



## A Different Jew

by Claudette E. Sutton

**N**ot long after I arrived in Santa Fe almost 30 years ago, I saw a notice in the *Santa Fe New Mexican* that a man named Stanley Hordes would be speaking in the St. Francis Auditorium at the New Mexico Museum of Art on the topic of New Mexico's "crypto-Jews."

This term was new to me. Growing up in the suburbs of Washington, D.C., my siblings and I went to public schools where about 40 percent of the students were Jewish. The Manhattan neighborhood where I lived during college had nearly as many bagel shops as bodegas. In my life to that moment, Jews had been anything but secret or hidden.

Then I came to Santa Fe. It was early December, and I walked into the old Safeway on Grant Avenue asking for Hanukah candles. No one knew what they were. On a hill above the Plaza, a big white cross was strung with Christmas lights, visible all over downtown. Public buildings and major roads were named for Catholic saints. I hadn't found the synagogue yet, but Jewishness in my everyday life had receded to the background.

So my attention was piqued as Dr. Hordes related the whispered confessions of New Mexican Hispanics who lit candles on Friday night, spun tops, marked tombstones with six-

pointed stars, and otherwise observed clandestine Jewish rituals within their outwardly Catholic lives. Here in the City Different, apparently even what constituted a Jew was different.

I knew something about being a "different" Jew. My family comes from Aleppo, Syria. Our holiday and Friday night dinners feature fried kibbehs, rolled grape leaves, rice, chicken, and vegetables stuffed with meat and allspice. The blessings my grandmother said when one of us sneezed or her husband left for work were in Arabic. No one had done a genealogy, but we accepted the common theory that Jews in the Arab countries

had all come from Spain and fled to the Middle East after the Inquisition.

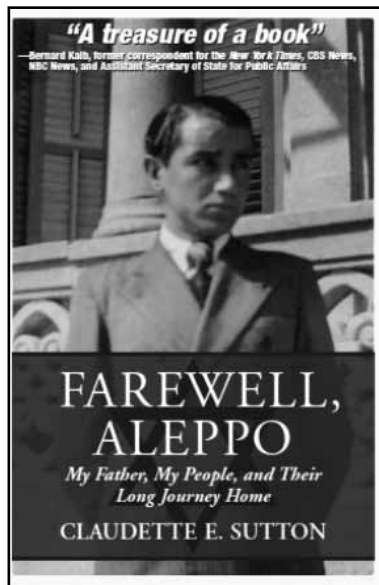
I had come to Santa Fe on a whim, not yet realizing it would become my home. Yet sitting in that auditorium named for a saint, surrounded by murals of Christ and his disciples, hearing a Jewish scholar shake up my assumptions about the delineation between Catholic and Jew, I began to wonder: Might my chile-roasting, cross-wearing, santos-carving Santa Fe neighbors actually be more "my people" than the Ashkenazim I had left behind? Had I come halfway across the country, only to run smack-dab into my own heritage?

The door to an answer opened several years later when I was walking down a Santa Fe street with my father just a few blocks from where I had heard Dr. Hordes speak. By then I had married, had a child and made Santa Fe my home. On one of my parents' visits, Dad presented me with a request. Friends had been asking about his life – growing up in Syria, living in China, coming to America – and he wanted my help with getting his story down on paper. I gladly agreed.

And so on my next trip to my parents' home in Maryland, I sat down with my father with a cassette recorder and list of questions. Years of interviews and research followed, culminating in my book, *Farewell, Aleppo: My Father, My*



Claudette E. Sutton



(continued on p. 3)

### INSIDE THIS ISSUE

A Different Jew.....	1
President's Column.....	2
American Ghost.....	4
Jewish Merchants of Albuquerque.....	5
Conference Keynote Address.....	6
Discovering Jewish Downtown.....	7
Rabbinic Activism in New Mexico.....	9
How NOT to Start a Jewish Film Festival...11	
Calendar of Events.....	12

## President's Column



appy 2015! This begins a historic year for NMJHS; the organization is celebrating its 30th anniversary! I can't think of a better way to celebrate than at our annual conference. Mark your calendar now for November 14-15, 2015, to gather with friends and colleagues from near and far in Las Cruces.

In the intervening months, please do take advantage of all of the wonderful upcoming programs. See the Calendar of Events on p. 12, which in May includes the clean-up of the historic Montefiore Jewish Cemetery in Las Vegas, the date to be arranged, and the Historical Society of New Mexico annual conference in Albuquerque on May 7-9



**NMJHS President  
Naomi Sandweiss**

2014 was a full one for NMJHS. Among other activities, we hosted a lively and engaging fall conference in Albuquerque in November. I want to thank the conference chair, Anita Miller and her committee members, along with all of the presenters for their thoughtful presentations. Please read more about the event on pages 5-8.

We hope that in 2015 you will consider joining an NMJHS committee. We have many opportunities to participate in events, programs, finance, and outreach. If interested, please contact our Administrator, Judy Weinstein, at the office, 505-348-4471, admin@nmjhs.org. I encourage you to use your time and talents on behalf of NMJHS. ✧

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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.

**NMJHS is now on Facebook and Twitter. Please "like" us at <https://www.facebook.com/NewMexicoJewishHistoricalSociety> and follow us on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/NMJewishHS>.**

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**A Different Jew** *(continued from p. 1)*

*People, and Their Long Journey Home*, published in the fall of 2014 by Terra Nova Books. What I learned changed my understanding of my father's identity, and my own.

