



My Years in New Mexico

by Wolfgang Mueller



When Hitler came to power in Germany in January 1933, I was studying for my bar mitzvah that March and attending the Leibniz School in Hannover. Shortly after the Nazi accession, most of the teachers were wearing swastika buttons and we students were instructed to rise in the morning when the teacher entered the classroom, raise our hands and say, Heil Hitler instead of Good Morning. I would not raise my hand. This was reported to the principal, Herr Heiligenstaedt, who telephoned my father and suggested that he take me out of school as my refusal to raise my hand could have very bad consequences for my family and the school.

Educated in England

After my bar mitzvah, my mother took me to England and enrolled me in Ewell Castle, a boarding school in Ewell, Surrey. I already was somewhat proficient in English as my parents had sent me to an English family for my vacation the previous summer.

I had been active in all kinds of sports in Germany and at my new school I

participated in rugby, cricket, soccer and tennis. We began each morning with a cross-country run, and I participated enthusiastically.

During school holidays, I returned to Germany – which was still possible in 1934 and 1935. In the meantime, my mother wanted me to attend a scholastically superior school and she transferred me to the Cranbrook School in Kent



Wolfgang and Sonya Mueller at the NMJHS Conference

where I resumed classes and started to prepare for the school certificate that provides access to an English university.

Shortly after I entered Cranbrook, my father could no longer send the tuition from Nazi Germany. He contacted Max Nordhaus in Albuquerque and Nordhaus, my grandmother's nephew, arranged to send money through a couple of ladies in Germany. This wasn't the first time that Max had helped our family. I remember packages from America finding their way to Hannover during the difficult period of inflation in Germany. My father instructed me to write Mr. Nordhaus when the money came from New Mexico to acknowledge receipt and to thank him. I did, and soon received a letter from Mr. Nordhaus inviting me to come to Albuquerque on completion of my schooling and perhaps assume a position in his business. I was very excited at such a prospect and begged my parents

to let me go as soon as possible. My mother consulted with the school and with Mr. Osborne, my house master, who recommended that I should finish the current semester.

To help me prepare for my departure, Mr. Osborne freed me immediately from my classes and entered me in an intensive reading course under his supervision. I went to the school library every day, read the books he prescribed, and met with him in the evening to discuss the material. The plan was a success and I dove into it with so much vigor that even Mr. Osborne was surprised with my progress. At the library, I had the chance to participate in group readings including modern and classical plays. I will forever be grateful for this opportunity and believe to this day that I was very fortunate to thus further my education and instill in me a passion for literature.

Travel to the United States

In the meantime, Max Nordhaus sent affidavits and other documentation to the American consulate in Hamburg, with copies of everything to my father. I returned to Germany, appeared at the consulate and my passage was booked very soon thereafter. I will never forget my father's advice to me as I was leaving for America. He advised me, "You don't have too much education and you will probably wind up in some kind of business. Whatever you do, don't lie to any-

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Message from President Dorothy Amsden



At the recent NMJHS conference I was intrigued to learn why the Santa Fe Trail came through Las Vegas. It was a matter of geography, a narrow neck of land some six miles wide between the mountains and the canyons. The railroad followed in 1879, making Las Vegas the largest town between Independence, Missouri, and San Francisco. It was a great place to run a business, attracting a number of enterprising Jewish merchants.

Conference speakers took the attentive audience into the many facets of why Jews chose to live in Las Vegas and nearby places in the northeast New Mexico Territory and how they adapted to the Wild West. An article in this issue recounts their fascinating talks.

The conference drew over 120 attendees from New Mexico, Texas, Colorado, Maryland, Washington D.C., Pennsylvania, New Hampshire, California and Oregon. Jewish pioneer descendants represented the Ilfeld, Nordhaus, Herzstein and Lowenstein families. After

dinner on Saturday night, we celebrated the 25th anniversary of the New Mexico Jewish Historical Society with a cake and a welcome from the mayor of Las Vegas, the Honorable Alfonso E. Ortiz, Jr., who presented me with a key to the city. Vickie Vogel of the Texas Jewish Historical Society offered greetings from the 11 members in attendance, A. David Scholder gave a brief talk on how NMJHS got started, and then Aaron Wolf performed liturgical music from the old Congregation Montefiore.

Everyone I talked to said the conference was interesting and well organized. And yet, as we all know, such an event takes an enormous amount of work. The credit goes primarily to two people, Stan Hordes, who planned the content and recruited the speakers, and Barbara Baker, who worked out the arrangements with the Plaza Hotel. Credit also goes to members of the conference

committee who got involved in the early planning stages and followed through to the end: Ron Duncan-Hart, Carla Freeman, Robert Gale and Noel Pugach. My contribution was creating the printed program and keeping things on track. Much credit also goes to our new administrator, Ruth Carter, who worked endless hours before the conference taking care of registration details and then presiding over the registration desk with the help of Bobbi Jackson, our former administrator.



