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Samuel and Saul Isaac: International Jewish Arms Dealers, Blockade Runners, and Civil War Profiteers

by

Adam Mendelsohn*

In the crisp dawn of Friday, May 10, 1861, sailing ships and steamers from across the world waited to dock in Liverpool harbor. The bustling English port had once been a center of the slave trade, its merchants made rich by dispatching their vessels to rendezvous with slave traders at forts that dotted the West African coastline. Now it prospered by importing cotton picked by slaves on plantations in the American South that was transformed into cloth in the factories of Lancashire. Weeks after the bombardment of Fort Sumter in Charleston harbor signaled the beginning of the Civil War, many in Liverpool expected soon to be doing business with the Confederate States of America. If they had known who was aboard one of the ships that arrived that day, the stevedores in this port city where pro-southern sentiment ran high may have given this inconspicuous passenger a hero's welcome. After disembarking, Caleb Huse was in no mood to tarry. His circuitous voyage had taken three weeks. The thirty-year-old West Point graduate, freshly commissioned a captain in the newly established Confederate army, had been dispatched on a clandestine mission. He was on his way to London, carrying on his young shoulders the knowledge that the task that awaited him might determine the fate of the Confederacy.

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The exultant glow that radiated through the South following the surrender of Fort Sumter could not long hide the stark realities that faced the hastily convened Confederate government. In its precipitate rush to war, the Confederacy had little time to create the stockpiles and systems needed to sustain armies in the field. Once it began to muster enthusiastic men into regiments—the Confederate congress authorized an army of one hundred thousand volunteers in March 1861—it quickly found itself at a massive disadvantage. On the eve of the war only a fraction of the nation's factories were based in the South. In the 1850s the South imported two-thirds of its clothing. It could barely shoe its soldiers: the North produced more than 90 percent of the nation's boots.¹ Each regiment was initially tasked with supplying its own uniforms. This policy was quickly reversed when it became clear that the flood of volunteers was unable or unwilling to supply outfits that approximated the cadet gray standard. Unlike northern states that scrambled to clothe the volunteer regiments, most southern states were unable to step into the breach. Instead the herculean task of outfitting the Confederate military fell to the Quartermaster Department hurriedly cobbled together under the command of Abraham C. Myers. By June 1861 Myers was placing orders for fifteen hundred sets of uniforms a week with manufacturers in New Orleans, a quantity that soon proved insufficient to satisfy demand. But for the decision of Alfred Mordecai, a senior officer in the Ordnance Department of the United States Army, to reject overtures from Jefferson Davis in March 1861, two of the most senior supply offices of the Confederacy would have been filled by Jews. Faced with conflicting loyalties to North and South, Mordecai turned down Davis's offer to head the Confederacy's Ordnance Department, instead resigning his commission and sitting out the war. The position went by default to the able Josiah Gorgas, one of the lesser-known heroes of the Confederate war effort. Abraham C. Myers, the grandson of Charleston's first rabbi, had fewer qualms in accepting Davis's offer.² As if a paucity of manufacturing capacity and an inefficient distribution system were not burden enough, Myers and Gorgas discovered that several other hurdles complicated their task. Union Commanding

General Winfield Scott's Anaconda Plan aimed to throttle the South by blockading its ports, keeping profitable cotton moldering in warehouses and imported supplies at bay. Several southern states, having newly asserted their sovereignty by seceding, chafed at Confederate efforts to centrally coordinate provisioning and preferred to channel hoarded supplies to their own troops. Some wily businessmen, reluctant to see their stocks requisitioned, proved even more recalcitrant. The Confederate military and congress carped at the quality and quantity of goods supplied.³

Scott's Anaconda Plan.
Cartoon map of General Winfield Scott's
plan to crush the Confederacy economically.
(Courtesy of the Library of Congress/American Memory.)

Barring divine deliverance, Gorgas quickly and Myers more slowly realized that the South would need to rely on imported materiel to stand any hope of victory. Plans may have been in place even before Gorgas assumed his role because in mid-April 1861 Caleb Huse was dispatched to London to begin purchasing the vast quantities of military supplies needed to surmount the Confederacy's shortfall. Huse arrived without detailed instructions and with considerable discretionary power to buy and ship goods to southern ports. Finding stiff competition for rifles and other equipment from representatives of the Union, vendors who demanded exorbitant cash payments and balked at supplying the Confederacy at a time when its longevity and credit were uncertain, and overwhelming demands on his time as a one-man supply bureau, Huse turned to two firms experienced in filling military contracts. So began a fateful partnership that paired Huse with S. Isaac, Campbell & Co., a British firm that had made its name in the boot making business, but now devoted its attention to serving the Confederacy. Working without support staff and under considerable pressure to forward supplies as quickly as possible, Huse came to rely on the firm and its three clerks to satisfy the new nation's gluttonous appetite for war materiel. Not only was the firm willing to extend large amounts of credit at critical moments, but it also offered expertise in navigating the landscape of the British arms industry, negotiating contracts with potential suppliers, inspecting purchased articles against defects, and organizing shipping to bypass the northern blockade. Given Huse's increasing dependence on the firm, it was probably no accident that he rented accommodation doors away from its offices in Jermyn Street in St. James. Letters to Huse were sometimes sent care of S. Isaac, Campbell & Co.⁴

As cargo and cotton crossed the Atlantic despite the best efforts of the Union naval blockade, Britain became the largest European supplier to the Confederacy—an arsenal for the slavocracy—with Caleb Huse by far its most important purchasing agent, and Samuel and Saul Isaac, the owners of the firm, his preferred partners. Aside from their extraordinary role as crutch to the Confederacy, the experience of the Isaac siblings is intriguing

for a variety of reasons. For one, it reveals the role of Jews as military contractors in Britain and America during the Civil War, a subject little known to specialists in American and Anglo Jewish history. The wartime activities of S. Isaac, Campbell & Co. have been described in brief by historians of Confederate diplomacy, supply, and blockade running. By contrast the pre- and post-war careers of the Isaac brothers remained largely obscure until recently.⁵ None of these studies, however, fully placed the brothers and their business in the context of modern Jewish history.

Samuel Isaac.

(Courtesy of Bastien Gomperts, London.)

This article does so in a variety of ways. Firstly, it proposes that the Isaac brothers were representatives of a new kind of Jewish military contractor that appeared in the modern period. Although a small cadre of court Jews served as prominent provision agents and financiers of armies in central Europe in the early modern period, and several Jews became military suppliers in America during the colonial period, the heirs of this tradition have escaped proper attention. Unlike their forebears who leveraged their access to trading and banking networks to enter the field, Samuel and Saul Isaac were men of humbler origin whose familiarity with manufacturing and wholesaling enabled them to compete for contracts to supply modern armies swollen by *levée en masse*.⁶ Secondly, it complicates our picture of antisemitism in the South during the Civil War, a subject of some debate.⁷ Despite the prominent role played by the firm during the conflict, there is no evidence that it was the victim of overt public prejudice on this side of the Atlantic. This was at least partly a consequence of the firm's distance from American shores, but nonetheless offers a sharp contrast with the experience of Jewish contractors in the Union.⁸ Thirdly, it raises uncomfortable questions about the wartime business behavior of Samuel and Saul Isaac. Given the sensitivity of the subject of financial fraud and profiteering by Jews—antisemites have long accused Jews as a group of possessing unethical mercantile mores—few historians of modern Jewry have explored examples of such misbehavior. Although it would be foolhardy to draw any wider conclusions from this case study, the example of the wartime misadventures of the Isaac brothers adds to the small but growing literature on Jewish criminality.⁹ Fourthly, this article presents further evidence of why scholars of Jews and the Civil War need to look beyond the battlefield to appreciate the legacy of the war for Jews. Arguably the most significant impact of Jews on the war and the war on Jews came not on the battlefield, but in their role as suppliers of the rival armies.¹⁰ Finally, the close study of Saul and Samuel Isaac and their business reinforces the benefits of embracing a transnational approach to the writing of American and southern Jewish history. As a field largely focused on the major subjects of social history—migration,

diaspora, ethnicity, gender, religion and race—American Jewish history is ideally positioned to answer the call made by Thomas Bender and others to produce scholarship that frames these themes in ways that look beyond the boundaries of the nation-state.¹¹ Several historians, including some who focus on southern Jews, have begun to embrace this approach. Study of the Civil War lends itself to a global perspective. A recent surge of books, articles, and conferences, many commemorating the 150th anniversary of the conflict, has plumbed the international dimensions of the conflict.¹² Although Jews played only a minor role in the Civil War as soldiers, the war had global repercussions for Jews. A handful of historians has begun to explore this impact.¹³ Some of the effects were limited and are not widely known. In India, for example, David Sassoon and his sons profited by supplying cotton to the mills of Lancashire. When the blockade of southern ports and the Confederacy's King Cotton diplomacy interrupted the supply of the commodity to Britain, the Sassoons and other exporters rushed lower quality Indian cotton to satisfy the demand.¹⁴ On a more significant scale, the war not only temporarily slowed the flow of Jewish immigrants to America's shores, but irrevocably changed the nation that awaited those who crossed the Atlantic after Appomattox. And as the story of Samuel and Saul Isaac reveals, Jews far from the frontlines were drawn into this epochal American conflict.

