



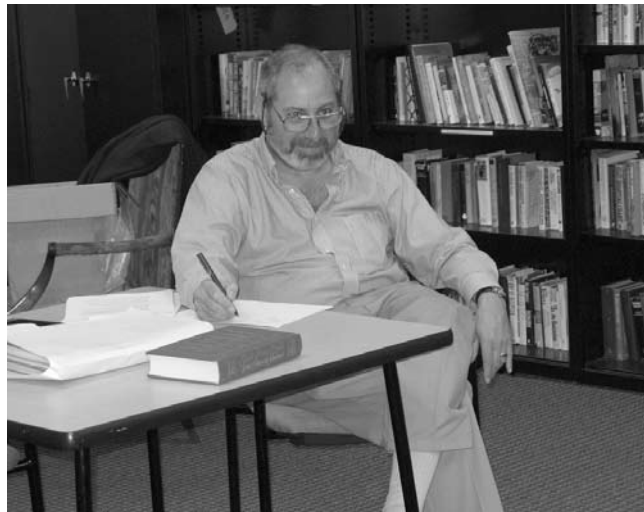
Conversos and Crypto-Jews in the Popular Press: A Survey

by Norma Libman

For almost three decades, the story of the Conversos and crypto-Jews of the American Southwest has been big news in the popular press. Everyone from *The New York Times* to *Hadassah Magazine* to the *Forward* has had a go at it on more than one occasion. Over the years the focus has shifted from oral tradition – tales of ancestors who survived the Inquisition in Spain by converting to Catholicism while maintaining Jewish practices in secret – to genealogy studies and then to DNA research. Various authors’ approaches to the subject range from awestruck to playful to snide derision.

The movement from serious studies of “marranos” (a word no longer acceptable because of its insulting connotation) by such historians as Cecil Roth to more accessible versions of the story occurred in large part because of the appearance of Dr. Stanley Hordes on the scene. In 1981 Hordes took the position of State Historian of New Mexico. Because he

had completed his doctoral dissertation on the Inquisition in Mexico City, people started to approach Hordes with tales of a survival of Jewish practices in New Mexico; Hordes began to study the phenomenon. When *The New York Times* ran several stories on the subject, other publications began to take an interest.



Dr. Stanley Hordes

Two early *New York Times* articles (“Scholars and Descendants Uncover Hidden Legacy of Jews in Southwest,” Nov. 11, 1990 and “After 500 Years, Discovering Jewish Ties That Bind,” Nov. 29, 1992) are written by Kathleen Teltsch. In both she includes brief summaries of the history of the Conversos and singles out some individuals to interview concerning their families’ stories. Teltsch quotes Hordes in both articles and Rabbi Isaac Celnik, then Rabbi of B’nai Israel in Albuquerque, in the earlier one. Also in the first article, Rabbi Marc Angel, of Shearith Israel in New York, is quoted describing some of his objections at that time to accepting Conversos as Jews. By the second article there is no mention of naysayers.

In an Oct. 29, 2005 *New York Times* article (“Hispanics Uncovering Roots as Inquisition’s ‘Hidden’ Jews”) written by Simon Romero, we see the changes that a decade has brought to the topic. For one thing, Romero includes developments in the field of DNA studies and references Bennett Greenspan, founder and chief executive of Family Tree DNA, on the work his company is doing to help “Hispanics interested in exploring the possibility of Jewish ancestry.”

On a disturbing note, however, one can also see in Romero’s article hints that he has read, and possibly taken as valid, material that appeared in the December 2000 issue of *Atlantic Monthly*. This magazine published an article (“Mistaken Identity?: The Case of New Mexico’s ‘Hidden Jews’”) by Barbara Ferry and Debbie Nathan.

It’s hard to know where to begin in reviewing this particular article, possibly the most inaccurate and distorted account of the Converso story ever to appear in the popular press. On the first page of the article there is a picture of a mysterious-looking stone object with some Hebrew letters. No caption identifies the source of the photo. It is, of course, nothing more

(continued on p. 7)

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5520 Wyoming Blvd. NE
Albuquerque, NM 87109

Telephone: (505) 348-4471
Fax: (505) 821-3351
website: www.nmjhs.org
email: nmjhs@jewishnewmexico.org

Administrator: Bobbi Jackson
Office Hours: 9 a.m. - 3 p.m.
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Message from President Noel Pugach



any changes are in the offing for the New Mexico Jewish Historical Society. I want to use the President's Letter in this issue to bid my farewell as President of the New Mexico Jewish Historical Society. My two-year term comes to an end with our Annual Meeting on June 27, when the list of new officers and board members is presented to the membership. I hope to see many of you at that occasion and join in welcoming our new officers.

I think the past two years have been highly productive and rewarding. We have had some very exciting and interesting speakers and conferences. Our first joint conference with the Texas Jewish Historical Society was a landmark event and last fall's conference in Santa Fe was extremely informative and delightful. Please plan to attend the 2010 fall conference which will be held in Las Vegas, New Mexico. A very exciting program is in store for the Society, its members, and guests. See the article on the preliminary plans for the fall conference in this issue of the newsletter.

