



Sephardic Romances from the Mediterranean Basin to the Americas

by Vanessa Paloma Elbaz

Editor's note: The author collects Sephardic songs, stories, and poems that she records and performs under her stage name, Vanessa Paloma.

Sephardic Romances are found throughout communities from the Mediterranean basin in all the countries that accepted exiles from the Iberian

Peninsula during the centuries before and after the expulsion of the Jews. These Sephardic Romances are for the most part shared with the Spanish Romancero still in existence throughout the Iberian Peninsula.

Just like the Sephardic exiles, who carried the Romancero with them after the expulsion, the Spanish Romancero traveled to the Americas with the Conquistadors. Musicians and singers traveled on the ships crossing the seas, as described in Emilio Rodríguez Demorizi's account of the trip to Santo Domingo from Spain.

Músicos y cantos eran el único solaz de la tripulación en la incierta y larga travesía Cuando en 1544 retornan de España ... en las naos venían 'los seglares tañendo guitarra y cantando romances y cada uno a su modo ... otros leyendo en libros...'

[Musicians and singing were the only respite for the tribulation during the long and uncertain journey When in 1544 they came back from Spain ... in the boats the 'minstrels played guitar and sang romances each one in their manner ... others were reading books...']

In the Americas, the Romancero survived through the sung voices in

communities living from the desert mountains of New Mexico to the Pacific jungles of Colombia (with the descendants of African slaves), in the Caribbean islands, and as far south as Argentina.

The driving themes of Romances had women's chastity, strength and purity at their core. These themes, crucial for Sephardim because of their minority status, helped maintain the community's integrity even after the cataclysm of the expulsion from Spain and the massive migrations throughout the Mediterranean and to the Americas that came about during the 16th and 17th centuries.

This article is an initial exploration of the reasons behind the survival and migration of Romance texts throughout the Mediterranean and the Americas. These Romances were easily transportable packets of crucial societal information that transmitted the fundamental stories, myths and mores from the society of the Iberian Peninsula during the time of Al-Andalus [the Arabic name for Spain]. The songs carried these messages into the Iberian diaspora after the fall of the Muslim reign and the expulsion of the Jews. The expansion of this repertoire throughout the Spanish, Catalan, Portuguese and Judeo-Spanish speaking world perpetuated the beliefs, stories and narratives of this lost world for centuries into the future, and into contemporary times.

The Communal Function of Narrative Songs

The singing tradition of narrative poems is traced back to Greek epic poetry. In ancient Greece, oral tradi-



Estrella Benchimol and her mother singing Romances in Tetuan, May 11, 2014. [Photo by Nate Evans]

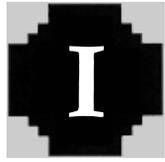
tion served as the fundamental way to transmit the community's beliefs, myths, stories and history. The function of these sung stories was to communicate their society's news but, as well, to pass on the mores of their society to the next generation. In an oral society, the language used to transmit these instructions requires fixed statements

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President's Column



I hope that you are enjoying a lovely summer so far. NMJHS kicked off the summer season in May with our Annual Meeting that concluded with a fascinating lecture by Rabbi Paul Citrin. In Rabbi Citrin's talk "Doing, Not Learning, is the Chief Thing: Rabbinic Activism in New Mexico," we heard what rabbis have been doing over the years as activists for social change, which, Rabbi Citrin pointed out, is not enough lately!

Another highlight of the Annual Meeting was the presentation of the Allan P. & Leona Hurst Award, the Society's highest honor, to Ron Duncan Hart, whom you will read about in this issue.



**NMJHS President
Naomi Sandweiss**

Also in May an important Society activity took place in Las Vegas, New Mexico: the annual Montefiore Cemetery Cleanup. Sharon Niederman's article in this issue captures the history of the cemetery and the spirit of this year's cleanup.

May was also time to welcome new board members Carla Freeman, Richard Melzer, and Cate Dixon and say good-bye to those rotating off the board, including Dorothy Amsden, Noel Pugach, Ron Duncan Hart, Tom Downey, and Karen Singer. We are sincerely grateful for the service

of all board members.

I am sure that you will enjoy this issue of *Legacy*, beginning with Vanessa Paloma's charming and informative article about Romanceros. You can see and hear her in person in Santa Fe on August 1. You'll certainly want to mark your calendar for November 15 and 16, the dates of the NMJHS Fall Conference, which will take place in Albuquerque. See the article in this issue by conference chair Anita Miller about the topics, speakers, and a walking tour of downtown Albuquerque.

