



Statehood Conference a Success

Over 100 attendees gathered in Santa Fe on November 4 for the 25th NMJHS Fall conference.

The conference, entitled Statehood:

New Mexico Jewry before and after 1912, was an official event of the New Mexico Centennial. Participants were welcomed by Dorothy Corner Amsden, NMJHS President, and treated to a fascinating keynote address by historian and University of New Mexico faculty member Richard Melzer, who spoke on "Herding Millions of Sheep: Solomon Luna and the Writing of the New Mexico State Constitution, 1910." Melzer, who is the author of 16 books and over 100 articles and chapters about New Mexico history, introduced the issues and individuals behind the passage of the New Mexico state constitution, laying the groundwork for the rest of the conference proceedings.

Panelists Susan Warburg, a great-granddaughter of Willi and Flora Spiegelberg,

early Santa Fe pioneers, and Ramona Caplan, an American West historian, shared information on Jewish activities in New Mexico before 1912. Ms. Warburg

After lunch, panelist and UNM Professor Emeritus Henry Tobias presented the life of Dr. Randolph Seligman, a decorated veteran of World War II and obstetrician who delivered over 10,000 babies in Bernalillo and Albuquerque over the course of his career. Diane Schaller, President of Historic Albuquerque, Inc., presented the last talk about her research on the Maisel family of Albuquerque.

Conference activities included display of the Pioneer Panels, a silent auction, and a book and art sale.

Preceding the Sunday conference, a walking tour of Jewish Santa Fe took place on Saturday.

The sites visited included the Spitz clock, the former store of a Jewish merchant on the south side of the Plaza, the tetragrammaton above the entrance to the Cathedral Basilica of St. Francis, and the former Spiegelberg home on East Palace Avenue, which now serves as an art gallery. Conference photos appear on page 6 of this issue. ✧



Members of the Bibo-Seligman family at the fall conference.

described the forces that led early Jewish immigrants to leave Europe and seek adventure and opportunity in the American Southwest. Ramona Caplan introduced Nathan and Artie Bibo and shared their visions and activism on behalf of Native Americans, particularly in relation to Laguna Pueblo. UNM Professor Emeritus Noel Pugach reintroduced attendees to the pioneer panels and relayed the stories of several early Jewish pioneers featured in the exhibit.

Legacy is the quarterly newsletter of the New Mexico Jewish Historical Society 5520 Wyoming Blvd. NE Albuquerque, NM 87109

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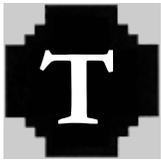
Membership Renewal

Don't forget to renew your NMJHS membership, which expired on December 31. Use the form inserted into this issue. Centennial and Lifetime members excepted. The address label on this newsletter indicates your membership expiration date.

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Message from President Dorothy Amsden



he NMJHS annual conference in Santa Fe November 3-4, 2012, drew a lot of enthusiastic comments from among more than 100 attendees.

Those of you whom I had an opportunity to greet said how much you enjoyed the talks, the exhibit of Jewish Pioneer posters, the silent auction, and the walking tour. The conference committee did a fine job planning and executing this event. Many thanks to those who made contributions over and above your registration fee to help us cover conference costs.

On another topic of interest, I would like to share some information about our current membership. As of November 21, 2012, NMJHS had 246 memberships. (This number actually translates into 364 members, when you count couples and families with two or more members.) This year over a third of you chose the three-year Centennial membership. The Society also has seven Life members, five businesses, three libraries, and one full-time student. The remaining memberships are held by individuals, couples, and families.

Of the 246 current memberships, 109 are in the greater Albuquerque area, 63 in Santa Fe, 10 in Los Alamos, 3 in Taos, and 1 each in Tesuque, Santa

Cruz, Abiquiú, Las Vegas, and Ratón. In the southern part of the state, 5 are in Las Cruces, 2 in Carlsbad, and 1 each in Grants and Tucumcari.

Remarkably, 47 memberships are out of state. Most have ties to New Mexico Jewish history. *Legacy* and other mailings go to members in Alabama, Arizona, California, Colorado, Washington, DC, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Maryland, Michigan, Missouri, New Jersey, New York, Oregon, Texas, Virginia, and Washington.



NMJHS President Dorothy Amsden

NMJHS very much appreciates your continued affiliation and support. Be sure to renew your membership in January 2013, unless you are a Centennial or Life member or have already paid your dues for 2013. If you are unsure of your membership status, please check the mailing label on the back page of this issue of *Legacy*: the top line indicates the date to when your dues are paid up. For new members who joined NMJHS during the last four months of 2012, your membership is paid through the end of 2013.

