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Mark K. Bauman, *Editor*

Rachel Heimovics Braun, *Managing Editor*

Dana M. Greene, *Book Review Editor*

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Making History: An Interview with Saul Viener

by

Eric L. Goldstein

With the passing of Saul Viener on July 25, 2006, the Southern Jewish Historical Society (SJHS) lost not only its founding president, but an inspirational leader who had continually guided the organization's growth and development over the last half-century. Saul presided over the first meeting of the organization in his Richmond, Virginia, living room in 1957, trying to build on the excitement generated by the American Jewish Tercentenary, which had been commemorated three years earlier. Although this first attempt at organization was relatively short-lived, Saul eventually won recognition for a rejuvenated society and helped establish it on a national basis.

In addition to his central role in the SJHS, Saul was a prominent leader of the Richmond Jewish community, where over the years he headed many institutions including the Richmond Jewish Community Center, the Richmond Jewish Community Council (now the Jewish Community Federation of Richmond), Congregation Beth Ahabah, and the Congregation Beth Ahabah Museum and Archives, which he helped found in 1977. On the national scene, he was active with the Jewish Publication Society, the National Foundation for Jewish Culture, and the Council of Jewish Federations, and was a guiding spirit of the American Jewish Historical Society (AJHS), where he served as chairman of the board of trustees (1978-1979, 1982-1985) and president (1979-1982). He was also a longtime board member of the Virginia Historical Society, which named him an honorary vice president. Alongside his

many organizational accomplishments, Saul published the results of his own historical research on American and southern Jews in various local publications, in the journal of the AJHS, and in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*.¹

The following interview with Saul is presented as an effort to explore and reflect upon the role of an influential layperson in building the field of American Jewish history and its subfield, southern Jewish history. It resulted from my friendship with Saul, which began in 2003 when he and his wife, Jackie, moved to Atlanta in order to be closer to family as Saul's health was declining. As a lifelong supporter of Jewish scholarly endeavors, Saul soon became a regular attendee at cultural and educational programs in Atlanta, including those sponsored by the Tam Institute for Jewish Studies at Emory University, where I teach Jewish history. Over the next few years we got together regularly to discuss our mutual interests, including the affairs of the Southern Jewish Historical Society. In the spring of 2006, I visited Saul at Piedmont Hospital, where he was recuperating after a procedure related to his illness. We spoke about the fields of American and southern Jewish history, and Saul shared some stories of his early years as a builder of both the AJHS and SJHS. Upon further discussion, Saul revealed to me that despite his leadership in numerous historical societies and involvement in a Richmond-based oral history project, he had never sat for an oral history interview. It was clear to me that it would be important to record his experiences for posterity, and that being interviewed might also help lift his spirits as his health declined. With the encouragement of Jackie and their daughter, Helene Sowerby, Saul and I met on three separate occasions during the summer of that year. During the sessions we covered a wide range of topics from his childhood in small-town West Virginia to his naval career during World War II to his work as an institution builder.²

What follows is a transcript of our conversations, arranged, edited, and annotated so as to focus on the most important points, provide a clear, chronological narrative, and offer background. The dialogue is divided into four sections, each with a brief

introduction to place the interview within a larger historical context and to guide the reader through the various stages of Saul's life.

"In the Wilds of West Virginia": Growing up in Charles Town

Saul Viener was born in 1921 in Charles Town, West Virginia, where his Lithuanian immigrant parents had established themselves in the scrap metal business more than a decade earlier. Although their experience was not typical of Jewish immigrant families of that generation, the Vieners were part of a significant minority of American Jews who settled in small towns, seeking economic opportunity and a better quality of life away from the country's major urban centers.³ The small-town environment in which Saul was raised had a profound impact on his life and career. First, as he makes clear, living in isolation from the large American Jewish population centers forced his family to work harder to maintain their traditions and practices. The concerted effort required to keep kosher, observe holidays, obtain access to Jewish education, and stay in touch with other Jews made the Vieners more conscious of and committed to their Jewishness. Second, living as part of a small minority in Charles Town taught Saul how to interact with people of different backgrounds and to successfully navigate cultural and religious divides, a skill that would serve him well in later roles. Finally, Saul's hometown, where two of George Washington's brothers had lived and where abolitionist John Brown was tried for treason, provided a rich historical setting that helped spark his long love affair with the American past.⁴

GOLDSTEIN: Start by telling me a little bit about your parents, what their names were, and how they came to this country.

VIENER: I am the son of Chaim Yitzhok ben Boruch—Hyman Viener. My mother, Golda Rivkah bat Yosef, was from a nearby village.

GOLDSTEIN: What was her surname?

VIENER: Mozenter. And they came from Nemaškiai and Raseiniai [in Lithuania]. I'm not sure which are the villages and

which are the provinces.⁵ My father came in 1899, an orphan. His mother had been married twice before and widowed twice, and a match was arranged with my father's father, who was a much older man but had been widowed. So growing up as a child, my father had nephews and nieces who called him Uncle Hyman, and they were practically the same age. [His] mother was a businesswoman. She had a tavern and her husband studied. There was a robbery, and my grandmother was murdered. Her husband went to pieces.

GOLDSTEIN: Did your father and mother know each other before they left?

VIENER: It was always a joke. My mother said, "I didn't know you," and my father said, "You did." My father traveled together with a brother, Harry, who later settled in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, and also a group of *landsleit*, and they came secretly, as I think was often the case. They traveled by night and left from Hamburg. [They were] very young when they came. Pop, I think, was sixteen. Uncle Harry was seventeen. And they came into Philadelphia, where they were met by a cousin who put them on a train to Shippensburg [PA]. My father had an uncle who lived in Shippensburg who had come to the states some years before. His name was Bernard Viener. They called him "Bernie Diamond," because apparently he was quite successful; he wore diamonds. The boys arrived one day, and the next day they were given packs to put on their backs to sell notions and were sent out to the country. They spoke no English. The first night they slept in a haystack and Uncle Harry, the elder, cried himself to sleep. The next day they started out and they went to a farmhouse, where a very kindly woman said to her husband, "These boys do not understand any English. Tell them a few words." That one story is typical of these Pennsylvania Dutch people, who were so compassionate that in later years, my father would regularly go back once or twice a year to some of the families to see them and keep in touch. My mother came over in her late teens. I forget exactly if she came with someone or on her own, but she came to Philadelphia and she lodged with a lady who was a cousin of my father's, Rasha, whom I knew.

GOLDSTEIN: How did she get together with your father?

VIENER: One day Rasha saw my father, who was then working out in Shippensburg, and said, "You should marry her." And he went to [my mother] and she was scrubbing the floor, helping keep house. As the story goes, he went up to her and said "I want to marry you." With that she overturned the bucket and ran from the room. But they did get together, and they were married in Philadelphia and went to live in the Shippensburg area, where a number of the immigrants had clustered. They were all peddlers, and my father and Uncle Harry worked together. They noticed at one point that there were large boxcars parked at the railroad stations of various little towns, and people were bringing old tires and rubber and throwing [them] into the cars, and they were collecting and bringing old farm equipment. So they asked lots of questions and started buying up scrap iron and rubber. That's how they got started with that. Pop realized there were too many people doing the same thing, and he had to find another place to work and had heard a great deal about the South. My father learned English very quickly and someone had brought to his attention an advertisement in one of the newspapers of a place of business in Staunton, Virginia, and he took the train—the Norfolk and Western—to Staunton. On the way down, my father, who was quite gregarious, met a gentleman who extolled the virtues of the town where he lived—Charles Town, in West Virginia. He went on to Staunton, and what was advertised was not exactly what it turned out to be. So on the return, he decided he would get off at Charles Town and see what that was like. This was 1907. He hired a horse and buggy and traveled around through the county and found that it was a very pretty farming area, but there were two limestone quarries, which generated a lot of scrap. And he made arrangements to rent a house with a stable and a yard. He came back to Shippensburg and told my mother what he had done, and she said, "Great idea." It was as simple as that. But Uncle Harry and the whole family exclaimed, "You go down there into the wilderness, you'll become goyim."

GOLDSTEIN: But Shippensburg wasn't exactly a metropolis.

VIENER: That's right, but there were a couple dozen [Jewish] families. So they moved to Charles Town [with] a daughter, Chaya Sarah, named for both mothers, and a little boy, Harry.⁶

GOLDSTEIN: Were there any other Jews in Charles Town?

VIENER: Yes, it so happens. The Palmbaum brothers, George and Myer. They were quite some entrepreneurs. They owned a big ready-to-wear [store] and a hotel, the Palm Hotel. They were German Jews, part of the Baltimore sphere. There was another family, the Theodores, also out of the Baltimore orbit, and the last member of that family, who was my contemporary, died about a year ago.

GOLDSTEIN: They were eastern European Jews?

VIENER: Yes, but they called themselves German Jews. They had five daughters, and the second daughter, Ruth, worked for my father as a bookkeeper. They did not keep kosher, which we did. But periodically on the holidays, Mr. Theodore would come with a list [when] my father had an order to pick up in Washington or Baltimore.

GOLDSTEIN: At this time, about how big was Charles Town?

VIENER: About three thousand people, even when I was in high school. But there was another little town adjoining—Ranson—which was perhaps one thousand people. Why it was a separate municipality I never knew.

GOLDSTEIN: So there were these three Jewish families, essentially?

VIENER: There was another family, Herz—an unmarried brother and sister and their mother, and they were German Jews. Mr. Herz was a very prominent citizen in Charles Town. He was a very fine, lovely gentleman with whom there was a friendly relationship.

GOLDSTEIN: So your father set up a scrap metal business in Charles Town. I don't know much about the scrap metal business. How did it work, exactly?

VIENER: He collected, then shipped to the mills or to dealers. Then it went on to the steel factories. Some of it was scrap iron, but it was various [other] metals as well.

GOLDSTEIN: It seems to me that was a big Jewish business.

VIENER: It was an opportunity for Jews to be independent. Now, after living there a few years, my sister became ill and died—scarlet fever and something else. My parents had established a connection at Hagerstown [MD], which was on the Norfolk and Western, and they would send their chickens to be slaughtered. Depending on the season of the year, they came back within a few hours, and when it was the hot weather, they were [spoiled and] thrown out, of course. That's why there was an appreciation of vegetarian, dairy things on the part of many Jews who tried to be observant.

GOLDSTEIN: How observant were your parents?

VIENER: The business was open on Saturday and my father established a branch with two of my older brothers in Washington. He traveled [and] every now and then when he could he went to shul. But strictly kosher—never dreamt of eating anything forbidden. The holidays were scrupulously observed. Fifteen miles from Charles Town was Martinsburg, West Virginia, in Berkeley County, and there was quite a little community of Jews. My parents were involved in the organizing and building of a synagogue there, and we would go there for the holidays and stay with a family by the name of Fine.⁷ How we all stayed in that house, I don't know. Not only did we stay, but a young black woman who worked for us would go along, and I can still see Eleanor Cooper walking with my brother Eli and me from the Fine's residence to the shul. In Martinsburg, a *shokhet* from Hagerstown conducted the services, [and] ultimately they were able to hire a religious functionary who was a *shokhet*. There would be these weekly trips. Someone would drive my mother and a couple of us over [to buy] poultry, depending on the season. A gentile butcher shop made a corner of the space available for the *shokhet*. And the religious functionary traveled around the nearby towns to teach the boys and prepare them for bar mitzvah. I was the youngest of eight brothers, and there were big bar mitzvahs for the boys.