Meir Sutton (he became "Mike" only many years later) was born in Aleppo in 1922 (or perhaps 1924; Syria didn't issue birth certificates at the time), the first of eight children. The Aleppo of his youth was a peaceful, slow-paced, multicultural, even multi-religious city, radically different from what we see today in daily news reports of ongoing sectarian violence.

Ironically, it was one of the better places in the world at the time in which to be Jewish. The city's Jews, Christians and Muslims lived alongside one another in adjacent neighborhoods not separated by gates or ghettos, as they had for centuries. The Islamic call to prayer was heard throughout the city several times a day. My father and his Jewish classmates walked to synagogue every morning before going to a school that also included Muslims and Christians of many denominations. On Fridays, after an evening of feasting and praying on the Sabbath, his family would have no trouble finding a passerby to come in and turn off the master electrical switch for them before they went to bed.

Yet by 1940, my grandfather foresaw that Aleppo's long era of peaceful coexistence was on the wane. Syria was vying for independence from France, and my grandfather knew that once

that happened, dynamics for Jews would change completely. Realizing that he had no prospect of getting visas for his family to come to America at once, he devised a savvy plan of "exporting" his sons. When they became

old enough, he would send his boys, singly or in pairs, to a place that might provide short-term safety and a stepping-stone to the United States.

And so late in 1940, in the middle of my father's second year of college, his father announced to him and his brother Saleh that they would be sent to Shanghai to work in an uncle's export business. Dad was 19, and Saleh was 17.

They left Port Said, Egypt, by boat in January of 1941 and arrived in Shanghai a month later. By the end of the year, Saleh had come down with tuberculosis and he was sent back to Syria alone. Their uncle, Syrian-born but a naturalized American citizen, escaped on the last ship to sail to the United States before the outbreak of war. My father was living alone in the YMCA on December 7 when he heard on his short-wave radio that Japan had bombed the U.S. naval fleet in Pearl Harbor. The next morning, he watched Japanese troops march into Shanghai, which it occupied for the duration of the war. How he adjusted to the increasing deprivations of war, and to the uncertainty of when and how that war would end, became a focus of my book.



*Selim Sutton*

My grandfather's plan for a stepping-stone was realized at last when Dad came to America in mid-1947, settling in Brooklyn. All those years of living alone, however, had disrupted his continuity with the orthodox practices of his youth – laying tefillin every morning, keeping kosher, not riding the streetcar on the Sabbath. Perhaps more significantly, his affinity with the insular, clannish life of the Syrian community had also been broken.

I have wondered if that, in part, is why he married my mother, who shared his background but was raised in Washington, D.C., away from Brooklyn's huge Syrian community. My parents met and married in New York before moving to Washington. They took pains to raise their children with a Jewish identity, but we comprised just a tiny Syrian satellite among the larger Ashkenazi community around us.

When I moved to New York in the early 1980s to go to college, I saw much more of my father's side of the family than I had growing up. At Sunday afternoon gatherings at his mother's house in the hinterlands of Brooklyn, I had the peculiar sense of being an outsider in my own family. My siblings and I weren't raised orthodox or kosher. We loved fried kibbeh, but also BLTs and cheeseburgers. We had friends who weren't Syrian—or even Jewish! Even our names gave us away. My cousins were all named by old Syrian tradition for a maternal or paternal grandparent. My parents had chosen names for us.

Looking back, I can see a trail from that insider/outsider sense to my striking out to Santa Fe, finding myself in an auditorium hearing about crypto-Jews, remaking my life here, and eventually writing my book. My father's invitation to write his story opened doors to discovering my own.

*(continued on p. 8)*

## American Ghost: A Family's Haunted Past in the Desert Southwest: Reflections of Author Hannah Nordhaus

*Editor's note: Hannah Nordhaus is an award-winning journalist and author who lives in Boulder, Colorado. In American Ghost, she attempts to uncover the truth about her great-great-grandmother Julia Schuster Staab, whose ghost is said to haunt the elegant La Posada Hotel in Santa Fe. Hannah will speak at Bookworks in Albuquerque on March 12, 2015, at 7 PM, and at La Posada Hotel in Santa Fe on March 13, 2015, at 7 PM. This article was adapted from material provided by Hannah Nordhaus.*



*by Hannah wrote about Julia Staab:* Shortly after I gave birth to my first child, I was poking around the dusty bookshelves in the

house my great-grandfather built in the mountains east of Santa Fe, when I found a history my great-aunt Lizzie had written before she died in 1980. I found it riveting: Lizzie told a tale of sadness and madness and forbidden love, of drug addictions and suicides, knives to the “bosom,” inheritance and disinheritance, penury, family feuds, brother against brother. There was, I realized, more to Julia’s story than just a ghost in an old hotel. Julia was once alive; she had been dragged as a new bride across the Santa Fe Trail to an unfamiliar place; she had been a new mother, like me.



*Julia Schuster Staab*

*How Hannah describes her book:* I think of it as a history that is wrapped in a ghost story. The story – the legend – of Julia’s life and death and afterlife is the reason people want to know about Julia. But I was also able to explore Jewish history in 18th and 19th century Germany; the settling of the Anglo-American Southwest; the European spas and séance rooms of the late 19th century; the fate of German Jews during the World War II era; and even the 1980s and ‘90s, when Julia’s ghost story first entered our cultural imagination.

