

MOSES MYERS OF NORFOLK

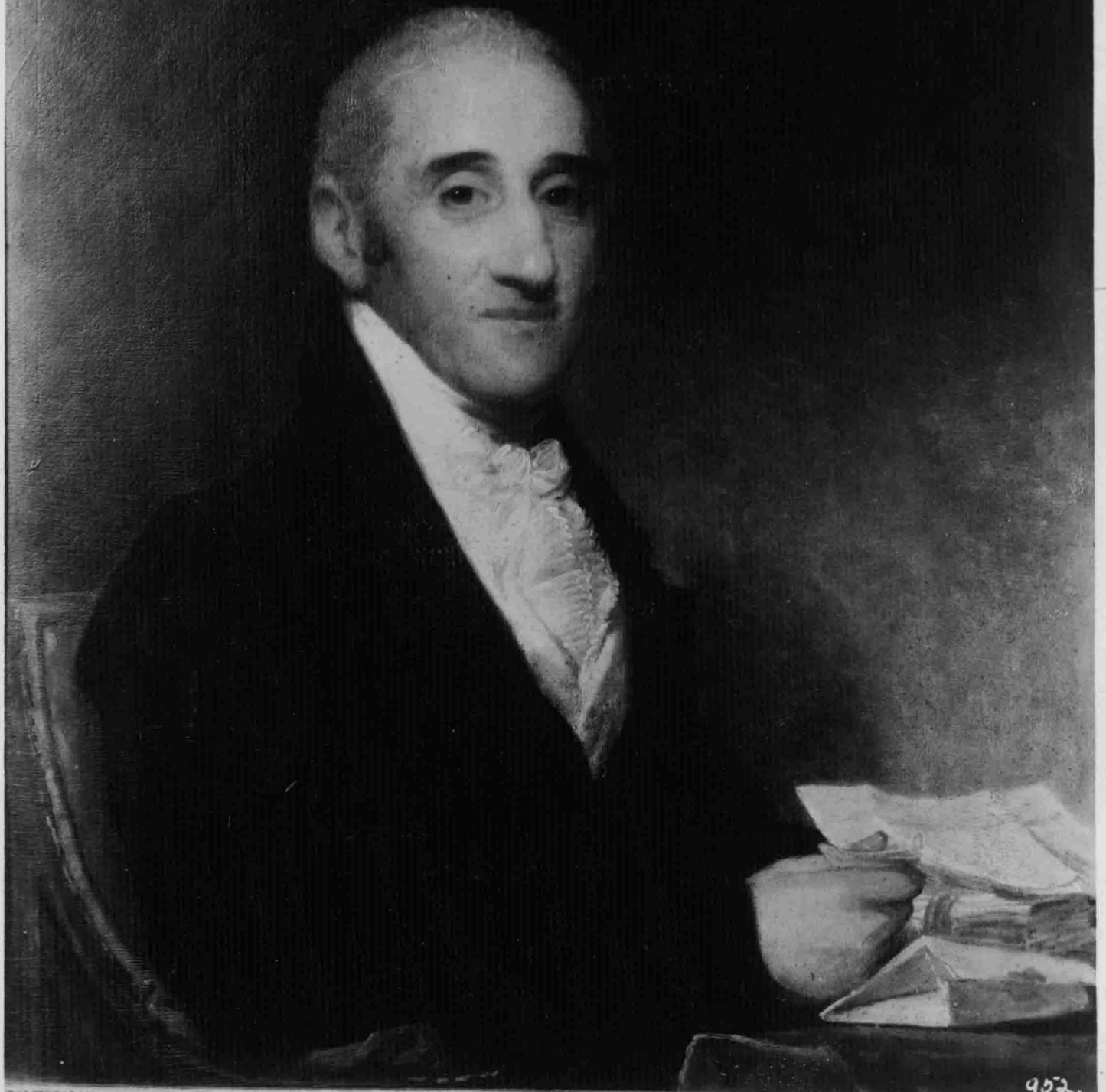
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MOSES MYERS  
By Gilbert Stuart

## PREFACE

The author of this paper feels he must express his debt of gratitude to the many scholars who helped him and encouraged him in his work. He found the people who work in the field of history a generous breed of men and women, always ready to lend a helping hand, always willing to share information and data hard to find. Some of them made available to the author the fruits of their own research; others helped him in the laborious work of tracking down bits of information, here and there.

Special mention must be made here of the help given to the author, by Dr. R. C. McDanel, under whose direction this thesis was written, Rabbi Malcolm H. Stern, of Norfolk, Virginia, and Miss Mary Churchill Brown, on the staff of the Public Library of Norfolk. Miss Katherine Barton Myers very graciously made available to the author the family papers in her possession.

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## INTRODUCTION

We often feel that life to-day is difficult and full of trouble. We sometimes wonder how we can stand the strain of it all. It is advisable, when such a mood comes upon us, to turn to the story of America's pioneers, those brave men and women who faced life with such steadfastness that their example cannot fail to inspire us.

Moses Myers was a child of the revolutionary era. He lived in an age of world chaos. His eyes saw the American Revolution, the French Revolution, the War of 1812, and the Panic of 1819. During those upheavals he both made and lost fortunes. He raised a large family and lived through the sorrow of seeing them die, one after another. In the last years of his life he was penniless, but he remained indomitable to the end. That is why his life is worth studying; it is a story of courage and faith.

## HYAM MYERS

For a number of years, a great controversy raged on, in learned circles, over the question of heredity versus environment. One school of psychology taught that man is entirely the product of his environment, while the other made the same claim for heredity. As late as 1924, J. B. Watson could write: "Give me a dozen healthy infants, well-formed, and my own specific world to bring them up in and I'll guarantee to take anyone at random and train him to become any type specialist I might select -- doctor, lawyer, artist, merchant-chief, and yes, even beggar-man and thief, regardless of his talents, penchants, tendencies, abilities, vocations, and race of his ancestors."<sup>1</sup>

Today, however, a saner and calmer point of view prevails. It is held that both heredity and environment interact in the development of human character. Heredity deals the cards; environment plays them. Now, since "the potential

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1. J.B. Watson, Behaviorism, p.82, quoted in LaPiere and Farnsworth, Social Psychology, p.32.

range of the historian is as wide as life itself"<sup>2</sup> history, without entering into the polemics of the matter, has always been interested in both of them, and so, in this study of the life of Moses Myers, it is not amiss to cast a backward glance at the life of his father, Hyam Myers, the immigrant who came to America and established a family that is flourishing and rendering public service even today.

In the 18th century, an ocean voyage across the broad North Atlantic from Europe to the Continental Colonies was still a venture to be undertaken only by the brave. The trip could take anywhere from four to eleven weeks,<sup>3</sup> and the ships of those days were far from being luxury liners. Yet, despite all the difficulties, thousands of brave men and women travelled this turbulent ocean highway in their search for religious liberty and economic opportunity. One of those who made this venturesome journey was Hyam Myers, a native of Amsterdam, who settled in New York.<sup>4</sup>

Some authorities believe that the name Myers is a very ancient and honorable one given to only the most distinguished families, since the Hebrew word Myer means "a bearer of light," but others hold that the name is derived from a river in the Bishopric of Sulzburgh and from a town

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2. H.C. Hockett, Introduction to Research in American History, p.XI

3. J.C.Ryle, The Christian Leaders of England in the Eighteenth Century, p.74.

4. S.Oppenheim, "The Jews and Masonry," Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society (PAJHS), XIX (1910), p.73n. -

in Lower Germany.<sup>5</sup> Be that as it may, it appears that Hyam Myers had little more than his name when he began his search for fame and fortune, in the year 1750.

In his need, Hyam Myers applied to the Shearith Israel Congregation of New York for the position of Shocket Ubodeck (Ritual Slaughterer and Examiner). This post had paid the previous incumbent thirty-five pounds per annum,<sup>6</sup> not much of a salary, but no worse than what most curates were receiving in those days,<sup>7</sup> and far better than the salary £16/18/8 that Judah Monis received as instructor of Hebrew at Harvard in 1750.<sup>8</sup> Yet, though Shearith Israel was the oldest and most prominent Jewish congregation in the country, it was not beyond taking advantage of the lonely bachelor.

Knowing, as congregations will, that a bachelor can get along with much less than a family man requires, it offered him not the thirty-five pounds per annum received by the previous incumbent, but only ten pounds per annum the tongues of all the animals he might slaughter, the payment of his ferriage across the river to the slaughterhouse, and the seals of his office. Hyam apparently had no better offer, so he accepted and the congregation magnanimously "Resolved

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5. M. Vexer, "Naturalization Roll of Jews of New York," PAJHS, XXXVII (1947), p.379.

6. "The Earliest Extant Minute Books of the Spanish and Portuguese Congregation Shearith Israel in New York, 1728-1786," PAJHS, XXI (1913), p.60-61.

7. A.S. Turberville, ed., Johnson's England....., I, p.25.

8. L.M. Friedman, Early American Jews, p.166n.



at the same time that the Tsedakah (charity fund) shall pay unto Jacob Hays for the support of his family £25 pr annum being the Remmening (sic) of what the former Sochet did receive."<sup>9</sup>

Small was his salary but big was his soul. He was a man of character and integrity and he showed it at every step. When the High Holidays came around Hyam did not plead poverty but paid a high pew rent of fifteen shillings, even as the most established businessman might have done.<sup>10</sup> Such conduct as this found favor in the eyes of the congregation, and so, when his year of service was up Shearith Israel raised his pay to twenty-five pounds per annum.<sup>11</sup>

Hyam found favor in other eyes too, and so it came about that some two months after his salary was raised he married Miss Rachel Louzada; M. Seixas and Benjamin Perreyra were the witnesses.<sup>12</sup> The young lady's father, Moses Louzada, had died intestate in 1750,<sup>13</sup> leaving his entire estate tied

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9. PAJHS, XXI (1912), p.61

10. Ibid., p.63.

11. Ibid., p.64. Dr. J.R. Marcus, in Early American Jewry the Jews of New York New England and Canada 1649-1794, says "Myers began at the bottom, the very bottom. But he was not so poor that he could not afford to marry the following year. His job as shohet paid him £10 a year...." This overlooks the raise in salary and the dowery that made the marriage possible.

12. "Miscellaneous Items Relating to Jews in New York," PAJHS, XXVII (1920), p.150.

13. "Early Jews in Middlesex County, New Jersey," PAJHS, XXXIII (1934), p.252.

up to an imbecile son, but nevertheless he had apparently had the foresight to leave his daughter's dowery in the clear, for we find that Rachel Louzada brought Hyam Myers a dowery of one hundred pounds in New York currency.<sup>14</sup>

Only one thing more was needed to fill Hyam Myers' cup to overflowing -- children, and soon he was blessed with that gift too. Thus the humble immigrant rose in the new world to a life of dignity and honor, but one cannot live on honor alone. Even after his salary had been raised it was still quite low. Low salaries were the rule in colonial days for all ministers and all the supplements that were resorted to were still inadequate. In Sandwich, the parson got a part of every whale that came ashore; in Newbury, the first salmon caught in the weir belonged to the parson; in Plymouth the minister was allowed free pasturage for his horse at the burial ground, and had to be told, "Please do not bring too many horses, as the head stones at Plymouth burial ground are getting badly injured."<sup>15</sup> Other gentlemen of the cloth had to find odd jobs to eke out a living, and a Parson Everitt of Sandwich earned an extra three dollars a year for cleaning his church.<sup>16</sup>

Hyam Myers, after serving the congregation for nine years, was ready to try his luck at something else in

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14. MS: American Jewish Historical Society Library, 2249.

15. A.D. Gray, "The Minister's Salary in Colonial Days and Later," The Homiletic Review...., LXXXI (July to December 1935), p.19.

16. Ibid., p.20.

the hope of bettering himself. On January 16, 1750, he was naturalized,<sup>17</sup> and that year he gave up his job with the congregation.<sup>18</sup>

For better or for worse, Hyam Myers was now a merchant. To become a merchant seems to have been the ideal and goal of the immigrant in those days. The immigrant was willing to start at the bottom if by so doing he might ultimately have a chance of getting to the top. Still, business in those days carried no guarantee of success with it. If there was money to be made in the Indian trade in those days, it must not be forgotten that there was danger in it too, for the Indian could be, at times, an ugly customer. In time, Hyam discovered that the life of a colonial merchant was not an easy one.

The conquest of Quebec in 1759 seemed to many American merchants to open up a great new market for their wares. Among those who recognized the potentialities of that trade was Hyam Myers. Soon he was so deeply in it that he had to go to Montreal and Quebec, despite the fact that this meant leaving his family for long periods of time. Still he would always get back to his home when it was important for him to be there. Thus in 1762, when his son Jacob was

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17. L.Huhner, "Naturalization of Jews in New York under the Act of 1740", PAJHS, XLII (1905), p.6.

18. Marcus, op.cit., p.219.

born, Hyam was at home waiting for the event <sup>19</sup> and for the circumcision which took place on July 8. <sup>20</sup>

That same year, Hyam sent a gift of one hundred pounds of wax to the newly established synagogue at Newport, Rhode Island. <sup>21</sup> Hyam though he had become a business man had lost none of his piety. Another kind of man might have been content to leave his family in New York while transacting business in Montreal, but not Hyam Myers, and so we find him moving his family to Canada in 1763. <sup>22</sup> He engaged in the Indian trade but all did not go well.

Hyam now developed some novel ideas on how to recoup himself for his losses in the Indian trade. He thought that since he had lost money on the Indians, he would make money out of the Indians, so he embarked for Europe, and took with him two Mohawk Indians, Sychnecta and Trosoghroga, apparently intending to use them for a side show. <sup>23</sup>

He had, however, neglected to obtain a proper certificate from Sir William Johnson to permit him to take the Indians to Europe. An outstanding Jewish gentleman, Sampson Simson, tried to help him out, and wrote a letter on his behalf to William Darlington asking that worthy to apply to

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19. Marcus, op.cit., p.222.

20. PAJHS, XXVII (1920), p.152.

21. Marcus, op.cit., p.222.

22. Ibid., p.223.

23. R.E. Day, comp., calendar of the sir William Johnson Manuscripts in the New York State Library, p.207.

Johnson for such a permit.<sup>24</sup>

Unfortunately this letter was destroyed, and only these few facts are available about it. The letter was written on February 27, 1764, when Hyam and his Mohawks were already at sea.<sup>25</sup> Had Hyam spoken or written directly to Johnson before he sailed away, he would have stood a better chance of success. Not having done so, he was in a bad position when questions arose.

The storm took some time before breaking over his head, but trouble arose when the following advertisement was printed:

To the Public: There is to be seen at the Sun Tavern, facing York-Buildings, in the Strand, Two Indian Warriors of the Mohawk Nation; the one is a Brother of the noted Capt. Jacobs, a famous Warrior....The above are personally known by many Gentlemen, Officers now in Town. They wear their Country Dress, with Belts of Wampum; likewise Tomahawks, Scalping-Knives, Bows, Arrows, and other Things too tedious to be mentioned. To be seen from Ten in the Morning till Six in the Evening. Each Person to pay One. Shilling.<sup>26</sup>

The day after this announcement appeared, proceedings were brought before the House of Lords, and the following day, the Lords were informed that "John Schuppe, who keeps the Sun-tavern in the Strand, where the two Indians are shown, and Hyam Myers, were attending without, pursuant to their

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24. Ibid.

