

**Joint Meeting of the
Texas Jewish Historical Society
New Mexico Jewish Historical Society**

Banquet
Temple Mount Sinai
October 25, 2008



Havdalah
Rabbi Larry Bach, Temple Mount Sinai

Dinner

Presentations

Crypto Jews of the Southwest: How and Why They Are Coming Back to Judaism
Rabbi Stephen Leon, Congregation B'nai Zion

Rabbi Stephen A. Leon was born in Brooklyn, New York. He graduated from Columbia University and the Jewish Theological Seminary of America. He received his ordination from the Academy for Jewish Religion. Rabbi Leon was the dean of the Academy for Jewish Religion from 1974 through 1986. He also was an instructor in Homiletics, Practical Rabbinics, and Cantillations. At the same time, Rabbi Leon served as the rabbi of Elmwood Park Jewish Center in Elmwood Park, New Jersey from 1971 through 1986. Rabbi Leon also served as the president of the Bergen County Board of Rabbis for a two-year term and was also on the Board of Directors of the Bergen County Jewish Federation. Rabbi Leon has been the spiritual leader of Congregation B'nai Zion in El Paso, Texas since 1986. In El Paso, Rabbi Leon serves on the board of the bioethics committee of Providence Hospital, of El Paso Hospice, of the Jewish Federation, and the Holocaust Museum. Rabbi Leon has been an instructor in the religious studies department of the University of Texas at El Paso for the past several years, and he has appeared on National Public Radio and has made numerous appearances on local television programs. Rabbi Leon has received awards from Israel Bonds, the Israel government Tourist Office, Hadassah, and the Bergen County Board of Rabbis, United Synagogue Youth, and others. In 1999 Rabbi Leon received a grant from the El Paso Community Foundation and visited many places in Europe where Crypto-Jews have lived, including Belmont, Portugal, where 300 Crypto-Jews formally returned to Judaism. Rabbi Leon has three daughters and lives with his wife Sharon in El Paso, Texas.

The Sephardic Legacy in the Caribbean: A History of Crypto-Jewry in Cuba, Santo Domingo, and Jamaica

Stanley Hordes, University of New Mexico

Dr. Stanley M. Hordes, Adjunct Research Professor at the Latin American and Iberian Institute of the University of New Mexico, received his B.A. in History from the University of Maryland in 1971, his M.A. in Latin American History from the University of New Mexico in 1973, and his Ph.D. from Tulane University in 1980. His doctoral dissertation, "The Crypto-Jewish Community of New Spain, 1620-1649: A Collective Biography," was based on research conducted in the archives of Mexico and Spain, supported by a Fulbright dissertation fellowship.

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His study on the secret Jews of Mexico revealed a considerable amount of information about the religious customs and career patterns of the descendants of those Spanish Jews who were forced to convert to Catholicism in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Many of these conversos continued to practice their old ancestral faith in secrecy, and moved to the Spanish colonies in the New World in order to avoid detection by the Inquisition.

When Dr. Hordes assumed the position of New Mexico State Historian in 1981, he began to encounter Catholic and Protestant Hispanic New Mexicans whose families observed customs suggestive of a Jewish background, such as maintaining dietary laws, celebrating the Sabbath on Saturday instead of Sunday, performing ritual male circumcision, etc. Interviews with several dozen informants revealed that while many of these people engage in these practices without knowing why, others, indeed, express an awareness of a Jewish heritage, and regard themselves as secret Jews. Preliminary documentary evidence, conducted in the archives of New Mexico, Mexico, Spain and Portugal, indicate that some of these individuals descend from secret Jews who had been persecuted by the Inquisition in Mexico and Spain.

Dr. Hordes's book, *To the End of the Earth: A History of the Crypto-Jews of New Mexico*, was published by Columbia University Press in 2005 with a generous grant from the estate of Eva Feld. In 2006 the book was awarded the "Gaspar Pérez de Villagrà Prize" by the Historical Society of New Mexico for outstanding historical publication of the year. In 2007, the book won the Southwest Book Award, given by the Border Regional Library Association.