



## New Mexico Jewish Historical Society

Volume 20, No. 2  
June 2006

### Annual Membership Meeting and Film *Tijuana Jews* A Huge Success

by Julia Bell



The New Mexico Jewish Historical Society's annual membership meeting was held at The Santa Fe Film Center on Sunday, June 11. The sold-out event featured the award winning documentary, *Tijuana Jews*, a film by Isaac Artenstein, who came to Santa Fe with his wife Jude, to introduce the film and answer questions.

Artenstein, who was born in 1956 in San Diego, California, has spent his life immersed in the world of film. He studied painting and photography at UCLA and film and video production at Cal Arts. After graduating college, he wrote, directed and produced many films, including *Break of Dawn*, which premiered at the Sundance Film Festival in 1996. He is also a professor of film at University of Southern California and University of California San Diego.

In his movie, *Tijuana Jews*, which made its debut at the San Diego Jewish Film Festival in 2005, Artenstein depicts the cultural, historical and aesthetic treasures of his childhood town, Tijuana, Mexico. He tells a story that allows the audience to feel what it was like to be part of the Tijuana culture, which included a significant number of Ashkenazi

and Sephardic Jews who migrated from Europe and the Mediterranean countries. This unique combination of people had one common thread among them: to instill within their children, not only the laws and customs of Judaism, but something much more. These immigrants were able to harness the strong bonds of family and society through the many gatherings and holidays that were celebrated by everyone within the community.

During the movie, Artenstein takes his audience through a visual journey that includes personal interviews with many of the original families who found themselves in the enchanting town of Tijuana. It is in these moving and poignant interviews that the real stories are born and take on a life of their own. They depict the community's adoring participation in every rite of passage from a Bris to a Bar Mitzvah, to a wedding and to the Jewish holidays. In addition, he provides insight into the experiences of local pioneers who operated many businesses on Revolution Avenue and from those who started the first Jewish temple in Tijuana and subsequent congregations, such as the Maguen David, The Hatikvah and the Centro Social Israelita de Tijuana. During the film, the feeling of warmth and community permeates an almost enchanted and storybook aspect through the character of each person interviewed. *Tijuana Jews* also brings to life Tijuana's colorful reputation and history that began with Prohibition in the 1920's.

After the film, Artenstein answered a series of well-thought-out questions from the audience as his wife, Jude, who was also the producer of the film, proudly looked on.

A short business meeting and presentation pre-

ceded the film where society president Lance Bell welcomed attendees and introduced members of the NMJHS board. In the traditional passing of the "presidential aspirin" ceremony, Lance had a smile on his face when he handed over the aspirin to Harold Melnick, the incoming President of the New Mexico Jewish Historical Society. To recognize the important efforts and to show appreciation of administrator Bobbi Jackson, Lance and the board presented Bobbi with a silver engraved desk clock.



Isaac Artenstein, Guest Speaker  
Photo by aj Melnick

Overall, the event was a huge success and also included a luncheon at the Green Canteen that was attended by 75 people. This event was sponsored by the following people and businesses who kindly donated funds to help bring Mr. Artenstein to Santa Fe:

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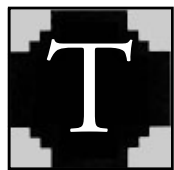
**Administrator:** Bobbi Jackson  
**Office Hours:** Monday, Tuesday, & Thursday  
9:00-2:00 pm  
**Managing Editor:** Bobbi Jackson

If you have any news or announcements of interest to our membership, please send it to the above address. Thank you.

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## Message From Outgoing President Lance Bell



his will be my last message as President of the New Mexico Jewish Historical Society. It has been an exciting two years serving our board and our many members. Exciting because we have achieved our goal of growing our membership base, continuing diverse and stimulating programs that reach out to all New Mexicans, as well as many others in different parts of the country. We have brought our newsletter to a new level, including more interesting historical and current events. Our newsletter has received positive feedback from many members. We were recently told by our webmaster that our website gets an unusually large amount of hits on a daily basis. The work we have accomplished is newsworthy and continues to be featured in many other periodicals and publications. As a matter of fact, the last two issues of *The Link* have featured

articles on important work stemming from the New Mexico Jewish Historical Society. In addition, look for our ad in the *New Mexico* magazine's July issue, an opportunity our board decided to take to help increase awareness and acquire more members.

I personally want to thank our board for all of their long hours, hard work, personal time and kind monetary contributions. I could not write this letter without a special shout out for Bobbi Jackson, our administrator and newsletter editor. Since the time we met, about a year ago, she has stepped up to the deck to handle many difficult tasks and has no doubt helped our society succeed with many of her wonderful out-of-the-box ideas and suggestions. I have en-

joyed working with Bobbi and I plan to continue helping her with our newsletter.

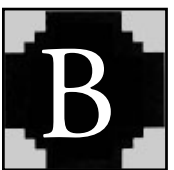
Finally, I want to reach out to our members and prospective members and ask you to get more involved with the society. We need you! I have gained and learned so much by working with our board and I know you will as well. We have many wonderful diverse members who have so much in common and I hope that you will find these folks as interesting and enjoyable to meet and work with as I.

Lastly and most importantly, I want to thank my wife Julia and daughter Jacqueline, for their support and for sharing our time together with the Society. Julie, without your enthusiasm, I could not have taken on this responsibility. Thanks.



Lance Bell, President  
(photo courtesy of  
Julia Bell)

## Message From Incoming President Harold Melnick



Bringing a groundswell of opposition or a write-in challenge, it seems I'm destined to be the next president of the NMJHS. I'm honored, but also intimidated. I've been trying on those shoes and they seem awfully big - like stepping into a bathtub. I don't have the knowledge and experience that Stan Hordes brought to the job; I don't have Lance Bell's abundant, youthful energy and extensive personal contacts. Lance and Stan have led the society to ever-higher levels of accomplishments. They, and others, assure

me that I can count on them for assistance and guidance as I try to approach the standards they've set. I intend to remind them of that promise frequently.



Harold Melnick, President

In fact, I'll be looking to them, to the board and to the membership for all the help I can get. I know I can't do it all myself; I'll need to delegate. I'm grateful that we have Bobbi Jackson, our administrator, who has done a Herculean job of organizing the office, assisting with fund-raising and doing more things than I can list here. Elsewhere in this edition of the newsletter, you'll read about recent accomplishments and coming events. Our list of activities and busy agenda are a tribute to Lance's leadership and the hard work of the board and others. But, we'll need continued support from the membership for fund-raising, membership acquisi-

tion and retention, program planning - all the things that make it possible for our society to continue its impressive work for the history of the New Mexico Jewish community.

I look forward to continuing the important work we're doing - and don't be surprised if I come knocking on your door, asking you to take part in that work.

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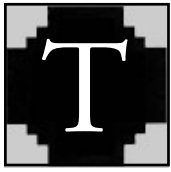
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## Genealogy Corner – Formulating Your Strategy

by Dorothy Corner Amsden

*The following article is based on selected information from the genealogy workshop that took place in Albuquerque on April 23. A repeat of that workshop will be offered in Santa Fe on September 17.*



The beginning genealogist is faced with a bewildering number of resources and often does not know where to get started. Online databases, in particular, offer an irresistible temptation that can lead you astray until you have learned the rudiments of genealogy.

Where should you start researching your family tree? Let me propose a simple approach that has helped me and may help other beginners.

- Think of your family as four major branches, one headed by each of your four grandparents. This means that you will start researching four surnames.
- Interview older members of each branch for names, relationships, locations, dates, and stories.
- Search the Ellis Island Database for members of your family emigrating to the United States.
- Look in the U.S. Census (1930 back to 1790) to locate family members.
- Obtain vital records: birth, marriage, and death certificates.
- Find naturalization papers.
- Find military records.
- Request Social Security application forms and look at the online Death Index.

This is a good start for a beginner. Of course, there are many more resources that you will learn about along the way, a number of which we have discussed in previous columns. As you start on your quest, I recommend that you read *From Generation to Generation* [1] and subscribe to the quarterly *Avotaynu* [2].

Write down what you know about your family. Then conduct interviews with the older generation in all four branches. At this point, the information can seem muddled or overwhelming. The best advice is to focus on one branch at a time. Perhaps you are eager to learn more about your paternal grandfather, and you have enough information to start looking for records pertaining to him.

Here is where you need to formulate your search strategy. What do you already know about Grandpa? What more do you want to

learn about him? Map out your strategy for obtaining pertinent data. When did he come to America? How old was he? Did he come alone or with family? What European port did he leave from? At which American port did he arrive? What country and town did he come from? What was his destination after arrival?

