



## The Ifelds on Parade: A Family Reunion in Las Vegas

by Noel Pugach

**T**he sixteen members of the extended Ifeld family were in a festive mood as they sat down for dinner in the meeting room of the old Plaza Hotel in Las Vegas, New Mexico, on March 31, 2009. Members of the family were close and had gotten together on other occasions. But for a number of the guests, about a third of them from out of state, it was an opportunity to visit with relatives they had not seen for many years. They also knew that on that pleasant evening they were witnessing history – the public opening and dedication of the Ifeld extension to the Plaza Hotel.

The Ifelds were among the most significant pioneer Jewish families in New Mexico. Charles Ifeld was neither the oldest nor the first Ifeld to arrive in New Mexico and enter the world of trade on this part of the frontier. However, he became the head of the clan by virtue of his enterprising skill, personality, and his success in creating probably the largest and most important mercantile establishment in nineteenth-century New Mexico.

Beginning in 1874, and for many years thereafter, the Charles Ifeld Company was headquartered in Las Vegas, New Mexico. The town was already developing as a bustling commercial center, but its growth and prosperity were cemented by the arrival of the Santa Fe Railroad in 1879. In 1882, to accommodate the needs of visitors and business travelers to Las Vegas the Plaza Hotel was constructed.



Plaza Hotel (building on left) in Las Vegas with Charles Ifeld's Emporium.

From the start, the lovely Victorian-style building had a certain elegance and a commanding presence on the Plaza.

As a sign of the firm's prosperity and growth, Charles constructed, adjacent to the Plaza Hotel, one of the first department stores west of the Mississippi. It was appropriately called the Great Emporium. Although one cannot tell from the outside, the striking three-story building was actually built in two phases, in 1886 and 1889. The Emporium sold a wide variety of goods that met the needs of most shoppers in its day.

Over the following decades, Charles expanded into wholesaling, sheep raising, and other enterprises throughout the New Mexico Territory. To assist him in managing his business complex, Charles hired his brother-in-law Max Nordhaus, who emigrated from Germany in 1878 and played a key role in the development of Charles Ifeld & Company. Max Nordhaus moved the company headquarters to

Albuquerque, when it superseded Las Vegas as the New Mexico business capital.

Charles, however, remained in Las Vegas until his death. Over time, Las Vegas declined, and with it the downtown Plaza area and the hotel, which after World War II, survived as a restaurant and bar operating on the ground level. Eventually, the Ifeld building was purchased by the Rosen family of El Paso, which owned a number of retail establishments in the state. The Emporium was renamed the Bonanza, but along with other shops around the Plaza, it succumbed to the competition from Wal-Mart.

Meanwhile, encouraged by Charles and the reports of his success, other Ifeld brothers — Louis, Bernard, and Noa — had arrived in New Mexico to seek their fortunes. In the beginning, they worked for Charles in Las Vegas, or at his branch outlets. After gaining experience, Louis and Noa, later joined by their older brother Herman, established their own highly successful general mercantile store in Albuquerque, under the name of Ifeld Brothers and later moved into the sheep business and other enterprises.

Their nephew Ludwig also settled in Las Vegas, where he opened his own general store on the Plaza; he later moved it to

*(continued on p. 6)*

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### INSIDE THIS ISSUE

The Ifelds on Parade.....	1
President's Message.....	2
22nd Annual Conference.....	2
Past NMJHS Presidents - Part 1.....	3
Genealogy Corner.....	4
November Genealogy Workshop.....	9
Peek into the Past.....	10
Upcoming Events.....	12

## Message from President Noel Pugach



he more I delve into the history of New Mexico Jews, the more I become fascinated with the subject. The new information gives a more complete picture and adds to its complexity, while the family stories and nuances add to the color of the story. Such was my experience in investigating and writing about the Ilfeld family reunion in Las Vegas, New Mexico, this past spring. My account serves as the lead article in this issue of *Legacy*. My participation in the event and the enlightening interviews with family members and the owner of the restored and expanded Plaza Hotel formed the basis for this piece.

Naomi Sandweiss's column on the Jews of Trinidad, Colorado, conveys a similar feeling of learning and creativity. She captures the early history and contributions of this small Jewish community that reached into northern New Mexico and provided religious services to its small and scattered Jewish population.

The Genealogy Corner article in this issue by Steve Gitomer offers some pointers about traveling to ancestral towns to the growing number of people who are searching for their roots. Society administrator Bobbi Jackson begins a very informative two-part article on the past presidents of the New Mexico Jewish Historical Society. Bobbi dug through the files and interviewed the individuals who have occupied that office. I thank her for her initiative and efforts and for the insights that she provides.

One of the major programs of the Society is its annual conference. It highlights our mission and gives members and interested non-members an opportunity to learn and to socialize in a delightful setting. This year the conference will be held in Santa Fe on October 25, 2009. I direct your attention to Stan Hordes's description in this issue of this year's conference, which is a most appropriate examination of New Mexico Jewry and the Great Depression. Stan and his hard-working committee have put together an exciting and interesting program.

I urge you to reserve your place at the fall conference when you receive your registration brochure in the mail.

The Society will sponsor two more educational and entertaining events in November. See the Calendar of Upcoming Events on the back page and plan to attend them.

I encourage you to use these pages to advertise your businesses and insert announcements concerning family and friends. These paid announcements are noticed by our readers and help the NMJHS.

New members who join the Society after September 1, 2009, will have their membership extended through the end of 2010. I invite you to take advantage of this opportunity. As always, I welcome your ideas and suggestions.

At this time, I and the board of directors extend a very Happy New Year to our Jewish members and friends. May it bring us all peace, enlightenment, and joy. ✧

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## “Jews and the Great Depression in New Mexico”

by Stanley M. Hordes



In these very uncertain economic times, it is helpful to step back and take a look at how earlier generations coped with their own crises. Historical perspective can give us insight into our own times. It is in this spirit that the New Mexico Jewish Historical Society focuses its attention for its 22nd Annual Conference on “Jews and the Great Depression in New Mexico.”

