



## Tears of Regret Cannot Turn Back the Hands of Time

### A Sephardic Family's Life in Egypt

by Michel J. Messeca

#### Jewish Presence in Egypt

**O**riental Jews lived for thousands of years in what we call today the Arab countries, experiencing poverty and wealth, confronting persecution and paganism. After the destruction of the First Temple by Nebuchadnezzar in 586 BCE, a group of Jews under the leadership of the Prophet Jeremiah went to Aswan in southern Egypt (where Nasser would build the Aswan Dam centuries later).

Jews continued to live in Egypt under a variety of rulers: Greeks, Romans, Arabs and Ottomans. They enjoyed long periods of prosperity, tolerance, and political autonomy. During the Roman era, however, the great Alexandrian community was decimated by a pogrom in 38 C.E. and Trajan's wrath following a revolt during the years 112-115 C.E.

Cairo became a center of Jewish economic activity and scholarly activity in the Middle Ages, particularly during the era of the great Moses Maimonides, who found a refuge there from Muslim fanatics in Spain and served as physician to the Vizier's court. Another prominent figure in Medieval Egypt was Saadiah Gaon, who was forced to flee because of his biting attacks on the "heretical" Karaite sect. He wound up in Babylonia, where he headed the great academy in Sura.

More recently, I have learned that the founder of Al-Azhar University of Egypt was Jewish. Today, Al-Azhar University is the center of spiritual and intellectual Islamic Studies in the Arab world.

It was not until the late nineteenth century, with the opening of the Suez Canal (1869), and the expanding role of l'Alliance Israélite Universelle [1] that we saw a rapid growth of Jewish emigration to Egypt from all horizons: Russian and Polish Jews (10,000) expelled from Palestine by the Turks; English and French Jews seeking new opportunities; and great numbers of Jews from Germany, Italy, Austria, Turkey and Greece.

From early 1920 to 1940 the Jewish community in Egypt was estimated to number eighty thousand members. It was diversified in its culture, spoke different languages and was well integrated into the community at-large. Among the Jewish population, it is estimated that only ten thousand held Egyptian nationality because it was extremely difficult for Jews to obtain citizenship.

What was special about the Jewish Community in Egypt was its vibrancy and cosmopolitan air. It had Italian, French



*Messeca family in living room of their Cairo home taken in 1954 or 1955. Grandmother Noemi on the left side seated. Behind her, from left to right, author's sister Mary, brother Maurice, sister Marguerite, youngest sister Maud, and author Michel. Behind Maurice and Marguerite, is author's father Clement and mother Clara. The four other people are cousins of the author's father.*

and English schools that were well integrated with the general population and political establishment and contrib-

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1. The Alliance Israélite Universelle was founded in Paris in 1860, sponsored by generous Jewish philanthropists, including Sir Moses Montefiore and Emile Pereire. It advocated the emancipation of the Jewish population and worked to protect the rights of Jews around the world. The Alliance established a series of schools in which it imparted the foundations of Western culture, and particularly French culture, to boys and girls. In 1914 the Alliance school system included nearly 200 schools and 44,000 students in the Mediterranean region, the Near East, and the Balkans.

## President's Column



It has been an active and busy winter at NMJHS. The board participated in an annual planning retreat in January, where we set a number of goals for the coming year. (See article on page 11 of this issue.) In February, Society members enjoyed two fascinating programs, delivered by authors Gabe Galambos and Judith Fein, respectively.

In other news, we are proud to announce that NMJHS has joined the Jewish Community Endowment Foundation of New Mexico. This partnership will allow us to help fulfill our financial goals and network with other Jewish nonprofit organizations that are doing the same. For more information about NMJHS finances for 2013, please see the Treasurer's Report below. We have also recently learned that NMJHS is the recipient of a grant from the Southwest Oral History Association for an oral history project focused on north-eastern New Mexico.



*NMJHS President  
Naomi Sandweiss*

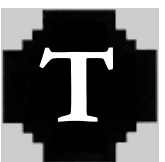
Spring brings additional activities, including the annual Montefiore Cemetery cleanup on Sunday, May 4, in Las Vegas, New Mexico. More information about the cleanup appears on page 3 of this issue. If you happen to be attending the conference of the Historical Society of New Mexico that weekend, the Jewish community of Las Vegas has graciously invited NMJHS members to attend their Shabbat service. The service will be held on Saturday,

May 3, at the Montefiore Temple (known as the "Newman Chapel") located on the campus of New Mexico Highlands University. We are also thrilled to welcome several new board members, including Diane Schmidt, Linda Goff, Rabbi Paul Citrin and Leba Freed Pierce. We look forward to having them share their many talents with the Society.

Please plan on attending our Annual Meeting and member appreciation on Sunday, May 18 at 4:00 p.m. at the Jewish Community Center in Albuquerque. As always, we encourage and welcome your input into Society activities. In particular, we are eager for committee volunteers in all of our areas — from programs and conferences to genealogy and membership. Please consider using your talents to benefit this organization. ☆

## Treasurer's Report for 2013

by Gila Yaniv



The New Mexico Jewish Historical Society is a nonprofit 501(c)3 corporation incorporated in New Mexico that operates on a cash accounting basis, with the exception of payroll taxes. It has one part-time employee.

