



## The Lost Minyan

by David M. Gitlitz. University of New Mexico Press, Albuquerque, 2010. 316 pages

Reviewed by Norma Libman

**I**n his new book, scholar and University of Rhode Island professor David M. Gitlitz breathes life into a handful of the many stories contained in the Inquisitional records of Spain. Gitlitz, author of several books on Jewish life and history, including books specifically on the Inquisition, selected a format that vividly illustrates the agonies of dealing with imprisonment, interrogations, secrecy, suspicion, and

the life-or-death choices people affected by the Inquisition repeatedly had to make.

As the title suggests, there are ten stories, the same as the number of adult males needed to perform certain Jewish rituals, which in Inquisitional times and again in modern times can also include adult females. Each story involves several people, including family members, business associates, neighbors or acquaintances. This is historical fiction

of the very best kind. Conversations and details of dress or place or thought are imagined, of course, but all the historical facts are notated at the end of the book in the sources, which are frequently Inquisition records themselves. The notes include the outcomes of each case, so they provide a good follow-up to the stories.

We learn in the book how difficult it was for the people involved to make

*(continued on p. 5)*

## By Fire Possessed

by Sandra K. Toro, Gaon Books, Santa Fe, 2010. 312 pages

Reviewed by Helen Horwitz

**S**ome years ago, while attending Dr. Noel Pugach's impressive UNM class on Modern Jewish History, I thought the Jews' struggles to make their way after the 1492 expulsion from Spain would make a compelling historical novel. Now, thanks to Sandra K. Toro, we have such a book with *By Fire Possessed: Doña Gracia Nasi*.

What makes her effort especially notable is that Toro has based her story on real people. Moreover, she has woven through the narrative many rich details about the history and culture of 16th century Europe.

At the center of this novel is Doña Gracia, the powerful businesswoman who saved thousands of Sephardic Jews from the horrors of the Inquisition that swept through much of Renaissance Europe. Born in 1510 in Portugal to parents who themselves had fled from Spain, Doña Gracia grew up in a family of exceptional wealth, privilege, and as it turns out, secrets. The Nasis, along with their good friends the Mendes family and other Portuguese Jews, were forced to convert to Christianity after settling in Portugal. As a result, they led double lives: as so-called "New Christians" they attended church and were christened, married and buried by Christian clergy – and also, despite certain torture or the stake if discovered, these hidden Jews secretly continued to practice their faith.

When, about 65 pages into the book, Doña Gracia marries Francisco Mendes, founder of the House of Mendes, we already feel confident that her story will be a good read. Toro keeps that promise. Francisco Mendes' death, how Doña Gracia assumes control of the House of Mendes – the greatest Portuguese shipping merchant of the day – and how she builds her power and influence to ultimately resettle thousands of Jewish families in the welcoming Ottoman Empire add up to

*(continued on p. 4)*



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## Message from President Dorothy Amsden

**B**y Congressional resolution and Presidential proclamation, May is **Jewish-American Heritage Month**. This May, the United States will recognize the more than 350-year history of Jewish contributions to American culture. Events during May 2011 will acknowledge the achievements of American Jews in fields ranging from sports, arts, and entertainment to medicine, business, science, government, and military service. For more information, go to [www.jewishheritagemonth.gov](http://www.jewishheritagemonth.gov).

Here's the latest update on the **Jewish Pioneer Panels**, which were in a storage facility in Santa Fe. NMJHS picked up the rental costs for 15 months, for a total of \$2,248. The panels, which are mounted on foam core, have been removed from their heavy wood frames and transported to Albuquerque to private storage that will incur no costs. At this point NMJHS is studying ways to exhibit the panels and use them for educational purposes.

Plans for the **Fall Conference** are to hold it in Albuquerque on October 22 – 23. More comprehensive information will be available in the June issue of *Legacy*. The conference committee is in need of volunteers to make this event as successful as the one last year in Las Vegas, New Mexico. If you have experi-

ence in event planning, publicity, can help with registration, or just want to lend a hand, please contact our administrator Ruth Carter at [admin@nmjhs.org](mailto:admin@nmjhs.org) or 505-348-4471.

We would like to hear from our **far-flung members** away from the Santa Fe-Albuquerque hub. If you have an article or letter to the editor that you would like to contribute to *Legacy* I urge you to submit it for publication. We hold most of our programs in Albuquerque and Santa Fe because that is where most of our members reside. If you want NMMHS to hold an event in, say, Las Cruces, we need to be assured of a good turnout.

NMJHS is working on **building its membership** through outreach. If you enjoyed a program offered by NMJHS, tell your friends, give them a membership application brochure and a copy of *Legacy*, and bring them to the next event. Our program chairperson Ron Duncan-Hart has scoped out events for 2011; you will find the list elsewhere in this issue.

An exciting development is happening at NMJHS in the **Jewish genealogy**

area, with the help of Schelly Talalay Dardashti. An International speaker and the author of the blog *Tracing the Tribe*, Schelly recently moved to Rio Rancho after 12 years in Israel. Under her guidance NMJHS is forming a group of people interested in Jewish genealogy to meet monthly in Albuquerque. Let me know if you want to be on the e-mail list for upcoming genealogy meetings ([president@nmjhs.org](mailto:president@nmjhs.org)). Once the Albuquerque group gets going, we want to start another group to meet regularly in Santa Fe.

NMJHS has applied to join the International Association of Jewish Genealogical Societies, which will entitle genealogists to membership in both NMJHS and the IAJGS for the single price of membership in NMJHS.