This is your opportunity to learn about how New Mexico Jews weathered the Depression, and how this fit into the larger national framework. We will view photographs from those years, hear personal accounts, and learn about a bank that was saved from folding.

This year's Annual Conference will be a one-day affair, held at the lovely Hotel Santa Fe, in downtown Santa Fe, on Sunday, October 25. The hotel, which opened in 1991, is owned principally by the people of the Picuris Pueblo, the only venture of its kind in the United States.

The program will feature presentations by scholars of the Great Depression in New Mexico, as well as experts on the Jewish history of the period. A high point of the event will be a panel discussion including New Mexico Jews from various parts of the state who grew up in the 1930s and early 1940s. Following the lectures and discussions, Dr. Stefanie Beninato will offer an insightful walking tour (optional) of Jewish Santa Fe.

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### 22nd Annual NMJHS Conference

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The morning will begin with Dr. Craig Newbill, Director of the New Mexico Humanities Council, offering a slide presentation on Depression-Era Photographs in New Mexico. Next, University of New Mexico, Valencia Campus, Professor Richard Melzer, will set a context for the day by giving an overview of the Great Depression in New Mexico.

Following a brief break, Professor Henry Tobias will speak on the topic, “How New Mexico Jews Weathered the Storm,” and Naomi Sandweiss will offer an in-

triguing talk, “Hard Times in Taos: How Bertha Gusdorf Helped Preserve First State Bank During the Great Depression.”

The luncheon program features a panel discussion with the participation of Marian Petchesky Silver, of Santa Fe; Robert Taichert, of Albuquerque; and Leon and Kathryn Rubin, of Raton, all of whom will share their experiences as young children of mercantile families growing up in New Mexico.

Registration brochures will be mailed to NMJHS members around the third week of September. Non-members may request a registration brochure from Bobbi Jackson at [nmjhs@jewishnewmexico.org](mailto:nmjhs@jewishnewmexico.org) or telephone 505-348-4471.

The conference registration fee, which includes a buffet lunch, is \$70 per person or \$130 per couple for members. The fee is \$90 per person or \$170 per couple for non-members. Advance registration is required; registrants at the door will not be guaranteed lunch. For program details, see the NMJHS website at [www.nmjewishhistory.org](http://www.nmjewishhistory.org). ✧

# Perspective on Past NMJHS Presidents - Part 1

by Bobbi L. Jackson



In 1985, A. David Scholder called together a group of people, most of whom were Jewish, but not all, to discuss the advisability and practical aspects of organizing and managing a Jewish historical society. Among those who attended the meeting at Temple Beth Shalom in Santa Fe were Leah Kellogg, Peter Hess, Walter Kahn, Rabbi Leonard Helman, Stan Hordes, James Mafchir, Manuel Rodriguez, Jerry Wertheim, Dr. Paul Kovnat, Ralph Scheuer, and Michelle Zackheim. Mr. Rodriguez and Mr. Wertheim, attorneys, offered their services pro bono.

Some of the attendees voiced concerns that an increased awareness of a Jewish presence in New Mexico might boomerang on the New Mexico Jewish population. Nevertheless, those present decided to create a viable Jewish historical society dedicated to activities consistent with other Jewish historical societies in the United States.

The first event held by the New Mexico Jewish Historical Society (NMJHS), in August 1986, was a lecture at St. John's College in Santa Fe. The organizers expected a small turnout but were pleasantly surprised when over two hundred people showed up. The rest is history.

Following is a survey of the remarkable people who have served as NMJHS president, some of them for more than one term. Each write-up is based on interviews. Part 1 covers four Society presidents from the early days: A. David Scholder, Jim Mafchir, Suzan Campbell, and Sharon Niederman. Part 2, which will appear in the December issue of *Legacy*, covers the terms of Claire Grossman, Philip Saltz, Shirley Jacobson, Stan Hordes, Lance Bell, and Harold Melnick.

## A. David Scholder

NMJHS founder A. David Scholder had vacationed in Santa Fe in May 1977 before making the decision to move there. During his first year in Santa Fe he

met Abe Silver, and the two of them had lunch at the Palace Restaurant. (Abe and his wife Marian were owners of the Guarantee Department Store, previously known as the "White House.") David asked Abe if there was an active Jewish community in Santa Fe. An excited Abe said, "Absolutely! And guess what? You bought your home from a descendant of an important Jewish pioneer family, the Bibos."



A. David Scholder

This led to David's research at the Museum of New Mexico History Library, housed at the Palace of the Governors in Santa Fe, to get some background and also to read the book by William Parrish about the Ilfeld Family. At first blush, David thought the history of the Jews started in Santa Fe. He learned from Saul Cohen that it was important to begin his investigation in Las Vegas, New Mexico. After a few visits to Las Vegas, David had the good fortune to meet with Milton Taichert.

David and Milton forged a close relationship, which included their love of opera. This happened because Milton Taichert, who was about ninety years old and who lived in a Victorian-style home, was playing "Aida" as David climbed the stairs to his home. He mentioned his interest to Milton and the two of them sang a duet together, an aria from "La Traviata" and another from "La Bohème".

Milton's tremendous knowledge of the Las Vegas Jewish Community and its well-known Montefiore Synagogue (established in 1884) were priceless. David and Milton hatched the idea to organize and initiate a cleanup of the Montefiore Cemetery, the end result being the repair of all the damage done to the headstones in the Jewish portion of the cemetery.

David had many meetings with Milton, who had all the records and notes about the Jews in that area. Milton introduced

David to the works of Rabbi Floyd Fierman, who had published many volumes on the Jews of the Southwest. After reading a few of Rabbi Fierman's books, David contacted Stan Hordes who was then the New Mexico State Historian. Stan and David agreed that it would be exciting to formalize a Jewish historical society that would document the history of the Jewish families who lived in New Mexico.