For the calendar year of 2013 the NMJHS had revenues of \$28,987 and expenditures of \$28,304, resulting in net income of \$683. The newly formed Finance Committee is working toward enhancing our revenues and reducing our expenses.

The major sources of revenue for 2013 were: 27% membership dues and 35% income from the Fall Conference. Other revenues consist of contributions 26%, Jewish Federation of New Mexico 10%, and other income 2%.

Major expenses for 2013 were payroll 40% and programming 26%. Other expenses were: office and equipment rental 8%, printing 6%, postage 3%, liability insurance 3%, newsletter design and website update 3%, advertising 2% and bank charges 2%. The remaining expenses (7%) were for supplies, contract services, fees, awards, charitable contributions, and refreshments. ☆

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## Anti-Semitism in Today's France

Talk by Robert Zaretsky on April 27, 2014, in Santa Fe

**A**nti-Semitism in France has been at a high since the Toulouse school murders nearly two years ago. As recently as January, French protesters chanted openly anti-Semitic slogans, calling for Jews to get out of France. Of all nations, France has the highest immigration rate to Israel.

The New Mexico Jewish Historical Society, in partnership with the Santa Fe Jewish Film Festival, will sponsor a talk entitled "French Jewry: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow" by Robert Zaretsky, Professor of Modern European History, University of Houston, and author of *France and its Empire Since 1870* (Oxford 2010). Dr. Zaretsky will address the situation of French Jewry in today's challenging climate.

This program will be an especially interesting follow-up to those who have seen the recent screening of "Being Jewish in France," but should be of interest to all.

Join us on Sunday, April 27, 4 p.m., Temple Beth Shalom, 205 E. Barcelona Road in Santa Fe. Admission fee \$10 at the door. ☆

## Sharon Niederman Presentation

May 3, 2014, Las Vegas, New Mexico

**N**MJHS board member Sharon Niederman will present a slide-lecture, "Lucien B. Maxwell: The Man and His Clan," at the 2014 annual conference of the Historical Society of New Mexico on Saturday, May 3, at

10:30 a.m. Niederman's presentation is included in the session, "Politics and Politicians of Northeast New Mexico." It is the culmination of a 2010-2011 Historic Records Advisory Board grant to preserve and make accessible the previously unseen documents and images of the history of Northeast New

Mexico housed in the Arthur Johnson Memorial Library in Raton. These vintage studio and personal images portray New Mexico pioneers such as John Dawson, the Chase Family, Fred Lambert, Maxwell family members and many more whose lives are legends of the American West. ☆

## Movers and Rakers

Montefiore Cemetery Cleanup on May 4, 2014

**T**his year the focus of the annual Montefiore Cemetery cleanup continues from the work done last year to facilitate wall reconstruction and weed removal, according to Ted Herburger, who is caretaker of the cemetery and vice president of the Montefiore Cemetery Association in Las Vegas, New Mexico. Ted is rebuilding the wall that used to surround the historical cemetery on the north and west sides. NMJHS volunteers can help him by moving rocks to positions where he can then incorporate them into a new wall.

In the accompanying photo, taken in 2012 at the annual cleanup, volunteers prepare to move rocks into a pickup truck. Rocks large and small are being moved to where they will be needed for wall building.



NMJHS invites you to join in this mitzvah on Sunday, May 4, from 10 to 1, at the Montefiore Cemetery in Las Vegas. Bring the tools you want to work with: dollies for moving rocks, work gloves, sturdy shoes or boots, and plastic buckets. If you want to clean up weeds bring large trash bags,

rakes, and shovels. For history of the cemetery and directions, go to the NMJHS website [www.nmjhs.org](http://www.nmjhs.org) and click on Montefiore Cemetery. Following a short talk about the cemetery's history the Cemetery Association will provide a picnic lunch. ☆

**Tears of Regret** *(continued from p. 1)*

uted significantly to the development of Egypt, economically, socially, culturally and politically.

Jews in Egypt encompassed several distinct communities: Arabic-speaking Jews who had been in the country for hundreds of years; European Jews of Sephardic origin who had arrived from Turkey, Greece, Italy, France and Spain; Ashkenazim who had fled the pogroms in Russian and Poland; and the Karaites (who recognize the Pentateuch, do not recognize the Jewish oral law, and thereby do not celebrate Chanukah, do not lay tefillin and do not follow the mezuzot tradition). The community was for the most part very well educated, mostly secular, and enjoyed a comfortable and cultural life with economic success.

**Messeca Family Life**

I was born in Cairo in 1941, the fourth child in a family with one brother and three sisters.

My family lived in an apartment building at number 106 King Street, Koubbeh Gardens in Cairo, near the palace of King Farouk. At home we spoke French and Egyptian Arabic.

