



Ernie Blake, Taos Ski Pioneer

by Lance Bell

As many New Mexicans are preparing to wax their skis for the last time and put them aside for summer safekeeping, let's pause to remember a man named Ernie Blake. He is best known as a legend in New Mexico ski history. But his life had many facets: dedicated war veteran, interrogator of Nazis, ski industry pioneer, and most notably, founder and developer of the ski capital of the southern Rockies, Taos Ski Valley.

The path that brought Ernie to New Mexico is an extraordinary story in itself. Born in Germany, reared in Switzerland, he immigrated to the United States in 1938. He first visited New Mexico during the summer of 1941 and returned to live there in 1949.

Ernie Blake was born Ernst Hermann Bloch in 1913 in Frankfurt, Germany. He grew up near St. Moritz, Switzerland, where his mother, a Swiss citizen, introduced him to skiing. Most people ski in Switzerland, where it is mandatory for school-age children to learn. Ernie excelled at the sport; in fact, he excelled in many sports from cricket to soccer. Ernie would have easily qualified for the 1936 German Olympic ice hockey team if it hadn't been for his Jewish heritage.

Ernie was lucky that he had a choice of citizenship; he opted for Swiss citizenship at the age of 18 and then served his mandatory service in the Swiss Air Force. He spent most of his school years in Switzerland until at the age of 19 when he attended the University of



Ernie Blake with his Cessna 170

Frankfurt for one year. Then anti-Semitic pressure in Germany induced him to attend the University of Geneva, where he studied chemistry.

Ernie's father Adolf Bloch was in the felt and fur business, which supplied hat firms worldwide, including Stetson. His mother, Jenny Guggenheim Bloch, was a nurse in World War I, who then left her profession to take care of the Bloch household. Ernie was the third of four children.

The Blochs were an influential family in German society; they worked hard and were recognized as good citizens. Ernie's family were assimilated Jews who did not lead a religious life in Europe or the United States. Notwithstanding, Ernie had a Bar Mitzvah as a result of a pledge his mother made to God when, as a child, he was desperately ill with meningitis.

Ernie's life and destiny would change due to an unexpected encounter at his family home in Frankfurt with the Gestapo. On that fateful day the Gestapo arrived at the Bloch home, recounts Ernie's eldest son Mickey Blake.

The Gestapo came to his parents' home During the interview one agent had an earache. My grandmother was a nurse

. . . and was able to relieve his pain. In gratitude, he told her they needed to leave Frankfurt immediately.

Ernie's father had lived in the United States at the turn of the century and felt that was the best place to move his family. Adolf felt that America was a place where all people could excel and choices were left up to the individual, not to the government. His earlier residence was the catalyst for the move to America. Ernie's family had maintained their large home in Frankfurt while Ernie was schooled in Switzerland; they eventually had to leave it behind when they fled Germany because they never could sell it.

In August 1938 Ernie immigrated along with his family to the United States. His first job was teaching people to ski on the famous Saks Fifth Avenue snow trains that departed Grand Central Station for North Creek, New York, in the Adirondacks. These were sleeper trains with bar cars and a place to rent or purchase skis. On weekdays he ran a ski shop on Madison Avenue.

Ernie left New York for Aspen, Colorado, with an Austrian friend and businessman who wanted to open a ski store in San Francisco and who needed help driving across the country. He had always wanted to see Aspen after reading an article about it while still in Europe. He and his friend stopped along every major ski destination along the way, including Aspen. It was this trip where Ernie found

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Message from President Noel Pugach



Having taught history at the university level for over forty years, I am always pleased when former students stop me and confess that they hated history in high school and college. But now that they have grown older and have experienced life, they appreciate the importance of the subject and remember my injunctions to think historically. Indeed, some go further and express their delight in reading history or watching the History Channel. Perhaps history is “wasted on the young.”

I am also thrilled when members of the New Mexico Jewish Historical Society and guests at our programs tell me how much they enjoy learning about New Mexico Jewish history. They were unaware of the many aspects of the Jewish presence in our state and region and find the discovery fascinating and rewarding. That, of course, is our mission: to mine, expose, and disseminate these riches through means of public lectures, conferences, workshops, and this fine newsletter, *Legacy*.

That point was clearly made by the capacity audience that heard Bettina O’Neil Lyons trace the history of her ancestors, the Steinfelds and especially the Zeckendorfs, in the Southwest on

Sunday, February 22. Former NMJHS president Harold Melnick has written a fine account of the program in his article in this issue.

In our lead story, Lance Bell, another former president of our organization, has provided an intriguing and informative snapshot of Ernie Blake, who created Taos Ski Valley. Blake’s other achievements are also compelling. With an introduction from Lance, I had the distinct pleasure of interviewing Mr. Samuel Adelo, who is a rich source of information and insights on the relationship between Lebanese and Jewish merchants in New Mexico. Some of that material appears in an essay in this issue.

Readers will find other treasures in this issue, so well edited by Dorothy Amsden. Don’t miss Naomi Sandweiss’s timely column on Jews and the Great Depression. Dorothy Amsden contributes this quarter’s Genealogy Corner. I am delighted to welcome Steve Gitomer, who will take over the reins of the Genealogy Committee from Dorothy. See his mini-bio in this issue.

The Society has a number of important activities in the offing. Our annual cleanup of the Montefiore Cemetery in Las Vegas will be held on Sunday, April 26. The annual meeting will take place on May 17 in Santa Fe. Following a

short business meeting, Dr. Henry Tobias, who has published two books on Jews in New Mexico, will speak on his recent *Jews in New Mexico: Another Look*, and sign copies.

