NPS Form 10- 900 (Rev. Aug. 2002)

NRHP ACCEPTED: 05/27/2009	
	OMB No. 1024-0018

United States Department of the Interior National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES REGISTRATION FORM

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

historic name Moses Myers House	
other names/site numberMyers House 122-0017	
2. Location	
street & number 323 Freemason Street (or) 331 Banl	k Street not for publication N/A
city or town Norfolk	vicinity <u>N/A</u>
state Virginia code VA county City o	f Norfolk code 710 zip code 23510
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for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for	n Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this X nomination request registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property X meets does not meet insidered significant X nationally
Signature of certifying official Virginia Department of Historic Resources	Date
State or Federal Agency or Tribal government	
In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the Na comments.)	tional Register criteria. (See continuation sheet for additional
Signature of commenting official/Title	Date
State or Federal agency and bureau	
======================================	
I, hereby certify that this property is:	
entered in the National Register	
See continuation sheet determined eligible for the National Register	Signature of the Keeper
See continuation sheet.	
determined not eligible for the National Register removed from the National Register other (explain):	Date of Action

walls Brick

other Stone and Wood Details

Moses Myers House Norfolk, Virginia ______ 8. Statement of Significance ______ Applicable National Register Criteria (Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing) **X** A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history. В Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past. ___ C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction. Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history. D Criteria Considerations (Mark "X" in all the boxes that apply.) A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes. removed from its original location. __ C a birthplace or a grave. D a cemetery. E a reconstructed building, object, or structure. a commemorative property. less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years. **Areas of Significance** (Enter categories from instructions) Social History Ethnic Heritage: European Period of Significance _1792-1931_____ Significant Dates _1792, 1802, 1907, 1931_____ Significant Person (Complete if Criterion B is marked above) Moses Myers Cultural Affiliation N/A Architect/Builder Moses Myers Narrative Statement of Significance (Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.) ______ 9. Major Bibliographical References _____ (Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.) Previous documentation on file (NPS) preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested. _X_ previously listed in the National Register

____ previously determined eligible by the National Register

Narrative Description (Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

	distoric Landmark nerican Buildings Survey # nerican Engineering Record		
Moses Myers House			Norfolk, Virginia
Local government _X University: <i>The Myers I</i> and Mary, Williamsburg, VA _X Other	Historic Resources c American Building Survey Family Papers, Manuscripts der Museum of Art, Myers Fa	and Rare Books Dept., Swem	Library, The College of William —
10. Geographical Data ===================================			=======================================
Acreage of Property <u>1 ac</u>	<u>re</u>		
UTM References (Place addit	tional UTM references on a continu	uation sheet)	
Zone Easting Northing 1 18 385220 4079036	Zone Easting Northing 2	Zone Easting Northing 3	Zone Easting Northing 4
Boundary Justification (Ex ====================================	plain why the boundaries were seld	ne property on a continuation sheet.) ected on a continuation sheet.)	=======================================
	d, historian and Paige L.W.	Pollard, principal	
organization <u>Commonwealt</u>	h Preservation Group	date12/29/2008	
		telephone 757-923-190	
		_ state_VA_ zip code <u>23439</u>	
Additional Documentation	1		
Submit the following items with the			
A sketch map for his Photographs Representation Additional items (Check wi	ve black and white photogra ith the SHPO or FPO for any	having large acreage or nume phs of the property.	
Property Owner			
(Complete this item at the request			
street & number		telephone	
city or town		_ state zip code	

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.). A federal agency may not conduct or sponsor, and a person is not required to

respond to a collection of information unless it displays a valid OMB control number.

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 36 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the National Register of Historic Places, National Park Service, 1849 C St., NW, Washington, DC 20240.

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Moses Myers House Norfolk, Virginia

Summary Architectural Description

The Moses Myers house was constructed sometime between 1791, when the family purchased land on what was then the outskirts of Norfolk, and 1797, when the house first appears in written records. However there is a reference to a visit to the Myers family on March 7, 1794 in their Norfolk home, giving strong evidence that the current house was complete by this time. Originally situated in a very rural setting, the federal style dwelling set a new standard of sophistication for the rapidly expanding City of Norfolk. The selection of a remote location by the prominent Moses Myers family served as a catalyst for the expansion of the City of Norfolk to the north, and by the nineteenth century, the dwelling was surrounded by urban style residential development. The area continued to grow, and today the dwelling is situated in a densely developed area amongst a mixture of historic and modern buildings which are two to four stories in height.

Despite its urban location, the dwelling retains a generously sized fenced yard. A kitchen garden typical of the era was installed in the southeast corner, and the Garden Club of Virginia finished the landscape with a garden appropriate for an elegant late-18th century federal style dwelling, installed in two phases in 2003 and 2006.

Detailed Architectural Description

The Moses Myers house was constructed in several distinct phases, with a subsequent historic renovation c1906 in anticipation of the Jamestown Exposition. The original late eighteenth century portion (c1791-1797) is a two and one-half story masonry dwelling executed in a Flemish bond brick pattern with a limestone belt course and decorative limestone lintels. The front door is accented with a decorative portico adorned with dentils and supported by fluted columns and pilasters. The primary entry consists of double leaf three panel wood doors with a decorative fanlight. The upper pediment is accented with an elaborate fanlight on the façade. The front gabled roof was extended with the early nineteenth century dining room addition; at that time, two large exterior chimneys were encased and now function as interior chimneys. The north side of the dwelling faces Freemason Street and has always been a prominent elevation, thus its portico and doorway have the same detail as the primary entry. The south side elevation features a simplified entry, and faces the garden. The dwelling has six-over-six double hung wood sash, with decorative fanlight detailing over entries and in the pedimented gable. Additions were appended to the south and west elevations, and have rendered them less formal and symmetrical than the primary elevations. The detailing in the additions is similar to the original dwelling though subtle distinctions render each addition discernible from the rest.

