



Opening the “Letter from Cloudcroft”

By Melinda Hess

Several years ago I discovered a bundle of yellowed letters, written in 1946, in an old suitcase. One letter stood out from the rest and became the inspiration for our documentary film, *Letter from Cloudcroft*. I had no idea at the time that the envelope, adorned with a calligraphic logo of the Lodge Resort, would uncover a secret story. While its contents were a mystery, my partner and I understood that the sealed letter could be a portal to the story about a young Jewish engineer who participated in a complex moment in history: when technology built by slave laborers in the Holocaust became the foundation for the bold scientific accomplishments of U.S. space exploration.

This letter, written from the Lodge Resort in Cloudcroft, New Mexico, belongs to a collection of approximately 40 letters written by my father, Private Sandy Hess. He was a young second-generation German-

Jewish U.S. Army engineer assigned to work on the V2 rockets after World War II. My father was the first mechanical engineer the Army assigned to work

with the Holocaust and the unique overlay of the collaboration between German and Jewish engineers.



Letter from Cloudcroft, Courtesy of Melinda Hess

Eight scholars made superb presentations that drew on both Jewish studies and American space exploration. Rick Hendricks, the New Mexico State Historian, was the moderator. What impressed most attendees was the unique combination of speakers, connecting the Holocaust with U.S. space exploration, a topic not widely publicized even among scholars. The symposium stirred emotions and intellects, causing many to reflect upon their own experiences or their parents'. Important moral and ethical questions were raised about the American government's decision to bring Nazi scientists to the United States, given its postwar knowledge of Holocaust atrocities.

Sandy Hess's personal story served as a touchstone for both the scholars and attendees, parsing the vast subject of space exploration into a personal experience. In examining my father's life, Dr. Frank Mecklenburg,

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with the German Nazi rocket scientists who had been secretly brought to the United States in *Project Paperclip*.

During New Mexico's centennial year celebration, on November 10, 2012 – in a public event and symposium funded by the New Mexico Humanities Council – I opened the 66-year-old letter with family and friends present. Broadcast live to the world via web streaming, the symposium addressed the complex issues surrounding the legacy of the V2 rocket in America from historic, cultural, political, and scientific perspectives. Told through the story of Private Sandy Hess, these angles included the intersection

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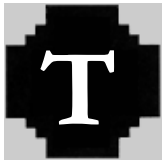
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Message from President Dorothy Amsden



The NMJHS Board of Directors held its Annual Retreat in Santa Fe this February. One of the big topics of discussion was how to achieve financial self-sufficiency. We are working on a number of ideas to raise more revenue, including a potential increase in dues for 2014. Your gifts to the organization are a huge plus in keeping revenue up with expenses. Our treasurer, Tom Downey, has a report on 2012 finances in this issue.

Many of you have already renewed your memberships for 2013. Those with Centennial memberships are paid through 2014. For those who have yet to renew, we will be sending out reminders at the beginning of April.

At the retreat, Program chair Ron Duncan Hart presented a host of interesting events that NMJHS will sponsor during 2013. Please see page 8 of this issue for details of upcoming programs. The Fall Conference is being planned for Taos this year at the Sagebrush Inn over Columbus Day weekend, with a Sephardic theme. Do save the date. This is a beautiful time of year to be in

Taos with the aspens turning color. You won't want to miss this conference.

Every year NMJHS takes on the mitzvah of cleaning up Montefiore Cemetery in Las Vegas. This year it will be on Sunday, May 5, from 10 to 1. The focus will be on moving rocks to help the caretaker Ted Herburger continue rebuilding a wall surrounding the cemetery on the north and west sides. He is doing a beautiful job. The Montefiore Cemetery Association provides a picnic lunch for participants. Please RSVP to the NMJHS administrator Ruth Carter if you plan to come so the Las Vegas folks know how much food to prepare, 505-348-4471 or admin@nmjhs.org.

