



A Survey of Sephardic History

by Ron Duncan Hart



Why the focus on Sephardic history at the recent Fall Conference of the New Mexico Jewish Historical Society? Most of us in the United States today

know little about the Sephardim, although for most of the last millennium they dominated Jewish life in sheer numbers, wealth, scholarship, social status and power.

Before the Edict of Expulsion from Spain in 1492, the largest concentration of Jews in the world seems to have lived there. The Sephardic Diaspora out of Spain that started in 1391 and culminated in 1492 began a long process of Sephardim establishing themselves as a presence in cities from Amsterdam to Istanbul and all the major cities in between.

Sephardim are Jews of Mediterranean culture, who lived in Spain for more than 1,500 years and who migrated after the Expulsion to countries around the Mediterranean basin from Morocco to Tunisia,

Libya, Egypt, Israel, Turkey, Greece and Italy. Later others migrated to Holland, then England. Sephardim from all those locations later migrated to the Americas, and many became major actors in the independence movements in the Americas.



Portuguese synagogue in Amsterdam, known as La Esnoga. This became the model for later Sephardic synagogues in England and the Americas. (Photo by Vanessa Paloma)

After the Expulsion from Spain and the persecution by the Inquisition in Christian Europe, Sephardic Jews began to concentrate in Muslim lands where they were accepted and could freely practice Judaism. Not all Sephardim lived in Muslim lands, but many did, and that experience gave them a unique dimension not shared with Jews from Germany, Poland and Russia.

Instead of Yiddish, Sephardim have spoken versions of Judeo-Spanish (Ladino, Haketía, or Judezmo) with significant influences from the Arabic language. Sephardic cuisine is based on rice, like the Muslim world, rather than potatoes like the Polish and Russian worlds. Sephardic music is characterized by ballads, or romances in Spanish, that narrate stories of Moors as well as stories of Jewish life.

Sephardic life around the Mediterranean was very different from the agricultural-

based shtetls of Poland and Russia. Sephardic Jews were primarily urban, frequently living in port cities, which correlated with their involvement in international trade and finance. Networks of Sephardic families and friends lived in port cities scattered first around the Mediterranean and then later in Asia and the Americas.

A Sephardic trading family based in Amsterdam could speak Dutch, English, Spanish, Portuguese, and perhaps Italian, maybe Arabic and/or Turkish. Sephardic trading families in Istanbul would speak Turkish, Arabic, Italian, Spanish, and perhaps Farsi. An Amsterdam family that needed spices from India would find them through their network of family or friends and languages between Amsterdam and sources of the spices in India.

Sephardic Jews have been characterized by an international orientation, being multi-lingual, and being integrated with the larger commercial world around them. Frequently Sephardim lived in defined

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Legacy is the quarterly newsletter of the New Mexico Jewish Historical Society
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Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday

Editor: Dorothy Amsden
Layout: DT Publishing, Santa Fe
Printing: Minuteman Press, Albuquerque
Mailing: Adelante, Albuquerque

NMJHS is a beneficiary agency of the Jewish Federation of New Mexico.

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Message from President Naomi Sandweiss Resilience

I marvel at the resilience of the Jewish people. No other people has such an obsession with memory. Elie Wiesel

At the September 15 Pioneer Panels exhibit and reception, board members Betsy Nordhaus Messeca and Sharon Niederman, along with curriculum designer Tammy Kaiser, spoke about the resilience and resourcefulness of the early Jews who settled New Mexico. Leaving behind homelands and families, support systems and business networks, Jews made their way to the New Mexico frontier and learned how to thrive, economically and socially. As we know, this is a collective Jewish story, one of exile and adaptation. New Mexico Jews are no exception.

As our outstanding conference “Sephardic History from Spain to New Mexico” illustrated, there are numerous routes Jews took to make their way here. Along the way, they not only survived but used their creativity and talents to thrive. I invite you to attend an upcoming talk on October 27 by NMJHS Professor Emeritus Noel Pugach on the subject replete with panel discussion of New Mexico Jewish ranching descendants at the New Mexico History Museum in Santa Fe.

I want to thank everyone who has planned, organized, advertised and facilitated such fine events this fall. Board members, community partners,

members and volunteers all pitched in to bring these programs to life. Thank you to our outstanding speakers, presenters and panelists. In order to bring additional outstanding events to the community, we welcome your ideas, your involvement, and your precious volunteer time.

One of the ways in which New Mexico kids will learn about the history of Jews in New Mexico is through the exceptiona eighth grade curriculum developed by Tammy Kaiser in conjunction with the Pioneer Panels project, “Adventure, Adversity and Opportunity.” This curriculum is appropriate for use in both religious and secular classrooms and speaks to the challenges that all newcomers face when relocating and making their way. If you know an educator who might be interested



*NMJHS President
Naomi Sandweiss*

in using the curriculum, please let us know and we will be happy to share this wonderful resource. It is currently available on our website.

Speaking about getting the word out about New Mexico Jewish history, recent efforts have been completed to update our social media presence (thank you, Melinda Hess!). On Facebook, please “like” us at New Mexico Jewish Historical Society and follow us on Twitter. We will also have a table at the community JCC Chanukah festival

on November 24 starting at noon at the Embassy Suites Hotel in Albuquerque. Please stop by to say hello! ☆

NMJHS is now on Facebook and Twitter. Please “like” us out at <https://www.facebook.com/NewMexicoJewishHistoricalSociety> and follow us on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/NMJewishHS>.