25. Ibid.

26. C. T. Foreman, Indians Abroad 1493-1938, p. 83, quoting The Gazetteer and Daily Advertiser, March 4, 1765.

lordships' order."<sup>27</sup>

After this the newspapers gave this matter their fullest attention. Letters from distant places began to arrive and to fill out the picture. One such letter stated that

A Jew having trappaned into this country two Americans, uncle and nephew, of a nation bordering on Pennsylvania, took it into his head to make a shew of them. He exposed the nephew here, and the uncle at Amsterdam: but two persons of the first rank in this country, fired with indignation at seeing two foreigners kept for public shew, who were born free, tho' savages, caused them to be set at liberty; and Sir Joseph Yorke, the British Ambassador, provided them with necessaries for passage to London, from whence they will be conducted to their own country.

Before their departure they were introduced to a ball, where, on request, they set up a war-whoop used among their own people. As they could speak a little English, we had the curiosity to know what they thought of the European ladies; and they frankly declared they gave preference to the women of their own country.<sup>28</sup>

Apparently, these very interested bystanders felt that making a war-whoop at a ball wasn't quite the same thing as making it at some tavern at a charge of one shilling for every spectator. Apparently the question about the Indians' preferences in women, was not due to any desire to pry; at least that's the newspaper's attitude.

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27. Ibid., quoting unnamed sources.

28. Ibid., pp.83-4, quoting The Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser, March 8, 1765. Printed also in The Pennsylvania Gazette, June 20, 1765.

In the House of Lords matters went a little better for Hyam. Schuppe, the tavern keeper, had this to say:

The said Hyam Myers hired a room of him eight days, in order to shew two Indian Warriors he had brought from America; that they had been shewn there for eight days, at 1s. each person; that they have their meals regularly, and drink nothing stronger than small beer.<sup>29</sup>

When Hyam told his side of the story, he claimed that the whole idea had come from the Indians and not from him. He had been about to set sail from New York when these two Mohawks met him and asked him to take them "to England to see their father; but having no money to pay their passage, he first consulted his friends about it, who advised him to bring them over, as he might reimburse himself the expense of their passage by shewing them."<sup>30</sup> So Hyam took them with him. When they landed in Bristol, Hyam left the Indians in charge of an interpreter while he went on to London, but the interpreter, during Hyam's absence, took one of the Indians to Amsterdam and sold him there.<sup>31</sup>

When Hyam discovered this, he took the remaining Indian with him to Amsterdam and tried to get the other one back, "but, notwithstanding all his endeavors, he could not get him again, being cast in a cause which he insti-

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29. Ibid., quoting unnamed source.

30. Ibid.

31. Ibid.

tuted there for that purpose." Finding no other way out, he went to The Hague where he applied to Sir Joseph Yorke for help. With such powerful intervention, he at last got his Indian back again.

Hyam told the Lords that Sir Joseph

... desired him to carry them back to their own country, by way of England, ... that he accordingly brought them to England, but being distressed for money he had shewn them in order to reimburse himself the expense he had already been at and also to enable him to carry them back to their own country.<sup>33</sup>

Not long after this the newspapers reported:

A bill has passed the House of Lords, to prevent any free Indian, under his Majesty's Protection, from being carried by Sea from any of his Majesty's Colonies in America, without a proper License for that Purpose.<sup>34</sup>

This brought the matter to an end and Hyam probably sustained considerable losses in this enterprise.

This act of Hyam's has been spoken of as <sup>35</sup> "the dastardly exploitation of the two Mohawk Indians." One fails to see why this should be so considered. The Indians, according to the testimony of the tavern keeper, had been well treated. They hadn't worked too hard either. Their hours of labor, from ten in the morning to six at night, would be considered good even by modern union leaders. They had seen Europe, and on their return to their

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32. Ibid., quoting unnamed source.

33. Ibid.

34. Ibid., quoting The Ipswich Journal, April 6, 1765.

35. Ibid., p. 25.



own people they would be famous. Besides all this, Hyam had broken no law.

While it is true that " ... law may be defined as the ethical minimum"<sup>36</sup> we have no right to say that a man who abides by that minimum is guilty of "dastardly exploitation." We would be a very happy people if everyone observed the law even though that would mean that they were only observing the ethical minimum. Hyam was a child of this generation, living by its moral code, and adhering to its standards. Had there been a law on the subject he would have honored it; since there was no law, he had felt free to act in the way that he did.

Hyam returned home to meet other problems. The years went by, bringing joys and sorrows. Mrs. Myers found giving birth a terrible ordeal. On one such occasion she nearly lost her life, and Hyam, in his honest way, felt compelled to put the whole story in the newspaper:

To the Public:

Whereas it has been industrially reported, by some ill-minded persons, that Mrs. Susanna Furth of Quebec, mid-wife, was blameable and unskilful in her profession, especially in laying the wife of me the subscriber, whereby the child was dead born: This is therefore to acquaint the public that when the said Mrs. Furth found that my wife had not her labouring pains as

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36. W. M. Urban, Fundamentals of Ethics an Introduction to Moral Philosophy, p. 24.

usual, she desired the assistance of a doctor, and in every other respect behaved herself as a skilful person, and gave great satisfaction to every one present; nor was the least blamable, but on the contrary it is verily believed that she was the means of saving the life of the mother.

And I do declare that on any like occasion I would employ her again and recommend her to my friends.

Quebec, 10th December, 1767.<sup>37</sup> Hyam Myers.

One wonders how Mrs. Myers felt about this airing in the press the full details of her misfortune, but for Hyam there was no other way.

When the American Revolution broke out, Hyam got into trouble. When he was asked to fight against the Americans, he refused because his sympathies were with the rebelling colonies. Naturally, Colonel McLean, the com-  
mandant, ordered his arrest.<sup>38</sup> After that, the Canadian air no longer suited Hyam, so he set out on a voyage to England.

While in England, he was of great service to his Canadian co-religionists. There was a great shortage of clergymen in Canada in those days, and those that were there were often a disgrace. A report on the Church of England at Quebec and Montreal, in those days, gives this sad information: "At Quebec, the only clergyman is

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37. Marcus, op. cit., p. 223, quoting the Quebec Gazette, December 17, 1767.

38. L. M. Friedman, Early American Jews, p. 17.

a very old Swede, who cannot speak a word of plain English. At Montreal the case is the same. At Three Rivers the situation may be called shameful ...."<sup>39</sup> The Jews of Canada didn't want this kind of a clergyman, so Hyam, who had once been a clergyman, was the ideal person to look the field over for them, and to find them a spiritual leader. Soon

... an agreement was entered into on February 13, 1778, between Hyam Myers, on behalf of the Jews in Canada, and Reverend Jacob Raphael Cohen who undertook to act in the capacity of 'Shochet, Hazan, Teacher and Reader' for the Jews of Montreal.<sup>40</sup>

Thus Hyam was responsible for the hiring of Canada's first Jewish Minister.

On the return trip, despite the pious axiom that those who travel in a good cause will never suffer any damages, Hyam was captured and held as a prisoner of war by an American privateer. This didn't please him at all, and he filed a petition to the "Honorable Council of the State of Massachusetts Bay" on July 13, 1778, saying:

That Hyam Myers is a merchant and broker in Quebec, of good character and friendly to the cause of Liberty, having a son, an officer in the American army, and he himself was imprisoned by Col. McLean at Que-

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39. B. G. Sack, History of the Jews in Canada from the Earliest Beginnings to the Present Day, I, p. 62, quoting Report on Canadian Archives, 1890, p. 168.

40. Ibid.

bec at the breaking out of these troubles, because he refused to bear arms against the Americans, the sd Myers was taken prisoner in the Gulph of St. Lawrence, by the Harlequin Privateer of Salem and arrived this day. Wherefore your petitioner prays that he may be admitted upon his parole and not be confined on board the Guard Ship ... 41

Hyam's petition was successful. He " ... was placed at liberty on condition that he would remain within the town limits of Salem." <sup>42</sup>

When the war was over, many Canadians hoped that they too would benefit from the victory of the United States over Britain, in that the colonial administrators would now understand that overseas possessions must be given liberty and freedom in order to keep them happy, but those hopes were not realized. On November 24, 1784, Hyam joined a number of "British freeholders, merchants and traders in the Province of Quebec on behalf of themselves and others" in a petition asking the King for liberal reforms and for a constitution. <sup>43</sup> Nothing came of it, however, for the day of such reforms was still a long way off in Canada.

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41. Friedman, op. cit., p. 17, quoting Massachusetts Archives, bk. 168, p. 444.

42. Ibid.

43. Sack, op. cit., p. 66, quoting Public Archives of Canada, Series Q, vol. 24-1, p. 1.

Hyam then decided that Canada was not for him.  
Back to New York he went with his family, early in 1786,<sup>44</sup>  
back to the surroundings with which he was so familiar. It  
is doubtful whether he brought much money with him back to  
New York, but as the years went by he must have done fairly  
well since we find that in 1795 he contributed £2 and 8  
shillings to the collection made by his synagogue.<sup>45</sup>

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44. Marcus, op. cit., I, p. 280.

45. "Items Relating to Congregation Shearith Israel, New  
York," PAJHS, XXVII (1920), p. 58.

## EARLY YEARS

Moses Myers was born in the year 1752.<sup>1</sup>

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1. F. A. Virkus, The Abridged Compendium of American Genealogy . . . . . , p. 215, gives the year of his birth as 1764. Rabbi M. H. Stern, MS., (in the author's possession), Some Notes on the History of Moses Myers, of Norfolk, p. 1, says that the year of his birth was 1763. On the other hand, separate obituary notices in the Norfolk American Beacon, July 9, 1835, and in The Richmond Whig & Public Advertiser, July 14, 1835, state that Moses Myers was eighty-three years old when he died; so he must have been born in 1752. Some, however, may question the reliability of such newspaper material, as was done in this letter in The Nation, XCV, July 11, 1912:

To The Editor Of The Nation:

Sir: Everyone is familiar with the extensive use of newspapers made by the most recent school of historians especially in dealing with American history. \* \* \*

Nevertheless ... it is interesting to turn to a passage in which Jefferson (Works, Ford, IX, 73) -- doubtless generalizing too freely as he was somewhat inclined to do -- brands the yellow journalism of his day in terms which would hardly be thought too severe ... at present:

Nothing can now be believed which is seen in a newspaper. Truth itself becomes suspicious by being put into that polluted vehicle. The real extent of this state of misinformation is

He lived in New York until 1763 when his family moved to Quebec.<sup>2</sup> This move gave him an opportunity to learn the French language in addition to his native English. It is possible, too, that he knew the Dutch language, his father's native tongue, and this would go a long way in explaining the facility with which he later moved in Amsterdam and St. Eustatia circles.

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known only to those who are in situations to confront facts within their knowledge with the lies of the day. I really look with a great deal of commiseration over the great body of my fellow-citizens, who, reading newspapers, live and die in the belief that they have known something of what has been passing in the world in their time, whereas the accounts they have been read in the newspapers are just as true a history of any other period of the world as of the present, except that the real names of the day are affixed to their fables. General facts may indeed be collected from them, such as that Europe is now at war, that Bonaparte has been a successful warrior, that he has subjected a great portion of Europe to his will etc., etc.; but no details can be relied on. I will add that the man who never looks into a newspaper is better informed than he who reads them; inasmuch as he who knows nothing is nearer to truth than he whose mind is filled with falsehoods and errors. This was written in 1807. Have we improved or derogated in a hundred years?

Gamaliel Bradford, Jr.

Wellesley Hills, Mass. July 5.

In view of the fact that Jefferson suffered considerably from the press of his day, we can hardly accept his conclusions about it as valid.

2. Marcus, op. cit., p. 223.

Little is known about his early years, at the present time.<sup>3</sup> According to his father's testimony he was an officer in the American army during at least part of the revolution.<sup>4</sup> It appears that he enlisted on April 23, 1775, and was a member of Captain Joel Pratt's Company in the Second Battalion of New York under the command of Colonel Peter Yates. His name appears on the company muster roll from June 28 to October 13, 1775, with the remark that he was sick in the hospital.

His name also appears on a list under the following heading:

We the subscribers being well convinced of the absolute necessity of raising a sufficient Body of Provincial Forces, for the Defence of the Constitution and the preservation of our Just Rights and Liberties when the same are in most eminent Danger of being invaded, have therefore voluntarily inlisted in the Provincial Service under Captn Joel Pratt, Lieuts Benja Chittenden & Israel Spencer ... and we do likewise severally promise not to go from or quit the said Service untill we are discharged from the same by the Continental Congress or the Provincial Congress of this Colony or by the General Committee of the City and County of Albany.<sup>6</sup>

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3. J. R. Marcus, Early American Jewry the Jews of Pennsylvania and the South 1655-1790, II, pp. 192-193, omits all mention of his early year.
  4. Friedman, op. cit., p. 17.
  5. MS., National Archives Old Records Section, Adjutant General's Office.
  6. Ibid.



This patriotic statement was signed on June 5, 1775, but it didn't mean all that it said. It concluded with these words: "N.B. These Articles are hereby understood to be in force for no longer than the last Day of Decr. ensuing."<sup>7</sup> This then was no enlistment for the duration.

As time went by it became evident to Moses Myers that he could be of greater service to the American army by leaving it and going out to find for it the military supplies it needed. In those days what America needed was gun powder and the tools of war. Right from the beginning of the war the island of St. Eustatia became a great supply base.<sup>8</sup> Here the arms and the ammunition so badly needed could be obtained. Mr. Isaac Van Dam, a Jewish gentleman,<sup>9</sup> was the principal agent in this business.<sup>10</sup> London heard disturbing things about Van Dam's activities. On one occasion he had sent 4,000 pounds of gunpowder to North Carolina; on another, he sent £2,000 sterling to France to purchase arms for the Americans. On one occasion a vessel was said to have carried 49,000 pounds of gunpowder to the Americans.<sup>11</sup>

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7. Ibid.

8. F. Edler, The Dutch Republic and the American Revolution (Johns Hopkins University Studies in History and Political Science, XXIX, No. 2) pp. 42-43.

9. Marcus, op. cit., I, p. 103.

10. Edler, op. cit., p. 43.

11. Ibid.

Maryland had an agent at St. Eustatia as early as March 1776.<sup>12</sup> Other states did plenty of business there too and so it was reported that in 1779 over 12,000 hogsheads of tobacco and 1,500,000 ounces of indigo were exchanged at St. Eustatia for naval supplies and other necessities from Europe.<sup>13</sup>

These activities at St. Eustatia attracted Moses Myers to that place. Together with Samuel Myers he formed a company known as Samuel and Moses Myers, with offices at St. Eustatia and Amsterdam. Samuel and Moses Myers were not relatives.<sup>14</sup> They also joined forces with Isaac Moses in Philadelphia to form the business house of Isaac Moses and Company. "Isaac Moses & Company, the American branch of the European house of Samuel & Moses Myers, was probably the largest Jewish mercantile business in the colonies during the days of the Revolution."<sup>15</sup>

This partner, Isaac Moses, was a very distinguished gentleman. During a very critical period in the Revolution he contributed his bond for £3,000 so that supplies could be gotten for the army;<sup>16</sup> the total sub-

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12. Edler, op cit., p. 57

13. Ibid., p. 62.

14. Marcus, Early American Jewry, II, p. 193, but William Vincent Byars, in B. & M. Gratz, Merchants in Philadelphia 1754-1798 . . . ., p. 66, calls them brothers.