"Mud, Jews, and Sailors"

The rise of Saul and Samuel Isaac was rooted in the long association of Jews with military supply in Britain. From the mid-eighteenth century, small but significant numbers of Jewish traders clustered in naval towns, providing the fleet and its sailors with a variety of services. The novelist Charles Dickens remarked snidely that the Portsmouth of his youth was "principally remarkable for mud, Jews and sailors."¹⁵ These services included basic banking—cashing paychecks, distributing money from prizes, and supplying goods on credit to the sailors and their wives—as well as stitching and selling slops, the rough uniforms worn by seamen.¹⁶ This latter role was important enough for the Jews to enter

naval slang. “Jewing” became the naval nickname for tailoring; a “Jewing firm” was a sailor on board ship who stitched for others in his spare time; and a “Jewing bundle” was the bag in which a sailor kept his sewing kit.¹⁷ Naval towns struggled after the Napoleonic Wars as the fleet was returned to a peacetime footing. Several Jewish slop sellers—those who made and sold the rough and inexpensive outfits favored by sailors—and navy agents left high and dry took their trade to London. The London *Post Office Directory* of 1800 recorded no Jewish names among the thirty-five slop sellers listed. By 1823 *Pigot’s Directory* listed seventeen, almost all near the dockside.¹⁸ In 1839, the *London Saturday Journal* decried the Jewish traders who rowed out to warships anchored in the Thames, eager to sell to sailors who had been paid advance wages. Those who managed to climb aboard quickly transformed the spaces between the guns on the main-deck into a “fair, or bazaar, where all sorts of articles, such as wearing apparel, gown pieces for the ladies, watches, and trinkets that attract the seamen’s attention” were ostentatiously exhibited.¹⁹ The familiarity acquired with slop work in port towns stood Jews in good stead to compete for ripe government contracts. Slop sellers sold both to sailors and to the Navy Slop Office that coordinated the supply of uniforms to Royal Navy vessels.²⁰ With the growth of bureaucracies and the formalization of state functions, ever more individuals required standardized outfits. By the end of the 1820s, the navy regularly advertised large tenders for slop clothing in the London press and purchased thousands of jackets, trousers, and shirts.²¹ Numerous additional institutions ordered great numbers of garments to outfit soldiers, policemen, post office workers, civil servants, and convicts aboard hulks anchored in the Thames.²² Hard wearing and inexpensive slop clothing remained in demand in colonial markets and among plantation owners seeking to cheaply outfit their slaves. Government supply was a profitable niche. Others prospered as suppliers and outfitters to the colonial civil service filling contracts—in Burma, for example, E. Solomon and Sons supplied water to the British navy, as well as ice to cool the drinks of wilting Englishmen—or selling fine goods to colonials pining for home.²³

*Saul Isaac depicted in a cartoon.
Saul Isaac sought public office in the 1870s.
(Courtesy of Bastien Gomperts, London.)*

London's East End housed a cluster of military and marine stores, as well as wholesalers who competed for contracts.²⁴ The suppliers were conveniently close not only to the dockside, but also to the "great military clothing depot" located in the Tower of London. Not only manufacturers profited from their proximity to the Tower; the depot also sustained a second ecosystem comprised of dealers and traders who bought and sold surplus uniforms. Surplus and secondhand uniforms were in considerable

demand whether sold in bulk or discarded by retiring (or absconding) soldiers.²⁵ Jews were particularly active in buying from this secondary military market. Their prominence roused concern during the Crimean War, a conflict that starkly highlighted the inadequacies of the provision of the British Army and spurred military reform in the middle of the 1850s.²⁶ Eerily foreshadowing events in America, a hastily mustered volunteer army went to war underprepared and ill-equipped. Confident of a quick victory, the troops were sent outfitted in parade uniforms that were hopelessly inadequate when the war dragged on through winter. Much of the replacement clothing sent to the shivering troops proved deficient. Suspicions abounded of contracts won fraudulently and of contractors increasing their margins by using shoddy (recycled wool usually used only to line jackets) to manufacture uniforms.²⁷ A major change to the supply system—the centralization of control of contracts at military depots—heightened concerns about corruption. Some Jewish dealers in military surplus were suspected of purchasing large quantities of obsolete and substandard boots and uniforms at the auctions held at the Tower, only to later fraudulently sell these back to the quartermaster as new. Those in port towns were accused of buying and removing the distinctive markings from the uniforms of deserting sailors.²⁸

One of those caught in the furor over Crimean War contracting was Samuel Isaac. Born in 1812 in Chatham, a town with a strategic naval dockyard and army barracks, Isaac's vaulting career exemplifies the broadening prospects opening to Jews in the clothing trade. Samuel's father was a furniture broker who almost certainly rented housewares to the transient population of military officers who came and went with the tides, and two of his uncles worked as slop sellers in a town where this was a common occupation for Jews.²⁹ Samuel and two siblings followed their family into this line of work.³⁰ By 1838 Samuel had established himself as a clothier selling outfits to soldiers and sailors, soon opening a grand store in the center of Chatham "the front of which had been made in London, and was to eclipse every other" in the neighboring towns.³¹ This was not the only sign of his business acumen and gathering prosperity. He soon employed two

servants to tend his three-person household.³² Within a decade he owned property in London and moved to the metropolis in the early 1850s. His younger brother Saul, a decade his junior, temporarily remained in Chatham, most likely tending his brother's thriving business.

By 1852 Samuel Isaac had established S. Isaac, Campbell & Co., a decision that reflected his broadened ambitions. No longer would Samuel focus on supplying the persnickety whims of single soldiers and sailors. Henceforth he sought to outfit entire armies. Although Samuel's name shared space on the marquee with Campbell, there was no question as to who was the firm's guiding force. There is little evidence that Campbell (most likely Dugald Forbes Campbell, an occasional attorney to the firm, and perhaps an early investor) played any role in running the company.³³ Samuel was soon joined by his brother Saul, establishing a formidable partnership. As in many matters relating to business, Samuel's timing was propitious. The size and needs of the British military were expanding as its tentacular reach circled the globe. In 1856 the *Jewish Chronicle* crowed that the firm had won the entire contract to outfit the British army in the East. In reality this was less impressive than it sounded since until 1858 Britain projected much of its power in Asia through the East India Company. The Indian mutiny and Second Opium War in China forced Whitehall to rapidly deploy more troops to the region. These soldiers were presumably clad in light cotton uniforms suitable for the tropical climate that were supplied by S. Isaac, Campbell & Co. Closer to home, the firm also won large contracts to supply boots to the new army depot at Weedon, a venture that persuaded Samuel to purchase a factory in Northampton, the town that supplied Britain with much of its cheap footwear. There Samuel innovated by introducing a mechanized factory system for producing shoes and boots, a method at odds with the tradition of outsourcing orders to workers who would sew by hand at home. In this he acted in the forefront of the industrial revolution.³⁴

Although S. Isaac, Campbell & Co. appears to have entered the boot business too late to have its footwear dispatched to British soldiers campaigning in the Crimean peninsula and played

*The Northampton Shoemaker, c. 1866.
(Courtesy of Northampton Museums and Art Gallery,
Northampton Borough Council, UK.)*

only a relatively small role as a supplier during the conflict, it became entangled in the reformist zeal galvanized by the Crimean War. The firm certainly benefited from the modernization and professionalization of the army's system of procurement in 1855. Previously individual regiments were supplied by Army Houses that enjoyed a monopoly position; now competitive bids were dispatched to the War Office for assessment.³⁵ As a conspicuous beneficiary of this new centralized system, S. Isaac, Campbell & Co. quickly attracted unwanted attention. An inquiry into army contracts in 1858 found evidence that the firm—the “largest army contractors contracted to supply soldiers’ kits”—had provided articles of an “inferior description, and not worth the sum paid for them by the government.” Compounding this charge, the firm was discovered to have sold items rejected by the inspector at Weedon to the depot at Chatham at a premium.³⁶ Even more damningly, the commission aired accusations of corruption. Samuel Isaac admitted to giving five hundred pounds to the principal military storekeeper at Weedon shortly before the latter absconded to America with his mistress. Despite vigorous protestations of his innocence—Isaac stated that the sum was a short-term loan, a claim that the commission endorsed—the firm was struck off the list of contractors permitted to compete for military orders from the War Department. Anguished by the loss of future contracts and fearing for the fulfilled orders as yet unpaid by the government, Isaac pleaded plaintively with the committee chairman that this unsubstantiated charge was ruinous. He protested that “to a mercantile man, character and position were great things.”³⁷ Samuel Isaac was right to worry about the stain left on his reputation. In future years, foes of S. Isaac, Campbell & Co. would return to this episode, extracting a dark seam of innuendo and calumny that helped to undermine the firm at what seemed to be its finest hour.