I also want to thank Dr. Leon Cohen for his interesting and insightful talks on the Jews of Carlsbad, New Mexico. It was

very rewarding to learn about the many achievements and contributions of the small Jewish population to the community of Carlsbad and the state of New Mexico. Dr. Cohen is one of the devoted members of the Society in that faraway corner of the state; he often makes the long trek to attend our major events.

I also want to announce that Naomi Sandweiss is taking over as editor of *Legacy* with this issue. Naomi has published several articles in the newsletter and has been writing a regular column, "Peek into the Past." Naomi will be assisted by our new associate editor Helen Horwitz. Helen published a fascinating article entitled "The Jewish Albuquerque That I Remember, 1940-1955," in the March 2008 *Legacy*. She is a fine writer and editor. I must again thank Dorothy Amsden for her superb work as editor of *Legacy* for the past several years. She placed the stamp of excellence on the Newsletter and thereby enhanced the reputation of the Society.

While I am on the subject of *Legacy*, I direct your attention to the other articles

in this issue, skillfully edited by Naomi. Norma Libman examines the current, sometimes heated, debate on the case

for the phenomenon of crypto-Jewry in the Americas. Barry Gaines has taken over the chairmanship of the Genealogy Committee and has written this month's column. Stan Rosen provides us with an enlightening review of Jean Abrams' important study of Women in the West.

I leave office confident that the new leadership is in very able hands and will bring growth and beneficial

initiatives to the New Mexico Jewish Historical Society. As past president, I will continue to serve on the board of directors. I also intend to remain active in Society affairs. I am engaged in several writing and research projects and plan to use these pages to inform you about them.

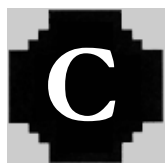
Finally, I want to thank the board of directors, our administrator Clara "Bobbi" Jackson, and the entire membership for their support, assistance, and encouragement over the past two years. It has been an exciting experience. ☆



NMJHS President Noel Pugach.

Albuquerque's Congregation B'nai Israel Marks 90th Anniversary

by Noel Pugach and Harvey Buchalter



ongregation B'nai Israel of Albuquerque will celebrate its founding 90 years ago this fall. The "Shul" was established in 1919 by traditional/Orthodox-inclined Jews, largely from Eastern Europe or their descendants, who felt uncomfortable attending services at the Reform Temple Albert, Albuquerque's only other synagogue at the time. Most of its members were drawn from the Jewish merchant community in "New Town."

Initially the congregation was lay-led and gathered in rented space in the downtown Sunshine Theater Building on Central Avenue. The cornerstone for B'nai

Israel's first building, on the corner of Coal and Cedar SE, was laid in 1940. The congregation built its current structure at Washington and Indian School Road NE in 1971. The Conservative congregation currently has approximately 275 member families and is formally affiliated with the United Synagogues of America.

Among the many events to mark the anniversary will be two lectures on the history of Congregation B'nai Israel, the first on November 3, the second on November 10. The speakers are long-time members of the congregation, almost all of them Albuquerque natives. The lectures begin at 7 p.m. The pre-registration fee for members is \$7, non-members \$10, and includes a light

dinner at 6:30 p.m.; \$15 at the door. Call B'nai Israel at 266-0155 to reserve your place.

NMJHS joins the rest of New Mexico in congratulating Congregation B'nai Israel on reaching this important milestone. Look for a major article on the history of the congregation in the September issue.

Harvey Buchalter is a noted sculptor, retired school teacher and Yiddishist. He is a former member of the NMJHS board.

Noel Pugach is Professor Emeritus at the University of New Mexico and President of NMJHS. ☆

Book Review

Review by Stanley Rosebud Rosen

Jewish Women Pioneering the Frontier Trail: A History in the American West

Abrams, Jeanne E.

New York University Press, NY 2006, 279 pages, index and photos.

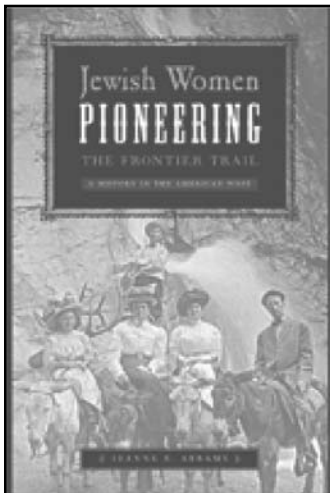
Major histories of Jewish pioneering in the West have focused primarily on Jewish businessmen, mayors and even cowboys. Women were described as housekeepers, and most often the silent partners in the historical drama of westward expansion and settlement. Women's history that has been published focused on the East, particularly, New York City.

Jewish Women Pioneering the Frontier Trail: A History in the American West is a well written, well researched and readable book that tells the story of the distinct role that Jewish women played in the west as leaders, home-makers, advocates for the Jewish religion, within professions, academia and in politics.

Given their small numbers, women's participation in progressive social reforms, commerce, politics, the professions and education at all levels is impressive. The book provides readers with an understanding of the important leadership role Western women played in the national women's organizations, starting with their establishment in the 1820's.