I especially want to thank Dorothy Corner Amsden, who in addition to being a past president, membership chair, genealogy chair, and board member for NMJHS, has also served as *Legacy* editor. As of the next issue, we will welcome Dianne Layden as the new *Legacy* editor.

As always, we welcome volunteer involvement in all aspects of NMJHS, from the office to *Legacy*, programs and conference planning to genealogy. If you would like to share your talents with the Society, please contact myself or Ruth Carter at 505-348-4471. ☆

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.

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Fall Conference Features “The Merchants of Albuquerque”

by Anita Miller

Imagine a trading post in the middle of Navajo country, with Yiddish on the outside walls to welcome a bride from the Old Country! This and other tales about the generation of Jews coming to Albuquerque and vicinity in the 1920s through 1950s will be told by their descendants at the 2014 Fall Conference of the New Mexico Jewish History Society.

This year’s conference features the merchants of Albuquerque and their considerable legacy. Do plan to join your fellow history buffs at the Jewish Community Center in Albuquerque over the weekend on November 15 and 16 for a trip back in time to the not-so-distant past.

“The Merchants of Albuquerque: Building Businesses and Community” will feature the stories of those Jewish merchants who came to Albuquerque before, during, and immediately after World War II and transformed a little town into the business capital of New Mexico, which it remains today.

Keynote speaker Harvey Buchalter calls his talk “The Exceptionality of Albuquerque. Why Jews Were Drawn to the West; Why Some Feared to Leave Home.” He notes that not all immigrants stayed in the enclave of New York’s Lower East Side. A few cast their fears aside to travel into the unknown. What did they create in Albuquerque?

Some of the speakers are descendants of merchant families, such as Leba Freed and Wayne Bobrick, who will talk about why so many Jews in America became merchants and why a number of them chose Albuquerque as a place to settle and start a business. They will

address the importance of their family businesses to the growth of a city.

One interesting focus of the conference will be on Jewish merchants whose businesses involved buying and selling Native American-made crafts, some of which are still thriving well into the 21st century.



The Rosenwald Building (as it appears today) opened at Fourth Street and Central Avenue in downtown Albuquerque in 1910 as a department store, built by the children of German immigrant merchants Aron and Edward Rosenwald.

Invited speakers include Roberta Ramo, Mike Danoff, Ron Taylor, Susie Citrin, Jay Hertz and Helen Grevey, all of whom are descended from Albuquerque area merchant families and have stories to tell. The many descendants of those old merchant families who still live in the area will be invited to attend the conference and share their family stories with conference attendees.

Jewish merchants and their descendants, along with other Jews in manufacturing and in the medical, legal, and financial professions, stimulated the growth of Albuquerque’s thriving Jewish community. They built a Conservative Synagogue in addition to the existing Reform Synagogue. This enterprising community didn’t stop after building their houses of worship but also conceived of and then built

the beautiful Jewish Community Center where this year’s Fall Conference is taking place.

The conference begins at 1 p.m. on Saturday, November 15, at the JCC with presentations, followed by cocktails and dinner on Saturday evening. The Sunday morning session starts off with brunch at the JCC followed by presentations until noon, when the formal part of the conference concludes.

Sunday afternoon conference attendees are invited to take an optional walking tour of “downtown” Albuquerque to see where these early businesses flourished. The tour will conclude at the Holocaust and Intolerance Museum of New Mexico on Central Avenue with a talk about Jews who joined their families in Albuquerque during the Holocaust. Refreshments will be served after the talk at the Museum.

Conference registration materials will be mailed to NMJHS members in early September. Arrangements have been made at the Hilton Gardens Inn on San Antonio Boulevard for out-of-towners. ☆

Donations Needed for Silent Auction

Cleaning, organizing, or moving this summer? NMJHS is seeking donations of artwork, collectibles, tickets, or gift certificates suitable for a silent auction at the Fall Conference on November 15-16. Please contact Janet Saiers at 505-299-5019 for information about making a donation.

Sephardic Romances (continued from p. 1)

that become transmissible as such. Eric Havelock, in his book *The Muse Learns to Write* (1986), summarizes this process:

What kind of language can supply this need [of transmission] and still remain oral? The answer would seem to lie in *ritualized utterance* [author's italics], a traditional language which somehow becomes formally repeatable like a ritual in which the words remain in a fixed order. Such language has to be memorized. There is no other way of guaranteeing its survival. Ritualization becomes the means of memorization. The memories are personal, belonging to every man, woman and child in the community, yet their content, the language preserved, is communal, something shared by the community as expressing its tradition and its historical identity. (Havelock, 1986: 70)

Romances are traditionally memorized and sung as the “ritualized utterance” that Havelock refers to. Memories of the themes, characters and plots enter into every part of the life of the communities that sing them, thus making Romances become an integral part of their identity. They serve as the communal message, forming the *topos* [Greek: common themes or topics] that navigate through their world.

