



“Our Chaplain:” Rabbi Abraham Klausner and the Surviving Remnant in Germany

by Dr. Avinoam Patt, Maurice Greenberg Center for Judaic Studies, University of Hartford

Rabbi Abraham Klausner (1915-2007) lived in Santa Fe after his retirement from Temple Emanu-El in Yonkers, New York, in 1989 until his death in 2007. While he spoke little about his heroic work in Germany after the Holocaust, Rabbi Klausner played a crucial role in a largely unknown but pivotal moment in modern Jewish history: the brief three-year period after World War II, when the actions of Holocaust survivors living in postwar Europe ended up helping to create the State of Israel in 1948. To the survivors, Rabbi Klausner became a legendary figure in this fascinating snippet of Jewish history.

In the first days and weeks following the liberation of Nazi concentration camps in Germany in the spring of 1945, Jewish chaplains serving with the American forces were instrumental in organizing relief and assistance for the few surviving Jews in Germany. As one of the first

Jewish chaplains to reach Dachau, Rabbi Abraham Klausner played a vital advocacy role on behalf of survivors before American military authorities. He secured much-needed supplies for survivors that summer. Together with other Jewish chaplains, Klausner conducted prayer services, buried the dead, created lists of survivors, acquired land for farms and advocated for a more urgent and robust response from world Jewish organizations. He and Zalman Grinberg, a survivor of Dachau, established the Central Committee of the Liberated Jews in the U.S. Zone of Germany as the official representative body of the Jewish displaced persons (DPs). Klausner was consistently lauded by the survivors themselves as their most trusted advocate, referred to as “our chaplain.” Unlike any other Jew from the outside world, he became for the survivors “one of us.”

Born in Memphis in 1915 and raised in Denver, Klausner was ordained at Hebrew Union College in 1941. He then joined the Army as a chaplain, reaching Europe near the end of the war. Initially reluctant to continue his service in Europe, where it seemed the fighting was over, Klausner sought a transfer to the Pacific theater, where he thought he might be more useful to troops still actively fighting.¹

Upon his arrival in Dachau in mid-May 1945 with the 116th Evacuation Hospital (three weeks after liberation on April 29, 1945), Klausner first aided survivors in burying the dead and organizing bedding and provisions, including kosher food. After reuniting one Dachau inmate with

his brother—an American Jewish chaplain named Abraham Spiro-Klausner quickly resolved that his job was to “find and



Rabbi Klausner with DPs. Courtesy: Klausner family.

bring brothers together. The moment penetrated my soul, telling me I had a purpose in coming to Dachau. If I brought brothers together and nothing more, I would have achieved some small measure of significance in my life.”²

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Message from President Dorothy Amsden



W e all have ties to New Mexico and to 1912, the year our state was admitted to the union, even though most of us were yet to be born. Think

back in time to where your family was in 1912. Only a few of our families lived in New Mexico then, but at some point in time they were drawn to the state. Those who live here today and those who live elsewhere but have roots here know what a special place this is.

My own ties to New Mexico started in 1912, when my father Cecil Korn was born into a poor Orthodox immigrant family in the gritty northern city of Leeds in England. He attended grammar school and *cheder*, went to a technical high school, and aspired to be an architect. Had he remained in England the best he could have done was to become a draughtsman.

In 1930 he left England for New York,

won a scholarship to Cooper Union, and finished the architecture program. Along the way he acquired American citizenship and changed his name to Corner. He was married to June Fox by a rabbi, and four years later I entered the world. After joining the U.S. Civil Service, my father managed to rise through the ranks as an architect. During his career, a job opening drew him to Albuquerque in 1956. The family put down roots. New Mexico became our home.

All of you have stories of how your families came to New Mexico, some of them a long time ago, others more recently. It's the kind of place that grows on you. At first you marvel at its scenery, and then you start learn-

ing a little bit about its history. Wow, this really WAS part of the Wild West. What ever drew Jewish families to live

on this dusty frontier that was once part of Spain and then Mexico? Adventure and opportunity, of course. Just like my own family many years later that drove west in a 1953 Ford along the new Santa Fe Trail, U.S. Highway 66.



NMJHS President Dorothy Amsden

To celebrate New Mexico's Centennial, the New Mexico Jewish Historical Society is holding its 25th annual Fall Conference in Santa Fe on November 4. (An article about the conference appears elsewhere in this issue.)

Don't miss this opportunity to join in a special program that focuses on notable Jewish families who made their mark on New Mexico before, during, and after statehood. See you there! ☆

Call for Donations to Silent Auction at Fall Conference

The Society is seeking donations of new or very gently used items for a silent auction at the November 4 conference in Santa Fe. Items sought include gift certificates (to restaurants, hotels, theatres), books, Lobo tickets, Judaica, artwork, jewelry, and fine clothing and accessories. All of the auction proceeds will go to NMJHS. If you have an item to donate, please contact Janet Saiers at 505-299-5019 or jsaiers@msn.com for information on pickup or drop off.

To All Members: NMJHS Wants You!

You're an NMJHS member because you're interested in the rich tapestry of Jewish history and contributions to the State of New Mexico.

Would you like to hone your knowledge and share it with others? We have just the program for you!



