



The Taichert Brothers and the American Dream

by Robert Daniel Taichert

The following article is adapted from remarks prepared for a panel discussion on observations by New Mexico Jews who grew up during the Great Depression and presented at the 22nd annual conference of the New Mexico Jewish Historical Society in Santa Fe on October 25, 2009.

Five Taichert brothers, German Jews, were born in a village on the disputed border between Prussia and Lithuania. The oldest, Joseph, was fourteen, and my father, Dan, was two when the boys were orphaned in 1896.

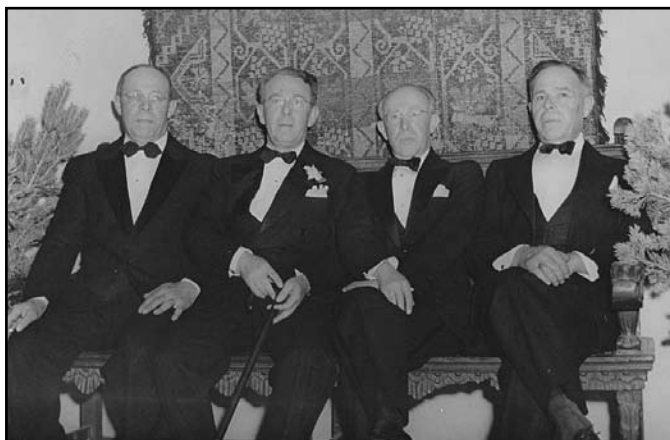
Uncle Joe got to the United States in 1903 and lived with relatives named Handmaker in Louisville, Kentucky. He learned to be a tailor. In 1905, he brought his four brothers over from the old country. My father was eleven when he and his brothers arrived at Ellis Island, speaking German, Russian, and Yiddish. English came later. Nathan, Milton, and Dan also went to live with the Handmakers. The youngest brother, Pincus, was killed when run over by a streetcar. Milton was a boy soprano in the Louisville Temple choir at thirteen.

The Taichert brothers learned tailoring. Dan sold newspapers. The owner of the *Louisville Courier-Times* noticed Dan, took

a liking to him, and sent him to school for four years. Then the owner died, and that was the end of Dad's formal education.

Uncle Nathan settled in Jasper, Indiana, where many spoke German. He began with a peddler's pushcart and developed

When he recovered his health he opened the JA Taichert Haberdashery on Douglas Avenue in Las Vegas. The business was a success. Then he started the JA Taichert Company, which became one of the largest wool and hide wholesalers in the Southwest.



From the Left: Nathan, Dan (the author's father), Milton, and Joe Taichert at La Fonda Hotel in Santa Fe, 1941.

a major department store. He became a leading citizen and prospered.

Diagnosed with "spots on his lungs" when he was eighteen, Uncle Joe headed West, living and working as a general factotum for a time at El Porvenir, a resort near Las Vegas. He became a trapper. He trapped beavers and foxes, which were then plentiful in the Gallinas Canyon, for pelts, which he sold to the Charles Ilfeld Company.

During the Depression, Uncle Joe prospered. In addition to the JA Taichert Company and Taichert's Clothing Store, he acted as a banker, rescued mortgage debtors from foreclosure, and drilled a successful gas well in the San Luis Valley of Colorado. When the Santa Fe Railway stopped using Las Vegas he bought the round-house as a wool and hide warehouse. The name "JA Taichert Company" emblazoned the outside wall.

Uncle Joe and Aunt Annie had three daughters, Marion, Louise, and Elaine. They grew up in a beautiful home with a grand piano in the living room. During the Depression Aunt Annie fed the hoboes passing through Las Vegas at the back of her house on the outside stairs. All three daughters are alive and relatively well today. Cousin Louise lives in Santa Fe.

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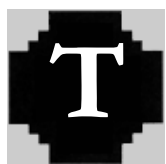
Time to renew your NMJHS membership

Unless you are a Life Member, your membership in NMJHS expires on December 31 of each year. You will be receiving a membership renewal form in the mail. Please take the time to fill it out and send in your dues for 2010.

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Message from President Noel Pugach



The Society's major event in the fall of 2009 was its highly successful and informative annual conference, held in Santa Fe, on the theme "New Mexico Jews and the Great Depression." Over sixty people attended, and many told me that it was both delightful and rewarding. A summary of the presentations may be found in these pages. We are also delighted to publish the family recollections of conference panelist Robert Taichert.

This issue is filled with other engaging and fascinating articles. You will find the second installment of Bobbi Jackson's interviews with past presidents of the New Mexico Jewish Historical Society that conveys their dedication and innovation. I commend Bobbi for coming up with the idea for this article and writing it down to inspire our readers.

Naomi Sandweiss's column provides insights into New Mexico banking. It is

an outgrowth of her conference presentation on how Bertha Gusdorf saved First State Bank of Taos during the Great Depression. David Dunmar, guest columnist for Genealogy Corner in this issue, shares his online experiences with a humorous touch to others looking on the Internet for information about their ancestors.

The Society was proud to be a sponsor of *¡Celebrate!*, the magnificent series of lectures, films, and exhibits on the Jews of the Spanish-speaking countries this past November. Another NMJHS event in November was a stimulating and well-attended genealogy workshop in Santa Fe.

The NMJHS board of directors is hard at work planning programs for 2010. You won't want to miss Dr. Leon Cohen's lecture about the Jews of Carlsbad

on March 7 at the JCC in Albuquerque. This small community in southeastern New Mexico has been home to Dr.



NMJHS President Noel Pugach.

Cohen and his family since 1959, when they relocated from Riverside, New Jersey. As always, we welcome your suggestions for other programs.

