bill) Fidanque, Ralph De Lima Valencia, Eugene Sasso Maduro, Eleanor D. L. Perkins, and Joseph Melamed, *Kol Shearith Israel: A Hundred Years of Jewish Life in Panama, 1876-1976* (Panama City, 1987), p. 73. We recommend this book, written in Spanish and English, for a complete account of this relatively small but important Jewish community. It was dedicated to

the memory of my father, Morris B. Fidanque, and was published during the presidency of my brother, Stanley Fidanque, B.

25. *Panama Canal Review* (Balboa Heights, C.Z.), November 1965, p. 59.

26. Fidanque et al., *Kol Shearith Israel*, historical material by E. A. Fidanque.

27. Rabbi Norman Feldheym, a graduate of the Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, arrived in Panama in 1932. He was the first Reform rabbi to serve Congregation Kol Shearith Israel.

28. Congregation Shevet Ahim is an Orthodox Sephardic congregation founded by families from the Middle East after World War I. Congregation Beth El is a Conservative congregation founded by families from Western Europe after World War II.

29. See note 23 above.

30. Victor Tarry, retired executive secretary of Congregation Shearith Israel, made this information available to me.

31. *Kol Shearith Israel*.

32. Nadjji Arjona. *La Familia Fidanque: Cien Anos en Panama, 1885-1985* (Panama City: Impresora Panama, 1986).

33. For full details, see *The Fidanque Family Tree*, collated by E. A. Fidanque and J. M. L. Maduro, art work by Enid Eder Perkins (New York, 1951). A copy of the family tree is on display in the Beth Hatefusoith in Tel Aviv.