

# The Disappointed Consul: Nageeb J. Arbeely

Linda K. Jacobs

When President Grover Cleveland nominated Nageeb J. Arbeely to the post of consul of Jerusalem in 1885, it was startling in many ways. First and foremost, Arbeely was an immigrant from the Ottoman Empire, a member of the “first Syrian immigrant family” to the United States, and certainly the first Syrian-American to be awarded a diplomatic post.<sup>1</sup> He was young – only twenty-four when he was appointed – recently naturalized, and not at all well known. Although he came from a Democratic state, he was not politically connected. How did he come to be appointed and why did he never serve?

## The “First Syrian Immigrant Family”

Nageeb Arbeely was the fourth of six sons of Yusef Awad al-Kaloush (Arbeely) and Mary Durany. Shortly before his birth in 1860, the family fled strife-torn Damascus for Beirut. There Yusef established an Orthodox school for the sons of other Damascene exiles and worked with the American missionary Cornelius Van Dyck on an Arabic translation of the Bible. Two of his three elder sons attended Syrian Protestant College – which would later become the American University of Beirut – and became physicians, while Nageeb and his two younger brothers attended grammar and high school.<sup>2</sup>

After almost eighteen years in Beirut, the entire family, including a niece, sailed to New York, arriving on 20 August 1878. Their arrival was noticed (they were wearing “native dress”) and on their third day a reporter from the *New-York Daily Tribune* wrote a long, admiring article about them, the content obviously provided



Figure 1. Arbeely family portrait taken in Beirut, c. 1878. Seated from left: Nasseem, Mary, Yusef, and Habeeb. Standing from left: Abraham, Khaleel, Fadlallah, and Nageeb. Later annotation is by Nageeb. Image courtesy of the National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.



Figure 2. Arbeely family portrait taken in Knoxville, Tennessee, c. 1883. From left: Jamilie, Nageeb, Abraham, Fadlallah, Joseph, Habeeb, Khaleel, and Nasseem. The empty chair is a memorial to Mary, who had died in 1880. Image courtesy of Habeeb Joseph Arbeely and Dania Arbeely, Houston, Texas.

by the family; more than one of them spoke fluent English. Joseph, as Yusef came to be called, produced letters of reference from American missionaries (including Van Dyck) and other Western clergy and gave a full accounting of his escape from the “tyranny of the Turks,” as well as of his myriad accomplishments. He looked forward to his younger sons being educated in the United States.<sup>3</sup> Two days later, it was reported that he and his older sons had filed their first naturalization papers.<sup>4</sup> Joseph was offered a job teaching Arabic to missionaries-in-training at the Presbyterian college in Maryville, Tennessee, and two weeks after they arrived the family took the train west and settled down in Maryville, a rural town with a population of 1,100.<sup>5</sup> Although the town had probably seen few foreigners, and fewer “Orientals,” the members of the family were treated with equanimity if not downright enthusiasm and they were quickly able to count several residents as friends.

They called themselves and were recognized as the “first Syrian immigrant family” in the United States. They took the role of pioneer seriously, hoping other Syrians would follow, and they spent the first decade of their stay searching for the ideal spot to found a Syrian colony (they never succeeded).<sup>6</sup> A photograph of the family taken in Tennessee shows Joseph holding a sign in Arabic that reads, “Here my children and I are pleased with freedom” – clearly meant for their friends and relatives back home.<sup>7</sup> They also felt it incumbent on them to present Syria in the best possible light to their American hosts, and their fluency in English as well as in storytelling furthered this goal.

Nageeb studied law at Maryville College and taught French there as well.<sup>8</sup> Even before he graduated in 1882, he, his father, and one or two of his brothers began to

## A NOVEL ENTERTAINMENT.

**A**N INTERESTING EXHIBITION ON Palestine and Egypt by Native Arabs, will be given at the Second Presbyterian Church on the 27th inst., at 7:45 p. m. Khawgat Nageeb Yusif and Habeeb Arbeely, of Damascus, in their illustrated discourse, will appear in the curious dresses of all the tribes of the Holy Land, men and women, and exhibit their Biblical Household Utensils, Furniture, Implements of Industry, Musical Instruments, and perform on them; Argeelles sandals, Books, Products, etc., so as to cause the hearer to be an eye witness to Oriental Manners and Biblical Customs. The Marriage Feast of the Druses of Mt. Libanon, which is so amusing and instructive, will be celebrated. A Mohammedan Prayer by a Howling Dervish from Jerusalem, will be given, with the history of Missionaries in Syria. Also the Famous Sword Exercise. Admission fee, 25 cents, and 15 for Children under 12 years.