NMJHS President Dorothy Amsden

With the glow of the Las Vegas conference in mind, NMJHS is planning programs and another fascinating fall conference for next year. I urge you to renew your membership for 2011 and get active in the organization. Encourage your relatives, friends and business associates to join. We welcome your suggestions, volunteer services, contributions and most of all your shining presence at upcoming NMJHS activities. ☆

Museum of American Jewish History Opens

After visiting the Liberty Bell and Independence Hall, visitors will now have another mandatory stop in the City of Brotherly Love—the newly opened National Museum of American Jewish History. The Museum, a \$150 million undertaking, provides visitors with an interactive view of the Jewish

experience in the United States. Three and a half floors of exhibit space in the five-story glass building follow 350 years of Jewish American life. For more information, visit the Museum Web site at <http://www.nmajh.org/>

WANTED
Computer-Savvy Volunteer
Albuquerque resident

- Assist NMJHS Office at JCC
- Maintain equipment and software
- Update NMJHS website

Contact Dorothy Amsden,
dca@unmalumni.com

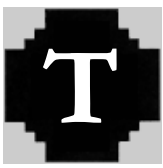
Invitation to India

The Texas Jewish Historical Society (TJHS) is going to India March 11, 2011! The tour includes a visit to the Taj Mahal and all the wonderful places you would expect to see, plus the ancient Jewish sites in the south of India,

including the 16th century synagogue in Cochin. A detailed itinerary can be found at <http://www.goaheadtours.com/tours/GTI/north-to-south-grand-tour-of-india.aspx>. You do not have to be a member of TJHS to join this tour.

Book directly through Go Ahead Tours on their Website or call 1-800-242-4686. Be sure to tell them you are with the Vickie Vogel or the TJHS group to get your discount.

Conference Attendees Learn and Celebrate in Las Vegas



The New Mexico Jewish Historical Society's 23rd fall conference, "Adventures along the Santa Fe Trail: The Jews of Las Vegas and Northeast New Mexico", wove together past and present, transporting participants from the days of the Santa Fe Trail to modern-day Jewish life in northeastern New Mexico. Over 120 people attended the event, some traveling from as far away as Texas, California, New Hampshire, and Washington, D.C.

Two pre-conference activities kicked off the weekend of learning and celebration. On Friday evening, a Shabbat service was held at the Newman Catholic Student Center on the campus of New Mexico Highlands University. The Newman Center encompasses the old Congregation Montefiore, the first New Mexico synagogue, established in 1884. Immediate Past NMJHS President Dr. Noel Pugach led the service. On Saturday morning, local historian Marcus Gottschalk led a walking tour of the Las Vegas Plaza, which was followed by a visit to Montezuma Castle (formerly the Montezuma Hotel).

Official conference proceedings included three Saturday and two Sunday plenary sessions. The first session, moderated by Dr. Alvin Korte, of Highlands University, featured two presentations that set the stage for an understanding of Jewish presence in the area. Dr. Susan Calafate Boyle, of the National Park Service in Santa Fe, presented her research on "Hispanic Contributions to the Santa Fe Trail Trade, 1821-1880." She described the Trail's opening, the goods that moved along it, and how they were moved (largely by mule). In many ways, the Hispanic mercantile elite resembled their

German-Jewish counterparts. Laura Gonzales, a graduate student at New Mexico Highlands University, provided a historical overview of the founding of Las Vegas—the first town New



Marcus Gottschalk leads a walking tour of Historical Las Vegas

Mexico settlers encountered on the Santa Fe Trail—and significant events in its history.

The second conference session introduced the Jewish pioneers of Las Vegas and northeast New Mexico. Sharon Niederman delivered a slide lecture on the "Synagogues on the Santa Fe Trail." Melanie LaBorwit offered an illustrated history of the Jewish community of Las Vegas, followed

to Ft. Union and frequently engaged in "chain migration," bringing out young male family members from Europe to serve as apprentices.

The day's final session featured three panelists on the topic of crypto-Jewry in the area. Gerald Gonzalez, J.D., and artist Sonya Loya each shared personal experiences of uncovering their Jewish roots. The Honorable Christina Armijo, a native of Las Vegas, described her close friendship with Las Vegas Jewish resident Max Nordhaus.

On Sunday morning, participants heard from speakers with connections to Jewish Las Vegas, both past and present.

The first session, convened by Noel Pugach, featured a panel discussion on the legacy of Las Vegas' and northeast New Mexico's rich Jewish past. Betty Mae Hartman, a granddaughter of Louis Ilfeld, recalled his stories about early days in New Mexico. Her grandparents honeymooned at the Montezuma Hotel, eventually settling in Albuquerque, where her grandfather was a leading citizen. Florence Ilfeld Beier shared information about her grandfather, Ludwig Ilfeld, Charles Ilfeld's nephew, who ran a hardware store in Las Vegas. He also served as lay rabbi of Congregation Montefiore, as Las Vegas' fire chief, as head of the New Mexico National Guard, and as an early movie actor. Nancy Paxton reflected on the times of her grandparents, Max and Bertha (Staab) Nordhaus. The conference's last session focused on Jewish Las Vegas today. Melanie LaBorwit, herself a former resident of Las Vegas, led a panel discussion among Diana Presser, Katrina Immerman and Nancy Terr, who discussed their lives as Jews in Las Vegas. ✧



Panel discussion moderator Noel Pugach introduces Florence Ilfeld Beier, Nancy Paxton and Betty Mae Hartman

by Dr. Noel Pugach on "The Jewish Commercial Presence in Mora County, New Mexico." He traced the arrival of Jews in the area, who sold provisions

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Volunteer Spotlight: Andi Kron



or those of you who have admired the lovely new NMJHS membership brochure, it was designed by Society member Andi Kron of Los Alamos.