GOLDSTEIN: In Martinsburg?

VIENER: No. They were held in Charles Town. They'd have minyan and a party and all that. Also in the early years my parents hired a tutor, who lived with them, to teach the boys. And

there are pictures of the man as part of the family. He helped my father in the business. That was over a period of quite a few years. As time went on, the tutor was not available, and the last of the religious functionaries that were teaching the boys left Martinsburg, as the Jews were dwindling in numbers.

GOLDSTEIN: Was there something causing the economy to decline there?

VIENER: Actually, it was a big B&O railroad center and also Interwoven Mills was there. I don't know if it was just that the Jewish population dwindled. So I never really had any formal training, but when I was thirteen, my father showed me how to lay tefillin, and the order of service. And the boys, as long as they were home, put on a tallis and tefillin with some regularity. They didn't have a minyan. But we had a big house, and in the library they'd do the ritual, there in the wilds of West Virginia.

GOLDSTEIN: Where did you spend the holidays after the community in Martinsburg declined?

VIENER: We went to Baltimore and we stayed with *landsleit*, whom we knew extremely well. The families kept in touch until almost recent times. Their name was Hoffmann and they lived on Saratoga Street. Then, when we established the business in Washington, we became connected there. On the holidays my parents arranged with a kosher caterer, Mrs. Abrams, who ran a boarding house, to prepare meals. We ate in the social hall at the Fifth Street Shul.⁸ My mother would bring God knows what from Charles Town. Not only would we eat, but there were some other folks that were always invited, which was a unique experience.

GOLDSTEIN: How did your mother feel about living in Charles Town?

VIENER: Very lonely.

GOLDSTEIN: Did she socialize with the non-Jewish women?

VIENER: Not really very much. The schoolteachers loved to come to visit, particularly as mother was always serving cake with wine. And to a degree there were certain—I'll call them friendships, or relationships—with neighbors. On Fridays, my mother baked bread, challah, cakes, everything. And we had a neighbor next door, Mrs. Gardner, who was incapacitated. She would say,

“Oh, Mrs. Viener, I can smell those very nice fragrances. You’ve been baking.” So my mother would send her something over. So that became a ritual, too. The gentiles liked the matzo, and every year when the order went to Baltimore for the provisions for Pesach, they knew when Pesach was and they wanted this.

GOLDSTEIN: Did your parents speak Yiddish to you?

VIENER: We were a bilingual household. My mother spoke Yiddish a great deal of the time at home [and] a fair amount of English. My father, more English than Yiddish, but, you know, we all understood it—varying degrees of understanding and varying degrees of speaking it. My oldest brother, Harry, broke his teeth every time he tried to say something in Yiddish, whereas Joe was just the opposite. My father subscribed to the *Morning Journal*.⁹ Often, we sat at the table after dinner and my father read from it, and enlarged upon whatever the story was. We learned about lots of things that we did not know from the general press.

GOLDSTEIN: What was the predominant ethnic group or religious group among the non-Jewish population?

VIENER: Just a mix. Catholics were a minority, and the Catholic church was just a short block from us. We had neighbors, two maiden ladies, whose mother was a Catholic and father an Episcopalian. So Miss Betty assumed the responsibility as a Catholic of looking after St. James’s. She would go on Saturday afternoons to sweep out the church, put the flowers in there. There were a handful of people who came for Mass in Charles Town, and one priest served the entire county. There were a number of Italians at the quarries. Harper’s Ferry had a church that catered to a larger Catholic population. And there were a number of old [Protestant] families, [like the] members of the Washington family. Not George’s immediate family, but cousins and those sorts of descendants. There was Miss Christine Washington [who] lived up the street from us, and Dr. John Washington.¹⁰

GOLDSTEIN: Were you conscious of that as a child that they were related to George Washington?

VIENER: Oh, yes. Everybody knew that, and the history that Charles Washington¹¹ laid out Charles Town. The Washingtons owned vast tracts of land, which incorporated the eastern

panhandle of West Virginia. Charles Washington built a house in Charles Town, which is still standing, and Samuel Washington¹² built a house west of town. Charles's home [was] Happy Retreat, also known as Mordington, and Samuel Washington's was Harewood, where James Madison and Dolley Payne Todd were married.¹³ We were told all of this as we went through school, also about John Brown and Harper's Ferry. He was tried in Charles Town, in the courthouse, which is still standing about a block and half from where we lived.¹⁴ So we got a lot of that, and it affected all of us that knew that. When we went elsewhere, we could talk about the town where we lived, and it so happened that I loved all the stories.

GOLDSTEIN: Did your father establish relationships with non-Jews through his business?

VIENER: Yes, he did—any number of them. I have a picture somewhere of my father with Mr. Rodefer, the butcher, in the volunteer firemen's organization. And then the Order of Red Men, that was very popular. [He was a member of] all these organizations. And my oldest brother ran and was voted in as a member of [the] city council. Terribly important to my parents was civic responsibility. Voting was very important. Came the Fourth of July or Decoration Day, we had a big front porch [with] hanging ferns and that sort of thing. My mother would put a flag in each one.

GOLDSTEIN: Was there ever any incidence of antisemitism?

VIENER: Oh, yes. Joe and Harry were in the same class, even though they were two years apart. One time, they came home, crying. The teacher said, "The Jews killed Christ." Well, my father went up to school and Mr. Denny, the principal, was a very fine, upstanding gentleman. My father stood over six feet tall—no shrinking violet. Mr. Denny was most sympathetic. And then there were the occasional taunts about Jews this or Jews that, but by and large there was very little of that. So it was really a wholesome ending. But the gentiles—on reflection—recognized how it was [for us]. When my brother, Eli, who was two years older than I, was going to graduate from high school, [the principal] Mr. Hurley came to my father and said, "I'd like to have a Jewish rabbi come and speak to the graduating class [at] commencement

*Jefferson County Court House, Charles Town, West Virginia.
Landmark famous for the treason trial of John Brown,
following the insurrection at Harper's Ferry in 1859.
(Postcard courtesy of Eric L. Goldstein.)*

exercises.” It turned out the graduation was Shavuos. Because my father couldn’t get an Orthodox rabbi to come, he made some inquiries and arranged for a Rabbi Breslau,¹⁵ a Conservative rabbi, to come. He came and spoke brilliantly.

GOLDSTEIN: Where was he from?

VIENER: Washington. Many years later, when I rose in the ranks of the American Jewish Historical Society, I met a very nice lady, and her father was Rabbi Breslau. She was Ruth Fein,¹⁶ who succeeded me as president.

GOLDSTEIN: Tell me a little bit about high school.

VIENER: [There was] a chance to take Latin, which appealed to me. There were just a handful of boys and girls that signed up for that. The Latin teacher was Miss Martha Phillips. [She] was a neighbor who taught some of my brothers, too, and her father was head of one of the banks. Nice lady. And that was an eye opener. I just learned so much. She just happened to be a knowledgeable lady. And then, junior year, there were a fair number that took French. Miss Hill was a character, a *farbrente* Baptist. One day, she came to the front door and said to my mother, “Madame, I understand you’ve accepted Christ.” So [my mother] said, “No, I don’t think I have.” That took care of that. At some point, somebody must have come by and my mother said, “Thank you so much for your literature,” and that was [the source of the misunderstanding]. That was the first overture that we knew anything about. So she taught French, not too well. She had an allergy to chalk dust, so before class started, there were a couple of people—I will not name them—who banged the erasers.

GOLDSTEIN: Were you involved in any clubs or activities?

VIENER: Yes, there was a science club. I was not a sportsman. My brother Maurice, who was four years older, was manager of the football team. And, of course, one went to all the high school football games, the basketball games. That was *de rigueur*.

GOLDSTEIN: Tell me about your college experience.

VIENER: Living in Charles Town was a professor for the University of Pennsylvania, Stanley Shugert.¹⁷ He came back—his mother lived there—and he took an interest in my brothers, and my father went to him about school, and of course he worked for

*Saul Viener.
High school graduation picture, 1938.
(Courtesy of the Beth Ahabah Museum and
Archives, Richmond.)*

the University of Pennsylvania, and the boys went. Joe went to Georgetown, but then Jake went [to the University of Pennsylvania, as well as] Reuben, Maurice, Eli.

GOLDSTEIN: So you didn't want to repeat that?

VIENER: I sort of knew and didn't know what I wanted. I wanted something different at that time, being the youngest child. My academic high school standing was pretty good. I didn't make valedictorian or salutatorian, but I was up there. I guess I could

have made [the Ivy League] too, but I didn't want to go away to school. A lot in my class were going to Shepherd College,¹⁸ so I went, except one year I went to George Washington University, then came back to Shepherd. One of my older brothers took me over to see about enrolling. There were all these people in the leadership of this little college [who were] truly educators. Anyway, I had a class in modern European history. I had a wonderful teacher who came from Hawkinsville, Georgia—Ruth Scarborough.¹⁹ Every Monday we were to have read the *New York Times* on Sunday, and we were quizzed. You could buy it in Charles Town, believe it or not.

Venturing Out

Saul's decision to remain close to home and attend Shepherd College was motivated in part by his strong identification with the Charles Town area and its history. By remaining in West Virginia during his college years, however, Saul delayed his encounter with the wider world only temporarily. When he finally did venture out, first as a commissioned naval officer in Brisbane, Australia, during World War II and later as a representative of his family's business in Richmond, Virginia, he found his surroundings full of new experiences and opportunities, especially in terms of Jewish community life. Unlike many Jewish military personnel during World War II who left behind thickly Jewish neighborhoods and got their first taste of the non-Jewish world, Saul's stint in Brisbane gave him his first chance to attend synagogue regularly and to socialize extensively with other Jews, including his future wife, Jacqueline (Jackie) Wolman, daughter of the local rabbi. When Saul and Jackie later married and settled down in Richmond, Saul immersed himself in an array of Jewish organizational activities that he had never dreamed of growing up in a small town.

Another unexpected opportunity came in the two years between Saul's navy service and his move to Richmond, when he enrolled as an M.A. student at West Virginia University. Knowing that he was interested in history but uncertain exactly on what subfield he would focus, his life was changed forever when his

adviser suggested that he write a thesis on the life of a prominent American Jew, Isidor Straus, the U.S. congressman and Macy's department store co-owner who died in the Titanic disaster.²⁰ At a time when there were no specialized programs in American Jewish history and students in secular universities were rarely encouraged to work on Jewish topics, Saul's experience stands out as unusual. Although Saul's hopes of becoming a history teacher ultimately gave way to his parents' insistence that he join the family business, his M.A. training did set him on a lifelong path of engagement with the history of American Jews.