I also want to remind you to renew your membership in the Society. You will receive a notice in the mail, and I ask you to return it promptly. The New Mexico Jewish Federation will also launch its annual fundrais-

ing drive in January. The New Mexico Jewish Historical Society receives a sizeable annual grant from the Federation, and I urge you to respond generously. The Federation is dealing with a very challenging environment, and your help is greatly needed.

On behalf of the board, I wish all of our members and readers a very healthy, happy, and successful New Year. I hope to see many of you at our events in 2010. ☆

Calendar of NMJHS Upcoming Events

Check online calendar of Upcoming Events for more details at www.nmjewishhistory.org.

Wednesday, January 27, film "The Colours of the Holocaust," commemorating the 65th anniversary of the Liberation of Auschwitz. Free Admission. Two showings at Jean Cocteau theater, 418 Montezuma Ave., in Santa Fe, at 2:30 and 5:30. One showing in Albuquerque at El Rey theater, 622 Central SW, at 7:00 p.m.

Saturday, February 20, lecture by New Mexico History Museum Director Fran Levine, "In Her Own Voice: Doña Teresa and Intrigue in the Palace," 2 to 3:30 p.m., museum auditorium at the Museum of New Mexico in Santa Fe. Details at www.palaceofthegovernors.org; scroll to lower right corner of home page, click on "all upcoming events," then select February 2010 and scroll to bottom of page.

February 25 - 27, "Moros, Moriscos, Marranos y Mestizos: Alterity, Hybridity, and Identity in Diaspora," the 16th Annual University of New Mexico Conference on Ibero-American Culture and Society. Conference explores the 400th anniversary of the expulsion of the Moriscos from Spain with historic and contemporary texts, traditions, and expressive culture from Moorish, Jewish, Christian, and Native American encounters in Iberia and the Americas. Details forthcoming at www.unm.edu/~spanish/spanconf16.html.

Sunday, March 7, 2 to 4 p.m., retired podiatrist Dr. Leon Cohen, resident of Carlsbad since 1959, will speak on "They Made an Impact: The Jews of Carlsbad, New Mexico," Jewish Community Center, 5520 Wyoming Blvd. NE, Albuquerque.

Welcome to New NMJHS Members

- Miriam Ries
- Nicola Baptiste
- Sue Breslauer
- Morrie Blumberg
- Robert Benjamin
- Sandy Levine
- Jann Levin
- Phil & Phyllis Glassman
- Bob Nurock
- Louise Marie Moya Stokes
- Richard & Kathleen Yoast
- Yetta & Zack Tropp
- Randolph & Tamar Rubin
- Shmuel Inbar & Barbara Cohen

Perspective on Past NMJHS Presidents - Part 2

by Bobbi L. Jackson



The New Mexico Jewish Historical Society has been well served by its presidents. Each one enacted new initiatives and kept the interest

alive. The September 2009 issue of *Legacy* covered the first four presidents: A. David Scholder, Jim Mafchir, Suzan Campbell, and Sharon Niederman. This issue continues the story of their successors in office: Gunther Aron, Claire Grossman, Stanley Hordes, Philip Saltz, Shirley Jacobson, Lance Bell, and Harold Melnick.

Gunther Aron

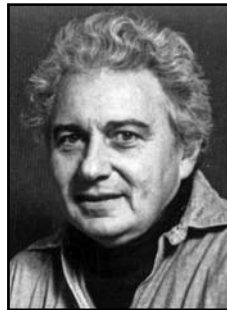
Sculptor Gunther Aron served as the sixth NMJHS president in 1995. He was on the board from 1993 - 1998, during which time all board meetings were held in Santa Fe.

An article in the July 2001 issue of the NMJHS newsletter, "Our Adventures as Archivists," written by Gunther and his wife Geri, describe the process of re-housing the NMJHS Archives

at the New Mexico State Records and Archives Center in Santa Fe. They both served on the NMJHS archives committee for a number of years.

Another passion for Gunther and Geri has been heading the committee for the Montefiore Cemetery Cleanup in Las Vegas from 1998 until recently, when they relinquished that duty for health reasons.

Born in Germany in 1923, Gunther has made his home in the United States since 1948. He is an artist, jewelry maker, and noted sculptor. His work has been reviewed in many publications and is in museums both in the United States and Europe. In Santa Fe, Gunther's Hanukkah menorahs are at Temple Beth



Gunther Aron

Shalom, Congregation Beit Tikva, and Capitol Art Collection of New Mexico.

Now retired, Gunther and Geri continue to reside in Santa Fe in their lovely home surrounded by his works of art.

Claire Grossman

Claire Grossman served as president and vice president of the Society for three years from 1996 to the end of 1999, often wearing many hats. She is considered "the glue that kept the Society together." For her seventieth birthday, many people donated to the Video History Project. Those donations served as the "seed" money to begin the project that lasted many years. Claire was the recipient of the fifth Dr. Allan Hurst Award in 2000.

In 1996, at the beginning of her presidency, Claire oversaw the gifting of the NMJHS archives to the new building that houses the New Mexico State Records Center and Archives on Camino Carlos Rey in Santa Fe. Twenty volunteers were involved with collecting, organizing, indexing, and otherwise preparing the collection for transfer. She negotiated the terms of the transfer from NMJHS ownership to NMSRCA with Daphne Arnaiz de Leon, the new Director of the Archival Services Division.

During one of her terms, the Annual Conference featured the Society's first film festival, with noted actress Celeste Holm as keynote speaker. One of the highlights of her tenure were the annual field trips the Society took to Trinidad, Colorado; Salt Lake City; Las Cruces; El Paso; Galveston; and Denver.