Each of the seven chapters dramatizes the life stories of women pioneers, often starting with their European roots and family histories, journeys to and settlement in the West. The narrative stories are detailed and well-

described and illustrate the subjects' development and adaptation to American society, while at the same time documenting their key role in maintaining Jewish religion and traditions. Women's contributions were bolstered by accepting husbands who were accomplished in their own right, and their developing contacts with Jewish women and organizations in the East, the Midwest and the South.



The establishment of the National Council of Jewish Women at the Chicago Exposition in 1893 was one of the many national Jewish organizations that enabled women to acquire leadership skills, ideas and support for local efforts. As transportation and communication im-

proved, national organizations provided an arena and resource for Western women to give creative leadership at the national level and bolstered their many-faceted local activities.

Flora Langerman Spiegelberg's story will be familiar to New Mexicans. Born in New York City, Flora Langerman married Willi Spiegelberg, a German immigrant who built a successful business with his four brothers in Santa Fe. Mrs. Spiegelberg was the founder of the first Jewish Sabbath School in New Mexico and hosted High Holiday and Passover observances in her home. She played an important role in organizing entertainment for her husband's clients and

was particularly effective in maintaining multi-cultural contacts within the community.

Another New Mexican, Anna Freudenthal Solomon, recalled arriving in Las Cruces, "I could not help having tears come to my eyes when I saw mud walls. Within a day I had the house looking comfortable." There is a photo of Freudenthal Solomon driving a horse and buggy, one of many photos included throughout the book.

The ability to adapt and grow in a new and often strange environment was a characteristic of the women documented. Jewish women were true pioneers in all respects. They took on challenges, adapted culturally and made important contributions to both the general and Jewish communities in which they lived.

The story of Fanny Brooks (Bruch) illustrates this well. Born in Prussia, a daughter of weavers, Fanny Bruch was well-educated and cultured. Her three-week journey to the United States was enjoyable, so much so that she did not want to leave the boat when it arrived in New York City. But leave she did, traveling from New York to Galena, Illinois, to Florence, Nebraska, to California and finally to Salt Lake City by wagon train. It charged \$65.00 per person, and averaged 13 miles a day. Along the way, men and women shared their tasks, although traditional gender roles were often in evidence with women in charge of cooking, washing and

(continued on p. 4)

NMJHS Annual Meeting June 27, 2010

Meet the incoming officers of the New Mexico Jewish Historical Society and help us honor the recipient of the Dr. Allan and Leona Hurst Award. Dr. Frances Levine, director of the Museum of New Mexico, and Gerald González, will present "In Her Own Voice: Doña Teresa and Intrigue in the Palace of the Governors" at the NMJHS Annual Meeting. The meeting will take place in Albuquerque at the Jewish Community Center, 5520 Wyoming Blvd. NE, from 2 to 4 p.m. Refreshments will be served.

Keeping You Up-to-Date via E-mail

NMJHS plans to inform its members of upcoming activities via e-mail. We will still mail out flyers to those who do not have e-mail addresses. However, to save on postage and to keep you informed of the latest developments, we want to make sure we have the correct e-mail address for you. If you are starting to receive NMJHS announcements electronically, there is no need to do anything. If you wish to receive our announcements electronically, please send an e-mail to nmjhs@jewishnewmexico.org and ask for your address to be added to the list.

Book Review *(continued from p. 3)*

cleaning. Fanny had a deft hand with driving the mules and her skills were appreciated by all.

After arriving in California in 1855, she then moved to Salt Lake City where all her four children died. Despite poor health, Brooks took in boarders, served meals to travelers and established a successful millinery shop. She had important relationships with the leaders of the Mormon Church, and worked to establish tolerance for Jewish citizens. Fanny Brooks became an important and well respected community leader.

Elizabeth Cohen was the first woman delegate to the Democratic convention in 1900 and seconded the nomination of Williams Jennings Bryant. She was one of many women who followed her in politics and community leadership, like Mary Goldsmith Prig. In 1952 Cohen worked as a high school principal, a women's advocate, and was instrumental in gaining the rights of married women to teach in the public schools and in pushing equal rights for teachers in California. At the age of 75, Cohen was elected to the San Francisco Board of Education.

Seraphine Pisk was one of the founders of the National Jewish Hospital in Denver. She joined hundred of Jewish women who worked to estab-

lish local Temple benevolent societies and other local and national Jewish institutions, playing a progressive role in philanthropy for the general community in which she lived.

Other names, experiences and accomplishments that might be forgotten without this book, include Haschen Hirshfelder, Helen Levinson, Rosa Newmark, Ricka Saftshayer, Yetta Cohen, Rosa Kastzen Stein, Rosa Drachman, Ann Fruedenthal Solomon, Flora Spiegelberg, Rosa Goldson and many others.

This book is must reading for those all readers who want to gain an appreciation of the accomplishments of these pioneer women, who along with others throughout the country, laid the groundwork for the important leadership role of Jewish women in our modern Jewish community and in our society. The author, Jeanne Abrams, is a professor at Penrose Library of the University of Denver.