With this first issue of *Legacy* for 2011 let me draw your attention to the advertisements in these pages, which help offset newsletter production costs. The Upcoming Events page on the NMJHS website features some ads with direct links to the advertiser's website or e-mail address. We thank our advertisers for their support. In return, we suggest our readers take note of their goods and services and give them your support. ☆



NMJHS President Dorothy Amsden

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## Annual Cemetery Cleanup May 22

**T**he New Mexico Jewish Historical Society and the Montefiore Cemetery Association invite you to participate in the annual cleanup of historic Montefiore cemetery starting at 10 a.m. on Sunday, May 22, 2011, in Las Vegas, New Mexico. Be

sure to bring work gloves. If you have a rake and shovel, bring them as well as a weed digger. We could use a wheelbarrow for moving large stones. Following the cleanup there will be a brief program and a picnic lunch provided by the Montefiore Cemetery Association. Congregation Montefiore was estab-

lished in 1884 as the first synagogue in New Mexico. Montefiore Cemetery is located adjacent to the Las Vegas Masonic Cemetery. Take exit 345 from I-25. Groups please RSVP to NMJHS office at 505-348-4471. ☆

## With a Doll in One Pocket and a Pistol in the Other: Rebecca Cohen Mayer

1837-1930 by Kay Goldman, CreateSpace Publishing, 2010

Reviewed by Ron Duncan-Hart



*With a Doll in One Pocket and a Pistol in the Other* introduces readers to Rebecca Cohen Mayer, one of the first women to travel the Santa Fe

Trail from Kansas City into Mexico and the former Mexican territories of the Southwest. It is also the story of the early German Jewish immigrants into the United States.

The author bases her book on Rebecca Cohen's own journal which she found at the American Jewish Archives.

In 1852, Rebecca Cohen married Henry Mayer in Cincinnati. She was 15, and he was 35. They left immediately after the wedding on a trading trip that would take them along the Santa Fe Trail to Chihuahua, Mexico. Rebecca and her family had known Henry for some time, and he had been courting her for years between his trading trips.

Rebecca starts her journal with the story of Henry's migration to the United States, later telling about her own family. Mayer was intrigued by the Comanches and other Indian peoples,

by the Western landscape, and the animals they encountered.

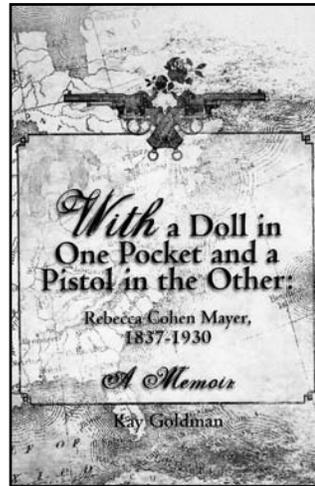
After their "Honeymoon", the couple they settled in San Antonio. Henry set up the New York Clothing Emporium on Commerce Street, and the family became involved in the growing Jewish community. Henry's business partner was Sam Kaufman, based in New York, and the two built a successful company. Henry became quite wealthy selling goods for travelers going to California, but trouble came at the beginning of the Civil War. The family left San Antonio, Texas, and their business and moved to New York where they lived comfortably for a period before returning to Germany. After a period, they moved to Liverpool, England, where Henry wanted to establish a new business, but those plans also failed.

At that point the family moved back to the United States and established them-

selves in Chicago with the idea of a new start in business. Their wealth was gone, and the family struggled financially. By this time in their lives, the wealth was in children. By the time she was 36, Rebecca had given birth to many children, of whom 12 survived. As their children grew and had children themselves, they dispersed across the western United States. *With a Doll in One Pocket and a Pistol in the Other* provides one of the few voices of a Jewish woman from the frontier experience, and Goldman gives a well-written and inter-

esting narrative of Rebecca Cohen's life. ✧

*The author, Kay C. Goldman, has a Ph.D. in History from Texas A&M University. Her research has focused on 19th century Texas Jewish businessmen and their integration into Texas' economic, political and social life. Presently, she holds a staff position at Texas A&M University.*



## Sephardic Nightingale Delights Audiences in Santa Fe



Vanessa Paloma, who is called "The Nightingale of Jewish Sephardic Music" in the international press, came to Santa Fe in her 2011 concert tour

after recent performances in London, Paris, Zurich, New York, Minneapolis-St. Paul and Denver. Her performance is entitled "The Mountain, Desert and Pomegranate: Songs and Stories from Sephardic Life in Morocco."

Paloma's concerts about Jewish life in Morocco open a door into one of the last living Jewish communities in a Muslim land. Paloma, who lives

in Casablanca, performs songs and dramatic readings about weddings, *brits* and other important life events. She uses traditional costumes and staging from Morocco.

Paloma is known for the moving spirituality of her music. National Public Radio (NPR) says, "Vanessa Paloma... is a passionate scholar and performer of songs from the Sephardic Diaspora from North Africa to Turkey..." *Hadassah Magazine* says,

"Paloma...brings richness of heritage to her work as an author, performer, teacher and preserver of Ladino songs and music."



Sharon Niederman

The concert took place at the New Mexico Museum of History Auditorium in Santa Fe on Sunday, March 13. The event was co-sponsored by the New Mexico Museum of History, New Mexico Jewish Historical Society and the Gaon Institute. ✧

**By Fire Possessed** (continued from p. 1)

a vivid narrative that is difficult to put down.

