

## In Memory of Rabbi Leonard A. Helman

by Dorothy Amsden and Lance Bell

**L**eonard Helman was larger than life. He was fondly known as Santa Fe's "town rabbi" or the "rabbi different".

Rabbi Helman served longer than any other rabbi in our state's history. The Cathedral Basilica of St. Francis of Assisi in Santa Fe, where his funeral service was held on June 10, was the only place in town that had sufficient room for all those who wanted to pay their last respects to him.

A traditional Reform Jewish service was performed to a capacity audience at the Cathedral by Rabbi Martin Levy and Cantor Michael Linder followed by a reception at La Fonda Hotel just across the street. Many of Santa Fe's top musicians offered their respects to Rabbi Helman with a performance of a song or dance to honor his memory. Notably, Antonio Mendoza and Doug Montgomery played at the reception.

The lifetime bachelor, born in Hartford, Connecticut, in 1926, became a rabbi, attorney, master contract

bridge player, chess aficionado, and soft-shoe dancer replete with straw hat and cane. He moved to Santa Fe in 1974 to practice law full time and serve as part-time rabbi of Temple Beth Shalom. Later he helped found Congregation Beit Tikva and served as its founding rabbi.

Helman worked 60- to 80-hour weeks. He served as an attorney for the New Mexico Public Service Commission and then as an administrative law judge from 1974 until 1987. He served as chaplain for the New Mexico Legislature from 1995 to 2010. To recognize the unique abilities of this remarkable man, Governor Bill Richardson proclaimed February 3 as "Rabbi Leonard A. Helman Day." Helman was a recipient of the prestigious "Santa

Fe Living Treasure" award and is included in Alice Bullock's book *Living Legends of the Santa Fe Country*.



*Rabbi Leonard Helman*

Rabbi Helman was most proud of the many successful marriages and family events he performed throughout his rabbinical career. In his role as State Chaplain of the New Mexico legislature, which he took very seriously, he forged many important religious friendships.

He made a point of asking pastors, priests, imams and rabbis throughout the state to help provide the opening prayer at the New Mexico State capitol.

Rabbi Helman was one of the founding members of the New Mexico Jewish Historical Society and 2005 recipient of the Hurst Award. ☆

## Nice Jewish Cowboys and Cowgirls

**T**he New Mexico Jewish Historical Society, in conjunction with the New Mexico History Museum and Temple

Beth Shalom in Santa Fe, will present a program entitled "Nice Jewish Cowboys and Cowgirls." The event will take place on October 27 in the auditorium of the New Mexico History Museum in Santa Fe at 2 p.m. It was prompted by the current special exhibit, "Cowboys Real and Imagined," showing at

the New Mexico Historical Museum.

Professor Emeritus Noel Pugach will introduce the topic of the largely unknown presence of Jews in New Mexico ranching and sheep raising and provide historical context. These Jewish ranching families played a prominent role in the second half of the 1800s, which they continue to play in New Mexico's rich and diverse economic and social landscape. Meredith Davison, a curator at the Museum, will

then show slides from the Wurmser photo collection.

The central focus of the program will be a panel of representatives of Jewish families who have been actively engaged in ranching in New Mexico. They will explain how they got involved in this enterprise and provide some fascinating stories. The audience will then have an opportunity to engage the speakers and share experiences. ☆