Many of these questions can be answered if you can find your paternal grandfather on a ship's manifest at Ellis Island or its predecessor, Castle Garden, or at other ports of entry into the United States. These records exist because a federal law of 1819 required ships' masters to list passengers at the point of embarkation for submission to the custom collector at the port of arrival. The Ellis Island Database [3] is an excellent place to start looking because it accounts for 71% of all U.S. immigration records.

Don't worry if you cannot find Grandpa on a ship's manifest. Go ahead and locate him in the U.S. Census [4]. Then look for his vital records and those of his family [5]. His naturalization papers [4] will tell you when he came to America and the name of his ancestral town in Europe, as well as a host of other useful information.

The name of the ancestral town is crucial for researching your family in Europe. However, before you take the plunge into Central European archives, I suggest that you concentrate on researching your family as far as possible in the U.S. or Canada or the U.K.

Researching your family is guaranteed to produce some surprises. The facts that you started with from family stories may or may not be borne out by the records you find. The names may be similar, but not exact or they may be altogether different. The dates may be off by a few years. The basic rule of genealogy is not to trust any single piece of information. You want to collect information from several different sources to substantiate a name or a date or an event. Errors are rife, sometimes by intent, but usually because of honest mistakes.

You will want to collect information from basic sources whenever possible. Your growing file will have birth, marriage, and death certificates, census data, passenger arrival manifests, and naturalization papers. Be aware that birth and marriage certificates are usually more reliable than

death certificates. However, you may find that the bride's age recorded at marriage can be several years more or less than her actual age.

When you have gone as far as you can go for the moment with one branch of your family, start researching another branch. Keep information for each branch separate. One idea is to color-code the folders in which you keep information. For example, your maternal grandmother's family information will go into yellow folders and your maternal grandfather's into red folders. For the paternal grandparents, use green for your grandmother and blue for your grandfather. This will allow you to keep the four branches intact but separate, no matter how many family surnames you end up researching.

As you find pertinent information, be sure to record the source of each document. For interviews, note the name of the person, their rela-

**Continued on p. 8**

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## Gerson Gusdorf and the Don Fernando Hotel of Taos

By Naomi Sandweiss



When Jewish Pioneer Gerson Gusdorf opened the Don Fernando Hotel on the Taos Plaza in 1926, he could have simply offered indoor plumbing, serviceable rooms and a decent meal. But by all accounts, in the six years that it operated (1926-1933), the Don Fernando Hotel served as a unique marketplace, meeting and cultural center for the Taos arts community and played a pivotal role in establishing Taos as the tourist destination and arts marketplace it is today.

Gerson Gusdorf arrived in Taos from Germany in 1884, at fifteen, to work for his half-brother, Alexander, who operated the Great Western Mills, just south of town. The Gusdorfs, relatives of the Staab family of Santa Fe, established businesses throughout Northern New Mexico, including First State Bank. As a young man, Gerson Gusdorf followed the Northern New Mexico mining booms, supplying miners and opening up general stores in Amizette and Red River. Like other Jewish immigrants, Gerson Gusdorf learned to speak English, Spanish and Tiwa in addition to his native German.

Initially, Gusdorf rejected the idea of operating a Taos-based business, put off by too much competition. However, after buying out his brother Alexander's general merchandise store on the Taos Plaza in 1904 (and subsequently his other business partners), Gusdorf established a profitable "store of quality" on the Taos Plaza where he sold and traded a variety of general goods. Always on the lookout for a new opportunity, in 1925, Gusdorf began transforming his store into a hotel. Up until that time, local hotels primarily served traveling merchants

passing through town. Mabel Dodge Luhan describes one such establishment, the Columbian Hotel, in her memoir, *Edge of a Taos Desert*: "The beds had thin springs and thinner mattresses-the sheets were damp and icy and inside, there was hot stove-heat, mingling cigar smoke with human odors."

Gerson Gusdorf envisioned his hotel as a European-style establishment, complete with a formal dining room, live entertainment and indoor plumbing, a rare commodity in Taos at the time. While the services of the hotel were to be European, Gerson's vision for the hotel's design was very much rooted in his adopted homeland. The hotel was built in the pueblo style, balconies decorated with Mexican and Indian blankets. In the center of the lobby, hanging from a massive viga, was the former Rancho de Taos Church bell. Most importantly, the Don Fernando's lobby, hallway and dining room walls served as exhibit space for Taos artists, many of whom were friendly with Gerson Gusdorf and his wife, the former Emma Wedeles of Mora. Despite the Taos Society of Artists' earlier success in arranging circuit exhibits and shipping canvases throughout the United States, by the mid 1920s, many out-of-state galleries were no longer willing to show their large pieces. The Don Fernando Hotel offered the perfect gallery space for Taos artists, such as Oscar Berninghaus, E. Martin Hennings, Buck Dunton, Walter Ufer and others.

Gusdorf opened the Don Fernando Hotel in 1926. His timing was perfect. Just a few months earlier, the Fred Harvey Company began offering "Indian Detours", car trips organized for Santa Fe Railway tourists. Taos was selected as an "Indian Detour" destination and Gusdorf contracted to provide tourists with meals and accommodations at his hotel. For \$45, train passengers could book a 3-day tour to Taos, transported in one of the Harvey Company's Packards. For the first time, Taos and its 2,000 residents were easily accessible to train passengers. Gusdorf also hosted conferences at his hotel, including the 1932 New Mexico Bank Presidents' Convention.

While tourism was

building momentum in Taos, locals also enjoyed the amenities of the Don Fernando. In fact, Taos artists booked rooms at the Don Fernando for the most practical of reasons: indoor plumbing. Terry Clayton Tagget and Jerry Schwartz write in *Paintbrushes and Pistols: How the Taos Artists Sold the West*: "The artists paid 50 cents each, once a week, to rent a single room at the Don Fernando Hotel where plumbing was considered a necessity for the guests. Then each artist and every member of their families would take turns throughout the day, luxuriating in the bathtub filled with hot water."

Taosenos gathered at the Don Fernando to talk, play cards, or smoke cigars. Locals and tourists mingled at weekly events, which included musicals, celebrity guests and most memorably, dancers from the Taos Pueblo. Illustrator Eric Sloane recalls one memorable evening:

"The lobby was dark, lit almost entirely by candles and there were few nights when the great pinon scented room was not breathing with the soft beat of Indian drums. After dinner, the scene crescendoed into a full scale Indian dance. One night, Isadora Duncan became so stimulated, she danced to the drums for a half-hour of impromptu excitement."

From the beginning, the hotel was a profitable venture for Gusdorf. An operating statement from 1927 reports \$3,622.59 in profits for a 6-month period. Gusdorf advertised his hotel in the 1931 Santa Fe Chamber of Commerce's Visitor's Guide as "Distinctively Unique. Worth a Trip Across a Continent. On the Indian Detour."

On December 15, 1933, a fire started on the upper floor of the Don Fernando. Gusdorf himself fought the fire with axes and buckets. There was no fire department in Taos at the time. As word of the fire spread, artists came to rescue their paintings, some injuring themselves in the process. The paintings, jewelry, blankets and other valuables were dragged out and carried to the plaza. Unfortunately, Gusdorf could not save the hotel. While Gusdorf carried fire insurance, he did not rebuild. Instead, Gusdorf opened a commercial dairy, *Puerta del Sol*, which was donated, by his wife, to a Jewish charitable organization upon her death.

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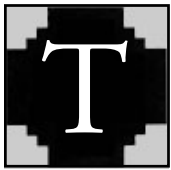
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## Jewish Settlers of Mora, New Mexico, Circa 1850

### My Life and History of my Ancestors in Mora, New Mexico

By Arnold R. Waxman, DDS (1913-2003)



There are several stories about the origin of this town's name. Many towns and cities in the United States are named for their founders and some are named for the town in Europe from which the original settlers migrated. It has been told that a French trapper whose name was St. Vrain, who later became a guide for the wagon trains and the army, upon reaching the place where, later, a village would be built, had discovered the skeleton of a human on the bank of the river that transverses the valley. He named this place "le eau de mort", which translated from the French language means the "water of death". During later years, the Mexicans who settled in this beautiful valley at 7,200 ft. elevation, surrounded by snow capped mountains and boasting of a river fed by melting snow, caused the name to gradually be pronounced Mora. This town was the site of an important trading post for many years, on the trail over the Sangre de Cristo Mountains, between Santa Fe and Mexico. Santa Fe was the territorial capital and later became the capital of the state of New Mexico. There is another story about this source of Mora's name claiming that, at one time, there was a great abundance of wild raspberries growing in this valley and the Mexican word for berries is "Mora". I understand, that in 1990, the people who owned the Salmon Ranch at La Cueva, which is located about five miles from Mora on the road to Las Vegas, have cultivated fields of raspberries and have made this venture into a profitable business. They ship raspberries to many markets throughout the United States.