As part of our effort to trim mailing costs, we are not sending out member-

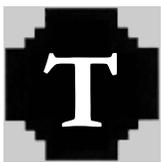
ship renewal letters this year. Consider this your reminder. Dues for 2013 remain unchanged from 2012. For your convenience, a membership renewal form is inserted in this issue. You may also renew your membership online at www.nmjhs.org.

As you might notice when you attend NMJHS events, many of our members are of retirement age. The Society is trying to grow its membership by reaching out to younger generations of working adults and students, with programs and activities that will get them hooked on history. As

an NMJHS supporter, please encourage your family, friends, and colleagues to take out a membership. Or better yet, surprise them with a gift membership.

Stay tuned for another exciting year of Jewish history in New Mexico and around the globe. Programs and events will be announced in those beautiful e-mails from our program chair, Ron Duncan Hart. Make sure we have your correct e-mail address by contacting him at gaonbooks@gmail.com. For those without e-mail, look for announcements in your US mailbox. ✧

Society News



through NMJHS, there are many ways to stay involved in New Mexico Jewish History. For more information, visit our web site at www.nmjhs.org or call the office at 505-348-4471.

LEARN: “Adventure, Adversity and Opportunity: Our Jewish Pioneer history in New Mexico”, the NMJHS curriculum, is now online on our website. This splendid educational program

was developed, piloted and evaluated for a middle-school curriculum in New Mexico, but also is of interest to anyone – young and old – curious about New Mexico or Jewish history, as well as immigration and the early pioneers in the American west. The program includes Teacher Guides and Student Activity Sheets, with maps, pictures and poetry. A donation of \$10 or more is suggested.

READ: From Nara Vista to Taos, Bernalillo to Ft. Sumner, there are stories of

Jewish families. The Society researched and published 14 booklets on Pioneer Jewish New Mexico families, including a revised and newly-issued booklet on the Taichert family. Books are available to purchase online on our website or by calling the Society.

SPEAK: We are actively seeking individuals who want to serve on our Speakers’ Bureau. Please see the insert in this issue for a full description of the Speakers’

(continued on p. 4)

Jewish Cowgirl On the Trail

by Kay Miller

I knew that my Jewish grandmother, Ruth Ilfeld, grew up in Albuquerque. Ruth told me that once when she was riding her horse as a child, the pair heard music in the air. The horse began to dance. Ruth found out later (to her amusement) that her horse had previously been owned by a circus.

Each summer, as an adult, Ruth would visit her grandfather Abraham Staab's magnificent Victorian house in Santa Fe at La Posada. Ruth was living in Ohio by then. As you know, one can visit the famous house and resort now although it is no longer owned by the family.

I first became interested in my ancestors in my late teens when my mother gave me a book about Jewish settlers of the Wild West. There were chapters about my ancestors the Staabs and the Ilfelds in the book. They had left Germany in the mid 1800s to escape their ghetto and military conscription and to find wealth and adventure in America. New Mexico was the logical starting point because relatives were already there. After years of struggle, Charles Ilfeld and Abraham Staab became the leading merchants of the state.

Many years after receiving the book from my mother I visited New Mexico. By coincidence there was an exhibit at the Palace of the Governors Museum in Santa Fe about Jewish settlers of New Mexico while I was in Santa Fe. I saw photos and some artifacts of my ancestors in the exhibit and I purchased the exhibit book at the museum shop. That was the beginning of my quest to learn more. With my background as a painter, I hoped to illustrate as well as document my roots.

In my research, I discovered that many people associate the Hebrew over the

entrance to St. Francis Cathedral in Santa Fe with Abraham Staab's generosity towards his friend Archbishop Jean Baptiste Lamy. In a book written by Catholic nun Blandina Segale, I read about how Julia Staab, Abraham's wife, was nearly robbed by Billy the Kid.

I also discovered how Charles Ilfeld befriended the freed slave Montgomery Bell, making him an agent for his mercantile business. Montgomery did well enough to start his own business, and he built one of the first two-story houses in the town of Las Vegas, New Mexico. Charles' department store, built in 1882, is now part of the Plaza Hotel in that quaint, historic town.

Another ancestor, Ludwig Ilfeld, lent his horse Maude to Teddy Roosevelt to ride in the Rough Rider's parade. Not only did Ludwig organize the parade but he also rode in Teddy's inauguration parade. Ludwig was a member of the National Guard and led troops into battle on horseback in the Spanish American War. He also served as substitute rabbi and a fire chief.