Beyond the primary entry, a formal and highly adorned hall extends to the north and south; each end is terminated by double leaf doors described above and designed to promote air circulation. The decorative plaster on the ceiling of the main hall is the most noteworthy in the dwelling, though impressive decorative plaster can be found throughout the entire first floor with the wall plaster having undergone extensive restoration. Additionally, throughout the dwelling most of the original wood wainscot, woodwork, hardware, and flooring remain in place. A U-shaped stair occupies the southern end of the hall; it is highly detailed with classical motifs and leads to the upper bed chambers

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Double parlors complete the remainder of the original first floor. Each parlor has distinct and elaborate detailing. In the north parlor, also known as the drawing room, the cornice is adorned with swags and urns, an egg and dart motif, and tobacco, representing decorative themes typical of the time and era. The hearth in this first parlor is marble, and the mantle is purported to be the most gilded Federal period mantle in the United States; it is composite. The elaborate over-mantle is executed in plaster and includes typical Federal motifs such as egg and dart, swags, and vines.

The second parlor has a marble surround surmounted by a painted composition mantle. The fireplace is flanked by blind arched doors with reeded surrounds, and a decorative cornice is adorned with swags and blossoms as well as egg and dart motifs. The music room connects directly to the main hall through a small door under the primary stair. It also connects directly to the rear servants' circulation area through a door in the blind archways flanking the fireplace.

The original second floor consisted of two bed chambers, a third room serving as either storage or a sitting room, and a half story finished floor above housed an additional bed chamber for children, along with a storage area. Marble and composite mantles along with a decorative plaster over-mantle in the primary bedroom extend the elaborate detailing to the family rooms upstairs. Plaster cornices are slightly more restrained than those in the downstairs spaces, but they contain brackets, floral motifs and acanthus and swag motifs.

As the Myers family grew, the house was expanded to better serve the needs of the family. The dwelling was originally designed with a basement kitchen which proved to generate too much heat for the warm Tidewater summers. Consequently, c1800 the Myers added a two story kitchen to the south of the dwelling. The new kitchen was attached to the main body of the dwelling via a two story hyphen which acted as circulation space for servants. This hyphen was substantially altered in the c1906 renovation, and is the subject of ongoing study to determine its architectural evolution.

By 1802 a substantial addition to the west side was constructed. This addition included a large dining room terminated by a bay window. The dining room was constructed with two niches specifically designed to house custom made sideboards which are still in place today. The decorative crown molding is in three parts and features acanthus leaves, among other organic motifs. The mantle and hearth in the room are comprised of several types of carved marble and are clearly distinguished from the plaster and composite mantle detailing found in the original parlors. The second floor of the addition housed two bed chambers to provide sleeping quarters for the growing family.

The last major renovation resulting in alterations to the dwelling took place in c1906, in conjunction with the Jamestown Exposition. The renovation was designed to modernize the dwelling as a variety of guests visited, including President Theodore Roosevelt. Evidence of the c1906 alterations is most evident in the servant's circulation area, where floor levels were adjusted to accommodate indoor plumbing for restrooms. Also, in the third floor some hardware, including hinges and door knobs, were replaced. It is likely that electrical service was extended to the dwelling at this time as well. Finally, it is believed that the north portico was built at this time replacing an original

lost in a late nineteenth century storm. The Moses Myers House remained in the family until 1931 when the dwelling and its furnishings were sold to the Colonial House Corporation. The dwelling was immediately converted to a house museum, and has remained open to the public as a museum ever since. While many of the original Myers

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family possessions have always remained with the dwelling, building stewards have continued to buy back original pieces resulting in a highly intact inventory of original Myers belongings.

In 1988 a modern square shed was built in the southwest corner of the property to serve as a maintenance building. The roof style is gabled with shingles to match the main house. The siding is clapboard. The shed is non-contributing.

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Moses Myers House Norfolk, Virginia

Summary Statement

The Moses Myers House is significant as the most intact, and best documented, surviving residence of a Jewish family in the United States from the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries; in fact the house is the best surviving example of a known Jewish residence in United States of any period before 1800. The house was home to the financially and politically prominent Myers family for five generations from the late eighteenth to the midtwentieth century. Moses Myers moved to Norfolk with his new wife in 1787 and built his grand Federal style home sometime between 1792 and 1797, becoming the first documented Jewish residents of the city. The Myers family's role in Norfolk as Jews as well as leaders in business, government, and the community is the key to the historical context of the Myers family home. The Moses Myers house is an expression of the traditional culture and role of Jewish society in America from the earliest days of our nation's history. Myers came to Norfolk via two of the more traditional centers of the American Jewish population in the Colonial era--New York City, where he spent much of his youth, and Richmond, Virginia where he first worked as an independent businessman. He maintained ties to both cities while forging a new life in the otherwise uniformly Christian city of Norfolk. This incredibly intact and outstanding example of Federal architecture, considered alongside its huge collection of artifacts--thousands of original documents, hundreds of books from the original library, a massive sheet music collection, along with the majority of the original art and furniture--must be considered a unique resource to examine the life and culture of a wealthy Jewish family beginning in the late eighteenth century and how it changed over five generations until the family sold the house in 1931. The house meets National Register Criterion A in the area of Social History as possibly the best surviving example of an early American Jewish home in the United States.

