



## Teshuva 500 Years Delayed?

by Bianca McDermott

**O**n a cold December day, I walked briskly toward La Fonda Hotel, seeking warmth and the comforting memory of my father, who had worked in the hotel for 35 years. As I rounded the corner of the Plaza, the imposing sight of St. Francis Cathedral loomed against a gray sky, while the music of the Hanukkah ceremony that I had just attended wafted through the air. The sight of the commanding stone Catholic cathedral coupled with the sounds of Jewish music struck me as a fitting end to a year that had shaken me to the core.

I grew up in Santa Fe, a city in which the past is very much alive. Secure in a family history dating back to the 16th century, my roots run deep in the Spanish colonial history of my ancestors. Having lived 20 years of my adult life in eight other states, I was keenly aware of how fortunate I was to have grown up in the rich historical matrix of northern New Mexico. So many Americans live disconnected from family ties and history. It felt good to return home in 1999, to sit in the Plaza that so many of my ancestors knew, and to feel that sense of belonging that I have only felt in Santa Fe.

Despite all the labels that have been attached to people of Spanish ancestry in the U.S.—Hispanic, Latino, Mexican, Puerto Rican, and Cuban—none of them fit the identity that I grew up with. Born in 1959, I was raised to think of Spain as the mother country, the source of our culture, language, and religion. I had felt nothing but exasperation with the questions I was

asked in other parts of the country: “When did your family come to the U.S.?” Never—the U.S. came to us. “You speak such good English!” I hope so, as it’s the only language I speak. “When are you going back to your country?” I’m not, because I am currently in it. To live in other parts of the U.S., one finds that the average American knows little about the history of the Spanish in the New World, which is surprising as it is the history of much of the Americas. The English may have ultimately put their stamp on the U.S., but the Spanish were here first, a fact that had been drilled into me by my parents and teachers. I have always resisted being put into a demographic box and labeled by the latest self-styled “experts” and census takers.

### An Amazing Discovery

This year I discovered that my family history as written in my DNA is more Jewish than Spanish. A few months after my brother reported that his DNA had indicated he was part Jewish, I took my own test and found that my 33 percent Jewish ancestry outweighed that of my heritage from the Iberian Peninsula (27 percent). I also had DNA of other European groups (Great Britain, Ireland, Scandinavia, and Italian/Greek) and Native American ancestry. Although I was aware of recent findings of crypto-Jewish heritage in New Mexico, my family had no mysterious customs or folklore. Rather, we were steeped in Spanish identity, with Catholicism being a strong element in our family practices. Jewish? How could this be? My grandparents were from the Martinez, Manzanares, Montoya, and Garcia families. How could our origins lie in Israel?

Ironically, this fit into what had been my own running joke since spending six years at Yale University where I received my training as a psychologist. In the midst of a very Jewish psychology department, I also worked with several Israeli physicians at an epilepsy surgery program at the medical school. I had often remarked that I was turning Jewish by sheer osmosis. It turns out that it was actually a pre-existing condition! I entertained several unlikely explanations. Could the Israeli neurosurgeons have inserted Jewish DNA into me as an experiment? Did some Jewish jokester spit into my saliva sample as well as that of my brother’s in Nashville? Could I be caught up in some kind of nefarious Jewish plot to take over New Mexico?

In the past year, I have attended Purim, Passover, and Hanukkah services. I have dined at the home of an Orthodox rabbi, attended Chabad and Reform services, and have read ex-



Bianca McDermott

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## President's Column



Assuming the leadership role in an organization is a daunting challenge. Following the footsteps of successful past leaders is even more so. It's also one of responsibility and trust, and one that I will work very hard to uphold in honor of the past and future of NMJHS. Thank you to my friends and colleagues on the board for your vote of confidence!

The success of any organization is also heavily dependent upon its members, past and present. NMJHS has been privileged to have such wonderful members who have helped grow and sustain us. We wouldn't be 30 years strong and we won't be another 30 years strong without you! It is the individual and collective YOU to whom we owe the greatest thanks.



*NMJHS President  
Linda Goff*

2015 and 2016 have been banner years for NMJHS as we celebrated our 30th birthday in Las Cruces, marking our largest attendance, and raising our visibility as a state-wide organization, a priority for us. A special thanks to Las Cruces board member, Susan Michelson.