Andi, a native of Philadelphia, first became connected with NMJHS approximately ten years ago, after hearing a talk by Dr. Stan Hordes on the topic of crypto-Jewry. Andi has lived in New Mexico since 1977, beginning her career in Albuquerque and then moving to Los Alamos where she worked at the Los Alamos National Laboratory's (LANL) geothermal Hot Dry Rock

program, making maps of geothermal potential across the United States. In 1982-83, Andi spent nine months living and working in Israel, learning Hebrew and experiencing kibbutz life. Settling back to life in Los Alamos, Andi met her husband Charlie Thorn in 1984 and started her own business making maps in 1988. She currently works part-time as a technical illustrator at LANL and enjoys donating her time and creative skills to various non-profit organizations. When asked about her design strategy for the new membership brochure, Andi responded that it would be, "To attract attention with the beautiful

cover photo and the word JEWISH in bold letters up top. Then inside, to keep the reader's attention with other cool photos and interesting text. Hopefully they'll sign up and join!" ✧

If you have talents to share with NMJHS, please contact Dorothy Amsden at dca@unmalumni.com or 505-662-6398. We are in particular need of volunteers with computer savvy, members to represent the Society at events, and various committee members.



*NMJHS Presidents
From left to right: Lance Bell, A. David Scholder, Claire Grossman, Sharon Niederman, Stan Hordes, Noel Pugach, Dorothy Amsden*

Thank You

NMJHS is grateful for your generous contributions. Following are the names of those who made contributions of \$100 or more to the Society.

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NMJHS Welcomes New Members

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|---|
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| Sally Cohen | Peter Mueller |
| Art Gardenswartz | Carmen Rodriguez |
| Paul and Nancy Greenberg | Lauraine Miller Rose |
| Betty-Mae Hartman | Irene K. Seff |
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| John and Evy Woods | Albuquerque Genealogical Society |
| Warren K. and MaryAnn Laskey | University of New Mexico Zimmerman Library |

IN MEMORY

NMJHS would like to extend its sympathy to the Hordes Family
In memory of Stan Hordes' mother, Frances M. Hordes

My Years In New Mexico (continued from p. 1)

body. A liar has to have a very, very good memory and you are not that smart." With his admonition in mind, I boarded the SS President Harding, United States Line, on July 7, 1936 and about three weeks later, I passed immigration in New York.

My father had given me American Express vouchers to cover my hotel in New York and my train ticket to Albuquerque. I was overwhelmed by my first impressions of New York and made friends with the American Express agent who arranged for my forward passage and a stay at the Palmer House Hotel in Chicago. The whole experience was exhilarating.

The letters I sent home bubbled with joy and happiness. I wired Nordhaus from the Palmer House announcing my arrival date, time and train connection. The train trip across this huge country during the 1936 election campaign between Willkie and Roosevelt was another astounding event for me. During a stop in Topeka, I stretched my legs on the station platform and could not believe the heat.

Arrival in New Mexico

A distant cousin, Rudolf Dreyer, met me on my arrival in Albuquerque. I was shocked when he informed me that Max Nordhaus had passed away a couple of weeks earlier. He said that he had been instructed to take me to the Nordhaus home to meet the family, and I went along in a daze wondering what was going to happen next.

After a short ride from the station to their home on 12th Street, I was met by the two Nordhaus daughters, Elizabeth and Maxine. My arrival seemed a complete surprise for them. Apparently, their father had never mentioned anything to anyone about me; I found out later that there was indeed a letter to my father that affirmed my pending arrival but I did not know about it at that time.

Elizabeth and Maxine were exhausted and overwhelmed with the events resulting from the sudden death of their father. They invited me to stay with them for the time being and told me that they would defer future dispositions. The meeting was short and I was soon left to ponder my situation and speculate about what I was getting into. In my first experience of facing life as an adult, one

thing was clear to me: I was far away from home.

I was shown to a guest room that was very comfortable and luxuriously furnished. It had a bathroom and large windows and a sleeping porch. Rudolf Dreyer had already wondered why I only had a small carry-on suitcase, nobody knew about my trunk that I had shipped from New York. I took a brief nap and ventured downstairs to look around. The family members had all left, I found two young Spanish-speaking girls, both domestics. Their English was perfect and we talked. They asked if I liked to dance and turned on the gramophone and we danced. I had fun, and I started to feel comfortable.

Family Connections

The next morning, I was up before the rest of the family and met my new friends in the kitchen. The breakfast room next door was magnificently set for a lot of people with loads of bread, pastries, orange juice and grapefruit; they told me to sit down and they then poured coffee for me. I was amazed by the opulence and decided to dive in. Shortly thereafter, Elizabeth, her husband Sam Minces, Maxine, and their brother Bob Nordhaus and his young wife Virginia came down and joined me. They were very friendly and we became acquainted.

Elizabeth told me that they were planning to leave for their mountain retreat near Las Vegas, New Mexico later that day and invited me to join them there. Sam Minces told me about his nephew, Bobby, who was visiting at the time from Cincinnati and who was already there and could be a nice companion for me.

We stopped at the Charles Ilfeld Company building in Las Vegas and then proceeded to Trout Springs, the Nordhaus summer retreat. The drive was spectacular. The family had a compound on top of a mountain that consisted of several buildings, a tennis court and a view across a stream. It was situated in beautiful wooded setting.

I met Bobby and it was not too long before we were on the tennis court. Elizabeth was wonderful to me and we had long talks, mostly about me and my

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Mission Statement

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

My Years in New Mexico (continued from p. 5)

family in Germany. I found out how they were related to my grandmother, Emilie Schuster Rosenthal. It felt really good to be their relative and be so quickly accepted by them. My stay at Trout Springs lasted several weeks. Bobby and I explored the whole region on horseback, sometimes with a guide from a local Hispanic family and later by ourselves; these horses were very sure-footed and could travel along paths over all kinds of terrain. We also went trout fishing in the creek and I had the best summer ever.