It is a delightful and informative book, a smorgasbord of stories, historical analysis and insight. Read it, enjoy and learn.

Stanley Rosebud Rosen is Professor Emeritus, University of Illinois and Director of the Chicago Radical Jewish Elders Video History Project. ☆

Welcome to New NMJHS Members

Sarah Bennett
Albert Brettner

Gail Goodman
Abigail Hunter

GENEALOGY CORNER: “Letter to Readers”

by Barry Gaines



i. My name is Barry Gaines, and I am a genealogist.

While I have written both a genealogy column and a theater review for *Legacy*, this is the first time I am writing as NMJHS Genealogy Chair. So let me give you some background. My wife Janet and I have lived in Albuquerque for thirty years during which time we have both taught at the University of New Mexico. I specialize in the plays of William Shakespeare and would feel more confident writing a column on Shakespeare than on genealogy. Maybe another time. (Shakespeare just made the cover of the most recent issue of *Reform Judaism* so the idea isn't as bizarre as I had thought).

I am strictly an amateur genealogist, in part because of the mystery of my father's family. Like many immigrants, my father did not like to talk about the “Old Country.” I knew that he was born in Russia, came to the U.S. in 1923 as a 16-year-old orphan, and became an upholsterer. I even met two of his uncles on his mother's side, but as I turned 30 I did not know his original surname or anything about his family or his journey to this country. My wife wrote to him (born in North Carolina, she had trouble deciphering his thick Russian accent on

the telephone) asking that I be allowed to visit and learn more about my family history. He agreed, and I bought airline tickets—but he died five days before I was due to visit, and I exchanged the tickets to attend his funeral. That was 1976.

With the most logical and direct source of information suddenly closed, I decided to find what records might exist that would shed light on my father and his family. And if you are reading this because you have an interest in family history, and you have not yet interviewed your surviving relatives about their experiences and relationships, stop what you are doing and arrange meetings with those precious sources who will not always be available. I'll wait for you.

When I started my genealogical quest, I felt strangely isolated. I eagerly devoured Irving Howe's *World of Our Fathers* and then Arthur Kurzweil's *From Generation to Generation*, but it did not dawn on me that there were hundreds of thousands of Jews on a similar quest. When, in 1994, I arranged to go to modern Ukraine to visit the villages where my

father and grandparents had lived, I thought that I was alone in contemplating such a trip. (I have written about that adventure in the March 2008 *Legacy* [22.1:4-5].)

Since then, fortunately, I have discovered the world of Jewish genealogy both online and through individuals in our state. That brings me to the purpose of this column. I would like to know what you readers would like to see in columns or workshops or lectures about genealogy. Would you like to send me questions? Or to write your own articles about family history problems or successes? At what stage is your research: beginner? expert? in between? Would you like me to organize a trip to Salt Lake City to do research at the LDS Family History Library? Or to the National Archives in D.C.? Would you



Barry Gaines

like to discuss the etiquette of contacting strangers? I invite all of you to email me at bjgaines@unm.edu with your ideas and comments. One of my favorite parts of genealogical study is helping others find family records.

I sincerely hope that you respond.
Barry Gaines. ✨

20th Annual Conference of the Society for Crypto-Judaic Studies to Meet in San Antonio, TX, August 1-3

by Stan Hordes



The Society of Crypto-Judaic Studies (SCJS) will hold its 20th Annual Conference in San Antonio, Texas, Sunday, August 1 through Tuesday, August 3, at the Hilton Palacio del Rio Hotel on the Riverwalk.

Founded in 1991, the SCJS fosters the research and understanding of the historic and contemporary experience of crypto-Jews of Iberian origin. The Society sponsors an annual conference, and publishes a quarterly journal, *HaLapid*, edited by anthropologist and NMJHS member Ron Duncan-Hart.

This year's conference will feature the participation of historians, anthropologists, political scientists, literature scholars, and novelists, as well as descendants of crypto-Jews exploring their own heritage. Presenters will be arriving from various parts of the United States, Mexico, England, and Spain.

Soprano Debbie Bussineau-King and Pianist Ruth Friedberg, from San Antonio, will perform Sephardic Music, Classical and Folk, for the annual Judy Frankel Memorial Concert, August 2. Laura Cesana, visual artist and author from Lisbon, will speak on secret Jewish communities

in Portugal. Visual artist Mercedes Gail Gutierrez will coordinate the SCJS Art Gallery, including the work of Cesana, Gutierrez and Dan Riis Grife, visual artist from Coupland, TX. Gutierrez will also facilitate a panel entitled The Artist and Crypto Judaism.

Focus on the arts is made possible by a grant from the Sosin-Stratton-Petit Foundation.

Program and registration details will be finalized soon, and will be available through the SCJS website, www.cryptojews.com. ✨

2010 Fall Conference in Las Vegas: Adventures Along the Santa Fe Trail

by Stan Hordes



The New Mexico Jewish Historical Society's 23rd Annual Conference will be held October 22-24, at the Historic Plaza Hotel in Las Vegas, New Mexi-

co. The theme of this year's meeting will be, "Adventures Along the Santa Fe Trail: The Jews of Las Vegas and Northeast New Mexico," and will feature lectures, tours, a concert, and, of course, wonderful food.