You are invited to be part of NMJHS's new Speakers Bureau. We're launching it to both reach out and respond to citizens of all ages, backgrounds, and interests throughout New Mexico. We're looking for topics and a roster of speakers who wish to give one or several talks during each calendar year.

Topics include:

- The Jewish pioneers on the Santa Fe Trail
- Conversos' settlement in New Spain
- Jewish leaders in politics, commerce, science, and culture
- Researching your Jewish genealogy
- Ladino music and language in New Mexico

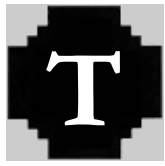
We're also building a database of potential venues, such as temples and churches, assisted living residences, schools, youth groups, and civic organizations. Got a suggestion of a community group who might be interested? Please let us know!

To join our Speakers Bureau, you need to be an NMJHS member with a desire to learn and speak about topics that interest you. You don't have to be a published scholar, although we welcome experts, too! Training will be provided in 2-hour sessions twice a year. To apply, please call our office at 505-348-4471.

Consider this an exciting new opportunity to inspire your community! We look forward to hearing from you.

On the New Mexico Frontier

NMJHS Fall Conference to Celebrate the New Mexico Centennial



he culmination of events that we all look forward to each year is the Fall Conference of the New Mexico Jewish Historical Society (NMJHS). This year it will take place in Santa Fe, the state capital, as befits a Centennial celebration.

As an official event of the New Mexico Centennial “Statehood: New Mexico Jewry before and after 1912” is not to be missed. It is the 25th in NMJHS’s remarkable series of annual conferences. The conference takes place at the new DoubleTree Hotel on Cerrillos Road in Santa Fe from 9 to 5 on Sunday, November 4. Registration is at 8 a.m. Conference attendees will enjoy a light breakfast, a sit-down lunch, a silent auction and a reception at 4 p.m.

The program includes an array of speakers who will tell us about some notable Jewish families in New Mexico during the Territorial period and after statehood, up to World War II:

- Richard Melzer, “Herding Millions of Sheep: Solomon Luna and the Writing of the New Mexico State Constitution, 1910”
- Susan Warburg, “Jewish Immigrants on the New Mexico Frontier, 1840s to 1880s”
- Ramona Caplan, “Nathan and Artie Bibo: Visionaries and Activists Crossing Cultural and Racial Borders in New Mexico and San Francisco”
- Noel Pugach, “Reflections on the Jewish Pioneer Panels: Their Origin and Content”
- Henry Tobias, “Dr. Randolph Seligman: Early Life of a Jewish Native Son”
- Diane Schaller, “Albuquerque Businesses: The Maisel Story”

Some of you may have heard Professor Melzer talk about the Centennial at conferences of other historical societies this year. He has revised his keynote

talk to focus on the writing of the New Mexico constitution during the contested statehood process, which took some 60 years to achieve because of the lawlessness, corruption, prejudices, and businessmen’s concerns about property rights that prevailed in the New Mexico Territory. [See article by Naomi Sandweiss in the December 2011 *Legacy*, “Opposing Views: New Mexico Territory’s Jews and the Statehood Debate.”]

Following the keynote talk, the morning session will focus on pre-statehood history. Susan Warburg, who provided the recent *Legacy* article [of which Part 2 appears in this issue] about her ancestor Flora Spiegelberg, “Reminiscences of a Jewish Bride of the Santa Fe Trail,” is coming from San Francisco to tell us about the early Jewish pioneers who roughed it along the Trail before the railroad came to New Mexico. Susan and her husband Felix were driving forces behind the 2000 – 2004 exhibit of Jewish Pioneers at the Museum of New Mexico.

Ramona Caplan, a graduate student at the University of New Mexico, has done extensive research on the remarkable Bibo family. All ten Bibo siblings immigrated to New Mexico from Prussia. Three of them—Nathan, Solomon and Simon—started their own mercantile businesses, after brief stints as clerks with the Willi and Flora Spiegelberg family, major players in Santa Fe’s Territorial economy.

As part of the conference, there will be a display of selected panels from the Jewish Pioneer exhibit, entitled “Adventure,

Adversity & Opportunity: Jewish Pioneer History in New Mexico.” Lunchtime speaker Professor Emeritus Noel Pugach plans to talk about the origin of the Jewish Pioneer panels and discuss some of the families they feature.



Bertha Staab and Robert Nordhaus with their children at their home in Albuquerque, circa 1915.

The afternoon session, which looks at the period after New Mexico was granted statehood, includes two talks. The first, by Professor Emeritus Henry Tobias, is about one of the sons of the Seligman family. Dr. Randolph Seligman’s family left Germany in 1866 and settled in Bernalillo, New Mexico, where they started the Bernalillo Mercantile Company. His father, Julius, and two uncles married three sisters from Bernalillo

and started a dynasty of Seligmans.

Winding up the talks is speaker Diane Schaller, president of Historic Albuquerque, who will share photos and stories about the Maisel family. Maurice Maisel built the trading post in the late 1930s after the rerouting of Route 66 through Albuquerque. By the 1940s, the trading post had become the largest of its kind on Route 66 and at one time employed over 300 American Indian craftsmen on-site. The store closed after Mr. Maisel died in the 1960s. In the 1980s, Mr. Maisel’s grandson, Skip Maisel, reopened the shop. It was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1993.