*From Germany to New Mexico:* Lügde, the German town where Julia came from,

was a settled place. Julia’s large and prosperous family had resided there for generations. In New Mexico, only recently cleaved from Mexico, home to ancient cultures suddenly overrun with fortune-seeking Anglos, everything was changing and new. Of course, that sense of flux also provided opportunity, and this seemed especially true for German Jews, who had been limited in their professional opportunities and taxed and fined at every turn in Germany, simply because they were Jewish. New Mexico didn’t hold the same prejudices.

*The different histories she consulted in researching the book:* The most helpful was the specific history of the Southwest that I encountered in old travel journals and newspapers from the time: what it was like to travel the Santa Fe Trail in the early days,

and how it must have been for Julia as a young bride riding into Santa Fe, a then-ragged frontier town of trash-strewn dusty streets and brothels and gunfights and all-night fandangos. In addition, the history of 19th-century treatment of women’s health and mental health helped me to understand Julia’s physical and emotional condition, and the strange and barbaric treatments she would have undergone in hopes of recovery.

*Hannah’s visits to psychics and spiritualists:* Often, I was able to trace Julia’s story only through the stories of others—her husband Abraham, her

children, and other people whose better-documented lives intersected hers. What the psychics did was to provide me with a means of connecting to an idea of Julia herself. They told me that she liked flowers; that she had once loved another man; that her children were the world to her; that she rocked back and forth in a rocking chair and brushed her white hair and paced the floor and wrung her hands. To them, she was a woman with a story of her own.

*The problem with family lore:* We had our family stories growing up, and I always assumed that they were true. But when I started investigating my family’s history more deeply, I learned that some stories might be every bit as apocryphal as the ghost tales about Julia. We had always believed, for instance, that Julia’s husband Abraham had helped fund Santa Fe’s cathedral, and that, in exchange, Santa Fe’s archbishop Jean-Baptiste Lamy had placed a set of Hebrew letters on the cathedral’s entrance. This was the story found in the history books, and it had never occurred to me that it wasn’t the case. But as I started looking into it, the tale grew murkier; it’s not, in fact, at all clear that Abraham had anything to do with building the cathedral. Other documentary evidence I found—citizenship applications, census records,



*Hannah Nordhaus*

*(continued on p. 8)*

# The Jewish Merchants of Albuquerque

by Anita Miller

The New Mexico Jewish Historical Society has had annual conferences featuring the Hispanic Jews of Northern New Mexico and the original German Jewish merchants who arrived in New Mexico during the Civil War, among other subjects. It has never had a program devoted to the Jewish merchants of Albuquerque, who arrived in New Mexico during the 1930s-1960s, and who now are “history.” These merchants became the subject of the society’s annual conference, held on November 15 and 16, 2014, at the Jewish Community Center in Albuquerque, which was established by many of these merchants and their families.

The conference began with a welcome and keynote by Harvey Buchalter, entitled “The Exceptionality of Albuquerque,” discussing why these Jews, mainly of Eastern European origin, established businesses in this isolated western city. Then followed two panels, introduced and moderated by Harvey. The first panel included the children of these Albuquerque merchants, now middle-aged, who talked about their family businesses, located mainly on Central Avenue, which was then Albuquerque’s main street. Howard Friedman, Myra Gasser, Marilyn Reinman, Roberta Sparks, Jim Kubie and Ron Taylor each provided family business histories, anecdotes and family stories. The businesses begun by their fathers, with the exception of Kurt’s Camera Corral, are now gone, but the audience enjoyed hearing about their beginnings.

A second panel, entitled “Commerce: Jewish Merchants and Native Americans,” discussed the participation of Jews in the Native American crafts trade. Many Jewish merchants sold pottery, jewelry, rugs and other items made by Native Americans. Most of these

businesses still exist, although except for Alan Bell the children of the founders no longer operate them. Members of both panels have mainly chosen other occupations and professions. The second panel included Leba Freed Pierce, Wayne Bobrick, Sheldon Bromberg, Mike Danoff and Helen Horwitz.

The panel presentations were followed by a successful silent auction, raffle and cocktails. Dinner at the “J” was preceded by Havdalah, led by Rabbi Min Kantrowitz.

Sunday began with brunch, followed by a film entitled “From Peddlers to Merchant Princes,” which was a history of Denver’s Jewish merchant community, comparable to Albuquerque’s. The conference then adjourned to the Andaluz Hotel, which was the fourth Conrad Hilton Hotel in the United States. Participants then walked west up Central Avenue, led by Sharon Neiderman, who pointed out the sites of original Jewish businesses and talked about Central, which was the main business district of Albuquerque during the years featured in the conference program.

The walk up Central ended at the New Mexico Holocaust and Intolerance Museum, where Noel Pugach discussed the European immigrants who came to Albuquerque during World War II, and the family businesses which they joined or established. The conference adjourned at the Museum, giving attendees the opportunity to view its collection.