The Romances functioned as a manner of constituting a community of belief in the vernacular. The need for this community formed around a world-view that existed outside of the Hebrew ritual and served to integrate the whole population: men, women and children. Joseph Campbell explains in *The Power of Myth* that

The basic theme of all mythology [is] that there is an invisible plane supporting the visible one.... And this idea of invisible support is connected with one's society, too.

Society was there before you, it is there after you are gone, and you are a member of it. *The myths that link you to your social group, the tribal myths, affirm that you are an organ of*



Mercedes Bengio (R) with her cousin on the left, both originally from Tetuan in Ouezzane, Morocco, during the pilgrimage for Lag B'Omer, May 18, 2014.

the larger organism [author's italics].... The main theme in ritual is the linking of the individual to a larger morphological structure than that of his own physical body. (Campbell, 1988: 90)

Romancero and its Poetic Tributaries

The memorized songs of the Spanish Romancero harken as far back as the tradition of Greek bardic songs. The formal, textual and thematic influences include Classical epic poetry, Carolingian poetry, *muwashshah* [Arabic poetic genre in strophic form developed in the 11th and 12th centuries] from Al-Andalus, and French poetic songs.

Following are some examples of these:

- Classical textual influence appears in the song *El robo de Elena*, a Romance

telling the story of Helen of Troy's capture, still sung in twentieth century Tangier.

- Carolingian thematic influence is in *Melisenda insomne*, which tells the story of Charlemagne's daughter's love for Conde Niño, popular in Tetuan until the 1950s.
- Zharjas, the vernacular strophes in *muwashshah*, used a meter orientated towards the Khalilian Arabic meter.
- *La Reina Xerifa Mora* develops from the 12th century French narrative poem *Floire et Blanceflor* and is still part of the Sephardic oral tradition in contemporary Morocco.

Romances and the Transmission of Core Communal Narratives

Since Sephardic Romances can be seen as one tributary stemming from the tradition of Greek bardic narrative poetry, one can infer that the nature of these narrative songs were the core cultural expression of this community, in the same manner as for the Greeks. The repeating narratives of adultery, faithfulness, captive maidens, and love that culminates in marriage are some of the themes that were central concerns of the Sephardi community. It is important to keep in mind that they were a minority community often surrounded by a population that desired the conversion of “non-believers.”

Catholicism in the Spanish and Portuguese world wanted – and on numerous occasions forced – the Jews to convert; in some cases the Muslims also forced conversions, such as during the Almohades period and during various moments of heightened political tensions in Fez. This potential loss of population to conversion and later, to intermarriage was resisted through the narratives of the Romances.

Sephardic Romances (continued from p. 4)

Sephardic Songs and Ritualized Transmission

In the Sephardic world most women lived with an oral tradition until recently. The world of the synagogue was dominated by men and was the context of ritualized expression in Hebrew, following a written, codified text. Only in rare instances did women know Hebrew prayers and liturgy.

However, women did have their own texts that followed similar rules of codification and ritualization. Their repertoire of ritualized expression was through songs in Judeo-Spanish that were passed from one generation to the next. They sang these songs during wedding celebrations, communal feasts, while putting children to sleep, and while gathering to cook for celebratory life-cycle feasts and holidays.

In a society that was based on oral tradition, the moments of passing crucial information from one person to another were done communally. Eric Havelock succinctly explains the mechanics of oral transmission in such situations:

Tradition has specifics for any given society. An individual has to learn what these are, whatever they happen to be. He does not draw them from an instinctive sensibility of his own, supposedly in tune with a vaguely conceived general consciousness.... One method of learning is visual. It consists of watching performance in order to imitate it, and it is very effective in the transmission of trades and crafts.... The other method is linguistic: you do what you are told to do, in this case by a *voice which is collective, a voice of the community* [author's italics]. This requires a body of language "encoded" to carry the necessary instructions.

The instructions *have to possess stability. They have to be repeated from generation to generation, and the repetition must be guaranteed to be faithful or else the culture loses its coherence and so its historical character as a culture* [author's italics]. The language of these instructions must be so framed as to possess this stability. (Havelock, 1986: 69)

In Sephardic tradition, as with classical epic poetry, the function of oral tradition changed within society once written literature developed. Today it is common to perceive the function of narrative songs as entertainment and not as fundamental in the transmission of the beliefs and mores of our time. However, when performers sing a Romance text, they always comment on the story before and after, explaining details, making their own commentaries and opinions about the unfolding of the plot or the core concern being addressed. This sort of relationship to the text elucidates the personal connection that the singers have to the narratives that drive this repertoire.