This year also marked the successful inauguration of NMJHS's Visiting Scholar program with the one-day genealogy workshop in late February with Bennett Greenspan. Over 100 attendees traveled from throughout the state, West Texas, and Colorado.

Our second Visiting Scholar will be Dr. Jonathan Israel, retired professor of history, School of Advanced Studies, Princeton University, who will be our opening keynoter at this year's Fall Conference, Nov. 12 & 13 in Santa Fe. This year's conference theme, "Jewish Identities: Lost, Rediscovered and Reclaimed," is closely aligned with the current History Museum exhibit, "Fractured Faiths: Spanish Judaism, The Inquisition, and New World Identities."

NMJHS has a clear mission statement and one of our goals is to create a Vision Statement outlining how, we, as a historical society, should begin to research and write the next 30 years of New Mexico Jewish history. To that end, and following the model established by the New Mexico Historical Society and the Office of the State Historian, the board will explore the establishment of an annual scholarship funding opportunity to qualified undergraduates, graduate students, faculty, and individuals to research and document new information as well as hidden gems about New Mexico Jewish history.

Our goal is to reach out to and work with our members, past presidents, and community friends to help chart this course. I welcome your ideas and feedback.

Finally, I hope you will continue to participate and attend our programs and events throughout the state and help us grow our membership and visibility. ✨

### Mission Statement

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

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5520 Wyoming Blvd. NE  
Albuquerque, NM 87109

Telephone: (505) 348-4471  
Fax: (505) 821-3351  
website: [www.nmjhs.org](http://www.nmjhs.org)  
email: [admin@nmjhs.org](mailto:admin@nmjhs.org)

Administrator: Anne McCormick  
Office Hours: Monday/Wednesday/Thursday  
9:30-1:30 PM

Editor: Pat Shapiro  
Copy Editor: Barbara Ruzinsky  
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**Teshuva 500 Years Delayed?** *(continued from p. 1)*

tensively on the history of the Jews in Spain. The first times I attended Shabbat services, I sat in the back, feeling acutely uncomfortable. Terrified of committing some kind of faux pas, or looking as if I didn't fit in, I wondered if my ancestors had similar feelings when they first attended Catholic Mass. Did they creep in quietly, sitting in the back pews, and watch and imitate their neighbors carefully to make sure they stood, kneeled, made the sign of the cross, and joined in prayers at the right times? Did they fear detection and challenge? Given that the Inquisition was in the distant past, I was surprised at my anxiety as I am usually bolder than the average person. I think I was most afraid of rejection, although that word does not describe the entire range of my fears.

Given that my ancestors had accepted baptism, had they forfeited their right to return? How would Ashkenazi Jews feel about Sephardic Jews of mixed ancestry wandering back into the synagogue after an absence of over 500 years? (Sorry to be late, we were busy pretending to be Catholics and forgot we were Jews. Are there any bagels left?) While the Hebrew term of "*anusim*," or the "forced ones," suggested a level of understanding and forgiveness, I suspected I might be seen as a descendent of cowards who had chosen Christianity over exile or death. Had my ancestors crossed a line of no return? Does Jewish DNA make a person Jewish if they had no knowledge of their past or familiarity with the religion? Isn't it hard enough to just be "Hispanic" in 21st century America without adding in the Sephardic Jewish spin? What does God want from me?

**What I've Learned**

To date, I have learned that the doors are wide open and the decision about how much to return is up to me. My only errors so far have been to turn

off the bathroom lights at an Orthodox service and to attempt to shake hands with the Chabad rabbi. (I turned the lights back on for the next guest.) Although my right hand automatically begins a journey to my forehead when a rabbi blesses the congregation, I am able to disguise it by fluffing my curly Jewish hair. Please don't make the sign of the cross at synagogue services! I've come close though. I might do it someday if I'm too absent minded.