Las Vegas was established in 1835 as a stop along the Santa Fe Trail, an important trade route that connected Santa Fe with Independence, MO. Hispanic crypto-Jews had settled in northeast New Mexico since the late 18th century, and the region attracted scores of Ashkenazi Jewish traders after the invasion and annexation of New Mexico by the United States in 1846. Las Vegas was the site of the first synagogue in New Mexico, Congregation Montefiore, constructed in 1886.

Pre-conference activities will include a Shabbat service on Friday evening,

October 22, at the Old Congregation Montefiore (since 1952 serving as the Catholic Student Services building for New Mexico Highlands University), followed by an Oneg Shabbat sponsored by the local Las Vegas Jewish



Plaza Hotel, Las Vegas, New Mexico

community. The following morning, Saturday, October 23, guides will conduct a walking tour of Jewish Las Vegas, a tour of Montezuma Castle, and a visit to Congregation Montefiore Cemetery.

The conference will begin with lunch at the Plaza Hotel, followed by lectures on the history of Las Vegas and the Santa Fe Trail, as well as presentations on Jewish settlement in the region.

After dinner, the group will be treated to a concert of liturgical music that actually had been performed in the 1880s and 1890's at Congregation Montefiore, taken from a songbook donated to the NMJHS by Diana Stein, who for years operated Los Artesanos Bookstore on the Las Vegas Plaza.

Sunday morning's program will include two panel discussions, featuring descendants of pioneer Jewish families, as well as members of the recently revived Las Vegas Jewish community.

The Conference will conclude with a lox and bagel brunch.

Look for further details in the September issue of *Legacy*. ☆

The Printed Past: Excerpts & Episodes from New Mexico's Colorful Jewish History



rom *The New Mexican*, Santa Fe.

September 21, 1881:

This new piece of news comes under the head of elopement, showing that while Mars has been busy Cupid has not been idle. The individual figuring most prominently in this affair is Miss Rosa Seitman, a young Jewess, whose pretty face and figure has played sad havoc with the hearts of several Santa Fe swains. Miss Rosa is the daughter of Mrs. Seitman, who keeps a small fruit store on San Francisco Street, and worked in her mother's store. Her pretty eyes fell into the heart of a young man whose name is not given for the reason it is not ascertained... Certum est the artful young man took time enough to convince Miss Rosa that

life with him was sweeter even than life in a fruit and candy store, and having done this he took the train for Las Vegas Monday morning and yesterday morning Miss Rosa followed suit, leaving her mother and lovers disconsolate. Beside the mischief which the young lady created among her friends she got the hack driver who took her over to the depot in trouble, the irate mother having had him arrested for complicity in the theft of her daughter. The driver gave bond and will be tried to-day.

September 24, 1881: The recent elopement has been cause of no end of trouble to all parties concerned. First of all came the trouble of the two lovers in succeeding in getting the connubial knot tied, despite the parental opposition encountered, the arrest of the hack driver, followed by the arrest of Cohn, the

groom, at Las Vegas, and lastly the arrest of the infuriated mother of the bride.

It will be remembered that on the day of the bride's departure, Mr. Crosson, who drives the hack, was placed under arrest and his trial set for the next day. When the time arrived, he was on hand but his accuser did not show up. Why this was...appears because Mrs. Seitman was in such a hurry to get to Vegas, that she did not want to carry out her threats against Crosson. Crosson...yesterday had Mrs. Seitman, who had arrived from Vegas the night before, arrested for carrying concealed weapons and threatening to take his life. Although the marriage of Miss Rosa has been attended by a series of events which it has been interesting to follow...lovers of sensations will have to look elsewhere for matter to satisfy their relish for such things. ☆

Conversos and Crypto-Jews in the Popular Press *(continued from p. 1)*

than the tetragrammaton carved above the doors of the St. Francis Cathedral in Santa Fe, a symbol that has nothing whatever to do with the Converso story. This is never explained in the article.

The very first words of the article announce that the true explanation for the phenomenon of Jewish practice among New Mexico Hispanics is “nearly as improbable” as the explanation that Conversos are descendants of Jews forced to convert to Christianity during the Inquisition. The authors glorify the flawed research of Judith Neulander who – while making some valid points about not relying on the possession of Jewish artifacts such as dreidels or mezuzahs as proof of a Jewish past – is the creator of the Seventh Day Adventist theory as the explanation of Jewish practices among Christians in New Mexico.

For a reader unfamiliar with the history of the American Southwest, an idea has now been planted that the accepted explanation is “improbable” when, actually, the explanation that the authors support – that the region’s crypto-Jewish practitioners were influenced by Seventh Day Adventists – is impossible, as Jewish behavior is documented in the area long before the arrival of the Protestant sect. The explanation that those families with Jewish practices are descendants of Jews forced into Christianity during the Inquisition is supported by historical documentation from Church and Inquisition records and is not the least bit improbable. The authors continue to misrepresent the facts of history and the stories of the lives of the individuals who allowed themselves to be interviewed.