Doña Gracia's eventual arrival in Constantinople is preceded by years of dead-of-night escapes. In London and Antwerp she continues to build the family's businesses. Then, after being held for six frightening weeks by the Inquisition in Venice, she and Joseph, a nephew, begin using the House of Mendes' underground operation to enable Portuguese New Christians – including the Mendes family -- to escape to hospitable Constantinople.

Everyone in the novel is worth getting to know. Doña Gracia is shrewd, perceptive and yes, glamorous, as she moves through the royal courts of England's Henry VIII, Queen Mary of Belgium, and Suleiman, sultan of the Ottoman Empire. Francisco Mendes, who starts the House of Mendes to satisfy the grand tastes of King Manuel of Portugal, is also the secret rabbi and leader of Lisbon's Jews. Diogo, Francisco's younger brother, is both brave and gentle; like Francisco, Diogo meets with a tragic, heartbreaking death. Brianda, Doña Gra-

cia's scheming younger sister, ultimately receives much less than the punishment she deserves. And Henry VIII is an affable fellow interested in both jousting and presenting Jane Seymour, his latest bride, with spectacular jewelry.

But make no mistake: the story is Doña Gracia's, and the author imaginatively reconstructs the life of this Jewish heroine against the complex background of 16th century European history with great energy. Toro is never boring and the extensive research underlying her writing is always evident.

For me, Doña Gracia's existence – much less her great heroism – was a revelation. Indeed, she must rank as one of the most important Jewish women of the last 500 years, and her deeds deserve to be better known. She is especially significant because her success and influence occurred at a time when men controlled all aspects of society. As I write this in mid February, Amazon reports that *By Fire Possessed* is almost sold out – but notes “more copies are due shortly.” I trust this is a sign of its growing popularity.

In reviewing this gripping novel, I must point out the distractions of misspelled words and occasional misplaced (and sometimes missing) punctuation. Doña Gracia's Portuguese name is spelled inconsistently throughout – is it Beatriz da Luna or Beatriz de Luna? Moreover, as every Albuquerque schoolchild knows – at least those of my generation – the Spanish Duke for whom the New Mexico city was named is spelled with two r's: Alburquerque.

Gaon Books wisely divided her original, 800-page manuscript for *By Fire Possessed* into two parts. The second, *Princes, Popes and Pirates*, being published in March, centers on Joseph Nasi, Doña Gracia's nephew. I hope this second volume was edited with greater care – but I also can't wait to continue the story! ☆

*Helen Horwitz returned to her native Albuquerque in 2000 after a 40-year career in New York and Chicago as a communications executive. She is now a communications consultant, writer and member of NMJHS.*

## New Mexico's Tasty Traditions

by Sharon Niederman, *New Mexico Magazine*, Santa Fe, New Mexico, 2010. 137 pages.

Review by Naomi Sandweiss

**S**he can cook up a novel, whip up a potato kugel and prepare the perfect *challah*. Sharon Niederman's taste for food and culture has led her in many directions, including the recent publication of *New Mexico's Tasty Traditions*. The book, Niederman's tenth, profiles 16 different New Mexican food traditions and includes recipes, interviews and Niederman's photographs. Sharon, a past president of NMJHS, recently shared some of her thoughts about Jewish food in New Mexico with *Legacy* readers.

Among profiles of roadside restaurants, Dutch oven cooking and Chimayo chile traditions, *New Mexico's Tasty Traditions* includes a chapter entitled “Latkes on the Rio Grande,” which includes Sharon's favorite recipe for potato latkes. Why

include potato latkes? “They were a good fit with the other recipes and they play to my strengths,” indicated Sharon. “I can't make a matzo ball to save my life.” While Niederman's latke recipe is traditional (potatoes, matzo meal, eggs and onions), Sharon also embraces fusion recipes, such as green chile latkes. “It means we finally feel at home and comfortable someplace,” she notes. Fusion foods “imply a sense of security, having fun and merging traditions.”

In fact, the message behind *New Mexico's Tasty Traditions* is that people survive because of shared customs. Sharon points to the collaboration between Native and

Hispanic populations in New Mexico. Such cultural unions are familiar to Jewish populations. From language (i.e., Yiddish, Ladino) to the dinner table, Jews have woven the threads of local traditions into their own customs.



Jewish cooks may have even helped shape an important New Mexico culinary tradition, according to Niederman. In her chapter on New Mexico's state cookie, the bisco-

chito, Niederman reveals that the source of the region's favorite treat is elusive. However, she notes, “I have found a similar recipe for Egyptian butter cookies, minus the lard, called ghorayebah in *The Book of Jewish Food: An Odyssey* (continued on p. 11)

**The Lost Minyan** (continued from p. 1)

some “of the necessary choices that they repeatedly faced. Beatriz Nuñez’s husband, for instance, wanted her to give up the last vestiges of their secret Jewish practices. He did not want her to wash her hands before and after eating lest the servants notice and become suspicious. But she would become queasy if she didn’t wash. In another tale, a bishop feared that Torquemada, known as the Grand Inquisitor for his harsh treatment of suspects, was pursuing him. The bishop’s parents had been Judaizers and he knew that the Inquisition would use his family to get to him.

It is an especially effective technique of Gitlitz’s to tell the stories from many different points of view – from defendants as well as inquisitors, and from the old world and the new – so that we get a fuller picture of the far-reaching arm of the Inquisition than only one person’s story could ever tell. And by taking us into the interrogation room, he illustrates us how the evidence can mount against a man and his entire family, including relatives already deceased. We see how inquisitors lied and twisted information until the defendants, half starved and beaten, did not know what they were saying.