When the Waxman family arrived in Mora in 1913, there was no electricity and no plumb-

ing. That was before the days of radio and of course, television. We used kerosene lamps for light. We used "out-houses" for toilets. One might ask about facilities for night time relief - there was always the "chamber-pot" stored under the bed. To bathe, we heated water on the kitchen range. The water was obtained from a well by using large blocks of ice in "ice-boxes". We had an "ice house" where blocks of ice were stored during the winter and covered with saw dust. This way of life lasted all during my youth, with the only exception being the advent of an electric plant in the late 1920s that supplied electricity to those willing to pay for its usage. This electric plant was privately owned and operated - functioning from dusk to dawn and very often did not work at all. We had several Coleman lamps in the store to supplement the electric lights. The kitchen range burned wood or coal. As coal was not always available, we always had a large supply of wood to heat the house and store. We could trade merchandise for the wood and as it was usually quite "green" and would not burn easily, we would always use the oldest supply first and so, were assured of good burning fuel.

The Waxmans were the first people in Mora to have a radio. I have very clear recollections of our first radio. It was an "Atwater Kent". There were three dials for tuning in the stations. It had batteries and the largest and longest antenna in the world!! This antenna consisted of two enormous wooden poles about fifty feet apart. These poles, at one time, were two massive trees in the forest. An antenna wire was stretched between them and connected to the radio in the house. We could get reception only at night and reached as far away as KDKA in Pittsburgh, Pa. The radio stations in San Antonio, TX. and Denver, Colorado were amongst our favorites. Before that, we always listened

to music from records on the gramophone.

Many of the men of families who had traded with us for several years were able to add to their small income from farming by herding sheep in Wyoming during the winter and by working in beet fields in Colorado during the summer months. We had a large building (a granary) with massive bins where we stored produce from farms. We traded merchandise for wheat, oats, corn, wool, barley, hides and pelts. We also traded for chickens for our own consumption. The pelts were mainly from coyotes, fox, beaver and muskrat and the hides of cattle. Later the federal government included our town in the Rural Electrification Program (REP).

The predominant religion of this area was, and remains, Catholic. Some inroads were made by Protestants, but were quite inconsequential. There was a secret religious organization in Mora County known as "the Penitentes". "Secret", in the sense that even though it was an open secret, the identity of the members was not generally known. During the holy week preceding Easter Sunday, this secret society would meet in the Mora mountains and reenact the scene of Jesus Christ carrying a huge wooden cross up a steep hill. They also would whip themselves and each other in penance for their sins. This time of the year was usually very cold in the mountains and very often, there would be untimely deaths. These deaths were never investigated, but it was generally understood as being the result of these rituals.

Mora became the seat of the county that bore its name when New Mexico received statehood in the United States in 1912. A courthouse was established and all persons involved in political matters came to Mora to transact their business.

**Continued on p. 12**

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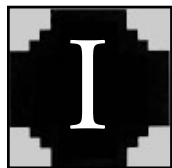
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## Meet Our Board – This Month's Profile is Dorothy Corner Amsden



Incoming NMJHS vice president Dorothy Corner Amsden writes the Genealogy Corner feature in this newsletter each quarter and organizes workshops for budding and experienced genealogists researching their Jewish roots. She hopes to form a network of Jewish genealogists in New Mexico to help each other with their research, to mentor beginners, and to provide the critical mass for sponsoring conferences and inviting notable speakers to New Mexico.

Born in the Bronx of New York City, Dorothy grew up all over the United States. Her family settled in Albuquerque in 1956 where she attended high school and then the University of New Mexico, majoring in French with a strong math minor. Graduate work through Middlebury College took her to Vermont for a summer and then a year at the Sorbonne in Paris, resulting in a Masters degree in French.

In 1966, Dorothy went to work for IBM in Los Angeles as a computer programmer in Federal Systems Division, eventually switching to technical writing. While with IBM, she lived in the Washington, D.C. area for four years before returning to California.

Interest in learning more about her Jewish roots led Dorothy to Israel in March 1973 as a temporary immigrant. She lived at the absorption center in Ashdod for five months, attending ulpan classes five hours a day, six days a week to learn Hebrew.

At that time, the Soviet Union was allowing Jews to emigrate to Israel. Half the class spoke Russian. Other students were from the U.S., France, Canada, England, India, and Denmark. Lessons were entirely in Hebrew. Getting to know the Russians required communicating in a new language, as none of them spoke English and Dorothy doesn't speak Yiddish.

After completing the ulpan, Dorothy and her western friends quickly found jobs. The Russians waited. "The government will find a job for us," they said. Dorothy noticed a job ad in the *Jerusalem Post* at the Weizmann Science Press, whose offices are located in Jerusalem, applied and was offered a position as copy editor of the *Israel Journal of Mathematics*. When she went back for a visit to Ashdod, she found her Russian friends still waiting for a job.

On Yom Kippur that fall, Dorothy, her housemate, and a friend from Tel Aviv were spending a quiet day at their apartment on Rashi Street not far from Mea Sha'arim when the sirens went off. The three women agreed to turn on the radio to Kol Israel and heard codeword troop callups. Switching to the BBC, they learned that Israeli front lines had been overrun.

During those terrible weeks, the men went off to the front and the women ran the offices. For civilians, it wasn't quite as grim as the 1967 war, when the dividing line ran right down the middle of Jerusalem. The secretary in Dorothy's office re-

counted how she and her two small sons had spent those six days and nights in the basement of their apartment house.



Dorothy Corner Amsden

Dorothy worked six days a week for 1000 lira per month (\$200), which was considered a good salary for a woman. She edited articles from prominent mathematicians in many countries in English, French, and once in German. In spite of the war, she made sure the monthly journal came out on schedule, shepherding it through the author review and press process to completion.

Arriving home to New Mexico penniless after 16 months in Israel and 4 months in London, Dorothy found work at UNM and eventually got a job offer as technical writer and editor from Los Alamos Scientific Laboratory, as it was called in those days. In the fall of 1975, she moved to Los Alamos and has been there ever since. The following spring, she met her husband to be, Tony Amsden. They will celebrate 30 years of marriage this July.

Besides researching her own family genealogy since retiring from the Lab in 1997, Dorothy serves on the board of the Los Alamos Concert Association, is secretary of the group Citizen Support for the Civic Center, enjoys working in her garden, and gives private French lessons. Why is she doing genealogy when she has no children of her own? "First of all, to satisfy my own need to know where I come from. And then, to share the findings with cousins all over the world and their children."

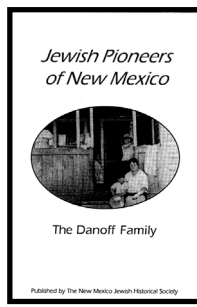
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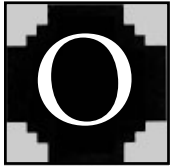
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**Genealogy Workshop**  
**Santa Fe**  
**September 17, 2006**



## Las Vegas Cemetery Clean Up

By Nancy Terr



On the first Sunday of May, eighty hands came together in Las Vegas to perform a mitzvah for a Jewish community who could not thank them

personally. Children and adults came from around New Mexico to clean the Montefiore Jewish Cemetery, an annual event sponsored by the Montefiore Cemetery Association and co-sponsored by the NMJHS. Students from the Temple Beth Shalom Religious School in Santa Fe joined relatives of the deceased, Las Vegas community members, visitors and history buffs in completing a variety of cleaning chores.

Robert Spitz, of Santa Fe, spoke while wielding a pick axe to clear the rubble of the old wall. "I have two great-grandfathers and a great-grandmother buried here and one grandmother and many cousins", he said.

Robert is the great-grandson of Isadore and Fanny Stern, grandson of Clara Shutz and Albert Stern and cousin of the Ilfelds, many of whom are buried in the Montefiore Cemetery.

Because of the severe drought in Las Vegas, there was little greenery to attend to and few weeds to pull. Volunteers concentrated their efforts on removing debris, cleaning stones and preparing for the rebuilding of a wall which Ted Herberger, Montefiore member and caretaker, hopes to begin this year.