Finally, I urge you to be mindful of the ways you can serve your Society. If you know someone who might be interested in joining, contact our office or one of the board members. If you have a special

occasion to mark, consider putting a notice in *Legacy* with a donation to the Society. I am delighted to honor our devoted member Stanley Feinstein in such a fashion on the occasion of his eightieth birthday. If you have documentary material, remember that NMJHS has a special collection at the State Archives and Record Center in Santa Fe.

I look forward to seeing you at upcoming events this year. See page 12 of this issue for dates, times, and places. ✧



NMJHS President Noel Pugach.

New Mexico’s Merchant Jews: Another Perspective

by Noel Pugach



A young boy accompanies his storekeeper father to observe how he transacts business in Las Vegas, New Mexico, with the Territory’s preeminent merchant and wholesaler Charles Iffeld. His father orders some goods, makes a brief effort at bargaining for a lower price, and then seals the matter with a handshake. Perhaps at this visit, the merchant prince pulls out a couple of boxes of cigars with the Charles Iffeld label on them. The two men inquire about each other’s health and that of their families.

Throughout, the conversation between the two is cordial and respectful. Before returning to their home in Pecos, the father takes his son to a few other stores,

perhaps those of Mr. Joseph Taichert or the Rosenwald establishment. This was the father’s method of teaching his son how to talk to the wholesalers and suppliers, how businessmen dealt with one another. Perhaps the son would one day take over the family store. The lessons would be repeated many more times in Las Vegas and later Santa Fe.

This young boy was eighty-five by the time I met him last summer. My first impression of Mr. A. Samuel Adelo was that of a striking and charming individual, who looked and carried himself like a much younger man. Still trim, handsome, distinguished-looking, and well-dressed, he is an articulate, alert, and sophisticated gentleman. Although he later protested that his memory occasionally fails him,

there is no question that his wits and intelligence are intact.

As we met at one of his favorite restaurants just off the Plaza in Santa Fe, it became obvious that he was a frequent patron and well known in the “City Different.” Lance Bell, a former NMJHS president and scion of a leading merchant family, arranged the meeting, suggesting that I interview Sam about northern New Mexico merchant Jews. Sam could not only provide first-hand information but also a non-Jewish perspective.

Over lunch, Sam, Lance, and I quickly connected and soon we were talking about Jews and Lebanese, commerce and

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New Mexico's Merchant Jews *(continued from p. 2)*

culture, the New Mexico past and the present. After an hour, Sam and I left the restaurant and walked to the Fray Angelico Chavez Library to conduct a taped interview.

Abdallah Samuel Adelo was born in Pecos, New Mexico, on February 16, 1923. His father, also known as Sam in the United States, was named in Arabic Assad Bouhabib. He had migrated from a town near Beirut, Lebanon (then part of Syria), in 1913, at the encouragement of a very close uncle, Charles Fidel, a Las Vegas merchant. As was true for Jewish and other settlers, the Lebanese were drawn to New Mexico by the promise of economic opportunity.

These Maronite Catholics had been farmers and laborers in Syria, but almost all turned to trade when they migrated to the United States, Latin America, and even Africa. While many like Sam's paternal grandfather, who had a store west of Wagon Mound, New Mexico, returned to his Syrian village, others decided to remain in the United States. Some of their sons stayed in the family business, but many became successful in the professions and other forms of enterprise. Representative names included Michael, Maloof, Koury, Sahd, Fidel, Hanosh, and Adelo.

Although he started as an itinerant trader, Sam's father Assad Bouhabib owned a general store in Pecos by the time Sam was born. In addition, unlike many of his peers who went back to Lebanon (Syria) to find wives, Assad married Lourdes Barela Silva, a native of Pecos. Like many Lebanese immigrants, Sam's parents impressed the importance of education on their children; Assad had studied at the American University of Beirut and had taught school before coming to the United States. For high school, Sam attended St. Michael's College in Santa Fe and then spent a year at a military school, St. Joseph's Academy in Kansas.

Sam came back to Pecos to help his father in his store, but he was not destined to become a storekeeper. Sam started at the University of Notre Dame, but his studies were interrupted by Army service during World War II. After the war, Sam received his B.A. from Notre Dame, an M.A. in Spanish from Northwestern University, and a law degree from Notre Dame. Except for a brief period as a translator for the State Department, Sam Adelo worked for a number of oil and natural resource

companies as an in-house attorney and public affairs spokesman.

As a result of his work, Sam entered a long period of "exile" from New Mexico, living in various countries and traveling extensively throughout the world. The Gulf Oil Company, which had major petroleum and uranium holdings in New Mexico, finally brought him back to his native state in 1976. When, Sam retired from Gulf after a rich 30-year career in 1984, he knew he had to remain active. In addition to serving on various boards, he works regularly as a certified Spanish translator for the courts in Santa Fe, where he lives with his wife, the former Lueretta Evans.

The Adelos, Sam informed me, had fond memories of the Jewish merchants of New Mexico. They had helped Assad and many of the other Lebanese merchants get started in business. When Assad first came to Las Vegas, Charles Ifeld supplied him with a team of horses and a wagon full of merchandise on his word.

After traveling to the small villages and ranches, the Lebanese merchant earned enough to pay for the merchandise and was given another wagon load on credit. Before too long he was able to settle down in Pecos and open his own store, now known as Adelo's Town & Country. (The store is currently managed by Sam's nephews.) Consequently, Assad Bouhabib Sam Adelo was always gratified to associate with Jews and regarded the Jewish merchants as friends as well as suppliers.