One woman, for instance, had been turned in by her husband who discovered after eight years of marriage that she was secretly a practicing Jew. She was determined to protect her sisters and an aunt because if she were found guilty they would all be implicated. Watching the interrogators undermine the women, each in their turn, is rivet-

ing. The use of torture, even just the threat of torture, was cleverly applied to get family members to turn against each other.

One of the stories, set in Mexico in the 17th century shows an inquisitor wrestling with whether a two-year sentence, already set, is appropriate. He felt it was not long enough if the man was a Jew, but too long if he was really a Christian.

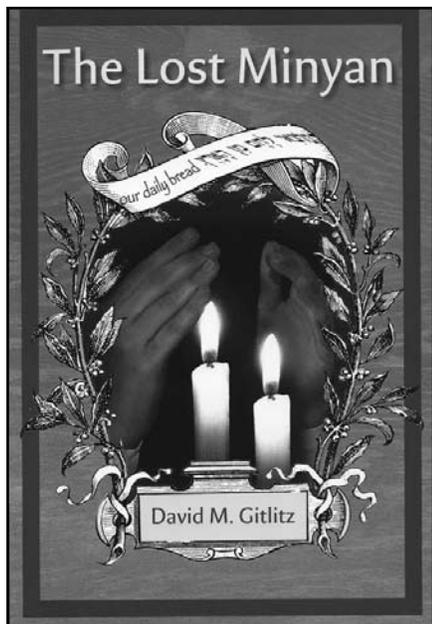
Two hundred years after the Expulsion it was still not possible to be sure of everybody. The inquisitors scrutinized what the man had said, even what he had read. They endlessly discussed the meaning of the evidence, which amounted to 700 pages according to Gitlitz’s sources.

Another man from the same era was both a Turkish Jew and a Spanish Christian.

As testimonies by and against him mount, we observe his decline from a proud man to a beggar.

The book’s ten stories bring to light the trauma of Spanish citizens – Jews and Christians alike – who were part of this bubbling cauldron of deception, which included self-deception. It is a valuable addition to the growing body of literature on this dark period of Spanish Jewish life. ☆

*Norma Libman is a journalist and educator who has been conducting research in the field of Converso history and contemporary life for 16 years.*







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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.

## Leading Jewish Genealogy Experts to Educate New Mexicans on April 3

**T**wo of Jewish genealogy's most famous experts – Bennett Greenspan of Family Tree DNA and Dr. Stephen P. Morse of the One-Step Webpages – will speak at the Jewish Community Center in Albuquerque on Sunday, April 3, from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. Both men are popular speakers at U.S. and international family history conferences.

A life-long genealogy buff and entrepreneur, Greenspan founded Family Tree DNA in 2000, turning a hobby into a full-time vocation. His efforts and innovation created the ever-expanding field now known as genetic genealogy and all its possibilities. He will speak on discovering Jewish history through the lens of DNA testing and address the overlap between Jewish DNA in Ashkenazi, Mizrahi, and Sephardic populations. He will also discuss amazing stories that non-Jews – who have discovered Jewish ancestry – share with him weekly.

Greenspan has spent years investigating his maternal grandfather's family, an obsession which led to the founding of the company and its association with Arizona Research Labs, led by Dr. Michael Hammer, a world authority on Y-DNA genetics. Houston-based Family Tree DNA is the largest non-medical DNA testing company in the

world that includes other cooperative ventures.

Steve Morse is the creator of the One-Step Website, which offers more than 200 tools for family history researchers. His work has been honored with lifetime achievement and outstanding contribution awards from several organizations, such as the Association of Professional Genealogists, National Genealogical Society, International Association of Jewish Genealogical Societies, and two Polish awards that he cannot pronounce.

A computer professional with a Ph.D. in electrical engineering, Morse has held various research, development, and teaching positions, authored numerous technical papers, written four textbooks, and holds four patents. He is best known as the architect of the Intel 8086 (the granddaddy of today's Pentium processor), which sparked the PC revolution 30 years ago.

The event, which will take place at the Jewish Community Center in Albuquerque (5520 Wyoming Blvd. NE), is sponsored by the New Mexico Jewish Historical Society and is open to the public. Admission: no charge to NMJHS members; \$5 for others, which may be applied to NMJHS membership. For more information, contact NMJHS president Dorothy Amsden, 505-662-6398 or president@nmjhs.org. ☆

## Legacy Wins Award

**T**he Historical Society of New Mexico (HSNM) announced that NMJHS will receive the Lansing B. Bloom Award for an outstanding publication or series of publications by a society or institution at HSNM annual meeting in May. The award is named for author,

scholar and editor 2011 Lansing Bloom, a preeminent figure in the pantheon of New Mexico historians. In 1926 Bloom became the first editor of the *New Mexico Historical Review* and continued in that post until his death 20 years later. Thank you to all who have contributed their ideas, energy and efforts to *Legacy*. ☆

## GENEALOGY CORNER

### Yizkor Books: A Personal Introduction - Part II

by Harvey Buchalter

**Note:** Last September, Harvey Buchalter presented a genealogy program on yizkor books. Part one of his talk appeared in the December 2010 *Legacy*. Here, in part 2, Buchalter discusses the village of Horodenko and its Yizkor book.