15. Marcus, op. cit., II, p. 192.

16. "Items Relating to the Moses and Levy Families, New York," PAJHS, XXVII (1920), pp. 331-2.

scription was £260,000. In 1775 he and his partners raised \$20,000 in specie and were generous enough to accept Continental paper for it so that the army would be able to have what it needed.<sup>17</sup> Thus it would seem that Moses Myers was in partnership with an outstanding merchant and patriot.

It was at this period that Moses Myers had considerable dealings with Silas Deane, the agent of the Continental Congress to France. Silas Deane had goods shipped to St. Eustatia as late as September 27, 1780.<sup>18a</sup> Moses Myers was in France in 1780 but as ill fortune would have it in 1781 he was back in St. Eustatia.<sup>18b</sup>

Now Britain had decided by this time that St. Eustatia had been too long a thorn in her side. The British ambassador to Holland, Sir Joseph Yorke, had advised that the capture of this island would also be an effective way of breaking up the trade that flourished between Amsterdam and the Americans.<sup>19</sup>

The blow at St. Eustatia came speedily. On February 3, 1781, the island was occupied by Admiral Rodney.<sup>20</sup> He captured some two thousand American merchants

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17. Marcus, Early American Jewry, I, p. 99.

18a. Byars, B. & M. Gratz, p. 66.

18b. MS., Papers of the Continental Congress, No. 46, folio 375.

19. Edler, op. cit., p. 181.

20. Edler, op. cit., p. 182.

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and seamen there. He stayed around cleaning up everything for he was determined that "that Nest of Vipers, which had preyed on the Vitals of Great Britain be destroyed."<sup>22</sup>

Rodney gave orders of unusual severity. All Americans were ordered to leave the island.<sup>23</sup> His treatment of prisoners was brutal as is shown by this letter from a captured sea-captain.

I was taken on the 16th day of February, 1781, in the ship General Nash from North Carolina, by sir George Rodney's fleet then at St. Eustatius, I was conveyed aboard the Sandwich before Sir George on the morning of the 17th, he asked me several questions respecting the affairs in America, which I answered to the best of my knowledge, but the answers not being as he could wish, though true, he immediately began to abuse me in these and the like expressions, God damn you, you rebellious scoundrel, &c. then away with him and put him in irons, at that instant push'd me down with common sailors on the main deck, and had nothing to eat for three days, when I got (together) with the steward of the ship, and received two thirds as much provision as one sailor.<sup>24</sup>

When it was suggested to Rodney that Englishmen who had given their parole to Americans be exchanged

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21. Ibid.

22. Ibid., p. 184, quoting from a letter by Rodney to General Cunningham, Governor of Barbados, February 17, 1781.

23. Ibid.

24. The Pennsylvania Packet or the General Advertiser, June 15, 1782, quoting from a printed letter by Daniel Deshon of New London commander of the ship General Nash, in the Continental Journal (Boston), May 30, 1782.

for his American prisoners-of-war, he answered the speaker that " ... as to his parole he might wipe his a-s with it, who the devil gave rebels a right to parole men." <sup>25</sup> When Rodney's prisoners arrived in England conditions for a while were even worse:

When we arrived at Portsmouth we were shifted to a place much more disagreeable, it was on board a tender where was ninety more unfortunates, we were thrust down in a room 15 feet square, and no other air but what came down through a scuttle one foot and a half square with grates over it so thick you scarce could get your hand through -- in one corner of this room stood a tub to do our business in, that and the breath of so many men rendered it far worse than any description I am capable of giving; in this place we remained four days, and I am convinced we could not have survived as many more ... 26

Severe as he was to these men, he was even more terrible to the Jews whom he found at St. Eustatia, and Moses Myers had the misfortune to be there at that time.

Moses Myers suffered as a Jew and as a patriot; later a bit of the story was told to Congress by a writer who said that Moses Myers " ... sufferings in St. Eustatia in Person & Property on Account of his Attachment to his Country I hope will entitle him to the recommendation of Congress ... " <sup>27</sup>

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25. Ibid.

26. Ibid.

27. Isaac Moses to Thomas Mifflin, President of Congress, New York, March 10, 1784, in Papers of the Continental Congress, No. 46, folios 375 and 378.

Just what happened to the Jews of St. Eustatia is best indicated by the touching petition they sent to their conquerors, Admiral Rodney and General Vaughan:

May it please your Excellencies, To permit us, in the name and on the behalf of ourselves and others of the Hebrew nation, residents in the island of Saint Eustatius, humbly to approach your excellencies, and with heartfelt anguish, to lay our grievances before you and say: that it was with the utmost concern and astonishment, we have already, not only received your excellencies afflicting order and sentence, to give up the keys to our stores with an inventory thereof, and of our household plate and furniture, and to hold ourselves in readiness to depart this island, ignorant of our destination, and leaving our beloved wives and helpless children behind us, and our property and effects liable to seizure and confiscation; but also find, that these orders are for the major part carried into execution, a number of our brethren having, on Tuesday the thirteenth instant, been sent on board a ship, and have not since been heard of. Such unexpected orders as these from British commanders, whose principal characteristic is "mercy and humanity," have not only been productive of the most melancholy scenes of distress and confusion, that ever British eyes beheld under the fatal consequences of a rigid war, but numbers of families are now helpless, disconsolate, and in an absolute state of indigence and despair.

Unconscious of deserving so severe a treatment, we flatter ourselves that your excellencies will be pleased to hear this our humble petition, and not involve in one complicated scene of distress and misery, our helpless women and innocent babes; confidently relying upon, and earnestly hoping that, through your excellencies justice and humanity, we shall not supplicate in vain.

It is the peculiar happiness of those who live under a British constitution, to be indulged with their own sentiments in matters of religion, when these principles of religion are

not incompatible with, or subversive of the constitution in church or state; and it is the peculiar happiness of the Hebrew nation to say, that their religion teaches peace and obedience to the government under which they live; and when civil dissensions have threatened to subvert the constitution, the Hebrew nation have ever preserved a peaceful demeanour, with true loyalty to the King, and a firm and steady attachment to the law and constitution.

For what reason, or from what motive we are to be banished this island, we are at a loss to account. — If any among us have committed a crime for which they are punishable, we humbly beg those crimes may be pointed out, and that such persons may be purged from among us. — But if nothing can be alledged against us but the religion of our forefathers, we hope that will not be considered a crime; or that a religion, which preaches peace and recommends obedience to government, should point out its sectaries as objects of your excellencies rigour, and merit exclusion from a British island, by the express orders of British commanders. A moment's reflection must discountenance the idea, and leave us in perfect confidence of your excellencies favourable answer.

Permit us then to assure your excellencies, that we ever have, and still are willing, to give every conscientious testimony of obedience to government; and those of us in particular, who claim to be natural-born subjects of Great Britain, most humbly intreat your excellencies to order us before you, or before such person or persons as your excellencies shall please to appoint, there to prove our loyalty and fidelity, and to repeat and take our oaths of allegiance.

May the God of all mercies incline your hearts to listen to the prayers and supplications of your petitioners, and in this confidence, we humbly submit ourselves to your excellencies determination, hoping that you will pardon us for the intrusion of this address; and that through your excellencies lenity and humanity, your excellencies will be pleased to grant us such favourable terms, as you in your judgment

and wisdom shall think most advantageous to his majesty's interest, and the honour and glory of his successful arms.

And your petitioners, as in duty bound,

will ever pray, &c.

saint Eustatius, February 16, 1781.<sup>28</sup>

Their excellencies, however, were not interested in doing justice, but in feathering their own nests.

Amsterdam suffered enormous losses when St. Eustatia was captured, and Amsterdam's loss was Rodney's gain.<sup>29</sup> Britain, on her side, expected grand results from this conquest, and a newspaper said that

As the New England provinces were principally supplied with provisions from St. Eustatia (not raising any quantity themselves) by the capture of the said island of St. Eustatia, the New England provinces will be obliged to return to their allegiance to avoid starving.<sup>30</sup>

In Parliament, Burke raised the question as to what right Rodney had to seize and confiscate private property at St. Eustatia, but this debate did little for the people who had been dispossessed.<sup>31</sup> How Moses Myers stood up to all this maltreatment is not known. Neither is it known how he got back to the United States, but by 1782 he was back in Philadelphia, and despite his

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28. The Annual Register . . . . for the Year 1781, pp. 308-10.

29. Edler, op. cit., p. 186.

30. Pennsylvania Packet, February 21, 1782, quoting from the Morning Post (London), October 27, 1781.

31. The Parliamentary History of England, XLII (1781-1782), p. 223.



financial problems, gave £23.10s. towards the building  
of the new synagogue in that city.<sup>32</sup>

Difficult days now came upon Moses Myers. Aside from his losses in St. Eustatia, trouble was now brewing in the United States. From 1783 to 1789 there was a financial collapse in the country.<sup>33</sup> In such days it was difficult to do new business and to collect old debts, so what could he do when called upon to pay his debts? There was nothing he could do. The firm of Samuel & Moses Myers of St. Eustatia and Amsterdam was bankrupt.

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32. "Items Relating to Jews in Philadelphia," PAJHS, XXVII (1920), p. 462.

33. D. R. Dewey, Financial History of the United States, pp. 56-59.

## BANKRUPTCY

The end of the war brought with it many problems. What was to be done with the vast fleet of privateers that had sailed the seas and been a scourge to British shipping? These ships were too large for the ordinary commercial ventures of former days. They had been built for speed and equipped to fight enemy vessels. "How were the men who had scoured the seas in hot pursuit of valuable cargoes to be reconciled to peddling codfish in Spain and collecting molasses and sugar in the West Indies?"<sup>1</sup>

The trouble, however, was infinitely worse. The sailors had to be reconciled to unemployment. There was an abundance of ships, but with it went a scarcity of trade. As things went from bad to worse, a depression developed in the coastwise towns and this in turn brought depression to the farmers who began to cry out "for the

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1. J. D. Phillips, Salem and the Indies the Story of the Great Commercial Era of the City, p. 31.

usual quack remedies of inflated currency, reduction of debts, and control of prices."<sup>2</sup>

To help the merchants, John Jay set out on a mission to secure as good a commercial treaty as he could possibly get, but since he didn't have much to offer, he got very few concessions. The British navigation laws passed on July 2, 1783 forbade imports into and exports from the British West Indies except when transported in British ships. Britain also placed an embargo on all American goods which she felt could be adequately produced in Canada. This had a drastic effect on American commerce even though this embargo was not as strictly enforced as it could have been.<sup>3</sup>

This embargo hit the farmer as well as the merchant. Hitherto, many of the products of the American farmer had gone to the West Indies, but where were they to go now? The war had been a severe strain on the country's finances and the economy was dislocated, so, peace did not bring plenty.

Moses Myers and his partner Samuel Myers went to Europe to see what could be done there to extricate themselves from the mess they were in. They were both there in the year 1783.<sup>4</sup>

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2. Ibid., p. 33.

3. O. P. Chitwood, A History of Colonial America, p. 718.

4. Collections of the New York Historical Society for the Year 1890 (The Deane Papers, V, 1782-1790), pp. 158, 209, and 226.

Samuel Myers was in Paris in July, 1783, searching for some one who would lend him and his partner £35,000 to £40,000 but he found no one who could oblige him with such a sum. The two partners fought gallantly, but victory could not be achieved, and so, in December, 1784, their company stopped payment. Isaac Moses & Company, back home in Philadelphia, did likewise in April, 1785.<sup>5</sup>

Samuel Myers remained in Europe until well on in 1785, when he returned to America. Upon arriving he sent a letter to the European assignees and trustees saying that he had arrived at Boston " ... after a passage of Fifty-four days attended with very disagreeable weather and much danger, having lost our Mizen Mast but three Leagues from the Rocks of Scilly in a violent gale of Wind ..."<sup>6</sup> Such was the extent to which S. & M. Myers were willing to go to do justice to their creditors. From that day on Samuel and Moses Myers drove themselves without mercy. As Samuel Myers put it: "Having hapily escaped that encounter there is none, but I will most willingly encounter to do you and the rest of my Creditors Justice."<sup>7</sup>

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5. Marcus, Early American Jewry, II, p. 197.

6. To Messrs. John A. Haas, Philip DeBordes, Jan Alstorpius, & Robert Voute, October 19, 1785. MS., Samuel and Moses Myers Letter book, I, 1785-87, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati.

7. Ibid.

Being human Samuel and Moses Myers occasionally faltered in their self appointed and thankless task. Thus before setting out on a collection trip to Philadelphia, Baltimore, and various Virginia communities, Samuel wrote to Isaac de Jacob Mendes saying that he feels more attached to Holland than to his native country "But such I fear has fate ordain'd, that I must slave here to gain what I am deficient by misplacing confidence."<sup>8</sup>

So too Moses Myers before setting out in 1786 on a collection journey to Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Virginia as far as Richmond, wrote a crying letter saying: " ... no worse season could I take. the Weather is Intensely hot & Travelling one Hundred Miles with perhaps a Crowded (coach) will be disagreeable.- I shall however not mind if but successful in my collections."<sup>9</sup> Such trips were more than Moses Myers could take and after such a journey he wrote to his partner Samuel: "I have Just recover'd from a severe fit of the fever & ague. Confin'd to my room all last week. greater part of the time to my bed. I am now getting hearty."<sup>10</sup>

After another such trip Moses Myers wrote his

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8. December 5, 1785, Letter book, I, p. 32. Printed in full in Marcus, op. cit., II, pp. 200-01.
  9. To Isaac de Jacob Mendes, July 23, 1786, Letter book, I, p. 168.
  10. September 4, 1786, Letter book, I, p. 186.

friend Isaac de Jacob Mendes: "I am just returned from the Second Journey to Virginia thro' Hail, Rain, Snow, frost, & all the disagreeables ... exclusive of the Ill Success in the collection of money ..."<sup>11</sup> In the same letter he summed up his life in a few brief words: "I got down to Richmond which is near five Hundred Miles in Eight Days. Thus my Dr. fellow do I continue to be buffeted About. Courage & Perseverance I hope will bring better days."

It was a bad time to be collecting debts. In Samuel Myers' own words: "the Commercial affairs of this Country are very Gloomy (.) indeed Ruin seems inevitable to all Mercantile People, there being no regulated System for Commerce nor Specia<sup>12</sup> enough for the medium of trade."

As bad as the times were, these two determined young men got results. They sent out batches of letters each day, and when they saw that their letters were not getting the needed results they went out on long and tedious trips, and got results.

While these two young men were working so hard to pay off the creditors, Isaac Moses was relaxing. Moses Myers wrote to Samuel saying that Isaac Moses " ... knows

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11. March 7, 1787, Letter book, I, p. 235.

12. To Messrs. Haas, DeBordes, Alstorpius, & Voute, October 19, 1785, Letter book, I, p. 1

nothing of the business that is Transacting. he minds his own while I am a Slave to that of the Estate."<sup>13</sup> Moses Myers goes on hard trips but "Isaac Moses has been in business from Immedy after his failure & never given the least attention to the settlement of his affairs."<sup>14</sup> S. & M. Myers were doing what was right and honorable while Isaac Moses was doing that which was profitable.