I became acquainted with Bob Nordhaus who came up on weekends; he seemed to take a liking to me and we talked about skiing. He was very interested to learn that I had started to ski in Germany as a small child and had hiked on skis cross-country.

The Charles Ifeld Company

After about six weeks in this paradise, Rudolf Dreyer appeared to take me back to Albuquerque and put me to work in his department, hardware, at the Charles Ifeld Company. I had also met Sam Mince's brother, Mickey Mince, who was a newspaper reporter at the *Albuquerque Journal*. I loved being around him and he took me to his office where I admired the teletype machines and the whole news ambience.

Rudolf picked me up the morning after my return from Trout Springs and took me to the office. I was introduced to Arthur Stern, the comptroller, and I was told that my starting salary was \$15 every two weeks. It was before Social Security. I was given some tasks to do, like filing and running all kinds of errands.

I soon found out that the business was divided into several divisions: grocery, the biggest one; liquor, of which Sam Mince was the manager; dry goods; and hardware. In our division we handled tools, building materials, appliances, guns, ammunition, saddles and automotive accessories. I had to keep running into the warehouse to check on availability of certain items. It did not take me long to catch on.

Rudolf was very efficient. I learned that he had come from Germany in 1928 and worked his way up to manager. He had an interesting inventory system that he

kept manually, and he taught me about profits and margins. Pretty soon, my duties were expanded and I was put in charge of updating the price books and catalogs. The catalog pages had to be duplicated with a ditto machine, and these catalogs went to all the outside salesmen. Of course, the master copy stayed in the office and I caught plenty of hell if something was not right. Rudolf was a tough task master.

I also learned about the rudiments of baseball. Rudolf's second in command, Bruno Morelli, was a great guy with lots of local customers. Morelli was from an Italian family, but he spoke fluent Spanish and we would go out at lunchtime and play catch in front of the building. He showed me how to use a baseball glove. I made lots of friends with other chaps working in the place and in some of the other departments. Sometimes Bob Nordhaus would ask me to go out to lunch with him and another young Jewish lawyer, Fuzzy Moses -- a special treat since most of the time I did not have enough money to buy lunch and I enjoyed the conversations with these educated young guys.

After a few weeks out of the house, I moved into a boarding house, where I had a room and dinner. When I could afford it, I went to the drugstore and had a doughnut and coffee for breakfast. Sometimes, on weekends, I would be invited by Elizabeth to come for dinner. The cashier at Ifeld's was a friend; sometimes I talked him into giving me a \$5 advance -- especially when I had a date-- but I soon was reprimanded by Arthur Stern for doing that.

After a couple of years, I was put in charge of bidding on all government contracts, which meant that I had to maintain records of when the bids were scheduled to be opened, attend those sessions, and if we were the successful bidders I had to procure the items ranging from all kinds of construction materials to appliances and household goods. Before submitting the bids I would also obtain commitments from the vendors for what I was bidding.

I was assigned to a desk in the office and was given my own secretary. I became

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GENEALOGY CORNER

Yizkor Books: A Personal Introduction

by Harvey Buchalter

Note: On September 26, 2010, Harvey Buchalter presented a genealogy program on Yizkor Books. The following column presents Part One of his talk. Look for Part Two in our March 2011 issue.



A casual conversation with another guest at a Jerusalem hotel in 1998 led me to this day, talking about Yizkor Books. The Holocaust Cellar, a place I had never heard of, might be of interest to me, he said. I made a note of it.

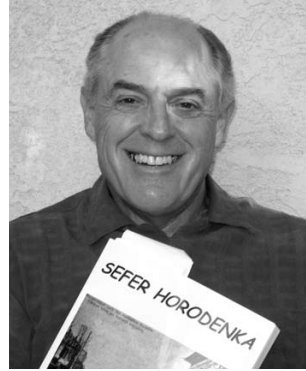
A day or so later, my family and I took a short taxi ride to a very untouristy section of Jerusalem to see this memorial to the *shtetlakh* – for that is the correct plural of *shtetl* – of Eastern and Central Europe.

It was not a Holocaust memorial with documents and artifacts recounting the Khurban, the destruction of our people in Europe. Instead, it contained row

upon row of tombstone-like monuments, each stone inscribed with the name of a *farsbrunde shtetl* – a disappeared town.

The most imposing memorial, carved in beautiful limestone was inscribed *Suchovoleh*. I stopped to catch my breath. This was the name of my mother's town, where my grandparents, aunts, uncles and their young children were led to their slaughter.

I took the requisite photos and resolved to dig out my mother's Yizkor Book, the



Harvey Buchalter

book of memoirs and the listing of those who perished in the Holocaust, which I had only casually looked at as I was growing up.

I was unclear about the significance of Yizkor books. But encountering these stones made me stop and realize how important they are in my own personal history.

The stones we had been looking at are memorials to places in Galacia – a province of the long-gone Austro-Hungarian Empire and places in the Pale of Settlement of

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conversant with the marketing department which led to increases and promotions. Pretty soon I was talking to the buyers of large local users like lumber yards and other large wholesalers. I had contacts everywhere for both buying and selling and it was not too long that I was able to buy a car and call on government and other clients including military bases and the University of New Mexico.

Drafted

I received my draft notice in 1941 and passed a physical examination. When I appeared at the local draft board office to obtain my induction instructions, I mentioned that I had a sister in Washington, D.C. and that I would like to visit her before entering the service. The draft board transferred my number to Washington, and I quit my job, sold my car, packed my few belongings and bought a Greyhound bus ticket to Washington.