Anita Miller

Anita Miller chaired the conference, assisted by Harvey Buchalter, Leba Freed Pierce, Gila Yaniv, Janet Saiers and Paula Amar Schwartz. The 2014 conference was deemed by all a great success. ☆

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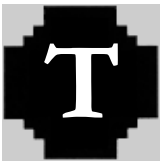
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## Conference Keynote Address by Harvey Buchalter

by Stu Simon



The New Mexico Jewish Historical Society held its fall conference entitled “The Jewish Merchants of Albuquerque” on 15-16, Novem-

ber 2014. The conference keynote, “Building Business and Community – Jewish Merchants in Albuquerque from 1930s to the 1960s,” was given by Harvey Buchalter. The keynote laid the foundation for a number of panel discussions that included descendants of a number of those merchant families.

Mr. Buchalter reviewed the history of Jewish immigrants who arrived in the US in the 1920s and 1930s, where they came from, and why they came. Most had experienced pogroms and expulsions which, combined with America’s open-door policies, brought thousands of families to Ellis Island and Galveston, Texas. They brought with them their traditions, fears, and insecurities. They found hope in joining together in communities and societies that helped them in finding jobs and taking care of each other in hard times. Roughly a third of the immigrants from the 1920s to the late 1950s worked in the garment industry.

Most of the immigrants became merchants and tradesmen because they faced quotas for entry into higher education, and restrictions on farming and becoming professionals. Over time, small numbers headed west to start a new life. Almost all of the Jews who arrived in New Mexico were German peddlers who followed the railroad or extended families of the original families that had settled here earlier. These families included the Ilfelds, Rosenwalds, Bibos, Staabs, Seligmans, Spiegelbergs, and others. The Jewish population in New Mexico in 1880 ranged from 180 to 220 and grew to 403 by 1900.

The formation of a B’nai Brith lodge in the 1880s preceded the laying of a cornerstone of Temple Albert in 1898. Congregation B’nai Israel was founded in 1920 with a permanent building in 1940. From that time, the Jewish community continued to grow and support



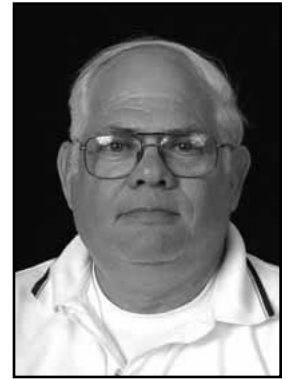
Harvey Buchalter. Photo by Stu Simon

many new organizations like Hadassah and ORT. As the Jewish community grew, participation in the merchant economy began to shrink. The next generation gradually traded ownership of stores for higher education and professions like medicine and law.

During the 1930s, many families moved to Albuquerque to try to escape the ravages of the Depression. They were greeted with a warm welcome at both the temple and synagogue and found a new home. Many never joined a synagogue, but held deeply to the Jewish practice of Tzadakkah. These practices helped to provide for the needy Jewish members of the community, as well as support the founding of additional organizations like the Jewish Community Center. Most of the Jews who came to Albuquerque from the late 1920s on sought assimilation on their own terms into American Life.

This keynote presentation provided a rich foundation for discussions among

the panel members, descendants of the original Jewish families. The panelists related what they knew of their predecessors’ lives and their impact on the growth of the Jewish community in Albuquerque. ☆



Stu Simon

*Editor’s note: The full text of Harvey Buchalter’s keynote address at the 2014 conference will be published in a subsequent issue.*

### Welcome New Members

Evvie Becker  
Myrna and Barry Bernard  
Laura and Tony Bleill  
Wayne Bobrick  
Dennis Carlton  
Diane Chodorow  
Rabbi Paul and Susan Citrin  
Michael Danoff  
Rabbi Malka Drucker  
Betsy Ehrenberg  
Howard Friedman  
Susan (Suki) Halevi  
Susie Kubié  
Molly Morris  
Ann Ramenofsky  
Marilyn Reinman  
Erika Rimson  
Joseph Rosenbaum  
Steven Sanders  
Susie and John Sandager  
Diane Schaller  
Rae Lee Siporin  
Roberta Sparks  
Ron Taylor  
Leslie and Sheldon Weinstein  
Gene Weisskoph and Family

# Discovering Jewish Downtown Albuquerque

by Sharon Niederman

**S**trolling along Central Avenue in Downtown Albuquerque, you would not have any idea of the rich history of Jewish entrepreneurship that thrived there through the late 19th and 20th centuries. Albuquerque proved the place to turn imaginative ideas and progressive vision into reality. Several of Albuquerque's Jewish businesses pioneered innovations with national merchandising impact; several were women-owned; husband-wife teams found much success.

Legacy businesses that originated Downtown include Manny Blaugrund's American Home Furnishings at 212 Central SW (1935-1950), H. Cook Sporting Goods on the corner of Sixth and Central, and Cooper's Western Wear (1946-1949) at Second and Central, predecessor of the Western Warehouse. Hilson's Western Wear also started Downtown.

Imagine Downtown as a bustling, prosperous center of activity. Central Avenue was lined with shops, cafes, and four popular movie theaters – the KiMo, the State, the El Rey, and the Sunshine at 120 Central SW, an early meeting site of Congregation B'nai Israel. During the 1930s on through the '50s, Downtown was a hub of stylish shops. Jordan's, Helen Sands' Women's Dress Shop, Accessories by Jean, Meyer & Meyer Menswear at 401 W. Central, and Mandell & Dreyfuss on the southwest corner of Third and Central kept Albuquerque well-dressed in the latest fashion. Pay-Less Drug, at Second and Central, now a parking lot, was bought out by Walgreens. All were owned and operated by active Jewish community members.