For the rest of his life, Assad, as did the other Lebanese store owners, continued to deal with the Jewish merchants in Las Vegas and later Santa Fe. After all, the Jews were a vital part of the economic life of New Mexico. They were hard-working, fair, dependable and trustworthy; they were respected and admired. While the Lebanese did not know much about their social life, they were considered models because they were good businessmen and they sent their sons and daughters to school, many of them "becoming good professionals." Interestingly, the Lebanese merchants were called "Arabes" by the local Hispanic population, but the same term was often applied to Jews.

When I asked Sam if the old stereotypes of Jewish merchants—of being conniving, cheap, rapacious, tough bargainers were common among the Lebanese, Sam replied that he never heard that kind of

talk. "We didn't have any of . . . this idea smashed in your brain . . . We didn't look upon them as stereotypes." Instead, the Lebanese regarded them as individuals. "That's how we identified them, by name," he added.

Once Sam Adelo got resettled in New Mexico in 1976, he renewed his associations with the Jewish businessmen and made new friendships. "The first place I visited was the Taichert store in Las Vegas with my father," he recalled. By that time, however, there were few of the old German Jewish merchants left; most of them had died and their enterprises disappeared. The Sterns (of Stern & Nahm) were still around, but for some reason Assad never took him into their store.

In adjacent Mora County, Sam did meet some of the Regensbergs, who were still prominent in the area. Jacob Regensberg was a pioneer Jewish merchant who arrived in 1867, but nearly all of his descendants became Catholic. A newcomer to Mora, David Salman, was perhaps the only Jew in the county. Salman had been a shipping magnate in Houston, but had fallen in love with Mora County. He bought the historic La Cueva Ranch and breathed new life into it by raising and selling agricultural products, especially his famous raspberries.

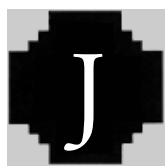
David Salman was also elected to the State House of Representatives and became a leading member of the liberal wing of the Democratic Party, known as the "Mama Lucys" in the 1970s, until a terrible auto accident forced him into retirement. Sam Adelo developed a friendship with Salman and engaged in long conversations with him. Sam considered David Salman the "smartest" person in New Mexico.

But it was in Santa Fe that Sam Adelo forged his closest personal ties with the Jewish merchant community. When he was a high school student, his father took him to the many Jewish-owned stores that dominated the Plaza by the 1930s. In particular, he remembered their shopping at Spitz's, the premier jewelry store in Santa Fe. Whenever his father had to buy jewelry or watches, his father "always thought of Spitz, like 'where else,'" Sam remarked. "And the prices were fair. And if something went wrong, he could go back and get it fixed." Sam ticked off a number of names — the Goodmans, who owned a

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GENEALOGY CORNER: The Home of Jewish Genealogy

by Dorothy Corner Amsden



Jewish genealogy is flourishing online. At the touch of a few keystrokes you can look for ancestors, take a course in beginning genealogy, learn some history, join a

discussion group, and volunteer to enter old information into new databases. JewishGen, an invaluable resource in learning the ropes, rightly calls itself "The Home of Jewish Genealogy," located on the Internet at www.jewishgen.org. This web site, the primary Internet source connecting Jewish genealogy researchers from around the world, is free to all users.

Until relatively recently, seasoned genealogists went about their search by going to libraries, looking through books and microfiche; going to county courthouses and looking through records; going to cemeteries and looking for tombstones; writing myriad letters and sending money orders for legal documents. Now, from the comfort of their own homes or nearby libraries, genealogists can discover online information about their families at breathtaking speeds. Letters that used to take months or years for a response, especially to places overseas, have been replaced by online inquiries and responses.

The JewishGen website has made it easier for those searching for their Jewish ancestors to learn the basics of conducting genealogical research and to meet others online who are researching the same families or ancestral towns in the old country. This article will explore the features of the JewishGen website that can help you on your way to researching your family. [1]

JewishGen offers beginners a tutorial under the somewhat misleading title FAQ, Frequently Asked Questions. (See sidebar for FAQ topics.) For example, why would you need to find naturalization records for an ancestor and how do you go about obtaining them? Click on Naturalization Records, where you will learn that they are often the best source for determining the town of origin of your immigrant ancestors who arrived in the United States after 1906. (Before that date you may be out of luck because naturalization forms did not request

much information that would be helpful to genealogists today.)

Through JewishGen you will find many databases available to you to search at no charge. For example, the JewishGen Family Finder (JGFF) is a compilation of surnames and towns currently being researched by over 80,000 Jewish genealogists worldwide. It contains over 400,000 entries: 100,000 ancestral surnames and 18,000 town names, and is indexed and cross-referenced by both surname and town name. Other databases can be searched by specific country. There is a Holocaust database and a Family Tree of the Jewish People that has data on over four million people, from family trees submitted by 3,000 Jewish genealogists worldwide.

You can also sign up for online discussion groups and special interest groups that are focused on areas relevant to your interests. Discussion groups allow you to share information, ideas, methods, tips, case studies, and resources with other Jewish genealogy researchers. Special interest groups such as Sephardi or Poland or Rabbinic keep you abreast of the latest developments in those areas through online postings.

Each discussion group format allows you to choose the type of subscription you want. There is no charge to participate. You can choose between Usenet newsgroup and Mailing Lists. Mailing lists are preferable because they have moderators who screen all messages for suitability and keep the discussion on track. A beginner can learn a lot just reading other people's postings. When you are ready to make a query you may be pleasantly surprised with helpful responses.

The JewishGen Discussion Group is an online forum that unites Jewish genealogical researchers worldwide as they read and discuss each day's messages. They share information, ideas, methods, tips, techniques, case studies and resources. Discussion groups also exist for specific topics (see sidebar). Yet other online groups are for projects such as DNA testing and Yizkor books. JewishGen hosts ongoing projects to transcribe records for the Jewish communities of Poland and Lithuania, which contain lots of

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JewishGen Frequently Asked Questions

You can click on each topic for a wealth of information.