Claire and Stan Hordes worked closely together for the Society, and their duties

often co-mingled. Their cooperation was successful as the Society grew to more than 400 members during their years at the helm.

Claire resides in a retirement community in Nashua, New Hampshire, near some of her family. She has four children and is the proud grandmother of five grandchildren. She remains an active board member, is a Life Member, and also a "Friend" of the Society many times over.

Stanley Hordes

Stan Hordes, one of the charter members of the Society, served as president and vice president for several terms in the 1990s, alternating with Claire Grossman, and again from 2002 to 2004.

Stan organized the Fifth Annual Conference of the NMJHS, "Commemorating the Quincentenary of the Sephardic Experience in the New World," which was held at La Fonda Hotel in Santa Fe in 1992. Speakers were invited from Mexico, Spain, and Israel, as well as from many parts of the United States. New Mexico Governor Bruce King welcomed the guests who numbered over 250.

Stan presided over the Sixteenth Annual Conference in 2003 with the theme "Views of Jews: Gentile Perceptions of Jews in New Mexico, 1598 - 2000," held at the Doubletree Hotel in Albuquerque, with Dr. Michael Perko as the keynote speaker.

Recipient of the first Dr. Allan Hurst Award, Stan has worn many hats, mainly as Program Chair, especially for planning annual conferences, and as contributor of many articles in the

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Claire Grossman



Stanley Hordes

GENEALOGY CORNER: Random Acts of Genealogical Kindness and Other Online Success Stories

by David Dunmar

So you're interested in the family history. You've spoken to all the relatives you can think of, have obtained a few clues about where your name and family may have come from, and you are now wondering how to proceed with your new life's ambition to find your roots. Well, perhaps it's time to allow your computer to lend some assistance. Turn it on and let's get going.

As I mentioned in a previous article [*Legacy*, June 2009] my approach to gather information was to Google the family name, Ploshansky, which rapidly led me to a commercial web site called Ancestry.com. I have found them to be a very good source of information. To access their resources one must first become a member. [Subscriptions cost from \$155 to \$300 per year.] Their databases are wide-ranging with new material being added daily.

Enter the name of a family member into Ancestry.com with known or estimated residence dates and places and, with a little fortitude, you will soon be the featured star of family cocktail parties and get-togethers. Some of the information available on this web site includes U.S. censuses through 1930, military records back to the Revolution, and millions of immigration records. After signing up you are likely to become addicted; don't forget to talk to your family once in a while so they remember who you are.

For anyone with Jewish heritage another "must" site is JewishGen.org. This site, too, requires membership but has no monthly fee. Donations are, of course, appreciated. Navigation is not as easy as some other sites, but it is fairly user-friendly none the less. Information from all over the world is available at JewishGen. If you think you know the name of the city or region where the family came from, but you aren't sure how to spell it or don't know which country it was in, JewishGen comes to the rescue. Go to the JewishGen Communities database, provide the best spelling you can, and all known cities that sound similar will be listed along with the country where they are now located.

A separate search on JewishGen with the family surname and previous country of residence can connect you with other people who are researching the same name or location. This feature was of great help in tracking down the Stern side of my family, which I reported on in the June 2009 issue of *Legacy*.



The author's great-great grandfather Madison T. Burton, who fought for the Confederacy during the Civil War, is buried in Moore's Chapel Cemetery in Bonham, Texas. As recorded on the tombstone, he was born May 31, 1826, and died October 30, 1896.

Most immigrants who came to the U.S. after 1892 entered the country through Ellis Island. After a few minutes of research on the Ellis Island web site, www.ellisland.org, my wife found the date of arrival of her Swedish maternal grandmother, the name of the city she came from in Sweden, her father's name, and how much money she brought with her. With this new knowledge and a little luck we were able to find living relatives in Sweden who were quite surprised to hear from the side of the family that traveled to America 100 years ago.

If your family immigrated to the U.S. prior to 1892 there were many ports where they could have disembarked, but chances are they came through the New York precursor to Ellis Island, which was called Castle Garden. You can search that web site as well: www.Castlegarden.org. Information on that

web site is usually not as detailed as that from Ellis Island.

Be sure to check out the Family History Library web site, sponsored by the Mormon Church, www.familysearch.org. The Mormons have microfilmed an incredible number of records from all over Europe, and they are currently in the process of putting these records into digital format. You can access the web site for free and spend months on it if you are so inclined.

An interesting web site I came across only a few months ago is www.raogk.com. RAOGK stands for Random Acts of Genealogical Kindness. It consists of volunteers worldwide, (but mainly in the U.S.), who volunteer their time to help with genealogical research. The volunteers, listed by state and county, will help out with specific types of research. Some will only look up obituaries in their counties, while others might help you search through Civil War Muster Rolls. Volunteers do not exist for every county in the country, but there are a substantial number of people who will help out with specific types of research. Donations are appreciated.

Using RAOGK, I encountered a volunteer in Texas who agreed to find a document for me in the Texas State Archives in Austin. This was a 1915 pension application filed by one of my great-great-grandmothers whose husband had fought for Georgia during the Civil War. After the war they settled in Texas, where the application was made and granted. Currently, another RAOGK volunteer is researching old microfilmed newspapers for obituaries on other family members who passed away in Fannin County, Texas, between 1896 and 1928.