When the Rosenwald Brothers Building at 320 Central SW opened in 1910,

the *Albuquerque Journal* described it as, "The handsomest, most up-to-date and most complete department store in the Southwest." Henry Trost, of the influential El Paso architectural firm of Trost & Trost, designed the three-story, 42,000 square-foot building of reinforced concrete, the city's first.

Inventor of the Fred Harvey jewelry style, Temple Albert member Herman Schweitzer presided over the Indian Room at the Alvarado Hotel (1902-1970). He brought Native American craftspeople from the Hubbell Trading Post at Ganado, Arizona, to make and sell wares to travelers at the Santa Fe Railway Depot in Albuquerque when Albuquerque was the center of cross-country rail traffic. Collaborating with interior designer Mary Jane Elizabeth Coulter on her first Harvey commission, Schweitzer created an Indian "museum" to hold the attention of passengers taking a 30-minute break. This incredibly "odd couple" can be said to have invented the look we call "Santa Fe style"; even more significantly, they built a brand that is still going strong.

"Indian art experts believe Schweitzer may have saved certain items – like Navajo rugs – from extinction," writes Stephen Fried in *Appetite for America*, his comprehensive book on the Fred Harvey Company.

First Avenue was the site of many businesses, including numerous pawn shops, as well. The former site of the Charles Ilfeld Offices and Warehouse was located at First and Central. Other businesses included Ben and Ida Markus Clothing and Footlockers and Joe and Dora Spector Curio Shop.

Maurice Maisel's Indian Trading Post at 519 Central SW was the largest trading post on Route 66, with 300

Indian craftsmen on site. Maisel hired architect John Gaw Meem to design the building and artist Olive Rush supervised the embellishment, gathering talented students from



*Sharon Niederman*

the Institute of American Indian Arts, including Pablita Velarde, Ben Quintana, Pop Chalee, and Harrison Begay to create exterior murals. Maisel took the business of merchandising Indian arts to a new level following the 1937 re-routing of Route 66 through Albuquerque's central corridor, thereby guaranteeing the traffic necessary to his venture.

At 518 Central SW, Leo Horwitz, a registered Indian trader who started out working for Maisel, operated his Navajo Indian Store across from the KiMo. He moved to Albuquerque at the behest of his aunt and uncle, David and Ann Elias, who came to Albuquerque due to Ann's TB. They were among the founders of B'nai Israel.

In 1930, unable to sustain a business in Columbus, New Mexico, during the Depression, Ravel Brothers moved to Albuquerque, with one brother, Sam, relocating to El Paso. In March 1916, their Columbus general store had been invaded by Pancho Villa's men. During the raid, Villistas captured Arthur Ravel and tried to force him to open the business's safe. Fortunately, the Villistas believed Ravel when he stated he did not know the combination. Arthur Ravel eventually escaped the Villistas when gunfire, possibly from the machine gun in front of the Hoover

**Discovering Jewish Downtown** *(continued from p. 7)*

Hotel, killed the two men holding his arms. The first of the Ravels' five Albuquerque feed and seed stores was located at Second and Lead.

The Freed Company, located next to the KiMo at 415 Central NW (1971-

1998), had its roots as a Kosher meat market and farm at 1500 High St. Leba Freed, who worked at the Central Avenue store for 20 years, recalls that her grandfather loved Navajo rugs, and eventually the family became dealers in pinons, wools, and leathers. As the

business transformed, they sold items from 30 countries and Native American tribes worldwide. ✧

**American Ghost** *(continued from p. 4)*

newspaper stories—was no more reliable. I could never figure out when, exactly, Abraham came to America and to New Mexico, for instance. Every document seemed to have a different date. Many of the things I thought were “hard fact” turned out to be as subjective as the myths, and these discrepancies made me realize how little, in the end, we can truly know.

*Why Hannah wrote about Julia's sister Emilie:* I met grandfather's second cousin Wolfgang Mueller, who had come to stay with my family in New Mexico as a German Jewish refugee in 1936. He told me that his grandmother, Julia's youngest sister, Emilie, lived long

enough to die in a Nazi concentration camp. The specter of the Holocaust haunts every German Jewish story and also it seemed that Emilie's life in Germany—cultured, privileged, surrounded by friends and family—was everything that Julia felt she had lost in coming to America. But Emilie's life ended in an unimaginably horrible manner. Hers was an alternate ending to Julia's life, and I felt compelled to explore it.

*What Hannah hopes readers will take away from American Ghost:* As I wrote of Julia and Abraham's house, “every rosette and fixture and plaster molding had a dream behind it, a story that began

in rural Germany and ended in the hands of strangers.” Almost every old building, every gravestone, every street, contains a history that spans generations and continents. This is true in Europe, of course; but it is also true in the American West, which was tied to the markets in the East and also to the lives of the many people who settled or passed through from beginnings in Europe and elsewhere. The drama of Julia's life may have unfolded on the isolated frontier, but it's also a larger story of immigration, assimilation, religion, capitalism, gender, expectations, and how legends are formed. The past can seem so far away, but it's right there for us to see, if only we look. ✧


**A Different Jew** *(continued from p. 3)*

One thing I *didn't* hear in Dad's memories of Syria was any mention of Ladino, the Jewish vernacular language of pre-Inquisition Spain, or other indications of Castilian roots. Eventually I learned that our family had not come from Spain but was part of Aleppo's older Jewish community, the Mizrahi Jews whose presence in the Middle East preceded the Inquisition.