Errata: *Legacy* apologizes for the incorrect last name of the 2013 recipient of the Allan P. and Leona Hurst Award. Congratulations to Marian Silver (not Singer).

NMJHS Welcomes New Members

- Jerry and Barbara Bock
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Edward and Linda Goff

Steven Margulin and Iris Weinstein

Bette Myerson

Janet Saiers

Carolyn Silver

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Jewish neighborhoods because of proximity to synagogues and kosher butchers and bakers, and in certain political times those neighborhoods could become closed ghettos.

In addition to commerce Sephardim were often the medical specialists who were highly prized by the royalty of the countries in which they lived. They frequently had a special relationship with the monarchy and would live in communities next to the palace under the protection of the king's forces.

From 1000 to 1500 C.E. Spain was the most advanced country in Europe with the influence of Muslim rule and the more sophisticated intellectual and scientific life that it brought. Cordoba became an intellectual capital with libraries, bookstores and learning centers that did not exist elsewhere.

Jewish scholars from Judah HaLevi to Hasdai ibn Shaprut and others came out of this ferment of intellectual questioning and reason in Andalusia. Maimonides, who grew up in Cordoba, was to become the foremost exponent of rationalism in Judaism, a place in Jewish thought that he still holds today.

In the north of Spain in Catalunya, Nachmanides represented another tradition of Jewish learning, culminating in the mysticism of Kaballah. An entire school of Kabbalistic thinkers emerged in that area and time. Nachmanides was so widely respected that he was challenged to a Disputation with leading Church scholars, an event that the king of Catalunya personally supervised.

Many people report that Nachmanides won the debate with Church scholars, which put his life in danger. The king told him that he could no longer guarantee his safety and shortly afterwards Nachmanides migrated to what is present-day Haifa where he lived the rest of his life.

During this period Jews in Spain were at the forefront of commissioning fine works of art, usually as religious books. Some of the best illuminated manuscripts of the late Medieval period are Jewish, especially Torahs and Hagadahs. It is not uncommon in the Sephardic world of Spain and Morocco that synagogues were owned, funded, and managed by wealthy families.



Image of the Seder in greyscale, from the Barcelona Hagadah. (Photo by Ron Duncan Hart)

It still is so today. Those families might have a Torah scroll or scrolls prepared for the synagogue they operated, and the custom started of having a Torah bound as a book in their home. These book Torahs were elaborately illuminated, some of the most beautiful books every produced. In like manner they commissioned Hagadahs in book format for family use. Because of a unique set of historical circumstances, the British Museum and the Bodleian Library at the University of Oxford have the most complete collections of these manuscripts. Virtually none survived in Spain.

A few Jewish families accumulated extraordinary wealth through international trade and/or banking during this period. In some instances a family might get a concession from the monarchy to control certain areas of trade in exchange for

giving the king a significant percentage of the profits.

The spice trade was an early example in which Jews were particularly involved. One of the families that accumulated great wealth was the Mendes family (Portuguese name) also known as the Nasi family (Jewish name), and we know the well documented lives of Doña Gracia Nasi and her nephew Joseph Nasi, the Duke of Naxos. They were the wealthiest and most powerful Jewish family for much of the sixteenth century.

Doña Gracia used her wealth and fleet of ships to save thousands of Sephardic Jews from persecution by the Inquisition by transporting them to the Ottoman Empire that welcomed Jews. She built factories, housing, and synagogues to provide these displaced Sephardim with communities where they could rebuild their Jewish lives. She pressured rabbis to challenge the Christian world when atrocities were committed against Jews. She was an extraordinary person and should be ranked as one of the important Jewish people of the last 500 years.

Like Doña Gracia, her nephew Joseph Nasi relocated to the Ottoman Empire and became a major figure in building the Ottoman navy. With his influence Jewish ship captains were commissioned by the Ottomans to attack Christian, especially Spanish, shipping, much as Sir Francis Drake and others did for England. This was the beginning of the legend of the Jewish pirates, who harassed the shipping of the hated Christian monarchs of Spain who had harassed Jews and expelled them from their homeland of almost two thousand years.

Joseph Nasi had a major role in preparing the Ottoman navy for the naval battle with the Christian forces at Lepanto for control of the Mediterranean. He personally planned and directed Ottoman attacks on Christian ports in Italy where local leaders had killed Jews, and in

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Christendom he became the feared and hated Jew. It is said that Marlowe created his figure of the "Jew of Malta" based on the real life reputation of Joseph of Nasi, a figure that others believe Shakespeare used to create his figure of Shylock. Both literary figures were created not long after Joseph Nasi's death in 1579.

While those events were occurring in the Mediterranean world, Spanish crypto-Jews migrated to the Americas with the idea they could escape the Inquisition, which did not yet have a developed presence in the Spanish colonies. Crypto-Jews were in the expedition with Cortes that defeated the Aztecs, and thousands more came to Mexico in subsequent decades. Crypto-Jews came with Governor Luis Carvajal to northern Mexico in the 1500s. He later died in the jails of the Inquisition, and his nephew of the same name was one of the early crypto-Jews burned at the stake in Mexico.