VIENER: Well, I finished [college] in May of '42. I'd already signed up for the draft. My brother, Jake, had applied for a commission from the Navy and he was given an ensign's commission. So I applied, and this commission came through in August. I was sent to Cornell University Naval Training School and a program at Harvard. I finished on the 16th of December and went right away to report in Norfolk, to go to Brisbane, Australia. I reported Christmas Day 1942 and was really launched in the Navy. I was on the staff of Admiral Daniel Barbey, who was chairman of the Amphibious Forces of the southwest Pacific.²¹ We were at sea for six weeks and arrived in Brisbane on the last day of January '43. I became friendly with a couple of guys on the ship. One was a man by the name of "Cash" – Cassius Marcellus Keller – who had been with a radio station in Washington.²² He was much older, but knowledgeable, and had a lot to talk about. There were few other people like that. When we got to Brisbane, it was midsummer, and we were really close to a lovely residential area with poinsettias and flowers in bloom. The next day we were free, so we took the tram into the city, and we were impressed with the beauty, the old-fashioned nature of it. That night I went through the telephone directory, looking for a synagogue listing. I could not find one, so during the week, I mentioned it to Cash, who was Catholic and had located the major church. Later in the week he said, "Saul, look in the paper. Here's a Jewish wedding. Here's the name of the rabbi." So I went to the public phone there at the post, and [called]. I said I was a naval officer stationed at Camp

Doomben, and inquired about the synagogue, if there were services, and when. This very pleasant voice [which turned out to be that of my future wife, Jackie] said, "Services are at 5:15, before the blackout," and she said, "You're welcome to come here after services." You know, you refuse the first invitation, or decline, anyway. So she says, "Suit yourself." I called back, realizing that I didn't know how to get to the synagogue. So she told me about the tram, and which one to take. Meanwhile, I said, "I'd be happy to come. I appreciate it." So I went. The person intoning the service was the Reverend Wolman, who later became my father-in-law.²³ He was in uniform, because the rabbis of the principal congregations at each of the capitals—Brisbane, Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide, Perth—all became chaplains. So people collected the servicemen at the conclusion of the services. Blanche, Jackie's younger sister, was there, and she and her father collected all of us that were left over. The synagogue was really just a block behind where they lived, facing the botanical gardens. It was an old colonial house with a central hall, and a separate kitchen, like in the American South. And there, laid out, was a perfectly beautiful table—lots of silverware, china, and a gracious hostess, who became my mother-in-law.²⁴ In the group were several American army chaplains and some other American servicemen who had arrived in Brisbane pretty recently. And there were a couple of Australian servicemen, whose wives were Brisbane girls, who came every Friday night, because my mother-in-law just collected people, and looked after these young couples. It was just a wonderful occasion, there at the other end of the world. My mother-in-law would always say on Friday night, "You're welcome to come to services tomorrow morning, and come here afterwards, but I know that many of you have to serve on duty." After dinner, I went into the kitchen and said, "Could I help clean up?" And they said, "No, no, no. You don't have to. We don't want you to do that." Anyway, Jackie was washing dishes, and a couple of the other young women, and so I came back Saturday. They had lunch, and I lingered in the afternoon, and I lingered—they couldn't get rid of me.

GOLDSTEIN: How had your father-in-law become a rabbi in Australia?

VIENER: My father-in-law was a Londoner, and my mother-in-law was born in Manchester. My father-in-law's parents had come from either East Prussia or Lithuania many years before, and my mother-in-law's parents had come as young people from Lithuania. The chief rabbi was urging the young clergy to go out to the colonies, and all the rabbis in Australia were from England. He had been the rabbi in Cork [Ireland], where the girls grew up. Anyway, they signed up for three years, over the protest of his parents. So that's how they got there, and the war intervened.

GOLDSTEIN: Was Brisbane a jumping-off point for the rest of the Pacific? Did a lot of people come through there?

VIENER: Our outfit was one of the first groups of American military that reached Australia. When the Philippines were evacuated, and other places, the [evacuees] went all the way to Melbourne, which was on the bottom of Australia. As the forces were coming back up, MacArthur was there at Brisbane, a couple of blocks from where we were, and it was interesting. He was such a character, that everything stopped when his automobile was brought for him. People stood on the side, and everybody was saluting. He made himself even more important than he was. He was not very popular among those who came to Brisbane. Anyway, our offices were in a building that had been an office building. We took over one floor, and I was the communications officer, decoding and coding messages. Up the street was the headquarters of the Allied forces in the southwest Pacific. We used to see General MacArthur with frequency. I worked, and whenever possible I went to the Wolmans'.

GOLDSTEIN: How did you and Jackie end up getting married?

VIENER: Well, I started courting her, and she was receptive. I wrote to my parents, who raised questions, but nevertheless [she was] the rabbi's daughter. Her parents were very much opposed. On the day of the wedding, my father-in-law said to Jackie, in front of me, "It's not too late to change your mind."

GOLDSTEIN: What was the source of their misgivings?

VIENER: They just wanted to give their daughter some more time. They didn't know me, other than [my visits] and letters from my folks. I was still sort of young and not situated. So anyway, we were married.

GOLDSTEIN: Did your father-in-law perform the service?

VIENER: Oh, yes. The service was in the Margaret Street Synagogue²⁵ in the presence of the congregation and servicemen that I knew. The congregation wives took care of the reception in the social hall. And, yes, my father-in-law married us. It was a traditional service. Jackie's sister, Ruth, was in the army, and she went AWOL to come to the wedding. And then after the wedding was over, my father-in-law, who was a chaplain, took her and reported in again.

GOLDSTEIN: What was the date of your wedding?

VIENER: March 29, 1944.

GOLDSTEIN: How long did you remain in Australia after you got married?

VIENER: Things were improving for the Allies. My mother was critically ill, almost at death's door, and I got permission to come back. We arrived in San Francisco and went across country slowly by train—three, four days. We stopped in Salt Lake City and so forth, heading to Martinsburg, West Virginia, which was on the main line, and we were met by family. My mother was doing somewhat better then. My orders were to Sanford, Florida, near Orlando. It was a naval air station and I was communications officer for the base. Jackie had a number of American relatives, [so] when I went to report in Sanford, Jackie went north to meet her Aunt Sarah and that family, and spend some time with them while I was in Florida, looking for a place to live.

GOLDSTEIN: So she came down to Florida?

VIENER: Yes, after I found a little apartment, Jackie came down and she became pregnant. It was a small town, but there was a little temple. Services were conducted by a local guy. [Our daughter] Helene was named there the following May, after my sister, whose name was Chaya Sarah. In '45 I was released and the base in Sanford was closing down as well.

*Wedding portrait of Saul Viener and Jacqueline Wolman
Brisbane, Australia, March 29, 1944.
(Courtesy of the American Jewish Historical Society,
Newton Centre, Massachusetts, and New York, New York.)*

GOLDSTEIN: So once you were discharged, what was your plan for after the war?

VIENER: I really wanted to go back to school. I came back to Charles Town and I made application for West Virginia University under the G.I. Bill. Somebody in the family knew somebody – there was going to be a house available [in Morgantown] for several months. So we occupied that for three, four months. [After that,] Jackie went back to Charles Town, and I stayed with a Jewish family. I had a room, no board. And so I earned my master's.

GOLDSTEIN: What did you study there?

VIENER: I studied mainly history, some political science, some foreign affairs.

GOLDSTEIN: Any particular teachers that you remember?

VIENER: I had the head of the History Department, Charles Henry Ambler,²⁶ a distinguished figure in [the study of] Virginia and West Virginia history. He was a man of many years. And then there was Festus P. Summers,²⁷ who then took over head of the department. He had written a history of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad. He became my adviser. Meanwhile, I had a course on Southeast Asian history – the French in Indochina or something like that. The man who taught that had spent some years out there, so that was a broadening experience.

GOLDSTEIN: So how did you get onto the topic of Isidor Straus?

VIENER: One of Straus's closest friends was a man from Charles Town, William L. Wilson, who had been postmaster general, and Dr. Summers had written his biography. In trying to find a topic, I thought about trying to do something in European history, but I didn't know enough, and there weren't enough sources. So in one of my sessions with Dr. Summers, he said, "Now, Mr. Viener, I have a suggestion. You are a Jew, and William L. Wilson's closest friend was a Jew, Isidor Straus. How would you like to work on a biography of Straus? Nobody has done anything about him and his political career." So I said, "Well, I'd be happy to." And he said, "I'm going to introduce you to the librarian at R. H. Macy. I'd like you to go to New York and work at the library with all the records of the family." I communicated with Jackie's

great aunt, Sarah, and her two daughters. So I stayed with them in Brooklyn, and commuted into the city every day for a week. I examined all the things I could about Straus's political career.

GOLDSTEIN: So what was Isidor Straus's political affiliation?

VIENER: He was a Gold Democrat and really a businessman at heart. This was a one-shot deal, so my thesis had to do with whatever I could find up there—his life, his origins, the fact that his parents had come from Germany to Talbotton, Georgia, and went back to New York. It was all very interesting and worthwhile.

GOLDSTEIN: So when you finished that, what did you do?

VIENER: I went back to Charles Town. I wanted to teach, but my parents were very stubborn about the fact that I was married with a child and to teach would not generate much income, and I really ought to go into the family business. Not much I could do about it.

GOLDSTEIN: Were all your brothers already in the business, or some of them?

VIENER: Yes, all of them, either in Charles Town, Washington, or a place [we had opened up] in Richmond. So it was suggested I go to Richmond, so I could be helpful there.

GOLDSTEIN: How had the business progressed from the peddling days of your father?

VIENER: Well, it became better organized, and in Richmond, there was this melting and refining plant.

GOLDSTEIN: What were you doing in the business?

VIENER: I actually worked in the plant. I supervised loading, unloading, weighing in materials, stuff being shipped out.

GOLDSTEIN: They were processing metals for shipment?

VIENER: We made alloys for the automobile industry—shapes of roughly seventy-five to one hundred pounds. I had a chemist, a whole process. They could use that in making the battery plates, lugs, and whatever. That's what I did for many years, [also] some traveling on behalf of the company, to visit people that sold to us and some to whom we sold. At one point, I [also] taught American history in the extension school of the University of Virginia at Fort Lee, which was at Petersburg. I worked in the plant all day

and then would drive on down. I had to study and prepare lectures, and the session was two-and-a-half hours with a ten or fifteen minute break in the middle. Then I would drive back home. Jackie humored me. I wanted to do this, [but we had] two small children. Our second child, Philip, was born in 1949. So anyway, that was another part of my background.

GOLDSTEIN: How was living in Richmond different from growing up in Charles Town?

VIENER: It was quite an enriching experience because it was really the first time I lived in a Jewish community. I became involved in what is today the Federation, working in the campaign and learning more about that which might be called Jewish organizational life in America. I relished everything I could learn. Coming from a small town, to find these things happening and to promote and educate was up my alley. I became involved with the Jewish Center.

GOLDSTEIN: You appreciated it more than someone who grew up with all of that?

VIENER: That's right. People took these things for granted. Now mind you, there were a lot of people who were sincerely dedicated, and there were a lot of soldiers, former servicemen and women, who were anxious to enhance the work of the Federation and Jewish organizations.

GOLDSTEIN: Was there a lot of new population in Richmond after the war? People moving in?

VIENER: Oh yes, there was a fair size community. There were a lot of local people from different social backgrounds, a lot just like myself, children of immigrants. But as you know, World War II was a great leveler.