The Romancero in the Americas

Throughout the Sephardic and Spanish Diaspora, the Romancero carried these narratives throughout the New World, thus connecting themes from North Africa to New Mexico, Cuba, Colombia, Argentina, and Andalusia.... Some examples of shared Romances follow.

- "Gerineldo," which is possibly the most popular Romance in the whole Romancero tradition, tells about the overtures of a princess to her page for his sexual favors. After he fulfills her desire, the King her father, finds them asleep together and must make a decision: kill them or marry them? Singers of this piece choose different endings according to the time and place – in some the page follows the King's command, in others he reiterates a promise

he made to not marry a maiden he had slept with.

"Gerineldo's" core theme is the relationship between two people of different social status. In some versions it is also an admonition to young women against premarital sex, even if they think they are in a position of power because they come from a higher social standing. In the Romancero a woman can only lose her honor – which is strictly linked to her chastity; she can never gain honor from her actions, nor can honor be transferred to her. Once she has lost it, there is no solution but marriage. (Found in the Iberian Peninsula, Greece, Turkey, Morocco, New Mexico, Cuba, Colombia, and elsewhere.)

- "Delgadina" is a Romance that deals with the taboo of incest. The earliest known mention is in 1555 as a reference for a tune in a printed document. Delgadina's father has fallen in love with her and has locked her up with no food and water until she will succumb to his propositions. She asks for help from every single one of her family members, but they do not help her out of fear of the father's reprisals. She dies while begging her family to save her and give her water. This Romance illustrates the catastrophe that unchecked patriarchy can wreak on a family. (Iberian Peninsula, Mexico, Chile, Colombia, Morocco, Turkey, Louisiana.)

- "¿Por qué no cantáis la bella?" This Romance narrates the story of a young maiden who vows to wage war to save her beloved who is a prisoner of war. She states that she will place her very body ("braids as sails, arms as oars, herself as captain") to save her beloved. Versions are found in Tetuan, Orán, and a version to the Divine in Cuba, where the young maiden was transferred to the Virgin Mary and the beloved was her son who was dying on the cross. The Sephardic tradition has

Sephardic Romances (continued from p. 5)

the only known versions of the secular Romance, which could also possibly be a metaphor for the Divine in the vernacular.

• “Albaniña,” also known as Rosablanca, is a Romance of an adulterous wife. Her husband is away at war when a lover approaches the house and she lets him in. At that moment the husband arrives, and when he enters the house he discovers a series of objects that belong to the lover. His wife masks the situation by insisting they are gifts for the husband from her family, until he enters the bedroom and finds her lover. In some versions he kills them both, in some he kills the lover, and in some he kills her and her father, leaving the lover alive in the bedroom. It is found through the whole Spanish, Portuguese, and Sephardic world.

• “Rahel Lastimoza” is a popular romance that tells a story of averted adultery. A young man declares his love for a married woman; he gives her valuable jewelry, but she returns everything “que casada era yo” (because I am married). It is the most popular of all the Sephardic Romances in Morocco and is sung at weddings, communal feasts and especially at pilgrimages to the tombs of Jewish Saints.

The colonial version of the romance is found in a document from 1630 in Argentina, where it was later notated in the margin of a legal document around the end of the seventeenth century. In this early version, the married woman was in fact adulterous and suffered terribly at the hand of her husband for her actions. Sephardic women in contemporary Morocco have consciously truncated the Romance text to maintain her faithfulness, and they attach a verse in Hebrew: *Hodu l'Adonai ki tov, ki le'Olam Hasdo* (Praised be God because he is good, and his mercy has no end). ✧

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Vanessa Paloma Elbaz lives in Casablanca, Morocco, with her husband and two young children. She is currently pursuing a doctorate from the Sorbonne in Paris at the Institut National de Langues et Civilisations Orientales. Her parents, Ron Duncan Hart and Gloria Abella Ballen, live in Santa Fe. For more information about the author and to listen to some of her songs go to vanessapaloma.com.



Vanessa Paloma in Performance August 1 in Santa Fe

International concert artist Vanessa Paloma will perform “Sephardic Sounds, Music from Morocco & Beyond” as a part of the Santa Fe North African Sephardic Festival. Her performance, co-sponsored by The Santa Fe Jewish Film Festival and the New Mexico Jewish Historical Society, takes place on Friday, August 1, at 6 p.m. with a pre-concert talk at 5 p.m. See Upcoming Events on page 12 of this issue for ticket information.