The first person of crypto-Jewish descent to arrive in the territory of the United States would have come with the expedition of Juan de Oñate in 1598 that made the first Spanish settlement in New Mexico. Crypto-Jews settled in northern New Mexico and southern Colorado, which were far from the reaches of the Inquisition in Mexico City.

In the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries there has been a period of reclaiming Jewish identity by people with remembered crypto-Jewish family backgrounds in many parts of the Spanish-speaking world. From New Mexico to Mexico, Colombia and other countries, people are discovering family connections to a Jewish past. Some consider it an interesting historical fact with no significance for their present lives or identity, but others find a spiritual identity in this background and wish to return to Judaism. Their social, language, and religious backgrounds can create cultural barriers to their inclusion into the now predominately Ashkenazi Jewish world of the Americas.

Sephardic Jews suffered the personal tragedies of the Expulsion, and those who chose to stay in Spain as hidden Jews could face the Inquisition jails, torture, and death by burning at the stake. Centuries of hiding their identity and bereft of synagogues, Torahs, and religious leaders meant that the families of crypto-Jews who still remembered their identity survived with the thin thread of memory of that past.

It is an experience different from that of Ashkenazi Jews who fled the pogroms and atrocities of Russia and Poland in more recent years and suffered the horror of the fires of the Holocaust. The Sephardic Jews who chose to leave Spain and Portugal in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries were able to re-create their lives as Jews in communities scattered across the Muslim world and the Americas, beginning the Sephardic Diaspora.

Not long after crypto-Jews arrived in New Mexico, the first openly practicing Sephardic Jews arrived in New Amsterdam (later called New York), expelled by the Portuguese from the Brazilian city of Recife. Twenty-three Jews arrived in 1654 in New Amsterdam shortly before the High Holidays that year. They organized themselves for services and became the first synagogue in North America, Shearith Israel, the remnant of Israel. For the next 200 years Sephardic Jews dominated and shaped the life of Jewry in the United States. Until the mid to late 1800s most Jews in the U.S. were Sephardic, a situation that changed with the mass immigration of Ashkenazi Jews starting in the 1880s.

The Sephardim have had major roles in business and cultural life in the U.S. from jurists such as Benjamin Cardozo, the U.S. Supreme Court judge, to Emma Lazarus, the poet, Uriah Levy, the first Jewish admiral in the U.S. Navy, and U.S. senators David Levy and Judah Benjamin. Early Ashkenazi families in the U.S., such as the Nathans, the Gratz, and the Harts intermarried with Sephardic families that

existed at the time and were assimilated into that Sephardic world.

After the independence of Latin American countries from Spain in the early 1800s Jews were welcomed into those countries, and many Sephardic Jews migrated there. By the mid to late 1800s, as Ashkenazim were migrating to North America, Sephardim were migrating to South America. After 1948, hundreds of thousands of Sephardic Jews migrated to Israel to help create the modern state, and today they make up the single largest concentration of Sephardim in the world.

In 2012 Spain officially invited the Sephardim to return to Spain with the promise of citizenship, which was stripped from their ancestors 520 years earlier. In the same year, Portugal went even further passing laws creating a legal structure for the return of the Sephardim with guarantees of citizenship and no discrimination.

After maintaining distinctive Sephardic communities and the Judeo-Spanish languages for over 500 years, today assimilation is eroding those traditions. In Israel Ladino and Haketia are being lost as the younger generation learns only Hebrew. In the Spanish-speaking world from Spain to northern Morocco and Latin America, Ladino and Haketia have been largely replaced by modern-day Spanish.

Even with these changes, Sephardic identity continues as it morphs into the internationalized identities of the world of today. In New Mexico, the only officially Spanish-speaking state in the United States, we honor the Jews of Spanish language and culture who have brought so much vitality to the Jewish heritage. ✧

Ron Duncan Hart is a cultural anthropologist and editor of Gaon Books, the publisher of Jewish books in Santa Fe. His most recent book is Islam and Muslims; currently he is writing a book on Jewish history in South America. The recent NMJHS Fall Conference in Taos owes its success to his vision and planning.

Islam and Christianity Clash with Judaism in the Sephardic World: Maimonides' Letter on Apostasy and Nachmanides' Disputation at Barcelona

by Rabbi Jack Shlachter

The following is an abstract of the talk that Rabbi Shlachter delivered at the 26th NMJHS Fall Conference in Taos.

Two of the giants of the Jewish world, Maimonides and Nachmanides, lived in Spain after the high point of the Golden Age of Jewish culture and before the expulsion of 1492. Maimonides, arguably the most illustrious figure in Judaism in the post-Talmudic era, was born in about 1135 in Cordoba (Andalusia). His father, Rabbi Maimon ben Joseph, was one of the most outstanding and influential scholars of his generation and served as a distinguished judge in Cordoba.

When Maimonides was about 13 years old, he and his family fled Cordoba as the result of an edict of forced conversion issued by a fanatical Muslim sect known as the Almohads. After wandering for over a decade, the family settled in Fez, Morocco, where Maimonides' father composed *Iggeret ha-Nehamah* (Letter of Consolation) to comfort and guide forced converts of Islam in their effort to preserve their Judaism.

