Haym Salomon (1740–1785) was born to a Jewish family in Poland. His work on behalf of Poland’s struggle for freedom put the young man in danger in his native country. As a result, Salomon fled to America in 1772. The American colonies were on the brink of their own war for independence from England. They would soon benefit from Salomon’s love of liberty.

Salomon came to America as a poor immigrant. But he had two great talents. In addition to Polish, Salomon could also speak German, French, Russian, and Italian. He also had extraordinary business skills. In New York, where he found work as a merchant, Salomon quickly mastered English.

Sent to Prison As soon as he learned English, the freedom-loving Salomon joined an underground revolutionary group called the Sons of Liberty. The group used petitions, meetings, and broadsides to gain support for the revolutionary cause. Eventually, Salomon’s association with the group got him a prison sentence for working against the king.

The Provost Jail in New York, where Salomon was sent, was the worst of Britain’s colonial prisons. The cold, filthy room where Salomon stayed was jammed so full that its prisoners had to sleep packed together from wall to wall. When one man turned over, all the others had to turn over, too.

Luckily for Salomon, the British quickly discovered his talent for languages. They released Salomon to help them communicate with the German troops they had hired. However, instead of giving the British officers’ messages to the Germans, Salomon delivered messages of his own. He told them that George Washington had promised a hundred acres of good land to every German soldier who would join the American side.

A Lucky Escape It was not long before the British officers noticed that German soldiers were deserting in large numbers whenever Salomon talked to them. They may also have discovered that he was giving money to American and French prisoners to help them escape. The British were about to arrest Salomon again in 1778, but he managed to escape.

Overcoming his fear of being captured, he carefully made his way through the British lines. Eventually, he reached an American camp. Salomon stayed at the camp for a while in order to lose the cough he had caught in prison. While there, he observed the ragged American army and was struck by the poverty he saw. He realized that without money, the revolutionary cause was doomed.

Financing the Revolution After the British had taken New York, America’s capital was moved to Philadelphia. When Salomon finally left the American camp, he spent two weeks walking to the new capital. Along the way, Salomon thought about how he could help supply the money needed for the revolutionary cause.

Though he arrived in Philadelphia without a cent, Salomon quickly established himself as a successful business broker. He bought and sold bills of exchange. These were like checks. They allowed people with money in other cities to spend money locally. Salomon advertised in Philadelphia newspapers that he specialized in foreign bills of exchange. Soon he was selling bills for the French and Spanish.

By 1781, Salomon had rebuilt his fortune. But he had not lost sight of the revolutionary cause. Realizing that the French-American alliance was important for the success of the Revolution,
Salomon sold bills of exchange to the French armed forces. This gave much-needed funds to the French soldiers fighting for the Americans. Salomon’s work for the French attracted the attention of Robert Morris, whom the Continental Congress had put in charge of finance.

Robert Morris selected Salomon from more than 20 other brokers in Philadelphia to market the bills issued by the Continental Congress. Salomon excelled at this important job. He sold the continental government’s bills at a profit. These profits helped the Polish-born patriot raise the large amounts of money the Continental Army needed to win the Revolutionary War.

In addition to his important financial work on behalf of the government, Salomon made private loans to many members of Congress. Among them were three future presidents: Thomas Jefferson, James Monroe, and James Madison. James Madison described how Salomon generously refused interest on his loans.

**A VOICE FROM THE PAST**
The kindness of our little friend in Front Street near the coffee house, is a fund that will prevent me from extremities, but I never resort to it without great mortification [shame], as he obstinately rejects all recompense [interest]. The price of money is so serious that he thinks it ought to be extracted from none but those that aim at profitable speculation. To a necessitous [needy] delegate he gratuitously spares a supply out of his private stock.

JAMES MADISON, quoted in *The Story of the George Washington, Robert Morris, Haym Salomon Monument*

**A Generous Spirit** Haym Salomon shared his wealth with private charities, too. He helped found Mikvah Israel, Philadelphia’s first synagogue. He also acted as treasurer for the Travelers Aid Society, the first Jewish charity in the United States. When the Revolution ended, Salomon resumed his financial support of relatives he had left behind in Poland.

Salomon’s generous spirit was recalled by many after his death in 1785. In January 1785, a Pennsylvania newspaper remembered him as “an eminent broker . . . remarkable for his skill and integrity in his profession, and for his generous and humane deportment [behavior].”

**Review Questions**

1. What drove Haym Salomon to emigrate to America?

2. How did Salomon’s economic skills benefit the Revolution?

3. What private activities showed Salomon’s generosity?

**Critical Thinking**

4. **Making Inferences** How did the British finally realize that Salomon was not passing along their messages to the German troops?

5. **Summarizing** Rephrase James Madison’s quote about Salomon in your own words.

6. **Forming Opinions** What epitaph would you write for Haym Salomon?