An Ilfeld/Staab descendant, Robert Nordhaus, was an original member of the 10th Mountain Division of the U.S. Army and U.S. Army, which fought the Nazis in the mountains of Europe on skis and snowshoes. When he returned to Albuquerque he became a lawyer whose specialty was Native American rights. Robert won a landmark U.S. Supreme Court case on behalf of the Jicarilla Apaches. They honored him by making him an honorary member of the tribe.

Robert also started one of New Mexico's biggest tourist attractions with over nine million visitors at Sandia Peak near Albuquerque.

(continued on p. 4)

Stefanie Beninato

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Mission Statement

The New Mexico Jewish Historical Society is a secular organization that welcomes all interested people, regardless of religious affiliation. Its mission is to promote greater understanding and knowledge of New Mexico's Jewish history within a broad cultural context.

Books in the News

The New Mexico-Arizona Book Awards, organized by the New Mexico Book Co-op, were presented in November 2012 to a sold-out banquet crowd of 232 people. The books were judged by over 70 booksellers, readers, librarians, and teachers in many states; each entry was reviewed by three judges. The following NMJHS members and affiliates received awards:

Pauline Eisenstadt won the 2012 New Mexico-Arizona Book Award for *A Woman in Both Houses, My Political Career in New Mexico*.

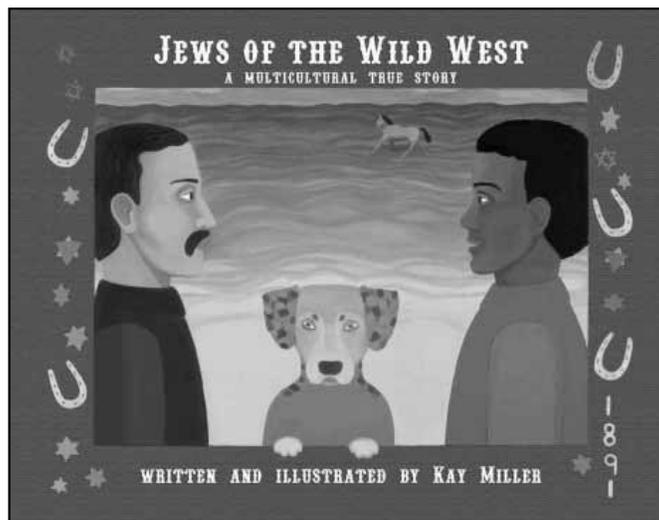
Richard Melzer, keynote speaker at the NMJHS 2012 annual conference, won two 2012 New Mexico-Arizona Book Awards for *New Mexico: Celebrating the Land of Enchantment and Sunshine & Shadows Volume III*.

Ron Duncan Hart was a finalist in the 2012 New Mexico-Arizona Book Award competition for *Islam and Muslims*. In addition, as publishers of Gaon Books, he and Gloria Ballen received an award for *A Hidden Light*, by Zalman Schachter-Shalomi and Natanel Miles-Yepetz.

Sharon Niederman, immediate past president of the New Mexico Press Women, former president of NMJHS, and 2011 winner of the Alan and Leona Hurst Award—NMJHS’s highest honor—won the Lowell Thomas Award from the Society of American Travel Writers

a variety of pilgrimages, ceremonies, and rituals, and listings for retreat houses and contemplation centers.

Several new books with New Mexico Jewish themes in various genres were recently published. These include:



Il Iluminado: A Graphic Novel by Ilan Stavans and Steve Sheinkin. Stavans, a Mexican-born Jew of Polish descent, uses the graphic-novel format to introduce a fictional account of a crypto-Jewish experience.

The Sandoval Sisters’ Secret of Old Blood by Sandra Ramos O’Briant. The author, who grew up in Santa Fe, reveals that while her story is historical fiction, “the issues confronted by the Sandoval sisters are contemporary:

racism, sexual intolerance, the power of superstition, dealing with mother-in-laws [sic].” (Note: this book has strong erotic themes.)

Jews of the Wild West: A Multicultural True Story by Kay Miller. This children’s picture book focuses on the Staab and Ilfeld families of Santa Fe. Colorfully illustrated, it is especially appealing to young children. (See article by Kay Miller on page 3.) ✧

in the guidebook category for her 14th book. In *Signs & Shrines*, published by The Countryman Press with photographs by the author, Niederman presents a discriminating overview of sacred sites, festivals, retreat centers, and more, based on more than 20 years of study and research. The book contains 13 itineraries throughout New Mexico that explore Chaco Canyon, the Gila Cliff Dwellings, Roswell, and other sites. The guide also includes information on how take part in

Jewish Cowgirl On the Trail (continued from p. 3)

These are just a fraction of the facts that I discovered about my ancestry. I went on to tell the tale in the book, *Jews of the Wild West: a Multicultural True Story*. My folk art illustrations with borders of

horseshos, stars of David and chili peppers frame the tale.