Historical Narrative

Moses Myers was born in 1753 in New York City, the first son of Hyam Myers and Rachel Louzada. Hyam Myers was a poor recent immigrant from Amsterdam and was first employed as a shohet, a kosher butcher, for the Congregation Shearith Israel. Rachel Louzada was from a longstanding New York Jewish family. Moses Myers grew up with a strong Jewish family tradition. Soon Hyam Myers would turn to the business of trade, working first in New York and later in Quebec. This foundation gave Moses Myers knowledge of three languages: French and English through the family business in Canada and the colonies, as well as Dutch from his father. Moses Myers used his knowledge of business and language from his father to become a successful merchant and politician.

Before Myers could launch his career in business, the American Revolution began and Myers played several roles in the war before it ended. At the outset of the conflict he joined Joel Pratt's Company (New York) and served a short stint from June 28 to October 13, 1775, before leaving for medical reasons.³ Shortly thereafter Moses Myers became a partner in the firm of Isaac Moses & Co. out of New York. Myers and Samuel Myers (not a relative) opened a Dutch office of the company in Amsterdam, which shipped war supplies for the colonists via blockade runners based on the Caribbean island of St. Eustatius.⁴ In early 1781 St. Eustatius was captured by the British and Moses Myers was one of many taken prisoner and imprisoned back in England.⁵

Upon returning to the United States after the war, Myers spent several years with Samuel Myers futilely trying to

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prevent the collapse of Isaac Moses & Co. and their own holdings in that company. After that bankruptcy, Moses Myers decided to try his fortunes in Virginia, a state he found to be ripe for business success and one he had visited several times after the war. The passage of the Virginia Act for Establishing Religious Freedom in 1786 must have weighed as a factor in Myers' decision as well since it made Virginia one of the most welcoming places for Jews in the United States. With its already established Jewish community, Richmond was a logical early choice for Myers, but a bad business deal there convinced him to head for the emerging market of Norfolk.⁶ Settling in Norfolk was a surprise as it was not one of the six cities with established Jewish communities at that time: Newport, RI, New York, Philadelphia, Richmond, Charleston, and Savannah.⁷ But Moses Myers focused his life on business as much as religion and Norfolk, with its port and expanding trade, seemed a perfect opportunity to enter a market early.

Just before moving to Norfolk, Moses Myers married Eliza Judah Chapman, a widow and member of an important Canadian Jewish family. They married in New York on March 22, 1787, Passover Eve. Moses came from an Ashkenazic Jewish family while Eliza's family were Sephardic Jews. Sephardic Jews were less common in America at that time, though the sample group was fairly small in the late eighteenth century, with only about 2,500 Jews in the country. Moses Myers was the first recorded Jewish settler in Norfolk, but he and Eliza soon began what would become a large family with twelve children, nine of whom lived beyond infancy: John (1787-1830), Abram (1788-infancy), Samuel (1790-1829), Adeline (1791-1832), Myer (1793-1877), Moses, Jr. (1794-infancy), Frederick (1796-1832), Augusta (1797-1896), Abram (1800-1821), Henry Hyam (1801-1822), infant daughter unnamed, and Mary Georgianna (1807-1862).

Moses Myers quickly found financial success in Norfolk with its natural port to support his business of trade with Europe as well as general movement from an agricultural to a merchant based economy in Virginia. In June 1787 Myers declared of Norfolk "I like the place and its inhabitants...I shall find no difficulty in getting a house and think from appearances we shall do well." He went on to own numerous merchant ships, often named for members of his family: the *Eliza*, *Adeline Myers*, *Georgiana*, and the *Moses Myers*. Myers' mercantile business grew to a level where he was known nationally and internationally, and became one of the richest men in Virginia. As soon as Myers' business was flourishing he began work on his grand home on the corner of Freemason and Catherine (today Bank) Streets at what was then just outside downtown.

Moses Myers purchased the lot on September 19, 1791.¹⁰ The original 2-1/2 story brick house, measuring 42 feet by 36 feet, was constructed on the northwest corner of the lot between 1792 and 1797.¹¹ By 1802 the kitchen, with a connecting porch to the house, as well as a two story addition containing the large dining room and upstairs nursery and boys' room had been completed.¹² Myers would live in the house until his death in 1835, but the family did lose control of the house to creditors between 1822 and 1827 as a result of the bankruptcy of his business in 1819.¹³ With the exception of the immediate additions completed by 1802, the house has remained unchanged except small changes at the rear of the house in 1906 to add a bathroom.

The house is an impressive Federal house with a Flemish bond brick pattern, limestone details, two large chimneys,

and several fan lights on the exterior. Interior features include decorative plaster ceilings, a large 'U' shaped stair decorated with classical motifs, as well as cornice moldings with patterns varying from room to room. The mantles

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are highly detailed with the first parlor example having elaborate gilding and a huge over-mantle plaster wall design containing Federal motifs. This level of decorative cornices and mantles continues in the upstairs bedrooms in a more restrained fashion.