Yet if my connection to my crypto-Jewish New Mexico neighbors is more complicated than I first thought, it is also simpler. Throughout my years here, I have integrated posole and rellenos into my culinary repertoire, along with Grandma's chicken and eggplant. Green chile has as much place in my

kitchen as allspice and cumin. I have blended aspects of my beloved adopted home with my historical roots. The choices, travels, and happenstances of my ancestors' lives, as well as my own, have led me to a unique relationship to my history and faith. Perhaps my santos-carving, candle-lighting neighbors and I are not so different after all. ✧

*Claudette E. Sutton will speak about her book at the Jewish Community Center in Albuquerque on March 22 at 2:00-3:30 PM, a free event. She lives in Santa Fe with her husband and their 26-year-old son, and can be reached at 505-984-3171 or claudettesutton@gmail.com.*



HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF NEW MEXICO

2015 New Mexico History Conference

May 7-9 2015  
Embassy Suites Hotel  
Albuquerque, New Mexico

Visit [HSNM.org](http://HSNM.org) for conference information, or contact Janet Saiers, president, [jsaiers@msn.com](mailto:jsaiers@msn.com), 505-299-5019.



## Rabbinic Activism in New Mexico: Keynote Address at the May 2014 NMJHS Annual Meeting

by Rabbi Paul Citrin

**I**n *Pirkei Avot*, Rabbi Shimon ben Gamliel states, “Not learning, but doing, is the chief thing.” Yet, Talmud teaches us that study of Torah is equal to fulfilling all of the other commandments. Study is important because it leads to doing. It seems to me that the bottom line is that while study is crucial and learning Torah is imperative, without action, without fulfilling Torah in practice, the sacred text is a dead letter. Torah remains only theory, not the work of a living community.

It is curious that the practical application of Torah values is often absent in Orthodox communities, and their rabbis rarely take activist positions. Liberal rabbis and their congregants are frequently less learned in sacred text, yet have ardently applied Torah values in both the Jewish and general communities. In this light, I want to spend a few minutes illustrating rabbinic activism in New Mexico since the end of World War II. For these remarks, I have interviewed Judie Shor Ning, Rabbi Marvin Schwab, Rabbi Joe Black, Rabbi Larry Karol, Rabbi Harry Rosenfeld, Rabbi Arthur Flicker, Rabbi Deborah Brin, Marilyn Reinman, and Myra Gasser (these latter two spoke with me about Isaac Celnik’s rabbinate).

Over the past seventy years, there have been two directions in social activism among rabbis and their congregations. The first area we may label as social justice, that is, attempting to right wrongs in realms of racial discrimination, labor practices, immigration and peace issues. The second arena is that of human welfare: the amelioration of hunger and homelessness, environmental issues, health and education. In both areas, on many different issues, rabbis around New Mexico have had intimate involve-

ment, taken public stands, testified before city councils and state legislature committees, and lobbied office holders. Let us look at some specifics.

David Shor served as rabbi of Congregation Albert from 1948-1978. He had already demonstrated his activism as a student at the Hebrew Union College in the 1930s when he went out in a rowboat to rescue people who lived in shacks along the Ohio River during a flood. Rabbi Shor was a quiet, self-effacing person, but over the years showed himself to have the courage of his convictions and confidence to express them. In many ways, he was that “still, small voice” of God’s presence. He combined in his rabbinate both social justice and human welfare activism. He was a founding board member of the Albuquerque Boys Club, Bernalillo County Mental Health Society, and All-Faiths Receiving Home. Rabbi Shor also served on the boards of Goodwill, United Way and the Albuquerque Jewish Welfare Fund.

As far as social justice is concerned, Rabbi Shor was no less involved. He was appointed by Governor John Simms in 1955 to the Western Inter-States Commission on Higher Education. He was also appointed to the Fair Employment Practices Commission. Governor Jack Campbell in 1963 appointed him to the New Mexico Cuban Refugee Commission. Governor David Cargo appointed Rabbi Shor to his Human Rights Commission. Cargo said of Shor, “He served with fairness, understanding and compassion.” Judie Shor Ning, Rabbi Shor’s elder daughter, said that due to her father’s activism in the realm of civil rights, he received many threatening phone calls. She also recalled that Rabbi Shor wrote guidelines with Albuquerque Public Schools on the place of religion in the schools.

There is a niche which we may say combines social justice and welfare. It is known as community organizing. Paul Citrin, rabbi of Congregation Albert 1978-1996, became active in the Albuquerque Interfaith Project, which focused on school-based health clinics and on raising educational standards in our city. Rabbi Larry Karol of Temple Beth-El in Las Cruces, 2011-present, is a board member of CAFÉ, Communities in Action and Faith, which organizes around issues of health, education, labor, raising the minimum wage, foreclosure prevention, and humane treatment of the undocumented. This participation in grassroots organizing and leadership development has aroused some controversy among Beth-El synagogue board members. Yet, even when boards of synagogues around the state are hesitant to commit their congregations to such organizing groups, they have generally supported their rabbi’s right to be active as he/she sees fit.