I did not regret leaving my job. The prospect of seeing my sister and her new husband in Washington was exciting. I was not sure about having to be drafted but if it led for me to fight the Nazis that seemed like a worthwhile prospect. I still don't know how I could shrug all of those portions of my life in New Mexico off so easily but I never gave any of it a

thought at that time. I was looking forward to a new and unknown future.

After the War

I was discharged from the US Air Force in January of 1945. Although I was immediately offered a government job to remain attached to the Air Force as a translator, I declined. I'd had enough of regimentation and wanted "OUT."

I made immediate plans to return to Albuquerque to reclaim my job. Still in uniform, I went to the military airport and hitchhiked to New Mexico. After interviewing at the Charles Ilfeld Company, I was offered a position in Las Vegas to manage the tire department for \$100 a week. I turned down the offer; I already had heard that in Washington, D.C., cab drivers there were making more. I decided to go back to the East and at least be closer to my family.

Sadly, I learned that my maternal grandmother died of exposure in the Terezin concentration camp. Two of her sons also perished during that period.

In 1948, I married a beautiful woman and we started a family. (Currently, we have seven great-grandchildren and two more are on the way). I wound up in the per-

ishable food business and retired about 18 months ago.

New Mexico Memories

I look back on my years in New Mexico with nostalgia. The evenings in Albuquerque with the rays of the descending sun reflected on the Sandia Mountains, and then looking west to see the sun dipping into the desert and painting it red will stay with me forever. My other memories include the fabulous adventures on horseback and with a fishing pole on the Jemez River and in the Brazos Meadows and the Middle Rio Grande Conservancy Lake. I also remember with fondness the family, personal and business contacts I made there. I am still active and excited about having recently joined the New Mexico Jewish Historical Society. ✧

Wolfgang Mueller, a new member of the New Mexico Jewish Historical Society, is connected to several New Mexico Jewish pioneer families. Mueller's maternal great-aunt, Julia Schuster, was married to Abraham Staab. Several of his grandmother's cousins also had New Mexico connections. Mueller's grandmother was an aunt of Max Nordhaus.

Yizkor Books (continued from p. 7)

the Russian Empire, including Poland, as well as Romania, that our ancestors called home for generations.

Approximately 90 percent of the Jews living in America can trace their lineage to one of the towns inscribed on these stones of remembrance, or towns very much like them for which no memorials of any kind exist.

No Jews live in these places any more. Revolutions – those fought with weapons, post-World War I industrial revolutions resulting in the “decomposing *shtetlekh*” scenario described by historian David Roskies, the policies of the former Soviet Union and unceasing anti-Semitism - caused thousands to abandon *shtetl* life for the bigger towns or cities, or to emigrate across the seas.

But the hundreds of thousands of victims taken by the Fuehrer’s Gestapo, Storm Troopers and common soldiers, and their more-than-willing native collaborators, reduced their lives to the content of memoir.

In Yizkor books we find their stories, recalled and recorded later on by survivors of the Holocaust, émigrés who left their *shtetlekh* before 1939, resistance fighters, or those who survived in hiding.

My Mother’s Shetl

The oversized blue book which I have, *Sefer Suchovoleh*, tells my mother’s story – and the story of everyone else who called Suchovoleh home. Suchovoleh, a *shtetl* of approximately 4,000 souls, half Jewish, half Polish, between Bialystok and Grodno, 30 miles from the main railroad, *ab stettl vi aleh kleineh shtetlach* – was a little town like all the other little towns, as the first entry states.

The book was printed in Tel Aviv in 1957 by the then-middle-aged *balutzim* (pioneer settlers) who left the shtetl of their birth for the Yiddisheh Medina – the Jewish Homeland of *Eretz Yisrael* in the 1920’s.

These same Jews erected the memorial for their *farshfundineh shtetl*, the disappeared town, that memorial that I came upon, almost by accident.

The books were published with private financing by the Encyclopedia of the Jewish Diaspora, and distributed to the Landsmanshaft Societies – the folks who called Suchovoleh home, who met monthly to

keep up their ties to the town and to help each other, and in the post-war years, to help those who had endured and survived.

My branch of the Suchovoleh Landsmanshaft was called the Zaben Family Circle, named for the family of my maternal grandmother, many of whom arrived in America in the vast flood of immigration, prior to 1914.

Suchovoleh Landsmanshaft societies were founded in New York, Mexico, Montreal, and Tel Aviv/Jerusalem. Their Yizkor book, typical of almost all Yizkor books in existence, was written in Hebrew and Yiddish.

There are no entries in English in the half-dozen or so Yizkor books I have examined. The New York-based Suchovoleh Landsmanshaft Society, as well as the Zaben Family Circle, ceased to exist in the late 1960’s, typical of many societies whose American-born inheritors moved on to careers and family life, often away from the places of their birth.

A little bit of background is now in order: I am fluent in Yiddish, a product not only of a home where Yiddish was used more often than English, but also as a graduate of the Workman’s Circle Schools: *Di Arbeiter Ring Shules*, where secular Yiddish studies were the rule.

So I was familiar with Suchovoleh: the photographs of the white-bearded rabbis, the grand wooden synagogue that served as one of the models for the Yiddish Book Center in Amherst, Massachusetts, the photo of Yossel the *meshbugener*, literally, Crazy Joey, the *vasser schlepper*, pails of water hanging down from the yoke across his back, a deranged look in his eye. And the photos of the town brewery. As an 11-year-old, I was fascinated by this photo. Jews brewing beer: definitely not part of my East Bronx apartment experience.