For the moment, fate continued to favor the firm. Even as its contracts with the War Department withered, a new source of demand emerged. Political turbulence on the continent and fears that Britain was left vulnerable by an overstretched army garrisoned across the empire persuaded the government to sanction the creation of volunteer corps beginning in May 1859. A rush of

civic leaders and businessmen including Samuel Isaac rallied friends and workers into volunteer units. Each corps was responsible for supplying its enlistees with arms and equipment and was free to design its own uniform. Since supply was outside the authority of the War Department and officers were granted considerable autonomy, S. Isaac, Campbell & Co. was able to solicit orders to outfit these part-time soldiers. By 1862, this force grew to over 160,000. If demand for uniforms to outfit these volunteer citizen soldiers provided a drip feed of military business that sustained the company at a moment of crisis, political ructions across the Atlantic served to resurrect their fortunes.

*Northamptonshire Volunteer Officers at Althorp, Northamptonshire.
Samuel Isaac standing, seventh from left, bearded and hat in hand, 1864.
The Northamptonshire Independent, October 9, 1915, November 6, 1915.
(Courtesy of the Northampton Chronicle & Echo, Northampton, UK.)*

Suppliers to the Confederacy

Soon after establishing himself in London, Caleb Huse quickly turned to Samuel and Saul Isaac for assistance in sourcing supplies for the Confederacy. The siblings worked hard to cement this relationship. Along with a variety of formal services—providing entrée to military manufactories and depots, procuring travel documents, warning about surveillance by Union

The Fifth Northampton Rifle Volunteers, 1868.

Major Samuel Isaac is seated, center, with elbow on the table.

The Northampton Independent October 12, 1922, October 21, 1922.

(Courtesy of the Northampton Chronicle & Echo, Northampton, UK.)

agents, and displaying considerable initiative in sourcing supplies—the Isaac brothers were careful to cultivate personal relationships with Huse and the other purchasing agents who joined him in London.³⁸ The firm supplied tickets to the theater and other London attractions, company on excursions, and expensive meals. Samuel Isaac entertained lavishly at his home. After one such evening spent with several guests, purchasing agent Edward Anderson recounted in his diary having enjoyed “a magnificent repast, everything being in the finest style, and in superabundance.”³⁹ On a previous occasion he had enjoyed the exclusive attention of his host: “He drove me out to his residence in a cab and gave me a capital meal with a profusion of costly fruit as a dessert. His wife and son were the only persons present

except myself. After dinner we adjourned to his sanctum & smoked cigars until near midnight."⁴⁰ Anderson rightly recognized that this largesse was not unconditional.⁴¹ Stroking the egos of Anderson and his associates was a demanding job. Anderson proved a fickle friend, easily piqued when Samuel Isaac was inattentive. For example, Isaac mollified Anderson after missing a meeting by arriving at his rented rooms "bringing with him as a peace offering a beautiful railway leopard skin."⁴² Samuel Isaac was not alone in identifying the Confederate purchasing agents as golden geese who should be carefully cosseted. His chief rival competed for their favor, offering invitations to his country house, serving a "sumptuous dinner" with the "costliest wines" and "princely" hospitality.⁴³

*Caleb Huse, Confederate major and arms purchaser,
in later life, c. 1904.
(Photo source: Wikipedia.org.)*

Even as Huse came to depend on S. Isaac, Campbell & Co., so too did Samuel Isaac stake the future of his firm on the Confederacy. Operating as commission merchants—connecting Huse with suppliers, arranging financing, and extracting a commission fee from both parties—S. Isaac, Campbell & Co. quickly became the conduit for vast quantities of munitions and ordnance, as well as cloth, leather, and uniforms.⁴⁴ The company ordered at least some of these articles from Jewish firms in London. It should be unsurprising that Samuel Isaac placed substantial orders with his co-ethnics, given the prominence of Jews among clothing wholesalers and their familiarity with producing low-cost garments in bulk for export. He supplied boots from his factory and other manufacturers in Northampton. In 1862, for example, a local newspaper reported that the town was enjoying “a great amount of prosperity as there was a very large demand for shoes for both armies.” The Confederacy imported one million pairs of shoes over the course of the war.⁴⁵ By the end of 1861 British exports to the Confederacy surpassed £240,000, the vast majority purchased by Huse.⁴⁶

Huse’s partnership with the Isaac firm grew stronger in 1862. The Confederate purchasing operation was hamstrung by tenuous finances making it ever more dependent on those willing to assume the risk of doing business with the secessionist states. While others often demurred, S. Isaac, Campbell & Co. continued to extend credit even as the credit-worthiness of the Confederacy fluctuated wildly with the ebb and flow of its fortunes on the battlefield. The Confederacy was slow to pay its bills, requiring Samuel Isaac to dispatch several letters begging Richmond to pay. In response to one such plea, Judah P. Benjamin, then Confederate secretary of war, wrote in March 1862,

[to] express to you the deep sense of obligation felt by this Government for the kind and generous confidence which you have exhibited toward us at a moment when all others in foreign countries seem to be doubtful, timorous, and wavering. You will find, however, that your confidence was not misplaced, and that we have not failed (as far as we could find means) to make remittances to Captain Huse, although not as rapidly as we desired; but our difficulties have been great in procuring secure

remittances. Enough, however, has been done, we trust, to relieve you from embarrassment or apprehensions. . . . Our demands for supplies from England will continue quite large, and we trust you may find your connection with our young Government equally profitable and agreeable.⁴⁷

Again in January 1863 the firm wrote to Benjamin imploring prompt payment of £120,000 — only part of the Confederacy's arrears — wailing at the "extreme urgencies of our house for money and the critical condition in which we are placed from the absence of remittances." Failure to pay, they warned, would "exercise a most pernicious and withering influence on the credit of the Confederate Government in foreign countries."⁴⁸ They reminded the Confederate secretary of state that "in the infancy of the war, when our resources in money and credit were placed without limit at its disposal and probably contributed in some degree to the success of its armies in the field."⁴⁹

The chronic cash shortage did not weaken the firm's embrace of the Confederacy. If anything, Samuel Isaac sought a closer bond with the southern states. In the middle of 1862 he instructed his twenty-six-year-old son to travel to Richmond with a formal proposal that S. Isaac, Campbell & Co. be granted the sole responsibility of furnishing clothing and equipment for 100,000 soldiers. Samuel Edward Henry Isaac, then stationed in Nassau in the Bahamas to superintend the firm's blockade-running operations, was struck down by yellow fever before he could deliver the message. Soon after its delayed delivery, this overture was rejected by Quartermaster General Myers.⁵⁰ Huse continued to place vast orders with S. Isaac, Campbell & Co. into the middle months of 1863. By June of that year the Confederacy owed the firm the astronomical sum of £515,000.⁵¹ Despite the scale of the orders — millions of yards of fabric, hundreds of thousands of boots and blankets — the Confederate purchasing agents could not come close to slaking the charnel appetite for materiel.⁵²

Default by its largest debtor was only one of the risks that S. Isaac, Campbell & Co. confronted. The firm also took a leading role in shipping goods through the tightening noose of the Union blockade. In the first year of war, the Confederacy agreed

*U.S. Army Colonel Abraham Charles Myers, c. 1850.
(Courtesy of the Collections of the Jewish Museum of Florida,
originated by Marcia Jo Zerivitz, Founding Executive Director.
Image Copyright © Fort Myers Historical Museum.)*

to purchase military cargoes carried by private blockade runners at a substantial guaranteed profit. Non-military articles could be sold at a hefty premium to a public grappling with wartime shortages. Once they had delivered their cargoes, blockade runners could return laden with cotton that was sold at great profit.⁵³ This arrangement offered juicy margins for firms with a stomach for risk. Over the course of the war slightly fewer than three hundred steamers tested the blockade, successfully breaching the cordon roughly one thousand times out of about thirteen hundred attempts.⁵⁴ Most used the Caribbean port of Nassau protected by the British guns of Fort Charlotte as an embarkation point. Nassau became a wartime boomtown: “rowdy, violent, bawdy, awash with wealth and greed.”⁵⁵ Along with his son, Samuel Isaac was represented on the island by his brother-in-law Benjamin Woolley Hart. They supervised the operation of several blockade runners. The *Stephen Hart* was named in honor of Samuel Isaac’s father-in-law, the *Harriet Pinckney* for Caleb Huse’s wife.⁵⁶ S. Isaac, Campbell & Co. also entered into a partnership with a man named Moses (likely Henry Moses), described as a “merchant of high position in Leadenhall-street” in London, to ship goods on the firm’s blockade runners.⁵⁷