Be sure to join us for the NMJHS Annual Meeting, named in honor of Claire Grossman, which will take place in Santa Fe this year on Sunday afternoon, June 9. We will say goodbye to officers going off the board and welcome new board members. I will be stepping

down as president at that time. Who will become our new president? Be there to find out. The Dr. Allan P. and Leona Hurst Award will be presented on this occasion. Following the business part of the meeting, keynote speaker Marcia Torobin will present a "History of Jewish Cinema."



NMJHS President Dorothy Amsden

NMJHS prints 450 copies of *Legacy* each quarter for mailing to members and distribution at various events. To cut down on our printing and mailing costs and save a few trees, we are wondering if some of you would like to receive *Legacy* in electronic form. Please let Ruth Carter know if this is your preference.

We are delighted that our members are volunteering to help with various NMJHS activities and to serve on committees. If you want to be contacted as a volunteer, ask Ruth to add your name to the list. In particular, we need a computer-savvy volunteer to keep the NMJHS office computer up to date and running properly. ✧

Letter from Cloudfroft (continued from p. 1)

director of research and chief archivist at the Leo Baeck Institute, talked about the rich cultural context of Washington Heights in New York City, the German-Jewish neighborhood where my father grew up, and how that experience might have shaped him.

Dr. David Shneer, director of Jewish Studies at the University of Colorado, added to Sandy's profile by explaining the significance of Sandy's engineering studies at the City College of New York, nicknamed "Harvard of the Proletariat." Attending CCNY, he said, was "code for an upwardly mobile, highly educated and explicitly Jewish man of the 1930s and

'40s." As a product of an insular immigrant community, equipped with City College's education and enculturation of American Jewish masculinity, young Private Hess approached his assignment working with the German Nazi rocket scientists as an opportunity of a lifetime. It was, he wrote his parents, "like getting a Master's degree."

At the symposium, my father's enthusiasm for his Army assignment came under scrutiny as scholars and attendees discussed his interest in and fascination with working with the Germans, according to his letters. Both speakers and audience members questioned what

someone's moral responsibility is when "obeying orders" in the context of duty in an army – be it the U.S. Army or Hitler's army. They discussed the issue of moral compromise and the range of responses that a person or government makes in the name of individual and professional ambition, national security, science, and self-interest.

Extracting the letter from the sealed envelope that had preserved its physical integrity for 66 years was extraordinary. As I unfolded the sheets of hotel stationery, the letterhead's brilliant colors startled me. The deep crimson floating
(continued on p. 3)

Letter from Cloudcroft (continued from p. 2)

in a wash of brilliant blue was shocking in its crispness. It had been preserved to perfection; my father's penmanship in bold dark ink was unfaded by time. And then my father's words, starting with "I'm sitting here by the fire with my pipe", could not have been more sweetly or dramatically written. From the food and drinks to the activities, he described his experience at the Lodge in detail, referring to it as "the most wonderful weekend [he] had in the Army." He concluded with a report that the day before venturing to Cloudcroft, he was at White Sands and witnessed the successful launch of a V2 – the best on record, as confirmed by the enthused rocket scientists at our event.

For us filmmakers, the day was the culmination of years of imagining and planning. At the same time, the opening of the letter was the launch of our project in a public venue, setting forth our intention to complete the film's production this year. Listening to the presentations and responses from attendees, we are confident that our story about an ordinary man, a young Jewish engineer, will illuminate the harsh reality behind the origins of the U.S. space program. The concentration camp prisoners who suffered and perished while building the V2 rockets need to be honored for their contributions to space exploration. Our goal is to inspire dialogue about the complexities of historic trauma, personal narratives and collective memory, and to forge paths toward understanding our world with transparency, disclosure and reconciliation.

The Letter from Cloudcroft documentary follows my journey to explore a critical moment in my father's life during the development of American space exploration. The story leads across the United States and back to Germany, where U.S.

space and missile development began with the V2 rockets and the slave camps of the Holocaust. Using letters written by my young Jewish father in 1946 when assigned to "Project Paperclip" as a U.S. Army engineer, the film interweaves a historic, personal, and political story.