Rabbi Marvin Schwab of Temple Beth Shalom in Santa Fe, 2001-2014, founded the Inter-Faith Leadership Alliance. Its purpose is to bring clergy together to address teen homelessness, clothing for the needy, and unemployment. This clergy alliance also set up a course to teach interviewing and résumé writing skills. Under Rabbi Schwab’s leadership of Temple Beth Shalom, the congregation engaged a paid social justice activities director. As the rabbi in the state capital, Rabbi Schwab was active in supporting a living wage campaign. When some cities in the state passed minimum



*Paul Citrin*

## **Rabbinic Activism** *(continued from p. 9)*

wage laws, and the state legislature tried to override those laws, Rabbi Schwab was instrumental in getting the state bill defeated.

Since the turn of the millennium, there has been a change of focus from issues of social justice to amelioration of poverty and homelessness. Congregation Albert built a Habitat for Humanity home under the leadership of Rabbi Citrin, Noel Kopald and Susan Citrin in the mid-1990s. Today, under the encouraging leadership of Rabbi Joe Black and Rabbi Harry Rosenfeld, Congregation Albert houses people in the synagogue itself as part of the Interfaith Hospitality Network, hosting as many as four families at a time. The congregation is also active in supporting St. Martin's, the Ronald MacDonald House, and Project Share.

Rabbis in New Mexico have also been leaders in LGBT issues. Rabbi Joe Black together with Father Brian Taylor founded the Religious Alliance for Inclusion. They met with a variety of city officials as well as to support gay pride

events. Rabbi Deborah Brin and Rabbi Harry Rosenfeld were on a clergy team which participated in conducting a mass gay wedding.

Local rabbis have long been involved with death penalty issues and police relations. Rabbi Citrin worked with Governor Toney Anaya to bring about a moratorium on the death penalty in our state. Rabbi Black worked to eliminate the death penalty under Governors Johnson and Richardson. Rabbi Arthur Flicker of Congregation B'nai Israel has served as a chaplain for over ten years for the Albuquerque Police Department, while Rabbi Black served for three years. Rabbi Flicker has served on a sub-committee for meetings with police and congregations to build partnership in public safety.

All of our rabbis have been concerned with preserving abortion rights and opposing the twenty-week abortion ban. They have also addressed and led programming in the area of the environment and the "greening" of their synagogues.

In our Biblical tradition there were two models of leadership in the community, the Priest and the Prophet. Priests were functionaries and vehicles for salvational ritual. Most rabbis must play this role to some degree. Rabbis Isaac Celnik and Leonard Hellman, of blessed memory, emphasized their priestly roles although they also had involvements on occasion in the sphere of social justice. Prophets called for being true to laws, values and ideals of Torah. They confronted power in their societies when necessary. Most New Mexico rabbis have reflected the role of Prophet through their tenure. Congregations and boards have been more or less supportive, depending on the times and on their constituents. When we consider the size of the Jewish community in New Mexico (demographics suggest we are around one percent of the state's population), the influence of our rabbis and congregations has been significant. Our rabbis have been a source of pride as they have represented the highest expression of Jewish religious and social culture. ✪

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## **CELEBRATE 30TH ANNIVERSARY OF NMJHS**

2015 Fall Conference in Las Cruces, New Mexico

New Mexico Jewish Historical Society  
5520 Wyoming Ave. NE  
Albuquerque, N.M. 87109  
505-348-4471; [admini@nmjhs.org](mailto:admini@nmjhs.org)

For more information about the 2015 conference,  
please contact:  
Linda Goff, Chair 2015 NMJHS Fall Conference  
[lagoff@hotmail.com](mailto:lagoff@hotmail.com)

The New Mexico Jewish Historical Society will hold its 2015 Fall Conference, entitled "Celebrating 30 Years: A Retrospective and the Jewish Communities of the Southern Southwest," on November 14-15 at the New Mexico Farm and Ranch Heritage Museum, Las Cruces, New Mexico.

In addition to celebrating our "birthday," we plan to focus on the Jewish settlers and communities in the southern Southwest and to cross state lines to include the rich history of Texas, Arizona, and New Mexico. Conference themes will also highlight:

- Crypto-Jews in the region;
- A spotlight on the Las Cruces and southern New Mexico Jewish communities;
- Student research projects from Southwest colleges and universities.

Our goal is to make this a regional conference by bringing together speakers and panels to recognize and celebrate the richness of Jewish history in the southern Southwest. A call for proposals was issued in November 2014 with a deadline of February 15, 2015.

Information about conference registration, lodging, and directions in Las Cruces will be published next fall in the conference registration brochure.

# How NOT to Start a Jewish Film Festival

by Marcia Torobin - Festival Director, Santa Fe Jewish Film Festival



What do a rabbi, economist, anthropologist, interior designer, and financial executive have in common? None have

experience starting a film festival, yet this is the group that met one early spring day nearly five years ago to create what is now the Santa Fe Jewish Film Festival. Ignorance is bliss and, had the group known what was entailed, the Santa Fe JFF may never have gotten off the ground. The saving grace may have been that the festival began under the auspices of HaMakom (it was originally called the HaMakom Jewish Film Festival), and the blessings of founding Rabbi Malka Drucker didn't hurt.\*

The realities of producing a film festival quickly settled in. Possession may be nine-tenths of the law, but not when it comes to whether you can show a DVD you own. Ownership and the right to screen a film are independent, and screening fees for newer titles can punch a big hole in the budget, if not consume it. It doesn't matter whether the screening of a film is under the auspices of a synagogue, takes place at the synagogue, or is free – obtaining the screening rights is “de rigueur.” And that almost always means money.