This trail ride has come full circle. That same history museum shop in Santa Fe

now carries *Jews of the Wild West* as does Collected Works Book Store in Santa Fe. The book is for ages 8 to 108. ✧

Society News (continued from p. 2)

Bureau program. Topics include the Jewish pioneers on the Santa Fe Trail, Conversos’ settlement in New Spain, Jewish leaders in politics, commerce, science, and culture, researching your Jewish

genealogy or Ladino music and language in New Mexico. If you know of an organization that would like a speaker, please contact our office.

CONNECT: For breaking news and links to fascinating resources related to Jewish history, join our Facebook page.

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Statehood Conference a Success (continued from p. 1)



Nurit Patt ehlp administrator Ruth Carter at the registration table.



Dr. Richard Melzer gives keynote address



Historian Henry Tobias speaks about Dr. Randolph Seligman.



Diane Schaller tells the audience about the Maisel family of Albuquerque.



Panelist Ramona Caplan speaks about the Bibo family.



Sue and Felix Warburg greet walking tour participants at the former Spiegelberg house on Palace Avenue in Santa Fe. The home was built by Sue's grandparents and is currently a gallery.

In memory of
Martin L. Gursky
of Los Alamos
long-time NMJHS member
from Dorothy Amsden

Condolences to long-time
NMJHS member Andrea Kron
on the passing of her mother
Selma Kron
from Dorothy Amsden

Many Thanks for Your Contributions

Guardian

Melvin and Paula Amar Schwartz

Friend

Lance and Julia Bell

Bill and Margrethe Feldman

Stephen and Jane Hochberg

Robert Kahn

Nate Korn and Deborah Peacock

Abe and Marian Silver

Allan L. Swartzberg

Eugene and Carol Venturini

Felix and Sue Warburg

Pioneers

Dorothy Amsden

Sally Cohen

Stuart Feen and Carol Sonnenschein

Drs. Nancy and Stan Handmaker

Geraldine Kipper and Sandra Dietz

Kay Miller

Drs. Yehuda and Nurit Patt

Leonard Pritikin

Betty R. Rosenberg

Janet Saiers

Vic Weisskopf

Joanna White

Marc Yellin

Thank You So Much Nancy Paxton

Long-time NMJHS member Nancy Paxton has volunteered her personal time to assist at the NMJHS office for the past year. Nancy has been a great help and is very much appreciated.

Ruth Carter, NMJHS Administrator

Ex-Army Chaplain, Young Rabbi, Led B'nai Israel

By Patrick Lohmann and Deborah Ziff, Journal Staff Writers

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Former Rabbi Isaac Celnik died Dec. 29 after more than 40 years in Albuquerque, around 30 of them spent as the spiritual leader of the Congregation B'nai Israel.

Celnik, 71, a former U.S. Army chaplain during the Vietnam War, was one of the youngest rabbis in the country when he took over the synagogue in 1971 at age 30.

He was born in Brooklyn, New York, in 1941 after his family escaped the Holocaust in Germany. They were the only Celnik family members to survive out of 200 relatives, said his daughter, Cindy Celnik.

"When they arrived in Brooklyn, they didn't have any money, and they were just happy to have been here and gotten away," she said. "My father was born because they were happy to be alive."

He earned a degree from Brooklyn College and attended the Jewish Theological Seminary. He was ordained in 1965 and joined the U.S. Army.

As chaplain, it was his job to inform next of kin about soldiers who died in the war. He said in a 2000 *Journal* interview that the job—which he described as the "most horrible of times"—later helped him overcome a diagnosis with Parkinson's disease because he learned to not feel sorry for himself. He had been diagnosed with early stages of Parkinson's in 1996.

As a rabbi, he emphasized messages of peace and reconciliation between religions, and he offered a Catholic archbishop his lectern during a service in June 2000.

"Isaac was a visionary," Celnik's family wrote in a recent obituary, "pioneering

efforts to bring many faiths together."

Celnik was also involved in reaching out to "conversos" in New Mexico, or descendants of Spanish Jews who converted to Catholicism during the Spanish Inquisition. Some families secretly handed down Jewish traditions from generation to generation.

"These people lived in fear of persecution for so long, they still look over their shoulders," Celnik told *The New York Times* in 1990. "They are historically conditioned over centuries to be suspicious and alert."

After more than three decades as rabbi, Celnik was dismissed in 2002.