Figure 3. Advertisement for Arbeely performance, *Register* (Wheeling, West Virginia), 27 September 1883.



Figure 4. “Nageeb J. Arbeely, The Syrian Lecturer Dressed Like a Mohamedan Sheikh from Damascus,” Washington, DC, c. 1883. Image courtesy of the National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

travel around eastern Tennessee and then all over the east coast giving lectures on “Life in the Holy Land,” or “Mohammedan customs,” often dressing up in Arab garb and demonstrating Muslims praying, sword fighting, or dancing. Admission was 25 cents for adults and 15 cents for children.<sup>9</sup> They were not the first “native” performers in America, but they were unique: Western-educated, Christian, “natives of the Holy Land,” and able to lecture in English as well as perform. On one of these tours (in May, 1881), Nageeb and his father visited the White House, accompanied by Quaker friends from Tennessee.<sup>10</sup>

## “Consul” Nageeb J. Arbeely

The three youngest brothers were naturalized together in Knoxville in January of 1884, and in July Nageeb wrote to President Chester Arthur asking that he be considered for the position of consul-general of Egypt.<sup>11</sup> He submitted letters of support from various prominent citizens of both Tennessee and Washington, D.C., including the “entire Tennessee Delegation.”<sup>12</sup> His file includes an announcement of one of his local performances, which he obviously thought strengthened his application. After Grover Cleveland took office, Arbeely had a meeting with him to press his case, and he went away thinking that the post was his, but in the end Cleveland nominated someone else. Undaunted, Arbeely wrote to Cleveland’s secretary of state outlining his qualifications for an alternative consular post. As he claimed to speak six languages and to “have lived at different times in Smyrna, Beyroot, and Jerusalem, and visited on business Tangier, Tunis and other parts of the French dominions,” he

felt he would be a suitable appointee to any of those cities.<sup>13</sup> This second application was successful: on 15 October 1885, Cleveland nominated him to the post of Consul at Jerusalem. He was quickly approved by the Senate and received his diplomatic passport less than two weeks later.

He was to take the place of Consul Selah Merrill, a Congregational minister and archaeologist who had been appointed in 1882.<sup>14</sup> Ruth Kark asserts that Arbeely's appointment was purely political: Cleveland, a Democrat, was replacing all Republican appointees. There is nothing in Arbeely's file that indicates his own political affiliation, but the "entire Tennessee Delegation" was Democratic, which was enough to recommend him.<sup>15</sup> Another factor in Arbeely's favor may have been Merrill's propensity for making enemies in Jerusalem – not just among the "natives," both Jews and Arabs,<sup>16</sup> but among his own countrymen, especially those of the American Colony – who were trying to have him removed.<sup>17</sup> They accused him of corruption, "falsifications of vouchers . . . neglect of official duties . . . bribe-taking, etc."<sup>18</sup> Merrill was employed by the English tour company Thomas Cook and Son as its agent in Palestine. Not an unusual arrangement in itself (many American consuls supplemented their salaries), it did leave him open to accusations (including from the American envoy in Constantinople) that he was liable to put his business interests ahead of his consular responsibilities and might be more loyal to Britain than America.<sup>19</sup>

The American residents of Jerusalem were waiting anxiously for a new consul to be named. Rolla Floyd, a tour guide based in Jaffa, who was in fierce competition with – and hated – Merrill, grumbled, "If the old brute is not changed, I shall put the United States Government down as being quite as rotten as the Turkish, for a more mean scamp than the so-called American Consul in Jerusalem cannot be found."<sup>20</sup> He was told of Arbeely's appointment in November: "His name is Doctor N. J. Arbeely of Tennessee (but he is a Greek). Let him be a Turk – it would be impossible to be worse than Selah Merrill, D. D."<sup>21</sup>

Nageeb left the United States in November of 1885, but instead of going directly to Jerusalem, he went to Constantinople at the urging of Secretary of State T. F. Bayard, apparently trying to head off what was already seen as a potential problem: the Ottoman government threatening to withhold Arbeely's accreditation because the Ottomans still considered him an Ottoman subject. Arbeely's letter to Bayard from Constantinople was not optimistic: "My being at a loss: what to do in case of my prospective failure to get an exequatur from the Turkish Authorities."<sup>22</sup> He must have still thought that he would be accredited, however, because he went on to Jerusalem, where he was welcomed by the American Colony and Jewish and Muslim residents alike as the incoming consul.<sup>23</sup> Floyd thought Arbeely "a very nice man" and "well educated in 7 languages," but he expressed his worry that Arbeely might not be acceptable to the Ottoman government, an indication that news of the problem had already been bruited about the city.<sup>24</sup> A letter to Floyd from Samuel Cox, the American envoy in Constantinople, promised that if Arbeely was not confirmed, he (Cox) would do everything in his power to have Merrill replaced.<sup>25</sup> Hedging his bets, Arbeely had already begun petitioning the American government to consider him for some other consular post if the Turkish government refused to accept him.<sup>26</sup>