We thank Dorothy Amsden and the New Mexico Jewish Historical Society for their support and serving as the fiscal sponsor for the NMHC grant. We also appreciate our event's being certi-




Melinda Hess reading letter, Courtesy of Melinda Hess

fied as an official New Mexico Centennial Event and supported by the New Mexico Department of Tourism and the New Mexico Film Office.

Melinda Hess is Co-Producer/Co-Director of the documentary film, Letter from Cloudcroft. She and her partner, Patricia Antelles own Convivial Design Studio, a video and digital media production studio creating story-based media with interactive, social and trans-media elements. For more information about our film, letter collection, symposium, and book projects, please visit <http://letterfromcloudcroft.com> and friend us on Facebook at <http://www.facebook.com/LetterFromCloudcroft>. Film. If you'd like to support the film with a tax-deductible donation, please contact Melinda at mah@convivial.com. ☆

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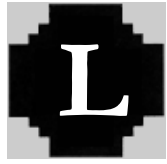
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Mission Statement
 The New Mexico Jewish Historical Society is a secular organization that welcomes all interested people, regardless of religious affiliation. Its mission is to promote greater understanding and knowledge of New Mexico's Jewish history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

He Lived Where Everyone Waved Hello: Leon Rubin 1920-2013

by Sharon Niederman



Like George Bailey, the protagonist of the film classic, "It's a Wonderful Life," played by Jimmy Stewart, Leon Rubin dwelled in the best of all possible worlds, 20th century small town America. His life was a demonstration of his beliefs in clear-cut, cherished, traditional values – work ethic, family, service, personal sacrifice when called upon, and patriotism.

Born in 1920, Leon was a true blue home town boy. He graduated Raton High School in 1930, and he only left his beloved Raton during World War II to serve in the Army Air Corps. His distinguished service record includes flying missions in Europe, the Air Medal with Oak Leaf Cluster and the European-African-Middle Eastern Ribbon with six bronze stars.

Kathryn Heyman Rubin, his wife and business partner of 67 years, said, "Leon loved Raton. He was always



Leon and Kathryn Rubin at 2012. Photo by Sharon Niederman

proud of his town and proud to be from there." He was content being part of a community he viewed as an extended family, where everyone waved

hello. He served on numerous civic and business boards and on the New Mexico Civil Rights Commission under three governors, and as its chairman.

For 75 years, he rarely missed a day at the store, where he could be found sweeping, washing windows, putting merchandise in order, or waiting on customers who depended on his gentle smile and courteous service.

In 2011, Leon and Kathryn closed Rubin's Family Clothiers and retired to Colorado Springs, where their son, Ronald, and his wife, Karen, make their home.

In addition to his family and business, Leon's other loves were music and the Masons. He was a member of Scottish Rite, Gate City, Lodge Number 11, and Bal-lut Abyad Shrine. He toured with the Shrine band as well.

In grade school Leon discovered music, and he was a familiar performer on the alto sax for more than 70 years in dance bands throughout northeastern New Mexico. He also played in the Raton City Band.

As was often the practice in their day, when the New Mexico Jewish community consisted of about 500 people, Leon and Kathryn made each other's acquaintance as young people through family connections. However, it wasn't until after Leon's discharge

from the Army in 1945 that they met again. Shortly afterward, at Fiesta in Santa Fe, he proposed. Their gala engagement party was held at the Hotel

Alvarado in Albuquerque, and they were married at Congregation Albert.

One of four sons of Minnie and Barney Rubin, a Russian immigrant and founder of the family enterprise in 1915, Leon followed the tradition of New Mexico's Jewish pioneers. Put in



Leon Rubin at 2012 Passover Seder, Temple Aaron. Photo by Sharon Niederman

historic perspective, Leon lived as one of the last of New Mexico's Jewish pioneers. He tended the family mercantile enterprise that at one time included four stores and today is still represented by son Randy Rubin, proprietor of Raton's Sports Arena.