Because of the Burning of Norfolk in 1776 by the British during the Revolution, all pre-revolutionary buildings were destroyed with the exception of St. Paul's Episcopal Church (1739). The result is that the Moses Myers house, completed within two decades of the fire, is one of the oldest buildings in the city. Within the neighborhood of the Moses Myers House are several prominent historic buildings of note: the Freemason Street Baptist Church (1848), which was designed by the U.S. Capitol architect Thomas U. Walter; Old Norfolk Academy (1840), which was also designed by Walter; Old City Hall (1847), also designed by Walter; James W. Hunter House (1894), designed by W.D. Wentworth. Two houses nearby are contemporaries of the Myers house--Willoughby-Baylor House (1794) and the Taylor-Whittle House (1791). Though no longer standing, the Myers family business also owned several warehouses by the port roughly six blocks away.

With his grand home complete, his family growing, and his business booming, Moses Myers went on to serve a number of locally, nationally, and internationally important positions. He reached these levels of political and social success not only because of his wealth, but because of the level of professional respect he had earned in a very short time. In 1792 he was appointed to head the Norfolk branch of the Bank of Richmond. In 1794 he was appointed agent for the French government to serve their interests in the United States, and specifically in the commercial arena of Norfolk and east coast trade. After living and working in the city less than a decade, he served as president of the Norfolk Common Council (equivalent to the modern office of mayor) from August of 1795 until he resigned in January 1797, but stayed on the council for several years longer. He also served in the Virginia militia as captain in 1798 and was promoted to major in 1800. He also helped found and served as president of the Norfolk Chamber of Commerce and also served on numerous local corporate boards. In 1809 his language and professional skills earned him an appointment as consul for Denmark. In 1819, over extended and suffering from the effects of the War of 1812 and the Embargo Acts (1807-1815), the Myers family business was forced to declare bankruptcy in 1819. Moses Myers lost all of his property and fortune, including ownership of his house. However, even in this financial situation he was elevated from vice-consul to consul for the Netherlands the same year. His last professional post, and one of the most important, was his appointment by President John Quincy Adams to the position of Collector of the Port of Norfolk. 4 Myers' later life was not only economically difficult as he also faced repeated personal tragedies with his wife and six of his children predeceasing him.

Moses Myers role as a Jew was to hold his family together, but also to live and work in a city nearly devoid of other Jews. Three of Myers children married and all three married into the Jewish faith. Samuel married Louisa Marx, of the prominent Richmond Jewish family, in 1816 and they had three children including Moses II who would carry on ownership of the house after the death of Myer Myers. Myer married Louisa's sister Judith in 1826 and they had no children. Augusta married Philip Cohen of Baltimore also in 1826. There was no temple in Norfolk yet, so a Reverend Isaac B. Seixas was imported to formalize the marriage ceremony. Solomon Nones, who was engaged to

marry Adeline Myers, was the first fellow Jew to die in Norfolk, passing in 1819. Moses Myers and several other Jewish men purchased land in what is now the Berkeley section of Norfolk "to be used as a burial ground or cemetery

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for such persons of the Jewish persuasion as may decease or die in the neighborhood."¹⁶ The first Jewish institution to be established in any community was the cemetery¹⁷, leading one to believe that even late in life, Moses Myers had his faith in mind in regards to his family and community.

During his lifetime he held the family together in faith, but by the third generation the Myers clan had largely converted to the Episcopal faith popular with many in their Norfolk community. It was common for Jewish families to assimilate, and the Myers family held out longer than most in the face of a virtually nonexistent community for religious support. Evidence suggests that "in the Colonial period…Jewish persons and families living away from the Jewish community were assimilated very rapidly. Without the mutual religious feeling engendered by the Jewish social unit, the individual soon intermarried or lost contact with Jewish life." For several generations, the Myers family was its own "Jewish social unit," maintaining Jewish faith and culture. A formal congregation would not be formed in Norfolk until 1848 when German immigrants created the city's first temple. They clearly maintained ties to Jewish communities in other cities, such as Richmond. In January 1832 Rebecca Gratz of Richmond wrote to Moses Myers regarding the recent death of his daughter Adeline declaring that she was one who "prays most fervently that the God of Israel may support and bless you."

The children of Moses Myers were also community leaders, particularly sons in this time period, and followed in his path of successes and failures. John Myers served as an aide-de-Camp to General Richard Taylor during the War of 1812 and opened his own office of the family business in Baltimore. Like his father, he was also ruined by the Panic of 1819 and spent the rest of his life recovering professionally and financially. He predeceased his father at the young age of 43. Samuel Myers was the first Jew to attend the College of William and Mary (1809). Samuel had a rough temper and killed Richard Bowden on May 25, 1811, in answer to Bowden assaulting Moses Myers. Samuel Myers was acquitted, but had to leave the city for some time, another disappointment for his father. Samuel also went bankrupt in the 1819 panic, but survived financially through his law practice. He also died young in 1829 at the age of 39. His son, Moses Myers II would be the third generation to own the family house. Myer Myers also took up the family business and moved to the family house in 1832. He later reached the rank of Colonel in the Virginia militia. He served as vice-consul to Britain and died in 1877, outliving his father and with no heirs. Frederick also worked in the family business and died young in 1832 at the age of 36. Frederick's great contribution to the family was to save the house by repurchasing it following the 1819 bankruptcy of his father's firm. Abram Myers worked in the family business as well and died very young at 21 years of age in 1821. Henry Hyam Myers joined the navy young and died of yellow fever after two years, at the age of 21 in 1822. Only Myer Myers outlived his father. In January of 1832 Rebecca Gratz, a close friend of the recently deceased Adeline Myers, declared in a letter that "poor Mr. Myers seems doomed to realize the mournful apprehension of his wife—that of surviving all her children—in little more than a year the two eldest, and most important members of his family have been hastily snatched away..."²⁰