Thinking about showing a foreign film? Don't forget the foreign exchange fees and courier costs from abroad. Want to show the hottest movie from Cannes before it's released theatrically? After sticker shock for obtaining the screening rights, don't be surprised if the distributor won't let you preview the film. Take it sight unseen or not at all. Rather sell tickets through a professional ticketing service? Service fees can be extremely high unless you're selling lots of tickets. Thinking of showing a 35mm print? Think again. Guess who pays the shipping charges. These can add up to an additional \$200 per film.

Despite ups and downs, the forerunner of the Santa Fe Jewish Film Festival opened in November 2010 with a charming award-winning film, *Yiddish Theater, A Love Story*, and has been going strong ever since. With a doubling in attendance by the second year, the festival reorganized as the Santa Fe Jewish Film Festival under the fiscal agency of Jewish Federation of New Mexico, staying true to its mission to bring films that inform about Jewish culture, history, religion and/or identity.

By the end of last season, the festival's fourth, attendance had increased over 1,300 percent. Festival audiences were among the first to see award-winning films, watch exclusive interviews via Skype with directors and producers, attend special events such as “A Conversation with Simon Schama” and “Sephardic Sounds” with Vanessa Paloma, and join in community for one of the many food events accompanying the films.

The fifth season, which began last fall, introduced a new “Pop-Up” film series to showcase last-minute selections from the top international film festivals and give Santa Fe audiences a “first look,” often before audiences in New York and San Francisco. The first selection, *Gett: The Trial of Viviane Amsalem*, was subsequently nominated for a Golden Globe for Best Foreign Language Film. *Gett* is expected to return to CCA for a theatrical run in March.

Cinema Salon, which is also new this season, highlights classic films and others that stand above the crowd, along with in-depth discussions. *The Dybbuk*, a film that has been called one of the “ten best Jewish” films, kicked off the series, with Professor Emerita Lois Rudnick adding insight and depth in an introductory talk and post-film discussion.

A tribute to film noir, “Stars in the Dark: Emigrés, Exiles and Film Noir,” is in the planning stages for later in the season. Jewish émigrés played a seminal role



*Marcia Torobin*

in the rise of film noir as directors, actors, and composers, and this tribute will explore their contribution.

Looking back, perhaps it was the very lack of experience of the Santa Fe Jewish Film Festival's founding group that accounted for the festival's success. Had the significant hurdles that lay ahead been apparent at the outset, it might have been a road not taken. Instead, for filmgoers, the festival has opened new vistas to the richness of the Jewish world in its many dimensions. ✧

*\*Editor's note: Founded in 2000, HaMakom, which means “the place,” describes itself as a place for passionate and progressive Judaism. Rabbi Drucker was ordained by the Academy for Jewish Religion, a trans-denominational seminary in New York City. See MalkaDrucker.com <<http://www.malkadrucker.com/RabbiMalkaDrucker/home/>>.*

Santa Fe Jewish Film Festival,  
SantaFeJFF.org, 505-216-0672,  
admin@santafejff.org. *A Borrowed Identity*, March 15, 4 PM; *Above and Beyond*, Sunday, April 19, 4 PM (films at Center for Contemporary Arts); “Stars in the Dark: Émigrés, Exiles and Film Noir,” film noir mini-festival, late spring TBA.

New Mexico Jewish Historical Society  
5520 Wyoming Blvd. NE  
Albuquerque, NM 87109

## Membership in NMJHS

For information contact the NMJHS office at 505-348-4471 or [admin@nmjhs.org](mailto:admin@nmjhs.org) to request a membership brochure. Alternatively, you can download a membership application from the NMJHS website [www.nmjhs.org](http://www.nmjhs.org)



## Calendar of NMJHS Upcoming Events

Check for future events at [www.nmjhs.org](http://www.nmjhs.org)

March 12-13: Hannah Nordhaus book talk, *American Ghost*, about her family legacy in Santa Fe. March 12, Bookworks, Albuquerque, 7 PM; March 13, La Posada Hotel, Santa Fe, 7 PM.

March 29: Jay Williams, "Voices in the Wilderness: Ernest Bloch, Frederick Jacobi and the Rise of American Jewish Music," Jewish Community Center, Albuquerque, 3 PM.

May 3: "Yom Limmud: A Day of Jewish Learning Arts, and Culture," co-sponsored by Temple Beth Shalom and the Jewish Federation of New Mexico, Santa Fe Community College, 1-5 PM.

May 7-9: Historical Society of New Mexico Annual Conference, Embassy Suites Hotel, Albuquerque, [HSNM.org](http://HSNM.org)

May TBA: Montefiore Cemetery Clean-up, Las Vegas.

June 14: NMJHS Annual Meeting, Keynote Address by Anne Derse, Former U.S. Ambassador to Lithuania. Tentative Topic: "Addressing the Legacy of the Holocaust in Lithuania." Co-sponsored with Temple Beth Shalom, Santa Fe, 1 PM.

November 14-15: Fall Conference, "Celebrating 30 Years: A Retrospective and the Jewish Communities of the Southern Southwest," New Mexico Farm and Ranch Heritage Museum, Las Cruces, [NMJHS.org](http://NMJHS.org).