Volunteers took a break for a picnic lunch and a fascinating talk by Rabbi Min Kantrowitz, of the Jewish Chap-

laincy Program. She spoke about Jewish burial customs, answered many questions about tradition and ethics and led the group in Kaddish. Her talk was well-received and much appreciated. The NMJHS thanks her for graciously offering to speak at the event.

For more photos, go to <http://www.lvjewish.org>.



*(Above) After a morning of work, Robert Spitz of Santa Fe, sprinkles dirt from Israel on the headstone of a relative. Rabbi Min Kantrowitz brought the dirt for the ceremony.*



*(Above) Melanie LaBorwit and her daughter, Sophie, clean up the grave of Aaron Schloss, who may be a lost relative.*


*(Right) Gunther Aaron of Santa Fe and his dog, Pennybaby, take a snack break at the clean-up.*



*Photos by Nancy Terr*

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Robert Spitz	Ilona Klein	Ron Duncan-Hart
Carolyn Silver	Isabel Stone	Gloria Abello
Rabbi Malka Drucker		

## Genealogy – continued from p. 3

tionship to you, and the date of the interview. As a genealogist, you need to know where or from whom you learned each piece of information so that you can later compare that information with other facts and determine the relative accuracy of each.

Keep a simple research log of which records you have searched. Note the place and date of the search and the outcome, whether or not the search was successful. This precludes having to scroll through the same microfilm several years hence. However, with online searches, databases can change, and it is often worth searching again for the information you could not find the first time through.

Remember to ask yourself simple questions as you research your family. If you ask general questions, you may not be able to find answers.

Be specific about what you hope to find in view of the resources that are available to genealogists. Instead of saying, "I want to know more about my grandfather's parents," think instead about which documents might provide that information and where you can access them.

Each source you find may provide clues to other pieces of the puzzle. For example, a marriage certificate will give the parents' names for both the bride and the groom, which allows you to go back one generation. This is a wonderful vehicle for finding out the maiden name of the bride.

Your search strategy will lead you step by step to where you want to go, though you may need to make revisions along the way. Think of genealogy as a circuitous process where you end up revising your earlier information in light of

new findings. The search process can be an exciting experience as you uncover facts that take you back in time and make your family history come alive.

[1] Arthur Kurzweil, *From Generation to Generation, How to Trace Your Jewish Genealogy and Family History*, forward by Elie Weisel, published by Jossey-Bass, copyright 2004, ISBN 0-7879-7051-4.

[2] *Avotaynu, The International Review of Jewish Genealogy*, published quarterly by Avotaynu, Inc., telephone 201-387-7200, <http://www.avotaynu.com>.

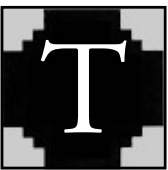
[3] Ellis Island Database, <http://www.ellisland.org>.

[4] U.S. Census and naturalization papers, <http://www.archives.gov/genealogy/index.html>.

[5] U.S. vital records, <http://www.cyndislist.com/usvital.htm>.

## NMJHS Jewish Pioneer Booklets Receive Historic Preservation Award

by Lisa Witt



The New Mexico Jewish Historical Society (NMJHS), proudly announces that the State of New Mexico Cultural Properties Review Committee (CPRC), has selected the Jewish Pioneers

Video History Project to receive the 2006 Heritage Preservation Award in the category Heritage Publication. The CPRC is recognizing the NMJHS for publishing 13 booklets on Jewish Pioneer families as part of a four-year study of pioneer descendant families. We are offering a special summer price of \$10.00 per booklet or \$125.00 for the set of 13.

The Committee, consisting of Project Director Lisa Witt of Avista Video Histories; Anita Miller, Chair; Dr. Noel Pugach, Lead Historical Consultant; Dr. Henry Tobias, Historical

Consultant; Dr. Durwood Ball, Historical Consultant and Judy Basen Weinreb, Archivist, received the award on May 19th at the Scottish Rite Temple in Santa Fe.

In a letter thanking the CPRC for selecting the project, the committee wrote: "This project, which took place over four years, was a labor of love, and it is particularly gratifying to have it receive this recognition. We are so fortunate to live in a state like New Mexico, which recognizes and honors its diverse history. The intent of this project was to document one part of this rich history and to make it available to fu-

ture generations. Receiving the Heritage Preservation Award from the CPRC indicates to us that we were correct in our opinion that these were stories that were worthy of preserving."

### The NMJHS THANKS the following Contributors:

Carol Pava	Barbara & Ronald Balser
Carla Freeman	Marvin Klein
Mortimer Herzstein	Ernest & Edith Schwartz
Rhoda Robins	Abeles Foundation
Claire Grossman	Gloria Golden
Sam Ballen	Elsa & Henry Abraham
Sharon Herzog	Abe & Marian Silver
Jennie Negin	Rabbi Malka Drucker
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Edward & Phyllis Gladden	Majorie Weinberg-Berman
Rabbi Leonard Helman	John & Bianca Wertheim
Harry's Road House	William & Jane Buchsbaum
Robert Spitz	Microsoft
T-M Cattle Co.	Alla Latin American Books
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**You make a difference because we cannot survive on membership alone. We apologize if there are any errors or omissions in this list. The NMJHS also wishes to thank ALL current Society members for their continued support and generosity.**



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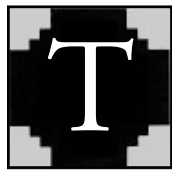
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## Albert Herzstein, Beloved and Remembered Citizen of Clayton, New Mexico

By Stanley Rosebud Rosen



To follow the trail of New Mexico Jewish pioneers, the road leads to Clayton, New Mexico, current home of the Herzstein Memorial Museum, which was dedicated on April 28, 1989. The name and life of Al Herzstein is still remembered fondly by the residents of Clayton, most of whom are not Jewish.

The Herzstein family originated in Spain, with two brothers who were Sephardic Jews. Much later, the three brothers, Nachman, Morris and Levi were born in Thulen, Germany. Al's father, Morris, came to the New Mexico Territory in 1890 and established a mercantile store in Casa Blanca in Union County. In 1892, he set up a store in Liberty, northeast of Tucumcari and was joined by his brother Levi, who was later killed by Thomas Edward "Black Jack" Ketchum. The Herzstein family was known for their civic and economic contributions to the community and took part in the "social swirl". A staunch Democrat, Morris was seriously considered for appointment as Governor in 1912; he served on the Clayton City Council. He was described by Ralph Twitchell, Historian: "He is rightly considered one of the foremost citizens of the County. He is characterized by unusual determination, business acumen and enterprise and all that he has undertaken has been carried forward to completion." (*The Leading Facts of New Mexico History*, 1917.)

Albert was born in Trinidad, Colorado, on March 5, 1907. As a boy growing up in Clayton, he learned to fix cars and do electrical and plumbing repairs. During the early days of the depression, he worked as a truck driver and a delivery boy for a welding sup-

ply business and ran a movie theater. Taken under the wing of Texas businessman, Ben K. Smith, he moved to Houston, Texas, to learn the art of manufacturing oxygen and welding equipment. He married Ethel Avis on September 17, 1927, a charming Southern Belle. In 1930, they decided to sell Ethel's car to become a one-third partner in the Smithweld Company, which expanded to build oxygen and welding plants in the Southwest. On December 18, 1948, Al took charge of the business. In 1956, he became the Executive Vice President of Big Three Welding Equipment Company. He was a capable and successful business leader. He and his family were fully accepted and involved in the social and community life of Clayton.

While he made lots of money, he lived modestly and followed the philanthropic tradition of his father. In 1965, he moved to Houston and worked in the real estate business. Here, he and Ethel established a charitable foundation, with assets of over 25 million dollars. His generosity has extended across the state and the country, supporting the Herzstein Historical Museum in Clayton and The University of New Mexico Research Center of Audiology and the Museum of Fine Arts, UNM. Other projects supported by the Foundation include a gym for the Chiniquipin School and a building for the food bank of the city of Houston. He was also a major contributor to a Jewish community center in West Houston. Al was a continuing and generous supporter of the Union County Historical Society and the Clayton Fire and Rescue.

His commitments included not only Jewish charities, but a great many Christian endeavors, both Catholic and Protestant. His contributions paid special attention to the youth.

Photos of Al and Ethel show a smiling presence, representing both their love of life, their love of people and their personal generosity.

In April 28 1989, at the dedication of the Herzstein Museum in Clayton, his son stated, "Dad was a good man - he was highly thought of; he was honest and raised his children in the old German way of having to work and earn their own salt. It is my pleasure to dedicate this Museum in memory of my parents."