Correspondence shows that most of Moses Myers' sons maintained some interest and participation in the Jewish faith during their lifetimes. In 1828 John Myers received a letter requesting donations for the "Society for the Education of Poor Children, and Relief of Indigent Persons, of the Jewish Persuasion." On May 24 John Myers received a letter

from Philip I. Cohen, fiancé of his sister Augusta, discussing her riding outfit, but also the need to arrange "shutting up of 3 days for Jewish religious observance." This practice of sequestering the soon-to-be-bride was common in the

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Jewish faith and demonstrated her active religious life. The Myers family could also be flexible with their faith as demonstrated when Samuel Myers wrote a letter declaring Myer Myers not to be a Jew, because he was not a member of a formal congregation, so that Myer could collect a debt in Denmark. Early in his business career, John Myers wrote to his father to declare that he would establish contact with "respectable Jews" in England to improve his business success, demonstrating that, at least away from Norfolk, being Jewish played a definite role for the Myers family. Samuel Myers was involved with M.E. Levy for several years in various plans to either start a Jewish school or, more radically, establish a Jewish settlement in Florida. In this case Samuel exceeded his father and brothers in his zeal for promoting his faith. Moses and John Myers, along with son-in-law Philip I. Cohen, joined M.E. Levy and Samuel Myers eventually in supporting the idea of a school to educate and form Jewish youth.

As a result of the times, the daughters of Moses Myers did not participate in business, diplomacy, or war, and as such records of their deeds are much less evident. But that does not mean they were not significant contributors to the Myers family both within the home and within Norfolk and Virginia society. Adeline Myers seemed to have been particularly admired. Samuel wrote to his brother John before visiting from Richmond that he was "quite transported with the idea of seeing yourself & Adeline" and later in the letter declared that "The Misses Gibson...Miss H. Marx...Miss Mayo..." sent their greetings and desire to spend time with Adeline.²⁷ After Adeline's death in January 1832, Rebecca Gratz of Richmond wrote to Moses Myers to offer condolences "as one who tenderly loved your dear departed, and sincerely mourns for her loss..." But all of the daughters, and Moses Myers's wife Eliza, played an important role within the home and contributed to the business and social standing of the Myers men. Moreau de So. Mery wrote in his book American Journey (1793-1798) of visiting the Myers household, "the excellent food, the simple and flattering welcome, the sight of a fond mother who even suckled a lusty infant during the meal, M. Myer's four pretty children—everything charmed us."²⁹

The third through fifth generations of the Myers family living in the Moses Myers house kept up the family's successes in business, politics, and society, but turned away from the Jewish faith. They did this as many had done before, but by maintaining the house, the family name, and the family history, they continued to add to the historic integrity and context of the Moses Myers House. Moses Myers II served under the Confederacy during the Civil War and died in 1881, only four years after Myer Myers, from whom he took over the Moses Myers house. Barton Myers, Sr. reached levels of political, social, and economic success only matched by Moses Myers himself, and returned much of the luster to the family name in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. At various times he served as mayor and president of the Chamber of Commerce, like his father. He was the leading proponent of extending the Belt Line railroad from Norfolk to the Elizabeth River eventually paving the way for the 1907 Jamestown Exposition. More importantly the purchase of the Elizabeth River site by the U.S. Navy for its newest facility eventually led to the current naval base, the largest in the world. The Belt Line also contributed significantly to the rapid expansion of the Port of Norfolk for commerce.³⁰ The negotiations between Norfolk and the Navy for the purchase of the Jamestown Exposition site went on for years and became quite contentious at times. Without the diplomatic, yet persistent efforts of Barton Myers Sr., the deal might never have succeeded. He repeatedly lobbied Senators and Navy officials and

the sale finally went through towards the end of WWI on June 15, 1917.³¹ Barton Myers, Sr. died on December 23, 1927, and was eulogized extensively by the Norfolk community, including the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities, an early regional preservation organization to which Barton Myers Sr. belonged. His son, Barton Myers,

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Jr. sold the Moses Myers house a few years later in 1931 to the private Colonial House Corporation. This organization maintained the Moses Myers House until 1951 when it was acquired as a gift by the City of Norfolk which transferred management to the Norfolk Museum of Arts and Sciences, now the Chrysler Museum of Art.

Collections

The extensive collections of the Myers family fall into four main categories: 1) personal and business correspondence and documents, 2) books contained in the family library, 3) sheet music, 4) a large number of original pieces of art and furniture within the house itself. These collections represent a conscious decision by the family to give their children a strong traditional education based in the classics and the arts. The oldest son John went on the Grand Tour in Europe, Samuel was the first Jew to attend the College of William and Mary, and all of his children attended the prestigious local Norfolk Academy located less than a mile from their house. The family played music together at home and read books covering all of the essential subjects of a classical education. This educational foundation created by Moses and Eliza Myers bound the family together in Norfolk, when the nearest place to practice their religion was a day's journey to Richmond.³² It also created a strong basis for the long term business and political successes of the family men for several generations.

