

Jewish Historical Society Mourns the Passing of Native New Mexican Walter Kahn

by Lance Bell



We mourn the loss of Walter "Wally" Kahn, a tower of strength to many in Santa Fe and a pillar to Jewish History in New Mexico. On July 4, 2005, after a brief illness, Walter Kahn, 87, beloved husband, father, grandfather, brother, uncle and friend to us all, passed away. Walter, born in Gallup, represented one of the New Mexican Jewish merchant pioneer families. Walter's passing is a personal loss to me and to the New Mexico Jewish Historical Society family.

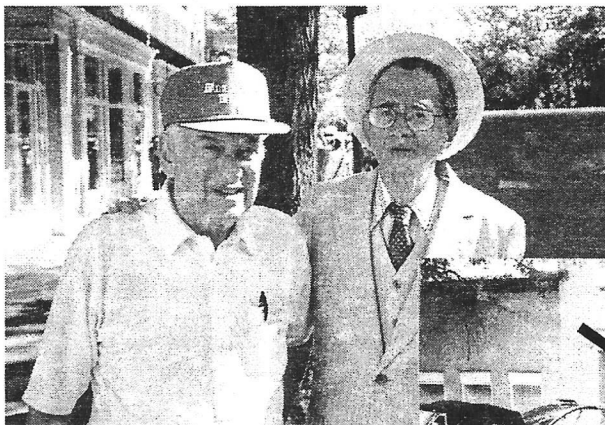
I knew Walter for 39 years, having met him at my bris at St. Vincent's Hospital. I learned early on from Walter that friendships do not have to arise only from one's contemporaries. I had more in common with Walter than I did with most friends from my own generation. We were all blessed that Walter always had a story to tell, that we could really learn something from his words and that he was a "go-to person" to ask any type of question about New Mexico, Jewish history, downtown Santa Fe and about people in general.

I fondly write about Walter because he was a personal link to my family history. Walter knew many members of my family who passed away long before I came on the scene. Since there were some unanswered questions about my family and since my father passed away when I was 15, Walter shared many wonderful personal sto-

ries about them that I treasure today. I always asked and he always had an answer. Now many of those stories are priceless to me. The lesson learned here is: ask your family and friends questions while they are still around and still enjoy talking about the past. During September of

Kahn's Shoe Store for great service, dependability and quality products. From Red Goose to Florsheim, they had the greatest brands and shoed many generations of Santa Fe locals. The employees at Kahn's knew that if Walter could not remember a customer's name, he never forgot a customer's shoe size.

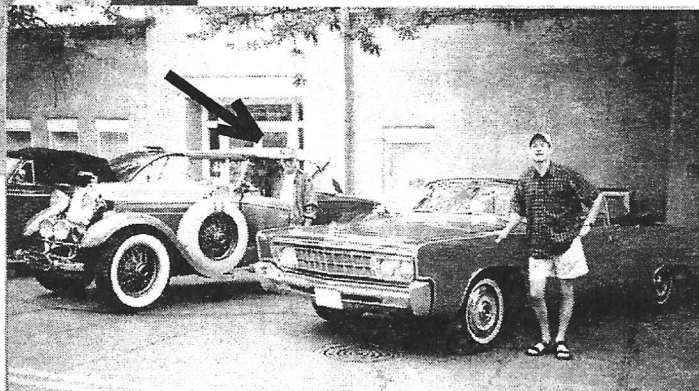
Speaking of the Kahn family history, as pioneer Jewish merchants, they were the finest example of the great reputation that European Jewish immigrants brought to New Mexico starting in the mid-1800's. In 1906, Walter's uncle, Sig, arranged for his brother Gus to arrive from Germany to help in the family business, which started



Rabbi Leonard Helman and Walter Kahn.

2001, Walter volunteered his time for the New Mexico Jewish Historical Society to lead a group, along with his friend Mayor Larry Delgado, on a walking tour of downtown Santa Fe. Those who attended were able to learn first-hand from Walter's stories, about how Santa Fe changed throughout the generations. If anyone is interested in viewing this video, please let us know; copies are still available for purchase.

Santa Feans knew shoes and Kahn's was synonymous with shoes. They knew they could trust



Walter Kahn and Lance Bell with "George" at the Santa Fe Car Show.

in Gallup, NM, in 1911. Walter's parents were married in 1914 and lived in Gallup until 1932. After liquidating the Gallup store, they relocated to Albuquerque. After several years in Albuquerque, while Walter was still a young man, his family moved to Santa Fe. Walter became a lifelong resident of this city, which he loved and

Continued on p. 4

whose history he knew in great detail.

In 1935, with \$3,200 and the help of the Pick family, Gus Kahn started his shoe business at 127 W. San Francisco Street. In 1946, Walter married the love of his life, Lorraine Kempenick, the daughter of Alfred and Mabel Kempenick, another prominent New Mexico merchant family. The Kempenicks had a curio store near the Plaza called "Kemps". In the late 1960's, Kahn's Shoes moved to its final and prominent Plaza location at 80 E. San Francisco Street, in what is known as the Gans Building, which the Kahns purchased in 1979 from Harold Gans.

Walter was a well respected businessman,

known for his integrity and his desire to serve. He was highly regarded and admired by his loyal clientele and his valued employees.

Walter was a true patriot and served with distinction in the military during both World War II and the Korean War. He was founder and president of Temple Beth Shalom and was a founding and active member of Congregation Beit Tikva. Walter was a founding member of the New Mexico Jewish Historical Society and was a recipient of the Dr. Allan Hurst Award for distinguished leadership to the New Mexico community.

He was past-president of the New Mexico Chapter of the Classic Car Club of America

and his 1928 Green Lincoln Roadster, complete with rumble seat (it was affectionately named "George" after a prior owner), was an important and significant part of Walter's life. Walter and "George" participated in many parades and car shows and recently "George" was restored to a grandeur that Walter was really proud of.

Walter's journey touched all of our lives. Walter, we will miss you; we will always keep you in our thoughts, whether at car shows, at Lion's Club meetings, putting up USA flags, at Synagogue services or when we are on the Plaza. We will all have a little smile, knowing you would be happy just knowing that the activities you loved so much are still enjoyed by us all.