Looking back on his long and active life as a businessman, philanthropist and community leader, he told his cousin Mortimer, "If I had to do it over again, I would do exactly what I did."

His life provides important lessons for the Jewish Community.

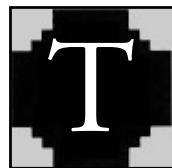
Materials for the preparation of this article were provided by D. Ray Blakeley, Director, The Herzstein Museum and his article in the *Union County Leader*, "Al Herzstein: A Man Worth His Salt", November 22, 1992. When you visit the Museum, you will experience his encyclopedic knowledge and his contagious enthusiasm.

Union County Historical Society  
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Clayton, NM 88415  
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Stanley Rosebud Rosen is Professor Emeritus, University of Illinois, a member of the New Mexico Historical Society and NMJHS. He was also a founding member of the Jewish Historical Society of Illinois. Stanley was introduced to the topic while attending a conference of the Historical Society of New Mexico in Clayton, in 2005.

## Name Our Newsletter Contest: Recuerdos, Zicaron, Yester-Year, Legacy, Legado

By Lance Bell



These are some of the suggestions that have come from members to name the NMJHS newsletter.

Why do we need to name our newsletter? What's wrong with its default name, The New Mexico Jewish Historical Society Newsletter or NMJHS Newsletter? For one thing, try saying these two versions out loud. Is that a name that trips

off the tongue? Is it simple, catchy, memorable? Our newsletter needs a professional name for marketing the Society to the public and to attract new members.

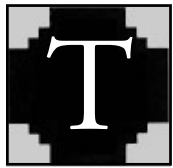
All things have names. People have names, as do pets, places, wars, treaties, inventions, songs, books, newspapers, even newsletters. The Taos Jewish Center calls its remarkable newsletter *Hakol* (Hebrew for The Voice). The Jewish Federation of Greater

Albuquerque calls its newsletter *The New Mexico Jewish Link*, or *The Link*, for short. Naming a person, place or event makes it take on a life of its own. What name best conveys the spirit of NMJHS? Submit your suggestion to nmjhs@jewishnewmexico.org or phone 505-348-4471. The winner will receive a one year complimentary membership to the Society.

## The Author at La Fonda

By Richard McCord

Reprinted with permission



he plaudits and the accolades have been registered now and the homage of a fortunate community has been paid. On Sunday, October 8, 2000, Sam and Ethel Ballen, who own and run the landmark hotel La Fonda, were declared Santa Fe Living Treasures.

With that honor out of the way, let me now say something different. Most people in Santa Fe, thousands anyway, already know about the Ballens' remarkable generosity, graciousness, humility and humanity. These were all lauded at the crowded ceremony at the Folk Art Museum when they officially became Treasures.

But, far fewer are acquainted with Sam Ballen, the author.

In 1997, in his 75th year, Ballen pulled together his memoirs in a privately published book. Cleverly titled *Without Reservations*, it traces his life's journey from his birth as the son of Jewish immigrants who ran a small grocery store in Harlem, through his tour as a combat soldier in World War II, a stint as a Wall street analyst, then a Texas oilman, during which time he became wealthy and on to his current place at La Fonda. It's the kind of life we all wish we had.

The book is a fascinating read for all its 281 pages; yet for any Santa Fean, the most gripping part has to be the final 100, which focus upon this community and focus on it with astonishing boldness and candor.

A plain-spoken man and a keen observer of human foibles, Ballen apparently decided to be blunt and honest in this summing up of his life. As a result, his book overflows

with riveting vignettes some flattering and some anything but.

The names in the book comprise a Who's Who of the movers and shakers of Santa Fe, in the years since Ballen's arrival in 1968: Fred and Bill Harvey, Harold Bibo, Ed Tatum, Milo McGonagle, Gene Gallegos, Dave Olmsted, Dr. Ralph Lopez, Bud Kelly, Dave Sierra, Ralph Petty, Nathan Greer, Gene Petchesky, Mel Eaves, George Dapples, Bill Mauldin, Stan Ulam, Sergio Viscoli, Joe Valdes, Eddie Smithson, Ned Wood, Tom Catron, Manuel Rodriguez, C. B. Ogas, Fred Stanley, judges Louis Sutin, Tom Donnelly and Edwin Felter, Tom Moore, Sam Pick, Harold Gans and many more.

A flaw of the book is that it provides scant identification for this colorful cast of characters. To appreciate the stories about them, readers must already know who they are. And for reasons of space, I am repeating the same flaw here.

Yet for readers in the know, Ballen's reminiscences pack a wallop. They tell tales of suicide, embezzlement, financial blackmail, betrayal, double dealing, alcoholism, infidelity, incompetence, bribery, egotism and a host of other dramas.

Some of his best stories are, naturally, about La Fonda itself. It was a failing, ramshackle inn with rooms renting for \$8 when Ballen

learned of it in 1968. La Fonda had been rejected by "every experienced hotel operator in the United States," he writes. Rashly, he and a small group of investors bought it and soon were facing bankruptcy. Until Ballen threatened to sue, a local bank president was ready to call in La Fonda's loan.

Yet, 20 years later, the story was different. Now a great success, La Fonda became the target of a takeover plot by Santa Fe land baron Gerald Peters. When Ballen resisted, Peters sued him for \$40 million. Somewhat excessively, the book details the battle, which Peters ultimately abandoned. Disappointingly, Ballen declines to reveal Peters' net worth, which he learned during the course of the lawsuit.

But very little about this book disappoints any seasoned Santa Fean. Crammed with facts and gossip, infused with outspokenness and modesty, it provides an amazing view of this city, from the vantage point of La Fonda's fifth-floor Bell Tower. They are available at the LaFonda Gift Shop.

Like its author, the book is a local treasure. It is currently out of print, but pressure for a second edition is building. To add to it, you can write Ballen at PO Box 2263, Santa Fe, New Mexico, 87504.

**The NMJHS sends its heartfelt sympathy to the Ballen Family, in memory of Ethel Ballen.**

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## Henry Jaffa and Wyatt Earp: Wyatt Earp's Jewish Connection

### Continued from March Newsletter

They often used family or landsman connections in partnership or in a network with each other. Many of them built successful mercantile establishments. In a part of the country they found relatively free from old world prejudices, they soon became leaders in civic affairs. By 1880, there were a few hundred Jewish males in New Mexico Territory (with Jewish women so scarce, many of these men sent for mail order Jewish brides!), with the number increasing every year in the coming decade. Prominent Jewish pioneers included:

The Herzsteins in Clayton; the Rosenwalds in Las Vegas, N.M.; Solomon Floersheim in Springer and Roy; Jacob Wertheim in Tucumcari; Nathan Jaffa in Roswell; Marcel Weiller in Carlsbad; the Moises family in Santa Rosa and David Abraham in Silver City. Perhaps the most prominent of these German Jewish pioneering businessmen was Charles Ilfeld, who grew a virtual mercantile empire in the territory.

Henry Naphtali Jaffa was born in Prussia, somewhere between 1844 and 1846, one of seven children of Cantor Aron J. Jaffa (1800-1882) and Ellie Hahn (1810-1877), from Heinebach, Germany. The couple married in 1836. Henry immigrated to the United States in 1863, as did three of his brothers and one sister, settling in western Pennsylvania. Henry's brother, Solomon, then 22 years old, first made the trek west. He arrived in Trinidad, Colorado in 1871, in what was then a settlement of about 500 people. Typical for Jewish families of the period, Sol sent for his brothers Henry and Sam and the three brothers established one of the earlier merchandising businesses in Colorado, Jaffa Brothers General Merchandise Store. The Colorado family ultimately included all four Jaffa brothers: Benjamin, Samuel, Henry Nahphtali and Solomon H.

Henry Jaffa left Colorado and moved to New

Mexico in 1874, where he likely came in contact with Doc Holliday in Las Vegas in 1879. In 1880, he opened a branch of the family business in Albuquerque. Jaffa family members, in the coming decades, would remain active in Colorado business and civic affairs in New Mexico. A nephew, Nathan Jaffa (1863-1945), would serve as mayor of Roswell in 1903 and later become Territorial Secretary of State. Nathan Jaffa would perhaps be best remembered for sinking the first artesian well in Roswell, helping to alleviate chronic water shortages, thus making large-scale cattle ranching in the area feasible.