Samuel Myers wrote to his friend Isaac de Jacob Mendes of all the trouble they were having with Isaac Moses: "One thing alone I cannot forget which is that the author of our ruin has endeavoured to asperse Our Character to Clear his own and reported that the Cause of his failure Was Owing to us. Of this we leave the impartial World to judge ..."<sup>15</sup> Samuel and Moses Myers discovered that Isaac Moses had, only a short while before going into bankruptcy, purchased an estate costing £9,000 and a number of pieces of land around New York, and that all this property was recorded in his own name. The money used to purchase this estate was really the firm's and should not have been used for such purposes. Now that Isaac Moses was bankrupt he wanted to use this property to

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13. July 23, 1786, Letter book, I, p. 169.

14. Moses Myers to Nicholas Hubbard, July 23, 1786, Letter book, I, p. 172.

15. December 5, 1785, Letter book, I, p. 32.

satisfy his private creditors but this Moses Myers would  
not let him do.

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The natural question is why they did not arrest Isaac Moses when they discovered this misappropriation of funds? To this, Samuel and Moses Myers gave this reply:

if we arrest him he Will give Bail (.) We must then go trough (sic) a Course of Common Law Which is both tedious & Costly -- and When that is at an end he will throw it into Chancery, Remain with the property in hand two or three Years More at the end of Which the property will be most probably greatly diminished and then an Act of Assembly will be With the Same care obtained and You and Ourselves be the Dupes.17

What was an Act of Assembly? Samuel and Moses Myers explained to their creditors that it " ... demands nothing more to free him, than to deliver up all his property on Oath and leaves him in possession of his Books which to this day are unsettled ..."

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Moses Myers gained himself lots of enemies because of his actions in this matter, and afterwards quite a few people were not on speaking terms with him, but he felt that all this was necessary if justice was

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16. (S. & M. Myers) To Nicholas & Jacob Van Staphorst, December 8, 1785, Letter book, I, p. 17.
  17. To Messrs. De Bordes, Haas, Alstorpius, & Voute, November 2, 1785, Letter book, I, p. 13.
  18. Ibid.



to be done to the creditors.<sup>19</sup> Samuel and Moses Myers didn't want to allow Isaac Moses' private debts to be included in the settlement but when they realised that if they insisted on this point their creditors would have even less,<sup>20</sup> they yielded.

In the end, Isaac Moses called in the firms of Jay & Blecker to appraise his furniture; then his plate was weighed and it was found to be <sup>21</sup> 445 ounces. Samuel and Moses Myers now proceeded to have the same done to their furniture and plate though they were not obligated to do so.<sup>22</sup> On January 16, 1786, the first sale was carried out; Isaac Moses' house fetched £4,450; the store sold for £1,710, and the lots in the city of New York were sold for £215, with one third of the money being paid in six days, one third in three months and the final third in six months.<sup>23</sup>

All in all, it was an unhappy situation. On the one hand, Isaac Moses' private creditors felt furious at having to share the estate with the creditors from

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19. Moses Myers to Messrs. Haas, De Bordes, Alstorpius, & Voute, December 27, 1785, Letter book, I, p. 36.  
20. Ibid.  
21. Moses Myers to Samuel Myers, June 13, 1786, Letter book, I, p. 153.  
22. Ibid.  
23. N.M. to Messrs. Haas et al., January 17, 1786, Letter book, I, pp. 52-3.

Holland; on the other hand, the Holland merchants felt that they were being robbed. Samuel Myers had to explain to the latter that "The modes pursued however repugnant to your Interest and my own to admit Isaac Moses & Co., Creditors, & Isaac Moses's private to be Class'd with ours, was the most prudent and beneficial to our creditors at large ..."<sup>24</sup> When the creditors in Holland upbraided him for having trusted Isaac Moses, Samuel gave it to them straight.

At the same time that I confess to you Gentin. that my confidence in Isaac Moses was misplac'd must in justice to myself say I did not think so at the time I repos'd it & in Justification of this Assertion after first requesting you to enquire his former Character as a Man & Merchant, nex't appeal to your own feelings & good sense and say whether any man would Voluntarily rush on ruin & Stake a fair Character to answer the ends of a Man regardless of the principles of honor and integrity: No! mus (t) be your reply. And as Merchants you will confess that the most experienced men are not always Guarded against the Designs of an Artful Deceiver. I am sensible of the truth of your assertion that the Credit we obtain'd arose from the ideas entertained of the Honor & discretion of my Self & partner Mr Moses Myers and I may here add the View of mutual benefit.<sup>25</sup>

Samuel and Moses Myers apparently felt that they had been laid low, not by the times, but by the partner they had trusted implicitly.

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24. To Messrs. J. A. Haas et al., December 17, 1785, Letter book, I, p. 155.

25. Ibid.

The total of their indebtedness was rated at £160,000 New York currency.<sup>26</sup> The New York pound, at that time, was rated at two dollars and a half,<sup>27</sup> so that would make their total debt, \$400,000. This sum weighed heavily on their minds. Isaac Moses didn't speak to Moses Myers or ever visit him in his office. When he wanted something of Moses Myers he would write him a note and Myers would reply with a note.<sup>28</sup> On one occasion Isaac Moses asked him for the old books of the company, but Moses Myers replied that the books could only be seen at the office. Isaac showed the assignees Moses Myers' letter of refusal, but these gentlemen upheld Moses Myers' decision.<sup>29</sup>

Of course, these letters of Samuel and Moses Myers tell only one side of the story — their side, but a number of facts point to the truth of their story. In the first place, one of them might just as easily have gone over to Isaac Moses' side, but this did not come to pass. Then there is the fact that the Myerses worked to salvage as much as possible for the creditors, while Isaac Moses did nothing for them. Another point is, that Isaac Moses had purchased Tory estates only two

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26. Moses Myers to Messrs. J. A. Haas et al., March 1, 1786, Letter book, I, p. 66.

27. J. B. McMaster, The Life and Times of Stephen Girard Mariner and Merchant, I, p. 13.

28. Moses Myers to Samuel Myers, July 5, 1786, Letter book, I, p. 162.

29. Ibid.

months before going bankrupt.<sup>30</sup> In view of all this, it would appear that when Isaac Moses wrote Thomas Mifflin and asked that Moses Myers be given the appointment as American Consul at Amsterdam, he was trying to remove from the scene his honest partner, so that he might be able to do as he pleased in the days that were to come.<sup>31</sup>

How did Samuel and Moses Myers make a living in these years when all their days were spent trying to collect money for their creditors? They got an occasional commission and sent out small bits of merchandise, although by law, as bankrupts, they were really not allowed to do this.<sup>32</sup>

Despite the fact that they were doing everything possible to gather money for their creditors, one of the creditors sued them and Samuel and Moses Myers almost had to go to debtors' prison, but the Sheriff, Marinus Willett, gave them a hint and they got together the necessary bail and didn't go to jail.<sup>33</sup>

The Myerses now saw many business opportunities pass them by. Those were the days that saw the beginning of the China trade. America was hampered by the

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30. Marcus, *Early American Jewry*, II, p. 198.

31. March 10, 1784, in Papers of the Continental Congress, No. 46, folios 375 and 378.

32. Marcus, *op. cit.*, II, p. 203.

33. Ibid., p. 199.

restrictions on her trade so she sought new markets. Robert Morris and Daniel Parker, from Philadelphia, fitted out a vessel, the Empress of China, for this new trade. She set sail for China, from New York, on February 22, 1784,<sup>34</sup> touched at the Cape de Verdes,<sup>35</sup> and reached Canton on August 28, 1784.<sup>36</sup> She returned to New York on May 18, 1785, and netted a profit of more than \$30,000. Thus in these critical depression years an avenue of hope was opened up, and those merchants who were alert jumped at the opportunity.

In the year 1786, quite a few American ships were in the Orient, and five of them visited Canton.<sup>37</sup> All parts of the country were taking part in this trade. From Salem went the Grand Turk in December, 1785,<sup>38</sup> while the first ship from Philadelphia, the Canton, under the command of Captain Truxton, set sail in January or February 1786, returning in May, 1787, after a passage of eighteen weeks.<sup>39</sup> Thus, apparently, American merchants were becoming quite enthusiastic over the China trade,

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34. F. R. Dulles, The Old China Trade, p. 8.  
35. J. Winsor, ed., The Memorial History of Boston including Suffolk County, Massachusetts, 1630-1880, IV, 204.  
36. R. A. Rydell, Cape Horn to the Pacific the Rise and Decline of an Ocean Highway, p. 24.  
37. C. C. Stelle, "American Trade in Opium to China, Prior to 1820," Pacific Historical Review, IX (1940), p. 425 n.  
38. J. D. Phillips, Salem and the Indies, pp. 46-48.  
39. S. Hazard, ed., The Register of Pennsylvania ..., I, p. 284.

considering it a real opportunity for making money, and for relieving the pressure in the American market.

Not all the merchants were so happy about the China trade, and some viewed the activity in New York and the other ports with bitterness, feeling that in the end there would be losses instead of gains. Such was the opinion of Moses Myers as he watched the feverish activity in the port of New York.

Three Ships now fitting in this Port for China and will sail in One Month. a small vessel has already sail'd from hence and a Ship from Phil-da.. those from here carry about 50000 dollars in specie — I apprehend that instead of Brilliant (success) as people expect much Money will be sunk but really such is the rage for Speculation that prudence is (not) adhered to. 40.

This opinion of his, however, may well have been due to a tinge of envy, for he was in a state of bankruptcy and couldn't raise money to invest in a China voyage. None but the largest merchants could participate in this trade, for, "in those days a Canton voyage was a serious undertaking, and ... six months were required to provide the specie, ginseng, and other cargo." <sup>41</sup> The long months taken up by a China voyage and the large sums required to finance it made it necessary, even for the wealthiest merchants to unite with others and sell shares

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40. To N. & J. Van Staphorst, January 22, 1786, Letter book, I, p. 284.

41. Winsor, Memorial History of Boston, p. 206 n.

in China ventures. So the China trade was definitely not for such people as the Myerses who needed money for day to day expenses.

Still, Moses Myers had moments when his pessimism gave way to admiration for the courage and heroism displayed by American seamen in sailing their tiny craft to those distant places. When American merchants saw that large ships from our shores didn't do so well, they sent out tiny vessels, such as the Experiment, a sloop of only 80 tons, the Hope, a brigantine of 70 tons, and the Pilgrim of only 62 tons, and won thereby universal acclaim.<sup>43</sup> When the Experiment, that vessel of 80 tons, returned from Canton in April of 1787, Moses Myers was thrilled by the adventure, and didn't mind saying so.

On Sunday last returned to this part the Sloop experiment, Capn. Dean, in 4 Months & 12 Days from Canton in China. her Cargo consists of fine Teas, Nankeens, and China; This I presume was the boldest enterprise ever attempted from this country - The Sloop only eighty Tons, & had five Men before the Mast, Souls in all on aboard Eleven. She was Sixteen Months on the Voyage.- The Ships Hope & Empress of China, & a brig was arriv'd from this port, A Ship from Philada.. & a Ship from Rhode Island had also arriv'd & would all sail again within Three Weeks.<sup>44</sup>

Thrilled he was, but he could only be a spectator in

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42. Ibid.

43. Dulles, Old China Trade, pp. 30-1.

44. To N. & J. Van Staphorst, April 24, 1787, Letter book, I, p. 245.

this new trade.

That same year there were some events that weren't so thrilling. Shay's Rebellion spread from its home ground into the back country of New York, and Moses Myers wrote his partner Samuel that "for my part, shou'd not be surpris'd at a civil war taking place on this continent. You will see by the papers the strides taken to overset gouvernment in eastern states which by and by will be a general case throughout."<sup>45</sup>

In this matter he was too pessimistic, and it didn't take long before he wrote his friends that

The disturbances to the Eastward have in some degree subsided, but have taken place in the Back part of this State; On Sunday last our Gouvernor with some of the Militia officers left this to see & Raise the Militia in the Country to dislodge a party who have com- mited Some depredations. And taken post. about One Hundred & Thirty Miles Back of us. I ap- prehend they will soon be dispers'd.<sup>46</sup>

Occasionally he paused, and instead of writing about other people, he wrote about himself and his plans for the future. Here is a letter he wrote his partner Samuel about the various places where they might get off to a fresh start again.

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45. January 12, 1787, Letter book, I, p. 224, printed in Marcus, Early American Jewry, II, p. 195.

46. Letter book, I, p. 153. Printed in Marcus, op. cit., II, pp. 207-8.



New York, June 13th, 1786

Dear Myers:

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It has ever been my opinion that we might do considerable good business in this city with care and industry, but then it requires we shou'd be together. Except we shou'd form such a connexion as wou'd be an object worthy your stay in Europe. In that case only I shou'd think it adviseable. I see no prospect of making such a concern, or do I think it would be our interest so to do. I wou'd have you settle our affairs and fix such connexions as you can and find necessary. That done, wou'd have you embark in the spring for Maryland or Georgia where I will join you, or if you judge best, to this city. — Georgia is a young country and promises success. The exports will ever make it a place of consequence. And we know by experience that in all new country's money is to be made. We shall doubtless meet many friends and support from every part of the continent. Our expenses together wou'd be very little more than ea(ch) apart, an object at the year's end, and business conducted with greater facility and Peace of Mind. — wou'd you prefer Philada.. I think money is to be made there with proper attention. Goods, I am convinc'd could be vended to a large Amot. & Certain Proffit & Many advantages arise from Commissions. in this case you may have it in your power to find such a Man as James Duff who'd let you ship wheat, flour &c & give you credit in London, Amsterdam, &c. from circumstances & things in Europe you will best be able to form your resolutions, weigh well all things & deliberate on them before you determine to not be precipitate. but when your plan is once form'd, Swerve not from it. Your experience & thorough knowledge of the Trade & People of this country will enable you to form the Most Solid Judgement of an Establishment. — I would in preference be alone except the advantage of a connexion is great indeed. You are too well acquainted with the consequences of copartnerships to need any coment thereon. Woefull experience has taught you they are pernicious & if possible to be avoided. \* \* \* 47

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47. Letter book, I, p. 153. Printed in Marcus, op. cit., II, pp. 207-8.

On another occasion Moses Myers wrote to Samuel that  
"In Virginia, Money is yet to be made ... as it is both  
in Chas. Ton & Georgia."<sup>48</sup>

A few days later, Moses Myers wrote his partner Samuel clarifying his thinking on the score of where would be the best place for them to start in business again.