Stan proved invaluable with his background and contacts. David later asked Rabbi Leonard Helman if he could call together people who had an interest in Jewish history, and they met at Temple Beth Shalom. It was at this informational gathering that the attendees agreed to pursue the idea of creating the NMJHS. The Jerry Wertheim law firm offered to have Manuel Rodriguez, a partner in the Jones/Gallegos Law Firm, do the legal work required to organize a 501(c)3 non-profit organization.

In 1985, after meeting Dr. Allan Hurst, an active member of the Rocky Mountain Jewish Historical Society, David agreed to organize a special evening of Jewish history at St. John's College. Allan was eager to have the thirty-five members of the Denver Jewish Historical Society who were visiting Santa Fe learn about the Jews of New Mexico. Over two hundred people turned out to listen to David, Stan Hordes, and Rabbi Fierman talk about different aspects of New Mexico Jewish history.

David became the first president of the Society and served two widely separated terms. His primary goal was to increase awareness of the importance of Jewish history in New Mexico. For example, he cited the Jewish merchants who literally transformed the economy of New Mexico from a bartering economy to a mercantile economy.

During David's two separate terms as NMJHS president, many firsts occurred, among them:

*(continued on p. 8)*

## GENEALOGY CORNER: Visiting Our Ancestral Towns

by Steve Gitomer



Lubny, Zlatopol, Nezhin. These strange-sounding names were ancestral towns I had heard years ago from older family members. They became even more intriguing when I embarked upon my genealogy research to try to pin down more fully the names, locations, and histories of as many of the ancestral towns as I could. During my research, using a variety of documentary sources, I was able to uncover other ancestral town names that few living family members had known about.

During a recent trip to Belarus and Lithuania my wife Joyce and I visited a number of these towns, hers and mine. In this article I want to give you a bit of the flavor of the planning, travel, and impact the visits had upon us.

Some countries provide more challenges than others to visit, such as Russia and Belarus. Not only is the distance and time to travel there somewhat daunting (over twenty-four hours of travel time from New Mexico), but there are considerable differences of language, alphabet, and social customs. Travel document requirements also confront the traveler. The easiest approach is to seek a tour provider offering to take care of the myriad logistical details and to provide the all-important local transportation, tour guides, and interpreters you'll need to have a successful and rewarding experience.

When we arrived at the Belarusian border by train from Lithuania, the border officials noted that our visas were in order but asked about our medical insurance. Luckily we had purchased a comprehensive medical policy for the trip from Medex. Unluckily, I only had the generic Medex insurance card.

The border guards asked where Belarus was mentioned on the card. I replied that it wasn't, but I had included it in my purchase of the policy. We were allowed to enter Belarus, but not before an English-speaking border guard gave us specific instructions on obtaining

a Belarus-specific policy from a governmental office in Minsk, our base of operations in the country. The following day, we purchased the required policy for a total of US\$6. Who knew?

Being a frequent business traveler to the former Soviet Union countries, I opted



*Retired school teacher Ona Bleizgiene (left) gives Joyce and Steve Gitomer flowers from her garden to place on the memorial to the Jewish victims of Leipalingis.*

to make our "roots" trip one that took advantage of the contacts I had made over the years in Belarus. Joyce and I put it together ourselves. Because Lithuania was a new destination, we wound up using our network of Jewish friends to set up that part of the trip.

We reserved hotels over the Internet; engaged tour guides and drivers through older or newer contacts; bought train tickets at the Vilnius and Minsk train stations, during which I got to use my rudimentary Russian; and obtained visas via a visa service in Washington DC. Slowly all the elements of the trip came together, though it was a maddening process. Some of the elements fell into place just as we were leaving our hotel for a day at a particular ancestral town!

During our week-long trip, we made time to send daily e-mail reports to the family back home. Following is our e-mail report about our last day in Lithuania, during which we traveled from Vilnius to Joyce's ancestral town of Leipalingis.

"It's another beautiful day here in Lithuania. Today, we are off to the ancestral town of Joseph Freedman. He's Joyce's grandfather, after whom she is named. There had been a lot of stories about Joseph's town, the area he lived in, and what was the original family name. Genealogy research provided some clues, for example, that the town was formerly known as Leipuny or Leipin. On today's maps, it's known as Leipalingis. That's where we headed with Diana, our guide and driver. Turns out she's the sister of Regina Kopilevich, who's a professional guide and genealogy researcher. Leipalingis is about a two-hour drive from Vilnius, along a modern, well aligned two-lane highway.

"We passed through many forested lands, and learned that in one of them – the Rudnitsky Forest – they filmed the movie "Defiance." Along the way there was a memorial to a Lithuanian village that the Nazis liquidated – Pirciupis – blaming the villagers for willingly provisioning the Jewish partisans. Later, we stopped at the regional capital, Merkinė. In this town, there was a church converted into a museum covering regional natural history and recent history, including one panel about Jewish presence in the town. A brief walking tour led us to a school building that used to be a Jewish cheder.

"Finally, we got to Leipalingis! A few photos at the sign at the entrance to the little town were taken. Then we went into the town stopping first at the library where we got some good information about the location of the Jewish Cemetery and a memorial to the victims of the Nazi liquidation of the Jews of the town (the mass murders were carried out on 9/11/1941). We also found a very detailed map on the wall, showing the little nearby village of Varnenai and the Varnenai woods. The ladies at the library told us about an elderly retired school teacher living in the town who might give us some additional useful information.

"With all these leads in hand we headed out on our day of discovery. The elderly

*(continued on p. 5)*



**Genealogy Corner: *Visiting Our Ancestral Towns* (continued from p. 4)**

retired school teacher Ona Bleizgiene welcomed us warmly. The exterior of her home was amazingly beautiful with myriads of flowers, a well manicured lawn, and a children's tree house probably for her grandkids. She showed us into her summer porch where she told us a number of stories. She served us apple juice, a special wedding cake, and cookies, left over from her recent 80th birthday party held on July 11th. She was a Christian lady who had Jewish friends, as did her husband. Some of her stories related to WWII and the eventual building of a memorial to the town's Jewish victims. She was proud to show us her four published books, of poetry, and prose. Interestingly, she had to sell her cow to get money to pay for the publication of one of the books.