My brother, sisters, and I went to school at the Lycée Français d'Héliopolis. Most of our teachers were French, as was the director of the school. We also had Egyptian teachers who taught Arabic writing, grammar and literature. The students, who were at least bilingual, came from diverse backgrounds: Italian, French, German and Greek. Our school was part of La Mission Laïque Française [2] under the supervision of the French Consulate in Cairo.

Messeca is not a common name, like DuPont in France or Smith in the U.S.A. Most of the Messecas living in Israel today come from differ-

ent countries, to wit, Egypt, France, Italy, South America, Spain and North Africa. Some have lived in Israel for a long time. Messeca is derived from the Hebrew name, Messika, which means "pressing the olive," i.e., extracting the oil for the lighting of the candles in the Jerusalem Temple.

My parents spoke several languages. In addition to Arabic, my father spoke Italian, German, French, Spanish and

lish. All of us were very sports driven. We participated in national swimming meets, inter-club, and inter-school. On many occasions, my brother Maurice was mentioned in the Cairo newspapers as the "Crocodile of the Nile," because of his numerous victories. Ping-pong, squash and athletics were also part of the sports competitions, where we participated with joy, had fun and also performed very well for the Club.



*The author's father Clement (second from the left) in a sugar cane field, circa 1935-1936.*

English. My mother spoke French, English and Ladino in addition to Arabic. My maternal grandmother spoke Ladino and Arabic. She lived with us, kept our home kosher, and observed all the Jewish holidays with respect.

We did not strictly observe Shabbat, but we always had many family members for dinner Friday night and/or lunch on Saturday. We were raised with the value of preserving Jewish traditions. I do remember that the major holidays, Yom Kippur, Rosh Hashanah and Passover were always celebrated in style with numerous family members. My religious education was minimal but sufficient to prepare for my bar mitzvah.

As children, our life centered around scouting and the activities at the English Country Club, where we spoke Eng-

My sisters were chosen to dance at the Cairo Opera during the Christmas holidays, thanks to performing arts classes with a private French teacher. We shared numerous soccer matches in the garden and chess games with our extremely friendly Egyptian neighbors. On many occasions, we were privileged to be invited to the French Consulate to watch French movies, where I had my first viewing of the talented Maurice Chevalier, Martine Carole and Juliette

Greco.

**Paternal Roots**

My father Clement Messeca was born in Egypt in 1890 to a father who may have come from Livorno. Clement's mother was born in Egypt of parents who came from Venice.

Clement had two brothers, and as the patriarch of the family, he supervised the family businesses. The three met regularly every Friday morning to review the status of their operations. They operated several lines of business: banking, agriculture, real estate, and foreign trade. Banking was entirely managed by the youngest brother, Felix. A second brother, Ruben, managed thousands of acres of cotton in the Nile delta, where we had a group of large houses to accommodate all three families for long weekends and vaca-

2. La Mission Laïque Française is a secular association created in Paris in 1902 that operates schools abroad to teach French language and culture.

**Tears of Regret** *(continued from p. 4)*

tions. Clement, my father, was in charge of the import-export business and the real estate properties.

To my knowledge, no written documents were ever drawn up by the three brothers to evidence the share of ownership each had in the different businesses; there were no minutes of meetings, no documentation on who was lending to whom, and how much. The businesses were conducted on the basis of trust, and that was enough, my father used to say. Women were not involved in any business matters. However, I do recall that my mother, in a very elegant way, often asked my father to make sure that someone knew what belonged to whom.

My parents were world travelers. They were married in London in 1934, where my oldest sister was born in 1937. The family business was represented in Berlin, Paris, and London. For many years my parents spent more than a half a year in Europe. When the political situation in Germany started to show its ugly face, my father made sure that his Jewish partner in Berlin found the needed support to start a new life for his family in New York. Later on, in 1957 when the events in Egypt put our family in difficulty, the same Berlin partner knew how to reciprocate.

**Maternal Roots**

While we always enjoyed a great number of family members from my father's side, Clara Vaena Messeca, my mother, was born and raised in Cairo, an only child. She rarely answered questions about or discussed her family. Her father, Salvatore Vaena, was a Cairo antiques dealer who died when she was very young. Her uncle Isaac Vaena, a very prominent businessman, contributed to her upbringing and provided for her well-being. Isaac was highly regarded in the Jewish community for his philanthropy.

The Vaena family had come to Egypt directly from Smyrna, Greece (now Izmir,

Turkey). We have been able to trace the Vaena roots back to a cemetery in Spain. Thanks to social media today, we have traced the Vaena family in France and Bulgaria since the early 1900s.

Clara, my mother, was intelligent, elegant, very sociable, straightforward and cheerful. Her silence about her family was always very intriguing. A couple of years ago while I was researching the name Vaena in the Yad Vashem database, I found, much to my surprise, that more than fifty members of her father's family had been killed in the German camps. Did she know from her father or uncle what had happened? Did she want to avoid pain and tears? My maternal grandmother Noemi never mentioned it either. Noemi grew up in Israel and came to Cairo to marry Salvatore. She was very observant and kept a strictly kosher home.