Despite Arbeely's inclusion on the official list of U.S. consuls serving in 1885 and 1886

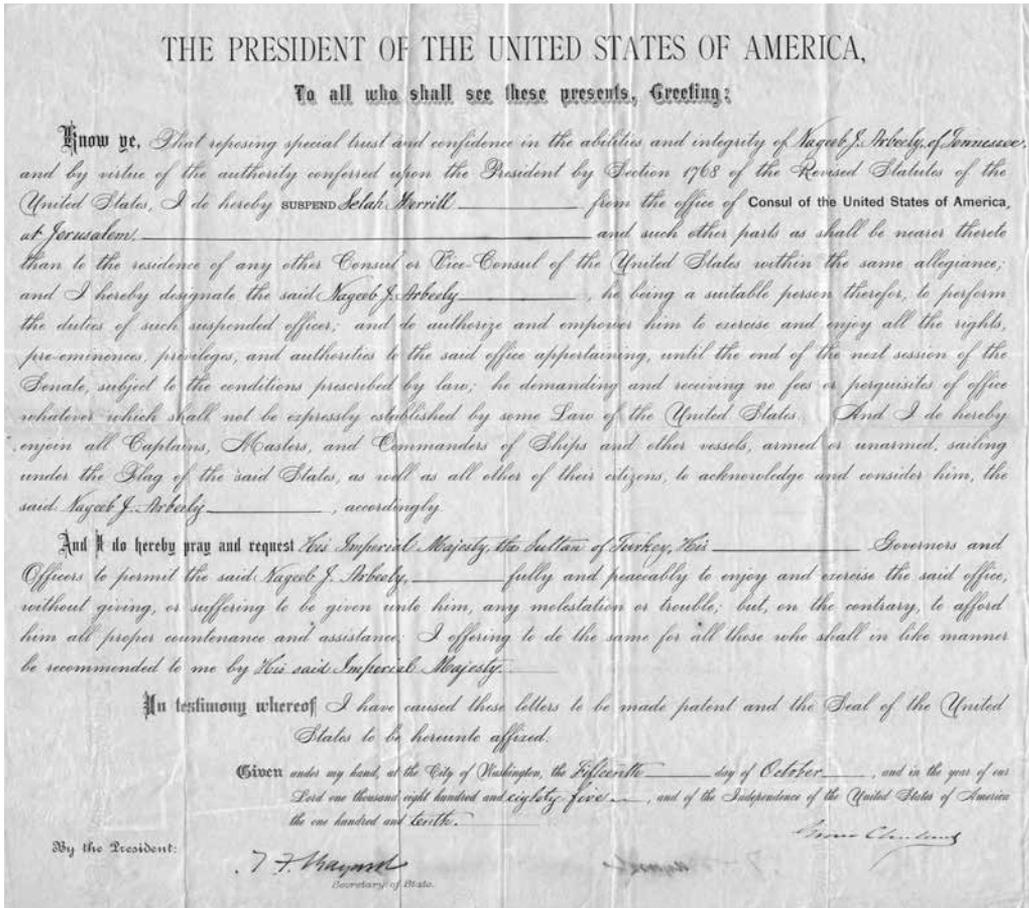


Figure 5. Nageeb’s consular appointment, from the Shapell Manuscript Foundation.

(giving his salary as 2,000 dollars per year plus fees earned of 70 dollars, which would most likely have been drawn by Merrill, who remained at his post while Arbeely waited for accreditation) and being listed as consul in several guidebooks published in 1886 and 1887, Arbeely did not take up consular duties, nor did he move into the consulate.<sup>27</sup> While the job was in limbo, Merrill continued to act as consul, much to Floyd’s and the American Colony’s disgust. Floyd blamed “Merrill & the Cooks brib[ing] the Turks to not give him affirmation,”<sup>28</sup> but that seems unnecessarily conspiratorial, given that the Ottomans’ refusal to recognize its subjects’ American citizenship was something that had bedeviled U.S.–Ottoman relations throughout much of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Under the capitulatory system, foreign nationals were generally outside the jurisdiction of Ottoman law. But the question arose as to whether Ottoman subjects who became naturalized citizens of the United States and then returned to the Ottoman Empire fell under this exemption.<sup>29</sup> The Ottomans claimed they did not, since Ottoman law stated that no one could become a citizen of another country without the Ottoman government’s express permission, while the Americans said they did: *jus sanguinis* versus *jus soli*.<sup>30</sup>