Pursuing the Jewish Past

Working by day at Hyman Viener and Sons, his family's metal smelting and refining company, Saul pursued his interest in history – particularly American Jewish history – at every available opportunity. With a Jewish presence dating back to 1769, Richmond provided abundant material for his historical pursuits. As both a newcomer and the son of eastern European immigrants,

Saul Viener, 1969.

*Viener, left, receiving gavel as president of the Richmond Jewish
Community Center from outgoing president, J. Y. Plotkin.*

(Courtesy of the Beth Ahabah Museum and Archives, Richmond.)

Saul was quite different in background from the well-established German Jews of the city, some of whom traced their roots back to colonial times, yet he quickly won them over with his intense curiosity about their community's history. Touched by his earnestness and enthusiasm, members of the city's oldest Jewish families told him their stories and shared treasures from their attics.

Based on what he learned, Saul wrote a commemorative history of Congregation Beth Ahabah and two articles on figures from Richmond's Jewish history for the *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society*.²⁸ In 1954 he was the logical choice to head

Richmond's observance of the American Jewish Tercentenary, celebrating the three hundredth anniversary of the arrival of the first Jews in what became the United States. Meanwhile, Saul's growing renown as a local Jewish historian led to his activism in the AJHS. Recognized—in his own words—as “somehow different” because of his youth and southern roots, Saul impressed the scholars and philanthropists who headed the AJHS as a fresh addition to the field. His involvement with the society marked the first step toward a greater role in national Jewish affairs.

VIENER: When we found a house, it was just a few blocks from a Conservative synagogue. We really didn't like [the synagogue], and some of the folks we had met suggested [the Reform congregation,] Beth Ahabah. We really liked it. They were very welcoming. At this time Helene was a couple of years old, and in short order went into Sunday school. I offered to teach in the Sunday school, and I taught American Jewish history.

GOLDSTEIN: Was that something you came up with, or was that already part of their curriculum?

VIENER: I think I mentioned this as a possibility, if I remember. The textbook they used was a very simple one; it couldn't have been so sophisticated for these youngsters. I am proud to say that I made it come alive, and there were supplementary things I did. It was a lot of fun. In due course, the romance of this old Jewish community captured me. Here were families that had been around for 100, 125, 130 years. And this congregation had been around—at least the earlier one [that it merged with, Beth Shalome]—since 1789. The more I learned, the more I wanted to know. There were families who were part of that earlier congregation that went to Beth Ahabah. You know Kitty Meyers Cohen?²⁹ Her mother's grandfather, Joseph Cohn, was the last reader of Beth Shalome. When these congregations merged, the Cohns retained their traditional habits, and were known as the “*frommer* Cohns.”³⁰ As time went on, I was picking up on the local Jewish history. I became interested in all the stories, legends, and so forth, and trying to pinpoint, confirm, whatever term you want to use. There were some nice people whom we met who encouraged me. One

was Sadie Engelberg,³¹ who was head of the history department at John Marshall High School. Jackie had become active in the National Council of Jewish Women, and there were several ladies that were very cordial. Once Jackie invited two ladies; one we had known, Stella Bowman, and with her came another lady we had known a little bit, Miss Helen Ezekiel. Miss Helen said, "Saul, I gather you're very interested in the history of our congregation. I have some letters, about my mother's grandfather, who fought at the Alamo. Would you like to see them?" And I said, "By all means, Miss Helen. May I call on you?" It was that formal. She said, "Please do." I phoned the next day and made the date, and she loaned me the letters. I prepared a monograph and submitted it to the [*Publications of the*] *American Jewish Historical Society*, and it was accepted.³²

GOLDSTEIN: Did you have any relationship, at this time, with the American Jewish Historical Society?

VIENER: Yes, I had joined. I'd done some things in Richmond relating to community endeavors, and somebody involved with the American suggested I get involved. I think it was Jules Mintzer, the director of the Richmond Jewish Community Council, who led me into the American Jewish Historical Society. The way the society functioned in that time was [that] if people wanted to join, they had to be qualified in some fashion. You were asked to give a paper. So I was given an opportunity at the annual meeting in Philadelphia, at Dropsie College. We went to Philadelphia on the Friday morning, and Friday afternoon we visited with the surviving daughters of the Reverend George Jacobs, who had been the minister at Beth Shalom, and then went and succeeded Isaac Leiser [in Philadelphia].³³ Well, these three maiden ladies, Miss Emilie, Miss Virginia, and Miss [Adeline]—it was something like a Victorian novel, [with] all the dresses. They were wonderful. They had Richmond cousins, whom I'd gotten to know.

GOLDSTEIN: So did they tell you a lot of things about Richmond that you didn't know?

VIENER: Well, they had stories. For instance, when they moved to Philadelphia, they came with a servant who stayed with them and lived out her years with them. And there were two oth-

er sisters who never married. They were all schoolteachers. There were two brothers, no longer living, who had children. At a later date the Jacobs girls came to Richmond and we entertained them, along with their local cousins. Anyway, on Saturday I'd been invited to Shabbat services at Mikveh Israel,³⁴ and to be called up to the reading of the law. I was the guest of the president. It was quite an experience. On Sunday morning, there at Dropsie College, my father had come to town with my stepmother. My brother Louis was there and his wife and my brother Joe.

GOLDSTEIN: You spoke on Isidor Straus?

VIENER: Yes. There on the dais at Dropsie College were Lee M. Friedman,³⁵ Jake Marcus,³⁶ and all the luminaries. Edwin Wolf II³⁷ was probably on the dais, and some other Philadelphians and some New Yorkers. Like a dozen men; no women. And so I gave my oration on Isidor Straus. At the conclusion of my remarks, I was questioned. I was followed by Jack Solis-Cohen,³⁸ who spoke about a relative who had gone to California in the Gold Rush and had a colorful career. There were all sorts of things said that proved that he was an adventurer. In the audience were Jack Solis-Cohen's sisters and some cousins, all these maiden ladies. I can see them – tall, slender, white hair. One of them got to her feet in a very dramatic fashion, contending that Jack didn't know what he was talking about. So it was, shall we say, colorful. There was a collation afterwards and my brother, Joe, and Jake Marcus hit it off. Marcus had a daughter [who] lived in Washington, and my brothers got to know her. She was manager of a hotel not terribly far from where our business was, and Joe and Louis occasionally would see her at lunch. Tragically, she died in a fire.³⁹

GOLDSTEIN: Was there any sense of connection with Marcus because he was a West Virginian?

VIENER: Yes. As he put it, we were West Virginia *landsleit*.⁴⁰ At that point he was actively involved in the AJHS, and he [also] created the American Jewish Archives.

GOLDSTEIN: What was the reason?

VIENER: Well, he felt that the society was not doing what it should do. It was not as active, aggressive, and he was dissatisfied. He went to Cincinnati and there was Hebrew Union

College, which was an anchor, a base. The college had a following, and he was well thought of. He was also knowledgeable about getting people involved. The problem with the society was it was an orphan being taken care of through the kindness of the Jewish Theological Seminary. Isidore Meyer was the director.⁴¹ He was a Conservative rabbi and a historian, and struggling to keep the society going. [Then] Lee M. Friedman died, and left over a million dollars for the society to come to Boston.⁴² Friedman was really unique—an early benefactor. He had never married, and the society was his great love. He had published two books about American Jewish history; one I used when I taught Sunday school at Beth Ahabah as a resource. So on that Sunday [in Philadelphia] this distinguished kindly gentleman said nice things to me, and I was very proud to be in his company. When this million dollars became available, there were people in Philadelphia—Leon Obermayer⁴³ and Maurice Jacobs⁴⁴—who pushed for the society to go to Boston, and some sort of dialogue began with Brandeis.

GOLDSTEIN: Was that actually a condition of the bequest?

VIENER: I don't think it was, but it may have been in Mr. Friedman's mind. Obermayer and Jacobs and a couple others were strong for doing something at Brandeis, with it being an academic institution, a Jewish university. And there were those that opposed it, in New York, like Rosalie Nathan Hendricks.⁴⁵ There was a big cleavage and great animosity. There was a meeting I attended in New York where it almost came to fisticuffs. I was, on the board, what you considered one of the rebels. I was with those who didn't want to go to Boston. Of course, there was the pied piper who helped found Brandeis, [Abram L.] Sachar, and he wanted the society to come.⁴⁶ Also, in the Boston group was David Pokross, who was an extraordinary man. He was raised by his grandparents in Providence, Rhode Island, and he became a lawyer. He was hired by a law firm—the first Jew. He ultimately became head of the firm many years later.⁴⁷ Finally, the society bought a piece of property just off the university grounds and erected a building, which became the headquarters, and that's when Bernie Wax was hired [as director].⁴⁸ He was [previously] with the Illinois State Historical Library. Somehow, there was a

rapprochement. That group in New York was still very unhappy, but they stayed as members. Bernie was a great diplomat as well.

GOLDSTEIN: How had you risen from being a new member to getting on the board?

VIENER: Because, I guess, I was somehow different, I was young. [So] at one point I was invited to serve on the board. I became more regular in attending meetings and became more involved. Bernie and I became great friends. I made myself available and worked on behalf of the society, tried to do things in Richmond and elsewhere—missionary work. Now concurrent with all of this, I was getting involved in the Richmond Jewish and general community. The Tercentenary year was a banner year for the Jewish community of Richmond, because the first Jewish exhibition ever held in Richmond took place. It opened in September 1954 at the Valentine Museum [and] remained open for about three months. I was an integral part of the whole process, and it was phenomenal. We had on display Myer Myers⁴⁹ silver that was in the possession of a Richmond family, no longer Jewish, and for part of the exhibit, on loan from Mikveh Israel, were Myer Myers Torah ornaments. There was a family in Richmond, the Hutzlers. They had a big wall painting of the three Millhiser children. The Milhisers and Hutzlers were all interrelated. Naomi Cohn,⁵⁰ who had taken a great interest in us, said that I should meet Constance Hutzler, who was a lady of formidable presence. She made a point of taking me to meet Constance. The Hutzlers had come quite early with the German Jews, and they lived in a big house on the north side of Richmond, where the prominent Jews had built homes. Anyway, Constance said [the painting] could go to the Valentine to the exhibit. I went to her with a pickup truck, and I held that painting as we went from the north side to the Valentine Museum, in town. And that in itself was a piece of history. For the Tercentenary, we also did a pageant, "Under Freedom," dealing with the history of the country and the people of Richmond, which was written by three people: Edith Lindeman Calisch,⁵¹ who was a writer and drama critic for the *Richmond Times*, and Allan and Louise Creeger. The Jewish War Veterans had their national encampment there that year, so the

pageant made history not only for the city. It was performed two nights, but with all these people from all over the country. We'd also had a Tercentenary Sabbath, and our scholar was Salo Baron,⁵² who spoke Friday night at Beth Ahabah, and Beth El was invited. Saturday morning, he came to the Orthodox congregation, Keneseth Israel. We arranged that to cover as much of the community as possible. The rabbi, [Jules] Lipschutz, who was an erudite scholar and gentleman, had Salo Baron and me for *shabbos* lunch, which was delightful. Then, to bring all the Tercentenary events to a conclusion, in the spring there was a reconsecration of the Franklin Street Burying Ground, the first Jewish cemetery, which had been neglected. There was a memorial plaque on a little stone put in there, and our speaker for the occasion was Rabbi Dr. David de Sola Pool.⁵³

GOLDSTEIN: So these were fairly big names. It must have been a nice thing for you to come into contact with them, and speak with them.