1. Getting Started
2. Publications
3. JewishGen Family Finder
4. Books
5. Vendors
6. Jewish Genealogical Societies
7. Conferences on Jewish Genealogy
8. National Archives
9. U.S. Vital Records (Births, Marriages & Deaths)
10. Passenger Lists
11. Finding Your Ancestral Town
12. Naturalization Records
13. LDS (Mormon) Family History Centers
14. Other Archives
15. Holocaust Research
16. Family Tree of the Jewish People
17. Jewish Names
18. JewishGen Discussion Group
19. Computers and Genealogy
20. Glossary, Abbreviations

JewishGen Special Interest Groups

Registered participants in the following JewishGen discussion groups exchange information, ideas, methods, experiences, and resources.

Austria-Czech	Poland
Belarus	Romania
Courland	Scandinavia
Early American	Sephardic
French	Southern Africa
Galicia	Ukraine
German	United Kingdom
Hungary	Rabbinic
Latvia	

Genealogy Corner: *The Home of Jewish Genealogy* (continued from p. 4)**Albuquerque-Based Genealogy Groups**

Several genealogy groups meet in Albuquerque at the Special Collections Library. They have frequent lectures and, from time to time, offer classes for beginners. More information is available from their mailing addresses and web sites.

The Special Collections Library, 423 Central Ave. NE (corner of Edith and Central), telephone (505) 848-1376, www.cabq.gov/library/specol.html.

The Albuquerque Genealogical Society, P.O. Box 25512, Albuquerque, 87125, www.abqgen.swnet.com.

The New Mexico Genealogy Society, P.O. Box 27559, Albuquerque, NM 87125, www.nmgs.org.

The Hispanic Genealogical Research Center of New Mexico, P.O. Box 27250, Albuquerque, NM 87125, www.hgrc-nm.org.

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information about all kinds of Eastern Europeans; this is a most worthwhile way to volunteer your time.

Not only can you look for names of Holocaust victims, you can also add new names or add to the information about a posted name. These are official Pages of Testimony that are kept at Yad Vashem in Hebrew and English. For almost half a century, Yad Vashem has been compiling the names of millions of Holocaust victims, but many are still unrecorded. It has recently launched a new campaign to collect and computerize as many of the missing names as possible. JewishGen fully supports this campaign, which in essence is an urgent mission for the Jewish people as a whole, with poignant links to our broken roots.

Also on JewishGen you will find a searchable database of names and other identifying information from Jewish cemeteries and burial records worldwide, from the earliest records to the present. It is a compilation of two linked databases: a database of burial records, and a database of information about each particular cemetery. This is an ongoing project to catalog extant data concerning Jewish cemeteries and burial records worldwide. Photographs of the gravestones (matzevot) are also included in this database.

JewishGen participants can seek commentary or problem-solving advice from others using ViewMate to submit material that is related to Jewish genealogy. They may submit photos for identification of people, clothing, buildings, scenes, objects, and artifacts. You may also submit letters, documents, book pages, and maps for analysis or translation.

For those of you who want additional direction, the JewishGen Learning Center offers online courses for a modest fee to beginning and more experienced genealogists. If you do not have access to local classes (see sidebar on Albuquerque-based resources) to get you started, consider taking one or more of these courses. They are offered on a regular basis and taught by leading genealogists who really know their subject.

JewishGen, Inc. was founded in 1987 by Susan King, who served as managing director for 21 years. In 1996 it was incorporated as a non-profit 501(c)3 corporation. It is staffed primarily by

volunteers. Warren Blatt, who has been actively involved in JewishGen since 1990, is the current managing director. In 2003 JewishGen became an affiliate of the Museum of Jewish Heritage in New York City.

Recently JewishGen teamed up with Ancestry.com (a subscription-based online family history site) for the mutual benefit of both organizations. JewishGen records will remain free and freely accessible. The alliance between the two organizations will allow JewishGen to be technically stable with sufficient bandwidth to serve growing demand, to improve its functionality, and to allow more data to be posted online quickly. Ancestry subscribers will be able to access the public databases on JewishGen but not the private information. Hyperlinks will guide Ancestry subscribers to JewishGen for additional information not available on Ancestry. [2]

While there are no fees for using JewishGen, you will be encouraged to register. This is a good idea so you can participate to the fullest extent. By the time you have tapped their excellent databases and other resources you may want to get involved by volunteering and perhaps making a contribution. My cousin Ann has been productively involved in transcribing hand-written records for the Hungarian Special Interest Group. She says it was really hard at first to decipher the handwriting from microfiche of original birth, marriage, and death registers and learn some of the nomenclature, but now that new knowledge is helping her in her own research.

Many countries of the Former Soviet Union are in the process of organizing their records and making them available to genealogists, sometimes even the original records. They realize that these neglected files could become a valuable source of income to their countries as genealogists make trips to their ancestral towns and seek official records that might tell them something about their families. These records, once inaccessible in dusty archives with defensive archivists, are now gradually becoming more accessible. Archivists are learning to be helpful. One needs to identify a specific archive and contact it directly. Information on JewishGen will help you make the right contacts.

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Genealogy Corner: *The Home of Jewish Genealogy* (continued from p. 4)

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The New Mexico Jewish Historical Society is a beneficiary agency of the Jewish Federation of New Mexico.

