



Abba Hillel Silver Collection Digitization Project

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Series VII: Personal Miscellaneous, 1908-1989, undated.

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Interview with Virginia Silver, 1981.

NOTES OF AN INTERVIEW WITH MRS. ABBA HILLEL SILVER

December 9, 1981

Virginia Horkheimer Silver was born the daughter of Louis Horkeimer and Clementine Rosenberg in Wheeling West Virginia. Louis Horkheimer was born in Freudenthal, Wurtenberg, Germany. (According to Who's Who in American Jewry, 1938-39, his date of birth was March 13, 1861 and he was the son of Benjamin and Regina Baer VES (Lehman) Horkheimer. He was president of Horkheimer Brothers; vice president of the National Exchange Bank of Wheeling, and a director of M. Marsh and Sons. He married Clementine Rosenberg on March 25, 1891 in Wheeling and lived at 16 Poplar Avenue. His office was at 1600 Main Street, Wheeling.)

Mrs. Silver reports that her father was the youngest of his brothers and was in the wholesale wool business with them . They would contract to buy wool from farmers before shearing and then sell it to clothing manufacturers. They had a large warehouse in Wheeling and also a somewhat smaller one in Columbus. Louis Horkheimer also had a sister who married a man named Fleisher, who was a mining engineer in Denver (was this the Walter A. Fleisher who is listed in the 1926 edition of Who's Who in ~~Contemporary~~ American Jewry?)

Mrs. Silver relates that her mother Clementine Rosenberg was a third generation American. Virginia Silver herself was born in the same house in Wheeling as her mother (was this 16 Poplar Avenue?)

Louis Horkheimer had three children: Pauline (Polly) who was three and a half years older than Virginia, and Harold Victor who was three and a half years younger. Shortly after his graduation from the University of Pennsylvania Victor Horkheimer was killed in a tragic automobile accident at the age of twenty-one while driving his father to the warehouse in Columbus. Their automobile was struck by a farmer and Victor Horkheimer was pierced by the steering wheel and died immediately. This tragic accident was a source of great grief to Clementine Rosenberg Horkheimer who died shortly after Harold Victor's accidental death .

Pauline (Polly) married Rabbi Morris Samuel Lazon on May 1, 1916, while he was serving as rabbi of the Eoff Street Temple (Congregation Leshem Shomayim). Pauline died quite young.

When?)

Jewish life in Wheeling centered around the temple.

It was the social center of the Jewish community. There were frequent suppers, entertainments, and other social events.

In the religious school of the temple the children were given unreadable leaflets every week. They learned practically nothing. One of the teachers was a Mr. Radiziner who would explain to the youngsters the meaning of their names.

Virginia Horkheimer says that her attendance at the religious school gave her a strong feeling of Jewishness. She felt most proud of being a Jew when she attended a revival meeting conducted by the evangelist Billy Sunday.

When Virginia Horkheimer met Abba Hillel Silver in the summer of 1915 shortly after he came to the Eoff Street Temple, she thought he looked rather queer. He was also quite thin, weighing less than 150 pounds. Virginia Horkheimer

was then about eighteen. She was a vivacious young woman who wanted to be taken out dancing. Quite soon after she made the acquaintance of Abba Hillel her mother said to her: "That young man has his eyes on you." Virginia replied: "He doesn't even know I exist; he only comes to the house to see father."

At times when Abba Hillel Silver came to call at the Horkheimer home, ostensibly to see Virginia's father, she had a date with another young man and left soon after he arrived.

On one occasion he gave her a set of beads which he alleged he had won in a punch board at the McClure House. In point of fact, Virginia later found out that the beads were actually lapiz Lazuli and worth about \$250.00 and had been bought at a jewelry store.

Shortly after Abba Hillel Silver arrived in Wheeling Virginia Horkheimer went off to Philadelphia to Goucher College.

There she had a number of boyfriends including Leslie Moses
of Baltimore.

One summer while she was a student at Goucher she
went to Europe with her mother. She and her mother received
a cable from Abba Hillel Silver saying : "Hear you're coming
home; will meet you in New York. Best regards. A.H.S."

When A.H.S. met them at the dock Leslie Moses was also there.

A.H.S. was a rather shy and devious suitor. In

general he was shy with the women in Wheeling. On one occasion
he and his sister arranged with Virginia to have lunch with them
in New York City. Shortly after Virginia arrived the sister
disappeared from the table and never returned.

A.H.S. had two sisters. As a boy in New York City he
would deliver the neckties that the sisters finished from raw
materials in their home to the manufacturer. On one occasion

while he was supposed to be delivering the neckties, he stopped in the public library, put down the package, became absorbed in reading, and the package was lost or stolen.

The family had to pay for it. Bessie (later Bessie Liebow)

was very stern with him. However, his sister Pearl, whom

he seems to have liked best and who died young was extremely

sympathetic.

When Pearl died her daughter Florence was only about

eleven years old. A.H.S. asked Virginia whether she would

like to have Florence with them in Cleveland. She responded

that she would love to have a daughter. Florence lived with

the Silver's until her marriage to Phillip Bernstein.

The relationship between Florence Bernstein and

Virginia Silver is still an extremely close one. Mrs. Silver

still considers her a daughter. Florence calls her at least

once a week. Virginia Horkheimer remained at Goucher College for about three and a half years. During her last months there she suffered from an abscessed ear and for several months spent most of her time at the doctor's office. An aunt of her's in Baltimore urged her to go home. She said it was not terribly important to have a diploma. Mrs. Silver lived in a dormitory at Goucher. She insists that her major purpose at the time was to have a "good time." She was not particularly interesting in studying and she had a number of beaus.

When Virginia Horkheimer came back from Goucher to Wheeling, Abba Hillel Silver was about to leave to become rabbi of the Temple in Cleveland. She remembered that she was asked to write some verses for the farewell party given in his honor.

Silver once said that all he got out of Wheeling was Virginia Horkheimer (Martin said: "Damn right!").

Virginia Horkheimer Silver reports, that the first
time she wore lipstick after their marriage Abba wiped it
off. He did not like "painted" women.