Much of the diplomatic correspondence between the American secretary of state and his envoy in Constantinople, the American envoy and the Ottoman government, and the secretary of state and the Ottoman legation in Washington concerned this issue. One can sense the diplomats' frustration at the intransigence of the Ottoman position and their own government's inability to resolve the issue, as other Western nations had been able to do.

As was its sovereign right, the Ottoman government refused to issue the exequatur for Arbeely's appointment on the grounds that he was still an Ottoman subject and therefore could not represent the United States government in the Ottoman Empire. The U.S. secretary of state admitted privately that the Porte's "refusal to receive Mr. Arbeely was not without ambiguity," but averred that Arbeely's legitimate claims as an American citizen could not take precedence over the Porte's right of approving Arbeely as consul.<sup>31</sup> The decision, he said, "cannot be questioned."<sup>32</sup>

The American government's acceptance without demur of the Porte's position was not, however, quite as straightforward as it appeared. In January 1886, Merrill had written to the assistant secretary of state accusing Arbeely of all sorts of misconduct, such as pretending that he did not speak Arabic and lying about his birthplace; Merrill thought Arbeely was dissembling in order to convince the Ottoman authorities that he (Arbeely) was American-born and therefore acceptable as consul. It is unlikely that Arbeely would have denied his heritage, given that he had bragged about his fluency in Arabic and his Syrian birthplace in all his application documents, clearly considering them assets. Merrill also complained that Arbeely had paid a call on the *mutasarrif* of Jerusalem without informing or inviting Merrill: "His [Arbeely's] conduct in this respect was a direct insult to the consul, to the United States consulate in Jerusalem, and to the United States Government by whose sufferance he had this opportunity of dishonoring it."<sup>33</sup> Merrill's intemperate rhetoric seems out of proportion to this supposed "insult," especially since Arbeely claimed his visit to the *mutasarrif* was a personal, not an official, call; but Merrill was often intemperate when it came to those he considered enemies.

Perhaps more damning was Merrill's assertion that Arbeely, as an Arab, would be unable to act as an American consul should: "Among these Oriental people the ties of kindred and family are so strong that no cause of an American citizen and no American interest if brought before a native of the country acting as consul, for his decision could possibly receive justice, supposing such cause or interest were in conflict with the interests of his family or friends."<sup>34</sup> The patronizing tone of the letter shows clearly why so many residents of Jerusalem hated Merrill, yet it may have influenced the department of state's refusal to fight for Arbeely.

Although it is unlikely that Arbeely had seen Merrill's letter, the latter must have broadcast his accusations around town, because Arbeely wrote an 11-page rebuttal in February to Secretary Bayard, with the signatures of more than 65 Jerusalem residents, including Arab and American clergy, dragomans, merchants, lawyers, and teachers.<sup>35</sup> It is rather impressive that in a few short months he was able to garner such support. When he received no satisfaction, he sent a desperate telegram to the secretary begging him to "delay transfer" until he could travel to Constantinople ("at my own expense") to plead his case.<sup>36</sup> Nageeb's father also wrote a letter to Bayard complaining about the

“injustice” done to the young man.<sup>37</sup> All fell on deaf ears. Whether the Americans could have changed the Ottoman position is debatable, but they did not try. Perhaps the American powers-that-be had remembered Arbeely’s well-known stage performances, in which he deliberately presented himself as “other,” reminding them, as had Merrill’s letter, that he was an Arab and not really American, and thus not deserving of any extraordinary effort.

Congress officially withdrew Arbeely’s nomination on 25 May 1886, simultaneous with Cleveland’s nomination of Henry Gillman of Michigan to the post. Arbeely submitted his final accounts on 25 June and made a last sightseeing trip in July, traveling with Floyd to the Jordan Valley. Gillman arrived in November, and Arbeely left soon afterwards. His health had been so adversely affected by the stress that he would have to go to Damascus to recover; to add insult to injury, he had to fight to be reimbursed for the expenses he incurred in Jerusalem.<sup>38</sup> He had been in Palestine for a year, struggling in vain for a position he never assumed.<sup>39</sup>

## After Jerusalem

Arbeely didn’t return to the United States for more than a year, perhaps reluctant to show his face in America so soon after the debacle.<sup>40</sup> After his return in December 1887, with the wound still raw, he wrote a long letter to President Cleveland describing the humiliations he had suffered at Merrill’s hands: “My defeat was caused by a conspiracy connived at by some of these [consulate] employees together with ‘Cooks Tourist Company,’ which had acquired the actual control of the Consulate during my predecessor’s time.” But he also brought up the vexed question of the rights of naturalized citizens in the Ottoman Empire: “To abide by such a precedent would be to practically deny me with a large number of others, the invaluable rights of ‘American citizenship.’”<sup>41</sup> He again begged the President for an alternative diplomatic appointment; this plea too went unanswered.