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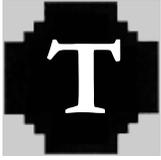
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2014 Montefiore Cemetery Cleanup

by Sharon Niederman



Those souls resting in an out-of-the-way Las Vegas, New Mexico, cemetery must surely be resting more peacefully.

For almost thirty years, the New Mexico Jewish Historical Society and the Montefiore Cemetery Association have organized the annual cleanup of the first sanctified Jewish cemetery in the state, and perhaps, west of the Mississippi.

On this sunny, windy first Sunday in May, a group of volunteers, ranging in age from 13 to 96, arrived with rakes and shovels in hand to pull weeds, trim trees, and move rocks to help preserve the serenity found here.

They enjoyed the shade of the new wood and stone shelter, and they admired the reconstruction of the length of stone wall that will eventually enclose the entire cemetery, thanks to the efforts of Ted Herberger, caretaker and vice president of the Montefiore Cemetery Association. Ted is supervising the repair of the crumbling 1890s wall, stone by stone. Participants heard about the grant from the Herzstein Foundation in Houston, Texas, that will enable them to dig a well. Finding water in this parched ground would greatly benefit the upkeep and preservation of this uniquely New Mexican Jewish sacred site.

This year's volunteers drove from Boulder, Angel Fire, Santa Fe, Albuquerque, and Raton to participate in the annual ritual of sharing the task of upkeep. After the work was done they shared lunch and history and recited Kaddish, the prayer for the dead, for those who

no longer have living family descendants to recite it for them. And several of those in attendance do have relatives buried here; graves are marked with the simple custom of placing a pebble on the headstone.

Stan and Helen Hordes of Albuquerque busied themselves cleaning brush from their own intended plot. Stan, former president and founding member of NMJHS, recounted the first cleanup in 1986, which he and Jim Mafchir helped organize.

Marvin Taichert, son of Las Vegas businessman Milton Taichert, founded the Montefiore Cemetery Association in the late 1980s to care for and clean



Nancy Terr hard at work. [Photo by Sharon Niederman]

the cemetery as a mitzvah for his family. He was instrumental in the first annual cleanup. Marvin passed away in 2002.

Santa Fe sculptor Gunter Aron and his wife Geri took the role of cleanup organizers for many years.

During the picnic lunch provided by the Montefiore Cemetery Association, historian Melanie LaBorwit, formerly of Las Vegas, gave context to the event by recounting the contributions of the



Cemetery cleanup crew: left to right, Helen Hordes, Jim Terr, and Stan Hordes. [Photo by Sharon Niederman]

largely German Jewish community of Las Vegas 19th and early 20th century merchants to the civic life of Northern New Mexico. Some of the best-known pioneers, such as Charles Ilfeld, are not buried in the Montefiore Cemetery; rather, they rest in the adjacent Masonic Cemetery.

One need only glimpse the dates on the headstones to be stirred by the journeys undertaken by New Mexico's Jewish pioneers. There one finds lives originating in Bavaria and other Germanic regions in the 1840s and 1850s, to end in as unlikely a place as Las Vegas, New Mexico.

This year's cleanup was a coda to the Historical Society of New Mexico's annual conference, this year held in Las Vegas. Janet Saiers, president of that organization, also serves on the board of NMJHS and came to lend a hand.

Sharon Niederman, NMJHS past president and archivist, currently serves on the board of NMJHS. ☆

Many Thanks for Your Contributions

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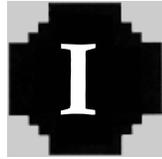


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In Memory of Susan Spiegelberg Warburg



It is with great regret that the New Mexico Jewish Historical Society announces the death of Susan Spiegelberg Warburg, a descendant

of the Spiegelberg family, one of the first Jewish families who settled in New Mexico before the Civil War. The Spiegelberg brothers opened a store in Santa Fe on the Plaza in a building that still bears their name, opened a bank, and made real estate investments. Two of the five brothers fought in the Civil War.

Wright Gallery. During the walking tour associated with the 2012 NMJHS Fall Conference in Santa Fe Sue talked about her Spiegelberg family, gave a personal tour of their house, and made sure that everyone had a chance to see the first indoor toilet in Santa Fe.



As an impromptu part of the walking tour before the 2012 Fall Conference in Santa Fe, Sue Warburg tells a rapt audience about her great-grandparents' house on East Palace Avenue. [Photos by Dorothy Amsden]

The idea for the Jewish Pioneer exhibit on display at the Museum of New Mexico from 2001 to 2005 came from Spiegelberg descendants following a Spiegelberg family reunion in Santa Fe in 1988. Susan and Felix Warburg were the guest curators and principal donors. Sue contributed family stories and heirlooms to the exhibit.