My mother hardly ever talked about the past. The now-familiar story of a Jewish mother concealing the past’s brutalities from her baseball-card-collecting, *bee gebornerer* (native born son) has been played out countless times in fact and fiction, and this was no exception.

When my mother died in 2001 and the Yizkor book was passed on to me, I started an on-again, off-again search for biographies, told from a very personal point of view, specifically for the aunts

and uncles I never knew, who perished on the way to Treblinka.

Would I be able to find their names and perhaps something about the lives they led within the covers of the *Sefer Suchovoleh*? Within the pages of maps, photos, other memorabilia? The answer is no.

But I did discover the stories of family members who survived because they left Suchovoleh in their youth for Palestine. Those who perished? Their names are among those in the Yizkor listing on the back pages of the book.

Yizkor books contain not only the most complete lists of all who perished, sometimes the how and the where, but also the stories of the survivors, especially those stories that have the word *Zichron* in their title.

It is the same word in Yiddish as in Hebrew, and it means memories, remembrances, in this instance, of people. The writers wanted to make sure no name was left out. But again, in the case of Suchovoleh, knowledge of Hebrew, knowledge of Yiddish, are necessary to recall their names.

Two Towns

Today we will be uncovering the treasured history of two towns: Suchovoleh and also Horodenko, whose Yizkor book I translated from Yiddish to English, as did several others who also translated its contents from Hebrew to English. This rather colossal undertaking was supported by the Biederman family of Santa Fe, in 2006, and we all owe them a debt of gratitude.

The book is divided into nine chapters, as I will describe in this overview:

Chapter one describes the rabbis of Suchovoleh: There were no *Hasidim* in the town, no lines of miracle-working, charismatic ravs. Rather, these were “old school,” rationalist teachers and religious authorities who “sought meanings behind meanings, who had a tendency to analyze, examine, re-analyze.” They did not engage in confronting Ha Shem with song.

Chapter two describes the growth of the community from its beginnings in the 1600’s when the first Jews arrived to help manage the estates of largely absentee landlords. Many held trusted positions.

(continued on p. 9)

Yizkor Books (continued from p. 9)

Over many generations, towns sprang up to handle commerce in the area. More Jews arrived to perform the jobs created through cattle raising and farming.

This was typical of shtetl origins all through the area. Jews had lived so long in the town that the cemetery had filled up and become neglected, and new land had been obtained in the 1920's.

This particular writer goes on to say that before a burial could be made, the family of the deceased had to cover any debts he had incurred. An odd fact to include, as was a lengthy description of the artifices – mainly smuggling – employed by the kosher butchers to avoid paying the exorbitant tax on the distribution of kosher meat. This type of material – odd, curious, practices – finds its way to Yizkor books, delineating the lives – the social and cultural history – lived in the *shtetlach*, as no history book can do.

This background chapter also includes very graphic descriptions and vivid photos of the devastation from pogroms unleashed upon the town in the early years of the last century.

Chapter three describes the schools. Children spoke Yiddish at home and Polish in the marketplace. The *cheder*, a one-room schoolhouse, was the traditional school for younger boys and girls, taught by a *melamed* who lived in the town or by a *yeshivah* student, studying to be a rabbi, earning money to cover his tuition in the rabbinical academy.

The writer has no kind words for the *melamdim* (teachers) saying the following: “every *schlimazel* who didn't know what to do with himself became a *melamed*.”

Chapter four describes the Zionist institutions. It is useful to keep in mind that many of the early Zionists in Russia, Poland, and Galacia became the conveyers of their town's history and traditions. They survived the Holocaust by making *aliyah* in the 1920's. Their lives in the Old Country were consumed by the Zionist ideal, as they abandoned Suchovoleh as a hopeless place for Jews to live.

Chapter five describes the members of

the *Chevre Kadisha*, the sacred society entrusted with the deceased's preparation for burial in the *bais oilim* – the cemetery.

Chapter six, entitled Pioneer Organizations and Training Schools, again goes back to the Zionist history of Suchovoleh, describing the leaders and teachers of the Zionist youth who made *aliyah*. Here, on page 483, I encountered Yacob Zaban, the brother of my maternal grandmother:

“He lived on Janovah Street in the same house as Masha der Blinder (blind Masha). He was a *lamden*, a scholar, a modest person. He taught children both at home and in the *cheder*. He was a knowledgeable person, who read and was familiar with Hebrew literature, who later became a teacher of Talmud in the Hebrew School, and was involved in the endeavors of Mizrachi, a Zionist youth organization.”

In the back of the Yizkor book is his photograph. Thankfully, his name is not on the Yizkor listing; he made *aliyah* in the late 1920's and thereby saved himself.

Zionist ideas began to come to Suchovoleh in the early 1900's. The writers say that the Zionists actually replaced the Magids, the traveling preachers – sermonizers – who visited the town to offer a *drash*, a sermon about the holy books, in exchange for a night's stay, a good meal, a few *rubels*. But it was not Zionism that emptied the town of its youth, but rather emigration, mainly to the United States, before the Great War.

The Yizkor book is chockfull of glimpses of emigrants. For example, the young *chazzan* leaving home to become the cantor of a *shul* ... in Detroit.

Other young Jews stayed in the region, migrating to the big city, Bialystok, working in the new factories and very likely, becoming Bundists, members of the Jewish Workers Union, fighting for the rights of the working class. They believed that a Jewish nation with Yiddish as its language could be birthed in the Russian provinces and the lands of Galitzia.