I have resolv'd over in mind the Circumstances respecting our future Establishment & think that either Chs. Ton So. Carolina or Norfolk in Virginia must Be the place(.) I always wou'd prefer a sea port town to any other the advantages are superior & need not be pointed out to you. I presume that you will be able (at least) to Establish a Credit in Amsterdam, for such articles as either place wou'd require & from whence there can arise no difficulty to make suitable returns (.) Neither Tobacco Rice or Indigo can possibly maintain their present prices & the State of Virginia having rejected Paper Money altogether gives it a Superiority over the other States & Establishes a Confidence unknown heretofore. I have observed that no or very little credit must be given the planter for thereby you frequently lay long out of your Money and lose their Custom. the Proffits are very Great & Goods Suitable to the Country Can be Vended in large Quantities. \* \* \* Money is Certainly to be made in Chs. Ton the trade you are no stranger to.--Georgia is a young State & I think offers advantages to a trade with Holland(.) they have timber In abundance, rice, Indigo, Tobacco, Corn for Exportation & being contiguous to the Spaniards I Shou'd Suppose wou'd give them great advantages. their emigration has been one third of the Inhabitants Since the peace. this Says my Informant but Really is not reasonable(.) before the War they Knew not what it was to raise Tabacco &

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48. December 6, 1786, Letter book, I, p. 203, quoted in Stern's Some Notes on the History of Moses Myers, of Norfolk, p. 3. -- In the preceding letter, the author differs with the paragraphing adopted in Marcus' Early American Jewry, II, pp. 207-8, and with some of the capitalisation, punctuation, and spelling, as they do not seem to be that way in the manuscript.

the last years exportation was three Thousand Hhds — it is impossible to enter minutely into the advantages or disadvantages of Trade without being on the Spot to collect the necessary informations(.) as we have both been lately in Virginia we can best judge for a Certainty & I think we can do well at norfolk ... in a Snug business that will Secure to us a Sure Income. We shall be enabled to get many Comms. from this and Philada.49

From this letter it would appear that Moses Myers was all for Virginia. It goes a long way to explain his ultimate choice of Norfolk as his home.

Another matter that Moses Myers was doing much thinking about, was marriage. A good marriage would be of great help to him in business. One can see his line of thinking in this letter to his friend Isaac de Jacob Mendes:

I dare say you have hear'd that Robert Stewart is Married in South Carolina to a Lady of Eight thousand Guineas; now, if I wou'd make Such a Speculation do you not think it wou'd do? Charmingly upon my Word, Tell one, are there any fortunes in Amsterdam that a body might get Transfer'd(?) I believe I must now think of Such a Negociation.50

Actually long before this he had shown a strong interest in a young widow, a Mrs. Chapman, and Samuel Myers could

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49. December 14, 1786, Letter book, I, pp. 208-9, printed in Marcus, *op. cit.*, II, pp. 209-10. Here too the author of this paper couldn't follow Marcus' paragraphing, punctuation, and capitalisation, as he felt that the manuscript was not like that.
50. March 7, 1787, Letter book, I, p. 236.

write early in 1786 that Moses Myers possessed her affec-  
51  
tions.

This Mrs. Chapman was a business woman.<sup>52</sup>  
Her brother was Isaac Judah,<sup>53</sup> and so her maiden name  
could not have been Elizabeth Judd as some writers would  
suggest, but Elizabeth Judah.<sup>54</sup> She was originally from  
55  
London, England.

Moses Myers was very pleased with his marriage, as a stream of letters from his hand go to show.  
"I shall with pleasure Receive your congratulations on my  
Marriage thursday last. excuse my Saying anything on the  
Subject of Mrs. Myers. I hope for the pleasure of making  
you personally Acquainted."<sup>56</sup> Writing to another friend  
he says: "I shall be better able now to settle myself  
in business by the aid of Mrs. Myers, with whom I have  
some property."<sup>57</sup> To yet another friend he wrote: "It  
is now Three Weeks Since I became a Benedict & find the

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51. To Mark Pringle, April 6, 1786, Letter book, I, p. 80.
  52. M.M. to Isaac Judah, August 8, 1786, Letter book, I,  
p. 176.
  53. M.M. to Isaac Judah, July 11, 1787, Letter book, I,  
p. 265.
  54. Marcus, Early American Jewry, II, p. 211.
  55. M.M. to Nicholas Hubbard, April 10, 1787, Letter book,  
I, p. 240.
  56. M.M. to John Chaloner, March 29, 1787, Letter book,  
I, p. 237.
  57. M.M. to James Murphy, April 5, 1787, Letter book, I,  
p. 238.

change very pleasing. on which I shall with pleasure Re-  
ceive your Congratulations — least you think me partial,  
I shall leave a description of my lady to Mr. (Samuel)  
Myers ... & only tell you She is from London, & has a  
handsome property."<sup>58</sup>

His happiness bubbled through his business  
correspondence. To his friends Nicholas and Jacob Van  
Staphorst he wrote this characteristic letter:

The better to firmly establish myself must  
Inform you that a few days Since I was Married;  
was I to say to a very desireable Lady, you  
might think I cou'd Say no more, but it is the  
case & with her I have some property.<sup>59</sup>

This reiteration of the fact that Mrs. Myers had some  
property was quite necessary if Moses Myers were to re-  
ceive an adequate credit from these correspondents.  
Mrs. Myers, it ought to be added, although a widow, was  
only a young woman of twenty-four.<sup>60</sup>

Moses Myers now began to order merchandise  
for his future business in Norfolk. He was happy that  
his business acquaintances in Europe were ready to give  
him goods on credit, but he felt that their terms were  
not sufficiently generous. While giving thanks for the  
credit they were extending him he protested some of the

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58. M.M. to Nicholas Hubbard, April 10, 1787, Letter  
book, I, p. 240.

59. April 13, 1787, Letter book, I, p. 241.

60. Marcus, Early American Jewry, II, p. 211.

interest charges saying: "I must here nevertheless observe that the Interest on your Invoices Shou'd not commence until Three Months after the Shipment, for a very considerable time is lost before the Goods reach this Country."<sup>61</sup>

Thanking another firm for extending him credit, Moses Myers made the point that instead of asking for payment in twelve months, in the future, payments should be extended to eighteen months.<sup>62</sup> Here was a man who needed credit, but he also knew his worth and would not permit usurious practices.

Again and again he analyzed the financial possibilities of Norfolk. On a visit there, he wrote that "from Appearances I think Money may be made here, but as you Justly observe not a very Speedy fortune."<sup>63</sup> That was what he wrote when he stopped for a little while in Norfolk, but when he got back to New York, Norfolk grew sweeter by comparison, and Moses Myers wrote his brother-in-law: "... I hope with Prudence, Industry, & Frugality in five or Six Years to have it in my power to set myself at ease. the distance is not great, with a fair Wind.

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61. To D. Cromeline & Sons, April 24, 1787, Letter book, I, p. 246.  
62. To Zadok and A. I. Salomons, April 24, 1787, Letter book, I, p. 245.  
63. To James Heron, June 19, 1787, Letter book, I, p. 245.

'tis but a run of Thirty-Six to forty hours." <sup>64</sup> This time limit he gave himself was an amazing prophecy, for as shall be seen, later in this paper, within five to six years he had established himself.

Samuel Myers was returning from Europe and Moses Myers was eagerly awaiting him, but the days went by and there was no sign of Samuel. <sup>65</sup> In the mean time Moses Myers had gotten everything ready. He rented a house from Mr. Newton of Norfolk, but not before that gentleman had agreed to a few alterations to the home especially the construction of "a Genteel closet" in place of the one there, did he proceed to make a lease. <sup>66</sup>

He wrote to one of his friends: "If my memory Serves, I advis'd in my last having charter'd the Schooner Sincerity Capt. White, for Norfolk, & mean to proceed round with my family, all my goods & furniture is on board, & I Shall Sail on Sunday the 22d. I dare not delay any longer." <sup>67</sup> He just could not wait for Samuel Myers any longer.

On July 22, 1787, Moses and his wife set sail aboard the schooner Sincerity; they took with them their

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64. To Isaac Judah, July 11, 1787, Letter book, I, p. 265.

65. To Nicholas Hubbard, July 18, 1787, Letter book, I, p. 268.

66. To Robert Taylor, July 1, 1787, Letter book, I, p. 260.

67. To Mark Pringle, July 19, 1787.

furniture and a cargo valued at £1,000, and business  
68  
brains worth far more than that.

Mrs. Myers was already pregnant during this journey and that might explain why Moses wouldn't wait any longer in New York as a further postponement of the journey might have made future travelling impossible due to her condition. As it was, she gave birth to a premature child on September 15, 1787. This was their eldest son  
69  
John.

During the next twenty years, this was to be Mrs. Myers' career; she bore her husband twelve children in that period, and ten of these children survived their  
70  
infancy. She created around her a warm atmosphere. Her home was always open hospitably to strangers and travellers, both Jew and Gentile. Only a few weeks after settling in Norfolk, when her home must have been far from settled and when her condition might well have served her

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68. Marcus, Early American Jewry, II, p. 214. Strangly enough, A. M., Pictures in Maritime Dixie: Norfolk, Va., Port & City. The Chamber of Commerce Book, p. 52, says that the firm moved to Norfolk in 1786, as does Leon Huhner, "The Jews of Virginia from the Earliest Times to the Close of the Eighteenth Century," PAJHS, XX (1911), p. 103.
69. Stern, Some Notes on Moses Myers, p. 8 n. Sydney Lowe, MS., Myers House (in the author's possession), p. 8, gives the date of his birth as September 5, 1787, as does the Virginia Magazine of History and Biography, XLVIII (1940), pp. 21-22 n.
70. Stern, loc. cit., pp. 8-9 n.



as an excuse, she extended the hospitality of her home to three people on their way to Richmond.<sup>71</sup> This was to serve as a pattern for the years ahead, when the great and the near great, as well as the humble and the distressed were to find a warm welcome in their home.

Moses Myers was still enumerating the advantages of Norfolk to his business associates. He sent out an announcement of the opening of his business, and told everyone that Norfolk would be a good place to do business in because it lay near the sea, was contiguous to North Carolina, had a good part of the bay trade to Maryland and to every part of Virginia, and all kinds of goods were to be found there " ... in abundance, very good and cheap."<sup>72</sup>

At first, Moses Myers was to do business on a cash basis, extending no credit to anyone.<sup>73</sup> He was still adhering to this policy when he put in an advertisement in The Norfolk and Portsmouth Gazette, saying: "The subscriber has for Sale on reasonable terms, for Cash or Wheat, The Following Articles: German Oznaburgs and Ticklenburgs, Raven Duck, Russia Sail Duck ... Calicoes and Cambricks ... Hyson, Green, and Souchong Teas by the box ... Coffee in barrels and bags ..."<sup>74</sup> We can see that his

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71. Marcus, *op. cit.*, p. 215.

72. Printed Announcement (in the author's possession), August 1, 1787.

73. M.M. to P. I. Van Berckel, August 30, 1787, Letter book I, p. 293.

74. October 21, 1789.

business had prospered greatly when we compare this list of merchandise for sale with that of his first announcement in which he had spoken only of "naval stores, corn, bees-wax, deer-skins, tobacco, and lumber."<sup>75</sup>

One wonders whether this policy of selling for cash only was due to the caution Moses Myers had learned from former saddening experiences which were still fresh in his mind, or, due to the smallness of his supply of cash and goods. It would seem to have been the latter reason, for, when he ran a similar ad in the Norfolk paper, about one year later, there was no mention made about cash being the only terms.<sup>76</sup> Thus Moses was slowly climbing the ladder of success. At the same time that he was energetically attending to his business, he also attended to his civic duties and immediately joined the fire company of Norfolk.<sup>77</sup>

Samuel Myers dropped out of the business in Norfolk very soon after the start, if he ever got there at all. By October, 1789, he was already in Petersburg, Virginia, and we find a consignment of six chairs being sent from Philadelphia to that place for him.<sup>78</sup> Later, he went to Richmond and settled there.<sup>79</sup> Why he left the

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75. Printed Announcement (in the author's possession), August 1, 1787.  
76. The Norfolk and Portsmouth Chronicle, August 28, 1790.  
77. MS., Norfolk Deed Book, I, p. 221, in the library of the Norfolk Corporation Court.  
78. H. E. Gillingham, "The Philadelphia Windsor Chair and Its Journeyings," The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography, LV (1931), p. 328.  
79. Marcus, op. cit., II, p. 214.

firm is not known, but he and Moses Myers remained close friends through the years.

As he got a little money together, Moses tried out other fields of business. On September 29, 1790, he bought a piece of land from " ... Joshua Peed and Blany his wife for the sum of 41 pounds Current money." <sup>80</sup> This wasn't a big deal, but it was a start. Business in those days had its sweet and sour aspects. The sweet aspect was: that he did not have to pay any personal property taxes in 1788. Though he had two slaves above sixteen years of age, still, since he had no horses colts or mules, no carriage wheels, no billiard tables, no stud horses, no vacant lots, and no houses and lots for rent, he did not <sup>81</sup> have to pay taxes that year.

In 1789, he had three free males over sixteen years of age, and four slaves over sixteen years of age; but since he did not have any of the other types of lux-<sup>82</sup>uries he again had to pay no personal property tax. In 1790, for the same reason he again did not have to pay <sup>83</sup>personal property tax. It was not until 1791, when he had been in receipt of a yearly rental of £8, that he <sup>84</sup>was obliged to pay that tax, and then it was only 2 shillings.

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80. Deed Book, I, p. 221.

81. MS., Norfolk Borough Personal Property 1788, in the Virginia State Library, Richmond, Va.

82. Norfolk Borough Personal Property 1789.

83. Norfolk Borough Personal Property 1790.

84. Norfolk Borough Personal Property 1791.

On April 5, 1791, Myer Myers, Moses' younger  
brother, died at Aux Cayes, Haiti.<sup>85</sup> He died intestate,  
and the New York court, on May 30, 1791, granted his father,<sup>86</sup>  
Hyam Myers of New York, the letters of administration.  
These letters however, were not of much value because  
France had a law known as the droit d'aubaine which de-  
clared that the estates of deceased aliens must become  
the property of the state.<sup>87</sup> Moses Myers, therefore went  
to see what could be done about this at Haiti.<sup>88</sup> On arriv-  
ing there he found that his brother's estate had already  
been confiscated in accordance with that law.<sup>88</sup>

There was an issue to fight out. In the treaty  
signed between France and the United States, article XI  
had stated that: "The subjects and inhabitants of the  
said United States, or any one of them, shall not be re-  
puted aubains in France and consequently shall be exempted  
from the droit d'aubaine ..." <sup>89</sup> The wily French, however,  
had drawn a distinction between France and the colonies of  
France, and held that the exemption applied to France and  
not to her colonies.<sup>90</sup>

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85. Stern, Some Notes on Moses Myers, p. 6.  
86. Collections of the New-York Historical Society for the  
Year 1905 (Abstracts of Wills on File in the Sur-  
rogates' Office, City of New York) XIV, p. 356.  
87. Stern, loc. cit., p. 6.  
88. Ibid.  
89. K. W. Porter, The Jacksons and the Lees .... (Harvard  
Studies in Business History, III), I, p. 372.  
90. Ibid.

Thomas Jefferson had not liked this interpretation of the treaty and had written in a similar case, to the charge d'affaires in France, on August 26, 1790, saying: "You will perceive, that the expression in the eleventh article of our treaty of amity and commerce with France ... has been construed so rigorously to the letter, as to consider us as Aubaines in the Colonies of France." <sup>91</sup> Against such an attitude Moses Myers could not prevail, so he returned to Norfolk about the middle of July, 1791. <sup>92</sup>

Moses Myers now proceeded to build himself a home. He purchased a large lot, some 266 feet by 149 feet, on September 29, 1791. <sup>93</sup> After this he proceeded to build the Georgian mansion, occupying what is now the corner of Freemason and Bank Streets.

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91. Ibid., quoting P. L. Ford's The Writings of Thomas Jefferson, V (1895), p. 234.