**Growing Tensions in Egypt**

The rise of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt (founded in 1929) created tensions vis-à-vis our Jewish community. During 1948, with the creation of the State of Israel, more than seventy Jews were killed by bombs in the Jewish quarter of Cairo. This event alone caused fifteen thousand to twenty thousand Jews to leave the country.

In July 1952, the lifestyle of King Farouk and the perception that he was more interested in gambling at European casinos than caring for the poor and needy, led to his overthrow by a group of young Egyptian military officers under General Naguib. At that time, many Jewish department stores and other Jewish businesses were attacked, set on fire and almost destroyed. Huge demonstrations took place in Cairo, Alexandria, and other major cities in Egypt in support of Naguib and against Jews and Israel.

General Naguib was a good friend of my father and was very well liked in the Jewish community. In that same year, 1952, he had attended the Great Syna-

gogue of Cairo during the High Holy Days to present his best wishes to the Jewish Community. His visit was a very encouraging sign for many Jews to stay. However, the new "Pharaoh" Gamal Abdul Nasser took power with a coup d'état at the end of 1952, and with the support of young officers took control of the country.

In July 1956 Nasser nationalized the Suez Canal Company. This event prompted an invasion by England, France and Israel, whose forces were successful in taking over the Sinai and occupying the Suez Canal. Their broader objective was probably to overthrow the Nasser regime.

However, the Soviet Union's threat to react militarily in the region brought the United States to put pressure on the advancing coalition to halt hostilities. This ushered in a new political era of cooperation between the Nasser regime in Egypt and the Soviet Union. During these events in 1956, more than thirty thousand Jews were forced to leave in just a couple of months. By 1967, by the end of the Six-Day War, only two thousand five hundred Jews remained in Egypt.

**Turbulent Times for the Jewish Community**

During this turbulent period, the Jewish community was advised not to be highly visible. In the past, for Passover, we had invited more than fifty family members to celebrate the Exodus from Egypt and recite the famous concluding prayer of anticipation and hope, "Next Year in Jerusalem." Now, we observed Passover with joy, but quietly, and with only immediate family present.

My bar mitzvah was celebrated (February 1954) in the Jewish Quarter, in the famous Maimonides Synagogue in the presence of my father and a couple of my friends. Previously, it would have taken place in the big synagogue in our neighborhood, with guests and family members from all over.

**Tears of Regret** *(continued from p. 5)*

Often we heard that Jewish houses had been broken into by Egyptian military personnel, and families were forced to leave. A climate of fear and uncertainty prevailed. My father's business office was sealed off, the bank accounts sequestered, and the assets expropriated.

My father tried hard to call highly placed government officials to have his office re-opened, to negotiate with the bank for a line of credit guaranteed by his current account, but suddenly he was unwelcome. His Egyptian employee of 20 years, Mohamed, could not understand what was happening to his countrymen. "Are they going crazy?" he would exclaim.

The idea of leaving the country started to mature in my parents' discussions with our Egyptian neighbors. I remember my mother, after we were all in bed one night, counting the number of suitcases we had, and wondering how many more we needed. What should they do with my grandmother who was then 65 years old? Was she capable of dealing with the cold weather in Europe? It was accepted as fact that the girls would work as secretaries, and that the boys should pursue their studies. How to prepare them for this new situation?

By the end of 1956 more than two hundred Jewish leaders and businessmen were sent to a detention camp in the desert, without any notice to their families as to where they were, and why this was happening. My father's brother, Ruben, who owned thousands of acres of cotton lands, was sent to the camp in the desert twice, once in 1948, and a second time in 1952.

It was said that the Jewish camp was very close to another camp where Muslim Brotherhood members were detained for many years. After a period of tension and threats between the two groups a new rapport developed. Thanks to skilled negotiations and

know-how by a Jewish lawyer who was highly respected in the Muslim community, the members of the Muslim Brotherhood cooperated and advised the Jewish detainees how best to survive living in the desert when you are unprepared for it.

**Exodus for the Messeca Family**

In the beginning days of March 1957, my father was ordered to appear early one morning at police headquarters in Tahrir Square, the site since made famous during the recent events of the Egyptian Spring. At my mother's request, I went with my father to this infamous meeting where we were forced to stand for seven hours. Finally we heard what we had feared, but in a sense welcomed: "You (my father) have the choice either to go immediately to prison or leave the country."

My mother, worried about our long absence, made inquiries about the situation and joined us at the police station where my father had to spend the night. In a couple of hours, with the help of the Swiss Embassy, we were able to get two tickets for my father and older brother Maurice to travel by ship to Marseille in France.

The following morning, my father – in handcuffs and escorted by two policemen – arrived at the Cairo train station where my mother, older brother and I were waiting to accompany him to Alexandria. From the port of Alexandria he and my brother embarked on an Italian ship to France.