All states and counties throughout the U.S. have departments that handle vital statistics and historical information. Many of my relatives came from Cleveland in Cuyahoga County, Ohio. The county site had quite a bit of useful, well-organized information available that enabled me to obtain marriage, immigration, and naturalization tidbits. Smaller counties will not always

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Coping with the Great Depression in New Mexico

Conference Review by Noel Pugach



Those who were fortunate to attend the Society's Fall Conference in Santa Fe on October 25 heard a number of informative and stimulating presentations on the timely theme of the Great Depression. While the focus was on the experience of New Mexico Jews, the initial presentations provided a necessary and helpful context of the state's history during the Great Depression.

Dr. Craig Newbill, Director of the New Mexico Humanities Council, provided a graphic picture of the impact of the Great Depression in New Mexico in his slide presentation and commentary. Newbill grew up on the Llano Estacado in Eastern New Mexico, which was scarred by both the Depression and the decade-long drought known as the Dust Bowl. The images taken by a group of very talented photographers, many working for the Farm Security Administration, captured the desolation of the land and the suffering of the rural population. Newbill's final slides showed a hopeful side through the depiction of New Deal programs making a difference in rural communities such as Pie Town, New Mexico.

Professor Richard Melzer, who teaches at UNM's Valencia Campus in Los Lunas, enriched the context by supplying statistical and anecdotal information on unemployment, labor strife, reduction in farm income, decline in mining, and the tactics employed to deal with transients. Answering his own question, "How did New Mexico survive the Great Depression?" he noted that there already existed a culture of poverty and stressed the importance of mutual aid. Melzer emphasized the role of leadership at the national and state levels. He concluded by outlining the immediate and long-range impact of the Depression on New Mexico. In some ways, he said, the New Deal was a boon for New Mexico, providing infrastructure that the state could not have afforded without the help of Federal government programs, such as the Civilian Conservation Corps.

Professor Henry Tobias focused on the experience of the approximately 1000 Jews in New Mexico (out of a general population of less than 500,000) who were overwhelmingly urban and mainly engaged in commerce. He reported that these Jewish families survived the Great Depression better than most of the population. The merchants made a point of helping others who were less

fortunate by extending credit to farmers and providing food and clothing to the needy. However, the records of Temple Albert in Albuquerque also show that the congregation ran a deficit (rescued by Mrs. Noa Ilfeld in 1931), that many members asked for and received a reduction in dues, and the rabbi's salary had to be cut. The worst was over by 1935 for New Mexico Jews, who then turned to rescuing their relatives and brethren fleeing persecution in Nazi Germany.

But how did individual New Mexico firms cope with the great financial and economic crisis? Naomi Sandweiss offered a case example with her analysis of First State Bank of Taos. First she provided a brief history of the bank in the context of the unstable record of Taos and New Mexico banking. New Mexico banks had seen their share of troubles even before the Depression started, with nearly 50% of them ceasing operations between 1923 - 1925. First State was founded by the Gusdorfs, a prominent Jewish business family in Taos. Bertha Gusdorf took over the management of First State after her husband Alexander died and kept the bank afloat through conservative banking practices, her intimate knowledge of the local popula-

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Genealogy Corner *(continued from p. 4)*

have such well-developed sites, but it's certainly worth a try.

One could happily search the foregoing sites, oblivious to the rest of the world, for months on end. But don't forget other information that is already available. What organizations might your relatives have been involved with? Were they members of Rotary? What schools did they attend? Were they in any specific regiment in the military in World War II or the Revolution or the Civil War? It's quite amazing how many web sites are tailored to the history of such institutions and the individuals who were involved with them.

After months of research and finding family members in Northern Mississippi in the mid 1800s, it came to light that one of them fought with the 26th

Mississippi Infantry Regiment during the Civil War. As you might have guessed, there is a web site specifically for the 26th. I have now obtained the Confederate service records of Captain Madison T. Burton, who was another of my great-great-grandfathers.

Although www.findagrave.com is by no means comprehensive, it currently contains information for about thirty-five million burial sites supplied by volunteers. On that web site I found a picture of the tombstone for Madison, along with the name of the cemetery in which he is buried. Madison was a captain in the 26th Mississippi Infantry Regiment during the Civil War. My family plans to visit this and other sites in the spring.

On a recent trip, I visited some of the National Parks where the 26th fought.

(You get quite a bit of private special attention from the Park Rangers when you mention you had relatives who fought there.) I also found a previously unknown cousin on the web site for the 26th Mississippi Infantry Regiment who was nice enough to share some of her genealogy with me, which helped me trace back that side of the family to 1632.

Amazing to say, it is possible to fill in those voids in your family history from the comfort of your own home.

David Dunmar grew up in Santa Fe where he has now resided for the past 40 years. He works for a local bank, is married to Anita, and has two sons, Thaddeus and Kameron, who are twenty-two and five years old. ✪

The Taichert Brothers *(continued from p. 1)*

As his business grew, he brought his brother Milton to Las Vegas to run the haberdashery, so that he could devote more time to the wool and hide business. Uncle Milton operated the store successfully, selling it when he was in his late eighties. Uncle Milton always loved music and opera, in particular. He collected many great recordings including old 78s of Enrico Caruso.

Uncle Milton was a loyal and faithful supporter of the Montefiore congregation in Las Vegas, which disbanded when the membership diminished to just a few, as Las Vegas deteriorated economically and Jews left town.

Uncle Milton and Aunt Frances had one child, Marvin, who graduated summa cum laude from Harvard College. He began medical school at the University of Illinois, but inexplicably dropped out after only six weeks, then spent the rest of his life living near Las Vegas and finally at his father's home.