Other conference activities include a reception following the talks that provides an opportunity to socialize with the speakers and conference attendees and to browse books by NMJHS authors that

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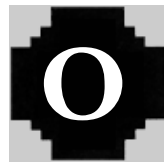
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Reminiscences of a Jewish Bride of the Santa Fe Trail: Part 2

by Flora Spiegelberg

Editor's Note: Part 1 appeared in the March 2012 issue of Legacy. The article was originally published in 1935 in the Jewish Spectator.



One of our best friends in Santa Fe was the Archbishop Lamy. In 1852, while still a Bishop, he was returning from Kansas accompanied by two young priests in a covered wagon and two mules. When half-way across the Santa Fe Trail he met a large caravan of ox-drawn wagons taking merchandise to Spiegelberg Brothers in Santa Fe. He was a friend of the brothers, so he halted his wagon to greet Levi, the second oldest of the brothers, who was accompanying his wagon train. He learned that Levi had been taken suddenly ill with a severe attack of dysentery, and as there was an epidemic of cholera at that time, the Mexican leader and his men of the caravan became panic stricken and refused to continue. Thus they forced the sick man to take refuge with a kind-hearted trapper living in a log cabin on the prairie until he was able to resume his journey. Just as he was being carried into the cabin, the good Bishop rushed up to his old friend, Levi, and quickly persuaded the sick man to join him. The two young priests said in a kindly, soothing voice, "Good friend, we gladly make room for you in our covered wagon, and will nurse you until you recover your health, for we could not think of leaving you here in this lonely long cabin on the prairies. We do not believe that you have that dreaded disease—and if you have it, we are not afraid either."

Archbishop Lamy

The five Spiegelberg brothers never forgot how Bishop Lamy's devotion to their brother possibly saved his life, and we are all very grateful to him.

In 1876, the Catholic cathedral in Santa Fe was built under his [Lamy's] personal supervision, and he had placed over the main arch, carved in large Hebrew letters the word, "ADONOI," [sic] and painted

black to make it more conspicuous. For many years he sent on the Jewish New Year and Yom Kippur gifts of wine, fruits and flowers to his Jewish friends.

No doubt as a result of his religious tolerance, the Mexican friends of the five Spielberg brothers used to say, and it has been published in New Mexican newspapers, "We honor and respect the Spiegelberg Brothers because they are of the same people as our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."

Lynching Averted

In 1887 an American physician was brutally killed by two young Mexicans, and when they escaped the death sentence, a party of old pioneers, to set an example and protect their families, appeared at midnight on horseback and urged my husband to join them to hang the murderers. I was terribly frightened for my baby was only a few weeks old. While my husband was persuading his neighbors that he could not leave his young wife, I wrapped my baby in a shawl and appealed to the ten men on horseback, "Good friends, you all have families. I am nursing this baby, have the care of another small child, if my husband were to accompany you it will endanger my health and prevent me from doing my duty to my young children, so I sincerely hope you will not ask my husband to join you in the first Santa Fe lynching party." Then almost in unison they said, "Good wife and mother, your wish is granted, we bid you goodnight," raised their hats and silently rode away in the bright moonlight.

In 1878 General Sherman was sent to Santa Fe to settle trouble with the Indians. At a dinner given to him, it was my good fortune to be seated beside the general. "General Sherman," I suggested naively, "do tell us something about your march

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Reminiscences of a Jewish Bride (continued from p. 4)

from Atlanta to the sea.” The general arose from the banquet table with characteristic military dignity. Stiffly erect, and with a voice full of feeling, he said: “Good friends, although I am a military officer, at heart I am a pacifist.” He stared for a moment into space and then blurted out the thunderous declaration which has become a famous saying: “War is Hell!”

Special Friends

In 1879, generals Sheridan, Pope and Miles came on official business, and in 1880 they were followed by General Grant, John A. Logan, and Robert Ingersoll. These gentlemen were all feted by the old pioneers and were welcome guests in my home. At that time General Lew Wallace, the author of *Ben Hur*, was Governor.

General Lew Wallace of Civil War fame was appointed Governor of New Mexico in 1878 and served with distinction until 1881 when he was appointed Minister Plenipotentiary to Turkey; this honorary title was created especially for him.

During the Governor’s term of office he was a neighbor of ours, and as Mrs. Wallace was obliged to remain at her home in Indiana to superintend the education of her young son, she only came occasionally to Santa Fe. My husband and Gov-

ernor Wallace became very good friends and he frequently was our guest for dinner. He told us interesting war stories, and on one occasion read for us his book the “Prince of Peace.”