VIENER: We'd gotten to know the Pools a little bit, maybe through the American Jewish Historical Society. This was the first time in recent years that all the rabbis in Richmond assembled on one platform. So, to be seen with Rabbi Pool, who spoke movingly and significantly, it was quite a splendid occasion.

Institution Builder

Not wanting the glow generated by the Tercentenary observances to fade, Saul contemplated how he and like-minded individuals might create a lasting framework to preserve and commemorate the history of Jews in Richmond and in the South more broadly. This vision led to the living-room gathering in 1957 where Saul proposed the creation of the SJHS, the first regional Jewish historical society in the United States.⁵⁴ But with modest resources and a limited base of support, it was a struggle for him and his small group to sustain the society. After several years of ups and downs, the group ultimately dissolved. The idea of an organization dedicated to southern Jewish history, however, continued to percolate with Saul as he grew in stature in the AJHS and in other national Jewish organizations. Then, in 1976, with the

backing of the National Foundation for Jewish Culture, the AJHS, and the Richmond Jewish community, Saul convened a landmark conference in his hometown devoted to exploring the southern Jewish experience. By all accounts, the conference, which brought together more than two hundred scholars and laypeople, was a resounding success. The keynote speaker was Eli Evans, whose book, *The Provincials*, had been published just three years earlier and had drawn a wide readership.⁵⁵ The enthusiasm generated by the conference led to the rebirth of the SJHS, which met in March 1978 in Raleigh, North Carolina, and then settled into a cycle of fall conferences that have continued on an annual basis ever since.⁵⁶

In addition to placing him at the helm of the reorganized SJHS, Saul's success with the Richmond conference helped propel him into the leadership of the AJHS, as did his close friendship with the organization's president, David Pokross, the Boston attorney and philanthropist who became his mentor. In 1979 Saul succeeded Pokross as president of the AJHS, a role that gave him the opportunity to deepen his involvement in activities beyond the southern sphere. Saul's strong personal qualities helped him become an effective fundraiser and goodwill ambassador for the AJHS on regular trips around the country. During his presidency, the society staged an impressive exhibit on the Jews of Boston and issued a large number of publications, including an anthology of the papers delivered at the Richmond conference and two volumes in the field of America-Holy Land Studies. Saul also rallied support for an effort to restore and distribute old Yiddish films, laying the groundwork for what became the National Center for Jewish Film at Brandeis University.⁵⁷ Meanwhile, his leadership of the AJHS opened the doors to greater involvement in other national Jewish organizations. During our interview, Saul mentioned only a few of these major accomplishments, focusing instead on the personal relationships he forged. Although involved in his fair share of meetings, conferences, and strategy sessions, he recognized that it was the more intimate associations that infused an organization with real meaning and value.

Celebrating the America-Holy Land Project, 1978.

Cosponsored by the AJHS and the Institute of

Contemporary Jewry at Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

From left, Maurice Jacobs of Philadelphia and the AJHS; Moshe Davis,
director of the Institute and the America-Holy Land Project;

Bernard Wax, director of the AJHS, and Saul Viener, board chairman of AJHS.

(Courtesy of the Beth Ahabah Museum and Archives, Richmond.)

GOLDSTEIN: How did the Southern Jewish Historical Society first come about?

VIENER: The Southern was an outgrowth of the Tercentenary. All the committee people involved in the Tercentenary in Richmond were learning about Jewish history. So I talked with a couple of people, and I said, "Wouldn't it be great if we had a regional Jewish historical society in the South?" One of my dear mentors was Rabbi Malcolm Stern,⁵⁸ who was in Norfolk. I talked to him and he encouraged me.

GOLDSTEIN: What was your connection with him before this?

VIENER: He was already doing research, writing, genealogy. He was in Norfolk and someone, I guess Ariel Goldberg,⁵⁹ our rabbi, introduced us. Malcolm would come up to Richmond. He was a lovely man, and he guided us. If you looked at the early journals, he did one article for us [in each issue].⁶⁰ I was involved at the Jewish Center, and the Jewish Welfare Board, which was connected with what became the Jewish Center movement, sponsored an American Jewish History Week. So the center director and his assistant thought it was a good idea, [and] we had a Sunday afternoon [gathering]. Malcolm was the speaker, and we drew a small but respectable group of people. Then some of us talked about establishing a society. One of them was Clare Levy Hutzler, who didn't talk about it or brag very much, but a friend told me, "You know, through her mother they've been here in the United States forever."⁶¹ She became secretary, I became president; somebody else did something else.⁶²

GOLDSTEIN: Why did that group in Richmond want to make it a *Southern* Jewish Historical Society rather than a *Richmond* or *Virginia* Jewish Historical Society?

VIENER: Because there were so many stories, so many experiences, and we felt, why not encompass a larger territory, having no idea how it'll all work out. That's why it was original.

GOLDSTEIN: Did other people from across the South get involved?

VIENER: Frances Kallison in San Antonio was very interested [and] became a founder in our little group. That was after I did the Moses Levy monograph that was published, having to do with the Alamo. She'd read it and she was a historian, head of the Bexar County Historical Society [in Texas].⁶³ We published three journals in a couple of years, but we didn't have a base of operation. So the Valentine Museum, which is a history center, made a little bit of space available, but they were small staffed. We had a locker there with papers and things. We had all sorts of problems, and as much as I loved it and tried to push, things fell by the wayside. There was a hiatus, a lapse of eight or ten years. Then, I was at a board meeting of the American Jewish Historical Society when the

chairman of the committee on academic affairs, a history professor who taught at a college somewhere in Massachusetts, reported on a conference, a modest one, on writing and collecting Jewish facts, and it proved successful. Bells went off and I put up my hand, and I said, "You know, if it can be done here in Massachusetts, why couldn't we have some sort of conference in Richmond and maybe we could collect some people and have papers?" Bernie [Wax] was interested. He said "It's a pretty good idea." So I came back to Richmond, and Mel Urofsky, with whom I'd become friends, was on the faculty of Virginia Commonwealth University.⁶⁴ I discussed it with him and he liked the idea. Meanwhile, Jules Mintzer from the Richmond Jewish Community Council thought it was a great idea, and the council would put up some money and help sponsor it, [as would] the [Jewish] Center leadership. I'd become involved with the National Foundation for Jewish Culture. Do you know anything about Harry Baron?

GOLDSTEIN: No.

VIENER: He was a federation director in New Orleans, but he had made a name for himself in the higher echelons of the Council of Jewish Federations for having pushed Jewish education, Jewish culture; all those things. He was selected [as executive director] when a wonderful man from Indianapolis [Julian Freeman], headed a small group to create the National Foundation for Jewish Culture. I was seated on the board because it was interested in helping the [American Jewish Historical] Society and other enterprises. So we approached them and they helped finance the conference, and it was extremely well attended.

GOLDSTEIN: By mostly people from Richmond?

VIENER: No, from all over. People that nobody knew about suddenly appeared. There were academics. From Valdosta, Georgia, came Louis Schmier.⁶⁵ For the opening session, Mel [Urofsky] was the speaker. Sunday night at the Jewish Center there was a banquet and the president of the Virginia Historical Society and the president of the National Foundation, Earl Morse, spoke.

GOLDSTEIN: I know that the conference led to the reestablishment of the Southern Jewish Historical Society. Why was it more successful this time around than when it was first started?

VIENER: Because we had interested substantive organizations and [raised] some money.

GOLDSTEIN: Was that because you had grown in your connections to people over the years?

VIENER: That's right, and because there was an excitement about it. Members of the board of the American [Jewish Historical Society] came to the conference—Ruth Fein, bless her heart, with whom I still keep in touch. This young man from New Orleans and a couple others said, "Let's have another conference." Well, we went to Raleigh, North Carolina, because I think Abe Kanof [a former president of the American Jewish Historical Society] had moved there by that time.⁶⁶ The momentum was there, and there was correspondence back and forth, bulletins to keep people connected. Meanwhile, we created memberships and that gave us money and wherever we went [for our conferences], the community usually threw some in the pot. It was altogether reorganized and I remained active for several years.

GOLDSTEIN: So how did things develop from those first couple of conferences?

VIENER: Well, every one was better than the one that had preceded it. Of course there was this lovely recollection of what happened in Richmond.

GOLDSTEIN: So how did that lead to you becoming president of the American Jewish Historical Society?

VIENER: Well I became more involved. And Bernie [Wax], bless him, encouraged me. David Pokross had become president. He was a man of many parts, and I think he must have realized that maybe I had the makings of becoming [president]. When I would come for meetings, the first time I stayed at a motel. And David said, "The next time you come, you stay at our house," because the meetings were quite often a late afternoon and the next morning, or an all-day thing. So I stayed, and in the morning when David awakened, he said, "I cook oatmeal, do you like oatmeal?" This very responsible citizen is cooking oatmeal for me and making my breakfast. So it became a loving friendship, and they would visit us. He was like a father figure. At meetings, he would see to it that I knew this, I knew that, and then he said, "I

think you ought to be the next president." This was after a year or so. I said, "Oh, I don't think so." But anyway, I became president, and this young man from West Virginia moved into another orbit.

GOLDSTEIN: What did you have to do as president? How much of your time did it take?

VIENER: Well, I think I spent more time than I should have. But it had to do with keeping the American Jewish Historical Society in the front, in the public, to help raise money and get people involved that could do for the society.

GOLDSTEIN: Did you need to be in Boston a lot?

VIENER: Oh, every couple of months I would go and it would be a couple of days. I wish I had a dollar for every trip I made. Sometimes I stayed with Ruth Fein, [sometimes] with the Pokrosses. Bernie Wax is an ice cream man, as am I, so when he took me to the airport after an all-day meeting, we stopped at one of the Boston eateries for a modest meal and we had a milkshake with the sandwich. And I said jokingly, "For dessert, how about some ice cream." He said, "What flavor?" I said, "Bernie, I'm teasing." He said, "But it's not a bad idea." So we had ice cream for dessert after the milkshake.

GOLDSTEIN: It seems as though the personal connections you made have really stayed with you.

VIENER: I may not have achieved as much as I would have liked to, but I did get people involved. We'd [also] go to the meetings of the Council of Jewish Federations and I was on that board. The General Assembly (G.A.) would start on a Thursday and continue, but there was never anything Friday night. So I talked with some different people. "Why don't we just have a *shabbos* evening in the hotel? We'll have a dinner and invite folks and maybe somebody will say something." Jackie and Eleanor Soble and her husband, Morris, we hit it off. He became president [of the AJHS]. So the Friday nights at the G.A. became almost like a local institution.

GOLDSTEIN: So as the president of the society, you now became part of a group of heads of organizations.

VIENER: Yes, the Council of Jewish Federations and the National Foundation for Jewish Culture. I was also on the board of

the Jewish Publication Society. There were a lot of interesting people. They were special times. I just got carried away with all the opportunities. They were formative years.