The next year, he sued on the grounds that he was fired because of his illness, but the state's Court of Appeals dismissed his case under the church autonomy doctrine, which protects religious institutions from government intervention.

In a 2006 *New York Times* story about the case, he talked about struggling with his deteriorating health and his wife's breast cancer.

"They don't teach this in rabbinical school," he said.

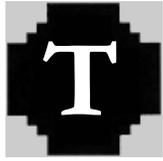
Celnik wanted to be buried at Santa Fe National Cemetery, but a required government form for burial there was misplaced. His daughter said Sen. Martin Heinrich's office helped them get a copy of the form within two days. He was buried on Jan. 3.

The rabbi is survived by his wife, daughters, son and four grandchildren, in addition to his large extended family. Memorial contributions can be made to the Parkinson's Disease Foundation at PDF.org. ☆

Judge Marvin Atlas - From Spain to New Spain

by Patricia A. Carlton

The following is an eyewitness account written by former NMJHS president Gunther Aron, published in the May 1998 issue of the NMJHS newsletter



The great Rabbi Isaac Abravanel stood before Queen Isabella and King Ferdinand of Spain, pleading for the Expulsion decree to be rescinded [by] offering them a fortune. Ferdinand seemed to relent, thinking perhaps of his own Jewish grandmother, when the door of the room burst open. In stormed Tomás de Torquemada, the Grand Inquisitor, himself of Jewish descent, brandishing a crucifix and exclaiming, “Judas sold Jesus out for thirty pieces of silver. Will you do the same for thirty thousand? Well, if so, barter him!” With that he flung the crucifix on the table in front of them. So goes the story – true or false – we don’t know.

But we do know that the Expulsion Decree was not rescinded, and that Rabbi Abravanel took his little grandson and led a group of Jews into exile across the Mediterranean to North Africa, where many settled in the Atlas Mountains.

Over five hundred years after, on Sunday, the 18th of January [1998], a descendant of that same Isaac Abravanel mounted the podium of Temple Beth Shalom in Santa Fe (formerly in New Spain).

Judge Marvin Atlas, a slight, elegant man in his eighties, his name bearing the name of the mountain range where his ancestors had settled in Africa, gave an account

of another important event in Jewish life – the Nuremberg Trials. Judge Atlas is uniquely qualified to do so. Born in Brooklyn, New York, before World War I, he graduated from Harvard Law School before World War II. After serving in the army he was asked, at war’s end, to join the War Crimes Commission in Washington, D.C. Subsequently, he was appointed Assistant Prosecutor at the newly constituted Nuremberg Trials.

For nearly two hours the judge spoke about the background, the difficulties and the people who brought the “trial” into existence. He knew many of them well – he worked with them – he was one of them.

For nearly two hours the filled Temple was silent; only the cultured voice of the judge could be heard, giving his erudite account in a clear fashion. When it was over, there were many questions from the audience, and Stanley Hordes had to rescue Judge Atlas by sending the crowd to the adjacent hall, where refreshments were being served.

Edited by Patricia Carlton, NMJHS Archivist.

Note: The Archivist regrets two errors in the June 2012 article about the Santa Fe White House. Emil (not Eric) Uhlfelder was the husband of Johanna Blatt, and Barney Petchesky was not a sports columnist. ☆

Society News *(continued from p. 7)*

Reminder: spell out New Mexico Jewish Historical Society to find us on Facebook.

SHARE YOUR TALENTS: NMJHS appreciates its volunteers, and we invite

you to get involved in your Society. We invite you to share your talents. Please contact Volunteer Coordinator Karen Singer at weblady2@gmail.com. ☆

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NMJHS Annual Dues

New members who join during the last four months of a year will have their membership extended through the end of the following year.

- Renewal New
- Individual \$40
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Calendar of NMJHS Upcoming Events

Check for future events at www.nmjhs.org

Events for 2013 are still in the planning stage. NMJHS will notify you about specific dates, time and place as soon as possible. In the meantime, you can look forward to the following events this year.

February: Herzl and the Jewish Homeland, a lecture by Dr. Nurit Patt, Santa Fe.

March: History of Sephardic Jews in the Formation of the United States, Dr. Ron Duncan Hart, Albuquerque and Santa Fe.

April: What's in a Name: the Baal Shem from the Shtetl to New Mexico, Dr. Karen Milstein.

May: Montefiore Cemetery Cleanup, Las Vegas, NM, Sunday, May 5. 10:30 a.m. – 1:00 p.m. All are invited to help clean and maintain this historic cemetery. Maps and information at www.nmjhs.org.

June 9: Annual Meeting in Santa Fe

October: Fall Conference in Taos

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