*"Perhaps the Yizkor Book is the last meeting place of the eyewitnesses to the events of those days or perhaps it is the last gathering of all the Horodenkians who witnessed the building and destruction of their town."* Shimson Meltzer

**S** **efer Horodenko**  
Yiddish poet Shimson Meltzer, a former teacher in the Horodenko Hebrew School, was chosen as editor of *Sefer Horodenko*. The organization of *Sefer Horodenko* decided that "every member was free to write about whatever he or she desired, but the editor would have the final say, and also act as a fact-checker." Meltzer, chair of The Progressive Horodenko Association in the United States, describes the process:

*Sefer Horodenko* was edited, written and financed by the sons and daughters of Horodenko from the world over. Some articles were written by those not born there, but who lived there or married a resident. "We did not set out to create a volume that is exclusive or a work of outstanding literary value, but a publication made by, and speaking for, the survivors."

Minutes from a committee meeting report: "We, who are present here today, the survivors of Horodenko, have cut-off limbs that are still bleeding. This wound is a terrible reality."

The Podway family in America became project leaders, mediating among the various factions in the United States and Israel. They underwrote most of the \$8,000 cost, publishing the first edition in 1957.

Meltzer acknowledges the incompleteness of the volume, noting "the dwindling of collective memories," that the very oldest memories are gone as the eldest pass away. He mourns the lack of information about organizations and institutions before the Holocaust.

About the *Yizkor* list, he says: "The list of those who perished will have errors, inaccuracies, omissions, but it is our holy duty to publish this, even if it is incomplete."

And then there was the matter of language: In the 1950s, some said only Yiddish should be used. It was the language of most Horodenkians, and a language that most Jews in Israel and America... 'spoke and understood.' Some wanted only Hebrew to perpetuate the memories of lost loved ones for the next generation – the language of the sons and daughters of Israel." Or English only: for the sons and daughters in the United States.

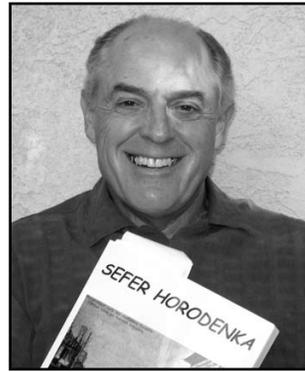
Yiddish was selected.

#### Horodenko

Horodenko still exists in Ukraine, but with no Jewish presence. In the early 20th century, about 10,000 souls lived there: 33 – 40 percent were Jews; 45 – 55 percent were Ukrainians; 10 percent were Poles. In the 1920s and 1930s – this is about as far back as memory takes the writers – Horodenko was "unprogressive" compared to other modern towns.

What made it special to its Jewish inhabitants was its "Gallitzian Soul," or *Gallitziāneh Nesbumah*, characterized by warmth and volubility.

Russian occupiers destroyed the City during the Great War; the Balfour Declaration of 1917 declared Palestine as a homeland for the Jewish people, energizing an entire generation of youth; the Holocaust destroyed what remains. This, in a nutshell, is the history of



Harvey Buchalter

Horodenko, but there is so much more.

The story of Horodenko, with slight changes of detail, is the story of all Eastern European Jews from the last months of the Great War to the aftermath of the next Great War, a scant 25 years later.

Moshe Fleshner's Horodenko story, *Our Town*, 1929 reflects all the changes that were coming to Jewish life in Eastern Europe.

His childhood consisted of *cheder*, then being sent on, reluctantly, by his observant parents, to the Baron de Hirsch School – one of the schools founded by the great philanthropist, to give Jewish children an education including then-forbidden secular subjects and manual arts.

Following the Baron de Hirsch School years, he enrolled in the New Hebrew School, founded in 1907, that "served as an opening to the nationalist movement – Zionism, especially in the aftermath of the Balfour Declaration."

Another writer reports that the Hebrew School "produced some of the first pioneers and settlers who went to Israel."

#### The Great War and Flight of Jewish Residents

In 1914, the Great War arrived in Horodenko – conscription, air fights over the town, invasion by the Czar's army, the return of the Kaiser's army, the remobilization of the Russian Army and the successive defeats suffered by the Austrian Army.

*(continued on p. 8)*

**Yizkor Books** (continued from p. 7)

Conscription extended to 17-year-olds, leaving younger children to support the family. With this came the mass flight of the Jewish residents.

Fleshner writes, “They grabbed their wandering staffs to save their lives and the lives of their children from plunder and murder that was prophesized to them by their false ‘friends and neighbors,’ the Ukrainians, several days beforehand.”

His family lived in exile in a neighboring town for the next three years. At the Great War’s end, they returned to Horodenko.

The sovereign Polish Republic, now nominally in charge, rebuilt the town, and the writers report normal relations between Jews, Poles and Ukrainians. The post-war years witnessed the pangs of Zionist longing, as well as the arrival of Socialism, but socialism with a *Yiddisheh tam* – a Yiddish flavor: Bundism, which felt that even this war-torn place could be transformed into a Jewish workers’ paradise.

**Zionism**

The *farbrenter Tzionists* – *di ershteb balutzim* - the fervent Zionists and first pioneers who eventually make the first aliya in 1919, prepared themselves on local farms for the rigorous life of backbreaking kibbutz-type work as field workers. The Jewish estate managers asked, “Why’s a nice Jewish boy like you want to be a peasant?”

In addition, the ultra-orthodox community viewed their secular brand of Zionism as heresy and put up many obstacles to emigration.