Despite what must have been a bitter disappointment, he resumed his life in the United States and made the best of it. He was ever after referred to as “Ex-Consul Arbeely” – perhaps he insisted on it – and was careful to keep the details of his defeat a secret. In an 1888 newspaper interview, almost two years after leaving Jerusalem, he said, “In 1885 President Cleveland appointed me Consul at Jerusalem, and I retained that position until a few months ago, when I resigned in order that I might devote myself to my pet project – the fostering of commercial relations between the United States and Egypt and Turkey.”<sup>42</sup>

He settled in New York and resumed lecturing on the “Customs and Manners of the Inhabitants of the Holy Land,” now armed with first-hand knowledge. On one notable occasion, he assembled a troupe of Syrians to perform for 1,500 Shriners in New York’s Madison Square.<sup>43</sup> He was hired as an interpreter at Ellis Island in 1890 and promoted to inspector in 1895, eventually earning a salary of 1,000 dollars a year. His growing family (he married in 1892) required that he supplement his Ellis Island salary: he imported and sold Syrian goods; purchased concessions at the many world’s



Figure 6. The front page of *Kawkab America*, 27 January 1893.



Figure 7. Memorial card for Nageeb, 1904. Courtesy of Habeeb Joseph Arbeely and Dania Arbeely, Houston, Texas.

fairs, which he then rented out to Syrian merchants; acted as agent for various Syrian businesses; and worked as a notary public (“in six languages”), all of which he continued to do throughout his life.

He was one of only two Syrian members of the American Oriental Society. He claimed to have written and then translated a book on Syrian antiquities and to contribute regularly to the Cairo literary journal *al-Muqtataf*.<sup>44</sup> Perhaps his greatest achievement and certainly his most lasting legacy, however, was founding with his brother Abraham the first Arabic newspaper in the western hemisphere, *Kawkab America*, in 1892.<sup>45</sup> It was read all over the United States and its territories, in the Caribbean and in Central and South America, and in the Ottoman Empire itself. The newspaper promoted Syrian immigration and fostered dialogue both within the diaspora and between members of the diaspora and those still at home. Its press published the first Arabic books in the United States, including a massive Arabic–English phrase book written by Abraham.<sup>46</sup> Nageeb became the person American reporters appealed to when they wanted an expert opinion on Syrian immigration or the cultural or political views of Syrians in America, and he wrote frequently to the New York papers, defending Syrians and the Syrian colony from aspersions cast on them. The fact that he spoke fluent English certainly helped, as did his willingness to opine on almost any subject. Nageeb thus fulfilled, in a way, his father’s dream of paving the way for Syrians in America.

Nageeb Arbeely suffered a stroke in 1900, forcing him to give up the newspaper and his job at Ellis Island. Planning to take up again the legal career he had abandoned

in Tennessee, he was admitted to the New York Bar in October of 1903, but this career was cut short by his death a few months later at the age of 42. He died intestate, leaving assets worth less than 200 dollars.<sup>47</sup> The family lost their Brooklyn home and the property Nageeb had bought in California, and his widow was forced to take a job at Ellis Island to support her six young children (the youngest born after his father’s death), a sad aftermath to the pioneering life journey of “Ex-Consul” Nageeb J. Arbeely.