A day later, back in Cairo without my father and brother, the remaining family members observed the first night of Passover. Thus began another Exodus from Egypt for the Messeca family. Tears of regret cannot turn back the hands of time.

In September 1957, I embarked alone on a Greek ship from Alexandria to

Marseille. I met up briefly with my father in Paris and then went directly to a boarding school near Fontainebleau. My mother, three sisters, and grandmother joined us at the end of the year. My family traveled on French passports, with the exception of my mother and grandmother, who had United Nations documents for stateless persons.

My uncles and their families left Egypt between 1956 and 1962 for Israel, Italy, England, Australia, Switzerland, France, and the United States. One elderly cousin remained in Cairo. ☆

*Michel Messeca received his M.S. in mathematics from the Sorbonne and his MBA from the Institut d'Etudes Politiques in Paris. After a long career in the international French bank BNP Paribas in New York, Paris, and Luxembourg, he served on the Executive Committee, retiring in 2000 to Albuquerque. Michel married Betsy Nordhaus in 1972, descendant of a third-generation New Mexico Jewish Pioneer family, whom he met in Paris. Betsy and Michel have two children and nine grandchildren, all of whom live in Jerusalem.*

**In Memory of Abe Chanin**

NMJHS regrets the passing of Abraham S. Chanin, who played an essential role in advancing the study of Jews in the Southwest. Founder and director of the Bloom Southwest Archives on Jewish History at the University of Arizona, he wrote numerous articles on Jewish history. Abe had a long career as a journalist and editor at the *Arizona Daily Star*. He also was an editor and publisher of the *Arizona Post*, the Jewish newspaper in Tucson. He and his wife, Mildred, moved to Albuquerque after retirement, where he became an active NMJHS member and served on the board. In 2007 he received the Society's Hurst Award.

# Leader in the Cultural Life of New Mexico Assumes New Post in Missouri

by Ron Duncan Hart



Frances Levine, former director of the New Mexico History Museum and leader in the cultural life of New Mexico in recent

decades, has moved to a new position as the President and CEO of the Missouri History Museum in St. Louis. In an interview for *Legacy*, Levine recognized the work of the New Mexico Jewish Historical Society and its role of disseminating information about the Jewish history of this state.

Fran Levine is a multi-dimensional person; defining her requires an extensive list of terms from anthropologist and museum director to community-oriented leader, creative thinker, Jewish and more. As Director of the New Mexico History Museum, she led the way to a new building that is a significant addition to downtown Santa Fe. Attendance at exhibitions under her leadership expanded dramatically. In the five years since the opening the NMHM building, the Museum has had 500,000 visitors.

While in New Mexico, Levine played an important role in supporting the understanding of Jewish history and collaborated with the NMJHS on various occasions. Although the exhibition, "Jewish Pioneers of New Mexico 1821–1917" had been planned before she became director, she supported dissemination of information about the exhibition. After the exhibit was taken down five years later, she offered to lend the panels of text and photos from the exhibition to the New Mexico Jewish Historical Society for display around the state, a project that continues to the present day.

Levine recognized the unique crypto-Jewish phenomenon in New Mexico with the program, "Sephardic Voices," that filled the Lensic Theater in 2008 and supported an exhibition planned

for 2015 entitled "Sephardic Legacy." Levine's leadership in recognizing the crypto-Jewish, anusim, and converso experience has been an important contribution to New Mexico and to crypto-Jewish studies.

Born in Connecticut, Levine has spent much of her life in New Mexico and the southwest United States. In talking about her experience of living in this multi-cultural region, she said that it was not until she moved to New Mexico that she became more comfortable with her Jewish identity. She said that she learned much about the suppression of identity from studying other cultures, which made her examine the issues of prejudice toward Jewish people that she had faced growing up in New England. From studying other cultures, and from raising her children, who asked questions about where they belonged in the "tri-cultural" myth of the Southwest, she became sure of who she was and how she could express her own Jewish identity.

An important component of Levine's life has been Mexico. Her mother's first cousin, truly her prima hermana, was a social activist who went to Mexico in the 1930s and married there. She and her husband were involved in supporting the social renovation of Mexico that occurred after the Mexican Revolution, and they were politically and socially active. Their commitment to social justice issues extended not only to Mexico but also internationally.

Levine's cousin had a major role in rescuing several boatloads of Spaniards who had supported the Republican side in the Spanish Civil War and later had to

leave Spain for Mexico. Levine's involvement with the Mexican side of her family has led to her having close personal and professional ties in Mexico.



*Frances Levine*

Having a Spanish-speaking part of her family has been an integral part of her reality of living in the Southwest and has contributed to her insight and understanding of the Mexican cultural background that ebbs and flows between Mexico and New Mexico.

From early on Levine wanted to be an archaeologist. Her father recommended that she go to a university in a

western state where the archaeology programs would be strong. She chose the University of Colorado where she did her undergraduate degree, and then she went to Southern Methodist University in Dallas for Master's and Ph.D. degrees. Later, she did postdoctoral work on museum leadership in the Getty Museum Leadership Institute in Los Angeles. She is a member of the American Alliance of Museums and professional museum associations.