Surprisingly, I have found local rabbis more welcoming than Catholic priests with whom I discussed my dilemma. One priest of Spanish northern New Mexican ancestry actually told me that "the Jews were given a choice." A choice? Baptism, exile, or death by burning at an *auto-de-fe*? Hardly a fair choice for a people who had likely been in the Iberian peninsula since the second destruction of the temple in Jerusalem in the first century. While their fortunes had risen and fallen with the predilections of rulers over the centuries (Visigoth kings, Muslim caliphates, and Christian kings), the Sephardic Jews had been active participants in the life of Spain and Portugal. In his reply to King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella's 1492 Alhambra Decree (Edict of Expulsion), Isaac Abravanel, a high-ranking Jewish member of their court lamented, "For generations to come, it will be told and retold how unkind was your faith and how blind was your vision. But more than your acts of hatred and fanaticism, the courage of the people of Israel will be remembered for standing up to the might of imperial Spain, clinging to the religious inheritance of our fathers, resisting your enticements and your untruths. Expel us; drive us from this land that we cherish no less than you do."

When I attended my first Passover seder, I thought of my ancestors, and hoped they felt some satisfaction in a descendent learning how to celebrate

a holy day that they had to surrender. Would they feel that at last, after 500 years, it was fitting that a family member reclaim a portion of what was lost to them? My Irish Catholic husband and I celebrated Passover in remembrance of their sacrifice and suffering. I am here in Santa Fe because of choices made over 500 years ago in the great conflicts between the Christians, Moors, and Jews of medieval Spain. Fleeing the terrors of the Inquisition, my ancestors sailed to Mexico and then journeyed to the far reaches of the Spanish frontier after *conversos* were burned in Mexico City. My paternal grandmother's name, Refugio, means refuge, which poignantly portrays what Santa Fe was to some members of my family.

Tragically, our world is once again embroiled in the clash of religions. Refuge in our current times may be impossible to find. The war is brought to us and we cannot flee to distant lands.

Isaac Abravanel chose exile in Italy. His closing words to the royal family were as follows, "Listen King and Queen of Spain, for on this day you have joined the list of evil-doers against the remnant of the House of Israel. If you seek to destroy us, your wishes will come for naught, for greater and more powerful rulers have tried to finish with us, and all have failed. Indeed, we shall prosper in other lands far from here."

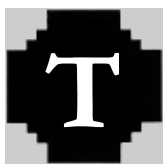
**Coming Full Circle**

Now when I sit in the Plaza, I think of all my ancestors, including the Jews of Spain. I sit, a small remnant of Israel, and listen to Hebrew songs sung in Santa Fe, and whispers of a history and a people that represent the past, present, and future of this strange land. Spain may have forced my ancestors to abandon their religion, but I am free to take it back up again.

*(continued on p. 4)*

## NMJHS Fall Conference Preview

by Ron Duncan Hart



he New Mexico Jewish Historical Society Fall Conference 2016 is called “Jewish Identities: Lost, Rediscovered, and Reclaimed.” The conference is designated to coincide with the exhibition “Fractured Faiths: Spanish Jews, the Inquisition, and New World Identities” now at the New Mexico History Museum. The conference will be held on November 12 and 13, 2016, at the New Mexico History Museum and The Lodge in Santa Fe. Look for brochures and registration forms in the mail in late summer. In conjunction with the conference there will be Friday evening and Saturday morning synagogue services, a walking tour of Jewish Santa Fe, and other activities. Since the program is being held partly in the History Museum, attendees will have ample opportunity to visit and discuss the unique “Fractured Faiths” exhibition.

The conference features Prof. Jonathan Israel and Frances Levine, Ph.D. Prof. Israel, the keynote speaker, will discuss “Why did the main persecution of new Christians for crypto-Judaism in Mexico end in the middle of the 17th century?” Prof. Israel is the Andrew W. Mellon Professor in the School of Historical Studies and the Institute for Advanced

Study at Princeton University. He is the former director of the Institute for Advanced Studies and a widely known Jewish historian. A specialist on Jews and the mercantile system, he has written ten books on the philosophy and economics of the 17th and 18th centuries, with special attention to the role of Jews.

Dr. Levine, the evening speaker, will talk on “Return to Sepharad,” examining issues around the new law in Spain inviting Sephardic Jews to return to that country. Dr. Levine is the president of the Missouri History Museum and the former director of the New Mexico History Museum. She is a specialist on the history of Doña Teresa Aguilera y Roche. Her book on the life of Doña Teresa was published in July 2016. Dr. Levine initiated the planning of the “Fractured Faiths” exhibition, and continued to consult on the exhibition from her new position in Missouri.