Approximately eight years after the composition of the Letter of Consolation, an anonymous letter claimed that all pseudo-Mohammedan Jews were heretics. The resultant renewed panic among the Jews of North Africa inspired Maimonides to compose *Iggeret HaShemad* (Letter of Apostasy). The first

half of my presentation was an overview of Maimonides – rabbi, codifier, philosopher, and royal physician – and his literary legacy. It also explored in depth Maimonides' clash with the Muslim world through an examination of *Iggeret HaShemad*.



Maimonides

The second half my presentation shifted from southern Spain and North Africa to Catalonia. Nachmanides was born in about 1194 in Gerona, about a decade before the death of Maimonides. Like Maimonides, Nachmanides wore multiple hats and is known today throughout the Jewish world as a major rabbi, scholar, Talmudist, philosopher, Kabbalist, poet, physician, and exegete. In addition, he was the leader of Spanish Jewry in his generation; he established a reputation early in his professional life during the so-called Second Climax of the Maimonidean Controversy.

Many years later, Nachmanides' life in Catalonia was completely disrupted by a religious disputation in which he was called upon to defend Judaism. Through King James I of Aragon, the Dominican Master General forced Nachmanides to

respond to charges against Judaism. In 1263, over a period of eight days in four formal sessions, Nachmanides and an apostate Jew known as Pablo Christiani argued before the King, largely about alleged rabbinic textual evidence that Jesus was the Messiah.

Nachmanides' published account of the Disputation at Barcelona declared victory for Judaism, which led the Dominicans (through the Pope) to put pressure on the King of Aragon to punish Nachmanides. By then in his seventies, Nachmanides was forced to flee Spain; he emigrated to Israel in 1267. Following a summary of the life and works of Nachmanides, the talk focused on passages from the Disputation and examined Nachmanides' clash with the Christian world. ✧



Nachmanides

Rabbi Jack Shlachter is a full-time physicist at Los Alamos National Laboratory, currently serving as the Deputy Division Leader of Theoretical Division. A passionate admirer of the rabbinic literature, Rabbi Jack's personal library exceeds 5,000 volumes.

In Memoriam:

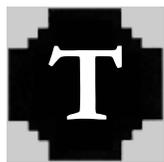
Robert Taichert

Attorney, first president of the Santa Fe Opera, president of the New Mexico Symphony Orchestra, author of December 2009 Legacy article "The Taichert Brothers and the American Dream."

The Mendes-Nasi Dynasty

by Sandra K. Toro

The following article provides the historical background and context for a talk that Ms. Toro presented at the 26th NMJHS Fall Conference in Taos.



To understand the impact of the Mendes-Nasi Dynasty, it is first necessary to understand the historical context in which they prospered and dominated the spice trade in the first half of the sixteenth century.

Francisco Mendes (his Christian name) was born Semah Beneveniste; his brother Diogo Mendes was named Meir Beneveniste at birth in Spain. For at least two centuries their family had been close friends, sometimes related by marriage, to the family of Don Joseph Nasi. Though wealthy and politically close to the royal court, they were destined to be expelled from Spain on August 2, 1492.

Almost all Western Europe had expelled the Jews by 1500. Together, the two families, with thousands of other Jews who refused to convert to Catholicism, walked across Spain to Lisbon, Portugal, bringing with them what wealth they could conceal in their clothing or carry in mule-drawn wagons. On arrival in Lisbon, the 600 wealthiest and best educated Jewish families were allowed to take up residence in Lisbon; the remaining families, as many as 50,000 persons, were allowed to make their homes in the countryside.

At King John II's death in 1495, a cousin, King Manuel the Fortunate became king at the tender age of 28. Manuel was ambitious, diligent, and shrewd. His dream was to unite Spain and Portugal and himself be King of Iberia. He decided one way to accomplish this was to marry Isabel, the eldest daughter of Ferdinand and Isabella. Under the influence of Torquemada, her confessor, Isabel declared she would only consider marrying King Manuel if he expelled all Jews from Portugal.

With great psychological insight, Manuel's first ploy was to demand that all Jewish

children between the ages of 4 and 14 be baptized on the following Sunday, March 19, 1497, which was also the first day of Passover. These children would then be sent to Christian farms to be brought up as Catholics and serve as slaves to the farmers.

This demand did not satisfy Isabel. Consequently, Manuel promulgated an Edict of Expulsion that required all Jews to either convert or leave Portugal by October 1497. But Manuel didn't want to lose the talents of these Jews — doctors, lawyers, professors, bankers, tax collectors, merchants, weavers, goldsmiths, artisans, cartographers, inventors and craftsmen — so he rounded up some 20,000, imprisoned them in an old castle without food, water, or latrines. After a week during which many converted, the rest were baptized en masse, holy water being showered on them, and forced to sign a baptismal register at sword point. Now King Manuel told his bride-to-be there was not a Jew left in the land.

The King returned the children to their families, promising them that for at least twenty years there would be no official inquiry into their private religious practices — in the privacy of their homes they could do whatever they pleased. The ultimate outcome was that the King had created thousands of bitter, outraged, revenge-seeking families, including the Mendes and Nasi clans.