The first private blockade runner, an iron hulled steamer, entered the Savannah River in September 1861 with its hold crammed with munitions and consumer goods for sale at public auction. The Quartermaster Department bought most of the shoes and cloth on board, but complained that it did so at inflated southern prices rather than those offered in London.⁵⁸ This price differential persuaded scores of investors to dabble in the business of blockade running. Clothing was much in demand. Its importation was a high priority for the Confederacy, designated as second only to arms and ammunition as cargo on blockade runners.⁵⁹ Although most uniforms were manufactured within the South, many were produced using imported woolen cloth that was sent to shops set up by the Confederate government to sew uniforms, employing soldiers’ wives and other women as seamstresses.⁶⁰ These were supplemented by greatcoats, socks, trousers, shirts, blankets, and boots, unloaded from blockade runners in Charles-

ton and Wilmington, North Carolina. The ships also carried garments and fabric for sale to those who could afford them. As the war progressed, southerners clamored for clothing to replace their tattered and frayed finery. Cloth and clothing was in such demand that it held special value when bartered. John de Bree, the head of the Confederate Navy's Office of Provision and Clothing, explained that in the countryside, where "the people have a little more provisions than they absolutely need, but are short of tea, coffee, sugar, molasses, and especially of osnaburgs, yarns, and shirtings. . . . [N]ot a pound of bacon or wheat can be bought at any price, for money [but] the sight of a pound of yarn, or a yard of cloth will produce an effect almost magical."⁶¹ In Richmond, diarist John Beauchamp Jones lamented in November 1863 that his family's clothing was "as shabby as Italian lazzaronis—with no prospect whatever of replenished wardrobes."⁶² Southern Jewish storekeepers and merchants were accused of hoarding supplies to raise prices and conspiring to buy up the cargoes of ships running the blockade. One bigoted British merchant who visited Charleston during the war complained that the city's auction houses were "crammed with my Hebrew friends." He remarked at his astonishment at the

number of Jewish-looking faces which I had met on the stairs, in the halls and parlours of the hotel, and at breakfast. Fully one-half of the large number of guests of the house seemed as if they had just stepped out of Houndsditch, and reminded me what a friend in Mobile said, that, 'I should meet more Jews in Charleston than I could see in Jerusalem.' They also seemed absorbed in the study of the auctioneers' pamphlets, and the long advertisements of sales which half filled the papers.⁶³

The Union government eagerly sought to staunch the flow of ordnance and equipment across the Atlantic. From the middle of 1861 until the beginning of 1862 Confederate purchasing agents were trailed by Ignatius Paul Pollaky, a Pressburg-born Jew who was one of the first of a new breed of private detectives selling their services in London. (He was immortalized in verse two decades later by Gilbert and Sullivan for "The keen penetration of Paddington Pollaky.")⁶⁴ The detective was hired on behalf of the

United States government to keep Huse under surveillance. He supplied a daily bulletin on the doings of the Confederates and their contractors. Pollaky acquired firsthand information about Huse's dealings with the Isaac brothers by bribing a clerk in their office to supply details of contracts.⁶⁵ In spite of these efforts, the flow of arms and equipment secured by S. Isaac, Campbell & Co. barely slowed. Instead Huse and his peers proved much more potent adversaries than Pollaky.

The Fall of S. Isaac, Campbell and Co.

The first of a squadron of Confederate purchasing agents who decamped to London, Huse was quickly joined by several others representing a variety of military bureaucracies, state governments, and private interests. In contrast, Myers only slowly followed Gorgas's example. In December 1862 he dispatched James B. Ferguson, Jr., a former dry goods import merchant, as the first dedicated foreign agent for the Quartermaster Bureau.⁶⁶ These often competing agents exposed the frailty of the Confederate purchasing system. The Confederacy's efforts were poorly coordinated and relied on oft-delayed and sometimes contradictory instructions carried through the Union blockade. Thus Huse and his associates worked at cross-purposes on several occasions.⁶⁷ All were under enormous pressure to purchase and ship supplies as quickly and cheaply as possible. Chronic financial strictures created considerable tension. Holding some control over the purse strings, Huse was usually at the center of sniping over funding. Several of his fellow purchasing agents came to resent his primacy, believing his schemes were crowding out their own ambitious plans. In some cases, they impugned his motives and patriotism on the basis both of his birth—he hailed from Massachusetts—and his close relationship with S. Isaac, Campbell & Co.⁶⁸ What began as murmuring about extravagant contracts signed in the desperate first months of the war turned into a full-scale campaign waged by Huse's rivals to discredit him on the basis of alleged financial impropriety.

To some extent the skirmishing in London was an extension of bureaucratic infighting within the Confederate government in

Richmond. For a time Josiah Gorgas proved a powerful ally, insulating his trusted subordinate in London from his critics.⁶⁹ The tide began to turn against Huse in April and May 1863 when his rivals unleashed a sustained barrage of accusatory letters to the War Department. These damning missives charged that Huse was not only stymieing the efforts of his fellow purchasing agents, but was also guilty of squandering the precious foreign currency of the Confederacy. At best they suggested this profligacy was evidence of rank incompetence, at worst of self-enrichment. Several fingered S. Isaac, Campbell & Co. as either the conjurer befuddling a naive quarry with accounting tricks and misdirection, or as a scheming associate conniving with Huse to profit at the expense of their southern paymasters. William Crenshaw, one of Huse's fiercest antagonists, pointedly reminded the secretary of war about Samuel Isaac's sullied reputation from the contracting scandal of 1858. Although his critics struggled to present firm evidence to back up their claims that Samuel Isaac was systematically overcharging the Confederacy for purchases, they did have enough damning proof of kickbacks to convince the War Department that there might be truth to the grander accusations.⁷⁰ An agent purchasing vessels for the Confederate navy wrote of his outraged rejection of the offer from S. Isaac, Campbell & Co. to split a large commission. Huse admitted to having accepted one thousand pounds from the firm, a sum he claimed he used to defray his travel expenses and put toward the purchase of a military library.⁷¹

The drama entered a protracted final act with the appointment of Colin McRae, the Confederate agent tasked with overseeing a vast loan secured against Confederate cotton by the Paris-based banking house of Emile Erlanger, to investigate the charges against Huse and audit the accounts of S. Isaac, Campbell & Co. Samuel Isaac was one of the key beneficiaries of the Confederate loan. In a complicated scheme, his company was repaid £457,224, partly in cash, but the majority in Erlanger bonds redeemable for government-owned cotton in the Confederacy.⁷² Temporarily Huse was the odd-man out in an accidental ethnic nexus that involved Samuel Isaac filling orders placed by

Brigadier General Josiah Gorgas, Confederate States Army.
(Photo source: *Wikipedia.org.*)

Abraham C. Myers cheered on by Judah P. Benjamin and ultimately paid for by a loan orchestrated by Emile Erlanger. Confident of exoneration, Huse urged McRae, himself a former commission merchant, to act quickly.⁷³ Initially McRae found the firm's accounts to be "based on correct business principles, accurately made out, and sustained by the proper vouchers." Insistent tugging at niggling threads slowly unwound the elaborate skein woven by Samuel and Saul Isaac. Evidence mounted of systematic overcharging, deceptive bookkeeping, double billing, and breach

of trust.⁷⁴ The secretary of war was quickly convinced that the “practices of that firm were more sharp than honest.” To his mind their show of compliance was little more than a sham. When confronted with “false invoices and deceptive accounts” the firm fell back on “knavery,” “effrontery and concealment.”⁷⁵