Marvin was a coin collector who built a million dollar collection. He kept the collection overnight at his home on 7th Street. It is a wonder it wasn't stolen. Marvin often said that his four years at Harvard were the happiest of his life. He gave his coin collection to Harvard and Milton's record collection to the University of New Mexico Opera Studio. Marvin was a dedicated supporter of the Montefiore Jewish Cemetery, and left a handsome bequest for its long-term upkeep.

Now to my family. My father, Dan Taichert, was quite a lady's man. Uncle Nathan in Indiana couldn't deal with him and shipped him off to his brothers in Las Vegas. For similar reasons Uncle Joe got him into the New Mexico National Guard. Dad served under General "Black Jack" Pershing, chasing Pancho Villa after Villa's raid on Columbus, New Mexico. A born linguist, Dad left the service completely bilingual with no accent in English or Spanish.

After the National Guard, Dad went to work for a general store in Las Vegas. In 1921 he met Ruth Parker, a pretty young Texan from Dallas, who went to Las Vegas with an aunt to escape the Dallas summer heat. Dan and Ruth eloped in 1921. Their marriage, between a Jew and a Texas Baptist, was stormy. In the words of the family maid, they lived "scrappily" ever after.

My sister Frances (Tancy) was born in Las Vegas in 1922. My parents moved to Santa Fe in 1924 and opened the first Taichert's five-and-ten, with \$1000 earned by my mother as a legal secretary and some borrowed from Uncle Joe. It was at the corner of Galisteo and San Francisco streets, now a Chico's. At first they had money for either inventory or a place to live, so they lived in the back of the store. When my mother cooked cabbage everyone in town knew.

The Taichert stores flourished. By the early 1930s the Taichert's main store oc-

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The Great Depression in New Mexico *(continued from p. 5)*

tion, and, critically, her alliance with Taos artists.

After a break for lunch, the conference resumed with a delightful and informative panel of New Mexicans who shared their family histories and personal reminiscences of living through the Great Depression. Several admitted that they were not representative, for they were comfortable, if not privileged. Yet, they were also touched by the experience in many ways and could provide interesting observations.

Marian Petchesky Silver of Santa Fe talked about her family's dry goods store on the Plaza, the White House (later renamed The Guarantee), that her grandparents established in 1912 and her parents ran during the Depression. Santa Fe was still a small town and had only a few Jewish families at the time. The family went to Temple Albert in Albuquerque for Jewish holidays because Santa Fe didn't have its own congregation until 1952. She noted that people had different expectations at the time; they lived simply

and modestly, even if they had money. The Petcheskys were also very close to the Taicherts of Santa Fe.

Albuquerque lawyer Robert Taichert talked about his childhood in Santa Fe where his parents started a five-and-dime store at the corner of Galisteo and San Francisco streets. They lived in the back of the store. As the business prospered they moved closer to the Plaza and then opened other stores in Santa Fe, Gallup, Taos, and Las Cruces. The Depression years were a good time for five-and-dimes. People could afford to buy things there, which they could no longer afford to buy at more expensive stores. Taichert noted that his father and Barney Petchesky were instrumental in establishing Temple Beth Shalom in Santa Fe. (The text of his full talk appears as the lead article in this issue.)

Kathryn Heyman Rubin, who comes from "old" New Mexico Jewish families, remembered growing up in Gallup and Albuquerque during the Depression. Her father had a business near the

train station in Albuquerque; some of his customers who could not pay cash exchanged pinto beans for goods. During the bank holiday in March 1933, when all the banks were closed and people could not cash checks, her father said, "We have eggs and beans – we can manage."

Kathryn's husband Leon Rubin of Raton worked in his father's clothing store. His father and one of the town's grocers, who didn't have much ready cash, agreed to trade with each other. Many of his father's customers bartered goods for clothing. Leon met Kathryn before World War II prior to enlisting in the Army Air Corps. They married in 1946. The original store in Raton has been expanded into several businesses today run by the Rubin family.

The presentations stimulated a lot of questions and comments from the audience. The exchanges provided further information and insights into the history of the Great Depression in New Mexico and, in particular, the experience of the small Jewish population. ✧

The Taichert Brothers *(continued from p. 6)*

cupied a large storefront on San Francisco Street, midway between Don Gaspar and Galisteo Street. Soon Dad added a second store in Santa Fe, and stores in Gallup, Taos, and Las Cruces. The Gallup store attracted many Navajo customers, and Dad learned enough Navajo to communicate with them.

During World War II he put a store in Los Alamos at the request of the Atomic Energy Commission. In the late 1930s he created a wholesale company, Coronado Sales Company, which increased the retail margins. The Depression years were a good time for five-and-tens.

Dad was a voracious reader, and when he got a little money ahead he bought the five-foot-long collection of the Harvard Classics and read them all. He never forgot his days as a newsboy. From the time he opened his first store until his death in 1954, he sponsored a free Thanksgiving dinner at La Fonda Hotel every year for every newsboy in Santa Fe.

I came along in 1928 just before the Great Depression began. My personal knowledge of that era is limited to a pampered childhood, growing up in a beautiful two-story pueblo-style family home at 403 Don Gaspar. Today it is the west walk of the Roundhouse. My childhood memory is of a lovely home with a Steinway grand piano, lots of music, and fine paintings by Taos and Santa Fe artists. My mother and sister were both talented pianists, and my parents had a wide range of friends.

Now to explain how I came to be an Episcopalian. Dad insisted that my sister and I go to some church, but he left the choice to us. My mother was not religious and described herself as a "fugitive from the Southern Baptist Church." In fact, the family maid, Doris Martinez Gaussoin, (nicknamed Dodie) ran the roost. In many ways Dodie was as much a mother to my sister and me as our own. She was a devout Roman Catholic, determined that my sister and I would follow in her footsteps.