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#### Endnotes

- 1 The term “Syria” as used in this paper refers not to the present-day nation-state, but to Greater Syria, which included Lebanon and Palestine as well as parts of today’s Syria.
- 2 For a summary of the family’s life, see my blog, [kalimahpress.com/blog/the-first-syrian-immigrant-family/](http://kalimahpress.com/blog/the-first-syrian-immigrant-family/).
- 3 “Seeking Freedom from Mussulman Rule,” *New-York Daily Tribune*, 23 August 1878.
- 4 At least that is what was reported in the American press. “Free at Last,” *New York Herald*, 25 August 1878, 4. The law stated that an alien had to be in the country two years before he or she could file first papers, so perhaps the newspaper mistook Joseph’s stated intention to become a citizen for the act itself.
- 5 It is not clear whether he had been offered this job before he departed Beirut or whether it came to him only after he arrived.
- 6 “Syrian Christians Seeking Homes in Texas,” *Knoxville Daily Chronicle*, 1 January 1879, 1.
- 7 Indeed, this photograph comes from the Arbeely family in Houston, TX, the descendants of Yusef’s brother Habib who remained in Damascus.
- 8 He was credited with speaking between seven and sixteen languages, exaggerations he himself probably put about. In his first application letter, he claimed to speak six and read nine. Nageeb Joseph Arbeely to President Chester Arthur, 17 July 1884, Washington, DC (datelined “YMCA Building, New York Ave.”), in National Archives and Records Administration [NARA] RG 59, Letters of Application and Recommendation for Public Office for the Hayes-Garfield-Arthur Administrations, Box 3.

- 9 Their performances are captured in a series of wonderful photographs housed at the National Anthropological Archives of the Smithsonian Institution. See, for example, [siris-archives.si.edu/ipac20/ipac.jsp?&profile=all&source=~!siarchives&uri=full=3100001~!53952~!0#focus](http://siris-archives.si.edu/ipac20/ipac.jsp?&profile=all&source=~!siarchives&uri=full=3100001~!53952~!0#focus) (accessed 30 November 2016). Most of these images are dated either 1887 or 1889, but judging by the brothers’ appearance, they were taken earlier.
- 10 Joseph and his two youngest sons, Habeeb and Nasseem, all attended Earlham College, a Quaker school in Richmond, Indiana, between 1885 and 1888; the young men became Quakers during that time. I have found no evidence that any other family members were Quakers.
- 11 Nageeb J. Arbeely to President Chester A. Arthur, 17 July 1884, Washington, DC (datelined “YMCA Building, New York Ave.”), in NARA RG 59, Letters of Application and Recommendation for Public Office for the Hayes-Garfield-Arthur Administrations, Box 3. The letter – beautifully penned (it seems not to be Arbeely’s handwriting) and in perfect English, with calligraphed Arabic salutation and signature – begins: “Encouraged by a deep conviction in your magnanimity as a sympathizing President who would not withhold encouragement from one of Syria’s struggling sons . . .” Where he got the idea to apply for this rather exalted post is not clear.
- 12 One of those he appealed to for support was James D. Porter, former governor of Tennessee, who became assistant secretary of state under Cleveland.
- 13 Nageeb J. Arbeely to Secretary of State T. F. Bayard, 9 October 1885, Washington, DC