The official office of the Governor was in the old El Palacio Real built of adobes by the Indians in 1609 under the supervision of the Franciscan Friars. It served nearly 300 years all Spanish-Mexican and American Governors until 1924 when a new handsome state building was erected. The large window at the old El Palacio Real is still shown to tourists where Governor Wallace used to sit after office hours and work on his manuscript *Ben Hur*. One day as I passed I looked in the window and bowed good morning, the Governor beckoned me to come in, he said, “Mrs. Spiegelberg, I have just wrapped up my manuscript of *Ben Hur*, to forward to my publisher, do you think it is worth the expressage?” For a moment, I stared at him, and then quickly replied: “My dear Governor, judging by the success of your book, the ‘Prince of Peace,’ I’d gladly pay the express charges if you agree to divide the royalties with me. He smiled saying, “I will consider your offer,” and I wished him good luck. It has been said that the royalties from the book *Ben Hur*, the play and the film amounted to a million dollars. In later

years I often joked with him about my offer, and how wise he was not to accept it.

Shortly before the Governor’s departure for Washington we gave him a grand banquet. In those good old days wines and champagne flowed freely, toasts and speeches were made, thrilling war and pioneer stories related and the real western spirit of good-will and fellowship prevailed.

Toward the end of his farewell dinner the Governor said to my husband who at that time was Probate Judge of the county of Santa Fe, the first and only Jew to be elected to that office in New Mexico, and by a very large majority; his opponent was Bradford L. Prince, a former Chief Justice and Governor of New Mexico:

“If during the time I am Minister to Turkey I can be of service to your people, for you know that the Jews in the Orient occasionally get themselves into trouble, I promise you for the sake of our friendship, I will do all in my power to assist them should such an opportunity occur.” My husband and I shook hands with the Governor assuring him of our deep appreciation and gratitude. Then all our guests again drank to his health and success, cheering and expressing their admiration for his spirit of tolerance. ✨

On the New Mexico Frontier (continued from p. 3)

will be offered for sale. There will also be a silent auction to benefit NMJHS. See sidebar.

A pre-conference walking tour of historic Jewish Santa Fe will take place on Saturday, November 3, from 2 to 4. Tour guide Alan Osborn, a Road Scholar leader, will tell us about former Jewish businesses and residences on or near the Plaza. The walking route may include such buildings as the Spiegelberg store, the Spitz clock and former jewelry store, The Guarantee, owned by Abe and Marion Silver, Kahn’s shoe store, the former Bell’s Department Store, the St. Francis Cathedral/Basilica built by Archbishop Lamy and financed

by Abraham Staab, the Spiegelberg home, the Staab residence, and possibly the Greer/Salmon home.

You saved the date, November 4. Now is the time to fill out that registration form and send it in. By the time you read this, you should have received your registration brochure in the mail. If you did not receive a brochure, there is a registration form on page 11 of this issue and also on the NMJHS website www.nmjhs.org. Be sure to mail it in with your payment before October 22, the registration deadline. NMJHS is offering a discount for early registration and a special rate for full-time students. ✨

Silent Auction
Bring your Checkbook

In tandem with the conference, a silent auction to benefit the New Mexico Jewish Historical Society will take place. Items will include books, jewelry, clothing, restaurant gift certificates, art, glassware, and much more. Winning bidders may pay for their items by cash or check only. We will not have the ability to process credit cards.

Eulogy For Dennis Duran

by Stan Hordes

Editor's Note: Stan Hordes delivered the following eulogy for former board member Dennis Duran on August 31, 2012, in Santa Fe.

This is a very sad day for all of us. We are here to mourn the passing of our friend – our brother – Dennis Duran. It was my privilege to have been

friends with Dennis for the better part of the past 25 years. I first met Dennis in the research room of the New Mexico State Records Center and Archives here in Santa Fe in the late 1980s.

I was conversing with a couple of colleagues about some new research I was conducting, looking into the history of the crypto-Jews of New Mexico. As the discussion continued, I noticed a young man kind of eavesdropping on the conversation, inching closer and closer, so that he could better hear. After my colleagues left, he came up to me and told me that some of the customs that I had been discussing had been practiced by his family, and he wanted to learn more about the topic. It turned out that Dennis had converted to Judaism a decade or so earlier in California, but he had no idea of any Jewish background in his family. Well, you all know the rest of the story about Dennis receiving confirmation of this heritage from family members, and his decades-long research into his family's past.

Dennis would never admit it, but he was an extremely courageous person, and his courage influenced the lives of countless individuals from within the Hispano community who also dared to emerge from the shadows and embark on their own exploration of their Jewish roots. Offended by an article published by a prominent scholar who questioned the authenticity of the phenomenon of crypto-Judaism in New Mexico, Dennis summoned up the courage to write a letter to the editor, letting her know his opinion of her work in no uncertain

terms. Moreover, I recall the time that Dennis stood up to one of his employers, who refused to allow him to take time off from work to observe the Jewish High Holy days.

Dennis was most proud of the leadership role that he played in the New Mexico Jewish Historical Society and the Society for Crypto-Judaic Studies,

thanks to Dennis's efforts, that event proved enormously successful, and attracted the attention, not only of local media outlets, but *The New York Times*, as well.

Yes, Dennis was "out there," appearing in newspapers, magazines, and documentary films, setting an example for others who followed a similar course.