Teaching Southerners about Jews and Northerners about the South

Having always had one foot in the Jewish world and one foot in the non-Jewish southern world that surrounded him, Saul often played the role of interpreter between these two overlapping but distinct cultures. His work for the AJHS and his success at organizing the 1976 Richmond conference helped create a new awareness of southern Jewish history among American Jews. As the SJHS began to flourish, Saul enlisted the support of the AJHS board members and staff. His longtime friend, AJHS Executive Director Bernie Wax, even became the treasurer of the organization. Whenever Saul helped launch a new project or exhibit pertaining to Jews in the South, he made sure it came to the attention of his northern friends and colleagues. Even as he taught northern Jews about their southern cousins, Saul devoted much of his activity in Richmond and Virginia to educating the non-Jewish public about the role Jews had played in southern life. In 1963, as a member of Richmond's Civil War Centennial Committee, he helped weave aspects of Jewish history into the community-wide program of events. During the 1970s and 1980s, Saul was a key player in the intense lobbying effort to convince the Thomas Jefferson Memorial Foundation to recognize the contributions of the Jewish naval officer, Uriah P. Levy, and his family in rescuing and preserving Monticello as a national shrine. In 1985, he was one of the principal speakers when a plaque recognizing the Levy family's role was unveiled at Jefferson's Virginia home.⁶⁷ Saul helped initiate the bicentennial commemoration of Virginia's 1786 Statute for Religious Freedom, which had paved the way for the full inclusion of Jews and other religious minorities in American life. The commemoration resulted in the founding of the Council for America's First Freedom, a Richmond-based, non-profit organization dedicated to increasing understanding and respect for religious freedom through education.

One of Saul's most enduring legacies was the role he played in the Virginia Historical Society (VHS), an organization founded in 1831 that had very few Jewish members when Saul joined in the late 1950s.⁶⁸ As Saul became active and ultimately joined its board of trustees, he pushed the VHS to broaden its traditional concerns by confronting the diversity that had characterized Virginia society since the colonial period. In 1997 Saul was the inspiration behind the VHS's ground-breaking exhibition, *Commonwealth and Community: The Jewish Experience in Virginia*.⁶⁹ Curated by his friend and frequent collaborator Melvin Urofsky of Virginia Commonwealth University, *Commonwealth and Community* was a tribute to Saul's role as a builder of bridges between people of different backgrounds.

VIENER: I served on the Richmond Civil War Centennial Committee. My brother Jake was friendly with the mayor, and there'd been publicity about this. So he said to the mayor, "He's very interested in history," or something like that, and I was invited to serve on the board. The chairman of the committee became my "uncle," J. Ambler Johnston.⁷⁰

GOLDSTEIN: Did you say your uncle?

VIENER: Yes, he became my "Uncle Ambler." He had a big engineering firm, but his father and his uncle had fought in the Civil War and his ancestors had come to western Virginia in colonial days. So he had all this history, a courtly sweet man. I was intrigued by the thing right off the bat. There were all sorts of plans about things relating to the Civil War; they published pamphlets. So I would talk back and forth with Mr. Johnston, and he said one day, "May I call you Saul?" I said, "By all means." But I said, "Mr. Johnston, I can't call you by your first name." [So, he said,] "Well, you call me your Uncle Ambler." One of the events we did was at Hebrew Cemetery in Richmond at the soldiers' section and the mayor of Richmond appeared, Mrs. [Eleanor] Sheppard,⁷¹ a very fine lovely lady. Rabbi Goldberg participated. It was a great afternoon. Mr. Johnston was very interested in real history being taught. I became the cultural member [of the committee], and I knew that to tell the story, we needed a little drama.

Saul Viener, November 1, 2002.

*At an event sponsored by the Beth Ahabah Museum and Archives.
(Courtesy of the Beth Ahabah Museum and Archives, Richmond.)*

In Richmond we had Dogwood Dell, [where] the Department of Parks and Recreation had a summer festival. There were plays, the local ballet performed—different things. And the lady who really was the top dog, Rose Kaufman Banks,⁷² was Jewish. We'd had some connections because of the Tercentenary pageant, and Rose and the whole Department of Recreation and Parks helped put on the pageant. So I talked to Mr. Johnston and Bobby Waitt, the director [of the committee]. Why not try to have something in Dogwood Dell? Adrian Bendheim, president of the temple and one of the founders of what became the Jewish Federation, was involved, and he had a flair for drama.⁷³ Adrian's grandfather had been Reverend Michelbacher [rabbi of Beth Ahabah], who had been very involved with the soldiers [during the Civil War].⁷⁴ We asked him if he would participate and play the Reverend Michelbacher. He was delighted. There was one scene where Reverend Michelbacher, who traveled around to the camps, conducted a little religious ceremony. And Adrian, who had never worn a yarmulke, had brought with him a proper yarmulke he had acquired somewhere. The evening at Dogwood Dell with the pageant was enormously successful. I don't know how many people came. There were all different kinds of people. There was a member of city council who was a prominent black citizen, and I went to him and told him what was going on. I felt there ought to be some sort of representation. He thought about it [and] said, "Maybe we can get some young people involved from the high school." It was a little effort to integrate.

GOLDSTEIN: So how did that lead to your involvement in the Virginia Historical Society?

VIENER: Mr. Johnston had been on the board of the society, and recommended me to go on the board.

GOLDSTEIN: You were already a member of the society?

VIENER: Yes, I was a member. That goes back to [when] Malcolm Stern said to me, "You ought to join the Virginia Historical Society because they have a whole Jewish collection of the Myers family, who disappeared as Jews."⁷⁵ One of the descendants was a lawyer whom I got to know, McDonald Welford. The society was then housed at the Lee House on Franklin Street. General [Robert

E.] Lee had lived there, near the state capitol. I made a date to come and to meet the director [because], of course, you had to be approved. His name was John Melville Jennings,⁷⁶ a Virginian who captured what was a local manner of speaking. "Now tell me, Mr. Vah-ner. How was it that those early Jews married into the best Virginia families?" And the Almighty was with me. I said, "Mr. Jennings, because they were the very best people." He changed the subject. Anyway, I was accepted for membership. Speaking of being accepted for membership, a man who became a great benefactor, a Virginian who was an executive in South America, was interested in becoming a member. They gave him the third degree, and he was not accepted. Later, he was very much accepted and became a vice president of the society. So it was not only the Jews but the non-Jews [who] went through a baptism of fire. [As a board member,] I was a little bit active. Very little was asked of the board members. Whenever the board met it was a cut and dried affair. John Jennings really ran the meeting. The president sometimes had a chance to say a word, and maybe it would have lasted forty-five minutes or an hour. Then they moved to another part of the headquarters for a little libation. Another world altogether.

GOLDSTEIN: So it was very different from the Southern Jewish Historical Society or the American Jewish Historical Society.

VIENER: Absolutely, [and] different from other things in Richmond, Virginia.

GOLDSTEIN: How did the Virginia Historical Society develop from the organization you describe to one that launched Commonwealth and Community, the exhibit on the Jews of Virginia?

VIENER: Commonwealth and Community was a joint effort of the Federation and the Virginia Historical Society. Charlie Bryan⁷⁷ [was] the director [of the VHS] to whom I went. I said, "Charlie, the journal has come out and it's recycling the early church of Virginia. I think there ought to be more of a focus on the other religious groups, like the Jews." [So he said,] "How do we start, Saul?" So we talked about how, and my experience with the American and Southern [Jewish Historical Societies]. And he said, "Well, we really need somebody to do a history and to really give

it focus. Let's see if Mel [Urofsky] would do it." Mel, I think, was on the board. Meanwhile, he had risen in the ranks of Virginia Commonwealth University. So we had a little meeting one morning and went through what we needed to do. And Charlie said, "We need a historian." So Mel said, "What about so-and-so." And then I said, "No. I don't think he'd do it." Finally, as Mel tells the story, the light went on [and he asked,] "Would you like me to do it?" We both said, "Yes indeed." That was a happy thing to happen, and he went forward with it, and I raised the money and it was special. I encouraged the board of the American to come to Richmond for the opening. David Pokross had a place in Florida, and they came up and we had not seen each other for a long time. When I met him at the airport he cried, I cried, so we took them home. They were very special guests. And on Saturday, some of the folks were in town, so I arranged a tour of Richmond, a Jewish tour. I asked some friends if they would mingle and they came on the bus, and several things happened. These New York types, of which there were a number, their eyes opened up. We got to the cemetery and I told the story of the soldiers' section. And Arthur Obermayer⁷⁸ was on the board and he looks over at a close grave. It was his father's aunt and uncle who had lived in some part of Virginia, but were buried there. Things like that happened, and the opening was very successful. It made a little bit of history.

Saul's Legacy

While interviewing Saul, I could not help but wonder whether he might have pursued the academic study of Jewish history beyond the M.A. level, had that been a realistic option for him in the 1940s. Because of limited opportunities for such work in American universities of that era, as well as the pressure brought to bear by immigrant parents who felt that a life of scholarship would be impractical for their son, he instead came to express his passion for the Jewish past through his involvement in organizations like the AJHS and the SJHS. Today, professional academics often dismiss the work of laymen who headed such organizations as being too celebratory and lacking scholarly detachment. But as my discussion with Saul drove home, at a time when graduate

programs in American Jewish history were unheard of and only a handful of scholars—all trained in other areas—cast their attention toward the history of American Jews, it was largely people like Saul and his compatriots who established the groundwork on which the fields of American and southern Jewish history later emerged. Surely, Saul's interests were never purely academic. As his interview reveals, the personal and emotional dimension of connecting with the Jewish past, bonding with his fellow Jews, and winning respect for them in the larger community were often in the forefront of his approach. In fact, one wonders whether he would have been able to touch so many people and make his mark in so many diverse settings had he confined his talents to the ivory tower. While helping to weave an appreciation for history into the collective consciousness of Jews in Richmond, the South, and across the nation, however, Saul also cultivated the interest of young scholars, provided them with myriad opportunities to reach a receptive audience, and helped build archival collections to support their work. That the SJHS in particular persists as an arena in which scholars and laypeople not only work together but celebrate the unique character that their collaboration brings to the organization is a testament to Saul's enduring influence.

NOTES

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¹ These include *A Commemorative History of Congregation Beth Ahabah, 1841-1966* (Richmond, 1966); "Surgeon Moses Albert Levy: Letters of a Texas Patriot," *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society* 46 (December 1956): 101-113, and supplement, 49 (March 1960): 202-207; "Rosena Hutzler Levy Recalls the Civil War," *American Jewish Historical*

Quarterly 62 (March 1973): 306–313; *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, s.v. “Calisch, Edward N.” and “Richmond.”

² The recorded interviews have been deposited with the American Jewish Historical Society at the Center for Jewish History in New York.

³ On the small-town Jewish experience in America, see Lee Shai Weissbach, *Jewish Life in Small-Town America: A History* (New Haven, 2005); Ewa Morawska, *Uncertain Prosperity: Small-Town Jews in Industrial America, 1880–1940* (Princeton, 1996); Eric L. Goldstein, “Beyond Lombard Street: Jewish Life in Maryland’s Small Towns,” in *We Call This Place Home: Jewish Life in Maryland’s Small Towns*, ed. Avi Y. Decter and Karen Falk (Baltimore, 2003), 27–79.