Sue Warburg, along with her husband, the architect Felix Warburg, owned and lectured for San Francisco Jewish Landmarks Tours for twenty years. A specialist in art, architecture, and Jewish history, Sue was a former chair of the advisory committee of the Western Jewish History Center of the Judah L. Magnes Museum.

Sue's great-grandparents Willi and Flora Spiegelberg built a fine house with indoor plumbing and gaslight at 237 East Palace Avenue in Santa Fe, just a few blocks east of the Palace of the Governors. It stands today much as it was built, occupied by the Peyton-

A native of New York City, Sue and Felix adopted San Francisco as their home. Sue was an early and active member of the New Mexico Jewish Historical Society and will be missed greatly. ☆

Profile: Ron Duncan Hart

by Diane J. Schmidt

Looking the part of a CIA agent might be an asset in the social circles of Santa Fe, but it is a distinct liability in Colombia if you really are in fact a dedicated, kind, hard-working cultural anthropologist and professor. So it happened, after almost two decades working there, that life became uncertain, and Ron Duncan Hart and his talented wife, Colombian artist and professor Gloria Abella Ballen, suddenly had to abandon their life there and return to the United States.

They had met and were both teaching in anthropology and art at Georgia State University when they first took a leave of absence to go to Colombia. Hart was only planning to be away for a year.

“And then we decided to stay. Gloria’s brother and sister, both in their own way, took me in and showed me the social fabric: Alfonso, a doctor, with the urban poor, and Nina, an anthropologist, with the African-Colombian population. With the two of them I had this incredible introduction – while I was still learning Spanish – to teach me what the reality of the social situation in Colombia was.

“With Nina, we began doing some work together. I started working with international organizations, with the Ford Foundation, with a Canadian organization that was similar, with UNICEF, working for social change, looking at what the local communities need to improve conditions.” With his PhD from Indiana University in cultural anthropology, Hart developed communication methods for delivering information for rural community development programs.

He got involved at one point in working with “invasion barrios,” squatter

settlements. “Poor people were coming in from the countryside to Bogotá, and one hundred families had occupied one piece of land. When the owner said they couldn’t stay there, the police went in with trucks, gathered them all up, and put them on another piece of land further out. We drove by the next morning outside Bogotá. In the early morning sunlight hitting the mountainside



Ron Duncan Hart in his Santa Fe home with Toto. [Photo by Diane Schmidt]

there was a sea of plastics glistening in the sun. Overnight they had stretched plastic coverings over beds and were claiming house sites. Then they got stakes and stretched plastic and later tar-paper shacks. They literally invaded a vacant space.”

“Those invasion barrios are so poor. The city does not recognize them. By the time it grew there were three thousand people there. Cali had one with one hundred thousand. There was no electricity, no running water, no sewer system. They illegally hooked into electricity and chipped in together and got hundreds of yards of hose to run water from some neighbor. Since they were illegal and had no legal address the children couldn’t go to school. We helped raise money in Canada to build a building with a health center and a school. Gloria’s brother is a medical doctor and was a professor at the National University Medical School. He

arranged to have student interns come out and provide medical services.

“We were in Colombia and Latin America from the early 1970s to the 1990s – for twenty years. We were in Puerto Rico for one period,” where Hart was Dean of Academic Affairs at the InterAmerican University. “After the disruption in Colombia with the narco-trafficking and guerilla war there was such a disruption that the Colombia we knew was gone.”

As is his quiet manner, Hart didn’t volunteer the story, but when asked if he had become a target for kidnapping he said, “That’s the reason we had to leave, when I got a threat. We already had known other anthropologists who literally had been

kidnapped, held for months. I packed my suitcase and got on a plane.

“Our plan was to stay – but when it gets that close, when you know people have actually identified you and you’re a target – two students warned me in the National University, which had guerilla cells. Two weeks before this, one of my students had been killed in a big shootout with the government, trying to rob a bank to finance their activity. Within a matter of two weeks I got this warning, ‘you have been identified, you should be careful.’

“I was teaching in the anthropology and art programs; they were both politicized with social consciousness, so at that point we decided it was not worth running this risk. They had also started targeting the Jewish community, it was usually a matter of ransom, but there was a young Jewish man who was killed. The kidnappings and that killing triggered an exodus in the late nineties. The

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Jewish community went from sixteen thousand to four thousand.