I remember being trooped off to St. Francis Cathedral on Sundays for a time. But one Sunday Dodie walked us past St.

Francis Cathedral, went a block and a half up Palace Avenue, and deposited Tancy and me at Holy Faith Episcopal Church, where we grew up. Dad never confessed his role in the change of churches. My sister and I adored each other, but the six-year difference in our ages meant we never had a lot in common.

Still Dad wanted me to learn about Judaism. Since there were not enough Jews in Santa Fe at the time to have a temple, an itinerant rabbi would come to hold services once a month. Dad engaged him to teach me about Judaism in 1937, when I was nine. I have no independent recollection of what follows, but Dad told the story with wry amusement. After the rabbi had been instructing me in Judaism for about six months in two-hour sessions, Dad decided to find out what I had learned.

The pivotal moment came one night at dinner. Mother was seated at one end of the dining table, Dad at the head, and Tancy and me on opposite sides. Dodie was hovering in the doorway between the dining room and the kitchen. "Who in the Jewish faith are we always taught to love and cherish?" he asked me. Without an instant's hesitation I said "God and Jesus Christ." He said, "That's right, Robert," and fired the rabbi. Dodie turned to the wall to hide her glee. She had won the war.

Dan Taichert was for a time Democratic Party State Chairman. He campaigned for Dennis Chavez in the North, when Dennis was running for the US Senate, *hablando español todo el tiempo*. My mother Ruth started the Santa Fe Milk Fund to provide milk to poor mothers in Santa Fe. Interested in preserving the Spanish culture, she compiled and published a song book called *Santa Fe Folk Songs and Dances*. She served as a Democratic State Representative from Santa Fe County in the New Mexico Legislature in 1951 and 1952.

Both my parents were active in civic and musical circles. They took Tancy and me to whatever concerts and musical events there were in Santa Fe in the 1930s. They had prominent friends. Vitya Vronsky and Victor Babin, a famous Russian

piano duo, regularly practiced on the Taichert Steinway. Our parents' circle of friends and frequent guests for Dodie's Mexican dinners included many musicians, writers and artists.

I did not learn until later in life that Dan Taichert and Marian Silver's father Barney Petchesky were founders of Temple Beth Shalom in Santa Fe. Dad was its first president. Between the New Mexico Military Institute during World War II, the University of New Mexico, Harvard Law School, and serving four years as a U.S. Naval Officer during the Korean War, I had little quality time with him as an adult. He died at age fifty-nine while I was overseas. That is a major regret of my life. Dan Taichert always was and still is my hero and role model.

Dan, Uncle Joe, and Uncle Milton exemplified the American dream. They knew where they came from, cherished their new country, and made the most of opportunities for people who were smart, ambitious, and hard workers. They prospered financially and were very good citizens, socially prominent and active in their communities, supporting worthy charities and helping out individuals in need.

Robert Daniel Taichert retired after fifty years of law practice. He served the New Mexico Supreme Court as Chairman of the Board of Bar Examiners and the Supreme Court Disciplinary Board. He held National office in the American Bar Association. He is a Fellow of the American College of Tax Counsel and of the American College of Civil Trial Mediators. Mr. Taichert was an organizer and first president of the Santa Fe Opera established in 1956. He served as president of the boards of Sandia Preparatory School and the New Mexico Symphony Orchestra, among others. Recently he completed a term as Chairman of the Board of the Mind Research Network, the neuroscience discovery foundation based in Albuquerque, which he set up for Senator Domenici in 1998. Robert and Zane Taichert live in Albuquerque. Married fifty-six years, they have two children and three grandchildren. ☆

Past NMJHS Presidents *(continued from p. 3)*

newsletter. Together with Claire Grossman, he organized many field trips to visit places of interest in the Southwest.

Stan is an adjunct professor at the University of New Mexico, former New Mexico state historian, and author of *To The End of the Earth: A History of the Crypto-Jews of New Mexico*. Stan resides in Albuquerque with his wife Helen, is the father of two children, and recently became a first-time grandfather. In spite of his many other professional obligations, Stan remains a very active member of the Society.

Philip Saltz

Philip Saltz of Santa Fe served as president from 2000 - 2001, assuming the position upon the resignation of A. David Scholder during his second term. With Phil at the helm, the Society moved its office into the Jewish Community Center in Albuquerque. He formed an alliance with the University of New Mexico to help meet the goals of the Video History Project. Phil also sponsored a membership drive to increase the Society's membership outside the Santa Fe and Albuquerque areas.



Philip Saltz

During Phil's presidency, the board decided to produce the NMJHS newsletter locally. Suzanne Ivener-Pettersson served as Society administrator during this time. Following his term as president, Phil served as treasurer.

The Fourteenth Annual Conference was held in 2001 at the Sheraton Old Town in Albuquerque with the theme "Jewish Women in New Mexico History."

Phil, an attorney since 1961, lives in Santa Fe with his wife Beverly. Now retired, he has four children and four grandchildren. He is past president of

both the Santa Fe Life Underwriters Association and The New Mexico School for the Deaf Foundation. An active lobbyist in California before his move to Santa Fe, he is also a former private pilot and past president of a Reconstructionist synagogue in Los Angeles.

Shirley Jacobson

Shirley Jacobson became president in 2001 when Phil Saltz resigned due to ill health. She was president during the Fifteenth Annual Conference with the theme "Havurot, Hippies and the Hollywood Ten: Jewish Life in New Mexico 1950 - 2000," which was held at the Sagebrush Inn in Taos in 2002, with director Karl Francis as a guest.