Although JewishGen has much to offer, it is not the only important online resource for genealogists. Other highly useful web sites abound. You'll want to exploit the Ellis Island database (www.ellisland.org), Cyndi's List (www.cyndislist.com), One-Step Search Tools by Stephen P. Morse (www.stevemorse.org), Ancestry.com, Consolidated Jewish Surname Index (www.avotaynu.com/csi/databases.htm), LDS Family History Library Catalog (www.familysearch.org), Social Security Death Index at RootsWeb (www.familysearch.org), Yad Vashem (www.yadvashem.org), and Sephardic genealogy (www.sephardim.com). These are some of the other important web sites to explore. History is at your fingertips.

Mind you, not everything can be found in a computer database. Countless records have yet to be digitized for computer searching. Many records no longer exist, although an amazing number survived World War II and came to light after the Soviet Union collapsed. Some records are waiting for funding and volunteers to transcribe them into digital form. Vital records such as birth, marriage, and death certificates are normally not available online because of privacy considerations. However, you should be able to order them online

and pay for them online instead of sending a letter with a request form, a check or credit card number, and a stamped self-addressed envelope. Times are changing. ✨

References

1. A series of articles on getting started in Jewish genealogy appeared in previous issues of *Legacy*. You can view them online at the NMJHS web site. In particular, you may wish to read the following articles. "Charting Your Course in Jewish Genealogy" (September 2005), "Records – The Underpinnings of Genealogy" (December 2005), "Finding Your Immigrant Ancestor in the Ellis Island Database" (March 2006), "Formulating Your Strategy" (June 2006), "Getting the Most out of Census Records" (Part I, December 2006; Part II, March 2007).

2. David G. Marwell, "About the JewishGen and Ancestry.com Alliance," *Avotaynu*, Volume XXIV, Number 2, Summer 2008.

Dorothy Amsden is stepping down after three years as Genealogy Chair, passing the torch to Steve Gitomer of Santa Fe, who will be offering new programs and workshops as well as articles of general interest for Legacy readers.

Steve Gitomer, Incoming Genealogy Chair

After being an inactive member of NMJHS for several years, Steve Gitomer is excited to become chair of the Genealogy Committee. Steve's career spanned over 35 years in academia at the University of Pennsylvania and at the Los Alamos National Laboratory. Following his retirement in 2005, he continued pursuing his interests in nuclear nonproliferation and diplomacy by working part-time at his home in Santa Fe for the U.S. Civilian Research and Development Foundation, which is located in Washington, D.C. Steve has lectured and written about genealogy subjects for over 25 years. His genealogical travels throughout the world with his wife Joyce are likely to be recounted in an article or two in future issues of *Legacy*.



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.

Zeckendorf Lecture

by Harold Melnick

Mention the name “Zeckendorf” to anyone familiar with New York and they’ll likely say, “Oh, yes, the well-known real estate developer.” Fewer people are likely to say, “Do you mean the merchant family from New Mexico and Arizona?” Yet that is where the Zeckendorfs lived and worked when they first arrived from Germany.

A descendant of the Zeckendorf and Steinfeld families, Tucson resident Bettina O’Neil Lyons described the saga and journey of the Zeckendorf family from Germany to New Mexico to Arizona to New York in an illustrated talk in Santa Fe on February 22. Ms. Lyons chose to emphasize the Zeckendorfs in her lecture because they played a significant role in mid-nineteenth century New Mexico. Her stories and pictures are part of her new book *Zeckendorfs and Steinfelds: Merchant Princes of the American Southwest*, published by the Arizona Historical Society in 2008.

The family tree contains several names important to New Mexico history. In addition to Zeckendorf and Steinfeld there are Lilienfeld and Spiegelberg. Abraham



Bettina O'Neil Lyons

Zeckendorf was the author’s great-grandfather. When Aron Zeckendorf came to New Mexico from Germany, he first worked for the Spiegelberg brothers. Over time, the Spiegelbergs, Zeckendorfs and Staabs opened stores in New Mexico.

Seeing less competition and greater opportunities further west, the Zeckerndorfs and the Steinfelds established enterprises in Arizona. As they prospered, they built a new store, L. Zeckendorf & Co. They even issued their own currency in lieu of U.S. currency. Albert Steinfeld was managing partner in Arizona; Louis Zeckendorf became senior partner and buyer, residing in New York. Succeeding generations of Zeckendorfs became involved in real estate development in New York, but the Zeckendorfs have continued their relationship with New Mexico and Arizona.

A capacity and appreciative audience filled the New Mexico Film Museum (formerly the Jean Cocteau theater) to learn about the adventures of these dynamic and imaginative families. The program was co-sponsored by the New Mexico Jewish Historical Society and the Museum of New Mexico (the Palace of the Governors). Bettina’s relatives Bill and Nancy Zeckendorf of Santa Fe hosted a reception following her presentation. ✧

New Mexico’s Merchant Jews (continued from p. 3)

dry goods store, the Bells, Harold and Julius Gans, and Gus Kahn; they sold him goods on credit and even shipped his orders to Northwestern University.

By the time Sam returned to live in Santa Fe permanently, he noted that the Plaza, besieged by tourists, was no longer the place he had known. He waxed nostalgic about the Santa Fe of his youth, where one could always meet friends and get the “latest gossip,” window shop and purchase an item from a trusted storekeeper, drop in at the pool hall, or grab a dinner at the “Greek-owned restaurants.”

Many of the Jewish-owned shops, such as the Gans store, had closed or would soon go out of business. But Kahn’s Shoe Store, now managed by Walter Kahn, was still operating and Sam often stepped in just for the fun of talking to him. He pointed out that the Kahns had often employed Lebanese women as clerks in their store. Another close friend was Sam Ballin, the owner of the La Fonda Hotel, who called him his “tocayo,” a term of endearment in Spanish. Sam Ballin also recommended

Adelo for a seat on the Board of the Georgia O’Keeffe Museum.