92. Stern, loc. cit., p. 6.

93. Ibid. Oddly enough, S. Lowe, Myers House, p. 1, writes that the house was built "in 1789 or 1791." The same statement appears in the Ledger Dispatch (Norfolk), December 18, 1930, but T. J. Wertenbaker, Norfolk, Historic Southern Port, pp. 102, 137, while praising the architecture of the house, omits all mention of the year in which it was built. Marcus, Early American Jewry, II, p. 215, says that the house was built "four years after Moses moved there ..."; that would be 1791. There was nothing to prevent the house from being built in 1789 except probably the shortage of cash. The fact that Moses didn't purchase the land until 1791 does not preclude his having built it earlier. On the other hand, if he didn't start building till well on in September 1791, he could hardly have finished the house before some time in 1792.

Moses built this house for comfortable living. It was a large place and with its stables, coach houses, kitchen, kitchen garden, and flower garden occupied an entire block.<sup>94</sup> Here he had ample room for his growing family as well as for guests and interesting people who might pass through Norfolk. Later, this house was to have such distinguished visitors as Lafayette, Henry Clay, General Winfield Scott, Commodores Barron and Decator, President Taft and President Theodore Roosevelt.<sup>95</sup> Had Moses been able to see all these famous people in his house he would no doubt have been glad, but even without that, the wanderer who had travelled all over Europe, the wanderer who had been driven out of St. Eustatia, now had a home, and that was enough to make him happy beyond compare.

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94. Lowe, Myers House, pp. 6-7.

95. Ibid., p. 7.

## THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

The early 1790's were a period of prosperity for the whole of the United States, and Moses Myers used them to good advantage.<sup>1</sup> His standing in the business world is best indicated by the fact that in 1791 Stephen Girard, the great Philadelphia merchant and banker, sent instructions to his people to go to Norfolk and call on "...Mr. Moses Myers, merchant of that place, who will give instructions to the captains where to go for cargoes."<sup>2</sup> Woe to the sea captain who did not do his duty by his ship for Moses Myers wouldn't hesitate to haul him into court if he set sail with his ship"... not properly Mand and Victualed...."<sup>3</sup>

In 1791, Moses Myers paid his taxes and they amounted to no more than 2 shillings, but that didn't mean that his business was small.<sup>4</sup> He had become so important in the business life of the community, that when the Bank of Richmond

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1. James, M., Biography of a Business 1792-1942 (,) Insurance Company of North America, p.25.
  2. McMaster, Stephen Girard, I, p.142.
  3. MS., Virginia Norfolk-Borough Register, Jan.1,1791-July 18, 1810, p.2, in Norfolk Corporation Court.
  4. Norfolk Borough Personal Property 1791.

was established in 1792, the act of the Virginia legislature named him to be the bank's superintendant at Norfolk.<sup>5</sup> That year, although his business was flourishing and he had four slaves, his taxes were only 3 shillings.<sup>6</sup>

In 1793, Moses Myers bought some real estate.<sup>7</sup> He seems to have started a firm Myers & Pollard and they owned considerable real estate.<sup>8</sup> Perhaps there was good reason for his increased interest in real estate at this period for a period of danger was developing for American commerce. The French Revolution began, at that time, to be felt in America. "What pleased the French in 1793 offended the English, and what served English ends was evidently hostile to the French, and both plundered defenseless neutrals, so long as they did not fight back, of cargoes, provisions, and seamen as their own needs required."<sup>9</sup>

When France, in 1793, gave neutral ships the same rights as French ships, it seemed a golden opportunity for American shippers, but England countered by ordering her navy to bring in all ships dealing with the enemy.<sup>10</sup> The British navy gave their orders such a broad interpretation that even ships consigned to British ports were unsafe,

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5. Huhner, PAJHS, p.103.
  6. Norfolk Borough Personal Property 1792.
  7. MS., Deed Book, III, Sept. 23, 1793-July 25, 1796, p.89,  
in the Corporation Court, Norfolk, Va.
  8. Norfolk Borough Personal Property, 1792.
  9. Phillips, Salem, p. 101.
  10. James, Biography of a Business, p. 29.



especially in the Caribbean.<sup>11</sup> Moses Myers soon became immersed in these matters, when he became the French agent at Norfolk.<sup>12</sup>

One wonders why Moses Myers took on this added responsibility. Perhaps he did so out of admiration for France's treatment of the Jews, since the revolution. France, on September 27, 1791, had passed an act to give the Jews the rights and duties of French citizens. She thus became the first country in Europe to give the Jews equality. A French clergyman had sponsored the bill and said: "I claim freedom and happiness for the Jews in the name of the sacred principles of my religion, and I will not leave this tribune before you give me a hearing."<sup>13</sup> This clergyman, the Abbe Gregoire, had stood firm even when his enemies threw ponderous law books and inkwells" that splashed their contents over his wig and cassock."<sup>14</sup> Such conduct, Moses Myers could appreciate.

Perhaps he took on this position as French agent in the hope that such activity might serve to protect his ships from French depredations and gain for them some diplomatic immunity. Be that as it may, the job kept him busy. On March 23, 1794, he appeared before the mayor of Norfolk

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11. Ibid., p.30.

12. Huhner, PAJHS, XX (1911), p.103.

13. P. Van Paassen, "A Bishop in the Synagogue," Jewish Forum, XV (Aug. 1932), p.244-5.

14. Ibid.

to protest, in his capacity as French agent, a violation of the neutrality law by the Americans.<sup>15</sup>

In his capacity as French agent, he was often called upon to advance all ships' necessities to French naval vessels on credit. Once, after making such an advance he wrote to a friend: "...I have been looking with Tears in my eyes for fifteen days for a remittance from M. Pichon for my advances account of the Simillante Frigate but it does not come...."<sup>16</sup> Had he known that payments would be so tardy he might well have reconsidered the whole matter.

When French refugees, driven from their homes in San Domingo by an uprising of the slaves, arrived in Norfolk, they received a warm welcome at the home of Moses Myers, even though such hospitality was not included in his official duties. Moreau de St. Mery gives us this statement under date of March 7, 1794:

Business matters took us to the home of M. Myer, a Norfolk merchant whose praises had been sung to us even before we disembarked. Everyone had spoken of his kindness to the French and his espousal of their cause, and even before we met him we felt that we knew him & had many things in common. It was nearly half after one when we came ashore, & we were wondering where we should dine, when M. Myer's kind invitation solved the problem for all of us — even for M. Briere, who had joined us.

For us, whose stomachs had been wrecked by

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15. Huhner, *loc.cit.*, p.103.

16. To John Leamy (Philadelphia), Jan. 7, 1803, Letterbook, II, p.379.

the Sophie's miserable fare, the meal was like a wedding feast. The excellent food, the simple and flattering welcome, the sight of a fond mother who even suckled a lusty infant during the meal, M. Myer's four pretty children -- everything charmed us.<sup>17</sup>

Moreau de St. Mery also records that Moses Myers got a sick French girl into a boarding house.<sup>18</sup> That was the way of this man. He wasn't just a business man; he was a warm-hearted, public-spirited citizen.

On June 24, 1794, Moses Myers was elected to the Common Council of Norfolk.<sup>19</sup> This was the beginning of a career of public service to that city. He was to retain his place on the council for many years, growing more popular in the eyes of his fellow citizens with each passing year. Another indication of his standing in the community, is to be found in the people who associated with him in business ventures. One such business partner was William Pennock;<sup>20</sup> another was Robert Taylor, in 1791.<sup>21</sup>

William S. Forrest has described in glowing terms the partnership of Moses Myers and William Pennock. He says that they

possessed in an eminent degree what may be called the chivalry of the commercial character, and displayed in bearing a dignity and grace which looked infinitely

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17. Kenneth and Anna M. Roberts, translators and editors, Moreau de St. Mery's American Journey (1793-1798), p.34.

18. Ibid., p.36.

19. W.H.T. Squires, "Norfolk in By-Gone Days," Norfolk Ledger Dispatch, Sept. 4, 1947.

20. MS., Norfolk Deed Book, III, p.106-7.

21. Ibid., p.99.

beyond an ignoble rivalry and the tricks of the trade....One may look even now in the Northern cities to find the counterpart of the counting rooms of Pennock & Myers, in the meridian of your commercial renown.<sup>22</sup>

A man may be judged by his associates. Moses Myers, a man of honor, chose only the finest gentlemen as his associates.

In 1794 Moses Myers employed seven slaves, and had an income of £29 in rent from various properties.<sup>23</sup> We have no further record of his business activities but can surmise that they must have been considerable as otherwise Pennock & Myers "counting rooms" wouldn't have merited such a flattering description. He continued to rise in public esteem to such an extent that at the elections for the Common Council, held on August 25, 1795, he received more votes than anyone else and because of this was made president of the council.<sup>24</sup>

The year 1796 was a busy one for Moses Myers. His business establishment employed six white men and nine slaves. His own property brought him a rental of £ 10, while the property owned jointly by the firm Myers & Pollard brought in £ 90 in rent. In taxes he paid £ 0.1.8 while the firm paid a tax of £ 0.15.<sup>25</sup> He was in London, England for

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22. Huhner, loc.cit., p.103, citing Forrest's History and Descriptive Sketches of Norfolk and Vicinity, p.116.

23. Norfolk Borough Personal Property 1794.

24. Stern, Some Notes, p.7; P.A. Bruce, History of Virginia, IV, p.433.

25. MS., Norfolk Borough Personal Property, 1796.

part of the year, and one wonders how that affected his work as president of the Common Council.<sup>26</sup> Perhaps it was because he saw that he couldn't do justice to that office because of his far-flung business enterprises that he resigned from the office at the first meeting of the council in 1797.<sup>27</sup> He was succeeded by his good friend Thomas Newton, Jr.<sup>28</sup>

J. M. Swan, French Agent in the U. S. A., had called Moses Myers "a man of integrity, capacity and capital," in 1795, and had appointed him as his Norfolk representative for that reason.<sup>29</sup> During 1796 it often looked as if Swan was Moses Myers' agent in Philadelphia as he was constantly negotiating drafts for him on various Philadelphia houses.<sup>30</sup>

If Moses Myers was the French agent at Norfolk, that did not mean that he ceased to be a patriotic American. When the time came, he did not hesitate to show where his sympathies lay. After the X.Y.Z. affair, a state of undeclared war existed between the United States and France. The United States began to prepare for the war that seemed so inevitable. In Norfolk there was considerable military preparations, and so it is not surprising to find Moses Myers being appointed as a Captain in the Fifty-fourth Regiment, on May 26, 1798.<sup>31</sup> At that time he was the father

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26. Stern, Some Notes on Moses Myers, p.8.

27. Squires, Norfolk Ledger Dispatch, Sept. 4, 1947.

28. Ibid.

29. American Jewish Archives, II (Jan. 1950) p.27.

30. J. Swan, Philadelphia, March 14, 1796, to M.M. in possession of Myers Family, Norfolk.

31. Lowe, Myers House, p.10. See also Wertenbaker, Norfolk, p.99n.

of six children, but that did not deter him from these patriotic duties.<sup>32</sup>

In all these difficult years, Moses Myers' business prospered. He occasionally lost a ship but the calmness of his tone shows that he could take it in his stride. Here is his report of one such loss: "You know that a French privateer 15 days since took several vessels off this coast, a Schooner of mine 3 days from the Delaware."<sup>33</sup> On another such occasion he wrote: "While I regret my loss on the Sch. Prudence & Cargo without any Insurance (,) I feel great Consolation in Capt. Patton and People being Saved(,)"<sup>34</sup>

He had worked out a way for doing business in the West Indies through people on whom he could rely thoroughly. Thus he told one business house: "My Agents in Martinique St. Pierre (sic) are Wickham & Shewell two young men brought up in my Compting Room(,) They are Active & honest."<sup>35</sup> These young men had been quite close to being captured by a French privateer on their way out to the island but had been fortunate enough to find their way to St. Bartholomews in safety.<sup>36</sup>

Because of the disturbed state of affairs in

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32. Ibid., p.8.

33. M.M. to John C. Jones, April 22, 1802, citing letter of August 27, 1800, Letterbook, III, p.569.

34. M.M. to John C. Jones, April 25, 1801, Letterbook, III, p.125.

35. M.M. to Isaac Moses & Sons, Jan.4, 1801, Letterbook, III, p.3.

36. Ibid.

Europe, news from that quarter was of the greatest importance to Moses Myers. He wanted to get news of any changes at the earliest possible moment. Thus he wrote: "We have miss'd making a little fortune (.) had you Sent me an express via Eastern Shore respecting the genl. rise of Articles I could have been a head but all the world was in the market before I got yr. letter by mail(.) the advices operated on were via Baltimore — you must Keep a better look out...."<sup>37</sup>

When his English correspondents didn't send him news, he wrote them that he would have to stop doing business with them.<sup>38</sup>

He told a friend that he had written to the London business house that he "...wod. with pleasure continue it (the business) — but under the express stipulation of regular information — I have six lines from them in five mos. & thousands depending (.) this will not do ...."<sup>39</sup> Moses Myers got news from all over Europe. To his friend John C. Jones he wrote: "I have late letters from Lisbon, they are also in want — their Stores would not hold out longer than next month (.) large Supplies of Troops from England (they write mee) and nothing to feed them with."<sup>40</sup>

On March 5, 1801 he wrote to John Grayson that late news from London told of "... a Peace between Austria & France & war between England and the Northern Powers."<sup>41</sup> News had a

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37. To John Leamy, Feb. 1, 1801, Letterbook, III, p.37.  
38. To J.C. Jones, March 8, 1801, Letterbook, III, p.73.  
39. Ibid.  
40. Jan. 26, 1801, Letterbook, III, p.33.  
41. Ibid., p.71.

vital effect on day to day business operations. On March 27, 1801, he wrote to his friend, Mark Pringle: "Our News yesterday from New York of a change in the British Ministry has made Some People Serious who have large Parcels of flour by them." <sup>42</sup> The following day, Moses wrote to John Leamy on the same subject: "I know not what to think of the Change in the British Ministry but view it a mere finess & that Mr. Pitt again be Solicited to continue in office."<sup>43</sup> In writing a bout this matter to the firm of S. & S. Myers, on March 31, 1801, he shows a change of heart, however, and says: "...for my part it forbodes a peace."<sup>44</sup> The changes in England worried his friend John C. Jones who had sent out a ship there, but Moses assured him that the ship would do well: "notwithstanding the reports of the Government refusing to pay the high Bounty alledging It had not Passed into a law they are in great want In Ireland and the Cargo must do well --."<sup>45</sup>

Moses Myers made keen and searching analyses of the news. His awareness of what lay behind the news is well illustrated by this piece:

I believe It is the determination of Mr. Jefferson at all events to keep us in a state of Neutrality (.) I fear the Task will be an arduous one if the European war continues so long (.) It would however appear

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42. Ibid., p.91.

43. Ibid., p.93.

44. Ibid., p.96.

45. April 3, 1801, Letterbook, III, p.99.



that the British mean to respect our flag more than they have done in the W. Indies this may be a policy to lull us for a time (.) the true Interest of our Country is indeed Peace which I trust will be our Lott.<sup>46</sup>

There is good sound judgement in all this, and some prophecy too. The space all this is given in Moses Myers' business letters shows how much effect international affairs had on our business. Events in Europe could bring American merchants boundless prosperity or hopeless ruin.