The document collection consists of thousands of original documents, as well as many copies of original Myers family documents housed in other collections: personal and business correspondence (1783-1869); account books (1785-1859); daybooks (1800-1804); ledgers (1818-1864); invoice books (1786-1861); and journals (1832-1862). These documents trace the family's personal and business affairs for two generations. Moses Myers and his sons are represented extensively throughout. Eliza and the daughters are well represented within the personal correspondence. The incredibly broad and intact collection of documents offers a unique multi-generational picture of a Jewish family from the Revolutionary War to the Civil War, and beyond. These documents not only trace the personal and business dealings of the Myers family, but demonstrate their links to national figures in American government and business. The letters and business records also show many years of regular communication and trade with Jewish families from many cities along the eastern coast of the United States.³³

The personal library of the Myers family numbers over 1,000 volumes, spanning four generations of the family. It is rare to find a library of antique books this large, varied, and intact. The collection offers an excellent view of the reading habits of a wealthy Jewish family in the southern United States during the late 1700s and early 1800s. The variety of subjects represents the full breadth of upper-class reading of the day. The books were published in cities across the United States and a good number were also published in Europe. Other than a small number of romantic novels and children's books, the vast majority of the collection consists of traditional academic subjects--Greek, Latin, science, mathematics, geography, philosophy, political science. The most popular topics were history and travel, as well as many biographies. Many of the books are also signed or contain notations from individual family

members demonstrating individual reading tastes. There are also a good number of books in French and Dutch--a reflection of Moses Myers as a multilingual speaker and reader--and a few in German and Spanish. Several Episcopal and Christian books are signed by Julia Barton in 1842 and later as Julia Myers after marrying Moses Myers II in 1851; this shows the conversion of most family members from Judaism to Episcopalian by the third generation.³⁴

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Books in his library such as <u>A Short History of the Ancient Israelites</u> (1811) and <u>A Treatise on Toleration</u> (1779), which addresses the issue of tolerating more than one religion within various societies in history, demonstrate that Moses Myers made a point of studying the historical and contemporary roles of his religion and likely his family's place in the Christian city of Norfolk, Virginia.

The sheet music collection may be the most impressive part of the Myers family collections because of its size and scope. It has been called "the largest extant collection of music from one family in ante-bellum America" and consists of roughly 900 compositions for voice, piano/piano forte, harpsichord, harp, flute, violin, string quartet, and eight-part sinfonia. Most of the collection dates to the first part of the nineteenth century, but does contain a number of works from the mid-to-late nineteenth century. The collection consists of 32 bound volumes, which are loosely grouped by music type, as well as several hundred loose sheets of music. The works were published from across the eastern United States as well as in several European cities. The composers vary from the great and world renowned to the regional to the unknown. Two well known Virginia composers represented were John McCreery of Petersburg and Charles Gilfert of Norfolk and Richmond. There are several dozen songs in the French language from the early 1800s and probably represent the taste of Moses Myers. Many of the volumes bear the name of a family member, sometimes one or the other of the two Marx sisters from before their marriages to Samuel and Myer Myers. Myer Myers and his wife Judith played the piano and he played the harpsichord, while John and Abram Myers played the violin. Myer Myers also played the harp. Georgiana's name appears on several song collections. The bound volumes were likely purchased as individual sheet music and then bound by the family.³⁶ The majority of the music is for voice, and presumably many of the family members performed these compositions regardless of whether they played an instrument.

The furniture and art collections of the Myers family remain in the house, unlike the rest of the collections which are stored in nearby research facilities. Approximately 70 percent of the original furniture and art from the time of Moses Myers remains with the house, much of it sitting in the same position for the past two centuries. With so many of the Myers' original belongings, which they used on a daily basis and picked particularly for this house, even for a particular spot, the visitor is able to experience their life, their culture, and their time unlike few houses in America.

The examination of the belongings is greatly assisted by the existence of an 1820 inventory which was made when Moses Myers was forced to sell his house as a result of bankruptcy after the post-War of 1812 financial crisis in 1819. The inventory lists furniture and decorative items room by room through the entire house.³⁷ In the dining room there were two sideboards, which were custom made to fit perfectly into niches along the wall with their feet placed into a gap in the molding; they are listed in the 1820 inventory and they are in the house today. The dining room table and chairs, the large collection of cut-glass ware, and several smaller pieces are all original to the room and remain there today. The inventory lists a drawing room and the five family portraits which are listed in the inventory still hang on the walls; the paintings of Moses and Eliza are by renowned portrait painter Gilbert Stuart who also painted George

and Martha Washington, while the painting of John Myers is by Thomas Sully. The two settees listed are the Greek styled couches, which were bought to first furnish the house and remain in place. The back parlor still has the two mirrors listed in the inventory. The piano forte and the harp were used by the family while the hermonicon was found in the attic by staff in the twentieth century. The entry hall has several original personal items of the Myers family on