- (datelined “Temple Hotel, City”), in NARA RG 59, Letters of Application and Recommendation for Public Office for the Cleveland-Harrison Administrations, Box 3. It is difficult not to see these claims as exaggerations or fabrications, since he came to the United States as a seventeen-year-old boy and had not left the country; when might he have traveled to, much less lived or done business in these cities?
- 14 Merrill served three terms as consul – from 1882 to 1885, 1891 to 1893, and 1898 to 1907 – all under Republican presidents.
  - 15 Ruth Kark, *American Consuls in the Holy Land, 1832–1914* (Jerusalem and Detroit: Magnes Press, Hebrew University, and Wayne State University Press, 1994), 323. As Kark notes, the “qualifications” of consular applicants varied widely and were rarely relevant to their consular duties; Arbeely, with six languages and a law degree, seems to have been exceptional.
  - 16 “Dreams and Diplomacy in the Holy Land: American Consuls in Jerusalem in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century,” an exhibition of the National Library of Israel, Jerusalem, 19 March 2013–2 March 2016, online at [www.shapell.org/exhibitions/dreams-and-diplomacy-in-the-holy-land/](http://www.shapell.org/exhibitions/dreams-and-diplomacy-in-the-holy-land/) (accessed 1 November 2016). Goldman also notes Merrill’s “intense disdain” for the Jews. Shalom Goldman, “The Holy Land Appropriated: The Careers of Selah Merrill, Nineteenth Century Christian Hebraist, Palestine Explorer, and U.S. Consul in Jerusalem,” *American Jewish History*, 85, no. 2 (June 1997): 152.
  - 17 Merrill was said to have “denounced every member of the Colony as immoral, declaring that the stench of their ‘goings-on’ was the most putrid odor in the nostrils of Jerusalem.” Alexander Hume Ford, “Our American Colony at Jerusalem,” *Appleton’s Magazine* 8, no. 6 (December 1906): 652. Bertha Spafford Vester details at length the antipathy Merrill exhibited toward the American Colony over the many years he served, as well as the colony’s decades-long attempts to have him censured if not removed. Bertha Spafford Vester, *Our Jerusalem: An American Family in the Holy City, 1881–1949* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1950). In 1908, the American Colony noted that it had sought “relief . . . in vain through cablegrams, letters, petitions and affidavits of facts, from ourselves and many others on our behalf.” American Colony to Theodore Roosevelt, 8 March 1908, Jerusalem, online at [www.loc.gov/item/mamcol.034/](http://www.loc.gov/item/mamcol.034/) (accessed 20 January 2017). See also Note 39 below.
  - 18 “Our Ex-Consul at Jerusalem,” *Washington Post*, 5 April 1886, 2. Perhaps submitted by a member of the American Colony, this article appeared only a month before Arbeely’s appointment was rescinded, suggesting that his accreditation was still seen as possible.
  - 19 In a letter to Rolla Floyd, Samuel Cox promised that he would “look after your interest as an American and will protest against the U.S. Consulate being all English—.” Envoy Samuel Cox to Rolla Floyd, 5 January 1886, Istanbul (datelined “United States Legation, Constantinople”), in Helen Palmer Parsons, ed. *Letters from Palestine, 1868–1912* (n.p.: Privately printed, 1981), 100. The fact that Merrill was reappointed to the post not once, but twice, indicates that none of these charges was taken seriously.
  - 20 Floyd to his sister Aurilla Tabbutt, 18 October 1885, Jaffa, in Parsons, *Letters*, 95–96.
  - 21 Floyd to Tabbutt, 17 November 1885, Jaffa, in Parsons, *Letters*, 96.
  - 22 Nageeb J. Arbeely to Bayard, 16 December 1885, Constantinople, in NARA M453. Roll 3, 2 January 1880–27 December 1885.
  - 23 In her one reference to Arbeely, Vester cites a letter from her mother written on New Year’s Day, 1886: “In the evening Mr. Arbeely, the new American Consul, came to tea and spent the evening. All of our Mohammedan friends came and were so glad to see him. They gave him a hearty welcome.” Vester, *Our Jerusalem*, 149. See also “Dreams and Diplomacy in the Holy Land,” online at [www.shapell.org/exhibitions/dreams-and-diplomacy-in-the-holy-land/](http://www.shapell.org/exhibitions/dreams-and-diplomacy-in-the-holy-land/).
  - 24 Floyd to Tabbutt datelined “Jaffa, January 24, 1886,” in Parsons, *Letters*, 99.
  - 25 Cox to Floyd dated January 5, 1886, reproduced in Floyd to Tabbutt datelined “Jaffa, January 24, 1886,” in Parsons, *Letters*, 100.
  - 26 Nageeb J. Arbeely to Bayard, 16 December 1885 (see Note 21 above) and note from one J. J. Coughlin to a Mr. Bartle, 4 January 1886, confirming receipt of the request. NARA, RG 59, Letters of Application and Recommendation for Public Office for the Cleveland-Harrison Administrations, Box 3.
  - 27 Ainsworth R. Spofford, ed., *The American Almanac and Treasury of Facts for the Year 1886* (New York and Washington: American News Company, 1886), 168.
  - 28 Floyd to Tabbutt, 12 July 1886, Jaffa, in Parsons, *Letters*, 105.
  - 29 For a description of the history of negotiations between the two countries, see Leland J. Gordon, “The Turkish American Controversy over Nationality,” *American Journal of International Law* 25, no. 4 (1 October 1931): 658–669.
  - 30 Gordon, “Controversy,” 660. A number of American newspaper articles quoted naturalized Syrian-Americans about their unpleasant experiences when they returned to Turkey: they were taxed, harassed, threatened with the draft and had their American citizenship denied.
  - 31 “We may no longer regard him as our appointed Consul, but we cannot cease to regard him as a citizen whom we are to protect in all lawful