Chapter seven describes the typical market, the excitement of market day. For many Jews, this was the only day of the week they actually took home cash for

selling goods they had bought from one and sold to another, the famous *handlen* (barter) of the *shtetl yarid* (market).

Chapter eight is the longest one. It contains capsule portraits of individuals who lived their lives in Suchovoleh, or later made *aliyah*, or emigrated to America, Canada or Mexico.

By the year of the Nazi invasion, 1939, the size of the *shtetl* had shrunk. Many had left for the larger town of Bialystok, Eretz Israel, Mexico. The Landsmanshaft Society in Mexico counts about 40 Suchovoleh families. Or Canada, where Mina Aronovska, aged 20 arrived at the port of Halifax, Nova Scotia, bundled up against the chill air, in January, 1932.

Mina was my mother, who may have preferred the United States, but its borders were all but closed to East European immigration. The Suchovoleh Jews in Mexico *Habben zikh genumen tzu handlen*, became peddlers in the villages of the Mexican hinterland, later opening up their own shops in the larger towns, thus establishing Jewish communities.

Chapter nine is the Yizkor listing of the Jews rounded up by the Nazis and their collaborators and taken off to the *concentratzja lagers* the camps, or were known to have been machine-gunned to death, on the spot, by the *Einsatzgruppen*, their bodies thrown into pits filled with lime.

In the Yiddish entries of Sefer Suchovoleh, there are no stories of survival in the forests, or rescue by friendly Poles as there are in Sefer Horodenko.

In Horodenko, a total of only 25 Jews were saved by the kindness – and the enormous risk taking – of Ukrainian friends and neighbors.

But all Yizkor listings are only partial. They are often augmented by additional names added by survivors to the exhaustive records of Yad Vashem in Jerusalem. ✡

Former NMJHS Board member Harvey Buchalter is a retired APS teacher, artist and sole owner of *Harvey Buchalter Sculpture and Judaica*.

PEEK INTO THE PAST

The First Quarter Century of Rabbinical Activism at Congregation Albert

by Naomi Sandweiss

Special thanks to Judy Weinreb of the Israel C. Carmel Archives at Congregation Albert for much of the material presented in this article.



Albuquerque's Congregation Albert, founded in 1897, was the second synagogue established in New Mexico. From the start, congregational affairs were woven into

the fabric of Albuquerque community life. When the synagogue's cornerstone was laid in 1899, New Mexico's governor, Albuquerque's mayor, members of the Masons and other leaders joined congregants in celebrating the event. Established in the Reform tradition, Congregation Albert welcomed six rabbis in its first 25 years. Beyond their positions as religious leaders, these early Rabbis were community activists, whose causes were sometimes at odds with their congregants' wishes.

In November 1897, a few months after organizing the Congregation, members of the board gathered at David Lesser's cigar store to review responses to their advertisement for a rabbi in *The American Israelite*. William H. Greenburg of London was secured—sight unseen-- at a salary of \$125 a month.¹ It was Rabbi Greenburg who initiated a tradition of community leadership. The newspaper celebrated the Rabbi's arrival and his presence was sought at community-wide events. At the end of his two-year contract, Rabbi Greenburg resigned to lead a larger congregation in Sacramento and later served as Rabbi of Emanu-El in Dallas.

Which were the Congregation Albert congregants of the early 20th century? The congregation was populated primarily by self-employed merchants and their families. Far from being isolated in Jewish circles, they were significantly involved with the community, upon whom they relied for their livelihoods. Religiously, many of these individuals were part of the German migration to the United

States, comfortable with Reform Jewish traditions such as the mingling of men and women at services, the absence of a kosher kitchen, and Friday night services. It wasn't until after World War I that Albuquerque saw an influx of Eastern European Jews with more traditional religious leanings.

Following Rabbi Greenburg, most of the congregation's clergy were American-born graduates of Hebrew Union College (HUC), established by Isaac Mayer Wise in 1875. HUC's curriculum was rooted in "modernity," and its thinkers argued that moral conduct and social justice, rather than faith, laws and ritual practices, formed the essence of Judaism."²

The rabbis on the pulpit after Rabbi Greenburg wasted no time in developing allies and causes well beyond the Jewish community. Following a short-lived stint by Rabbi Pizer Jacobs, who was advised that his "services would no longer be required by the congregation"; Rabbi Jacob Kaplan came to the pulpit from Denver in 1902. Rabbi Kaplan, beloved by congregants, was an advocate both within and outside the synagogue. Due to his requests, the congregation hired a religious school teacher, established a Rabbi's Fund, and built a parsonage.



Rabbi Jacob Kaplan

Rabbi Kaplan represented the congregation at community events, including delivering a baccalaureate address at New Mexico Military Institute and teaching community classes on ethics and psychology. Kaplan partnered with his Protestant counterparts, asking the Temple's trustees for permission for the First Methodist Episcopal Church to hold their services at Temple Albert and forming a nonsectarian aid society for the impoverished ill in 1904.³ Kaplan also began

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Peek into The Past (continued from p. 9)

publishing a newsletter, *The Barbarian*, in conjunction with his colleague Reverend Crawford. While congregants supported the Rabbi by purchasing advertising space, some of his points of view may have concerned the merchants.