In addition to marrying Isabel, Manuel's other passion was to make Portugal the greatest naval power on earth so that his treasury could reap the profits of importing and selling precious goods — spices, gems and luxuries of the Far East — to the untapped markets of Northern Europe. Francisco Mendes shared this dream with the king; together they formed a business relationship that guaranteed the House of Mendes a monopoly on the pepper trade.

This monopoly enabled the Mendes brothers to enlarge their trade in precious gems, build one of the largest privately owned merchant shipping empires in the world, and create a large international banking house. Ultimately, the banking house would lend money to all the crowned heads of Europe, the Holy Roman Emperor, and many members of the College of Cardinals.

Europe's population was changing: a substantial middle-class, hungry for a better living standard and seeking ostentatious goods, increased the marketing potential for companies such as the House of Mendes. In addition to pepper and spices, their ships carried silks and brocades, sables, fox, mink and ermine, pearls, precious gems, gold and silver, Murano glass, munitions and armaments.

The conversos of Portugal, working for the Mendes brothers, became major players in this new global marketplace. According to historian Andree Brooks, "The know-how and contacts gained became the basis for a global trade network that descendants of these first generations of Portuguese conversos developed in the subsequent century among each other as they moved onwards to such centers of international trade as Bordeaux, Bayonne, Antwerp, Amsterdam, and the Caribbean." Brooks also tells us that Mendes cousins set up offices in Lyons, London, Venice, and Ancona.

As anticipated, King Manuel, who was lucky enough to reign at the beginning of the spice trade era, became the wealthiest ruler in Europe, though heavily dependent on the Mendes brothers. By 1512 the Mendes family had opened an office in Antwerp, headed by young Diogo Mendes. The brothers had cemented business relationships with the Affaitatis, a prestigious banking family

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The Coca Family and the Gusdorfs: Crypto-Jewish and Ashkenazi Transition

by Mona Hernandez

The following summary is from a paper presented at the 26th NMJHS Fall Conference in Taos.

My discovery of an Ashkenazi link to my mother Mae Coca's family is purely accidental. Although I already knew of Alex Gusdorf and of his connection to my late mother's family, I never gave him a second thought, until

Last year, while compiling all the information I have on my mother's family, the Cocas of Rancho de Taos, New Mexico, I found the last will and testament of my great-great grandfather Juan Bautista Coca and saw Alex Gusdorf's name in the will.

About three years ago I came across a book that was published by the Museum of New Mexico Press in connection with an exhibit that was held at the Palace of the Governors Museum in Santa Fe from October 2000 to December 2004, entitled *Jewish Pioneers of New Mexico*. Two of the pioneers featured in the book are Alex and his brother Gerson Gusdorf. I didn't know Alex had a brother.

Curious, I Googled both brothers' names to see what I could find on them. To my surprise, I came across a birth record for a child born in Rancho de Taos in 1889, the father's name listed as Gerson Gusdorf. The mother of the child was a niece of my great-great grandfather.

I contacted Stan Hordes, hoping that he might be able to shed some light on my discovery. He was not able to do so, and suggested I contact Naomi Sandweiss, a local historian residing in Albuquerque. So, I contacted Ms. Sandweiss and this was her response:

"I'd be happy to speak with you about what I know of the Gusdorfs. Several

years back, I interviewed Frank Gusdorf, Jr., of Rancho de Taos, a grandson of Gerson Gusdorf, who was Alex Gusdorf's younger half-brother. I wrote a booklet on the family back in 2001 or so which is handled by the New Mexico Jewish Historical Society."

In an interview Ms. Sandweiss conducted with Frank Gusdorf, Jr., on November 25, 2002, Mr. Gusdorf stated that Gerson Gusdorf was his grandfather and Cleofas Coca was his grandmother.

Although he didn't marry her, why did Gerson Gusdorf have a relationship with Cleofas Coca? I don't know if crypto-Judaism played a role in Gerson's choice. My cousin Emilio has admitted that his branch of the Coca family is Jewish. Emilio has in his possession his grandfather Abel Coca's kosher knife, yet Abel's son Jose Arcenio Coca was baptized (in the Catholic faith) and the child's godparents were Cleofas Coca and the child she had with Gerson Gusdorf. Abel Coca was a grandson of Juan Bautista Coca. Were the Cocas really involved in the practice of crypto-Judaism and were the Gusdorf brothers Alex and Gerson aware of this?

The Coca family may have descended from crypto-Jews, via the 17th century Portuguese Gomez Robledo family accused of the practicing Judaism in secret. In 1661 Francisco Gomez Robledo was arrested and tried by the Mexican Inquisition. Although the Inquisition had made a compelling case against Gomez Robledo, he was cleared of all charges. The Coca family descends from Francisco's younger brother, Andres Gomez Robledo. ☆

Mona Hernandez has been researching her family in New Mexico and Colorado for many years. Her research has been published in Nuestras Raices, The New Mexico

Genealogist, and Herencia. Her essay "La Conquistadora: A Crypto Jewish Connection," was published in New Mexico's Crypto-Jews: Image and Memory, Photographs by Cary Herz, University of New Mexico Press, 2007. Her article "A Surprising Discovery," about Gerson Gusdorf and his connection to the Coca family appears in Herencia, Vol. 21, Issue 4, October 2013.