Stars of Dennis by Diana Bryer

where he was quite active in the 1990s in organizing several successful conferences. The most memorable of these took place at La Fonda Hotel in 1992, when the NMJHS commemorated the 500th anniversary of the expulsion of the Jews from Spain. We thought that we might have about 35-50 people attend. Imagine Dennis's surprise when some 350 folks showed up, and the event came perilously close to collapsing from its own weight. But, no small

Dennis's quest for greater knowledge about his heritage prompted him to embark on travels to Spain, Portugal, and Israel. Just days before his passing, he told me that the high point of his life was when he was called up to the Torah at a Sabbath morning service at an Orthodox Sephardic service in Jerusalem – formal recognition of Dennis's legitimacy as a Jew, 500 years after his ancestors were forced to convert to Catholicism, and forced to practice their ancestral faith in secret.

As many of you can attest, Dennis constantly portrayed himself as rather "taciturn" – "stone-faced," as he would always put it. But, also as many of us know, this characterization belied a wonderful sense of humor, and a love and appreciation of his friends and family.

Dennis is gone, and we mourn his untimely passing at an all-too-young age. But we all can take comfort in the fact that he will live on in the memories of the many, many people whose lives he touched. ✧

Professor Stan Hordes is a founder, past president and board member of NMJHS as well as former New Mexico State Historian.

Paloma of the Sefarad In Memory of Dennis Duran

© Isabelle Medina Sandoval

From Noah's ark to the synagogues
of Spain
The dove is empowered by the Sep-
hardic reign
Cu cu ru cu cu

Perched on the cross near the Saint
Francis belfry
the paloma's son soars in the plaza
and pine tree
Cu cu ru cu cu

Am Ysrael
Nation of Ysrael
Am Ysrael
Hijo de Ysrael
Am Ysrael
Judío fiel
Cu cu ru cu cu
Cu cu ru cu cu
Descansa la paloma de la Sefarad
Cantando alabados para eternidad
Cu cu ru cu cu

The stars mark a faithful Jew
The stamens of the cryptic lily coo
El Shaddai of the Sefarad is true
Cu cu ru cu cu
Cu cu ru cu cu

*Isabelle Medina Sandoval is a poet and
writer whose most recent work is Hidden
Shabbat: The Secret Lives of Crypto
Jews.*

"Our Chaplain:" Rabbi Abraham Klausner (continued from p. 1)

Klausner surveyed camps in Bavaria and compiled lists of survivors he met there, and had them published in Landsberg (where, ironically, Hitler had written *Mein Kampf*). Seeking a title for the publication, he recalled his love for the prophets who predicted: "There would always be a *sharit ha-platab*, a saving remnant, to treasure the call of the Lord. I scribbled the title on the cover of the batch of lists I left with the printer: *Sharit Ha-Platab* (the Surviving Remnant)."³

When Klausner's unit was ordered to move on, he secretly returned to Dachau against Army orders, and eventually became a G-5 officer (with the civil affairs wing of the Army) assigned to work in the interests of the DPs.⁴ Besides helping survivors reconnect with lost relatives and mourn the dead, Klausner worked to connect them with the Jewish world, pressed American Jewish organizations for aid and assistance, and conveyed the DPs' political wishes to the Yishuv in Palestine through correspondence with the Jewish Agency.

During May and June 1945, in surveying conditions faced by Jewish DPs in Germany, Klausner visited 14,000 Jews living in 17 DP camps a month after liberation.⁵ He found deplorable conditions: poor accommodations, no plumbing, no clothing, rampant disease, malnutrition, and a

lack of any plan by the American military, which he detailed in a report to Philip Bernstein (later the Adviser for Jewish Affairs):

There seems to be no policy, no responsibility, no plan for these... stateless Jews... Liberated but not free – that is the paradox of the Jew. In the concentration camp his whole being was consumed with the hope of salvation. That hope was his life, for that he was willing to suffer. Saved, his hope evanesces for no new source has been given him. Suffering continues to be his badge.⁶

Chastened by the lack of assistance from world Jewry, Klausner and Zalman Grinberg decided to take matters into their own hands. They established the Central Committee of Liberated Jews in Bavaria, in late June and early July 1945.⁷ Its purpose was to champion the interests of the Jewish DPs and draw attention to their plight before the U.S. Army and the United Nations relief agency UNRRA. It appointed Abraham Klausner honorary president and elected Grinberg as chairman of the executive. In the Committee's first year, Klausner played a central role, participating in nearly all of the meetings for at least his first year in Germany and helping articulate an ardently Zionist

political message that embodied the survivors' shared dream.

In the first issue of *Unzer Weg* (*Our Way*), the Committee's Yiddish weekly—which Klausner helped Levi Shalit, a survivor from Lithuania, to publish—Klausner penned an article titled "One of You," in which he shared with survivors the intimate connection he had established with them:

I know you well, my people. I know your thoughts and hear your speech. I know your dreams and I behold your works and I am thankful to Destiny for weaving me into the pattern of your rebirth. [...] Have I written as one who has suffered with you? I have done it only because I have hoped during these months that if not through suffering, then through my work you would accept me as one of you. And hand in hand, we would work together until we could meet on sacred soil.