In 1984, Leon and Kathryn became the caretakers of Temple Aaron, the 1889 onion-domed Reform synagogue in Trinidad, Colorado, designed by influential Western architect Isaac Hamilton Rapp. Temple Aaron is home of the oldest ongoing Jewish community in Colorado still in its original site.

It was constructed during the era Trinidad was home to a thriving community of German Jewish merchants, come to serve the coal miners of southern Colorado, and Trinidad was the second biggest banking town in Colorado.

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Treasurer's Report for 2012

by Tom Downey



NMJHS is a nonprofit 501(c)3 corporation that is incorporated in New Mexico and operates under the basis of cash accounting, with the exception of payroll taxes. It has one part-time employee. During 2011 and 2012 we made a successful transition from the MONEY accounting system to QuickBooks, operating the two systems in parallel for a full year.

For the calendar year of 2012 the New Mexico Jewish Historical Society had

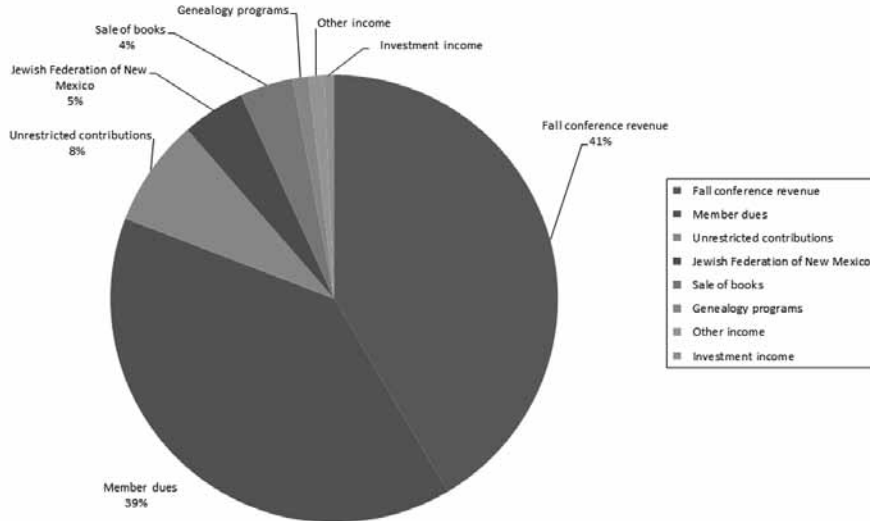
revenues of \$22,795 and expenditures of \$23,878, resulting in a deficit of \$1,083. One reason for this deficit is the three-year Centennial membership, which will continue to impact income in 2013 and 2014. We are working toward enhancing our revenues and reducing our expenses.

The major sources of revenue for 2012 were 39% member dues and 41% income from the fall conference. Other revenues consist of contributions (8%), JFNM (5%), sale of books (4%), and other income (3%).