The secretary of war had little patience for the explanations offered by Samuel Isaac that these irregularities reflected the discounts and commissions taken as a matter of course by mercantile houses in England. Was S. Isaac, Campbell & Co. guilty of fraud? As his investigation dragged on into 1864, McRae became convinced that the firm “made charges that can be characterized by no other term than that of fraudulent.” He found evidence that “in many instances” it had overcharged the Confederacy from 5 to 20 per cent in addition to the commission it legitimately claimed for its services and concealed the difference in false invoices. Hired to be an honest broker between suppliers and the Confederate government, S. Isaac, Campbell & Co. instead used the opportunity to charge a hefty commission to both parties. Even if this practice was “customary” among some merchants in England, to McRae’s eyes it was “immoral,” depriving “the principal of that protection to which he is entitled.” Such behavior was at odds with his goal of rationalizing the supply system of the Confederacy and perhaps offended him as a former commission merchant. McRae found evidence that the firm had gone even further, obtaining “large commissions and deductions upon invoices of goods” purchased by Huse directly without their input. They were able to do so because they “kept his accounts and sometimes disbursed his money and took receipts.” Having no bookkeeper of his own, Huse relied on the firm to manage his complicated financial affairs. This afforded prime opportunity for speculation. The firm, McRae charged, “had by means of double invoices etc etc [*sic*] furnished him with receipts for money which [they] merely paid out with one hand to receive back with the other.” To add insult to injury, S. Isaac, Campbell & Co. had not only received commissions on orders placed by Huse, but had in several instances “actually charged the Govt such monies [they] had not only not paid but refused to pay [to suppliers].”⁷⁶

In its defense S. Isaac, Campbell & Co. argued that, "under the circumstances [i.e., the precarious credit of the government] the profit they have charged is not unreasonable or excessive."⁷⁷ The firm did assume substantial financial risk and offered loyal service of a kind to the Confederacy when others were reluctant to do so. But this self-serving rationalization ultimately reveals that the firm understood its actions to be deceptive, if not dishonest. Why otherwise engage in slippery bookkeeping practices and conceal its profit margins from Huse? Even as McRae pinned much of the blame on Samuel Isaac, his opinion of Huse plummeted. In the absence of evidence of criminal intent, Huse continued to serve the Confederacy in London until the end of the war, and McRae faulted him for making "very serious mistakes," foremost placing "great confidence" in S. Isaac, Campbell & Co.⁷⁸ McRae, however, recognized that the scandal stemmed at least partly from the Confederacy's approach to procurement. He understood profiteering to be a systemic consequence of reliance on private enterprise for sourcing supplies. Even after uncovering ample evidence of wrongdoing and being fully cognizant that "many of their accounts will not stand a strict scrutiny," as late as February 1864 he continued to advise the secretary of war not to break off business relations with the firm. "The fable of the fox and the flies" he counseled "is as true now as it was in days of Aesop." If Samuel Isaac was shooed away, he tacitly conceded, another firm would gladly take its place and probably replicate its practices.⁷⁹ Concerned about the negative impact of publicity on Confederate credit and recognizing that his claims would be difficult to prove in court, McRae spent much of 1864 pressing for a settlement with S. Isaac, Campbell & Co. to recoup at least some of the money that the Confederacy had overpaid. The two parties finally agreed to the terms for arbitration in December 1864, after much stalling and heated correspondence. Nonetheless, McRae's legal representatives counseled that such a step was "practically useless." There is no evidence that the matter was resolved. The dissolution of the Confederacy's purchasing operations in February 1865 after the loss of Wilmington, North Carolina, apparently saved the firm from a final reckoning.⁸⁰

Although unusual in having its deceptions so thoroughly exposed and noteworthy because of its central role in supplying the South, S. Isaac, Campbell & Co. was certainly not alone in extracting fulsome returns from dealings with the Confederacy. Sizeable commissions were common currency in transactions with the Confederate states. When visiting England in 1861, Edward Anderson noted with little evident alarm that the firm appointed to administer the Confederacy's financial transactions "were the recipients of large commissions upon all the funds passing through their hands."⁸¹ The payment of kickbacks and bribes was reputed to be standard practice among military commission houses in England; Edward Anderson described this as "the English way of doing business." A handful of those affronted by such offers recorded their upset; those amenable likely quietly pocketed the proceeds. Anderson's diary also suggests that Confederate purchasing agents understood full well that men like Samuel Isaac sought to maximize their profits. After negotiating the charter of a blockade runner, Anderson reflected that "Friend Isaac is a most useful man to us, but he never loses sight of his profits . . . He can manage Huse without any trouble, but thinks I am a very unreasonable somebody."⁸²

McRae's close study of contracting practices persuaded him that many of the Confederacy's commercial partners had made "enormous" sums by transacting business with it.⁸³ He grouched that his investigation was hamstrung by the "way business is done here." Not only were the firms with which S. Isaac, Campbell & Co. negotiated contracts for the Confederacy reluctant to testify openly in court, but their own business practices were equally rotten. They too were guilty of a litany of evils—"keeping supplemental ledgers where such [misleading] accounts only appear, the allowing [of] discounts, [charging a] fee for introduction" that would preclude McRae from "ever arriving at the truth."⁸⁴ Even if a minority of merchants may have been inspired by idealism, all were motivated by the pecuniary rewards promised by doing business with a nation that had little room to maneuver. While it is possible that Samuel Isaac may have been sympathetic to the Confederate cause, enjoyed the clout conferred

by his relationship with Huse, or became enchanted by the baubles dangled by the Confederacy—one purchasing agent suggested to Isaac that he may be rewarded with appointment as consul general in England if the South prevailed—undoubtedly profits provided the largest enticement.⁸⁵ Given abundant opportunity and considerable temptation, there is little doubt that S. Isaac, Campbell & Co. was not alone in boosting its profits through dishonest means.

While Samuel and Saul Isaac profited in the short term, they soon received their comeuppance. Paradoxically their financial affairs were undermined by the Confederacy's payment of its debts. The Erlanger bonds that the South used to compensate S. Isaac, Campbell & Co. proved very volatile. After the surrender of Vicksburg, in July 1863, cut off the Confederacy from the Mississippi River and its riparian cotton plantations, the value of cotton securities plummeted. Saul Isaac whimpered to a still sympathetic Colin McRae that the blow had crippled his firm, imperiling its credit and capital, and making its ability to transact business uncertain. Now the bonds could only be sold at a "disastrous" loss; Grant's victory wiped off 30 percent of their value overnight.⁸⁶ In an additional irony, the firm may have ultimately been saved from bankruptcy by McRae's discovery of its deceptive practices. In 1864 and 1865 the Confederacy all but ceased to do business with its former favorite. Perhaps anticipating this souring of relations, S. Isaac, Campbell & Co. had begun to refocus its business on the domestic market as early as May 1863. Even if it lost massively on its outstanding Erlanger securities when the Confederacy surrendered—one contemporary pegged the final figure at £150,000—the firm had incurred no new large receipts in the previous year. These would have been unenforceable after Appomattox.⁸⁷

Although hobbled by its losses, S. Isaac, Campbell & Co. limped on. Following the war the ever-enterprising Isaac brothers parlayed their appetite for international intrigue and their newly acquired expertise in blockade and gun running into the sale of two mothballed Confederate warships to a Chilean government at war with Spain. S. Isaac, Campbell & Co. evidently outfitted the

Cyclone and *Tornado* as marauders to terrorize Spanish merchant shipping in the style of the *Alabama* and other Confederate raiders. The capture of one of these men-of-war by a Spanish frigate off Madeira before it reached Chilean hands and the “severe confinement” of its British crew in Cadiz created a diplomatic contretemps between Spain and the British government. The financial losses incurred by this final defeat pushed the firm toward failure.⁸⁸ Both brothers declared bankruptcy in 1869, revealing large unpaid debts and a penchant for an ostentatious lifestyle. Saul alone owed over three thousand pounds to a wine merchant at a time when an upper-middle-class income began at roughly one thousand pounds a year. Samuel’s mansion in Kensington was tenanted after him for a season by the Begum of Oudh, but then long stood vacant. Curiously Saul’s largest remaining assets were investments in Charleston, South Carolina, and Yelbana, Sierra Leone.⁸⁹

Despite this embarrassing retreat, both brothers quickly resurrected their fortunes. Saul and Samuel were married to sisters who had inherited substantial estates. This money cushioned their fall. Saul leased a colliery near Nottingham in 1870 in time to take advantage of a soaring demand for coal. This commercial coup revived his reputation. In 1874 he won a local parliamentary seat that he occupied for six years as the first Jew elected to the House of Commons as a Conservative. Perhaps unsurprisingly one of his causes in Parliament became the necessity of stockpiling “strong and effective armaments.” Saul was active in the Jewish community, serving as a synagogue treasurer for seven years, and was elected as Master of the Worshipful Society of Clockmakers—a sign of his status within London society.⁹⁰ Samuel had sought to represent Northampton in the House of Commons during the Civil War, but he retreated after becoming the focus of a vociferous local opposition that lambasted him as a warmongering “servant of the Southern Confederacy” and supporter of slavery.⁹¹

For Saul, this second period of brilliance faded as quickly as the first when he suffered further financial reverses. This time there was no Lazarus-like return; he died in London in 1903 with an estate valued at only twenty-nine pounds.⁹² Samuel restored