"Another story related to the Polish aristocratic family who dominated the early history of the town, and likely figured into the life of Joseph Freedman and his family. The original aristocrat was a kindly man, named Anton Krashevski. Upon his death, his nephew with the same name, took over his uncle's position. This Anton was a mean-spirited man widely disliked. Joyce wouldn't like me to say that the aristocrat was an SOB, but her oldest uncle, Uncle Louie, from whom all of the Lepuny stories came, would have certainly said it. This fact (mean-spirited aristocrat) fits in with family lore Joyce had learned from Uncle Louie.

"After leaving Ona's house we went to the memorial to the Jewish victims, placing flowers Ona had given us from her garden on the memorial stone, and a few pebbles as well. Then we went on to the manor where the aristocratic family had lived. Their lands are now the campus of a boarding elementary school, but the original manor buildings in a reasonable state of preservation are there on the campus as well.

"We ended our stay in Leipalingis by traveling a few kilometers beyond, through the town of Varnenai to the Varnenai woods. Why were we doing this side trip is an enigma to everyone but Joyce. In her many discussions with Uncle Louie, she had heard that the

original family name, was Vernyansky. He said there was a woods in the area with the same name as the family. We don't know which came first, but Joyce just had to see this place.

"The visit to the woods was the highlight of Joyce's day. The woods covered an area of about 100 acres. It was rather dense, with thick undergrowth, lots of pine and deciduous trees, wildflowers and butterflies flitting everywhere. We parked in a clearing, had a picnic and took a little walk in this incredibly peaceful setting, with sunlight filtering down to the forest floor, and the sound of the wind in the trees was like the rushing of water. Our guide Diana found some edible mushrooms, and Steve discovered some tasty wild strawberries and blueberries.

"We took a brief detour to the spa town of Druskininkai, just next to the Belarus and Polish borders, on the banks of the Neiman River (that also flows through Grodno, Belarus). Then we headed back to Vilnius, making a single stop to walk in the woods where the film "Defiance" was made – the Rudnitsky Forest. Back in Vilnius, we had another dinner of Lithuanian food, and got ready for the return trip home."

The trip to Belarus and Lithuania was truly outstanding. It gave Joyce and me

new insights into the lives of our ancestors and the priceless experience of walking in their footsteps.

Is a trip to your ancestral town something you're contemplating? Are you interested in just seeing the town and its environs, or are you thinking about a research trip to include visits to national or regional archives as well as seeking out gravesites of your ancestors? All these activities and more are possible using the myriad resources you can uncover at JewishGen, [www.jewishgen.org](http://www.jewishgen.org). (Please see the article on this terrific resource in the March 2009 issue of *Legacy*). I wish you as much enjoyment and enlightenment in your planning and travel as we had on our trip of discovery to our ancestral towns in July 2009.

*A native of New Jersey, Steve Gitomer always wanted to be a scientist. He had a distinguished career as an Electrical Engineering professor at the University of Pennsylvania and as a scientist at the Los Alamos National Laboratory. Now retired, he travels extensively in the former Soviet Union as a part-time employee of the US Civilian Research and Development Foundation. He started researching his family history over twenty-five years ago and likes to share his passion for genealogy and his expertise in the field with others who want to learn the process. Steve, who currently serves as NMJHS genealogy chair, is planning a genealogy workshop on November 22 in Santa Fe. ✧*

### **Gathering at the Candy Store of Jewish Genealogy**

Every year in late October a group of genealogists from all over the U.S. gathers at the "Candy Store" of Jewish genealogy in Salt Lake City. That's right, the LDS (Mormon) Family History Library is a treasure house of records for the researcher to peruse. These records, which are available on computer, microfilm, and microfiche, include census information, vital records, passenger arrival manifests, naturalization records, emigration lists, and more from the United States, Canada, and Europe.

Albuquerque genealogist and NMJHS member Nancy Greenberg goes every year, including this October, and explains that the time she spends at the FHL is invaluable. "It would be fun to have someone from New Mexico join me," says Nancy, who adds, "Everyone who goes gets a degree in "Mishpochology."

This year the trip will take place from October 22 - 29 under the expert guidance of *Avotaynu* publisher Gary Mokotoff and professional genealogist Eileen Polakoff. For more information, go to [www.avotaynu.com/slctrip.htm](http://www.avotaynu.com/slctrip.htm).

**Ifelds On Parade** (continued from p. 1)

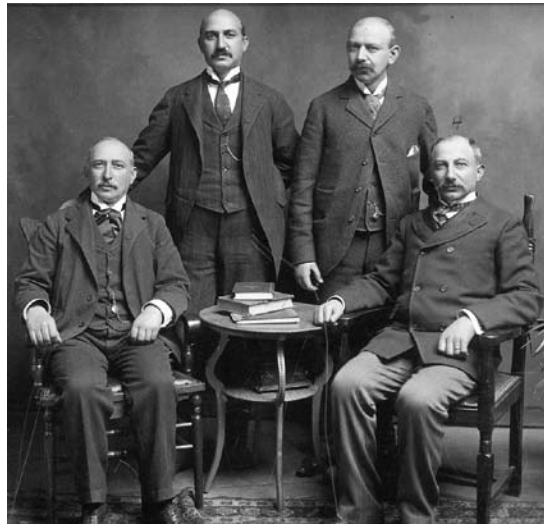
Douglas Avenue, the emerging commercial street in New Town, where it still survives under the ownership of Jess Price. These Ifelds married, raised children and grandchildren, and produced a network of nephews, nieces, and cousins, some still making their homes in New Mexico, others scattered throughout the United States.