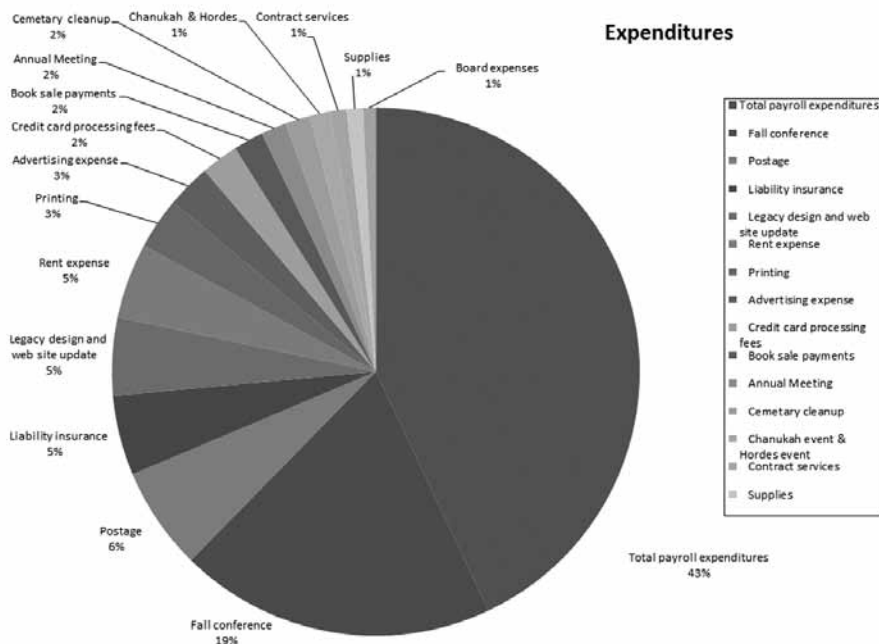
Major expenses for 2012 were payroll (43%) and programming (19%). Other expenses were for postage (6%), liability insurance (5%), newsletter design and website update (5%), office rental (5%), printing (3%), advertising (3%), and credit card processing fees (2%). The remaining expenses (9%) were for supplies, contract services, fees, awards, and refreshments. ✧

Tom Downey has been NMJHS treasurer since February 2012. He works as a manager at Moss Adams LLP and is married with one son.

Unrestricted Revenues



Expenditures



Many Thanks for Your Contributions

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NMJHS Welcomes New Members

Samuel Gerstein and Diane Cohen
 Ed and Linda Goff
 Herzstein Memorial Museum
 Gary and Hallie Spitzberg
 Yvette Cohn Stoor
 Lynn Trojahn

From the Archives



If you don't know what to do with those old family photos and letters, please consider donating them to the NMJHS archives. Our collection, housed at the New Mexico State

Archives and Records Center, is accessible to scholars of New Mexico Jewish history.

Below, we share some of the terrific images from a recent donation of letters, business papers and photographs

donated by Victor Weisskopf of Deerfield, Illinois. The collection spans the state from Shiprock to Albuquerque, Springer to Grants. Below are three of the many photographs that illustrate the family's business and recreational activities throughout the state.



1936. *left to right, Eleanor Florsheim, Carrie Weisskopf, Irma Florsheim, Allan Rosenwald, Donald Florsheim, Mora Canyon, New Mexico*



Above: Grant Trading Co. sales force, Cammil & Hannah Weisskopf, Carrie & Philipp Weisskopf



Left: Alan Rosenwald, Phil Weisskopf, Jaritas Ranch, 1936, Springer New Mexico.

Montefiore Cemetery Cleanup Set for May 5

Every year in the spring NMJHS helps the Montefiore Cemetery Association with tasks to clean up the cemetery. Please join us on Sunday, May 5 from 10 a.m. – 1 p.m. to participate in this mitzvah.

Montefiore Cemetery's tombstones date to 1881, when Las Vegas had a thriving Jewish Community. A walk through the cemetery is a walk through New Mexico Jewish history. Family tombstones include those of the Ilfelds, Herzensteins, Taicherts, Regensbergs, Moises, Danzigers, Rosenthals, Teitelbaums and many others.

As you may remember, the cemetery was vandalized in the summer of 2010 and rededicated on October 7, 2011, by Rabbi John Feldman, who was joined by several individuals from the Las Vegas community.

Past cleanup activities included pulling weeds, removing trash and plant-

ing trees. This year, the emphasis is on moving rocks to reconstruct a wall that used to surround the cemetery on the north and west. Cemetery caretaker Ted Herburger has made considerable progress on rebuilding the wall in the past year. In 2012 NMJHS gave him an award plaque for his dedication.

For this year's effort, Ted asks us to bring gloves, plastic bags for collecting trash, rakes, shovels, pruning shears, and dollies or wheelbarrows for moving rocks.

After our hard work we hold a short service, after which the Cemetery Association rewards volunteers with a picnic lunch.