⁴ On the history of Charles Town and surroundings, see Millard K. Bushong, *Historic Jefferson County* (Boyce, VA, 1972). See also Saul Viener’s memoir, “Growing up in Charles Town: History and Memory,” *Magazine of the Jefferson County Historical Society* 66 (December 2000): 19–30.

⁵ According to the detailed biography of Hyman Viener (1882–1969) in *National Cyclopaedia of American Biography* 54 (1973): 442, he was born in Eržvilkas, a town in the district of Raseiniai, Lithuania, and died in Charles Town. His wife, Golda Rivka (Rebecca Goldie) Viener was born c. 1884 in Nemaksciai and died in 1947.

⁶ Ultimately, the Vieners had nine children: Sarah Ida (Chaya Sarah, 1904–1912), Harry Benjamin (1906–1975), Joseph Michael (1908–1964), Louis Mayer (1910–1970), Jacob Max (1912–2002), Reuben (1914–1982), Maurice Abraham (1916–1990), Eli (1918–1998), and Saul (1921–2006).

⁷ Beth Jacob Congregation was founded in Martinsburg in 1912. On the history of the town’s Jewish community, see Abraham I. Shinedling, *West Virginia Jewry: Origins and History, 1850–1958* (Philadelphia, 1963), 1025–1037.

⁸ Congregation Ohev Sholom was founded in Washington in 1886 by eastern European Jewish immigrants, and from 1906 to the late 1950s was located at 500 I Street, NW, at the corner of Fifth Street (hence the name “Fifth Street Shul”). Today it is known as Ohev Sholom: The National Synagogue.

⁹ On the *Morgen zhurnal* (Jewish Morning Journal), a conservative Yiddish daily established in New York in 1901, see Arthur A. Goren, *The Politics and Public Culture of American Jews* (Bloomington, IN, 1999), 100–109.

¹⁰ Christine Washington was a descendant of Samuel Washington, a brother of President George Washington. Her father, Richard B. Washington, was a Confederate veteran and a member of the Stonewall Jackson Brigade. See *Washington Post*, May 16, 1937. Dr. John Augustine Washington was a nephew of Christine Washington, the son of her brother S. Walter Washington. See *Washington Post*, September 24, 1987; and James E. Surkamp, “The Washingtons of Jefferson County: Interview of John A. Washington,” *Jefferson County Historical Society Magazine* 69 (December 2003).

¹¹ Charles Washington was the youngest brother of President George Washington. He arrived in Jefferson County, VA (now West Virginia), in 1780. Seven years later he laid out

the streets of Charles Town on eighty acres adjoining his private estate. See Bushong, *Historic Jefferson County*, 29, 42–43.

¹² Samuel Washington was the first of his family to live in the vicinity of what became Charles Town, arriving by 1770. See Bushong, *Historic Jefferson County*, 25–27.

¹³ In 1794, when the wedding was held, the mistress of Harewood was Lucy Todd Washington, daughter-in-law of Samuel Washington and sister of Dolley Payne Todd. See Bushong, *Historic Jefferson County*, 27.

¹⁴ Brown was found guilty of treason in 1859 for his seizure of the federal arsenal in Harper's Ferry, VA (now West Virginia). His trial and execution were held in Charles Town because it was the county seat of Jefferson County, where Harper's Ferry was located. See Bushong, *Historic Jefferson County*, 173–204.

¹⁵ On Rabbi Isadore Breslau, an army chaplain, officer of the Zionist Organization of America, and community leader in Washington, DC, see *American Jewish Year Book* 80 (1980): 362–363.

¹⁶ Ruth B. Fein served as president of the American Jewish Historical Society from 1982 to 1985, the only woman to hold that office. She also headed Boston's Combined Jewish Philanthropies from 1980 to 1983 and was the founding president of the New England Holocaust Memorial. See Larry Tye, *Home Lands: Portrait of the New Jewish Diaspora* (New York, 2001), 117; and Jonathan D. Sarna and Ellen Smith, eds., *The Jews of Boston* (Boston, 1995), 119.

¹⁷ On Stanley Pulliam Shugert, a mathematics professor at the University of Pennsylvania from 1919 to 1955, see *Who's Who in America* 29 (1956–1957): 2347.

¹⁸ Founded in 1871, Shepherd State College (now Shepherd University) is located in Shepherdstown, WV, thirteen miles north of Charles Town. In 1930, the school became an accredited four-year college devoted to teacher training. See Arthur Gordon Slonaker, *A History of Shepherd College, Shepherdstown, West Virginia* (Parsons, WV, 1967).

¹⁹ Ruth Scarborough served as a history professor at Shepherd State College from 1936 to 1966, during which time she also chaired the Department of Social Sciences. In 1977, the university's library was named in her honor. See "Dr. Ruth Scarborough," online at <http://www.shepherd.edu/libweb/about/ruth>, (accessed: July 15, 2007).

²⁰ The final product was Saul Viener, "The Political Career of Isidor Straus" (master's thesis, West Virginia University, 1947).

²¹ On Vice Admiral Daniel Edward Barbey, a leader in the development of amphibious warfare in the Pacific during World War II, see his memoir, *MacArthur's Amphibious Navy: Seventh Amphibious Force Operations, 1943–1945* (Annapolis, MD, 1969).

²² On Cassius Marcellus Keller, later a news editor and writer for *Voice of America*, see *Washington Post*, November 2, 1971.

²³ Rev. Joseph Wolman was the rabbi of the Brisbane Hebrew Congregation from 1937 to 1946. He subsequently served as the rabbi of the Wellington Hebrew Congregation in Wellington, New Zealand.

²⁴ Saul's mother-in-law was Reka Corwin Wolman (1891–1982).

²⁵ The Margaret Street Synagogue was built in Brisbane in 1886. On the synagogue's centennial, Saul and Jackie Viener erected a stained glass window in memory of Jackie's parents and their service to the congregation.

²⁶ Charles Henry Ambler was a professor in the Department of History at West Virginia University from 1917 to 1947, serving as chair of the department from 1926 to 1946. Among his many publications were *Sectionalism in Virginia from 1776 to 1861* (Chicago, 1910); *A History of Transportation in the Ohio Valley* (Glendale, CA, 1932); *A History of West Virginia* (New York, 1933); and *George Washington and the West* (Chapel Hill, 1936). See "Charles Henry Ambler," *West Virginia History* 19 (1957-1958): 152-153.

²⁷ Festus Paul Summers was a professor in the Department of History at West Virginia University from 1939 to 1965, serving as chair of the department from 1947 to 1962. Among his published works are: *The Baltimore and Ohio in the Civil War* (New York, 1939); *William L. Wilson and Tariff Reform: A Biography* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1953); and, with Elizabeth Cometti, *The Thirty-Fifth State: A Documentary History of West Virginia* (Morgantown, WV, 1966). See the sketch of his career in *West Virginia History* 27 (1965-1966): 306-308.

²⁸ See note 1, above.

²⁹ Katherine (Kitty) Meyers Cohen, a native of Richmond, is an attorney in Atlanta and a longtime friend of the Viener family.

³⁰ Joseph Cohn, a layman, was authorized to chant the liturgy for Beth Shalome after the departure of Rev. George Jacobs for Philadelphia. He served as the reader of the congregation from 1869 to 1873 and again from 1878 to 1898. When Beth Shalome was absorbed by Beth Ahabah in 1898, the Cohn family began to maintain a private synagogue in Richmond where they could perpetuate their Orthodox practices. See Myron Berman, *Richmond's Jewry: Shabbat in Shockoe, 1769-1976* (Richmond, 1979), 60-62.

³¹ Engelberg, along with William E. Hemphill and Marvin W. Schlegel, wrote the high school textbook *Cavalier Commonwealth: History and Government in Virginia* (New York, 1957).

³² Viener, "Surgeon Moses Albert Levy."

³³ Rev. George Jacobs was the *hazan* of Beth Shalome from 1857 to 1869, when he became the rabbi of Beth El Emeth in Philadelphia. See Berman, *Richmond's Jewry*, 59-60.

³⁴ On the history of Congregation Mikveh Israel, see Edwin Wolf II and Maxwell Whiteman, *The Jews of Philadelphia from Colonial Times to the Age of Jackson* (Philadelphia, 1957).

³⁵ Lee Max Friedman, an amateur historian and collector of Judaica, was president of the American Jewish Historical Society from 1948 to 1952. He was the author of *Early American Jews* (Cambridge, MA, 1934), *Jewish Pioneers and Patriots* (Philadelphia, 1942), and *Pilgrims in a New Land* (New York, 1948). For a sketch of his career, see Isidore S. Meyer, "Necrology: Lee Max Friedman (1871-1957)," *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society* 47 (1957-1958): 211-215.

³⁶ Jacob Rader Marcus, Reform rabbi and historian, was principally responsible for the establishment of American Jewish history as a professional field of study in the United States. From 1926 until his death in 1995, he taught at the Hebrew Union College-Jewish

Institute of Religion in Cincinnati, where he also founded the American Jewish Archives in 1947. From 1955 to 1958, he served as president of the American Jewish Historical Society. On Marcus's career, see Jonathan D. Sarna, "Jacob Rader Marcus (1896-1995)," in *The Dynamics of American Jewish History: Jacob Rader Marcus's Essays on American Jewry*, ed. Gary Phillip Zola (Hanover, NH, 2004), 3-12.

³⁷ Edwin Wolf II was the librarian of the Library Company of Philadelphia from 1953 to 1984. He was co-author, with Maxwell Whiteman, of *The History of the Jews of Philadelphia from Colonial Times to the Age of Jackson* (Philadelphia, 1957).

³⁸ Jacob Da Silva Solis-Cohen, Jr., was a real estate consultant and appraiser from a prominent Philadelphia family. Active in Jewish community affairs, he served as president of the Jewish Publication Society of America from 1933 to 1949. See Jonathan D. Sarna, *JPS: The Americanization of Jewish Culture, 1888-1988* (Philadelphia, 1989) 173-174, 375.

³⁹ Marcus's daughter was Merle Judith Marcus, an actress and singer who later became a sales manager for hotel chains in Washington, DC, and Los Angeles. She died in an apartment fire in Los Angeles in 1965. See Jewish Women's Archive, "Personal Information for Merle Judith Marcus," online at <http://www.jwa.org/archive/jsp/perInfo.jsp?personID=1035> (accessed July 15, 2007).

⁴⁰ Like the Vieners, Jacob Rader Marcus's family had migrated from small-town Pennsylvania into West Virginia around the turn of the century. Marcus was born in New Haven, PA, but spent much of his youth in Farmington and Wheeling, WV. See Shinedling, *West Virginia Jewry*, 842-845.

⁴¹ Dr. Isidore S. Meyer served in a position at the American Jewish Historical Society called "Librarian-Editor" from 1940 to 1968, but since the society had no official director at the time, Meyer was the principal member of the administrative staff. See Jeffrey S. Gurock, "From *Publications* to *American Jewish History*: The Journal of the American Jewish Historical Society and the Writing of American Jewish History," *American Jewish History* 81 (Winter 1993-1994): 205-206.

⁴² The exact amount of the bequest was \$1.4 million. See Gurock, "From *Publications* to *American Jewish History*," 227.