Stefanie Beninato

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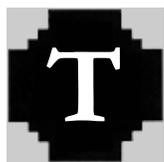
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Jewish Pioneer Panels, Part 2

JCC and NMJHS Team Up for a Successful Exhibit and Reception

by Betsy Nordhaus Messeca



The theme was “Religion, Social, Family Life and Legacy” of the Jewish Pioneers of New Mexico at a stellar reception on the afternoon of September 15 at the Jewish Community Center (JCC) in Albuquerque, hosted by the JCC and NMJHS. Attendees heard several talks and viewed the second part of the Pioneer Jewish Panels originally shown at the New Mexico Palace of the Governors from 2000 to 2004. The first part of the exhibit opened at the JCC on January 15, 2012.

Phyllis Wolf (JCC Director of Arts, Culture and Education) and Tammy Kaiser (NMJHS Educational Consultant for the “Panels Project” and Director of Life-Long Learning at Congregation Albert) curated the exhibit, which hung at the JCC from August 15th to October 15th. The New Mexico History Museum made the original panels available to NMJHS for exhibitions and educational programs, and the Jewish Federation of New Mexico provided grant funds for these programs.

As chair of the Pioneer Panels committee for the past four years

I have worked with a team of dedicated people to prepare exhibits for showing in Albuquerque and other parts of New Mexico. It has been my pleasure to work with Tammy Kaiser, who is developing an online educational program for eighth graders.

Many people made this special exhibit and reception possible. In particular, I wish to thank Noel Pugach, Stanley Hordes, Carla Freeman, Anita Miller, Naomi Sandweiss and Tammy Kaiser. In the past four years, our Panels Project has had much support from NMJHS members and board members, family and

friends, and committee participants, who made successful exhibits and educational programs possible.

At the reception, Dave Simon, Executive Director of the JCC, welcomed attendees with his appreciation of the importance of New Mexico Jewish history for now and the future. Dave also informed the audience that he is considering installing a permanent exhibit at the JCC about the Jewish experience in New Mexico.

Naomi Sandweiss – NMJHS historian, author and president – introduced the event speaker, Sharon Niederman, past NMJHS president and present board



Panels Part 2: Parties—1898. Three different images of Erna Ferguson (later a well known New Mexican author), in costume for a Washington’s Birthday party sponsored by the Ifeld family.

member, who came all the way from Raton for the occasion.

Sharon shared with attendees her most interesting and personal recollections of having participated in researching the original exhibit in Santa Fe of the “Pioneer Jews of New Mexico.” As part of that exhibit’s committee, she traveled far and wide in New Mexico, to little-known towns and villages, gathering family histories and artifacts, as well as parts of family journals. Sharon also shared excerpts from some pioneer foremothers’ histories – Yetta Kohn, Emma Vorenberg Wertheim, and Flora Spiegelberg.

It occurred to me as I introduced Tammy Kaiser that during this week of disastrous floods in New Mexico (and Colorado) the project’s title of “Adventure, Adversity and Opportunity” still holds today.

Tammy Kaiser gave an overview of Part 2 of the online Educational Program she has been preparing: “Religion” and “Social and Family Life.” She explained some of the questions she had to grapple with in developing this part of the curriculum geared to eighth graders in all schools, not just Jewish schools: How to present religion in a secular curriculum without being religious? How

do you present information about the Jewish pioneer families, many of whom became quite successful, without feeding in to some of the commonly held (negative) stereotypes of Jews?

How do you talk about the presence of violence in the pioneer west (actual murders, gambling, hangings) with the proper warnings to teachers for their students? The expanded Educational Program (Modules III and IV) will soon be evaluated by teachers and will be put on the NMJHS website along with Modules I and II already posted.

We invite you to visit the Educational Resources part of the NMJHS website, www.nmjhs.org, to access these remarkable materials. ✧

Betsy Nordhaus Messeca traces her New Mexico roots back three generations to the pioneering Staab, Nordhaus and Ifeld families. She has served on the NMJHS Board since 2009 and has coordinated the Panels Project of exhibits and educational programs connected to the original exhibit in Santa Fe of “The Jewish Pioneers of New Mexico.”

Interfaith Gathering Held at Temple Aaron

by Sharon Niederman

Continuing a tradition dating to 1940, Temple Aaron in Trinidad, Colorado, held its annual Interfaith Tea on September 8, the Sunday between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur. Members of faith communities of Raton and Trinidad as well as members of Congregation Aaron and interested residents and visitors attended.

Rabbi Paul Citrin presented the program, "Judaism & Christianity: Elder & Younger Brothers – What We Share and How We Differ." In a presentation both clear and stimulating, Rabbi Citrin explained the essential elements that define Judaism. He then took questions from the audience.

The crowd descended from the second floor sanctuary to the social hall, where

folks visited over home-baked treats with coffee and tea poured from a silver tea service. The event evoked a sense of community and the ongoing spirit of Temple Aaron, the oldest ongoing congregation in Colorado.

Tamar and Randy Rubin of Raton organized the lively and well-attended gathering. For approximately the past half-century, Kathryn Rubin, now of Colorado Springs, and her late husband Leon, preserved the Temple and organized services there.