- exercise of his personal rights if they be called in question.” Bayard to Cox, 24 March 1886, Washington, DC (datelined “Department of State”), in NARA M77, Diplomatic Instructions of the Department of State, 1801–1906, “Turkey.”
- 32 Bayard to Cox, 29 April 1886, Washington, DC (datelined “Department of State”), in NARA M77, Diplomatic Instructions of the Department of State, 1801–1906, “Turkey.” There were several cases brought before the American envoy in Constantinople in which the envoy was forced to agree that, by Ottoman law, without specific authorization of the Turkish government, a Turkish subject’s American naturalization was considered null and void. In Arbeely’s case, however, this justification was unnecessary, since the Porte had the absolute right to refuse a nominated consul.
- 33 This was Mehmet Sharif Rauf Pasha, whom Merrill referred to as the “pasha of Jerusalem.” Merrill to Assistant Secretary of State Porter, 22 January 1886, Jerusalem (datelined “Consulate of the United States”), NARA M453, Despatches from U.S. Consuls in Jerusalem, Palestine, 1856–1906, Roll 4, 2 January 1886–20 December 1889.
- 34 Merrill to Assistant Secretary of State Porter, 22 January 1886, Jerusalem.
- 35 Nageeb J. Arbeely to Bayard, 15 March 1886, Jerusalem (datelined “Hotel Feil”), in NARA M453, Roll 4. The letter is divided into three parts. The first was Arbeely’s defense. The second, signed by more than 50 men (with “Rolla Floyd, American Citizen” being the last and largest signature), stated in part, “His appointment to this post is regarded by us, and the community at large, as one of the best the American Government has hitherto made.” The third, with 15 signatures said, “Having known N.J. Arbeely, Esq. and his estimable family personally & their high standing in Syria, we can say that the unscrupulous misrepresentations and fabrications made against him by his oponents [sic] have only increased the love & respect of the people of Jerusalem towards him as they have their contempt & condemnation against his unprincipilled [sic] assailants.”
- 36 Transcript of telegram from Nageeb J. Arbeely to Bayard, 30 April 1886, Jerusalem, in NARA M453, Roll 4.
- 37 Joseph Awad Arbeely to Bayard, 27 June 1886, Indiana (on Earlham College stationery, datelined “Ind.”), in NARA, RG 59, Letters of Application and Recommendation for Public Office for the Cleveland-Harrison Administrations, Box 3.
- 38 Nageeb J. Arbeely to Department of State, 1 June 1886, Jerusalem (datelined “Consulate of the United States”), in NARA M453, Roll 4.
- 39 An intriguing footnote is an official letter dated 15 January 1886 from the committee on commerce of the U.S. Senate to the secretary of state requesting “all papers and information bearing on the conduct in office of Sela [sic] Merrill Consul of the United States at Jerusalem and touching the appointment of Nageeb B.[sic] Arbeely to that office.” A note records that Arbeely’s file was sent to the committee two weeks later, but there is no mention of Merrill’s having been sent. Was this request an indication that the American Colony’s complaints had been heard? There is no evidence that the committee ever considered the case. NARA, RG 59, Letters of Application and Recommendation for Public Office for the Cleveland-Harrison Administrations, Box 3.
- 40 Arbeely presumably met his future wife – a Greek woman from Alexandria – at this time. Kark says Arbeely was recalled to Washington only on 11 November 1887, which would jibe with his December arrival in New York but which was a full year after Gillman was in place. Kark, *American Consuls*, 326.
- 41 Nageeb J. Arbeely to President Cleveland, undated (early 1888), Washington, DC (datelined “Temple Hotel, 9<sup>th</sup> and F, City”), in NARA, RG 59, Letters of Application and Recommendation for Public Office for the Cleveland-Harrison Administrations, Box 3.
- 42 “In Aid of Turkish Trade,” *New York Herald*, 23 April 1888, 9. He was obviously covering up his defeat—understandably, as it must have been a source of embarrassment—but his grandiose claims to mercantile acumen in the article were also highly exaggerated.
- 43 “An Oriental Entertainment for the Mystic Shriners,” *Kawkab America* (English page), 20 January 1893.
- 44 Both of these claims, which I have been unable to verify, come from Arbeely; either or both could be false. See: “In Aid of Turkish Trade.”
- 45 The first four years (1892–1896) of the newspaper survive and are available online at [dds.crl.edu/crldelivery/19879](http://dds.crl.edu/crldelivery/19879). For a description of the newspaper’s founding and its contents, see Linda K. Jacobs, *Strangers in the West: The Syrian Colony of New York City, 1880–1900* (New York: Kalimah Press, 2015), 263–270.
- 46 Abraham J. Arbeely, *Al-Bakoorat al-Gharbeyat Fee Taleem al-Lughat al-Englezeeyat: The First Occidental Fruit for the Teaching of the English (and Arabic) Languages* (New York: Oriental Publishing House, 1896). The transliteration and translation are Arbeely’s as they appear on the title page. See: [babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=umn.31951001549595g;view=1up;seq=5](http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=umn.31951001549595g;view=1up;seq=5) (accessed 25 November 2016).
- 47 New York, King’s County Estate Files, 1866–1923.