Members of the Jaffa family were instrumental in building the opulent Jaffa Opera House in Trinidad in 1882, today listed on the National Register of Historic Places. It was, incidentally, the site of a notable gunfight between two law officers in 1882, George Goodell, a Trinidad police officer and county undersheriff M. B. McGraw. McGraw had charged, in a letter to the editor of the local paper, that Goodell and his wife were respectively, pimp and prostitute. Goodell killed McGraw, pumping him with six bullets.

Bessie, Henry Jaffa's wife (b. 1861 in Pennsylvania), bore him four children in New Mexico. Benjamin O. (1879-1946), Walter M. (1880-1965), Aron, called "Ronie" (1884-1919), died in the flu epidemic of 1918-19 and Edgar ((1892-1990). Of the four sons of Henry and Bessie Jaffa, the only living descendants today, issue from Benjamin and his wife Florence, are four great-children living in California.

By the time Henry Jaffa arrived in Albuquerque, he had achieved prominence and prosperity. He opened his first grocery store on South Second Street, where he offered "hot rolls around the clock" from the delicatessen and bakery within his

grocery store. He frequently advertised in the local papers, and, in the family tradition, became active in civic affairs.

From the *Albuquerque Morning Journal*, November 18, 1882:

"Jaffa Bros. intend to go out of the grocery business and devote their entire attention to their dry goods, clothing and furnishing goods business. They propose to close out their entire stock of groceries at greatly reduced prices, in order to make room for the line of goods carried in the other branches of their business. For particulars, see their large advertisement on the first page of this morning's *Journal*."

Later, Henry Jaffa served as the first mayor of Albuquerque, winning the town's inaugural municipal election. The campaign lasted three weeks, with Jaffa, well qualified from his service as Board of Trade president, only becoming a candidate in the final eight days. He defeated John A. Lee on Election Day, a day on which Sheriff Santiago Baca ordered all saloons closed. Jaffa's term as mayor lasted from July 1885 to April 1886.

During his mayoral tenure, Jaffa dealt with a number of issues marking the transition of Albuquerque from a frontier town to a modern city. He oversaw the creation of a professional fire department and a much needed sewerage system. He spoke out about the city's problem with opium dens, working for the ordinance that eventually decreed, "Any person who shall be in charge of such a house.. wherein opium..or hop is smoked, shall be deemed to keep a nuisance and shall be fined from \$10 to \$50." Another ordinance passed on Mayor Jaffa's watch outlawed dance halls.

### More to Come in the Next Issue

#### Know someone who is not a member?

A friend or relative? Ask that friend or relative to join the NMJHS! Every "old" member, please get busy and sign up a "new" member. A membership to the NMJHS makes a great and unexpected GIFT!

#### Help us grow!

### The NMJHS Board's Appeal to Its Members

Our continued existence depends on the interest and support of our members. We need your cooperation to interest others to join our Society; we need your help to obtain archive material and your ideas. We urge you to please renew your membership when due. If you are already a 2006 member, please encourage your friends and family to join!

We are proud of our accomplishments, but we cannot rest on our laurels. It is your Society – we appreciate your continued interest and support. Thank you.

## **Jewish Settlers of Mora – continued from p. 5**

By Arnold R. Waxman

So Mora grew in importance to some degree also. However, being thirty miles from the nearest railroad, the growth was limited. The roads were mere wagon trails before the advent of automobiles and improved highways, so the journey to the nearest railroad was arduous at best.

The United States Army had established Fort Union near Ocate during the 1800s and the nearest town that would offer entertainment, when the soldiers were off duty, was Mora. Our trading store had a good supply of whiskey and the girls of Mora were friendly. Dance halls were crowded and lively. Fort Union, today, is deserted.

My mother's sister, Zelma and her husband Morris Back, moved to Mora, New Mexico, circa 1895, where Morris and his brother Sam had a general merchandise business among the Mexicans who had then become citizens of the U. S. Territory of New Mexico. Rose and Morris Waxman, my mother and father, also moved to New Mexico with me at six weeks old, in 1913. Minnie and Phillip Stienfeldt, my mother's sister and brother-in-law, became partners with my parents in the Morris Back and Co. Store (trading post).

We lived in an adobe house owned by my uncle, Morris Back. All of the buildings in Mora were, and are to this day, built of "adobe" bricks. The Mexicans made these bricks of mud which contained some clay. Straw is added to the mud and fashioned into large bricks. The walls of the buildings were very thick (in some instances, three feet). This was a very good insulation against the outside weather. When the buildings were complete, the interior and exterior walls were plastered with a coating of this very same mud. I can remember, as a child, the heavy wooden shutters on every window in the store and our home that we closed and bolted from the inside every night for protection. When a fire occurred in any of the town's buildings, the church bells would ring and all able-bodied men and boys would form lines for a water brigade from the nearest water well. Fires were somewhat easy to control because the adobe walls would not burn. The sidewalk and the platform in front of the stores were made of wooden planks. The store platform had iron rings on the edge, so that those arriving by horseback could tie up their horses. The telephone office was located in the home of the one and only operator. We had a telephone in

the store that was used only for long distance calls (mainly business calls to suppliers in Las Vegas, N. M., only 30 miles away). We did not have a telephone in the house because no one else did, which made it impossible to converse with neighbors by phone. If one would want to call at night, it was necessary to walk to the operator's house since she was on duty from 9am to 6pm weekdays, but never on Sundays.

There were two hotels in town - The Butler Hotel and the Kahn Hotel. The Kahn Hotel was owned and operated by two sisters whose father, Louis Kahn, was of German Jewish ancestry. He is buried in the little Jewish cemetery on the way from Mora to Ledoux. The hotel had about twenty rooms with a nice courtyard in the center. They also served meals. The Butler Hotel was in a more imposing building, with a large lobby and party room, besides regular hotel rooms. I do not remember too clearly the exact make up of this hotel as it was considered "off limits" to me as a child, since it was, at the time, a rather rowdy place where high stake gambling often occurred. In later years, this hotel was replaced by a store that was owned by a Syrian family named Hanosh.

There were several stores in Mora, even in the early years when we first arrived there. Our store was the largest one. Next in size was the store owned by Peter Balland, a Frenchman, who had a wife and two daughters. Then there were several smaller stores - one owned by Florentino Sanchez, one owned by Eugenio Romero and more by Frank Trembley. We, The Morris Back and Co. store, had the best facility for storing all the produce of their customers' farms, so we were able to trade with them for whatever they needed to exchange for their products.

Later on, in 1918, after the First World War, when the railroad came to Las Vegas, the trail to Santa Fe changed to easier terrain. This change resulted in the importance of Mora as a trading post diminishing because much of the produce of the entire area was taken to Las Vegas to be shipped by rail to the Eastern markets. Mora, at that time, had many large farms where wheat, oats and corn were grown in abundance. Las Vegas grew tremendously with the establishment of warehouses and commercial establishments that attracted business people from many parts of the country.

Mora remained a good trading town for many years after the railroad came to Las Vegas. Because of the increased ease of transporting merchandise from the cities of the northeast, merchants in Mora were able to obtain larger quantities of goods for sale. They no longer had the necessity of conveying merchandise by wagon from the nearest northern centers of commerce. About that time, my grandfather, Herman Roberts, would buy large quantities of clothing from bankrupt stores that were sold at auction in Philadelphia and sent this merchandise by railroad to the store in Mora. The huge wooden crates were then transported by horse and wagon from the railroad depot in Las Vegas, thirty miles to our store.

There was a large safe in the office of the store that had been here for many years and had the name of the original owners painted on the large heavy doors. The inscription read "LOWENSTEIN & STRAUSS", who were the pioneers of the business. The safe was necessary, not only to keep money and gold for the business, but also to store materials used in the Post Office that was part of the store, before the time of our arrival in Mora. I cannot even imagine how this huge safe was transported to the store from where it was purchased. All records of transactions and invoices were maintained in hand-written records. Not even the typewriter was used at any time in this business. All data of purchases and correspondence was filed during each year and then placed in boxes at year's end and stored in a warehouse located at the rear of the store.

New Mexico's Las Vegas was the only Las Vegas until 1905. Cowboys, Indians, outlaws, horse soldiers, wagon trains on the Santa Fe Trail, cantinas full of señoritas, vigilantes riding in the night - all were once part of every-day life in the north central part of the state.