These friendships and relationships were mainly at the public – not at the private – level. In answer to my question, the two groups did not socialize in their respective homes. That was also true of his relationship with the Bells. They were good friends, “compadres,” but they did not socialize in the private sphere, as he did with the Maloofs, Michaels, and Fidels. Thus, certain boundary lines continued to prevail. Santa Fe’s growing ethnic diversity and intermarriage may be creating new dynamics especially among the young. But for Sam and his generation certain ethnic boundaries continued to prevail.

My conversation with Sam Adelo therefore proved to be very instructive and valuable. His stories and memories confirmed much information we have about the role, daily activities, and significance of the Jewish mercantile community in northern New Mexico. At the same time, Sam Adelo added a more human dimension and a sense of reality to these men and their activities. I also learned much about the Lebanese merchants and their importance to the region’s commerce. These hard-working men and their relationship to Jewish businessmen are an integral part of the mosaic of the history of the region.



Sam Adelo

President Noel Pugach of the New Mexico Jewish Historical Society lives in Albuquerque where he is Professor Emeritus of History at the University of New Mexico. ✧

Ernie Blake, Taos Ski Pioneer *(continued from p. 1)*

out that the Rocky Mountains were more fantastic than he ever imagined.

On New Year's Day 1941 Ernie met his future bride Rhoda Limburg, daughter of a New York Supreme Court Justice. Their love blossomed, and it was Rhoda who got Ernie to New Mexico during the summer of 1941 where Rhoda was taking independent art classes. She invited Ernie to join her in Santa Fe. They rode horseback together, traveled around to see the scenery, went to Taos Pueblo, and took many pictures. It was this trip that would lead him to become a true pioneering ski mogul.

Rhoda and Ernie both received U.S. citizenship on June 27, 1943. Rhoda was a Jewish World War I orphan from England, adopted by the Limburg family, who were also of the Jewish faith. Ernie and Rhoda were married at the Limburg home in New York City on February 26, 1942, and they spent their honeymoon in Sun Valley, Idaho.

Ernie and Rhoda moved to Colorado, where Ernie volunteered, but was not accepted, for the 10th Mountain Division. (This was a special unit of the U.S. Army, known as one of the most unique combat forces in American military history.) It was a great disappointment for Ernie. Because of his German background the Army thought he might be a spy. That is why it took him an additional year before the Army accepted Ernie as an intelligence officer. Subsequently he became a German language instructor.

Besides speaking English and German, Ernie was also fluent in French and Italian. He was soon commissioned as an officer without having to attend Officer Candidate School. It was during this time that the Army had him change his name from Bloch to Blake because he was going to be assigned to interrogate German officers. The Army had reason to believe that German war prisoners would not talk to someone with a Jewish surname.

Second Lieutenant Ernie Blake received orders to fly to Europe on the day of the Normandy invasion. He became an interpreter attached to General Patton's headquarters and was part of the contingent that encountered the first Nazi concentration camp during Patton's advance across Germany in 1945. "My

father was always haunted by that experience," recalls his son Mickey Blake.

I recall on one occasion something I said touched a nerve about these memories; I never saw that look on his face or heard that tremor in his voice any other time. He also told me it was the only time he saw General Patton absolutely ashen and so upset that he was unable to speak.

Mickey said that it was from this point on that Ernie felt compassionate about contributing towards Jewish relief for Israel and for Jews worldwide. He was one of the largest and most consistent contributors to the United Jewish Appeal campaign in New Mexico.



Ernie Blake in World War II uniform.

Ernie helped interrogate about 200 German prisoners during and after the war. Most of them claimed they had been forced into becoming Nazis. Most notably he interviewed some of Hitler's henchmen, Hermann Goering, Wilhelm Keitel and Albert Speer, which he found captivating. The following quotes about World War II come from *Ski Pioneers* by Rick Richards. [1]

Ernie interrogated Speer, a relatively young man of 38, in a British castle. "He was very well informed and gave us a lot of detailed information," reported Ernie. "He knew the production schedules of each and every item. We never discussed any philosophical questions about the atrocities." Another prisoner, General Wilhelm Keitel, told in detail about the shooting and gassing of the Jews during the Polish campaign. Goering "admitted the errors he had made, how he had let down Hitler by getting involved in collecting paintings, sculpture and jewelry, generally not doing his job and running the Air Force effectively."

The war was a major experience in Ernie's life. His experiences changed him, and he became much more outgoing. In one respect it set him up for his next monumental achievement in the building of Taos Ski Valley.

Ernie had first heard about New Mexico from Salomon Spiegelberg, a relative who had returned to Germany. During a visit to Ernie's grandmother in her salon, he told Ernie about life in New Mexico, "Red Indians," and the Wild West.

Ernie and Rhoda moved to Santa Fe in 1949, where Ernie took a position as general manager of the Santa Fe Ski Basin. This position required running both the Santa Fe ski area and Greenwood Springs ski basin in Colorado simultaneously. It was in Santa Fe where Ernie installed the first detachable chair lift in 1949.

Years earlier Ernie had learned to fly a single-engine plane. This led him to purchase his own Cessna 170 in 1953 so he could fly between the two ski areas. During his air ventures, he began a search for a suitable mountain where he could develop his own ski park. From the air he spotted the mining town of Twining, 19 miles northeast of Taos. Eventually this little mining town would become the Taos Ski Valley, which opened its mountain to skiers in 1955.

Ernie realized that the idea of a ski area in Twining was completely crazy. Yet he was convinced he would succeed.