Built in 1889, the Isaac Hamilton Rapp-designed Temple is the site of the oldest ongoing congregation in Colorado.

Rabbi Jon Feldman of Albuquerque this year officiated at High Holiday services; the Temple also hosts an annual Passover Seder.



Randy Rubin addresses the crowd at Temple Aaron. (Photo by Mike Aaron)

To learn more about the Temple, arrange a tour, or contribute to the building fund necessary to repair the leaking roof, please contact trubin@bacavalley.com. ☆

The Historical Society of New Mexico

According to Janet Saiers, president of the Historical Society of New Mexico, HSNM was founded in 1859 to help increase the knowledge of New Mexico history. Its annual conference will take place next spring in Las Vegas, New Mexico, at Highlands University from May 1 – 3. NMJHS is

planning to schedule its annual cleanup at Montefiore Cemetery in Las Vegas to coincide with the HSNM conference.

Janet, a board member of NMJHS, wants to let NMJHS members know that the Jewish Historical Society is an organizational member of HSNM. As such, NMJHS is entitled to two speakers each year from the HSNM Speakers

Bureau at no cost. Members of NMJHS may join the state Society for only \$30, at a discount of \$10. HSNM members receive the historical publication *La Cronica*. Most importantly, NMJHS and HSNM are working together to reach out to the next generation of historians through teacher workshops and annual conferences. ☆

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.

Your tribute here, \$25
Birthday
Anniversary
Bar/bat mitzvah
Death, yarzeit

Support NMJHS,
promote your business
with an ad, only \$100
annually for all four issues

Remembering Sanford H. Siegel (1947 - 2013)

by Noel Pugach



We are greatly saddened to report the sudden death of Sanford Howard Siegel on July 19, 2013.

Sandy was long-time member of the New Mexico Jewish Historical Society. He also served briefly on the NMJHS board of directors, but was pressed to step down because of his work load.

Sandy was born on May 27, 1947, in Brooklyn, New York. He received his B.A. in Political Science and History from Cornell University, where he also immersed himself in the Classics (he studied Greek), and an M.A. in Philosophy at the New School for Social Research. His practical nature led him to get a J.D. at Fordham University.

Sandy served as Assistant District Attorney for New York County (Manhattan), where he prosecuted high-level criminal cases. After five years of this hectic

work, Sandy and his wife Rita, whom he married in 1969, sought a quieter lifestyle in the Southwest and chose Albuquerque as their permanent home. Sandy also switched fields to family law. He worked with the leading firm of Atkinson & Kelsey for thirteen years and was admitted as a partner. He later opened an independent practice.

The law remained his career, but his first and abiding love was the study of history, philosophy, politics, and Judaism. Sandy had a curious, fertile and questioning mind; he was an avid reader. In need of intellectual stimulation, Sandy created and led a biweekly study group (the Plato Club) whose members read the Classical thinkers, Shakespeare, and more modern writers. And of course, he included the

speeches and works of his great hero, Abraham Lincoln. "The things I want to

know are in books," Abe has been quoted. "My best friend is the man who'll get me a book I ain't read."



In later years, he became fascinated with New Mexico Jewish history. He loved to read *Legacy* and attend the annual Fall Conferences, which opened the door to his larger understanding of the New Mexico Jewish history.

Sandy served his community in many ways. He was very active in Civitan, volunteered for literacy programs, and was devoted to his congregation, Chavurat Hamidbar (The Fellowship of the Desert). He will be sorely missed. ✧

Jewish Heritage Riverboat Cruise

by Stuart Simon



After researching my family's genealogy for a number of years, I decided it would be nice to learn more firsthand about the places of our parents'

origins. After some research I discovered a river cruise that was appropriate and unique in its own way, offered by AMA Waterways.

Last year my wife and I took an AMA Waterways cruise designated as Jewish Heritage from Budapest to Prague. We started by staying a few days in Budapest, where we were given a city tour that included the Jewish quarter and the Dohany Street Synagogue that is also known as the Great Synagogue. In Bratislava we visited the tomb (shrine) of Rabbi Chatam Sofer.

In Vienna we visited the Jewish Museum and Old Synagogue. On an optional tour to Salzburg the 95-year-old head of the Jewish community briefed us on the state of Judaism today in Austria. After Vienna, we visited the courtroom in Nuremberg where most of the Nazi trials were held and convicted. Finally after a bus ride we were able to visit numerous synagogues in Prague and take an optional tour to Terezin, the concentration camp.

Throughout the trip we had knowledgeable Jewish guides who really added value to each segment of the trip. One passenger on our cruise was a Reform Rabbi with a contingent from Florida who held Friday night services.

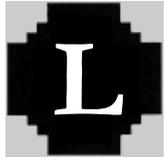
We found the trip both enlightening and enjoyable. We have been on many large ship cruises before, but the ability of the

river ships to land in each city near where major sites are located is a real plus.

In 2014 AMA Waterways is offering four Jewish Heritage cruises starting in either Prague or Budapest, and I would highly recommend them to anyone looking for a comfortable Jewish experience. We learned that the company is considering offering additional Jewish Heritage cruises with different itineraries in future years. Details at www.amawaterways.com/jewish-heritage-cruises.