Several people have asked me how and why my parents and previous relatives settled in Mora, New Mexico. I am including, below, some excerpts from a letter I received from my cousin, Seymour Back, in which he has written a short history of our family in Mora:

"Soon after the civil war (in the early 1870's), a Mr. Birnbaum and a Mr. Lowenstein, brought a wagonload of trading goods to the territory of New Mexico. They settled in the beautiful little mountain village on the Mora River, 35 miles

**Continued on p. 13**

## **Jewish Settlers of Mora – continued from p. 12**

By Arnold R. Waxman

northwest of Las Vegas, New Mexico. Mora village had a convent school and a thriving farming and ranching community, complete with a mill to grind corn and wheat. It was a hard trip to Las Vegas, so the community welcomed a trading post.

Mr. Birnbaum soon returned to the East and was replaced by a Mr. Strauss, some relative of my grandmother Back, whose maiden name was Amalia Strauss. Her brother and his wife were lost on the Titanic in 1912. Their mother was a Rothschild.

When Lowenstein and Strauss returned to the East, the trading post was transferred to Joe Harberg and his wife Teckla, my father's sister. Joe's brother, Carl, had a store in the nearby village of Cleveland. When Joe's son was old enough to require more schooling than was available, they moved back East and turned the store over to my father and his brother, Sam Back. Morris Back, my father, operated the store (trading post) for eighteen years - 1895 to 1913. In 1913, my parents decided to return to Philadelphia, where I could receive an education in English. They turned over the store to my mother's two sisters and their husbands, the Waxmans and Steinfeldts.

There is a small Jewish cemetery on the edge of the Catholic cemetery that is located on the road to Ledoux. The few graves of the Jewish settlers found in 2005 are from Morris Back's in-laws: the Lowensteins, Louis Kahn and Jacob Regensberg, who all settled near Mora."

### **A History of Jacob Regensberg, Great-Great-Great Grandfather of Alvin Regensberg of Santa Fe**

Jacob Regensberg was born on June 11, 1847 in Germany. Jacob and his brother Joseph traveled together, leaving Europe, circa 1867. It is safe to assume they arrived in America via

Philadelphia before settling in Mora County, New Mexico. Jacob was employed as a grocery clerk in the Ocate store of Salomon Lowenstein. Joseph, his brother, lived in Guadalupita, where he was a farmer. Jacob is buried in the Ledoux Cemetery.

Jacob traveled by rail as far as Kansas City, where he boarded a wagon train bound for Ocate, New Mexico. He later settled near Guadalupita, where he opened a butcher shop and mercantile store.

As early as 1871, Jacob acquired property in the Guadalupita area. Between 1871 and 1882, he purchased over 450 varas of land, two houses, one with a lot, and the other with a grooming house. Jacob's son settled there later and opened a butcher shop and general store. By 1880, Jacob had married Eduviges Gould (Gold). They had three children: Benjamin (born November 1877), Amelia (born April 1879) and Eliza (no birth date known).

Eduviges, Jacob's wife, died in 1883. Later, Jacob married Bertha Stern, who came from Pennsylvania. Jacob and Bertha had eight children: Morris, Joseph, Carl, Beatrice, Sidney, Myrtle, Alice and Leo. Jacob Regensberg died on November 21, 1903.

Jacob Larry Regensberg of Guadalupita, New Mexico told some stories about his great grandfather, Jacob Regensberg:

It seems that during the days of Fort Union, which was close to Mora, his great grandfather, Jacob Benjamin and his father, Benjamin Jacob, took their horses, at night, all the way to the Philmont Ranch, near Cimarron, New Mexico, to be bred by the fine stallions that were kept by the owners of that ranch. The offspring of these horses (remounts) were then sold to the soldiers at Fort Union. This went on for quite a few years.

### **Patricia C. Sanchez, who still lives in Mora (2006), tells about her maternal Great-Grandfather, Louis Kahn and paternal Great-Grandfather, Henry Birnbaum.**

Louis was born in Bavaria, Germany, in 1830. He died in February, 1906, in Mora, New Mexico and is buried in the little Jewish cemetery also. In 1847, Louis immigrated to Mississippi from Germany at the age of 17. Louis made his way west with a team of horses and a wagon, peddling goods on the way west. In March of 1849, he joined a wagon train and arrived in Santa Fe in August. He was involved with freighting from 1845 to 1867. In 1867, he arrived in Sapello, New Mexico.

Louis operated a general store and meat market, since he was a butcher by trade. From 1874 until his death in 1906, he owned the Kahn Hotel in Mora and various real estate holdings in the area, including 100 acres of irrigated land and orchards.

In 1855, at the age of 25, he married Maria Candelaria Salazar. They had four daughters: Antonia Kahn, who died in infancy; Mary and Regina Kahn never married, but operated the Kahn Hotel in Mora. Julia Kahn married Charles Strong, an Irishman, in 1870. Their children were Daniel, Emma, Annie, Margaret, Julia and Josephine.

Henry Birnbaum, my paternal great-grandfather, was the original owner of the Lowenstein & Strauss Store. He married Juana Leyba and had two children, my paternal grandmother Isabel and Esteban (Steve). Isabel married Jesus Maria Sanchez and had six sons. One of them was my father Phillip. Emma, my mother, married Phillip Sanchez. I, Patsy, my late sister Julia Van Sicklen and my late brother Phillip Charles Eulick Strong were their children.

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**The New Mexico Jewish Historical Society thanks the following for their help at the Annual Membership Meeting: Nancy Terr, Sheila Gershen, Regina Dingler, Norm Budow, Eli Arvizu and Brian Westerberg.**

**The New Mexico Jewish Historical Society is a beneficiary agency of the Jewish Federation of Greater Albuquerque**

## Hispanics Uncovering Roots as Inquisition's "Hidden" Jews

By Simon Romero

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When she was growing up in a small town in southern Colorado, an area where her ancestors settled centuries ago when it was on the fringes of the northern frontier of New Spain, Bernadette Gonzales always thought some of the stories about her family were unusual, if not bizarre.

Her grandmother, for instance, refused to travel on Saturday and would use a specific porcelain basin to drain blood out of meat before she cooked it. In one tale that particularly puzzled Ms. Gonzales, 52, her grandfather called for a Jewish doctor to circumcise him while he was on his death bed in a hospital in Trinidad, CO.

Only after Ms. Gonzales moved to Houston to work as a lawyer and began discussing these tales with a Jewish colleague, she said, did "the pieces of the puzzle" start falling into place.

Ms. Gonzales started researching her family history and concluded that her ancestors were Marranos, or Sephardic Jews, who had fled the Inquisition in Spain and in Mexico more than four centuries ago. Though raised in the Roman Catholic faith, Ms. Gonzales felt a need to reconnect to her Jewish roots, so she converted to Judaism three years ago.

"I felt like I came home," said Ms. Gonzales, who now often uses the first name Batya. "The fingerprints of my past were all around me, but I didn't know what they meant."

It is difficult to know precisely how many Hispanics are converting or adopting Jewish religious practices, but accounts of such embraces of Judaism are growing more common in parts of the Southwest. In Clear Lake, a suburb south of Houston, Rabbi Stuart Federow has overseen half a dozen conversions of Hispanics in recent years. In El Paso, Rabbi Stephen Leon said he had converted almost 40 Hispanic families since moving to Texas from New Jersey 19 years ago.

These conversions are the latest chapter in the story of the crypto-Jews, or hidden Jews,

of the southwestern United States and northern Mexico, who are thought to be descended from the Sephardic Jews who began fleeing Spain more than 500 years ago. The story is being bolstered by recent historical research and advances in DNA testing that are said to reveal a prominent role played by crypto-Jews and their descendants in Spain's colonization of the Southwest.

For more than two decades, anecdotal evidence collected by researchers in New Mexico, Colorado and Texas suggested that some nominally Catholic families of Iberian descent had stealthily maintained Jewish customs throughout the centuries, including lighting candles on Friday evening, avoiding pork and having the Star of David inscribed on gravestones.

The whispers of hidden rituals coming from thoroughly Catholic communities were, at times, met with skepticism. One explanation for these seemingly Jewish customs was that evangelical Protestant sects, active in the Southwest about a century ago, had used Jewish imagery and Hebrew writing in their proselytizing and that these symbols had become ingrained in isolated Hispanic communities.

Skepticism aside, some rabbis view assistance to, or conversions of crypto-Jews, as a responsibility. "The American Jewish community provided support in bringing Soviet, Albanian or Syrian Jews to the United States and helping them in their transition," said Rabbi Leon of Congregation B'nai Zion, a Conservative congregation in El Paso. "I don't see how the crypto-Jews are any different."

Modern science may now be shedding new light on the history of the crypto-Jews after molecular anthropologists recently developed a DNA test of the male or Y chromosome that can indicate an ancestral connection to the Cohanim, a priestly class of Jews that traces its origin back more than 3,000 years to Aaron, the older brother of Moses.