Levine is most noted for exhibitions such as "Threads of Memory: Spain and the United States," which drew more than 20,000 visitors; "Illuminating the Word: The Saint John's Bible" about an illuminated Bible from Wales; and the current exhibition "Cowboys Real and Imagined," which includes programming about Jewish cowboys and their families in the history of New Mexico.

Levine worked with her staff and outside educators to develop classroom curricula for all the exhibits, with the result that the Museum has public school

## Many Thanks for Your Contributions

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## Frances Levine (continued from p. 7)

students on an almost daily basis as they experience exhibitions and do projects related to them. The Brainpower & Brownbags Lecture series and other public lectures have become important complements to the exhibition schedule. Santa Fe Community College has also offered a semester-long class in New Mexico history at the museum since 2009, making a unique opportunity for students to experience and utilize the exhibitions.

As Director of the New Mexico History Museum, Levine has also directed the staff of the Fray Angélico Chávez History Library and Photo Archives, the Palace Print Shop, and the Native American Portal Artisans Program, each of the programs making innovations during her tenure. Before coming to the Museum as director, she was the assistant dean of Academic Affairs for Arts and Sciences at the Santa Fe Community College in Santa Fe, where she also taught classes in New Mexico history and the ethnohistory of Pueblo and Hispanic communities of the Southwest.

Levine has authored and edited a number of books in addition to scholarly articles. Her books include *Our Prayers Are in This Place: Pecos Pueblo Identity over the Centuries*, *Through the Lens: Creating Santa Fe* (with MaryAnne Redding and Krista Elrick), and *Telling New Mexico: A New History* (with Marta Weigle and Louise Stiver), a chapter in the 400th anniversary volume *All Trails Lead to Santa Fe* (with Gerald González), and *Frontier Battles and Massacres: Historical and Archaeological Perspectives* (editor with Ron Wetherington). She is currently working on a book about the life of Doña Teresa Aguilera y Roche, the wife of New Mexico governor Bernardo López de Mendizábal, both of whom were accused before the Inquisition as Judaizers and taken to Mexico City for trial.

Levine's husband, Tom Merlan, is a historian and researcher who has writ-

ten on homesteads and ranches in New Mexico and other themes. He is from a family of long-time residents in Santa Fe. They have two children, Stephen who lives in New Orleans and Anna who lives in New York. Both are actively involved in social justice work, say their proud parents.


As she talked about her new position at the Missouri History Museum, Levine said that the NMHM has been one of the models that she has admired for years because of its strong educational and community outreach programs. She sees the mission of a museum to be a community organization that not only informs people through exhibitions but also provides a venue for educational interaction from children's programs to lecture series for adults.

As Director of the New Mexico History Museum for the last twelve years, Levine has made a major contribution to Santa Fe, New Mexico, and the Southwest. Her intellectual leadership and vision of the museum as an active member of the community it serves has created a dynamic ongoing institution, giving the Southwest one of its most important museums. Her involvement with Jewish and crypto-Jewish programs has given an important venue of communicating this information to the larger museum-going world. ☆

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# Restoring Family Links

by Tammy Kaiser



Instead of closure, George Gordon got quite the opening.

For 60 years he thought he was his family's sole survivor. As a teenager Gordon (born Jerzy Budzynski) fought the Nazis in the Warsaw Ghetto uprising, which is where he saw his father and younger brother shot dead by SS soldiers. As for his mother and sister, the German Red Cross said they could find no trace they survived and so he assumed they were dead. For 60 years.

In 2002, George contacted me at the American Red Cross and filed paperwork to trace the fate of his mother and sister. He was looking for graves. George was never looking for living people. The only reason he even began searching was just to find out where his family was buried so that one day he could visit and pay his respects.

I remember visiting Poland with the March of the Living. After I was done with my duties as an educator with the March, I found myself in a Polish cemetery on a gray, rainy day. I had promised George that I would do my best to find his family's graves while I was in Poland. I searched for hours, plodding over muddy paths between bullet-shattered tombstones. Nothing.

I had three hours to get to the Warsaw airport and told the taxi driver in broken Polish to take me to my flight. On my way to the airport we passed a Polish Military Cemetery. On a whim, with the little time I had left in Poland, I instructed the taxi driver to pull over and wait for me as I searched one last cemetery. My taxi driver reminded me, as he had already done many times, that the soil was thick with blood in Poland.

I will never forget the groundskeeper who pointed to a little shed. Inside the shed sat a small woman with a very large book. The book was filled with pages upon pages of typewritten names. It took about ten minutes until I found the names of George's brother and father. Next to their names was the location of their graves. I remember running into the rain, finding the ground-



*Childhood photos of brother and sister Jerzy and Krystyna Budzynski in Poland.*

keeper and begging him to help me locate the graves. He did. It turned out it wasn't two graves, but one. George's father and brother, Jan and Dionzy, were buried with other resistance fight-



*Reunion of George (aka Jerzy) and sister Krystyna in Wroclaw, Poland in 2003.*

ers in a mass grave labeled, "The fighters against Hitler and the SS."