In 1924, Moshe Fleshner made *aliyah*. In 1929, he returned to Horodenko and the surrounding villages where his extended family, those who took him in during the occupation, still resided. Ever the keen observer, Fleshner calls their existence, “an exile within an exile.”

He discusses the reasons Jews settled in these outlying areas: the Ukrainians liked their liquor, but couldn’t manage a saloon. The Jews could, and so

despite the loneliness, the intense hatred they felt, the risk of becoming an *am ha-aretz* (an ignorant person) cut off from everything familiar, they settled in these places. Only on the High Holidays would they join with their fellow Jews.

Horodenko became a field of battle between Russians and Austrians as the Great War moved to the Eastern Front. Caught in the middle, Jews fled as best they could, recalling Moshe Fleshner’s three-year exile in the outlying countryside.

Occupation of the now largely destroyed and evacuated town went back and forth three times, as described in many accounts in the *Sefer*. The Russians, believing the Jews had betrayed them by giving their positions to the Kaiser’s Army, wanted to teach the Jews a lesson.

Leon Yurman’s memoir, “Blue-Green Tongues,” encapsulates all the horror of the Great War in my translation from Yiddish:

Ten Jews selected to be impaled by bayonets. The captivity continued. The town burned. Through crooked old and dirty streets Jews were driven. One spotted his house and stood in front of it stone still for a moment, as bayonets impaled countless “guilty” Jews one after another in the screaming dawn of May.

Suddenly there was mass hysteria, as eyes became fastened to the sight of the telegraph poles. The will to live, with wide-eyed obstinacy rose up in the core of the Jew’s being and faced down the challenge of death. A struggle between life and death broke out between the helpless captives and the Cossacks. But still they hung nine persons, people who had just been alive and who breathed fear and at the same time, yearned for a springtime morning.

One victim came loose from the rope, and before any of the Cossacks had a chance to hang him again, he ran away, but not far enough. Two Cossacks grabbed

him near a burning house. His large frame shook as he grabbed both of them and took them into the burning house. Then the deadly flames fell upon all three of them and covered them for all time.

In the middle of the day in the market place and wherever houses burned, the smoke was visible through the clearness of the dawn. And the nine people suspended on the telegraph poles had exposed their bluish green tongues which were covered with dust and grime. Nine lifeless tongues. Nine tongues up against the monster – the beast of imperialism that ruins lands, that kills people and releases the savagery that lurks within the human breast.

The day had ground down, and brought an end to the harsh, dark night.

The inter-war years were hard. Immigration routes to America were closed, but about 250 young people made it to Israel. Some – the numbers are not stated in the memoirs – left for Mexico and South America.

**World War II**

In Meyer Sucher’s memoir, “The Murder of the Jews of Horodenko,” the horror of the Blue-Green tongues is revisited, only this time, it is 1941- 42. Here is what ensued:

The Hungarian Army, an arm of the Russian bear, takes control of Horodenko, and for a moment, all appeared quiet. However, one Sabbath morning, three weeks later, the first ominous signs appeared. Trains carrying large numbers of Hungarian Jews, all densely packed together, passed through the city on their way to the concentration camp in Transnistria.

The Jews of Horodenko hurriedly organized a makeshift kitchen to provide for the small number who managed to escape the clutches of this round up.

(continued on p. 9)

**Yizkor Books** (continued from p. 8)

On *Tisha B'Av* a few weeks later, the first German Division entered Horodenko and immediately showed their colors. They invaded the synagogues and threw the Torahs and Holy Books out into the streets to be trampled to bits. Then they caught and tortured several Jews. At the same time their Ukrainian collaborators, notorious anti-Semites who were the Nazis' civil administrators, began robbing the Jews of their possessions.

Sucher goes on to describe the ghettoization of the Jewish population into one third of the city, the appointment of a *Judenrat*, a Jewish Council, which was supposed to represent the Jews. And finally, the enforced isolation of outlying towns.

For six months the Jewish community of Horodenko struggled to live under these conditions. On December 5, 1941, the Germans initiated their first of three "actions" (a total assault that inspires total terror). These "actions" led to the annihilation of the Jews of Horodenko.

Sucher then describes the special murder squads: Jews lined up under the pretext of receiving inoculations for typhus, then led to the adjacent forest and shot, their bodies falling into pits – 2,500 souls, half the Jewish population of Horodenko.

Escaping into the forest and hiding in barns and along ditches, bribing their Ukrainian neighbors, or declaring themselves "useful," a "productive element" to the Nazis, 1,500 Jews remained alive. Sucher, claiming to be a baker, was saved by his enemy. He was one of the very few who survived to tell this story:

Among the Jews hiding in the outlying areas, there was a tremendous fear of Ukrainian bandits, especially one named Bandera, a Ukrainian nationalist, an enemy of the Jews, but also an enemy of the Russians and Germans.

Ironically, the Jews believed the Germans could actually protect them against this rogue band of Ukrainian outlaws. Of course, this was not to be the case.

To flush out the remaining Jews, Sucher says, the Nazis now proclaimed they would no longer bother the Jews. Somehow, they convinced the approximately 1,500 Jews who were in hiding to come out into the open.

Some were still able to ransom themselves as "productive elements," but elderly Jews were executed and the rest forcibly assembled and transported to the concentration camp in Madjanek to an almost certain death.

The few who managed to escape joined the Partisans and actually survived the war, and their stories of survival are found in the Horodenko Yizkor Book.