During the afternoon session on November 12, Drs. Estelle Quinn (The *Converso* Experience in Spanish Literary Expression), Victoria Erhart (Was She or Wasn't She? Doña Teresa versus the Inquisition), Isabelle Medina Sandoval (New Mexico Inquisition Legacy of Miguel de Quintana), and Ron Duncan

Hart (The Twentieth Century Return-to-Judaism Movement) will talk on various aspects of the *converso* experience in Spain, Mexico, and New Mexico.



Ron Duncan Hart, Conference Chair

During the first Sunday morning session, Rabbis Jack Shlachter (New Mexico Paradise: Making Jewish Home Practice Meaningful Today), Neil Amswych (Return to Judaism), and Ron Wittenstein (Halach and Conversion) will talk about Jewish lifestyle and practices for those who wish to identify with and reclaim Judaism.

In the second Sunday morning session, Maria Sanchez, Maria Apodaca, and Bianca McDermott (Judaism, My Identity and Life) will discuss their identity and practice of Judaism, and Sara Koplik and Daniel Diaz-Huerta will talk about the Spanish law of return. The program will close with a talk about Fray Angélico Chávez and contemporary crypto-Judaism by Joseph Mora.

Hotel reservations can be made at The Lodge in Santa Fe for the event. For further information, go to [www.nmjhs.org](http://www.nmjhs.org) or contact [hart.gaon@gmail.com](mailto:hart.gaon@gmail.com) or call 505.920.7771. ✨

### *Teshuva* 500 Years Delayed? (continued from p. 3)

I do not know in full how I will combine my Jewish and Catholic ancestry. Like the child of any mixed marriage, I am loath to take sides, and prefer to embrace both. To what extent this will be possible, only time will tell. It is likely to be an amusing as well as stimulating journey. My family's sense of humor has long been our strength, and I recognize that trait in the Jewish people. I look forward to the journey with all its complications and contra-

dictions. I pray that the laughter will outweigh the tears. I thank God for this great gift, and I will remember it all the remaining days of my life. *Somos judios*—We are Jews. ✨

*Bianca McDermott, Ph.D., was born and raised in Santa Fe. She is a U.S. Navy veteran and has lived in many parts of the U.S., including Alaska and Hawaii. Bianca and her Irish-born husband Patrick recently spent time in the Republic of Ireland tracing*

### Welcome New Members

Paul Sklar  
Sarah Winger  
Peggy Werbner  
Jonathan Chisdes  
Beverly Nomberg  
Michael and Gail Goldey

*his family roots in Leitrim County. Bianca enjoys literature, history, cats, and travel. She is a member of the NMJHS and the Society for Crypto-Judaic Studies.*

# Aron Straser: A Difficult Life

by Harvey Buchalter



Aron Straser has put the unspeakable into words—poetic Yiddish words, the words of the Jews of a shtetl that were erased in the Shoah.

Aron was born in 1925 in the village of Smorgon, midway between Vilno and Minsk. Twelve years later, his simple life of school, swimming in the river, and going to the marketplace turned upside-down when the Nazis and their collaborators rounded up the Jews and moved them to outlying concentration camps and ghettos. Lithuanian soldiers executed his father, and Aron's life as a slave laborer began.

He was interred in concentration camps in Lithuania, Poland, Estonia, and Germany from 1941 until his liberation from the notorious death camp, Bergen-Belsen, in April 1945. Life in Stutthoff, the first camp, was emblematic of his life in the others: "It was like a perpetual eclipse of the sun. Darkness shrouded our every thought," he wrote.