In 1981, Wid Slick, a Texas real estate entrepreneur and former schoolteacher came to New Mexico in search of business opportunities. He drove into Las Vegas, saw the Plaza Hotel, and immediately fell in love with it. It had potential, he thought, as he imagined its restoration. Las Vegas would become his new home. Wid shared his ideas with the owners, the Luceros, and persuaded them to partner with him in a massive renovation of “the Belle of the Southwest.” After spending a million dollars, the “century-old Italianate-style brick hotel” was “returned to its former glory.”

Wid Slick, however, had already imagined the incorporation of the former Ifeld Emporium into the re-born Plaza Hotel. “It made common sense,” he told me. He was taken by the history of the Ifelds and Las Vegas. He read the major literature about them and later reached out to the family. At first, the Rosens rejected his early offers for family reasons. However, the situation changed in 2003. Having closed the Bonanza, the Rosen family was now ready to sell the property. After extended negotiations, the financing (with support of local banks and the State Finance Authority), design, and construction finally came together.

On March 31, 2009, the public opening of the “Ifeld extension” took place in the presence of the press, public dignitaries, friends of Wid and the hotel, and the members of the Ifeld family. The New Mexico Jewish Historical Society was also invited to send representatives to the gala function, and in that capacity I attended the event. Thanks to Betsy Messeca (a Nordhaus-Ifeld descendant and a member of the board of the NMJHS) and Larry Ifeld, I was also invited to the family dinner where I managed to interview several members.

Interestingly, it was Linda Anderele, the administrative assistant to Wid Slick, and Larry Ifeld who were largely responsible for planning the family reunion on the occasion of the “preview opening” of the Ifeld addition. Larry gives credit to Linda for developing the “kernel of the idea” eighteen months earlier, when he visited the Plaza as Wid was launching the renovations of the Ifeld building. It should also be noted that Betsy Messeca alerted Larry that Wid Slick had purchased the Ifeld property and was starting on his grand project.



*Ifeld brothers (left to right) Charles, Louis, Bernard, and Noa.*

Some months before the grand opening, Larry, Betty Mae Hartman, Nancy Paxton, and her niece, drove up to Las Vegas when they learned that the workers had broken through the walls to the Ifeld Building. The two structures were linked; the dream was becoming a reality. As the dedication date drew near, Linda proposed a family dinner, and Larry ran with it. He, in turn, contacted family members throughout the country. Larry expected that only a few of the New Mexico members would attend. To his surprise, there was a lot of interest and excitement throughout the family, though in the end some could not make it.

What explains this enthusiasm? This is the question I decided to pursue, and it proved to be revealing. In my conversations with many of guests (I was unable to interview them all), the common theme was knowledge of and pride in the “historical prominence and significance of the Ifelds.”

Larry Ifeld’s involvement in the project is particularly striking and indicative of the family’s historical consciousness. Larry was born in Boston, Massachusetts, to Charles’s son Lawrence Ifeld and his wife Mary, a Boston native. Lawrence had attended Exeter for a year, one of the famous New England private schools, and then went to Harvard, from which he graduated in three years. He became a wool broker for Eisenmen Brothers, which had business ties to the Charles Ifeld Co., probably the firm’s major supplier. Lawrence and Mary made their permanent home in Boston, only returning to New Mexico for family visits.

Larry Jr. recalled that the summers he spent in New Mexico between the ages of six and fourteen were a “real thrill.” Like kids everywhere, then as now, “I always had a fascination with cowboys.” He was regaled with family stories of their experiences in the “Wild West,” notably the tale of Louis Ifeld being held up “twice” by Billy the Kid. But he referred me to his cousin Betty Mae Hartman, the “grande dame” of the family in her late eighties, for a more accurate account.

Betty Mae gave me a somewhat different version of her grandfather’s encounter with the Kid at the isolated branch store of the Charles Ifeld Company that he managed in Anton Chico. However, Betty Mae’s mother, Beatrice Ifeld Meyer, the author of the booklet “Louis Ifeld,” sets the story in Thoreau, New Mexico. In both versions, Billy knocked at the door of the store in the middle of the night and demanded food, whiskey, and ammunition. Louis recognized the Kid and did not quarrel or present a bill. However, Billy returned some months later and paid for the goods in full with gold coin, the source of which Louis Ifeld did not question.

Indeed, many New Mexico families have Billy the Kid and other outlaw stories. For example, Larry’s cousin Florence Beier, the granddaughter of Ludwig Ifeld, wrote a memoir, *Reaching for New Rides: Stories from My Life*, in which she details several examples of violence in Las Vegas.

(continued on p. 7)

**Ifelds On Parade** (continued from p. 6)

In another conversation, Betty Mae told me that Ludwig set aside the rooms above his furniture store for “ladies of the night.” While some of these tales are apocryphal or exaggerated, they serve to link intimately the pioneer families to the history and folk heroes of New Mexico.

Ten years ago, Larry Jr. decided to make his home in New Mexico, and soon he was reconnecting with old family members and meeting a lot of new ones. Undoubtedly, the family stories and distant memories of summers in New Mexico stayed with him. Larry mentioned that he knew something about the Ifeld building, that it was owned by the Rosens, even before he moved to New Mexico.

For other descendants, who lived most of their lives in New Mexico, their consciousness of the family’s involvement and contributions were more continuous and tangible. Ludwig Ifeld’s family continued to run his retail business in Las Vegas for many years. There were constant reminders of Ludwig’s critical impor-

tance to the civic life of Las Vegas (among other things he was chief of the volunteer fire department) and the religious life of the dwindling Jewish community.

Fred Ifeld, Jr., Ludwig’s grandson, was particularly struck by the public recognition of the Jewish identification of the Ifeld family at the Plaza Hotel ceremony. Fred admitted that when he grew up in the Los Angeles area, his parents largely hid their Jewishness because of fear of rampant anti-Semitism. Now a psychiatrist in Squaw Valley, California, he lives openly and proudly as a Jew and was delighted to witness and be part of the Jewish heritage of the Ifelds in Las Vegas history.