In recent years some writers have taken a more serious approach by focusing on the scientific angle: specifically, developments in DNA research. The October 2008 issue of *Smithsonian Magazine*, for instance, ran an article by Jeff Wheelwright entitled “The Secret of San Luis Valley.” Wheelwright includes a history of the Conversos and crypto-Jews from the Inquisition to modern-day New Mexico, but his focus is on the

185delAG mutation of the BRCA gene in Jewish women, the mutation implicated in breast cancer, and its recent discovery in surprising numbers of Hispanic women in Southern Colorado. Until recently, this mutation was thought to be associated with Ashkenazi women only, but now it has been identified in women of Sephardic heritage, “los judios” of San Luis Valley in southern Colorado.

Talia Bloch takes this line of inquiry even further in her article “The Other Jewish Genetic Diseases” in the August 28, 2009 issue of *The Forward*. She includes a comprehensive discussion of genetic diseases in Ashkenazi and Sephardic Jews. In addition, the paper ran a second article by Bloch focusing on Persian Jewish disorders, a two-page list of Jewish genetic diseases with comments on symptoms, testing and treatment for each one, and more articles on Jewish genetic diseases by other authors.

Despite this seeming new serious approach and the scholarly interest in what DNA research can bring to the crypto-Jewish/Converso story, the old-style, breathless, “guess what’s happening out in the desert” type of story still appears in major magazines. So we find in the December 2009 issue of *Harper’s Magazine* an article entitled “Shalom on the Range: In Search of the American Crypto-Jew” by Theodore Ross.

Ross recounts his own scant Jewish history and says the “idea of hidden Judaism in Santa Fe had the feel of a tall tale, of yetis and UFOs and Atlantis.” He judges the practices of crypto-jews – sweeping to the center of the room, covering the mirrors after a funeral – as dubious because *he* has never heard of them. While some of the people he encounters in his travels in New Mexico are not genuine examples of Conversos, Ross adopts a tone which suggests that none are. His approach, in the end, is not serious.

We do not have space here to examine every article written about Conversos in the popular press. Most are respectful and accurate. Some are overly roman-

tic and excited in their approach, but the authors are well-meaning. They are journalists, not historians or anthropologists or psychologists. They give a brief history and some examples. They do not delve into the profound trauma of living a double life, of keeping a family secret, of finding out late in life that your family story is not what you thought it was. Nor are they equipped by training to tackle such subjects. The highest praise goes to those who do not trivialize the subject or attempt to make a joke at the expense of those who live this story every day of their lives.

At last, there is a body of serious scholarship accumulating that looks not only at the history of this phenomenon but also at the impact it has on people’s lives and on our understanding of Jewish history. We should turn to scholars such as Stanley Hordes, David Gitlitz, Seth Kunin, Janet Liebman Jacobs and others for answers to the many questions the Converso/crypto-jewish story raises. Below are several excellent resources:

Gitlitz, David M. *Secrecy and Deceit: The Religion of the Crypto-Jews*. The Jewish Publication Society, 1996.

Greenleaf, Richard E. *The Mexican Inquisition in the Sixteenth Century*. University of New Mexico Press, 1969.

Herz, Cary. *New Mexico’s Crypto-Jews: Image and Memory*. University of New Mexico Press, 2007.

Hordes, Stanley, M. *To the End of the Earth: A History of the Crypto-Jews of New Mexico*. Columbia University Press, 2005.

Jacobs, Janet Liebman. *Hidden Heritage: The Legacy of the Crypto-Jews*. University of California Press, 2002.

Kunin, Seth. *Juggling Identities: Identity and Authenticity Among the Crypto-Jews*. Columbia University Press, 2009.

Norma Libman is a journalist and educator who has been conducting research in the field of Converso history and contemporary life for 16 years. ☆

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www.nmjhs.org**



By the time you read this, the new NMJHS Web site will be on-line for your perusal and enjoyment. You

will find information about pioneer Jewish families, crypto-Jews, Jewish genealogy, the Montefiore Cemetery, the NMJHS archives, back issues of the quarterly newsletter *Legacy*, and links to relevant Web sites. You can renew your membership, give a gift subscription, and make a contribution online on a secure Web page. A new feature allows you to order publications online, including any or all of the 14 NMJHS booklets about Jewish pioneer families as well as the paperback edition of Stanley M. Hordes' *To the End of the Earth*.

Special thanks to the dedicated team who made this new, vibrant version

of the NMJHS web site possible. Computer-savvy Harold Melnick provided his knowhow in the early stages of planning the Web site. Dorothy Amsden worked long and hard to develop the content and logical organization. Last but not least, John Gravel of DT Publishing, who hosts the new Web site, chose the template and implemented the evolving concept with infinite patience.

You may have noticed that one important element is still lacking: photographs. We are looking for new material and will post relevant visuals as we come across them. If you have material that you think might be appropriate for the new Web site, please contact Dorothy Amsden at 505-662-6398. Send high-resolution digital images to her at dca@unmalumni.com. ☆

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.