“It was both the para-military right-wing army groups, in that chaos, and with the student guerilla groups, there were too many things happening from too many directions. The thing is, being out in the countryside, being in *campesino* (farming) communities, but being a North American, the leftist guerillas thought I was CIA, and the right wing thought I was aligned with the leftists. Being a foreigner, neither side trusted who I was where I was, trying to be a neutral observer. There is no neutral ground – you’re assigned a status whether you want it or not.”

Raised in a secular Jewish American household in the Bay area as Ron Duncan, he later added his mother’s name Hart, as is the custom in Colombia. His keen appreciation of Sephardic history brought him to Oxford University to do postdoctoral work, and his growing interest in bettering Westerners’ understandings led him to travel further into the Muslim world, from Morocco to Central Asia.

He gave the 2008 Neustadt Lecture at Oklahoma City University, titled “Cain’s Question and the Arab-Israeli Conflict.” The preface, by Dean Mark Davies of the OKCU theological center, reads “I am thankful that Ron heeded the wisdom of his grandmother who taught him when he was just five years old that it is wrong to objectify and demonize persons who we might see as the “other.” She had stopped him from playing cowboys and Indians saying, “You don’t shoot Indians.”

Hart wrote a book *Islam and Muslims* [Gaon Press, 2011], dedicated “To Jews and Muslims / Who have lived together / With respect and mutual acceptance / for more than a thousand years.” The book includes incisive critiques of Western views and demographic analyses.

Hart explained that “In Egypt, the Palestinian territories, and some other Arab countries, there is a big population growth, fifty percent of the people are under eighteen, the economy is not growing fast enough to absorb them. Young men are unemployed and unemployable, so they cannot get married, can’t move into the adult mature next stage in life, there is the potential for people to engage in violence.”

Hart does believe that, over the next thirty to forty years, changes that will improve the situation will come, largely through greater education of and leadership by women. Simply put, with literacy, birthrates drop.

“A lot of people who are professionals in the field, scholars, people in peace studies and international conflict resolution, say it’s going take time. Their view is basically, they do not expect (the conflict with Israel) to be resolved now, but in the next forty years. Until these generations are gone it will not be resolved.

“What is interesting to me is the rise of women, a new generation of educated women. As these women emerge, their voices are different from the men’s voices. If women came into power with elected positions they might approach the whole thing with Israel in a different way. And in the process, the more women in [leadership in] Israel, maybe the women can find a way to resolve this that men can’t – that we men can’t see.”

Since first coming to Santa Fe in 2005 and finally moving there in 2008, Hart has become deeply involved in many aspects of the Jewish community. He has established a growing publishing house, Gaon Books, which in the last six years has published thirty-six titles. Hart’s interests continue to lean towards Jewish non-fiction women’s voices.

With this year’s successful launch of Gloria Abella Ballen’s art monograph *The Power of the Hebrew Alphabet* that was recently featured in *Hadassah Magazine*, the press is becoming a recognized force in the publishing landscape. Gloria’s beautiful and insightful publication features her paintings of the Hebrew letters taking flight – inspired by her studies of medieval Sephardic illuminated manuscripts and the Kabbalah.

As program director the past four years on the board of the NMJHS, Hart’s tireless work culminated in the highly successful 26th Fall Conference in 2013 held in Taos, “Sephardic History from Spain to New Mexico.” And, from its inception at HaMakom in 2010, Hart also has worked on the advisory committee of the Santa Fe Jewish Film Festival with Festival Director Marcia Torobin. The festival has quickly become a stellar annual event with sold-out tickets at all shows.

Hart is now involved in work on a major exhibit and book, “Sephardic Legacy,” that will open in May 2016 at the New Mexico History Museum in Santa Fe. Hart explains, “This is the first time really that an exhibit of this kind has been done, showing when Jews had to go into hiding, to give insight into how people who were hiding their Jewish identity lived. The exhibit and book will trace the Jewish story in Spain, then – after the expulsion – bringing it into Mexico and New Mexico, and the crypto-Jewish story here where it was illegal to be Jewish up to contemporary times.”

The project began as the brainchild of Frances Levine, former director of the museum, in discussions with donor Helene Singer Merrin. Then another gift from Stephen and Jane Hochberg made the book possible.

Duncan Hart is co-editor of the Sephardic Legacy book for the exhibition

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with Roger Martinez, of the University of Colorado and President of the Society for Crypto-Judaic Studies, and they have a fascinating international line-up of scholars tracing Jewish history in Spain, Mexico, and New Mexico. The entire production promises to be a groundbreaking exhibition that will spark international interest in New Mexico's unique history and greater appreciation of the intertwined histories of Jews, Muslims, and Christians.