Whenever Moses got a piece of news, he hurried to communicate it to his friends. Thus, on January 5, 1802, he wrote John Leamy that "Five thousands Troops & four Sail of the line had arrived at Jamaica from England (.) other Troops and Ships were to follow by which it would appear they wish to be prepared least the force...from France... might make a mistake and fall to Leward."<sup>47</sup>

The war in Europe created a great demand for American produce. Those who had the produce became very demanding and Moses Myers had to write his friends that "Cash is necessary to procure your cargoes on good terms..."<sup>48</sup> All who were familiar with war-time shortages will feel for him when he writes that "The holders of all provisions are alarmed when you ask the price of anything."<sup>49</sup> Our produce

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46. To J.C. Jones, May 9, 1801, Letterbook, III, p.136.

47. Letterbook, III, p.377.

48. To Saml. Brown, Boston, Jan.3,1801, Letterbook,III,p.7.

49. To J.Leamy, Jan.27,1801, loc.cit., p.31.

wasn't equal to the demand and Moses wrote: "It appears to me we shall have no Provision left by the month of April."<sup>50</sup> Prices rose immensely and Moses reported with a we that pork"...has got up here to \$16 nay people who have purchased ask \$20 -- It is Shipping to England."<sup>51</sup>

About these sky-rocketting prices, Moses Myers could say but one thing: "We are indeed Mad. you will Say Stark Mad...."<sup>52</sup> All too soon the bubble burst, bringing ruin to many merchants all over the country. When the news of the Peace of Amiens finally reached America, many merchants were unprepared for it and suffered great losses. To business associates Moses wrote: "I regret to learn the disasters in Philada. and Sincerely hope you are Clear of them as I am and fear there will be many more in that City...."<sup>53</sup> Writing to another friend he said: "I am fearful the Consequences of the Peace are not yet felt. the failures in Philada . will cause many more...."<sup>54</sup>

Though he was clear of all the failures, they distressed him greatly. As the situation slowly improved, he wrote to his friend John Leamy, of Philadelphia, that he "... was glad no more failures had taken place [.] I wish the calamity may cease but I fear it will spread further."<sup>55</sup>

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50. To J.C. Jones, Jan. 26, 1801, loc.cit., p.33.

51. To J. Leamy, Feb. 1, 1801, loc.cit., p.36.

52. To J. Leamy, March 9, 1801, Letterbook, III, p.72.

53. To Isaac Moses & Sons, Dec. 24, 1801, loc.cit., p.364.

54. To Judah Hays, Dec. 29, 1801, loc.cit., p.367.

55. Dec. 29, 1801, loc.cit., p.367.

A week later, he wrote once again to John Leamy, saying, "I hope there will be no more failures with you & that as in New York confidence is again restored."<sup>56</sup>

As the year advanced, Moses Myers felt that the troubles were not yet over. Thus he wrote a business associate: "At Philadelphia & Baltimore misfortunes have happened as I expected & I am sure others must follow."<sup>57</sup> There was great danger in those days when the American economy was geared to the war in Europe. Any change in Europe brought unexpected results in America. As it was, there had been trouble and money shortages all along, even for Moses Myers, and he had had to write on one occasion to his ex-partner, Isaac Moses, saying: "... dont Scold (.) I will draw no more for Some time. I am told you never have less than 50 to 80,000 Dollars in Bank and can certainly oblige your friend...."<sup>58</sup>

About a month later he wrote another letter to Isaac Moses saying: "I observe what you Say respecting Money Banks &c. that yr. friends make Shifts to get all your Spare Money (.) I know It (.) there is extreme Satisfaction in Serving our friends and doing as we would be done by --"<sup>59</sup> The shortage of money produced a cry for banks in many places, and it is therefore very interesting to see Moses Myers' opinion on banks.

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56. Jan. 7, 1802, loc.cit., p.379.

57. To Wm. Smith, Jan.14,1801 (?), Letterbook, III, p.388.

58. April 2, 1801, loc.cit., p. 101.

59. May 1, 1801, loc.cit., p.131.

He wrote a business associate: "I observe indeed I knew that it had been determined a Branch Bank shou'd be established at Savannah (;) it is a good thing for prudent men but a Bad thing if misused." He then added the words: "I have been a Director of our Bank ever since its establishment."<sup>60</sup> Neither banks nor other institutions could help our business men at that time, however, for our business was geared to the war needs of Europe. Europe's losses were America's gains and vice versa.

The financial picture of that era is admirably summed up in this paragraph by Hugh Blair Grigsby:

The trade of our fathers in 1802 was an unnatural trade. It was a fungus that sprung from the diseased condition of foreign powers. It was not the result of developed productive wealth, but the accident of the war between the two greatest commercial nations of the globe, which gave us the carrying trade. It was born of other people's troubles, and destined to die when those troubles were appeased.<sup>61</sup>

That is why the Peace of Amiens was a calamity and a disaster for many of the greatest merchants of the land, and failures took place in all the principal cities.

Moses Myers, looking at the situation cried out: "Where for Heavens Sake is all this to end, I see not."<sup>62</sup>

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60. To Lewis Harrington, April 22, 1802, Letterbook, III, p.575.

61. Wertenbaker, Norfolk, p.103n., citing H. B. Grigsby, Governor Tazewell, p.27.

62. To Isaac Moses & Sons, March 10, 1802, Letterbook, III, p.431.

Writing to a New York business house, he said: "I regret very much the Genl Situation of things in all the Northern Towns ...."<sup>63</sup> To another gentleman he wrote that the failures" ... seem too General every where."<sup>64</sup> In yet another letter he said: "the failures in Baltimore New York & Chs Town are dreadfull...."<sup>65</sup> So business was bad both in the north and in the south. Peace in Europe, however, was not of very long duration, so business recovered quite quickly when the war was renewed.

There was other bad news about which to write that year; events in the French West Indies caught the attention of the whole world. It was about those events that Moses Myers wrote the following:

You are no doubt advised as to the Most unpleasant News from Cape Francois -- I have Spoken with Capt. Rodgers who says that on the approach of the fleet Gen Leclerc (Leclerc) sent a Message to Toussaint purporting that he had Come to take possession of Hispaniola and to preserve to the people their Liberty (&) Property and that the fleet would enter the Port next day to which Genl Christoph replied the Commander in Chief Toussaint being absent had directed him not to Suffer more than two Ships to enter the Port, more woud be considered hostile & on the first Gun being fired he shoud announce it alagial (?) to putting a torch to every house on the Island (.) on the entry of the Ships the Cape was accordingly fired and when the army landed on (ly) 57 Houses Remained (sic) unburnt and Capt Rodgers says the flames extended in the plain as

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63. To Isaac Moses & Sons , March 8, 1802, loc.cit., p.429.  
64. To Wm. Smith, March 9, 1802, loc.cit., p.430.  
65. To Geo. Gibbs, March 10, 1802, loc.cit., p.433.

fair (sic) as the eye could intend (.) an embargo has been laid and his was the only Vessell Suffered to depart...."66

Those were anxious days for many of our merchants.

They were anxious days too for those who lived in southern communities amongst the negro masses. Moses Myers gives us a sharp picture of this:

there is an unpleasant report of the massacre of a whole family in North Carolina by the negroes. I hope it may only prove a Report (.) it has however caused us to be Vigilant (.) I had a patrol last night and shall have it Continued for some time (.) we must see to get our Militia in Regular order (:) it may be very necessary for the Negroes grow disorderly and the St. Domingo business may put mischief in their heads....67

Thus one sees that there were many tensions at work in those war years. Money was made and lost. Ships were boarded and sailors impressed. It was a time of trouble for all.

Fortunately, there were no failures in Norfolk, and none were expected, although there was a general shortage of cash. For this, Moses Myers was very thankful.<sup>68</sup> That year, 1802, his properties brought him in a rental of \$900.00 on which he paid a tax of \$61.72.<sup>69</sup> Taxes seem to have gone up quite a bit that year, for in the previous year

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66. To L.A. Pichon, Baltimore, March 3, 1802, Letterbook, III, p.425.

67. To Thomas Newton Jr., March 12, 1802, loc.cit., p.436.

68. M.M. to Wm. Smith, March 9, 1802, Letterbook, III, p.430.

69. Personal Property 1802.

on a rental income of \$860.00 he had paid in taxes only  
\$20.97.<sup>70</sup> That's what war conditions do to taxes.

Perhaps it was with a sigh of relief that Moses Myers turned away from his business concerns to the pleasant task of writing the following letter to Thomas Jefferson:

Norfolk, June 1st, 1802

Sir

Permit me the Honor to Introduce Admiral Hartsinck (Commanding the Squadron of the Batavian Republic in Hampton Road, & for which I am agent) to your Civilities. The object of the Admiral's Journey is to pay you his Personal respects & I am happy Sir to Inform you that the Impressions on his mind are very favourable indeed as relates to our Country — which has been very flattering to me —

The Admiral will be extremely Gratified in the Honor of Your personal acquaintance & I have taken the liberty to assure him you would be glad to see him.

I have the Honor to be with much Respect  
Sir

Your very obt. St.  
Moses Myers<sup>71</sup>

Thomas Jefferson Esq.

From this letter it would appear that Moses Myers was acquainted with Thomas Jefferson, and had a very real respect and admiration for that distinguished gentleman. It also shows us that Moses Myers was always ready to do his part to help influential foreigners gain a good impression of his beloved country. In those days of conflict, this was very important to America.

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70. Personal Property 1801.

71. Max J. Kohler, "Thomas Jefferson and American Jews,"  
PAJHS, XX (1911), p. 17.

## SORROWS AND TRAGEDIES

The war years brought prosperity, but they were full of worry for the American business man. This is seen clearly in a letter written by Samuel Myers (Moses' son) to his elder brother, John, in which he said: "I have long since made up my mind to pursue the profession of Law, & have been not a little prompted to this determination by the prest. deranged state of mercantile affairs ..."<sup>1</sup>

Only a few years later, this same son, Samuel<sup>2</sup> stood accused of the murder of Richard Bowden, of Norfolk. It happened this way: Bowden had an argument with Moses Myers and knocked him down. When Samuel learned of this, he took a pistol and went out and shot Bowden.<sup>3</sup> Apparently he got off scot free, but as late as 1820 there were still<sup>4</sup> people in Norfolk who called him a murderer.

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1. MS., April 10, 1808, in the Library of the College of William and Mary.
  2. Norfolk Gazette & Publick Ledger, May 27, 1811.
  3. Wm. B. Street to John Myers, July 4, 1811, MS in the possession of the Myers family of Norfolk.
  4. Diary of William Dunlap 1766-1833 . . . ., II, pp. 518-519.



This marked the beginning of a series of tragedies that now fell on Moses Myers. He could take pride in the record of his sons, John and Myer, in the War of 1812, but after that his life was a long series of trials and tribulations.<sup>5</sup> A few years after the cessation of hostilities, a great and terrible panic swept over the country. Gloom covered the whole land, early in 1819, when the following poem appeared in the press:

#### HARD TIMES

Hard are the times indeed when all confess,  
That every face is clouded with distress;  
When merchants groan beneath a weight of care  
And cheerless prospects greet a newborn year;  
When the Mechanick's tools aside are laid,  
And he, bemoaning tells of bills unpaid;  
When banks lamenting mourn their credit gone,  
And from their vaults the specie all withdrawn,  
And when the parson with look demure,  
Complains of want, whose stipend should be sure;  
When e'en the Editor, whose copious sheet,  
Mingles our bitter cup with many a sweet,  
Feels the dejecting gloom the season wears,  
And justly mourns his patrons long arrears --  
When e'en the Bard, whose wants for cash are small,  
Feels his dejecting lot, the lot of all,  
And tho' he dares not hope or wish to hoard,  
Desires a trifling sum to pay his board.  
Stipendiary. 6

The Panic of 1819 crushed Moses Myers. On July 5, 1819, he and his son, John, executed a deed which made over their properties as security to their debtors.<sup>7</sup>

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5. The Norfolk Landmark, November 10, 1877.
  6. American Beacon, (Norfolk) January 28, 1819.
  7. The Norfolk & Portsmouth Herald, July 31, 1822.

Moses explained his troubles, in the following note: "My means are large greatly above my debts, but a dollar cannot be raised on anything."<sup>8</sup> His trouble was that "property would only bring as many hundreds as it would have commanded thousands eighteen months earlier."<sup>9</sup> Thus once again did circumstances conspire to rob Moses Myers of all his possessions.

After this, the hand of death descended on the Myers family. In November of 1819, Moses' son, Abraham, passed away, and this is what the newspaper said about him:

With feelings of most painful sorrow we have to announce the death of Mr. Abraham Myers of the firm Myers & Woodlands, Merchants, at the residence of his father. The amiable youth was but a few days since in the bloom of health & beauty of life. He died on the 18th inst. in the 22nd year of his age. In his intercourse with society he was admired as the polished gentleman, animating the social circle with the sallies of his lively imagination, and binding every heart to him by his openness of character, and refined sensibility. But alas! he has been thus suddenly taken from his fond parents, and affectionate sisters & brothers, who in this awful dispensation of Providence and severe bereavement, have sustained a loss too afflicting to be expressed, and known only to those whose hearts have been painfully wrung by such a trial. In his character every virtue was combined to render him beloved by his connexions, and

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8. To John Leamy, June 6, 1819, Letterbook, VIII, 391.

9. E. Channing, A History of the United States, V, 314 n.

intimate friends, and his loss will long be deplored by all who had the pleasure of his acquaintance. As a son, he was every thing a parent could wish. As a brother, affectionate and devoted. As a friend, honorable and sincere. 10

A man can recover from a business loss, but from this kind of a loss it is impossible to recover. For that matter, Moses Myers had no chance to recover. More tragedies came his way.

His youngest son Henry had chosen the navy as a career, possibly because of the collapse of the family business. He had become a midshipman and was thus on the road of duty and honor, but the path of duty led to an early grave. He was aboard the U.S.S. Hornet, going from Havana to Norfolk, when he became ill with yellow fever. He lasted only a few days, and died on August 9, 1822.<sup>11</sup> Who can estimate the pain and heart ache caused by this watery grave? The parents had no chance to nurse their son. They had even been denied the privilege of following their son's bier. There was not even a grave to look after and adorn with flowers. Mrs. Myers' health broke beneath the weight of all this tragedy; she died<sup>12</sup> on October 19, 1823.

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10. American Beacon, November 19, 1821.

11. Ibid., August 13, 1822.

12. Richmond Enquirer, November 4, 1823.

Once again the obituary notice tells the story:

Departed this life, after a lingering illness at her sister's in Montreal, Canada, Mrs. Eliza Myers, consort of Moses Myers, Esq. Merchant, of this Borough. Her disease was principally that of the mind, occasioned by sorrow for the untimely exit from this life of two of her devoted, amiable and accomplished sons who were cut off suddenly, in the beauty and bloom of life and usefulness, promising as they matured in age, solace to their aged parents and ornaments to society. She was a pious woman, affectionate wife, and tender parent.

Those friends who had the honor of an acquaintance with Mrs. Myers, will long regret the loss they have sustained in this sad event, and sympathise with those more nearly connected — a distressed husband and affectionate children.<sup>13</sup>

It is possible too that the loss of all their properties, was keenly felt by Mrs. Myers. The properties were sold in 1822 for a tiny fraction of their real worth in order to still the clamor of their debtors.<sup>14</sup>

Moses Myers took all this with fortitude. In September of 1826, the sky brightened for him, when his son Myer Myers married Miss Judith Marx of Richmond.<sup>15</sup>

Moses now faced the world with newfound energy. In May of 1827, Moses was appointed Collector of Customs for the district of Norfolk and Portsmouth, Virginia.<sup>16</sup> In addition to these duties he was also expected to be the Superintendent of Lights, and Agent of the Marine Hospital, and all

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13. American Beacon, November 1, 1823.