The editorial board's response captured the special status Klausner had acquired as an honorary member of the Surviving Remnant: "Rabbi, friend, brother, you have become one of us!"⁸

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“Our Chaplain:” Rabbi Abraham Klausner *(continued from p. 2)*

Others corroborated the sense that, apart from Klausner, few were doing much to assist the Jewish DPs in the first months after liberation. Rabbi Eli Bohnen, the first chaplain to reach Dachau after the war, described Klausner’s work in a letter to Philip Bernstein:

The one bright gleam of hope in the whole mess is Chaplain Klausner. He has done more for the thousands of Jews in Munich and in the surrounding camps than all the agencies combined and then some. That’s a misstatement. The agencies have done practically nothing and he has, by himself, moved mountains. I cannot exaggerate the wonderful job he has done. That boy deserves the thanks of thousands upon thousands of Jews. He has literally saved hundreds of lives. How he manages to avoid a breakdown I don’t know. I confess I was lost in admiration for him and his achievements. If he had the resources of JDC [Joint Distribution Committee] at his disposal he would have performed super miracles. As it is, he only performed miracles.⁹

Over the next several months, American officials allowed increasing numbers of Jews arriving from Eastern Europe to enter the American zone, and supported Zionist solutions to the Jewish DP situation. Such solutions included the creation of 40 agricultural training farms where young Jewish DPs could prepare for their future lives in Palestine. Klausner continued to help the DPs organize and advocate for their needs. In April 1946, he officiated at the first official Passover *seder* in Munich, for which the *Survivor’s Haggadah*, written by Yosef Dov Sheinson, was printed by the military press with the insignia of the Third Army.¹⁰ In his preface to the *Haggadah*, Klausner noted Germany’s symbolism as the new Egypt: “Pharaoh and Egypt gave way to Hitler and Germany. Pitham and Ramsees faded beneath fresh memories of Buchenwald and Dachau.”¹¹ Klausner saw the Allies’ failure to create a unified relief plan, or

to solve the survivors’ stateless condition while rebuilding Germany, as a failure to grant the Jews true freedom.

By the summer of 1946, Klausner’s continuing and sometimes abrasive struggle on behalf of the survivors, and his year of cutting corners on military regulations and criticizing the JDC for its slow and disorganized arrival in the DP camps, caught up with him. In July 1946, Leo Schwarz, the third JDC zone director in the US zone (after Eli Rock and Lavy Becker), made it his mission to have the troublesome Klausner removed from the American zone. He described Klausner as “a sick young man, afflicted with a form of hypomania.”¹² Klausner left Germany that month, but not without tremendous appreciation from the DPs and those in the American military and Jewish organizations, for his remarkable sacrifice. Philip Bernstein, by then Adviser for Jewish Affairs to the American zone commander, expressed gratitude for Klausner’s, “historic accomplishment in Germany” that first post-liberation year:

You took broken human beings and fragments of Jewish life, and built them into a community. You gave these people dignity and purpose. Perhaps you have made history. Who knows how long this community will endure? So, despite whatever problems arose, you have a right to take lifelong satisfaction from your achievement here. I hope you will continue to derive satisfaction from your future career.¹³

Klausner’s achievements had indeed been remarkable: he had compiled and published lists of survivors in the *She’erit Hapletah* volumes; established hospitals for survivors in St. Ottilien and Gauting; supplied food, clothes, and religious items; created a mail service; helped create the Central Committee of Liberated Jews, to represent those of southern Germany [Bavaria] and Austria in all negotiations with American military authorities; and carefully informed Jews of their rights.¹⁴

The creation of a vocal and independent Zionist leadership did indeed convince international observers that, if only given the chance, the Jewish DPs would choose to make *aliyah* to Israel *en masse*.

Despite the recommendations of the Anglo-American Committee in April 1946, however, diplomatic efforts stalled throughout 1946 and early 1947. It became clear that for most Jewish DPs, life would continue in Germany rather than Palestine. After six months in the US, in early 1947 Klausner returned to Germany and discovered what he believed to be a vastly changed and seriously demoralized population of Jewish survivors. They seemed deeply pessimistic about the prospects of ever leaving Germany. By 1948 Klausner radically shifted his view of the DPs, believing that with the arrival of over 100,000 Jews from Eastern Europe, and with the *Bricha* crowding and languishing in the DP camps [word missing] had transformed the *She’erit Hapletah* into a people “not to be asked, but to be told what to do.” While he shocked world Jewish leaders with his suggestion that the Jews “must be forced to go Palestine,” his work with the survivors in the three years after liberation helped create a situation that enabled more than two-thirds of European Jewish survivors to make their way to Israel after statehood.

In a letter of May 25, 1948, William Haber described Abraham Klausner as approaching his work in the DP camps with the “zeal of a prophet.”¹⁵ Klausner seemed to believe his actions transcended his chronological time and place and functioned on a greater, meta-historical plane. The collective identity that Klausner helped in no small part to fashion for the *She’erit Hapletah* enabled the DPs to speak with one voice before the authorities. The significance of this fact in postwar diplomacy cannot be underestimated, for by speaking in unanimous terms the DPs played a disproportionately significant role in decisions leading to the creation of the State of Israel. As a “prophet,” Klausner

(continued on p. 7)