In my conversations with Betty Mae Hartman, she stressed the prominence of her parents in Albuquerque. When Louis Ifeld left Las Vegas, the separate Ifeld Brothers firm established by him was the major

retail establishment in Albuquerque – not the Charles Ifeld Company. After a fire destroyed the store at Central Avenue and Third Street, Louis left merchandising to his brother Bernard, while he concentrated on the sheep and hide business, running several herds, each with thousands of sheep, in central New Mexico. One herd wintered on the West Mesa of Albuquerque.

Louis, like Charles, had an instinctive talent for business, more so than the other brothers. Louis, Betty Mae reminded me, was the key figure in the Albuquerque business community and was frequently consulted on financial and civic matters, while eschewing public office except for serving at the Constitutional Convention in 1911. The home of Betty Mae’s parents, Louis and Beatrice (Staab) Ifeld, at Seventh and Central, was the social center of the city and the place where President Howard Taft was entertained on his visit to Albuquerque.

Without detracting from the significance of Charles Ifeld and his enterprises, my

interaction with the various guests at the gathering reminded me that there were a number of branches of the Ifeld family. Several individuals were notable in their own way and left significant marks on our New Mexico history. Their descendants have their own memories and reflections. And yet, they were all drawn together by the knowledge, sentiment, and pride that they are part of one of New Mexico’s great Jewish families. For that evening, in March 2009, they were a unit that was on parade in the expanded, restored, and historic Plaza Hotel in Las Vegas.

*Noel Pugach is Professor Emeritus at the University of New Mexico and President of NMJHS. For more information on the Ifeld family, consult the booklet “The Ifeld and Nordhaus Families,” written by Dr. Henry Tobias and Sarah R. Payne, published by NMJHS. Copies are available for purchase. ✧*



*Betty Mae Hartman, great-niece of Charles Ifeld, attended the Ifeld family reunion with her son and daughter-in-law Roger and Barbara Hartman.*

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**Errata**

Kathy Burd of the Genealogy Center, Periodicals, at the Allen County Public Library in Fort Wayne, Indiana, called to our attention that the June 2009 issue was mistakenly numbered Volume 24, issue No. 2. It should have been numbered Volume 23, issue No. 2. Thank you, Kathy, for catching our mistake.

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

- first toll-free telephone number to the NMJHS office
- first glossy newsletter was printed
- first administrator was hired (Rebecca Bernard)
- first website for the Society was launched in December 1998
- first Oral History Workshop was held
- the Video History Project began to document the lives of descendants for 13 Jewish pioneer families of New Mexico
- first Shabbat Symposium was held in Carlsbad
- first Alvin H. Solomon Conference (first New Mexico Jewish Film Festival)
- first to reach out to other Jewish communities in the state

During David's second term, after a multi-year gap, he presided over two annual conferences. The theme of the 12th Annual Conference was "Pioneer Jews and Native Americans on the Frontier," during which Dr. Henry Tobias received the Dr. Allan Hurst Award. (The Dr. Allan Hurst Award, now known as the Dr. Allan and Leona Hurst Award, is given annually to the person or organization who contributes to New Mexico Jewish history, culture, and community for a period of time.) The theme of the 13th Annual Conference was "Negotiating Jewish Identity," during which Walter Kahn received the Dr. Allan Hurst Award.

David currently resides in New York City where he works as a financial planner for philanthropists. David admits to working on a book about the Jews of New Mexico as well as a small volume on the Jews of Santa Fe. Both of these will be published in 2010. David recently renewed his membership in the Society after an absence of many years. We welcome him back!

**Jim Mafchir**

Jim Mafchir, who notes he was the first *elected* president, served from 1986 - 1991. During his two terms, he wore many hats, as did most of the board of directors. Meetings were held at Jerry Wertheim's office in Santa Fe for several years

and at members' homes. Jim made a point that all the board members pitched in to accomplish what needed to be done to make the NMJHS viable and to grow and to serve its members.

Jim was the author/editor of the first newsletter, which he described as basic, to keep members informed of what was happening. Among his lasting achievements as president, he proposed the first annual



*Jim Mafchir*

conference and the annual membership meeting. He also proposed the establishment of an archives for the purpose of preserving and making available to scholars and the public, material and documents of New Mexico's Jewish pioneers, as well as family records, photographs and papers of notable New Mexicans, and the Society's administrative records.

Working closely with vice-president Stan Hordes, then former New Mexico State Historian, they arranged for the as yet non-existent collection to be housed at the New Mexico State Records Center and Archives. Within two weeks of setting up this arrangement, telephone calls came in from people wanting to donate material to the Society if it had a way to care for the collections. And now it did!

During Jim's tenure, the bylaws were initiated; the mission statement and standing committees, including Programs, Archives, Publications, and Genealogy, among others, were formed; and the duties of the various officers were defined. Membership grew to more than 150 members. He presided over five annual conferences, each held in a different New Mexico city and with different themes.

After five years as president, Jim continued on the board of directors for an additional five years, for a total of ten years of service to the NMJHS. During that time he was responsible for designing

and producing its newsletter and conference brochures.

Jim is a book publisher who lives in Santa Fe.

**Suzan Campbell**

Santa Fe native Suzan Campbell served as Society president from April 1991 to April 1992. During her tenure, the fourth annual conference was held in Taos and a meeting took place in Las Cruces in May 1991. At that time, the Society was very involved in the Montefiore cemetery cleanup in Las Vegas. Jewish children would come to help with the cleanup, making it a big social day, concluding with a picnic.

Suzan emphasized during her active days in the Society that the organization was secular – all you had to do was be interested in New Mexico Jewish history. She was the only non-Jewish president of NMJHS.