RSVP to NMJHS administrator Ruth Carter at admin@nmjhs.org or 505-348-4471. Maps and information available on our web site at www.nmjhs.org ☆

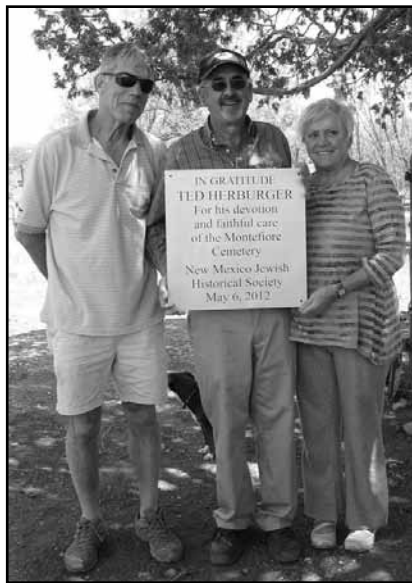


Photo taken May 22, 2012, at Montefiore Cemetery in Las Vegas, New Mexico. Ted Herburger, vice president of the Montefiore Cemetery Association holds plaque that NMJHS presented to him with other officers of the association: Jim Terr (left), Kate Inman (right).

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In memory of
Shirley Jacobson
antiquarian book dealer
past NMJHS president

In Memory of
Robert Wertheim
1933-2013
may his memory be for a blessing

Leon Rubin (continued from p. 4)

Today, with a scattered remnant community that extends from Denver to Albuquerque, Temple Aaron remains the site of High Holiday services led by Rabbi John Feldman of Albuquerque and Passover seder.

Along with Kathryn, Leon kept Jewish tradition alive in northeast New Mexico. Today, Randy Rubin and his wife, Tami, continue their family tradition of caring for Temple Aaron.

Sharon Niederman's most recent book, "Signs and Shrines: Spiritual Journeys Across New Mexico," received the 2012 Lowell Thomas

travel writing award. She has three books of New Mexico food and travel forthcoming. A former president of the New Mexico Jewish Historical Society. Sharon lives and writes in Raton. For more information on Temple Aaron, visit her website at www.sharonniederman.com. ☆

2013 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
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Calendar of NMJHS Upcoming Events

Check for future events at www.nmjhs.org

Herzl and the Jewish Homeland

Nurit Patt, M.D., Psychiatrist. This talk about Theodore Herzl will cover his personal, political and cultural background. The lecture will also cover some of the other attempts to save the Jews of Europe that occurred at about the same time. \$10 for NMJHS or JCC members; \$15 for non members. Sunday, April 14, 2013, 2:30 p.m. Jewish Community Center of Albuquerque

What's in a Name: the Baal Shem from the Shtetl to New Mexico

Including the film "A Fire in the Forest: The Life and Legacy of the Ba'al Shem Tov". Sunday, April 21, 2:00 p.m. Temple Beth Shalom, Santa Fe. Karen Milstein, Ph.D., Psychologist.

Montefiore Cemetery Cleanup, Las Vegas, New Mexico, Sunday, May 5. 10:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m. All are invited to help clean and maintain this historic cemetery. Maps and information at www.nmjhs.org. See the article on p. 7 for additional information.

Claire Grossman Annual Meeting, Sunday, June 9, Santa Fe. 2:30 pm. Congregation Beit Tikvah, 2230 Old Pecos Trail, Santa Fe. Keynote Speaker: Marcia Torobin, The History of Jewish Cinema. On this occasion NMJHS honors board members who are stepping down or leaving the board, welcomes new officers and board members and presents the Hurst Award.

NMJHS Fall Conference, Taos, October 12 & 13, Saturday afternoon and Sunday. Sagebush Inn. Sephardic History from Spain to New Mexico. Keynote Speaker: Steve Ovitsky, Executive Director of the Santa Fe Chamber Music Festival. Sephardic Music from Israel to the Americas.

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