*Sinking of Clifton Colliery pre 1871.
Saul Isaac is standing in front.
(Image courtesy of E Walker and www.picturethepast.org.uk.)*

his reputation by initiating and managing the construction of a railway tunnel linking Liverpool and Birkenhead—the *London Jewish Chronicle* lionized him as “the Lesseps of the Mersey tunnel” — a grand project long dormant for want of investors. Unlike his brother, he died with his fortune intact in 1886.⁹³

For the Isaac brothers, slop selling and boot making provided a springboard for unlikely careers as arms brokers. Much like others who seized the opportunities offered by the expansion of markets in the mid-nineteenth century, Samuel Isaac transformed a modest business in response to burgeoning demand. Their enterprise was typical of other successful Jewish entrepreneurs in leveraging a familial familiarity with stitching and selling clothing, a (sometimes disastrous) penchant for risk taking, and a willingness to stake out new markets into ambitious international businesses that did not (and could not) exist when they began their careers a few decades earlier. Samuel and Saul Isaac’s long-term influence on Jewish involvement in the clothing business in Britain is less certain. By 1862 the Isaac brothers were less focused on boot making than on blockade running, in the process becoming a British *bête noire* of the United States government. While the brothers almost certainly directed orders toward Jewish clothing firms, the demands of the Confederacy drew them away from shirts and trousers toward rifles and artillery batteries.⁹⁴ Their withdrawal from the clothing trade was all but complete by 1869. While the height of their rise and the depths of their fall was atypical of the legions of Jews who began as slop sellers in port towns like Chatham, many others followed a more modest version of their trajectory away from petty retail toward shop keeping and manufacturing. Some followed their lead in focusing on the military market. Indeed Jewish clothiers supplied the Redcoats who sweltered under the South African sun during the Anglo-Boer War and sodden Tommies entrenched in France during the First World War.⁹⁵ None, however, had as large and significant an impact as Samuel and Saul Isaac and their arsenal for the slavocracy.

NOTES

¹ James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom* (New York, 2003), 91, 95, 318.

² On Mordecai see Stanley L. Falk, "Divided Loyalties in 1861: The Decision of Major Alfred Mordecai" in *Jews and the Civil War*, ed. Jonathan D. Sarna and Adam Mendelsohn (New York, 2010), 207. Abraham Myers's controversial tenure is described in Harold S. Wilson, *Confederate Industry* (Jackson, MS, 2002), 3–92.

³ Wilson, *Confederate Industry*, 39, 102–103; Richard D. Goff, *Confederate Supply* (Durham, NC, 1969), 67–68.

⁴ Stanley W. Hoole, ed., *Confederate Foreign Agent: The European Diary of Major Edward C. Anderson* (University, AL, 1976), 3, 39, 23, 43; John D. Bennett, *The London Confederates* (Jefferson, NC, 2008), 54. For an example of a letter to Huse sent care of Isaac, see *War of the Rebellion: a Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, series 4, v. 2: 539.

⁵ The most thorough exploration of the firm's pre-war contracting and involvement in blockade running is provided by C. L. Webster, *Entrepôt: Government Imports into the Confederate States* (Edinburgh, Scotland, 2009). David G. Burt and Craig L. Barry, *Supplier to the Confederacy: S. Isaac, Campbell & Co. London* (Bedfordshire, UK, 2010) occasionally echoes the prejudices of the primary sources it references. Michael Jolles's *Samuel Isaac, Saul Isaac and Nathaniel Isaacs* (London, 1998) provides a detailed description of the Isaac family and reflects the author's genealogical focus. Jolles offers additional information about Saul Isaac in his *Jews and the Carlton Club* (London, 2002).

⁶ Jacob Rader Marcus describes the role of Jewish military suppliers and sutlers in America in the colonial period in *The Colonial American Jew*, 2 (Detroit, 1970), 706–718. My thanks to Mark Bauman for bringing this to my attention. From 1760 until the Revolution, a London syndicate that included Moses Franks as one of its four members supplied British troops in North America. Franks, in turn, subcontracted to family members. See William Pencak, "Anti-Semitism, Toleration, and Appreciation: The Changing Relations of Jews and Gentiles in Early America," in *The First Prejudice: Religious Tolerance and Intolerance in Early America*, ed. Chris Beneke and Christopher S. Granda (Philadelphia, 2011), 247.

⁷ Eli Evans argues in his biography *Judah P. Benjamin: Jewish Confederate* (New York, 1989) that antisemitism reached a crescendo in Confederate Richmond during the war (198–210). By contrast Robert Rosen suggests in *The Jewish Confederates* (Columbia, SC, 2000) that the South was relatively welcoming of Jews, and that Jewish soldiers faced little prejudice within the ranks of the Confederate army (xii, 32, 34–35, 91, 274.)

⁸ On antisemitic accusations made against Jewish contractors in the Union, see Adam Mendelsohn, "Beyond the Battlefield: Reevaluating the Legacy of the Civil War for American Jews," *American Jewish Archives Journal* (forthcoming).

⁹ For examples see John Levi and George Bergman, *Australian Genesis: Jewish Convicts and Settlers 1788–1850* (London, 1974), 122–141; Charles Van Onselen, *The Fox and the Flies: The Secret Life of a Grotesque Master Criminal* (New York, 2007); Van Onselen, “Jewish Police Informers in the Atlantic World, 1880–1914,” *Historical Journal*, 50 (2007): 119–144; Susan Tananbaum, “‘Morally depraved and abnormally criminal’: Jews and Crime in London and New York, 1880–1940,” in *Forging Modern Jewish Identities: Public Faces and Private Struggles*, ed. Michael Berkowitz, Susan Tananbaum, and Sam Bloom (Portland, OR, 2003); Jenna Weissman Joselit, *Our Gang: Jewish Crime and the New York Jewish Community* (Bloomington, IN, 1983); Robert A. Rockaway, *But He Was Good to His Mother: The Lives and Crimes of Jewish Gangsters* (Jerusalem, 1993).

¹⁰ See Mendelsohn, “Beyond the Battlefield.”

¹¹ See Thomas Bender, ed., *Rethinking American History in a Global Age* (Los Angeles, CA, 2002); Thomas Bender, *A Nation Among Nations: America’s Place in World History* (New York, 2006).

¹² See for example, R. J. M. Blackett, *Divided Hearts: Britain and the Civil War* (Baton Rouge, 2001); Edward Bartlett Rugemer, *The Problem of Emancipation: The Caribbean Roots of the American Civil War* (Baton Rouge, 2009); Amanda Foreman, *A World on Fire: Britain’s Crucial Role in the American Civil War* (New York, 2011). In March 2011 the College of Charleston hosted a conference titled “Civil War—Global Conflict” that examined the international dimensions of the conflict. Work by Anny Bloch, Anton Hieke, Chris Monaco, Elliott Ashkenazi, and others have placed southern Jews in a transnational context.

¹³ For the war’s impact on the business activities of two Jewish banking families, see Elliott Ashkenazi, “Jewish Commercial Interests Between North and South: The Case of the Lehmans and the Seligmans” in *Dixie Diaspora: An Anthology of Southern Jewish History*, ed. Mark K. Bauman (Tuscaloosa, 2006).

¹⁴ For the Civil War boom in Bombay, see Christine E. Dobbin, *Urban Leadership in Western India* (London, 1972), 25–26. On the Sassoons’ business during the Civil War, see Cecil Roth, *The Sassoon Dynasty* (London, 1941), 45, 47–50, 98; Stanley Jackson, *The Sassoons* (New York, 1968), 21, 24, 39–40, 44.

¹⁵ Madeline House and Graham Storey, eds., *The Letters of Charles Dickens*, I (Oxford, UK, 1969) 423. Sailors were promiscuous in their use of the word “Jew,” often using the term as a blanket description for traders who offered them credit in advance of their wages. See Geoffrey L. Green, *The Royal Navy and Anglo-Jewry, 1740–1820* (London, 1989), 40, 132–133, 138–139.

¹⁶ On the presence and roles of Jews in naval towns, see Geoffrey L. Green, “Anglo-Jewish trading connections with officers and seamen of the Royal Navy, 1740–1820,” *Transactions of the Jewish Historical Society of England* (1988): 99–108; Beverly Lemire, *Dress, Culture and Commerce: The English Clothing Trade before the Factory, 1660–1800* (Basingstoke, UK, 1997), 89–90.