For those interested in visiting Eastern Europe next spring, Rabbi Harry Rosenfeld of Congregation Albert in Albuquerque is leading a land tour of Prague, Warsaw, Krakow and Budapest from March 16 to 28, 2014. Contact Congregation Albert at 505-883-1818 for more details. ✧

Forty-Eight Years Ago



Lilo Waxman submitted a newspaper clipping (right) she recently found in her late husband's files that goes back in time. It was

published in the *Albuquerque Journal* on January 12, 1965, with a photograph from 1887 of the Charles Iffeld store in Las Vegas. Lilo writes that Seymour Back of Albuquerque mailed this clipping to St. Louis to his first cousin Arnold Waxman (Lilo's husband) on January 13, 1965, because he liked to "keep us informed when something happened in any of the Charles Iffeld Co. relatives or especially Ludwig Iffeld's family. Ludwig Iffeld owned the Hardware Store in Las Vegas. Charles Iffeld was the Mercantile Co at the Plaza in Old Town Las Vegas." ☆

Thanks from Betsy Messeca to all helpers who made the Pioneer Panels exhibit and reception on September 15 a resounding success: Phyllis Wolf and the JCC staff, Tammy Kaiser and her daughter Mia, Anita Miller, Paula and Mel Schwartz, Naomi Sandweiss and her dad Stanley Feinstein, Julia Seligman (who came early and pitched in!), Karen Singer, and huge thanks to Michel Messeca for shopping, transporting, setting up, and taking down. Special thanks to Phyllis Wolf, whose sense of fun and professionalism make it a pleasure to work with her.

January 12, 1965



OLD PHOTOGRAPH: This is an 1887 photograph of the Charles Iffeld store in Las Vegas, one of a number of old photographs appearing on the 1965 calendar issued by the firm in observance of its 100th anniversary. The founder, Charles Iffeld, is the hatless man on the step.

Historical Calendar Issued by Iffeld's

Charles Iffeld Hardware Co. has issued a 1965 calendar in observance of the firm's 100th anniversary containing reproductions of early photographs and newspaper advertisements.

Also appearing on the calendar is a reproduction of an 1851 map of the Territory of New Mexico.

Most of the early photographs are exterior and interior views of the Charles Iffeld Co. store on the Las Vegas plaza in the 1880's and 1890's. Portions of pages of early Las Vegas Optics are reproduced, showing Iffeld advertisements of the 1880's and 1890's.

The founder of the firm, Charles Iffeld, was a German immigrant who entered the retail business in Taos in 1865 after traveling to New Mexico down the Santa Fe Trail. He later packed his wares on 75 burros and made his way to Las Vegas, where he established what was to become one of the largest mercantile firms in New Mexico. It has been a wholesale company since 1905.

Robert Nordhaus, local attorney, is president of the company.

The Mendes-Nasi Dynasty *(continued from p. 5)*

from Italy, and the Fuggers, the foremost banking family in Germany. Thus was born what today would be called an international syndicate: the Affaitati-Mendes-Fugger group. Such were their trusting relationships that their ships frequently traveled in large convoys, providing safety from pirates and forces of the Ottoman Empire.

In 1521 the world changed for the Mendes and Nasi clans. King Manuel died and was replaced by his illiterate, viciously anti-Semitic son, John III. Once again persecution of the conversos became acceptable and popular. Francisco Mendes and his brother Diogo increased their bribes to members of the College of Cardinals in an effort to prevent the Inquisition from coming to Portugal.

Sandra K. Toro is the author of two novels about the Mendes and Nasi families, By Fire Possessed: Doña Gracia Nasi, and its sequel Princes, Popes, and Pirates. She teaches creative writing at the University of New Mexico and has produced public affairs programs for ABC and PBS. During the Carter and Clinton administrations she served in high-level government positions.

2013 NMJHS Annual Dues

New members who join during the last four months of a year will have their membership extended through the end of the following year.

- Renewal New
- Individual \$40
- Individual Senior (+55) \$35
- Family \$55
- Senior Couple \$45
- Library \$20
- Fulltime Student \$25
- Nonprofit Organization \$40
- Business \$100
- Life Membership \$1000
(payable over two years)

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Please make your check payable to:
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Calendar of NMJHS Upcoming Events

Check for future events at www.nmjhs.org

Nice Jewish Cowboys and Cowgirls, speaker Professor Emeritus Noel Pugach, Sunday, October 27 at 2 p.m. in the auditorium of the New Mexico History Museum in Santa Fe. His talk ties in to the current special exhibit, "Cowboys Real and Imagined," showing at the New Mexico Historical Museum.

Chanukah festival, sponsored by the Jewish Community Center of Albuquerque, Sunday, November 24, starting at noon at the Embassy Suites Hotel in Albuquerque. Stop by the NMJHS table.

Dr. Bruce Trigg, "The Jews of Cochin: A Report on a Recent Visit to and Investigation of This Ancient Jewish Community in India." Dr. Trigg will give a Power Point Presentation on Sunday, December 8, at 2:00 p.m., Jewish Community, Center, 5520 Wyoming Blvd., NE, Albuquerque.

New Mexico Jewish Historical Society
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 Albuquerque, NM 87109