In 1991, a silver pin was created and



*Suzan Campbell*

sold as a fundraiser, which was very successful. The Silver Pin, designed by Irma Thaler and Leona Hurst, showed the Star of David on a southwestern mosaic background. Only one of the pins remains in possession of the Society today, a testament to its huge success.

Also, in 1991, with Suzan's leadership, a membership brochure was created to explain the Society's mission and encourage the public to join. It is still in use today.

Under Suzan's direction the Society developed a fund to pay for the archivist and the archival supplies, and made it a point to keep the archives current. Back then, the Society actively recruited families to donate their papers to the archives.

*(continued on p. 9)*



## Past NMJHS Presidents *(continued from p. 8)*

During her tenure, the membership grew from about 200 members to 325 members. She was also editor of the newsletter and ran a column about memories of Jewish elders. The Society also created a booklet entitled "Stones of Remembrance" by renowned photographer, the late Cary Herz, about the Montefiore Cemetery and sold the booklets as another fundraiser that was highly successful.

When the Society was soliciting material for the archives, it bought a box of papers from the Nahm family in Las Vegas. Among the contents, Suzan found some papers about her grandfather who was principal of the Las Vegas high school and a Lutheran. He was the cantor of the Montefiore Temple in Las Vegas.

Suzan has a doctorate in Art History and is an art historian. She is moving back to Santa Fe after an absence of many years. Welcome back to New Mexico, Suzan.

### Sharon Niederman

Writer and photographer Sharon Niederman was the fourth president of the NMJHS. All Society meetings were held in Santa Fe at that time. The annual membership meeting was held at Temple Beth Shalom. In 1992, Sharon presided over a very successful conference at the La Posada Hotel in Albuquerque. The theme was Jewish Artists and Writers, and artists from all over the state attended. The event was funded by a grant that Sharon applied for from the Albuquerque Community Foundation.

During Sharon's tenure, she had the active participation and help of Dr. Stan Hordes, Jim Mafchir, Claire Grossman, Leona Hurst, Dr. Henry Tobias, and Gunther and Geri Aron. The Arons, who were in charge of the cemetery cleanup in Las Vegas, brought in Hebrew school children from Albuquerque to participate. Cary Herz, another active board member, photographed the cleanup project.



Sharon Niederman

Before assuming the presidency, Sharon had the position of NMJHS Archivist. The State Records Center and Archives, where the NMJHS Archive is housed, was then located on Montezuma and Guadalupe in Santa Fe. She reviewed original ledgers, correspondence, journals, military records, and family histories, much of it donated by the Taichert family in Las Vegas. She then cataloged and organized the information into acid-free files and folders for its preservation.

Sharon is an award-winning author, journalist, and photographer. Her ten books include New Mexico history, travel, and cuisine, and her debut novel, published by UNM Press, *Return to Abo*, was a finalist for the 2006 Willa Award for contemporary western women's fiction. Currently, she is Coordinator

of the Writing Center at Trinidad State Junior College in Trinidad, Colorado, where she teaches writing and Southwestern literature. She was lead writer on the "Jewish Pioneers" exhibit at the Palace of the Governors that was on display from 2000 to 2004.

Her current book projects include *Traditional Foods of New Mexico*, to be published by New Mexico Magazine in spring 2010, and *Shrines and Signs: Spiritual Journeys Across New Mexico*, due out from The Countryman Press in 2011. Both books have photographs by the author.

Sharon resides in Raton, New Mexico, with her husband, Raton native Charles Henry, her English springer spaniel Samantha, and her Airedale terrier Buckley, in a 1906 home designed by architect Isaac Hamilton Rapp. "Living in Northeastern New Mexico, when we say blessings on challah and light the Shabbat candles, I feel like one of the original Jewish pioneers," she says. Please visit her website at: [www.sharon-niederman.com](http://www.sharon-niederman.com).

*Bobbi Jackson has been the administrator of the NMJHS since mid 2005 with the exception of a year (2007) of medical leave. During this time she has learned bits and pieces of the history of the Society, but she wanted to know the whole story. This article was spurred by her interest and is the product of her research. Bobbi is fascinated with history, and although she is not Jewish, she finds Jewish history absorbing. ☆*

## November Genealogy Workshop: Searching for Your Jewish Roots

Come and join us for the November NMJHS genealogy workshop to learn how to trace your family back in history. Beginners to advanced researchers are welcome. We can acquaint you with the many resources and methods available to genealogists whether your family has Ashkenazic, Sephardic, or Mizrahki roots.

Did your family celebrate Jewish traditions among their Catholic Hispanic

neighbors? Noted scholar Stan Hordes will lead a discussion session for those who wish to explore their crypto-Jewish roots.

For those itching to follow Internet resources, and there are lots of them, we will cover that avenue too. Our presenters are experts in many fields of Jewish genealogy. They will be available to answer your questions, suggest new directions for your research, and even

give you tips about visiting your ancestral towns.

The workshop will take place in Santa Fe on Sunday, November 22, 2009, from 2 to 5 p.m. at Temple Beth Shalom, 205 East Barcelona Road. Presenters include Stan Hordes, Nancy Greenberg, Dorothy Amsden, and Steve Gitomer. Register at the door. NMJHS members \$10, non-members \$15.

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**PEEK INTO THE PAST: Trinidad, Colorado**

by Naomi Sandweiss



As one drives north on Interstate 25 from Raton, New Mexico, it is easy to pass Trinidad, Colorado, without a thought.