¹⁷ These examples are drawn from the British Navy’s Covey–Crump dictionary of slang, accessed July 11, 2012, <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20090127182544/>

and [http://royalnavy.mod.uk/training-and-people/rn-life/navy-slang/covey-crump-\(a-to-aye\)/jago-jutland/](http://royalnavy.mod.uk/training-and-people/rn-life/navy-slang/covey-crump-(a-to-aye)/jago-jutland/).

¹⁸ Robert Wechsler, "The Jewish Garment Trade in East London, 1875-1914: A Study in Conditions and Responses" (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1979), 30.

¹⁹ *London Saturday Journal*, 11, May 25, 1839: 321.

²⁰ The Navy recognized the need for slops as early as 1623 to "avoyde nasti beastliness by diseases and unwholesome ill smells in every ship." Quoted in Henry Lawrence Swinburne, *The Royal Navy* (London, 1907), 345.

²¹ For representative advertisements see *London Times*, September 7, 1829; April 26, 1830; May 11, 1831; March 12, 1834; December 18, 1835; March 21, 1843; April 2, 1846.

²² For a sampling of advertisements see *London Times*, September 7, 1829; February 14, 1831; May 1, 1839; December 18, 1839; November 23, 1840; November 28, 1846; September 27, 1858.

²³ Manifold ways were employed to service the imperial project. In Port Said and Suez, for example, the shunting yard of the British Empire, enterprising Jews pimped prostitutes to sailors and tourists bound for India, the Far East, and Australia. Ruth Fredman Cernea, *Almost Englishmen: Baghdadi Jews in British Burma* (Lanham, MD, 2007), xx, 4, 8; Jacob Landau, *Jews in Nineteenth-Century Egypt* (New York, 1969), 37.

²⁴ James Greenwood, *Unsentimental Journeys; or, Byways of the Modern Babylon* (London, 1867); *London Times*, October 1, 1858.

²⁵ For advertisements of the sale of surplus slops, see *London Times* December 3, 1814, November 16, 1831, August 3, 1833; July 29, 1834; April 23, 1859; for advertisements by merchants for "left-off military and plain-wearing apparel," see August 10, 1839, October 12, 1839, June 27, 1843.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, August 8, 1854; January 2, 1855; March 24, 1855; July 11, 1855.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, September 22, 1858; September 25, 1858. On the profits generated by Crimean war contracts, see *Parliamentary Papers 1858*, 6 (*Reports v. 2*), cmd 328, "Second Report from the Select Committee on Contracts," 2193; 4910-4911. On the inadequacies of supplies, see Robert B. Edgerton, *Death Or Glory: The Legacy of the Crimean War* (Boulder, CO, 1999), 112-113.

²⁸ *London Times*, June 7, 1854; September 22, 1858; May 28, 1859; September 23, 1858; September 29, 1858.

²⁹ Jolles, *Samuel Isaac, Saul Isaac and Nathaniel Isaacs*, 3-6, 11, 14-16, 43-46.

³⁰ Samuel's brother Nathaniel, an army broker, committed suicide after becoming heavily indebted and forging checks.

³¹ *The Era*, October 27, 1839, quoted in Jolles, *Samuel Isaac, Saul Isaac and Nathaniel Isaacs*, 44-45.

³² Charles Booth used the number of servants employed in household as a measure of class status. He judged those who employed one or two servants as middle class, and those who employed three or more as wealthy. Charles Booth, *Labour and Life of the People II* (London, 1891), 40-41.

³³ Indeed his primary service seems to have been to provide a name that may have briefly obfuscated the Jewish ownership of the firm. If this was the intention, it only worked for a short period, if at all. The Isaac brothers were identified as Jews during the Weedon scandal. It was no secret to the Confederate government that the firm was Jewish-owned. This fact, however, was rarely commented on in America. For one such instance, see John B. Jones, *A Rebel War Clerk's Diary* (Philadelphia, 1866), 2, 53; Burt and Barry, *Supplier to the Confederacy*, 19.

³⁴ On S. Isaac, Campbell & Co.'s business connections with Northampton, see David Waller, "Northampton and the American Civil War," *Northamptonshire Past & Present* 8 (1990-1991): 137-139; *London Jewish Chronicle*, February 1, 1856.

³⁵ These changes are described in Webster, *Entrepôt*, 22-23.

³⁶ In a heated letter to the editor, Isaac blamed the episode on the incompetence of the inspector "an unfortunate farmer, and wholly unfit for the duty which he assumed." *London Times*, July 10, 1858. The most thorough account of the episode is provided in Webster, *Entrepôt*, 21-27. Two official reports on the scandal provide a wealth of material on the Isaac brothers' contracting business: *Report of the Commissioners Appointed to Inquire Into the State of the Store and Clothing Depots at Weedon* (1859) and the *Fifth Report from Select Committee on Contracts (Public Departments)* (1858). My thanks to an anonymous peer reviewer for drawing these two reports to my attention.

³⁷ *London Times*, November 20, 1858; Jolles, *Samuel Isaac, Saul Isaac and Nathaniel Isaacs*, 91-95. For earlier examples of bribery, nepotism, patronage, and the use of political connections to secure military clothing contracts, see D. J. Smith, "Army Clothing Contractors and the Textile Industries in the 18th Century," *Textile History* 14 (1983): 159-160.

³⁸ For firsthand descriptions of these services, see Hoole, *Confederate Foreign Agent*, 24, 28, 30, 50, 58, 64, 71.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 67.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 49, 52, 61.

⁴¹ Bennett, *London Confederates*, 56.

⁴² Hoole, *Confederate Foreign Agent*, 59.

⁴³ Bennett, *London Confederates*, 54-56.

⁴⁴ These orders are meticulously detailed in the Huse Audit Series: S. Isaac Campbell and Co. Subseries of the Colin J. McRae Collection at the South Carolina Confederate Relic Room & Military Museum. Columbia, SC, (hereafter cited as the McRae Collection.)

⁴⁵ Quoted in Richard Lester, *Confederate Finance and Purchasing in Great Britain* (Charlottesville, VA, 1975), 168; McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 380.

⁴⁶ Lester, *Confederate Finance and Purchasing in Great Britain*, 167. For orders placed through S. Isaac, Campbell & Co., see references to Huse and Anderson in Hoole, *Confederate Foreign Agent*, 23, 36, 40, 47, 49.

⁴⁷ *War of the Rebellion*, series 4, 1: 1007-1008.

⁴⁸ Lester, *Confederate Finance and Purchasing in Great Britain*, 174.

⁴⁹ *War of the Rebellion*, series 2, 3: 641-643.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, series 2, 3: 605; series 4, 2: 190–191; series 2, 3: 505.

⁵¹ Using the retail price index as a measure, this sum is roughly equivalent to £37,500,000 (\$58,000,000) today. When calculated to reflect changes in average earnings, the sum is equivalent to £330,000,000 (\$517,000,000).

⁵² For the scale of Confederate orders, see Bell Irvin Wiley, “From Finery to Tatters” in *The Civil War Soldier: A Historical Reader*, ed. Michael Barton and Larry M. Logue (New York, 2002), 110–111; Wilson, *Confederate Industry*, 160, 176–179; Lester, *Confederate Finance and Purchasing in Great Britain*, 180, 188; Bennett, *London Confederates*, 57. On the sums expended by the purchasing agents, see Frank Lawrence Owsley, *King Cotton Diplomacy* (Chicago, 1959), 368; Bennett, *London Confederates*, 61.

⁵³ During the latter months of 1861 one Charleston merchant wrote, “Business perfectly prostrated everything selling enormously high ... hardly any shoes to be had dry goods of every kind running out.” McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 381.

⁵⁴ Stephen R. Wise, *Lifeline of the Confederacy: Blockade Running During the Civil War* (Columbia, SC, 1991), 221.

⁵⁵ McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 380.

⁵⁶ Their braggadocio earned them the animus of the Confederacy’s agent in Nassau. *War of the Rebellion*, series 4, 1: 1175; series 4, 2: 8–9, 19.

⁵⁷ *London Times*, June 29, 1866; November 6, 1866; Samuel Blatchford, *Reports of cases in Prize argued and determined in the District Court of the United States 1861–65* (New York, 1866), 439–440; *War of the Rebellion*, series 2, 2: 143–144; Wise, *Lifeline of the Confederacy*, 71, 132; Bennett, *London Confederates*, 103.

⁵⁸ Wise, *Lifeline of the Confederacy*, 48–51; Lester, *Confederate Finance and Purchasing in Great Britain*, 166.

⁵⁹ Lester, *Confederate Finance and Purchasing in Great Britain*, 167.