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display: a miniature portrait of Moses Myers and the outfit he is wearing in the painting is still in the closet in his bedroom upstairs; a necklace with the Star of David represents a rare remaining piece of Judaica from the days of Moses Myers; a sampler made by Adeline (the eldest daughter) when she was nine sits near an original sewing table; and a jug given to the family by a sea captain with a painting of a ship named the *Moses Myers*, which was one of five ships owned by Myers in the early 1800s. In the bedrooms upstairs are numerous original pieces including several beds and tables. Several pieces of note include a business desk which used to be in Moses Myers' office in Norfolk and his strongbox, which still shows signs of when it was stolen and damaged during his lifetime. There are also several outfits in the closet that were worn by Myers and his sons, including the previously mentioned suit that is seen in the miniature portrait downstairs. The collection also has John Myers' uniform from when he served in the War of 1812 as an aide-de-camp to General Richard Taylor. In the back bedroom is an octant used by Henry Myers during his short time in the navy before he died. There is also a silver set given to Barton Myers, Sr. by the Chamber of Commerce for his sixty sixth birthday (Moses Myers started the Chamber and was president at one time, as was his great-grandson Barton). Finally, in the far back bedroom is a large collection of souvenirs, brochures, and collectibles from the 1907 Jamestown Exposition, which Barton Myers helped organize and during which he hosted President Theodore Roosevelt at the house.

The Moses Myers House in National Context

The Moses Myers house, with its almost unchanged structure and decoration, its largely intact collection of furniture, its huge collection of original books and music, its comprehensive collection of thousands of business and personal documents, and its multi-generational link to a prominent Jewish family, is a unique resource in the United States for demonstrating Jewish culture beginning in early post-Revolutionary America and continuing well into the nineteenth century. The Moses Myers house shows us the life of a wealthy merchant family at the turn of the eighteenth century better than many museums or houses in American today, but it defines itself nationally by revealing an almost lost piece of history and culture. The Myers' powerful link to Jewish culture in the early days of our nation's history is demonstrated nowhere else in the United States at such a high level of integrity.

Only two other Jewish houses in the United States have documented links to the Colonial or immediate post-Revolutionary War era--The Gomez Mill House in Marlboro, NY, and the Deshler-Morris House in Philadelphia, PA. Both houses are on the National Register, boast rich histories, and are linked to Jewish history and culture. But neither has the high degree of integrity seen at the Moses Myers house because so much of the house and the family's belongings remain intact and unchanged. Also neither has the long and continuous presence of original occupants as was true through five generations at the Moses Myers house. These houses are excellent resources, but fail to reach the national historic standard set by the Moses Myers house.

The Gomez Mill House, located on the Hudson River, is the oldest house on the National Register in Orange County,

and is claimed to be the earliest surviving Jewish residence in North America. The house was built by Luis Gomez who arrived in America like so many, by fleeing religious persecution, in his case at the hands of the Spanish Inquisition. In anticipation of establishing a fur trade in the Americas, Gomez received a grant of land from Queen Anne of England on April 18, 1705. The Gomez Foundation for Mill House actually possesses the "Act of

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Denization" from Queen Anne recorded for Luis Gomez in its collection at the house. With this right to acquire land in hand, Gomez began purchasing land on the Hudson River north of New York City in 1710 and by 1714 had purchased a total of 6,000 acres, much of which intersected with numerous Algonquin tribe trails. Gomez built a one story stone house with walls up to three feet thick to ward off attack. Luis Gomez and his sons lived there from 1714 until 1748 and ran their fur trading business. Gomez was part of a prominent New York family and became the first president of the synagogue serving New York's Spanish and Portuguese Jews. In 1748 Gomez sold the house and moved to Philadelphia, ending any Jewish association with the home. In 1772 the house was purchased by Wolfert Acker who added a brick second story to the house and the house went on to play a part in several Revolutionary era events. While much of the original house remains, it is greatly altered by the later addition that significantly changed the character of the house. Also, very few documents or Gomez possessions remain with the house. While an outstanding historic resource, with integrity throughout its long history, its architectural and cultural integrity as linked to early American Jewish culture is limited and not comparable with the virtually unchanged Moses Myers House and the depth and variety of its collections.

The Deshler-Morris House is located in the Germantown section of Philadelphia and boasts a very strong link to several important Revolutionary War events and figures including President George Washington, and is often referred to as the "Germantown White House." The house was built from 1772-1773 and Germantown was at that time a summer vacation area for wealthy members of Philadelphia society. The name of the house is linked to the first owner, David Deshler, who was a merchant who originally built a small cottage in 1752 and expanded it to its present state in 1773. The last owner of the house was Elliston P. Morris, who donated it to the National Park Service in 1948. In 1777 it was part of the Battle of Germantown and was occupied by British General Sir William Howe. After the war Deshler died in 1792 and Isaac Franks, himself a former colonel in the Continental Army who served under General George Washington as a young soldier through most of the war, bought the house.³⁸ The greatest source of national prominence for the house was during the Yellow Fever Epidemic of 1793 in Philadelphia. President George Washington and his cabinet fled the city and sheltered in the Deshler-Morris House from November 16 to 30, 1793. They rented the house from Colonel Isaac Franks and held several cabinet meetings, thus the nickname, "Germantown White House." In fact, it is the oldest surviving presidential residence. The next summer Washington and his family rented the house once more from Franks. Later, in the early 1800s, Franks hit hard times economically and sold the house to the Morris family who owned it until it was given to the National Park Service in 1948. When considered on the national level, the Deshler-Morris house has very strong integrity in the areas of the Revolutionary War and early American government. However, its link to Jewish history is tenuous with only one occupant in its long history and no clear link today to Jewish culture. The house is a strong resource with unique and important history, but very little to offer as a Jewish cultural resource other than as a residence for a Jewish officer for a few years after the War for Independence.