Family Tree DNA, a Houston company that offers a Cohanim test to its male clients, gets

about one inquiry a day from Hispanics interested in exploring the possibility of Jewish ancestry, said Bennett Greenspan, its founder and chief executive. Mr. Greenspan said about one in 10 of the Hispanic men tested by his company showed Semitic ancestry, strongly suggesting a Jewish background. (Another divergent possibility is that the test might suggest North African Muslim ancestry.)

"The results have just blown me over, reminding me of something out of Kaifeng," Mr. Greenspan said, referring to the Chinese city of Kaifeng, where a small Jewish community persisted for about 1,000 years until the mid-19th century when it was almost completely assimilated. "Lots of Hispanic people tell me they're interested in something Jewish and they can't explain it. Well, this helps explain it."

Not everyone who discovers Jewish ancestry, either through genealogical research or DNA testing, has decided to convert to Judaism. Some Hispanics who have found links still feel drawn to incorporate Jewish customs into their life. For instance, the Rev. William Sanchez, 52, a Catholic priest in Albuquerque, spent years researching his family's past in New Mexico before a DNA test three years ago showed that he almost certainly had the Jewish Cohanim marker.

Since then, Father Sanchez has sought to educate his parishioners on the connections between Catholicism and Judaism and has helped oversee the Nuevo Mexico Project, which tries to identify Sephardic ancestry among Hispanics from New Mexico. He has encouraged more than 100 of his parishioners to take the DNA tests.

Father Sanchez has also introduced some Jewish customs at St. Edwins Church in Albuquerque, where he serves; he blew the shofar, or ram's horn, this month during the Yom Kippur holiday. At another parish where he used to work in rural northeastern New Mexico, in the village of Villanueva, he would hold an annual Passover supper.

"I have a pluralistic, not an antagonistic, view of our religions," Father Sanchez said.

**Continued on p. 15**



## Hispanics Uncovering Roots – continued from p. 14

Still, others feel they have to make a clean break upon exploring their Jewish roots. John Garcia, a lawyer in El Paso, whose family moved to the United States two generations ago from northern Mexico, said he had heard stories since he was a boy that his family had a Sephardic Jewish past.

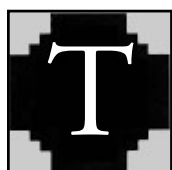
He formally converted to Judaism in 2001 and last year, had a bar mitzvah in El Paso, at the age of 53, together with five other crypto-Jews. These days, Mr. Garcia, a lawyer in the public defender's office in El Paso, never works on the Sabbath and is an active member of Temple Mount Sinai, a Reform congregation in El Paso.

"I've had to go beyond my comfort level in something I would call a reversion rather than a conversion," Mr. Garcia said. "There were an intervening 400 years when my family had become Catholic, but something about Judaism, I don't know exactly what it was, was kept alive."

## Adventures in the American Southwest

By Noel Pugach

Reprinted with permission of *The Forward* (Original Print 5-19-2006)



They lived the adventure, excitement and dangers of the Southwest frontier. Outside of Pueblo, CO., five year old Clara Goldsmith was kidnapped by Indians and traded back to her anxious father, Henry, for some calico, flour and hickory; teenager Levi Herzstein was gunned down in 1896 by Thomas "Black Jack" Ketchum, New Mexico's most notorious outlaw at the time; young Charles Solomon was stuffed into a crate to hide from a band of marauding Apaches by his father. Charles was so frightened that he could not speak for days and stuttered thereafter.

Such was the life of Jewish pioneers in New Mexico and in the surrounding territory. Of course, the dangers of that era passed in time. Alongside them, Jews engaged in the more prosaic, but long-lasting struggle to earn a living, raise families and attend to their social and religious needs. While some failed and retreated to other parts of the United States, a large number were economically successful and planted deep roots in New Mexico's soil. Their business enterprises - ranging from mercantile establishments and the wool trade to mining and ranching - made important contributions to the region's economy. Their community involvement laid the foundation for the creation of many Jewish and general institutions.

The outline of this chapter in American Jewish history has been known for many years. But a fuller and more complex picture of this fascinating story, together with an array of new characters, is now available as a result of the New Mexico Jewish Historical Society's Jewish Pioneer Video History Project. Under my direction and that of Avista Video's president, Lisa Witt, a team of historians and

volunteers conducted video interviews of descendants of New Mexico pioneer Jews, did additional research and wrote brief essays on 13 families. The project yielded a number of significant and interesting conclusions about the Jews who settled in New Mexico between the 1840s and the 1920s. Although a number came from Eastern Europe, particularly after the 1880s, the great majority emigrated from German-speaking countries.

Compared with Jews who settled east of the Mississippi, the immigrants drawn to New Mexico (and other parts of the West) tended to be risk-takers and adventurers. Without being reckless, these young men, indeed, many were teenagers, seemed to thrive on the challenges, dangers and isolation of the New Mexico frontier. They saw opportunity, but they also were attracted by the greater personal freedom they found in the territory. Many rode their own horses, their children raised in the saddle. Frieda Freudenthal Mashbir, whose father, Lewin Freudenthal, made at least three attempts to live in New Mexico while struggling to observe the dietary laws, reminisced that her times in the Southwest were among the happiest moments of her life (until she married and had a son), because of the freedom she enjoyed.

Virtually, all these Jews moved from rural villages and pre-capitalist economies in Germany and settled in a similar environment in New Mexico. (On the other hand, Jews from larger European cities tended to gravitate to urban centers in the United States.) Yet, they quickly grasped the development of modern capitalism and introduced new commercial forms, techniques and economic specialization to New Mexico. While the Spiegelbergs, Staabs and Amberg-Elsbergs quickly added wholesale functions to their retail establishments, Charles Ilfeld made the

full transition to mercantile capitalism in New Mexico only 25 years later. In tiny Clayton, Simon Herzstein opened a ready-to-wear store in 1915 that carried only the best name-brands: Justin boots, Florsheim shoes, Stetson hats, Levi's jeans and Hart Schaffner & Marx suits. His clientele came from all over the Southwestern plains. Jewish merchants also introduced regular buying trips to the East Coast, particularly to New York.

A sizable number of Jewish immigrants engaged in ranching and in raising sheep, often as an offshoot of their mercantile businesses, but also as stand-alone enterprises. In either case, their livestock operations occupied a significant place in the region's economy. Hugo Loewenstern specialized in raising Herfords and his customers came from a large swath of the West.

Furthermore, Jewish settlers adapted very well to the culture and society of New Mexico. They spoke Spanish (often before they became fluent in English) and some learned Indian languages. They integrated completely into their local communities and were highly respected. Some assimilated totally, while many struggled to retain Jewish practices and traditions. Most led happy lives in New Mexico, their descendants reporting they rarely thought of leaving the Land of Enchantment.

Much more information has been accumulated and is being analyzed. The interviews, on CDs and hard-copy formats and a great deal of historical material, will soon be available to researchers at the State Archives in Santa Fe and in Zimmerman Library at the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque. Yet, we may have only scratched the surface.

Noel Pugach is a professor of history at the University of New Mexico. We are offering a special summer price of \$10.00 per booklet or \$125.00 for the set of 13.

The NMJHS is soliciting historical papers and photographs for inclusion in its archival collection at the New Mexico Records Center and Archives. For more information, contact The NMJHS at (505) 348-4471 or nmjhs@jewishnewmexico.org.

## Calendar of Upcoming Events

- **July 22, 2006**, Book Signing Event with Consuelo Luz, Mesilla
- **August 27, 2006**, Santa Fe Downtown History Walk with Marian Silver, 10am
- **September 2 & 3, 2006**, Annual Book Sale, Santa Fe - Wild Oats Community Room
- **September 17, 2006**, Genealogy Workshop, Santa Fe
- **October 5, 2006**, Palace of the Governors at the History Library, Subject: Carol Berge, American Author
- **October 16-20, 2006**, Archives Week
- **November 11 & 12, 2006**, Annual Conference, Hilton Hotel, Albuquerque

## Mission Statement

The mission of the New Mexico Jewish Historical Society is: to promote greater understanding and knowledge of New Mexico's Jewish history. The Society's programs examine the state's Jewish heritage in all its diversity and strive to present this heritage within a broad cultural context. The Society is a secular organization and solicits the membership and participation of all interested people, regardless of religious affiliation.

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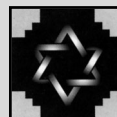
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