During Shirley's tenure the Video History Project was in full swing. At the annual membership meeting Stan Hordes gave a lecture on "Crypto-Jews and the Establishment of the First Permanent Spanish Colony in New Mexico by Juan de Oñate: A Closer Look" at Temple Beth Shalom in Santa Fe. Julie Gordon was hired as the Society administrator, a position she held for four years. Board meetings were held in both Santa Fe and Albuquerque.



Shirley Jacobson

Shirley was president during the First Annual Book and Art Treasure Sale and remains the driving force behind this major fund-raiser eight years later, with the help of Sheila Gershen. Because Shirley handles the book sale for the Museum of Fine Arts every year, she gets their excess books and donates them to the NMJHS Annual Book Sale.

At the History Library in the Museum of New Mexico there is a collection on New Mexico Jewish artists and authors. Shirley saw to it that ten percent of the profits from the NMJHS annual book sale go to buying additions to this holding. All the books contributed by

NMJHS to the History Library have bookplates identifying NMJHS as the donor.

Prior to serving as NMJHS president, Shirley initiated many imaginative and instructive events for Archives Week at the New Mexico State Records Center and Archives, including one memorable event entitled "Rain Gods and Conversos," which attracted numerous attendees.

A Santa Fe resident, Shirley is the owner of Books Unlimited, an out-of-print bookstore. She is one of the four promoters of the Annual Santa Fe Antiquarian Book Show every October.

Lance Bell

Lance Bell, a native New Mexican, served as president from 2004 - 2006, infusing the Society with his youth, enthusiasm, contacts and new ideas. He received the Dr. Allan Hurst Award in 2009 for his outstanding service to the Society. He hired Bobbi Jackson as administrator and encouraged her to "think outside the box."

Lance, whose interest in New Mexico Jewish history derives from his family's mercantile roots in Santa Fe, wrote an article "Preserving the Past for the Future" for the NMJHS newsletter in March 2005 underscoring the need for preservation of our family histories.



Lance Bell

During Lance's term as president, he initiated several new activities. One was a scholarship that he established, along with relatives of Marvin Taichert, to fund a young person to serve on the NMJHS board in partnership with Hillel. He launched several fundraising activities and remains active as a fundraiser. He also established a genealogy committee to present semi-annual workshops.

(continued on p. 9)

Past NMJHS Presidents (continued from p. 8)

During his term the first thirteen Video History Project booklets on New Mexico pioneer Jewish families were completed and became available for sale. Lance was instrumental in establishing a relationship with the Museum of New Mexico Bookstore to sell the VHP booklets. Also during his term in office, he established a new membership category of Life Member for those who make a contribution of \$1000 to the Society.

Lance initiated several creative ideas for the newsletter, among them, contacting potential advertisers to place ads in the four quarterly issues. Under his guidance the newsletter printed its first tribute box, first contributor list, president's column, and board member profile.

Two conferences were held under his leadership. The Seventeenth Annual Conference with the theme "Treasure of Your Own Family History," was held in 2004 in Santa Fe with archivist Kevin Proffitt from Cincinnati as keynote speaker. The Eighteenth Annual Conference "New Mexico Jews in War and Peace," held in Albuquerque in 2005, was a politically charged event featuring speakers who ranged from veterans to historians to anti-war activists.

Lance maintains a career as a Biotech commercial representative with Genentech USA. He resides in Santa Fe with his wife Julia and daughter Jacqueline. In spite of a demanding work schedule, Lance remains an active member of the Society.

Harold Melnick

Harold Melnick served as president from 2006 - 2008, during which time board meetings alternated between Santa Fe and Albuquerque. As with other presidents, many firsts occurred during his term. The Society held a contest to give a name to the NMJHS newsletter, resulting in *Legacy*. Back issues of the newsletter were posted on the NMJHS web site. Following Lance's lead, Harold had more board members profiled in *Legacy*.

During Harold's tenure, the Video History Project booklets received the 2006 Historical Preservation Award. The Society welcomed several new Life Members. A one-day conference on Jewish Genetic Diseases in the Hispanic Population was held in Albuquerque. The showing of Jewish films was launched in Santa Fe. The Society received its largest allocation to date from the Jewish Federation of New Mexico.

Under Harold's leadership, the board decided that each board member would take responsibility for some activity of the Society. The nineteenth annual conference, "Movers and Shakers: The Jewish Difference in the Land of Enchantment," was held at the Albuquerque Hilton.

During this time, Debbie Blackerby replaced Bobbi Jackson as administrator for a year. Bobbi returned, as administrator, in 2008 from medical leave.

Harold resides in Santa Fe with his wife, noted photographer aj Melnick. He is the father of three daughters and works for the State of New Mexico in the Aging and Long-Term Services Department. He previously served as treasurer for the Society and remains an active member.

Bobbi Jackson is the administrator of the New Mexico Jewish Historical Society. ☆



Harold Melnick

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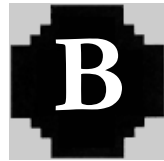
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PEEK INTO THE PAST

by Naomi Sandweiss



Banks have certainly been in the news as of late. From the one hundred bank failures in the United States in 2009 (to date no New Mexico banks

have succumbed) to the 80th anniversary of the Great Depression, I became curious about the early history of New Mexico banking and the involvement of Jewish citizens.

Before the 1870s, the New Mexico Territory was without any banks, operating primarily as a bartering economy. Currency was in short supply. Merchants, many of whom were Jewish immigrants from Germany, acted as de facto bankers, extending credit, and issuing scrip and trade tokens to their customers. William Parish, author of *The Charles Iffeld Company*, explained the lack of banks, noting that "The merchant credit system . . . delayed the rise of the banker."