I had about one minute to spend at the grave before I had to get to my flight. I had found the graves of his brother and father, but I felt bad that I could

not locate the graves of his mother and sister.

When I returned to the United States, I received a message from the Polish Red Cross. Polish researchers discovered a simple newspaper obituary. It was for George's mother, Janina. And it mentioned only one survivor, her daughter Krystyna. There was a phone number in the message. I drove straight to George's house. I will never forget saying the words, "Krystyna is alive," and handing him the phone. I had to dial her number.

"(George) Gordon, who has seen men burned in crematoria, been shot and tortured, recounts war horrors matter-of-factly," writes the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*. "Only when speaking of the night he heard his sister's voice for the first time in 59 years does his voice waver."

"Krystyna, this is Jerik," he said, using his childhood nickname over the telephone to Poland."

On September 26, 2003, they saw each other again for the first time in 60 years. They met in the lobby of the Hotel Monopol in Wroclaw, Poland, where Hitler had once shouted speeches from the balcony. I was there. I met George's nieces and nephews. I learned of Krystyna's time in Stutthof. We all cried.

George describes his first glimpse of his sister to a newspaper in Seattle, "These two women walked in, my sister and her daughter," Gordon said, gazing at the diary he kept during his year at Buchenwald. "I wouldn't have recognized her if we'd passed each other on the street — to me she was always a 12-year-old girl — but when I heard her voice, I knew it was her."

*(continued on p. 10)*

## The Rabbi and the Priest

by Noel Pugach

**E**rna Fergusson is often referred to as the “first lady of New Mexico letters.” She was the granddaughter of Albuquerque pioneer developer and merchant Franz Huning and the daughter of Harvey Fergusson, a lawyer and important political leader. Fergusson began as a journalist for the *Albuquerque Herald*, where she specialized in capturing the early history of the town she loved, and then wrote numerous books on the state and region.

In her book *Albuquerque* (1947), Fergusson tells a humorous story involving Rabbi Moise Bergman and Father A. M. Mandalari. The joke was retold in Gunther Rothenberg’s 1972 history of Congregation Albert (pp. 25-26).

Father Mandalari served for many years as the parish priest of Immaculate Conception. His great achievement was the completion of the church building be-

gun by his predecessor, Father Ferrari, in about 1885. Over time, Mandalari became the “dean” of Albuquerque’s clergy and was beloved by all for his numerous good works.

He worked closely with Rabbi Moise Bergman, and they became close friends. Rabbi Bergman assumed the pulpit at Congregation Albert in 1914 and served there until 1922. He led the congregation in raising funds for the relief of Jews in Eastern Europe, who suffered greatly during World War I, and also for the rebuilding of Jewish life in Palestine.

Bergman engaged himself deeply in Albuquerque community affairs and won recognition and respect. He became famous for treating and assisting the victims of the Great Flu Pandemic of 1918-1919. Consequently, Rabbi Bergman was repeatedly chosen the president of the Albuquerque Board of Charities.

One day, a committee of the board found itself in the unusual and fortunate position of having surplus cash and debated what to do with it. At a meeting, Farther Mandalari rose and said: “Gentlemen and Ladies: I move that this extra money which, with the dissolution of our committee, will belong to nobody, be used to buy a Christmas present for Rabbi Bergman.”

The younger Bergman sprang to his feet and said: “No, no. I offer a substitute motion. I move, Mr. Chairman, that we apply this surplus to the purchase of a wedding present for Father Mandalari.”

This delightful tale may shed light on the integration of the Jewish community in Albuquerque during the early 20th century. Indeed, that seems to have been true of Albuquerque since its incorporation in 1885. In fact, Henry Jaffa and Michael Mandell, both Jews, were respectively the first and sixth mayors of Albuquerque. ✧

### Restoring Family Links *(continued from p. 9)*

George’s story is special. It was one of the highlights in my career as a WWII and Holocaust Victim’s Tracer with the American Red Cross. But his story is not the only one. There were others. Not all resulted in reunions. Many resulted in the number of the transport to Auschwitz. Many. I was able to provide the transport. I was able to provide a date of death. I was able to provide a *yahrzeit*.

I still can. Currently, I volunteer with the American Red Cross in New Mexico in the International Services Department. I am still searching for information. And, believe it or not, survivor stories still happen. It has recently come to my attention that many Jews of New Mexico do not know that this service exists. We are still here for you. We can search for family, their fates, personal information,

certificates of detention, displaced persons and internment. Whether you are looking for information about yourself or a family member, Restoring Family Links is about reuniting living family and finding the history that links us to our loved ones in the past.