They are also fonts of research for the personalities that emerged from the *shtetlakh*. In the case of Horodenko, the actor Alexander Granach is foremost, albeit not as well known today as his Jewish actor contemporaries, Edward G. Robinson and Paul Muni. He left his mark as a Shakespearean actor in Berlin, and starred in the drama, "A Bell for Adano" on the New York stage.

**Horodenko Landsmanshaft Society**

The Horodenko Landsmanshaft Society was founded in New York in 1885, composed of peddlers and furriers whose dream, according to editor's concluding remarks, was to save a few hundred dollars and return to Horodenko. But most stayed on.

They provided assistance to one another in sickness and need. A plot for a funeral. Some established their own *shules*, usually *shtibelakh* (a cellar room) and formed a *minyán*. They sent many hard-earned dollars to assist their brothers and sisters during the Great War, and in 1925 they financed

the construction of a Yiddish Cultural Center and Yiddish School – never to be completed – in the center of Horodenko.

In the aftermath of the *Khurban*, they raised \$10,000 for refugee resettlement.

**After the Holocaust**

In 1945, the first survivors arrived in *Eretz Israel*. Those already in the country or who had been born or lived in Horodenko organized a committee to give aid and comfort to the newcomers, and to establish a monument. But they came to realize that a more suitable monument would be a memorial volume to record the story of the Horodenko Jewish Community from beginning to end. The result was *Sefer Horodenko*.

*Yizkor bikber* were written to be read: the names listed at the final chapters are there so as not to be forgotten. The memoirs were written to educate their descendants. We are their heirs. ✧

*Former NMJHS Board member Harvey Buchalter is a retired APS teacher, artist and sole owner of Harvey Buchalter Sculpture and Judaica.*

**Editor's Note:** According to the United States Holocaust Museum, some Yizkor books have been translated and can be found at JewishGen's Online Yizkor Book Project at <http://www.jewishgen.org/yizkor/>. In addition, The Dorot Jewish Division at the New York Public Library is creating a freely available collection of digital memorial book reproductions. Reprints of these yizkor books are available through the National Yiddish Book Center.

# PEEK INTO THE PAST

## The Pivotal Role of the Commercial Club in Early Albuquerque

by Naomi Sandweiss

**T**he arrival of the railroad, in 1880, changed the face of Albuquerque. “New Town” grew to a city with a prospering business district in a few

short years and was incorporated in 1885. It is well known that the town’s first mayor was Jewish businessman Henry Jaffa. Jaffa and Albuquerque’s growing Jewish community helped to establish and lead local business and civic organizations.

A major one of these organizations was the Commercial Club, organized in 1890. The club was conceived as a place to “increase scientific and literary pursuits, to establish a library and to maintain reading rooms, assembly halls and club rooms.”<sup>1</sup> In fact, the Commercial Club proved to be a powerful

force in advocating for Albuquerque’s business interests. Along the way, Jewish businesspeople were among those who led the organization. According to some accounts, Henry Jaffa served as the first President.

Just two years after it was founded, a three-story sandstone building was erected on the corner of 4th and Gold Streets. (Eight years later, Congregation Albert was built nearby at, at 7th and Gold.) The cost of the building and furnishings ranged from \$75,000 to \$120,000, depending upon the source.<sup>2</sup> This investment reflected a climate of optimism about the future prospects of the city.



Henry Jaffa inside the Albuquerque Commercial Club circa 1892. (Photo courtesy of University of New Mexico Center for Southwest Research.)

The first floor of the club was rented to merchants, while the second floor was the main meeting and social area for the club. There was an impressive mahogany reception desk, billiard hall, card rooms and social hall. Alcohol was freely served, and although smoking was permitted it was not allowed during “ladies’ receptions.” Several classes of membership were established: resident members, associate members, non-resident members and honorary membership. Resident members could join for an initiation fee of \$50, followed by annual dues of \$48. The Jewish business elite of Albuquerque signed on. The Grunsfelds, Ilfelds, Lowenthals, Weillers and Weinmans all held memberships. Like the Albuquerque Country Club and the Masonic and Rotary organizations, there were no apparent barriers to full participation of Jewish residents, either as members or as leaders at the Commercial Club.

However, it is notable that among the list of members there are no Hispanic surnames. Photographs show that most of the staff of the Club were African-American.

Early on in its history, the club served as the site of Albuquerque’s first library. In 1892, after a successful fundraising campaign by Clara Fergusson and Emma Hazeldine, a lending library opened in the Club’s reading room. In 1900, after outgrowing the space, the library moved to its own building.<sup>3</sup>

The greatest role the Commercial Club took was in advocating for local businesses. Their activities in this regard were as creative as

they were varied. As early as 1893, the club officially lobbied representatives of the New Mexico legislature. About the same time, they distributed tobacco seed to local farmers, in hopes of producing an additional revenue source for the region<sup>4</sup> and tried to woo woolen manufacturers to the area.<sup>5</sup> The organization published flyers and other “booster” materials, promoting Albuquerque, touting both business opportunities and suitability as a health resort. In 1906, for example, they advertised in *Out West* magazine, using the tag line, “Albuquerque: City of Realities.”

In 1902, the club raised money for land which they gave to the railroad to build a tie-plant<sup>6</sup> and advocated for the building of a landmark hotel which was accomplished in 1902 with the opening of the Alvarado.