In 1906, Kaplan offered his opinion of the Territorial Fair, held in Albuquerque. "Annual fairs, like annual revival meetings, are a good thing when they are over. A Fair is an invitation for the rats of civilization to come out of their holes and walk the streets unmolested." Kaplan was an early advocate of equality among the races, warning his readers not to "presume too much upon your color."⁴ In 1907, shortly after Kaplan's contract was renewed and he received a no-interest loan from the board, a dispute arose over Kaplan's published attack on perpetrators of a lynching against a black man. After receiving violent threats, Rabbi Kaplan resigned immediately and left the congregation with a three-month severance package.⁵

Rabbi Kaplan's successor, Rabbi Edward Chapman, concerned about his low salary⁶ and deterred by ill health, remained at the congregation just three years. His successor, Mendel Silber, who took the pulpit in 1910, made a significant impact upon the Albuquerque community. In addition to his rabbinical education, Dr. Silber was trained as a medical doctor.⁷ Silber was a strong opponent of intermarriage, writing in 1908 that, "Inter-marriage is inadvisable, undesirable and unpermissible."⁸ Despite his opposition to romantic partnerships between Jews and non-Jews, he was very committed to interfaith cooperation. In 1913, Silber successfully partnered with Father Alphonso Mandalari and Albuquerque's mayor to raise funds for a new building for St. Anthony's orphanage.⁹ Silber also served as dean of the University of New Mexico College of Education in the absence of dean Charles Hodgkin. An early supporter of education, Silber advocated the creation of a new public high school in Albuquerque. His lectures, such as one entitled "What Constitutes True Charity?" delivered in 1911, were attended by members of the entire community.

In 1914, Silber switched pulpits with Rabbi Moise Bergman of Congregation Gates of Prayer in Lafayette City, Louisiana.¹⁰ Although Rabbi Bergman was a native of Louisiana, his wife was ill, and

it was thought the dry New Mexico air would do her good. Having graduated just two years apart from Hebrew Union College, the two rabbis likely were friends.

While he made many contributions to the congregation over his eight years of service, Rabbi Bergman's legacy was shaped by his response to the Spanish influenza epidemic of 1918. As Secretary of the Albuquerque Board of Charities, Bergman worked hard to help victims and prevent future outbreaks, risking his own health to visit patients. Bergman strongly supported Albuquerque's quarantine, much to the dismay of some of his merchant congregants.

Bergman responded in print to the concerns of Albuquerque's business people (many of whom were his congregants), "it is hard to answer the man who says his business has been hurt by the restrictions, but it will be impossible to answer the one who says 'my child has died because of the neglect of the city'."¹¹ Bergman led a drive to raise \$10,000 for the poor in Albuquerque, including those children left orphaned by the epidemic, all the while maintaining close relationships with his Christian counterparts.

The decades that followed the first 25 years of rabbinical service at Congregation Albert were also populated by clergy with an interest in community issues. Particularly memorable was Rabbi Abraham Lincoln Krohn, who served the congregation from 1931-1938 and was trained as both a social worker and rabbi. Krohn went to Washington, D.C. to lobby on behalf of farmers against the Middle Rio Grande Conservancy district and served as President of the Bernalillo County School Board.¹² Krohn was ordered by Temple Albert's trustees to desist from his activities.

Curiously, there is no evidence that Congregation Albert's earliest spiritual leaders focused much of their efforts on the national issues of their day. During the congregation's first 25 years, the U.S. faced labor strife, Prohibition, immigration conflicts, and the rise of hate groups such as the Ku Klux Klan. Internationally, the Great War dominated the era. Meanwhile, Albuquerque's early rabbis were focused primarily on local issues.

What motivated their efforts? The congregation's early clergy came of age

during the era of the Protestant social gospel movement and Reform Jewish social activism, which shared common goals, if not a common underlying theology. The duty of the Reform movement, as articulated in the 1885 Pittsburgh Platform, was to "participate in the great task of modern times, to solve...the problems presented by the contrasts and evils of the present organization of society."¹³ Ultimately, Congregation Albert's early clergy addressed the problems they witness with their own eyes—lack of resources for orphans, the suffering of the flu victims and the needs of the poor. In doing so, they established a foundation upon which subsequent clergy addressed the issues of their times. ✡

1. Congregation Albert minutes, November 1897, Israel C. Carmel Archives at Congregation Albert.
2. *American Judaism: A History*, Jonathan D. Sarna, Yale University Press, 2004, p. 195.
3. *A History of the Jews of New Mexico*, Henry Tobias, UNM Press, 1992, p. 141.
4. *The Barbarian*, Rabbi Jacob Kaplan, October and November 1906.
5. Tobias, p. 142.
6. *Jewish Life in Small Town America: A History*, Lee Shai Weissbach, Yale University Press, 2005.
7. Silber graduated from St. Louis College of Physicians and Surgeons. *Albuquerque Morning Journal*, March 24, 1911.
8. *Yearbook of Central Conference of American Rabbis*, volume 18, 1908.
9. St. Anthony's Orphanage Historic American Buildings Survey, 1989.
10. *The Jewish Community of New Orleans*, Irwin Lachoff, Catherine C. Kahn, Arcadia Books, 2005.
11. *Epidemic in the Southwest, 1918-1919*, Bradford Luckingham, Texas Western Press, 1984.
12. Tobias, p. 142.
13. *Reform Judaism and the Jewish "Social Gospel"*, Darren Kleinberg, CCAR Journal: The Reform Jewish Quarterly, Fall 2009.

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Dr. Avinoam Patt, Professor of Modern Jewish History at the University of Hartford, will talk about events in Europe between the end of World War II and the founding of the state of Israel.

By 1947, 300 Zionist farms and kibbutzim were established by young survivors in the American zone of occupied Germany. The Zionist farms became youth movement and later migration centers as thousands left for Israel.

For more information about the program, please call 505-348-4471 or 505-920-7771.

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