14. The Norfolk & Portsmouth Herald, July 31, 1822.

15. The Norfolk Landmark, November 10, 1877.

16. The Norfolk & Portsmouth Herald, June 1, 1827.

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this for the modest sum of \$904.83 per annum. One  
couldn't get rich on that salary, but at least it gave  
Moses Myers something to take his mind off his troubles.

His troubles, however, were far from over.  
Early in 1830, he resigned from the office of Collector.  
Then on November 27, 1830, his beloved son, John, passed  
away. Here is his obituary notice:

Died — On Saturday evening last, at half past  
six o'clock, after an illness of three weeks,  
John Myers, Esq. aged 42, eldest son of Moses  
Myers, Esq. late Collector of the port of Nor-  
folk. On the reorganization of the Junior  
Volunteers last Spring, he was though not then  
a member, elected to command that distinguished  
corps, of which — the coincidence is somewhat  
striking — he was Lieutenant 17 years ago, when  
it was commanded by the lamented M'Connico, whose  
death has just been announced; and, with his com-  
mander was taken from his station in the company,  
and appointed Aid-de-Camp to Brigadier Gen. Taylor,  
then commanding the State troops at this post.  
They were much associated both in military and  
in death they have not been divided.<sup>18</sup>

The cup of bitterness was presented to Moses' lips again  
and again, almost beyond the limit of human endurance. One  
wonders how he stood up under the weight of all these sor-  
rows heaped upon him in the short space of a few years,  
and what gave him solace and strength.

A year later, his home was draped in black  
once again. His beloved daughter, Adeline, died. Here

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17. Register of Officers and Agents Civil, Military and  
Naval in the Service of the United States on the  
30th of September, 1829 ..., p. 58.

18. Daily Richmond Whig, December 4, 1830, p. 3.

is her obituary notice;

Miss Adeline Myers, daughter of Moses Myers, Esq. departed this life, after a short illness, on Monday evening. Her funeral will take place this Day at 11 o'clock, at the house of her father. Her friends and acquaintances are invited to attend at that time, without further notice.

The lamented subject of this notice enjoyed in a high degree the affection and esteem of the polished and enlightened society in which she moved, for she was eminently distinguished for all those virtues & graces which elevate her sex and do honor to human nature. — Blessed with an intelligent & well regulated mind, and a disposition every way amiable; this highly accomplished lady sought her sum of earthly enjoyment in dispensing happiness to those around her — in her domestic circle, and in the society of her friends. Sad, indeed, is the sacrifice to which they have been required to submit, in the loss of so cherished and endearing an object, and painful beyond expression the visitation of the calamity to her already griefstricken family, bowed with the burden of many previous sorrows, heaped upon them in the lapse of a few short years. 19

Moses Myers was being tried in the fiery furnace of affliction, but his trials were not yet over. Of course, one might argue that this is one of the penalties of advanced old age — the penalty of seeing loved ones drop off, like leaves in wintery weather.

The obituary notices, however, seem to indicate that the community felt that Moses Myers was getting more than his share of sorrow. Especially is this seen

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19. Norfolk and Portsmouth Herald, January 18, 1832.

in the notice following the death of his son, Frederick:

It is with no less regret for the loss to our community of so valuable a member than of sympathy for the anguish which has been inflicted in a family already depressed by many sorrows; that we announce the death of Frederick Myers, Esq. Merchant of this Borough; he departed this life on Saturday night last, (June 16, 1832) at the residence of his father, Moses Myers, Esq. in the 35th year of his age. He was born and reared in our community and the universal sentiment of regret, with which his death has inspirited it, is the best evidence of his worth of character, and the blameless tenor of his life. The friends of the family are invited to attend his funeral, from the residence of his father, this day, at 10 o'clock, precisely, without further notice.

#### Masonic Notice

The Members of Lodge No. 1 will meet at the Mason's Hall, This Morning at  $\frac{1}{2}$  past 8 o'clock, A.M. to pay the last tribute of respect to the remains of their Worshipful Master, Frederick Myers.

The Members of Lodges No. 16, 56 and 100 and all transient brethren are respectfully invited to attend. June 18.20

This was a cruel blow to Moses Myers, for Frederick had been the support of his old age. Frederick had worked very hard to pay off his father's debts and had joined with Myer to maintain their father.

Another man would have been knocked out by

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20. Norfolk and Portsmouth Herald, June 18, 1832. I am indebted to Miss Mary Churchill Brown, of the Norfolk Public Library, for this notice.
21. Stern, Some Notes, Appendix, A.

such a tragedy, but not so was it with Moses Myers. The death of his son Frederick, spurred him on to new activity. Perhaps it was his fierce desire for independence that made him go to Washington, to join a lobby, only a month after the tragedy. In Washington, however, the going was none too easy, and Moses Myers was soon attacked by no less a personage than Henry Clay. Mr. Clay's remarks smelled of religious bigotry, and this interesting correspondence ensued:

Baltimore July 15, 1832.

Dear Sir: You know that I am your friend, and therefore I write to you freely. Several of the religious society to which I belong, myself included, feel both surprised and hurt by the manner in which you introduce the expression "the Jew" in debate in the Senate of the United States, evidently applying it as a reproachful designation of a man whom you considered obnoxious in character & conduct.

I do not know the person you allude to, the term "the Jew" as used by you, is considered illiberal. If therefore you have no antipathy to the people of that religious society, I can readily believe you will have no objection to explain to me by a line, what induced the expression.

I am, with respect and esteem,  
Your Obt. St.  
S. Etting

Hon. H. Clay  
United States Senate, Washington<sup>22</sup>

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22. Walter Liebmann, "The Correspondence Between Solomon Etting and Henry Clay," PAJHS, XVII (1909), p. 81.



Henry Clay followed exactly the line suggested by Solomon Etting, and here is his reply:

Washington, 16th July, 1832.

My Dear Sir: I regret extremely to perceive from your letter of yesterday, that you have thought it possible that a remark of mine, applied to a subordinate officer of the Customs who was in attendance here, was liable to an unfavourable interpretation to the Jews generally. Nothing could have been further from my intention. The remark was intended to describe a person, and not to denounce a Nation. It was strictly, moreover, defensive. Some of my friends who were in the Senate had been attacked by Genl. Hayne, as I thought, rudely for the assistance which they had rendered about the Tariff.

In reply I said they were not the only persons attending on that object, but that on the other side, Moses Myers (or Myers Moses, for I do not yet know his designation), had been summoned by the Secretary of the Treasury, and might be seen daily skipping about the house; and I then proceeded to describe his person, &c.

I judge of men, not exclusively by their Nation, religion, &c., but by their individual conduct. I have always had the happiness to enjoy the friendship of many Jews, among them one of the Gratz's of Lexington, formerly of Philadelphia, stands in the most intimate and friendly relations to me; but I cannot doubt that there are bad jews as well as bad christians and bad mahometans.

I hope, my dear sir, that you will consider this letter perfectly satisfactory.

With great regards, I am,  
Truly yours,  
H. Clay.

Solomon Etting, Esq.<sup>23</sup>

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23. Ibid. This is far from being a satisfactory explanation, but is about the best that Henry Clay could say, under the circumstances.

If Clay's letter can be taken literally, it is certainly very wonderful that at the age of eighty years, Moses Myers could still go "skipping about the house."<sup>24</sup> After this incident, however, old age really set in, with its infirmities and ailments. In his declining years, he became financially independent, thanks to a legacy of five thousand dollars, from his old friend,<sup>25</sup> Abraham Touro.

On July 8, 1835, Moses Myers passed away, and this is what the paper said about him:

Died, yesterday morning, between the hours of eight and nine, in the 83d year of his age, Moses Myers, Esq. formerly Collector of this port, and one of the oldest and most enterprising merchants in the Union. He had been in feeble health for some months past, and a few weeks since paid a visit to a beloved daughter in Baltimore, but his health was not improved by the jaunt.— He became ill in that city, and being desirous of breathing the pure air of the sea to which he was accustomed, he was removed, as soon as his situation would permit, to this place, where he has since remained. But it was not decreed that he should again recover his usual health. He grew gradually weaker, & finally breathed his last, more, as it were, in obedience to the law of our common nature than of any positive disease. Few men were more prosperous in middle life than the subject of this notice, and few have been more severely tried in the ordeal of affliction. Within the range of a few short years, he not only lost the wife of his bosom — the partner for many years of his joys and sorrows — but son after son --

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24. Ibid.

25. Stern, Some Notes, Appendix, A.

in the pride and prime of life -- had been stricken from beside him, till he stood, like the forest tree whose limbs have been nearly stripped by the tempest almost alone in the solitude of age. We have said that he lost child after child -- but we can scarcely write even at this day, disconnected though we be in relationship, of one -- a daughter -- on whom the father looked with becoming pride and enthusiastic affection -- one whose name, when grace and elegance, and the thousand virtues which elevate and ennoble the female character were mentioned, came unbidden for on the lips of all -- and whose sudden death cast a gloom over our community -- even at this moment the image of the venerable father weeping at her grave is fresh before us. One of his sons who had just attained the age of manhood, and returning from a distant voyage, when within a few hours' sail of his native place, breathed his last. Yet under all these severe afflictions, he bore up with great fortitude, and cheered by the sedulous attentions of his surviving children, it was not beyond our expectations that he might yet live a few years longer. But it has been determined otherwise.

Mr. Myers resided in this borough for upwards of fifty years, and was at one period more extensively engaged in commercial transactions than any other merchant south of the Potomac.

The friends and acquaintances of the deceased are invited to attend his funeral from his late residence on Catherine Street, This Afternoon at 4 o'clock.<sup>26</sup>

He was a Mason too, and his lodge gave him a funeral in  
27  
accordance with their best traditions.

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26. American Beacon, July 9, 1835. Since Moses Myers only arrived in Norfolk in 1787, this notice is incorrect in stating that he had lived there for more than fifty years.

27. Ibid.

Another paper had this to say about him in an obituary notice: "Mr. Myers was distinguished for public spirit and contributed liberally in his day to advance the prosperity of the town and its institutions, — giving active employment to hundreds, & freely distributing<sup>28</sup> of his abundance in private & public benefactions." When such things are written about a man who was almost penniless, one can rest assured that it is the truth.

During his life, he served in many positions of honor and trust. He was Danish vice consul at Norfolk for many years.<sup>29</sup> The Netherlands appointed him vice consul in 1819.<sup>30</sup> In addition to this, he had served as a director of the Farmers Bank in Norfolk.<sup>31</sup> Whatever he did, he did well. For many years after his death, his name was remembered by those who loved courage and devotion to duty.

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28. The Richmond Whig & Public Advertiser, July 14, 1835, p. 1.
29. Bruce, History of Virginia, IV, p. 433.
30. Ibid., Stern, Some Notes, p. 14, shows that in 1824 he was still carrying on this task.
31. Norfolk Gazette & Public Ledger, August 5, 1812.

## APPENDIX

### The Will of Moses Myers<sup>1</sup>

In the name of God, Amen. I, Moses Myers, of the Borough of Norfolk, and State of Virginia, being of sound and healthful mind and memory-blessed be almighty God for the same-do make and publish this my last Will in case of my death.

Whereas by a codicil to the will of my late deceased friend Abram Touro of Medford in the state of Massachusetts he bequeathed to me a legacy of five thousand dollars to be placed in the hands of John Coffin Jones as trustee for my use during my life, the interest thereof to be paid to me, and at my death the principal is to be disposed of by me by Will. And whereas the embarrassed state of my affairs required that I should take measures to prevent the benevolent intentions of the testator towards my family from being frustrated by any circumstances which might in my present pecuniary situation and the distribution of my resources for their support

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1. Norfolk County Will Book #5, p. 375, cited in full by Stern, Some Notes, Appendix.

deprive them of the future aid of my son Myer and Frederick, to whose aid they and myself have been chiefly indebted for maintenance since the entire surrender of my effects, and being bona fide indebted to my said sons Myer and Frederick in a larger sum than the aforementioned bequest I considered myself conscientiously justified in selecting them in preference to the other creditors, as well as in consideration of the motives and design of this legacy, as of the aid and support already received and thereafter to be received. I did convey by my deed bearing date on the eleventh day of November last, convey to my said sons Myer and Frederick in consideration of the sums of money due by me to them, all my right, title and interest, legal or equitable in the aforesaid legacy.

But in the possible event of any question arising at my death as to the validity of my said deed or as to the title vested in me by the terms of the Codicil to the will of my deceased friend, Abram Touro, I deem it proper to fortify the conveyance already so made by this last Will & Testament. I give and bequeath to my son Myer Myers the sum of three thousand five hundred dollars, for and in consideration of certain sums many of which I stand indebted to them whether for debts contracted before my failure or for monies since advanced by them for the support of my family, the amount to be paid to them out of the aforesaid legacy of five thousand dollars to me be-

queathed by Abram Touro to John C. Jones or any other sum or sums of money in the hands of the said Jones or of any other person for me or of the executors of the said Touro as by him so bequeathed, and having every confidence that my said sons Myer and Frederick will contribute their affairs to support my family as heretofore although the immediate object of my friend Abram Touro in making his late bequest has been frustrated in part I do hereby appoint my sons John, Myer, and Frederick or either of them my executors of this my last Will and I desire that no security may be required from them as such for the execution of this duty.

In witness whereof I have hereunto set my hand and seal this tenth day of December in the year one thousand eight hundred and twenty-two.

Moses Myers

\* \* \*

If at my death a less sum should be due to either of my sons Myer or Frederick than is intended to be covered by the annexed Will, then it is my intention that the surplus arising out of the five thousand dollars, shall be paid to Myer or Frederick as the case may be. But if I should not be indebted to my said sons Myer and Frederick,

I give and bequeath the whole of said legacy or any surplus to my daughters, Adelin Augusta, and Georgianne.

Probated July 20, 1835.

James Cresbie and Maurice Primrose, Dec'd  
P. I. Cohen out of the Commonwealth, John Pettit attested  
Primrose's hand; Thomas Reilly, Cresbie's hand. Wm. W.  
Sharp and S. Whitehead attested Moses Myers hand. Myer  
Myers granted executor's right, there being more than  
sufficient in the estate to meet its debts.



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## VITA

The author of this paper was born in Skalat, Galicia, Poland, on March 2, 1922. When he was six years old, the family moved to Guelph, Ontario, Canada, a city of some thirty thousand souls, where his father served as the spiritual leader of the Jewish community totalling about thirty families. He lived in Guelph for five years and then the family moved to Toronto, Ontario.

After graduating from elementary school and high school, the author began studying for the rabbinate. He received his rabbinic diploma from the Ner Israel Rabbinical College of Baltimore, Maryland, where he was on a scholarship for five years. After that he entered McMaster University of Hamilton, Ontario, Canada, and received his B.A. in May of 1950.

The author has occupied the following pulpits: Hebrew Men of England, Toronto, Ontario, Beth Jacob Congregation, Hamilton, Ontario, United Orthodox Synagogue, Norfolk, Virginia, and is now the rabbi of Congregation B'nai Israel of Logan, Philadelphia, Pa. He is married and has a family of three young daughters.