NMJHS board member Diane J. Schmidt is a writer, photographer, and public speaker. National awards include 1st Place for enterprise reporting from the National Federation of Press Women in 2014, a Robert R. McCormick Fellowship to the Poynter Institute in 2012, and a National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship for her photo essays in the *Chicago Tribune Sunday Magazine*. Memorable projects include the art monograph "The Chicago Exhibition," her memoir as a photojournalist covering the civil war in El Salvador, and health projects for the Navajo

Nation. Diane has a BA from Prescott College in Arizona, a BEA from the Rhode Island School of Design, and an MA from the University of New Mexico. She and her husband live in Corrales. Read articles by Diane J. Schmidt online at *The Albuquerque Judaism Examiner*. ✨

NMJHS presents the 2014 Dr. Allan P. and Leona Hurst Award to Ron Duncan Hart



Every year the New Mexico Jewish Historical Society bestows a special award to a person, persons, or organization that has contributed to

New Mexico Jewish history, culture, and community for a substantial period of time. The award was first established by Leona Hurst in 1998 following the death of her husband Dr. Allan P. Hurst, who was a founding member of the Society. After Leona passed away her name was added to the award.

At the NMJHS Annual Meeting on May 18, Noel Pugach and Dorothy Amsden presented this year's Hurst award to an unsuspecting Ron Duncan Hart for his outstanding service to NMJHS and the Jewish community.

Ron Duncan Hart is a cultural anthropologist by training, who relocated to Santa Fe after many years of living in South America and Puerto Rico. He has written numerous articles and books on Sephardic history as well as a notable work about the Muslim world.

Ron earned his doctorate in cultural anthropology at Indiana University and conducted postdoctoral work at Oxford University. He worked in Latin

America for 18 years with UNICEF, the Ford Foundation, and other international agencies. His research in the Muslim world took him from Morocco to Central Asia. He has received awards from the National Endowment for the



Noel Pugach and Dorothy Amsden present the Hurst Award to Ron Duncan Hart at the 2014 NMJHS Annual Meeting in Albuquerque on May 18. [Photo by Diane Schmidt]

Humanities, the National Science Foundation, Ford Foundation, and Fulbright.

In Santa Fe Ron is highly active in the Jewish community, serving on the boards of the Santa Fe Jewish Film Festival, HaMakom, and several other organizations. Ron is also an active member of the Society for Crypto-Judaic Studies. He is currently working on an exhibit about Sephardic Jews to go on display at the Museum of New Mexico in 2016.

Ron and his wife Gloria Abella Ballen established a small publishing company in Santa Fe called Gaon Books to bring attention to "books of distinction on the social, cultural, linguistic and spiritual tapestry that is Judaism," with "special attention . . . [to] women's voice[s] and the Judeo-Spanish cultural and religious heritage." Ron has become a major player on the Santa Fe arts and cultural scene.

Ron joined the NMJHS board in June 2010, during which time he extended the scope of the programs and outreach of the Society.

Ron has been an active player in NMJHS activities, organizing programs and conferences, sending out attractive notices via email to members and interested parties, writing articles in *Legacy* and *The New Mexico Jewish Link* about Jewish history, and serving as recording and corresponding secretary.

A Renaissance man, Ron continues to broaden the horizons of Jewish history from New Mexico to Latin America, Spain, Morocco, and the Middle East. ✨

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Membership in NMJHS

For information contact the NMJHS office at 505-348-4471 or admin@nmjhs.org to request a membership brochure. Alternatively, you can download a membership application from the NMJHS website www.nmjhs.org



Calendar of NMJHS Upcoming Events

Check for future events at www.nmjhs.org

Friday, August 1: International concert artist Vanessa Paloma performs “Sephardic Sounds, Music from Morocco & Beyond” as a part of the North African Sephardic Festival taking place in Santa Fe July 29 to August 3. North African music master Fattah Abbou will accompany her on the oud. Ms. Paloma will give a pre-concert talk at 5 p.m. followed by her performance at 6 p.m. in the auditorium of the New Mexico History Museum in Santa Fe. Ms. Paloma’s performance is co-sponsored by the Santa Jewish Fe Film Festival and the New Mexico Jewish Historical Society. Tickets cost \$20 per person and must be reserved ahead of time, either online at www.santafejff.org or by phoning 505-216-0672.

Saturday and Sunday, November 15-16: NMJHS Fall Conference entitled “The Merchants of Albuquerque: Building Businesses and Community” takes place at the Jewish Community Center in Albuquerque. [See page 3 in this issue for more information.] **SAVE THE DATE**