The fact that Twining was so hard to reach was an asset to me because it made it a destination resort, not a weekend or in-and-out resort, which I didn't want it to be.

Taos Ski Valley, north of Wheeler Peak (at 13,160 feet, the highest in New Mexico), reminded Ernie of Switzerland.

Some of the ski runs in the Taos Ski Valley have names that relate to history. Four runs, Stauffenberg, Oster, Tresckow, and Fabian refer to the courageous German officers who attempted to assassinate Hitler in July 1944. Another run, Niños Héroes, is named for the Mexican cadets who fought against the Americans' attack

(continued on p. 9)

Ernie Blake, Taos Ski Pioneer *(continued from p. 8)*

on the Castle of Chapultepec during the Mexican War. Ernie was fascinated with martyrs.

Then there is Al's Run, which is known to everyone who has ever been to Taos Ski Valley. It is the first run that everyone looks up to upon arriving at the basin and either says, "yes, Taos land of the steeps" or "I am out of here, this is way too difficult." Ernie named this run after Dr. Al Rosen who moved to Taos in 1941 and was the first doctor in the county. He was a real character who skied with his oxygen tank strapped to his back due to a heart condition. Dr. Rosen was a supporter of Taos Ski Valley; he knew it was special and wanted to see it grow.

Bob Nordhaus, another ski industry pioneer who built the Sandia Tram and developed the Sandia Peak ski area, was a good friend of Ernie's. Bob said: "Ernie picked an outstanding location for a ski area – good snow and very difficult terrain, and he developed it very well." Later Ernie realized that the mountain was too steep for the average person. According to Nordhaus, "Al's Run with the moguls is pretty tough." Ernie had to provide some easier runs, so he built Kachina Basin. "Then all of those hot-shot skiers could claim they skied Taos."

"When I saw Taos Ski Valley for the first time", recounts part time New Mexico resident and NMJHS member, Felix Warburg,

I was amazed at the steepness of the slopes, which had always been Ernie's trademark. He took me on all the steepest slopes, which were scary but manageable at my age, which would have been around 38 at the time. Ernie was 49. I got to know his wife and children and many of the town characters who were part of this amazing isolated village. Although we never talked about it, we had a lot in common besides a love of skiing. We both spoke French and German and were one of the Ritchie Boys, [2] both of us were born in Europe. Looking back, it was amazing that our paths had never crossed earlier and more often.

Ernie felt that the ski school was an integral part of the experience while on the Taos Mountain. Because the terrain was so difficult it was always his goal to make everyone who skied at Taos a better skier than when they arrived. That tradition continues today.

In 1987 Ernie was inducted into U.S. National Ski and Snowboard Hall of Fame. This esteemed group represents the highest level of national achievement in America, featuring prominent athletes and snow sport builders whose accomplishments showcase American skiing.

Ernie died of pneumonia at the age of 75 on January 14, 1989. At his funeral on January 21 he received an honorary membership into the 10th Mountain Division Southwest Chapter. In his honor the lifts at Taos stopped for an hour and the Air National Guard flew over Taos Ski Valley. Ernie's ashes were scattered on his mountain. One could say he never did leave Taos. His legacy continues. Each year skiers make the journey to what many would say is the best skiing resort in the United States. Taos Ski Valley continues to flourish under the management of Ernie's family.

Acknowledgments

The author is indebted to Ernie's oldest son Mickey Blake and Ernie's widow Rhoda for providing many of the historical facts and personal details used in this article.

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Santa Fe native Lance Bell has skied at Santa Fe and Taos since he was a child. A history buff who loves New Mexico history, Lance is past president of the New Mexico Jewish Historical Society and a current board member. Like his father, who owned Bell Stores Inc. in downtown Santa Fe, Lance grew up with the Plaza at his footsteps. Today he helps educate medical professionals about anti-angiogenic cancer therapy as a representative of Genentech USA's commercial division. He is most proud of his wife Julia and 7-year old daughter Jacqueline. ☆

The NMJHS Board extends its deepest sympathy to the Terr family for the loss of Dana Terr Konno, a long-time member of the Society.

Noel Pugach congratulates Stanley Feinstein on his 80th birthday.

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**PEEK INTO THE PAST:
Jews and The Great Depression**

by Naomi Sandweiss



More than a few people have compared today's economic climate with that of the 1930s. Whether or not the comparison is valid, it is nearly 80 years since the

United States plunged into the dark and uncertain days of the Great Depression. How did American Jews fare during this time? What strengths and vulnerabilities existed within the community and what unique challenges faced American Jews?

When the Depression began, American Jewry had absorbed over two million (primarily impoverished) immigrants over a 40-year period, primarily in large East and West Coast cities. Immigrant aid societies and kinship networks provided financial, employment, and housing assistance to the new Americans in addition to helping them learn English. By 1929, many American-born children of immigrants were beginning their climb into the middle class, pursuing business opportunities and professional careers.

After the 1929 crash and subsequent financial crisis, Jewish citizens, poor and anxious about money, turned to the same aid services that had sustained Jewish immigrants a generation before. Needy Jewish citizens in San Francisco, for example, were sheltered, provided loans, and received subsidized medical care from Jewish welfare groups. [1] Eventually, the demand for resources exceeded what was available. During the first nine months of 1931, Jewish welfare agencies experienced a 42.8% increase in relief requests. Only three years later, 70 - 90% of dependent Jewish families nationwide had been transitioned to public relief rolls [2] despite the fact that some Jewish social workers were reluctant to transfer cases out of concern that the public agencies were unable to accommodate Orthodox Jewish dietary preferences. [3]

Closer to home, New Mexico Jewish citizens weathered the Depression somewhat differently than Jews in other regions. There is no doubt that individuals and institutions felt the strain of the struggling economy. Henry Tobias notes that Albuquerque's Congregation Albert was forced to sell their parsonage in 1932

due to arrears in dues and resignations of congregants. However, at only 0.27% of the population in 1930, the New Mexico Jewish community did not have many recent immigrants.