But the town of nine thousand, set in a coal-mining region two hundred miles north of Santa Fe, is the site of pioneer Jewish history, with numerous connections to nearby New Mexico. A quick trip into town reveals Temple Aaron, the oldest continually operating synagogue in Colorado, the Frank and Sarah Bloom home (now a museum), and the Jaffa Opera House, opened by the pioneer Jaffa brothers in 1883.<sup>1</sup>

After the Civil War, Jewish merchants following the Santa Fe Trail settled in Trinidad. In 1867, merchant Maurice Weiss opened a general store on Trinidad's Main Street and Denver businessman Abraham Jacobs established a stage line that ran to Santa Fe. By 1872, there were enough Jewish citizens to form a minyan. Two brothers, Samuel and Henry Jaffa, owners of the Jaffa Mercantile company, conducted services.<sup>2</sup>

Jewish citizens became involved in all aspects of community life. In 1876, Samuel Jaffa was elected Mayor of Trinidad, a position he held for four years.<sup>3</sup> In 1879, Simon Sanders and his wife Jennie arrived in Trinidad. Simon opened a wholesale liquor business and was later joined by his brother Jacob.<sup>4</sup>

Another prominent Trinidad citizen, Frank Bloom, moved to Trinidad from Pennsylvania in 1876 to manage a general store. Bloom opened the first mine in the coal district surrounding Trinidad, ran the Bloom Cattle Company, which operated in Lincoln County, New Mexico,<sup>5</sup> and served as first vice president of First National Bank for

over forty years. In 1882, Bloom and his wife Sarah built an elaborate three-story Victorian mansion, which now serves as a Trinidad museum.

By the late 1870s, the Jewish residents of Trinidad were ready to establish Jewish civic and religious organizations. In 1878, the Jewish men of Trinidad founded a B'nai B'rith Lodge. Temple Aaron, which would become a Reform congregation, was officially founded five years later with twenty-four members under the leadership of the Jaffa and Sanders Brothers.<sup>2</sup>



Temple Aaron in Trinidad, Colorado, today.

In 1889, a synagogue building, designed by Trinidad architect Isaac Hamilton Rapp, who is known to have originated the "Santa Fe style," was erected.<sup>6</sup> The build-

ing was decorated with a hand-carved pulpit and an organ, which were transported to Trinidad by wagon train!<sup>1</sup> By 1889, the congregation, now numbering fifty-four members, hired a graduate of Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, Rabbi Leopold Freudenthal, to lead the congregation.<sup>6</sup>

Connections between Jewish families and business associates in both Denver and the New Mexico Territories were frequent. The Herzsteins of Clayton, the Floersheims and the Rosenwalds of Las Vegas, and the Gusdorfs of Taos would participate in and support Temple Aaron, writes Sharon Niederman.<sup>7</sup> Nathan Jaffa, nephew of Trinidad's Samuel Jaffa,<sup>8</sup> settled in Roswell, New Mexico, where he served as mayor, fire department chief, bank director, and synagogue founder.<sup>9,10</sup> In Albuquerque, another Jaffa family member, Henry, served as Albuquerque's first mayor (1885) and first president of Congregation Albert.

(continued on p. 11)

**Peek Into the Past** (continued from p. 10)

Jewish citizens of Trinidad conducted business with a diverse range of customers who visited or settled in Trinidad. By 1911, the town was bustling with visitors arriving by rail, eating at the local Harvey House restaurant and frequenting the shops, opera house, and other local attractions.<sup>11</sup> During its heyday, Trinidad drew immigrants from Greece, Ireland, England, Italy, and other nations to work in or supply the local coal mines, which were owned by none other than John D. Rockefeller.

Because of its proximity to the coal mines, Trinidad saw its share of labor strife. It served as the headquarters of the strike that led to the Ludlow Massacre. In 1914, labor activist Mother Jones was deported from Trinidad by Colorado troops.<sup>12</sup>

After the 1920s, the Jewish population of Trinidad dwindled along with a decline in coal mining and other key industries. During World War II, Trinidad, like three other Colorado and six New Mexico towns, held German prisoners of war.<sup>13</sup> It seems that some of the 2,500 men held at Trinidad were anxious to leave. Camp commanders discovered a 150-foot, electrically lit tunnel, which originated in a closet of one of the German officers.<sup>14</sup>

A Jewish refugee from Europe, Kurt Landsberger, headed a group of translators at the Trinidad camp. Mr. Landsberger subsequently wrote a book about his experience, entitled *Prisoners of War at Camp Trinidad, Colorado, 1943 - 1946: Internment, Intimidation, and Country Club Living* (Arbor Books, 2007).

In the 1950s, Trinidad's once ninety-member B'nai B'rith chapter dwindled to twenty members,<sup>15</sup> and many Jewish residents left the town for jobs and education elsewhere. Nevertheless, Jewish life still goes on in the region, where Temple Aaron, still in operation, stands proudly at 407 S. Maple Street, witness to over 125 years of Jewish life in southern Colorado and northern New Mexico.

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**In memory of  
Marilyn Bell  
mother of Jon and Lance Bell  
from Lilo Waxman**

**It is with sadness that NMJHS marks the passing of Rosalia Feinstein on August 30, 2009. Rosalia, wife of Stanley Feinstein and mother of Naomi Sandweiss, contributed the delightful and informative article on the Meyer family that appeared in the June issue of *Legacy*.**

**NMJHS thanks  
Sheila Gershen  
and Shirley Jacobson  
for a very successful booksale  
over Labor Day Weekend**

**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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### Calendar of NMJHS Upcoming Events

Check online calendar of Upcoming Events for more details at [www.nmjewishhistory.org](http://www.nmjewishhistory.org).

Sunday, October 25, NMJHS Annual Conference, "New Mexico Jews and the Great Depression," Hotel Santa Fe, 1501 Paseo de Peralta, Santa Fe.

November 5 - 15, Albuquerque and Santa Fe, "¡Celebrate! The Jewish Experience in Spanish-Speaking Countries," lectures, films, food tastings, and musical events. For specific events, times, and locations, go to [www.adl.org/Celebratefestival](http://www.adl.org/Celebratefestival).

Sunday, November 22, 2 - 5 p.m., genealogy workshop, Temple Beth Shalom, 205 East Barcelona Road, Santa Fe.

### NMJHS Annual Dues

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

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- Family \$50
- Senior (55+) \$30
- Senior Couple \$40
- Fulltime Student \$20
- Business \$100
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