“Our Chaplain”: Rabbi Abraham Klausner (continued from p. 6)

felt he had the historic responsibility to lead the DPs to Israel (and perhaps to never even reside there himself). Much like Moses and the generation of the wilderness, so too, Klausner felt, those who had once been slaves in Germany would have to be coaxed out of the land of their enslavement, out of the wilderness, and into the Holy Land.¹⁶

After the establishment of the State of Israel, Klausner left the military and began recruiting pilots and nurses for the Israeli Defense Forces in the United States (turning down an offer from Ben-Gurion to work in Israel). Thereafter he was invited to become Provost at Hebrew Union College. After serving as Senior Rabbi at Temple Israel in Boston from 1949-1953 (when he also earned a Doctorate in Divinity at Harvard University), Klausner served at Temple Emanu-El in Yonkers from 1954 to 1989, when he retired and moved to Santa Fe. He would go on to write several books, including *Weddings: A Complete Guide to All Religious and Interfaith Marriage Services*, and his memoir, *A Letter to My Children: From the Edge of the Holocaust*. He was also featured in the 1997 Academy Award-winning documentary about Holocaust survivors in the immediate aftermath of the liberation of the concentration camps, *The Long Way Home*. In 1966, Klausner married Judith Steinberg and they had four children, sons Jeremy, Amos and Michael and a daughter Robin. Abraham Klausner died June 28, 2007, of complications from Parkinson's disease at the age of 92.¹⁷

Avinoam J. Patt, Ph.D. is the Philip D. Feltman Professor of Modern Jewish History at the Maurice Greenberg Center for Judaic Studies at the University of Hartford, where he is also director of the Museum of Jewish Civilization.

Previously, he worked as the Miles Lerman Applied Research Scholar for Jewish Life and Culture at the Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM). Dr. Patt received his Ph.D. in Modern European History and Hebrew and Judaic Studies from New York University. His first book, Finding Home and

Homeland: Jewish Youth and Zionism in the Aftermath of the Holocaust (published by Wayne State University Press, May 2009) examines the appeal of Zionism for young survivors in Europe in the aftermath of the Holocaust and their role in the creation of the state of Israel. He is also the co-editor (with Michael Berkowitz) of a collected volume on Jewish Displaced Persons, titled We Are Here: New Approaches to the Study of Jewish Displaced Persons in Postwar Germany (Wayne State University Press, February 2010). He is a contributor to several projects at the USHMM, and is co-author of a recently published source volume, entitled Jewish Responses to Persecution, 1938-1940 (USHMM/Alta Mira Press, September 2011). ✧

1. See in Klausner papers, AJHS, Box 1, Folder 3, Institute of Contemporary Jewry, Hebrew University, *American Jewish memoirs: Oral Documentation*, Edited by Geoffrey Wigoder, 1980, p. 74.
2. Ibid., 27.
3. Klausner, 16.
4. Klausner, 26.
5. June 24, 1945 report of Klausner, “A Detailed Report on the Liberated Jew as He Now Suffers His Period of Liberation Under the Discipline of the Armed Forces of the United States,” in Alexander Grobman, *Rekindling the Flame*, pp. 42-43.
6. For more on the early and extensive involvement of American Jewish chaplains in the relief efforts and organization of DP institutions, see Alexander Grobman, *Rekindling the Flame*.
7. See Klausner, 85. *Unzer Weg*, October 12, 1945, see also Grobman, p. 121. The editorial board was Klausner, Eli Rock of the JDC, and five members of CCLJ).
8. Letter from Eli Bohnen to Philip Bernstein regarding Klausner, September 5, 1945, in Klausner, 117; and in AJHS, Klausner papers., Box 1, folder 3.
9. Klausner, Letters, p. 108.
10. See in *Survivor's Haggadah*, p. 8.
11. Letter from Leo Schwarz, AJDC Zone director to J.H. Whiting, US Zone director, Pasing, July 17, 1946, YIVO, DP Germany, File #161.
12. AJHS, Klausner papers, BOX 1, FOLDER 3, letter of July 5, 1946, from Philip Bernstein, Adviser to the Theater

Commander on Jewish Affairs to Abraham Klausner.

14. Grobman, “American Jewish Chaplains and the She’erit Hapletah,” page 12.
15. AJHS, Klausner papers, Box 1, Folder 9.
16. Text from Klausner papers, AJHS, biographical note.
17. Text from Klausner papers, AJHS, biographical note.

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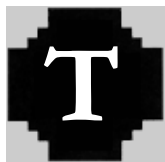
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From the Archives - Reluctant Pilgrims in Santa Fe

by Patricia A. Carlton

The following excerpt was edited by Archivist Patricia Carlton based on an article by A. David Scholder (a former President of NMJHS), published in the Oct. 1982 issue of New Mexico Magazine.



he story of Jews in Santa Fe, site of the upcoming NMJHS conference in November, is part of the larger historical picture that revolves around the family histories of German and Eastern European immigrants who sought opportunities outside the constraints and tumult of 19th-century Europe. Prior to that time, most Jews in New Mexico had come from the Iberian Peninsula, taking flight when the Spanish Inquisition dismantled their lives in the 15th century. Because of this persecution, it is no wonder that it is a rare individual who identifies himself as being Jewish in the recorded history of 16th, 17th, and 18th century New Mexico. The reluctant pilgrims from Europe who later chose the dirt roads of New Mexico were in silent pursuit of the path their largely anonymous Iberian ancestors had begun to explore generations before them.