In 1870, Lucien Maxwell chartered and financed the first bank in the territory. Two years later, the Spiegelberg brothers, Santa Fe wholesalers and traders, established their own bank, the Second National Bank of Santa Fe. According to historian Rabbi Floyd Fierman, the prime reason motivating the Spiegelbergs to establish their bank was to negotiate their own monetary exchange.

Some of those associated with Maxwell's First National Bank were not happy about the Spiegelbergs' new venture. Stephen Elkins, President of First National, wrote a letter in which he reported, "some jews (sic) of this place . . . are attempting to establish a 2nd National Bank here . . . of course it is in our interest to defeat their project." The Spiegelberg venture was successful for twenty years, at which time the family voluntarily liquidated their assets and moved out of the territory.

The expansion of the economy – fueled by the development of railroads and related enterprises – was a catalyst for subsequent bank development. Railroad towns such as Las Vegas, New Mexico, supported six banks by the 1900s. One

of these banks was the San Miguel National Bank of Las Vegas, which opened its doors in 1880. Joseph and Emanuel Rosenwald, Las Vegas merchants, served as directors of the bank, which was housed in their dry goods store.

Nathan Jaffa, another pioneer merchant who later served as secretary of the New Mexico Territory, was president of the Bank of Roswell up until 1899. He organized and became cashier of the Citizens National Bank of Roswell when it opened its doors in June 1903, the same year he served as Mayor of Roswell and helped found Roswell's Jewish congregation. After Nathan Jaffa was appointed Secretary of the Territory in 1907, his brother, Joseph J. Jaffa, assumed his position as bank cashier.

During the period between 1870 and 1917, the number of banks in New Mexico ballooned to seventy-one. Every mining venture in the state seemed to result in a new bank. With only \$25,000 in capital required, banks were readily established and regulations were loose. Times were good for New Mexico bankers until the recession of the early 1920s. With the state in the middle of an agricultural depression, bankers felt the pinch when farmers couldn't pay back their loans. Forty-seven percent of New Mexico banks failed between 1921 and 1925, the highest bank failure rate in the nation.

It was during this period that another Jewish merchant family, the Gusdorfs (Alexander and Bertha), chartered a bank in Taos in 1922. Three banks had opened and closed their doors in Taos in the preceding years. The Gusdorfs had been in New Mexico since 1863, when Alexander arrived from Germany to work for his uncles, the Staabs, in Santa Fe. In the intervening years, the family operated a flour mill and ran a general merchandise store on the Taos Plaza.

Alexander also had agricultural, mining and political interests, serving as Taos county commissioner and territorial sen-

(continued on p. 11)

Peek Into the Past (continued from p. 10)

ator, building alliances with other businesspeople, politicians, and the emerging Taos arts community. As merchants, the Gusdorfs had extended credit for years. Most importantly, they possessed an astute knowledge of the community from their decades of involvement and service.

The Great Depression of the 1930s, while not kind to New Mexico banks, did not impact the state's financial institutions as harshly as the rest of the nation. (Seventeen percent of New Mexico banks were suspended between 1930 - 1933, compared with 42.8% of banks nationwide.) The bank shakeout of the early 1920s, combined with the absence of branch banking in the state, may have prevented greater losses.

Still, New Mexico did experience bank failures, despite the efforts of many to prevent them. One of these individuals was pioneer Jewish merchant Louis Ilfeld, who was asked in 1933 to deposit a wad of cash into his account at the Bank of Albuquerque in full view of other customers. Despite his efforts, Ilfeld's actions were not enough to prevent the bank from closing its doors later that year.

Following the bank failures, consolidations, and increased regulation of the 1930s, Jewish New Mexicans continued to be involved in banking, primarily as directors, stockholders, and employees. Among those involved include Leon Rubin of Raton, who was a director of a bank in Trinidad, Colorado, and Abe and Marian Petchesky Silver of Santa Fe. Some of the banks founded by the Jewish merchants, such as First State Bank, endure.

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New Mexico Premiere of "Parted Waters"

The New Mexico premiere of Robert Benjamin's play "Parted Waters" will be performed by the Enchanted Rose Theatre at The North Fourth Arts Center on January 15 - 24: Fridays at 8 p.m., Saturdays at 2 and 8 p.m., and Sundays at 2 p.m.

Set in New Mexico, this contemporary tale of three generations of Hispanics wrestling with crypto-Judaism and assimilation is a piquant brew of drama and humor. (See December 2008 issue of *Legacy*, page 3, for playwright's insights into creation of the play.)

North Fourth Arts Center, 4904 Fourth Street NW, Albuquerque, 505-344-4542. General admission \$20, Seniors and Students \$18. Purchase tickets online at VSARTSNM.ORG or at the door.

The New Mexico Jewish Historical Society is a beneficiary agency of the Jewish Federation of New Mexico.

We invite you to become a Life Member of NMJHS. The \$1000 fee can be paid over a two-year period.

Mission Statement

The mission of the New Mexico Jewish Historical Society is to promote greater understanding and knowledge of New Mexico's Jewish history. The Society's programs examine the state's Jewish heritage in all its diversity and strive to present this heritage within a broad cultural context. The Society is a secular organization and solicits the membership and participation of all interested people, regardless of religious affiliation.

Check it out: www.nmjhs.org

The New Mexico Jewish Historical Society has a new web site address, www.nmjhs.org. The old one still works, www.nmjewishhistory.org. During 2010 the NMJHS web site will be undergoing some major changes. If you have photographs that you think would be appropriate for the new web site, please contact the Society administrator.

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

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