Since the 1870s, Jewish New Mexicans founded and operated New Mexico institutions —businesses and banks, galleries and cultural societies – in conjunction with their Anglo, Hispanic, and Native American neighbors. The Great Depression offered a test of their civic and business leadership. In 1930, New Mexico elected Arthur Seligman, a New Mexican of Jewish descent, as governor. Seligman initiated New Mexico's first unemployment relief program, [4] responding to the State's dismal poverty. In Lynn Perrigo's history of Las Vegas, New Mexico, one family's circumstances are described by a case worker:

The family are badly in need of clothing and especially underclothing. Their food will not last until the next regular order. They have no debts, no income, no insurance and no compensation. No livestock. No garden. [5]

Legend has it that New Mexico Jewish merchant Louis Ilfeld helped avert an Albuquerque bank crisis. Sophia Trunch writes,

During the Great Depression, Jack Reynolds, who was president of the First National Bank in Albuquerque, was faced with overwhelming withdrawals by his depositors. Reynolds asked Louis (Ilfeld) for help and, true to form, Louis walked into the bank past the queues of people with thousands of dollars in his hand, which he promptly deposited in the bank. This act lessened the customers' fears and avoided a financial disaster at the First National Bank. [6]

While employment prospects were limited nationwide, (25% of Americans were unemployed in 1932 [7]), Jewish Americans faced the additional burden of quotas and other racial barriers. The editors of the 1932 - 1933 *American Jewish Yearbook* reported that

A subject which has frequently come up was the widespread practice on the part of employers . . . to refuse employment to Jews without regard to their fitness or ability. Owing no doubt to the intensified struggle for existence of the past several years, this practice has

(continued on p. 11)

Peek Into the Past (continued from p. 10)

come to affect a far greater number of Jewish employment seekers, with the result that it has now come to be recognized as . . . a problem of tremendous seriousness. [8]

The Jewish Vocational Service Network and other job services for Jewish applicants were established during this time. When possible, many younger Jews were advised to stay in school rather than face the uncertain job market. [9]

Unfortunately, prejudice against Jews extended beyond the workplace. Citizens were influenced by anti-Semitic messages, especially those of Father Coughlin, a Michigan Roman Catholic Priest. In 1939, a Roper public opinion poll revealed that only 39% of Americans felt that Jews should be treated like other people. [10] The online exhibit, *Uneasy Years: Michigan Jewry During Depression and War*, illustrates Father Coughlin's hateful propaganda including a "Buy Gentile" campaign. [11]

Meanwhile, most American Jews (85%) supported Roosevelt and his New Deal efforts. [12] Among the beneficiaries of Roosevelt's social programs was Arthur Rothstein (1915 - 1985), a Jewish-American photographer, who was hired by the Farm Security Administration to document the dust bowl and other elements of Depression life. Rothstein traveled through New Mexico, from Taos to Roswell, and in between. His photographs, like those of fellow Farm Security Photographer Dorothea Lange, are iconic and can be viewed many places, including online at the Library of Congress. [13]

By most accounts, Jewish families faced economic hardships during the Depression the way most Americans did — by subsisting on less, relying on all members of the family, and accepting any kind of work they could find. Families advertised for boarders, sent children to work selling newspapers or shining shoes, and took in piecework. One woman who experienced the Depression, Ruth, went to work in a factory in Manhattan at the age of 16 to help her family. She recalls her family's experiences in an online interview.

How does a man feel when he's got four children to support, and no job, and he knows he's got to provide for these children? So he would break a scab line to get a day's work. There were no unions. And to leave two dollars for my mother. I do remember there was a butcher

store on the corner of Livonia Avenue . . . If they were left over with chickens on a Friday afternoon, they were closed on the Sabbath. So you had to get rid of the chicken. So my mother would wait until three o'clock in the afternoon on a Friday, and buy a chicken for twenty-five cents. [14]

Ultimately, historians agree that the Depression delayed but did not alter Jewish educational and economic trends. [15] In the aftermath of WWII, Jewish investment in human capital, along with greater acceptance of Jewish citizens and Jewish migration throughout the nation, led to the robust participation of Jewish citizens in all aspects of U.S. economic, social, and political life.

NMJHS is planning a fall conference for mid-October 2009 on the theme of the Great Depression. Look for details in the June issue of *Legacy*.

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Calendar of NMJHS Upcoming Events

Check online calendar of Upcoming Events for more details at www.nmjewishhistory.org.

Sunday, April 26, 10 a.m., Montefiore Cemetery cleanup in Las Vegas.

Sunday, May 3, 1 p.m., genealogy workshop at Taos Jewish Center, 1335 Gusdorf Road, Suite R, Taos. For more information, contact TJC at 575-758-8615 or email tjc@newmwx.com

May 17, 2 p.m., Congregation Beit Tikva, 2230 Old Pecos Train, Santa Fe, NMJHS Annual Meeting. Henry Tobias, keynote speaker.

July, [date to be announced] in Santa Fe, lecture by professor Seth D. Kunin, anthropologist at the University of Durham (UK), about his book, *Juggling Identities: Identity and Authenticity Among Crypto-Jews*, to be published in June 2009 by Columbia University Press.

October, [date and location to be announced] NMJHS Annual Fall Conference, "New Mexico Jews and the Great Depression."

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