The Santa Fe pioneer Jews were individuals trying to survive within the confusion of frontier New Mexico, rather than groups searching for a community experience. Louis Gold was only 15 when he entered the territory in 1837; S.J. Spiegelberg was a boy of 16 when he joined the wagon trains in Missouri and trudged his way to Santa Fe in the early 1840s. Plots, intrigue, and daring were the basis of their survival. However, in a short period of time between the 1840s and 1890s, these young people became government leaders and community managers as well as bankers and merchants. In no small measure, they controlled the vital goods and services on which people depended.

The Golds, Spiegelbergs, Ilfelds, Staabs, Zeckendorfs, and others came in family packages and not as a community of

movers and shakers. Inter-marriage was first regarded as a form of socialization, but eventually, these immigrants sought comfort and community with their fellow Jews in the areas in which they settled. The inevitable need to identify with people who share a common past and common values served to motivate the creation of a Jewish settlement.

Although Las Vegas and Albuquerque grew as the railroad line developed in New Mexico in 1879, Santa Fe was still the strategic center of activity. In fact, commerce on the Santa Fe Trail brought Jewish traders into Santa Fe long before Congregation Montefiore in Las Vegas or Temple Albert in Albuquerque were organized. Evidence of this exists in many records. The *American Israelite* reported in a Feb. 13, 1881, issue this account of an earlier and historic Yom Kippur gathering:

It was Yom Kippur, 1860, at the kind invitation of Mrs. Levy Spiegelberg (then age seventeen) who but a few months before had been married and gone to the far, far West, that our assemblage had gathered together in the parlors of the only two houses in Santa Fe, and occupied by our host and hostess. How strange it appeared to us all to meet together as *Jubudim*, on this grand and holy day, that makes us all bow with awe and reverence at the grand Sabbath of Sabbaths, and the thrill of olden days rushed through our souls. How we remained together all that long day until night, fasting, praying and seeing who could fast the best. It was a strange crowd in that Catholic country, where Indian fights, murders, broils and fandangos were everyday occurrences; but that motley crowd consisted of men and women whose hearts beat for Israel. They were the first Hebrew ladies in

that country, and let me record the names of that first meeting for future reference [family names include Spiegelberg, Staab, Dittenhoefer, Gold, Hirsh, Felsenthal, Zeckendorf, Elsberg, Ilfeld, and Schwartzkopf]... Louis Gold and [his son] Joseph Hirsh were our Hebrew readers. Finally, the ladies had prepared for us a grand feast, and we were in just such a condition to do it justice, and after a pleasant evening's chat ended the first Yom Kippur held in Santa Fe, New Mexico, just twenty-one years ago. (Signed "D")

There are other equally charming accounts of Jewish activity in Santa Fe between 1850 and 1900, including the "confirmation" (Bar Mitzvah) of Alfred Grunsfeld on Jan. 3, 1876, "which brought together the greater part of the Jewish population of Santa Fe to witness for the first time in New Mexico a Jewish boy take upon himself the obligations imposed by the law of Moses." The Feb. 17, 1882, *Daily New Mexican* carried an advertisement for the Rev. Samuel M. Laski, a skilled and practiced *mohel*. By the 1930s, there was a lively Jewish group in Santa Fe which met in various venues until in 1946 the Santa Fe Jewish Temple was legally established. In 1949, the name was changed to the Santa Fe Jewish Temple and Community Center, which led to the final designation in 1970 of Temple Beth Shalom.

Today, with at least four flourishing Jewish congregations in Santa Fe, it is a far different scene than the one encountered by those reluctant pilgrims of the 17th century, who had to practice their religion in secret and in fear.

Patricia Carlton is the NMJHS Archivist. ✧

NMJHS 25th Fall Conference Registration Form

Registration Deadline: October 22, 2012

Complete this form and return it with your payment to:

NMJHS Conference, Attn: Ruth Carter
5520 Wyoming Blvd. NE, Suite B
Albuquerque, NM 87109

- Early registration (postmarked by Oct 8)
 - NMJHS member \$ 65 x ____ = \$ _____
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- Registration (postmarked by Oct 22)
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 - Non-member \$105 x ____ = \$ _____
- Speaker (no charge) \$ 0 x 1 = \$ 0.00
- Student (full time) \$ 35 x 1 = \$ 35.00
- Saturday walking tour \$ 20 x ____ = \$ _____

- I/we want to join NMJHS and qualify for the member fee
(fill out form at www.nmjhs.org and include with this registration) \$ _____

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Registrant name(s) as they will appear on nametag(s)

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___ Check (*preferred, payable to NMJHS*)
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LUNCH PREFERENCE (*indicate number of meals and then registrant names*)

___ Tilapia (fish) _____
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Calendar of NMJHS Upcoming Events

Check for future events at www.nmjhs.org

Saturday, November 3, walking tour of historic Jewish Santa Fe.

Sunday, November 4, NMJHS Fall Conference, Doubletree Hotel, Santa Fe
Statehood: New Mexico Jewry before and after 1912. See complete conference details on page 3.

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