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**Back issues of the NMJHS
newsletter are available
online at
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Montefiore Cemetery Cleanup

by Dorothy Amsden



ot even a brief spring blizzard could stop the intrepid people who trekked to Las Vegas, New Mexico, from Raton, Santa Fe, Los

Alamos and Albuquerque on May 2 for the annual spring cleanup of the Montefiore Cemetery. Adults and children showed up to participate in this mitzvah. They pulled weeds, raked detritus, planted irises, and several volunteers hauled heavy stones to add to the wall that caretaker Ted Herberger is building.

attended with their parents and teacher Yael Chaiken. They made tombstone rubbings with Carla Freeman, NMJHS vice president, who provided the materials and demonstrated the technique. The enthusiastic youngsters got to work and then studied their creations, identifying



Melanie Laborwit shares the history of the cemetery with participants. (Photo by S. Niederman)

The cemetery is in amazingly good condition, thanks to the dedication of the Montefiore Cemetery Association and the New Mexico Jewish Historical Society over the past number of years. Its tombstones date back to 1881, when Las Vegas was a thriving community with a sizable Jewish population. Family tombstones tell the history of families who made eastern New Mexico their home: the Ilfelds, Herzsteins, Taicherts, Regensbergs, Danzigers, Moises, Rosenthals, Teitlebaums, and many others.



Volunteer weeding the cemetery grounds. (Photo by D. Amsden)

the Hebrew characters and learning what the inscriptions meant.

The weather was sunny, but brisk. A cold wind convinced attendees that it was better to work than to watch. After a lunch of grilled hot dogs, beefburgers and other goodies prepared by Lewis Terr of the Cemetery Association, the workers young and not-so-young assembled to listen to Melanie Laborwit recount the history of the area. To close the event, Yael led attendees in saying kaddish before

everyone made their way home. ✧

A group of fourth graders from Congregation Beit Tikvah in Santa Fe

Thanks to
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PEEK INTO THE PAST

New Mexico's Jewish Burial Grounds

by Naomi Sandweiss

Establishing Jewish burial grounds was the first order of business for the Jews of the Americas.¹ The oldest existing Jewish cemetery in the U.S., located in Rhode Island, dates from 1677. In frontier communities, such as the New Mexico territory, it was no different. Pioneers could postpone other lifecycle events, but burials were inevitable and could not be delayed. In New Mexico, primarily a Catholic territory, Jewish settlers established cemeteries as early as 1881 and frequently used civic and social affiliations, such as Masonic membership, to secure Jewish burial places.

Las Vegas' Montefiore² Cemetery was deeded in 1881 and is part of what is now known as the Masonic Cemetery, which includes three burial grounds—the Masonic Cemetery, the International Order of Odd Fellows and the Congregation Montefiore cemeteries. In all, there are 2,350 names in the index of the stones in the three cemeteries. Charles Ilfeld (1847-1929), the patriarch of the Ilfeld family and empire, is buried in the original Masonic Cemetery as are a number of the Ilfeld/Nordhaus relatives.

In 1888, Las Vegas' Congregation Montefiore, the first synagogue in New Mexico, purchased a portion of the Odd Fellows burying ground as a cemetery.³ The New Mexico Jewish Historical Society conducts an annual cleanup of the Montefiore Cemetery (see Montefiore Cemetery Cleanup, in this issue), where several other Ilfeld relatives are buried including Carl, Max and Bertha Ilfeld.⁴

In Santa Fe, where there was no synagogue until the late 1940's, Jewish

residents were routinely buried at Fairview Cemetery, which was established in 1884. The cemetery was not Jewish, but used by those who were not eligible for a Catholic Church burial.⁵ Among the Jewish pioneers interred at Fairview include Governor Arthur Seligman and his family, seven members of the Staab family, and members of the Jaffa, Gold and Hirsch families.⁶ The Seligman and Staab grave markers, while impressively sized and even ornate (in the case of the Staabs),



The Joseph Rosenfeld grave in the Las Cruces Masonic Cemetery includes both Jewish and Masonic symbols.

do not contain Jewish symbolism nor Hebrew text,⁷ although those of other residents such as Solomon Lowitzki (1846-1903), contain both a Hebrew inscription and Masonic symbols.

Santa Fe businessman Sol Spiegelberg headed the Fairview board in the 1880's. Subsequently, the Women's Board of Trade (later the Santa Fe Women's Club), managed the functions of the cemetery. Bertha Staab, daughter of businessman Abraham Staab, chaired the first Women's Board of Trade cemetery committee.⁸ Today, Fairview Cemetery is overseen by the Fairview Cemetery Preservation Association.

In Albuquerque, B'nai Brith undertook the task of purchasing land for

a cemetery, which was formalized in 1892.⁹ As noted by Henry Tobias in *A History of Jews in New Mexico*, although B'nai Brith began the process of establishing a burial ground in 1883, the formal constitution for the cemetery did not come until almost a decade later. In 1902, the cemetery was purchased by Congregation Albert¹⁰ and is the resting place of many members of Albuquerque's pioneer Jewish families—the Grunsfelds, Ilfelds, Rosenfelds, Mandells among them—in addition to long-time Congregation Albert Rabbi David Shor.