⁶⁰ Demand for imported uniforms was seasonal. The South had ample cotton for lighter uniforms used during the summer, but not nearly enough processed wool for the warmer jackets and trousers needed in winter. Shortages were compounded by the profligacy of soldiers who were only too eager to discard surplus blankets and garments to lighten their march. Until the last months of the war the Quartermaster Department continued to issue vast quantities of clothing to its increasingly bedraggled armies and place orders for resupply from abroad. Goff, *Confederate Supply*, 65–66, 70; Wise, *Lifeline of the Confederacy*, 196, 212

⁶¹ Quoted in Wilson, *Confederate Industry*, 106; confirmed by the Confederate Quartermaster General, 155.

⁶² Jones, *A Rebel War Clerk’s Diary* 2, 98 (quotation), 77, 101, 235.

⁶³ W. C. Corsan, *Two Months in the Confederate States: An Englishman’s Travels Through the South* (Baton Rouge, 1996), 61. Hostility to Jews in the South is discussed in McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 439–441. On nativism in the antebellum South, see Andrea Mehrländer, *The Germans of Charleston, Richmond and New Orleans during the Civil War Period, 1850–1870* (Berlin, 2011), 61–76.

⁶⁴ William Evan Fredeman, ed., *The Correspondence of Dante Gabriel Rossetti: The Last Decade, 1873–1882* (Cambridge, UK, 2006), 306. The reference to “Paddington Pollaky,” appears in the Gilbert and Sullivan operetta, *Patience*.

⁶⁵ Bennett, *London Confederates*, 78–79.

⁶⁶ Goff, *Confederate Supply*, 16; Wilson, *Confederate Industry*, 156–157.

⁶⁷ *War of the Rebellion*, series 4, 2: 890; Lester, *Confederate Finance and Purchasing in Great Britain*, 47.

⁶⁸ See, for example, William Crenshaw’s bitter turf war with Huse over shipping. Crenshaw was convinced that the Confederacy’s money problems in London would be solved if its finances “were under the control of a party who was really anxious to serve the interest of our Government, which I do not believe Major Huse is.” Huse was “not fit for the position;” in his place the South should appoint “a true-born Southern gentleman, if you please.” *War of the Rebellion*, series 4, 2: 539–547, 646–647; Wilson, *Confederate Industry*, 166; Wise, *Lifeline of the Confederacy*, 102–104; Bennett, *London Confederates*, 51, 58. On the financial problems facing the purchasing agents, see Charles S. Davis, *Colin J. McRae: Confederate Financial Agent* (Tuscaloosa, 1961), 37–40, 46.

⁶⁹ In May 1863 Gorgas assured the secretary of war that although he had “no doubt Major Huse was frequently compelled to pay quite 50 per cent over the actual market value of his purchases” without seeking approval from his superior in Richmond, “authority to that effect would have been given to him without a moment’s hesitation.” Quoted in Wilson, *Confederate Industry*, 162.

⁷⁰ For the most damning correspondence, see *War of the Rebellion*, series 4, 2: 478–479, 539–541, 555–558; Wilson, *Confederate Industry*, 161.

⁷¹ *War of the Rebellion*, series 4, 2: 393–395, 556–558.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 644–647, 886–895. For an explanation of the workings of the loan agreement, see Davis, *Colin J. McRae*, 36–37.

⁷³ *War of the Rebellion*, series 4, 2: 599–602, 894. On McRae’s background, see Davis, *Colin J. McRae*, 13–34.

⁷⁴ See Balance Sheet, June 1863–August 1863, G11; McRae to SIC, October 28, 1863, K75; McRae to Huse, December 10, 1863, K37; S. Isaac Campbell correction of Interest Account, G17; M. H. Bloodgood to McRae, April 27, 1864, K28, Financing the Confederacy Series, all McRae Collection.

⁷⁵ For example, the firm was instrumental in ordering expensive Austrian rifles unsuited to campaigning in the South. To compound matters, the Confederacy appears to have overpaid for the rifles, and incurred a £25,000 fine for Huse’s delay in canceling part of the contract. *War of the Rebellion*, series 4, 2: 628–631, 1067–1068; Wilson, *Confederate Industry*, 161.

⁷⁶ Undated draft of letter, G15, McRae in England: Huse Arbitration Subseries, McRae Collection. On McRae’s ambitions in Europe, see Davis, *Colin J. McRae*, 50–53.

⁷⁷ *War of the Rebellion*, series 4, 3: 528, 702–704. The firm vigorously protested these accusations. Unfortunately their lengthiest rebuttal—a six-page letter defending their actions—

is almost wholly illegible. S. Isaac Campbell & Co. to Huse, April 4, 1864, K2, Financing the Confederacy Series, McRae Collection.

⁷⁸ *War of the Rebellion*, series 4, 2: 1067–1068; series 4, 3: 154–157.

⁷⁹ *War of the Rebellion*, series 4, 3: 154–157.

⁸⁰ Messrs. Ball & Co. to McRae, August 3, 1864, McRae in England: Huse Arbitration subseries; Agreement of reference between SIC and CSA. December 1864, K9, Financing the Confederacy Series, McRae Collection.

⁸¹ Hoole, *Confederate Foreign Agent*, 37. See also Owsley, *King Cotton Diplomacy*, 368; Bennett, *London Confederates*, 61; Wilson, *Confederate Industry*, 167; Lester, *Confederate Finance and Purchasing in Great Britain*, 167; *War of the Rebellion*, series 4, 2: 646–647

⁸² Hoole, *Confederate Foreign Agent*, 62; Burt and Barry, *Supplier to the Confederacy*, 65.

⁸³ *War of the Rebellion*, series 4, 2: 982–983.

⁸⁴ Undated draft of letter, G15, McRae in England: Huse Arbitration Subseries, McRae McRae Collection.

⁸⁵ Hoole, *Confederate Foreign Agent*, 50.

⁸⁶ *War of the Rebellion*, series 4, 2: 890. On the difficulty of disposing of the bonds, see Davis, *Colin J. McRae*, 38–40.

⁸⁷ Burt and Barry, *Supplier to the Confederacy*, 90–91; Bennett, *London Confederates*, 91. For a description of some of the British firms that were financial losers because of the Confederacy's defeat, see Wise, *Lifeline of the Confederacy*, 224. In March 1865, with the end of the war in sight, Benjamin Wooley Hart attempted to sue Jefferson Davis, Judah P. Benjamin, and George Trenholm for £20,000 of unpaid Confederate debt. See Jolles, *Samuel Isaac, Saul Isaac and Nathaniel Isaacs*, 112. Following the war, McRae entered into a business partnership with Judah P. Benjamin's brother in Belize. See Davis, *Colin J. McRae*, 87.

⁸⁸ *London Times*, February 15, 1867; March 22, 1867; May 14, 1867; *Illustrated London News*, April 20, 1867; *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, v. 188 (July 23, 1867), 2034–2070; G. C. Bentinck, *Case of the Tornado* (London, 1870), 1–32.

⁸⁹ The latter was likely an investment in his cousin Nathaniel Isaacs's trading enterprise. Nathaniel Isaacs was an unusually adventurous colonial traveler and trader. Saul owned the Adger Estate, as well as prime commercial property in Charleston. See *London Times*, June 9, 1868; June 8, 1869; July 17, 1869; November 1886; Jolles, *Samuel Isaac, Saul Isaac and Nathaniel Isaacs*, 113, 154. On Nathaniel Isaacs see Richard Mendelsohn and Milton Shain, eds., *The Jews in South Africa: An Illustrated History* (Johannesburg, SA, 2008), 7; Louis Herrman, "Nathaniel Isaacs," *Natalia* 4, 1974: 19–21; *London Times*, July 17, 1869; November 1886.

⁹⁰ Quoted in Jolles, *Samuel Isaac, Saul Isaac and Nathaniel Isaacs*, 158–161, 172; Jolles, *Jews and The Carlton Club*, 28–32.

⁹¹ *Northampton Mercury*, December 27, 1862 quoted in Jolles, *Samuel Isaac, Saul Isaac and Nathaniel Isaacs*, 107–108.

⁹² *London Jewish Chronicle*, October 9, 1903.

⁹³ *London Times*, November 1886; Jolles, *Samuel Isaac, Saul Isaac and Nathaniel Isaacs*, 116–124.

⁹⁴ This pattern of clothiers becoming general purpose suppliers who provided a range of goods was also evident among firms that supplied the Union. Mark Wilson, *The Business of the Civil War: Military Mobilization and the State, 1861–1865* (Baltimore, 2006), 121.

⁹⁵ See Wechsler, “Jewish Garment Trade,” 67–68. Jewish-owned factories supplied the military market beyond Britain and the United States. In Bialystok Jewish manufacturers produced the “vast majority of woolen uniforms for the Russian army.” See Rebecca Koblin, *Jewish Bialystok and Its Diaspora* (Bloomington, IN, 2010), 30.