*(continued on p. 11)*

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## Peek into The Past (continued from p. 10)

The club took its political message to the next level during President Theodore Roosevelt's visit to Albuquerque in 1903. Commissioning Navajo weaver Elle of Ganado to weave a blanket with an image of the Albuquerque Commercial Club membership card, they presented it to the President on site.

While the club apparently prospered in terms of membership (173 members in 1897 and claimed 700 members in 1912)

there were some missteps. In a 1913 article in *Sunset Magazine*, the writer admires the Mahogany Bar and tall drinks available at the club. However, he writes, "I would suggest to the club's board of governors, however, that they take steps to remove the undertaker's establishment which flanks the entrance. When one drops into a place to get some facts regarding the desirability of settling there, it is not exactly reassuring to be greeted by a pile of coffins."<sup>7</sup> Apparently, the directors did not take the author's advice.

By 1917, the heyday of the club was largely over. The Rotary Club, of which there were many Jewish members, decided to establish an Albuquerque Chamber of Commerce to coordinate

economic development activities. Jewish businessman Max Nordhaus served as its first president.<sup>8</sup> By this time, the Albuquerque Country Club was also established, complete with golfing facilities, and may have superseded

the social role of the Commercial Club. Since its inception, the Country Club was open to Jewish members. Arthur Prager served as President in 1923. The club's role as community library was also long finished, and the Albuquerque/Bernalillo Public Library System is its legacy.

In 1921, Chester French, founder of French Mortuaries, purchased the Commercial Club and renamed it the French Building. It was demolished<sup>9</sup> in 1953 to make room for the new 13-floor

Simms building, Albuquerque's first "skyscraper".<sup>10</sup> Apparently, some of the building's original bricks were incorporated into the new structure.<sup>11</sup>

While the heyday of the Commercial Club was relatively short, it served a vital social, economic and civil role, serving as an incubator of sorts for organizations that would later shape the city. Jewish businesspeople actively participated in its early vision and success. ✨

1. 1897 Constitution, rules, etc...
2. *History of New Mexico, Its Resources and its People*, George B. Anderson, Pacific States Publishing Company.
3. Albuquerque's tricentennial site.
4. Report from the Governor of New Mexico to the Secretary of the Interior, 1892.
5. *Fiber and fabric: a record of American textile industries*, Volume 2.
6. Albuquerque Tricentennial Materials, 2007.
7. *Sunset Magazine*, Vol. 32, Issue 1, 1913.
8. *The Rotarian*, October 1917.
9. *Albuquerque Tribune* 12/5/07.
10. *Albuquerque Remembered*, Howard Bryan, 2006.
11. *Forgotten Albuquerque*, Ty Bannerman, Arcadia Publishing, 2009.



Commercial Club building (Photo courtesy of the University of New Mexico Center for Southwest Research.)

## New Mexico Tasty Traditions (continued from p. 4)

from *Samarkand to New York*, by Claudia Roden. These favorite cookies, flavored with cardamom or cinnamon, could conceivably have Sephardic Jewish roots stretching back to the Middle East."

Sharon's own family had strong food traditions. Her maternal forbearers ran a dried fruit business in her Polish *shtetl*, to where her family may have emigrated from

Spain. Sharon's Hungarian grandmother was known for her dish of *shishkaleb*—potato and flour dumplings fried in butter with breadcrumbs, the dish representing "warm associations, security and roots," for young Sharon.

Sharon herself is an accomplished cook. On Friday afternoons you will find her mixing flour, eggs and yeast, kneading and shaping *challah* at her home in Raton. After preparing the braided egg bread with a Rosh Chodesh community at Congregation Nahalat Shalom in Albuquerque, Sharon embraced the weekly tradition.



According to Niederman, the exchange of culinary traditions among New Mexico's cultural communities is still alive and well. She points to the Santa Fe deli/bagel restaurant run by the son of a New York bialy maker. There is "so much culture

and history coded within our legacy dishes."

Read more about Sharon at [www.sharonniederman.com](http://www.sharonniederman.com) and follow her culinary adventures at [newmexicotastytraditions.com](http://newmexicotastytraditions.com) where you will find Niederman's picks for cafes, restaurants and places to find great green chile stew.

Sharon's current project is *Shrines and Signs: Spiritual Journeys Across New Mexico* with color photos by the author due out from The Countryman Press Spring 2012. ✨

Naomi Sandweiss is Editor of *Legacy and author of Jewish Albuquerque 1860-1960*, Arcadia Publishing, 2011.

## 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
- Individual Senior (+55) \$35
- Family \$55
- Senior Couple \$45
- Library \$20
- Fulltime Student \$25
- Nonprofit Organization \$40
- Business \$100
- Life Membership \$1000  
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## Calendar of NMJHS Upcoming Events

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

**Vanessa Paloma in Concert** Sunday, March 13, 2:30 p.m., New Mexico Museum of History Auditorium, Santa Fe.. \$15 at the door.

**Jewish Genealogy Program** featuring Bennett Greenspan, founder and CEO of Family Tree DNA and Stephen P. Morse, renowned search engine guru. Sunday, April 3, 11:00 a.m., Jewish Community Center, Albuquerque. NMJHS members free; others \$5.

**Montefiore Cemetery Annual Cleanup**, Sunday, May 22, 10:00 a.m., Las Vegas.

**Annual Meeting**, Sunday, June 26, 2:00 p.m., Santa Fe. Presentation by Steve Ovitsky, the Director of the Santa Fe Chamber Music Festival on *Jewish Folk and Religious Themes in Classical Music*. Location to be announced.

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