The gravestones vary in appearance and reflect the style preferences of their respective eras. Many include places of birth. There is liberal use of both Hebrew and English. The Victorian-era gravestones frequently feature floral motifs and some graves are engraved with symbols such as broken chain links, lambs and the hand symbol of the Kohanim. There may also be gravestones of travelers who were victims of the 1918 flu epidemic.

In the early 1940's, Congregation B'nai Israel established its cemetery in close proximity to the Congregation Albert section. Today both burial grounds remain in use by the Congregations, and are part of the larger Fairview Memorial Park, at 700 Yale Blvd. SE where Fellowship of the Desert maintains a cemetery as well. There is also a Jewish War Veterans graveyard and memorial at the site, erected in 1978.

Many Jewish pioneers of Las Cruces are buried in the Masonic Cemetery. The cemetery was established by the Masons in 1867 and in 1921 opened to the general public. Several rows

(continued on p. 11)

Peek Into the Past (continued from p. 10)

in Section B are reserved for Jewish families and are under the auspices of Temple Beth El. Louis and Carmen Kahn Freudenthal, Herman Wertheim and Samuel Klein are among those pioneers buried in the Masonic Cemetery.¹¹

In other New Mexico towns without Jewish communal organizations, residents were buried in individual plots or community cemeteries. Kit Carson Cemetery in Taos is the resting place of Jewish pioneers Bertha and Alexander Gusdorf along with many well-known Taos residents including Mabel Dodge Luhan and, of course, Kit Carson. Early Mora residents were buried outside of town on the edge of a Catholic cemetery and include Louis Kahn and Rachel and Robert Lowenstein.¹²

For those residents in relative proximity to established Jewish cemeteries, the deceased were laid to rest out of town, as was the case of Max Goldstein, who died in Columbus, NM in 1921 but was transported to El Paso for burial.¹³

In addition to individuals who were buried in accord with Jewish tradition, crypto Jews may be buried in church cemeteries or family plots. The late photographer Cary Herz documented Catholic gravestones engraved with Hebrew text in her book, *New Mexico's Crypto Jews: Image and Memory* (UNM Press, 2008).

There is much to be learned about the history of New Mexico's Jewish residents from visiting their final resting places.

1. *The Canary in the Coal Mine, American Jewry 1654-1770* by Jerry Klinger

2. Lance Bell, former NMJHS President, recently brought my attention to a biography of Moses Montefiore, the

man for whom the Montefiore Cemetery is named. The book is entitled *Moses Montefiore: Jewish Liberator, Imperial Hero* by Abigail Green, Harvard University Press, 2010.

3. *A History of the Jews in New Mexico*, Henry Tobias, UNM Press, 1990, p. 12.

4. A full burial list is found on the Montefiore Web site at <http://www.lvjewish.org/cemetery.html>.

5. <http://www.masonicinfo.com/gravestones.htm>.

6. Ibid

7. See images at <http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~nma/santafe/fairviewselectedphoto.htm>.

8. *Fairview Cemetery*, Corinne P. Sze, Fairview Cemetery Preservation Association, NM Office of the State Historian.

9. *A History of the Jews in New Mexico*, Henry Tobias, UNM Press, 1990, p. 108.

10. *Congregation Albert 1897-1972*, Gunther Rothenberg, Congregation Albert, 1972.

11. Branigan Cultural Center *Visit Our Ancestors Cemetery Tours 2008 Guide to the Masonic Cemetery*.

12. *Jewish Settlers of Mora, New Mexico Circa 1850*, Arnold R. Waxman, NMJHS, *Legacy*, Vol. 20 No. 2, June 2006.

13. <http://files.usgwarchives.org/nm/luna/cemeteries/columbus2.txt>. ☆

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Calendar of NMJHS Upcoming Events

Check for more details at www.nmjhs.org.

Sunday, June 27, 2 - 4 p.m., NMJHS Annual Meeting, Jewish Community Center, 5520 Wyoming Blvd. NE, Albuquerque. Introduction of incoming officers, presentation of the Dr. Allan and Leona Hurst Award, followed by a presentation by Dr. Frances Levine, director of the Museum of New Mexico, and attorney Gerald González, "In Her Own Voice: Doña Teresa and Intrigue in the Palace of the Governors."

Sunday, September 26, 2 - 4 p.m., genealogy program presented by noted sculptor Harvey Buchalter on the topic of yizkor (memory) books, which commemorate a lost town in the Old Country. To be held at the Jewish Community Center, 5520 Wyoming Blvd. NE, in Albuquerque.

Friday-Sunday, October 22-24, NMJHS Fall Conference in Las Vegas, New Mexico, at the historic Plaza Hotel. See article on page 6 of this issue.

New Mexico Jewish Historical Society
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NEWSLETTER OF THE NEW MEXICO JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY



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