⁴³ Leon Jacob Obermayer was a prominent attorney who served as president of the Philadelphia Board of Education. See Jacob Rader Marcus, *Concise Dictionary of American Jewish Biography* (Brooklyn, 1994), 2:471.

⁴⁴ Maurice Jacobs served as secretary of the Jewish Publication Society of America from 1936 until 1950. In the latter year he opened Maurice Jacobs, Inc., which became "one of the leading specialty printers in the United States, and one of the foremost printers of Judaica anywhere in the world." See Sarna, *JPS*, 175-218.

⁴⁵ Rosalie Nathan Hendricks is described by writer Stephen Birmingham as "a grande dame of New York Sephardic society." She was responsible for gathering and donating to the New-York Historical Society a vast collection of manuscripts related to members of her husband's family, who were copper merchants in early America. See Birmingham, *The Grandees: America's Sephardic Elite* (New York, 1971), 16-18.

⁴⁶ Abram Leon Sachar, a professor of American history at the University of Illinois, became the founding president of Brandeis University in 1948 and held the post for the next two decades. See *New York Times*, July 25, 1993. For an account of the controversy over whether to relocate the AJHS, one that provides a different list of key individuals, see Gurock, "From *Publications* to *American Jewish History*," 227–230.

⁴⁷ For a brief biography of David R. Pokross (1907–2003), see *Heritage: Newsletter of the American Jewish Historical Society* 2 (Spring 2004): 9.

⁴⁸ Bernard Wax began as director of the AJHS in 1966, two years before the headquarters on the Brandeis campus were completed. He served in this capacity until 1991 and is now director emeritus. See his reminiscences of Saul Viener in *Southern Jewish History* 9 (2006): 201–204, and of the founding and early years of the SJHS elsewhere in this volume.

⁴⁹ Myer Myers was a gold and silversmith in colonial New York, where he made both secular pieces and Jewish ritual objects. Three of his children settled in Richmond before the end of the eighteenth century. See David L. Barquist, et al. *Myer Myers: Jewish Silversmith in Colonial New York* (New Haven, 2001); and Herbert T. Ezekiel and Gaston Lichtenstein, *History of the Jews of Richmond from 1769 to 1917* (Richmond, 1917), 47–50, 58.

⁵⁰ Naomi Silverman Cohn was an activist for social causes and women's rights in Richmond. See *Virginia Dictionary of Biography*, s.v. "Cohn, Naomi Silverman." Although not a native Richmonder, her husband's family was among the oldest and most prominent in Richmond's Jewish community. See note 30, above.

⁵¹ On the career of Edith Lindeman Calisch, see *Virginia Dictionary of Biography*, s.v. "Calisch, Edith Elliott Lindeman."

⁵² Salo Wittmayer Baron taught at Columbia University from 1930 to 1963, where he held the first professorship in Jewish history created by a secular American university. His works include the eighteen-volume *Social and Religious History of the Jews* (1952–1983). See Robert Liberles, *Salo Wittmayer Baron: Architect of Jewish History* (New York, 1995).

⁵³ David de Sola Pool, rabbi of New York's Spanish and Portuguese Congregation Shearith Israel, served as president of the American Jewish Historical Society from 1954 to 1955 and was author of works on early American Jewish history, including *Portraits Etched in Stone: Early Jewish Settlers, 1682–1831* (New York, 1952); and, with Tamar de Sola Pool, *An Old Faith in the New World: Portrait of Shearith Israel, 1654–1954* (New York, 1955). See *New York Times*, December 2, 1970.

⁵⁴ The meeting was held on January 13, 1957, at the Vieners' home at 302 Greenway Lane in Richmond. See the circular announcing the meeting, dated December 28, 1956, in the Southern Jewish Historical Society Papers, Jewish Heritage Collection, College of Charleston (hereafter, JHC-CC), MS 1056, box 1, folder 1.

⁵⁵ Eli Evans, *The Provincials: A Personal History of Jews in the South* (New York, 1973).

⁵⁶ On the Richmond conference and the rebirth of the Southern Jewish Historical Society, see the articles by Bernard Wax, Saul Rubin, Janice Rothschild Blumberg, and Eli N. Evans in the current volume; Nathan M. Kaganoff and Melvin I. Urofsky, eds., "Turn to the South": *Essays on Southern Jewry* (Charlottesville, VA, 1979), ix–xii; Louis Schmier, ed., *Reflections of Southern Jewry: The Letters of Charles Wessolowsky, 1878–1879* (Macon, GA, 1982),

169-171; and Deborah R. Weiner, "'A Sense of Connection to Others': A Profile of Stephen Whitfield," *Southern Jewish History* 7 (2004): 58, 63. Correspondence and circulars concerning some of the early conferences can be found in the Southern Jewish Historical Society Papers, JHC-CC.

⁵⁷ For an account of AJHS activities during these years, see Saul Viener's two presidential addresses in *American Jewish History* 70 (December 1980): 189-199; and 72 (September 1982): 127-131. The papers of the Richmond conference were collected in Kaganoff and Urofsky, "Turn to the South."

⁵⁸ Rabbi Malcolm H. Stern (1915-1994) was the rabbi of Norfolk's Congregation Ohef Shalom from 1947 until 1964, when he became the Director of Rabbinic Placement for the Central Conference of American Rabbis in New York. He was also a pioneer in the field of Jewish genealogy. His magnum opus was *Americans of Jewish Descent: A Compendium of Genealogy* (Cincinnati, 1960), most recently reissued as *First American Jewish Families: 600 Genealogies, 1654-1988* (Cincinnati, 1991). See Kerry M. Olitzky, "A Memorial Tribute to Malcolm H. Stern," *American Jewish History* 82 (1994): 329-330.

⁵⁹ Dr. Ariel Goldberg served as rabbi of Congregation Beth Ahabah from 1946 to 1970. See Berman, *Richmond's Jewry*, 322.

⁶⁰ Stern's articles in the *Journal of the Southern Jewish Historical Society* were "Moses Myers and the Early Jewish Community of Norfolk," 1:1 (November 1958): 5-13; "Monticello and the Levy Family," 1:2 (October 1959): 19-23; and "Some Notes on the History of the Organized Jewish Community of Norfolk, Virginia," 1:3 (November 1963): 12-36.

⁶¹ Clare Levy Hutzler was a descendant of three longstanding Richmond families, the Ezekiels, the Levys, and the Mayers. See Stern, *First American Jewish Families*, 69, 162, 190.

⁶² The original officers were Saul Viener and Louis Ginsberg, co-chairmen; Clare Levy Hutzler, secretary; and Samuel Z. Troy, treasurer. See *Journal of the Southern Jewish Historical Society* 1:1 (November 1958): 1. Ginsberg, an amateur historian and writer from Petersburg, VA, was the author of *History of the Jews of Petersburg* (Petersburg, VA, 1954) and *Chapters in the History of Virginia Jewry* (Petersburg, VA, 1969).

⁶³ Frances Rosenthal Kallison also co-founded, along with Rabbi Jimmy Kessler, the Texas Jewish Historical Society in 1979. She was the author of "Was It a Duel or Murder? A Study in Texas Assimilation," *American Jewish Historical Quarterly* 62 (March 1973): 314-320; and "100 Years of San Antonio Jewry" (master's thesis, Trinity University, 1977). The monograph Saul refers to was his "Surgeon Moses Albert Levy."

⁶⁴ Melvin I. Urofsky is professor emeritus of history and public policy at Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond, where he taught from 1974 to 2006. He served with Saul Viener as co-chair of the 1976 Richmond conference. Among his publications not cited elsewhere in this article are *American Zionism from Herzl to the Holocaust* (Garden City, NY, 1975); *Louis D. Brandeis and the Progressive Tradition* (Boston, 1981); *A Voice that Spoke for Justice: The Life and Times of Stephen S. Wise* (Albany, NY, 1982); and *A March of Liberty: A Constitutional History of the United States* (New York, 1988).

⁶⁵ Louis Schmier is professor of history at Valdosta State University, where he has taught since 1967. Schmier was the founding secretary when the SJHS was reestablished following the Richmond conference.

⁶⁶ Abram Kanof, M.D., was president of the AJHS from 1961 to 1964. See Margaret Kanof Norden, "In Memoriam: Dr. Abram Kanof, 1903-1999," *American Jewish History* 87 (1999): 95-96; also see page 25 of this journal for details about the organizing meeting Kanof hosted in 1976. David Goldberg of New Orleans was apparently the "young man from New Orleans" to whom Saul refers. Schmier, *Reflections of Southern Jewry*, 170-171 n11.

⁶⁷ See Marc Leepson, *Saving Monticello: The Levy Family's Epic Quest to Rescue the House that Jefferson Built* (New York, 2001), 247-253; and Melvin I. Urofsky, *The Levy Family and Monticello, 1834-1923: Saving Thomas Jefferson's House* (Charlottesville, VA, 2001), 200-202.

⁶⁸ On the history of the VHS, see Melvin I. Urofsky, *The Virginia Historical Society: The First 175 Years, 1831-2006* (Richmond, 2006).

⁶⁹ See the exhibit's companion volume, Melvin I. Urofsky, *Commonwealth and Community: The Jewish Experience in Virginia* (Richmond, 1997).

⁷⁰ J. Ambler Johnston, an architect by profession, was an amateur military historian and scholar of the Civil War. He was known widely as "Uncle Ambler," especially among students at Virginia Polytechnic Institute, where he was active in alumni affairs. See *Richmond News Leader*, February 7, 1974. At Saul Viener's invitation, Johnston wrote an article on a Jewish soldier who had fought alongside his uncle, N. B. Johnston, in the Civil War. See "Not Forgotten: Henry Gintzberger, Private, C.S.A.," *Journal of the Southern Jewish Historical Society* 1:3 (November 1963): 6-10.

⁷¹ Eleanor P. Sheppard served as mayor of Richmond from 1962 to 1964 and was later a member of the Virginia General Assembly. See *Richmond News Leader*, July 2, 1962; November 2, 1969; and November 3, 1971.

⁷² Rose Kaufman Banks was founder of the Richmond Community Theater, later absorbed by the Richmond Theater Guild. From 1941 to 1975 she organized arts programs and special events for the Richmond Department of Recreation and Parks. See *Dictionary of Virginia Biography*, s.v. "Banks, Rose Kaufman."

⁷³ On Adrian L. Bendheim, see *Richmond Times Dispatch*, February 5, 1983, and *Richmond Times Leader*, February 5, 1983.

⁷⁴ Rev. Maximillian J. Michelbacher was the first rabbi of Richmond's Congregation Beth Ahabah, where he served from 1846 until his death in 1879. On his tenure there, and his work with Confederate soldiers during the war, see Berman, *Richmond's Jewry*, 139, 190-193, 211.

⁷⁵ On this family, the descendants of Solomon and Judith Myers, see Stern, *First American Jewish Families*, 217.

⁷⁶ On Jennings, see Urofsky, *Virginia Historical Society*, 124-140.

⁷⁷ Charles F. Bryan, Jr., became director of the VHS in 1988. On his career there, see *ibid.*, chap. 7.

⁷⁸ Arthur S. Obermayer is a high-tech entrepreneur and philanthropist in West Newton, MA, and a longtime trustee of the American Jewish Historical Society. He is the son of Leon Obermayer, mentioned earlier in this article.