Contact Tammy Kaiser at 505-400-4447 or [tammy.kaiser@gmail.com](mailto:tammy.kaiser@gmail.com) for information or to begin a search. ✧

*Tammy Kaiser is a writer, educator and public speaker living in Albuquerque. Her most recent work includes training material for the United States Coast Guard; a Religious and Cultural Diversity Awareness Training for the Transportation and Security Administration; and Adventure, Adversity and Opportunity: Our Jewish Pioneer History in New Mexico for NMJHS.*

### Mission Statement

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

### NMJHS Welcomes New Members

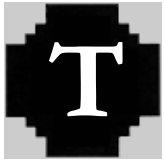
Rabbi Paul Citrin & Mrs. Susan Citrin  
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Estelle R. Kramer  
Shlomit Kronberg  
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Michelson  
Frank & Brooke Rummert  
Carmela Wilcox

### Welcome Back to Former Members

Elliot S. Pierce, MD & Leba  
Freed Pierce

# NMJHS Board Holds Annual Retreat

by Linda A. Goff



The Society's Board of Directors held its traditional one-day Annual Retreat immediately followed by a Business Meeting on January 26th

in Albuquerque. Board members traveled from Los Alamos, Abiquiu, Santa Fe, Raton and the greater Albuquerque area to brainstorm, strategize, and plan not only for 2014 but also beyond.

Society President Naomi Sandweiss presided over the Retreat during which the Board devoted much of its time rotating among breakout groups focusing on five broad categories: 1) Programs, Publications, and Historical Research Contributions; 2) Membership and Membership Participation; 3) Education Outreach; 4) Society Organizational Structure and Operations; and 5) Society Finances and Future Fundraising Opportunities.

After considerable discussions in small groups that reported back to the group at-large, the Board identified the following highlights in each of the categories.

## Programs, Publications, and Historical Research Contributions

The "heart and soul" of the NMJHS are its programs, including specific theme-focused programs, the annual Fall Conference, and on-going historical research. Organizing and presenting thematic programs of interest to Society members as well as nonmembers are key to current and future strength of NMJHS. Specific ideas include a revitalization of its Speakers' Bureau, development of an anthology of Society printed publications, identifying and holding events at non-traditional venues, and continued touring of the Pioneer Panels.

## Membership and Membership Participation

The "backbone" of the Society is its membership and membership participation to ensure its vitality and future strength. Currently, the Society has 376 members; it has the obligation to provide quality membership services, benefits, and attractive programming that appeals to new and current members. The Board is strongly committed to encouraging both undergraduate and graduate college students to participate in the Society as program speakers or on conference panels. One of our goals



*The NMJHS Board held its all-day Annual Retreat in Albuquerque on January 26.*

is to provide members the opportunity to sponsor college student membership in addition to offering research scholarships. Other ideas include creating special interest categories such as re-establishing genealogy workshops and studies.

## Outreach and Education

The Society's mission is "to promote a greater understanding and knowledge of New Mexico's Jewish history within a broad cultural context." Outreach and Education serve as the primary vehicles for implementing this mission in addition to drawing together Programming, Publications, and Membership. To further this goal, the Board reaffirms its dedication on several fronts:

- reach out to regional sister organizations,

- continue to exhibit the Jewish Pioneer panels in far-flung cities in New Mexico,
- improve outreach to the crypto-Jewish community, and
- create on-line digital apps and other technologies to promote Society programs.

## Organizational Structure and Operations

The Board also "turned inward" to analyze its current organization structure and in particular Board committees.

It took action to formalize committees and their membership. We discussed the creation of an Executive Committee to streamline some of the decision-making in order to assist the duties of the Society's Administrative Director and the Board President. A high priority of the current Board is to encourage and involve more members-at-large as well as to identify college students to participate on committees.

## Finances and Fundraising

Like many non-profit membership organizations whose membership dues and donations are critical to their success, the Society is no exception. In fact, memberships and donations comprise our largest revenue stream. The Board has exercised conservative stewardship of its assets and monetary reserves, yet recognizes the need to raise additional funds in order to increase member programs, educational outreach, and enhance membership services. The Board and its newly established Finance Committee soon will begin to explore opportunities to set fundraising goals and identify potential donors that will allow us to achieve these objectives. (The Treasurer's Report appears on page 2 of this issue.) ☆

# Legacy

NEWSLETTER OF THE NEW MEXICO JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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## Membership in NMJHS

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

## Calendar of NMJHS Upcoming Events

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

Shabbat Service in Las Vegas, New Mexico, May 3 at 10:30 a.m., Montefiore Temple (aka Neuman Chapel) on campus of Highlands University.

Montefiore Cemetery cleanup, May 4, 10 - 1, Las Vegas, New Mexico. See page 3 of this issue for more information.

Annual Meeting, Sunday, May 18 from 4 p.m. at the Jewish Community Center in Albuquerque. Speaker to be announced.

Anti-Semitism in France lecture on Sunday, April 27, 4 p.m. at Temple Beth Shalom, 205 E. Barcelona Road, Santa Fe. Admission \$10. (See page 3 of this issue for more information.)

SAVE THE DATE: November 15-16. The NMJHS major event of the year, the Fall Conference, will take place in Albuquerque at the Jewish Community Center. Details forthcoming.