The Moses Myers House and Early American Jewish Culture in the United States

The Moses Myers house, built in the 1790s by the first documented Jew to live in Norfolk, Virginia, is likely the best preserved example of an early American Jewish residence in the United States, and also a notable example of Federal architecture. Moses Myers made the decision to make his way in a Christian city without the support of an established

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January 31, 1832.

1929, p.138.

Moses Myers House Norfolk, Virginia

Jewish community and, in doing so, continued centuries-old traditions of establishing Jewish communities. The Myers family lived in the house for five generations and practiced Judaism there for roughly half that time, including holding weddings and founding the first Jewish cemetery in the city. The Myers family members were business and political leaders in Norfolk for the entire time they occupied the house, including two of the men being chosen as mayor a century apart from each other. The Moses Myers House contains only furniture owned by the Myers family, and the collection is extensive and has a high degree of integrity with most of it being part of the house since the time of the original owner, Moses Myers, in the late 1700s and early 1800s. The collection of business and personal documents is vast and offers a rich and detailed history of five generations of the Myers family at this house. The music, books, and personal artifacts all enhance this incredibly well preserved Jewish home. The events, people, and fabric of this house result in a resource with very high integrity, a strong historic character, and an undeniable nationally significant example of traditional Jewish culture in early national America.

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- Letters from M.E. Levy to Samuel Myers, Records #3402, 3403, Myers Collection, Chrysler Museum, 3/1/1820.
- Letter to Moses Myers from Society (Chenuch) of N.Y., Record #4171, Myers Collection, Chrysler Museum, 6/17/1821.
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Moses Myers House Norfolk, Virginia

GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

Verbal Boundary Description: All of parcel MH-1A, Plate # 0734A, located in the city of Norfolk and owned by the City of Norfolk. The property is bordered by East Freemason Street to the north, Bank Street right of way to the east, MacArthur Mall property (owned by the City of Norfolk) to the south and west.

Boundary Justification: The boundary includes all remaining land which was owned by the Myers family when the Moses Myers House was sold in 1931 and which is historically part of the house. The boundaries encompass the house, the garden, the modern outbuilding, and land which was part of the property from the beginning of its construction in 1792.

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Moses Myers House Norfolk, Virginia

PHOTOGRAPHIC DOCUMENTATION

All photographs are of:

MOSES MYERS HOUSE

Location: Norfolk, Virginia VDHR File Number: 122-0017 Date of photograph: April 9, 2008

Photographers: Marcus R. Pollard, Paige L.W. Pollard

SUBJECT: North façade, Freemason St.

VIEW: Facing south PHOTO 1 of 21

SUBJECT: East façade, Bank St.

VIEW: Facing west PHOTO 2 of 21

SUBJECT: West façade: old kitchen on right, dining room addition on left

VIEW: Facing east PHOTO 3 of 21

SUBJECT: Garden, west side of house

VIEW: Facing west PHOTO 4 of 21

SUBJECT: Entry hall VIEW: Facing south PHOTO 5 of 21

SUBJECT: Drawing Room with gilded mantel, Thomas Sully portrait of John Myers

VIEW: Facing west PHOTO 6 of 21

SUBJECT: Parlor with mantel, nineteenth century harp

VIEW: Facing west PHOTO 7 of 21

SUBJECT: Parlor, original piano forte

VIEW: Facing north PHOTO 8 of 21

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Section __11__ Page _19__ **Moses Myers House** Norfolk, Virginia

SUBJECT: Dining room with original sideboards

VIEW: Facing south PHOTO 9 of 21

SUBJECT: Dining room with mantel, original dining chair

VIEW: Facing east PHOTO 10 of 21

SUBJECT: Old kitchen interior

VIEW: Facing west PHOTO 11 of 21

SUBJECT: Second floor landing

VIEW: Facing northwest

PHOTO 12 of 21

SUBJECT: Bedroom #1 with original mantel

VIEW: Facing west PHOTO 13 of 21

SUBJECT: Bedroom #3 with mantel and octant used by Henry Myers

VIEW: Facing east PHOTO 14 of 21

SUBJECT: Bedroom #4 over dining room addition

VIEW: Facing west PHOTO 15 of 21

SUBJECT: Second floor hall showing 1906 hallway dropped to accommodate access to a modern bathroom

VIEW: Facing west PHOTO 16 of 21

SUBJECT: Moses Myers' desk in bedroom #1 (formerly at his off site office)

VIEW: Facing south PHOTO 17 of 21

SUBJECT: Moses Myers' strongbox in bedroom #1

VIEW: Facing east PHOTO 18 of 21

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SUBJECT: Commemorative pitcher located in library, image of ship owned and named after Moses Myers

VIEW: Facing west PHOTO 19 of 21

SUBJECT: Attic view of large pediment fanlight window on Bank St. facade

VIEW: Facing east PHOTO 20 of 21

SUBJECT: Modern outbuilding, shed/garage

VIEW: Facing southwest

PHOTO 21 of 21