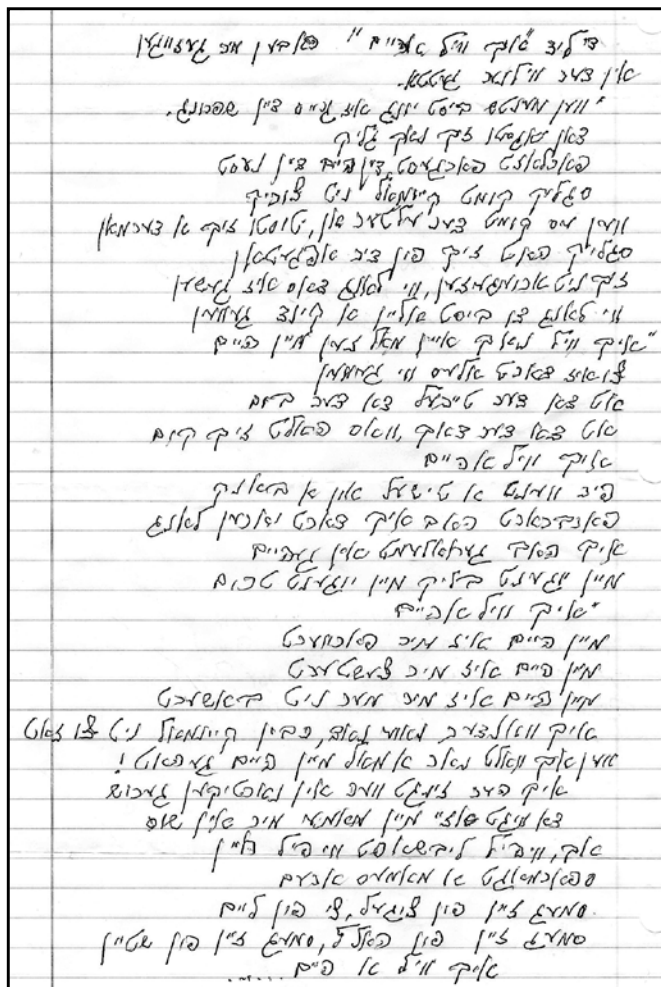
Following the war, Aron married a fellow prisoner of Bergen-Belsen. Aron and his new wife, Judy, emigrated to the United States in 1949. In the mid-1980s he and Judy moved to Albuquerque and became active in Jewish community life. He also talked to countless high school students about his experiences.

Aron, a robust 91-year-old, still lives in Albuquerque with his wife of 11 years, Miriam. He is an accomplished wood sculptor and woodworker. In the past few years, he has served as hazzan for the High Holy Days for the Rio Rancho Jewish Center.



Harvey Buchalter

Aron's poems are easily accessible and direct. His words are clear. Each line is a story in itself. Translated from the Yiddish by Harvey Buchalter, the following poem, entitled "In the Vilno Ghetto," is part of the Holocaust narrative. Aron Straser's poems survive. ☆



**Note: The English translation of this poem will appear in the fall issue of Legacy.**



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## The Backstory of Making the Film *Challah Rising in the Desert*

by Paula Amar Schwartz

Over 150 people gathered in May at the annual meeting of the New Mexico Jewish Historical Society at the Jewish Community Center in Albuquerque to see the 30-minute preview of the film, *Challah Rising in the Desert*. It was a *shebecheyanu* moment—a small miracle or special moment that calls for this blessing prayer when seeing a rainbow or waterfall or a first blossom on the apricot tree. How we got to this special moment is its own story, unlikely, improbable, *b'shert*, kismet, “fated” or “meant to be.”

At our 2014 NMJHS Fall Conference, we showed the film, *From Peddlers to Princes*, the story of the pioneering Jewish merchants of the Colorado gold rush. Sitting there, listening and talking with other attendees, it struck me that New Mexico had its own unique story to tell, and that telling it in film could bring it to a larger audience, many of whom had never thought that there were Jews in New Mexico. I began to ponder how to capture and tell the story of Jewish settlement in the “land of enchantment.”

A few days later, I woke from a dream with the concept of New Mexico’s waves of settlement as a five-strand challah, our ceremonial bread, rising in this high desert environment. The metaphor consumed me. I thought of the *Conversos*, or *Anusim*, the hidden Jews who arrived over 400 years ago with the Conquistadors, seeking to go to the ends of the earth to escape the Inquisition. They were the first strand. The next strand was the wave of German-Jewish merchants who came down the Santa Fe Trail in the mid-1800s, supplying the U.S. Army in the territory. A later wave of merchants found that there were already mercantile establishments in the towns along the trail and fanned out farther. They developed trade and trading posts with the indigenous communities. They learned the native languages—Keresan, Tewa, Navajo—and became close friends and sometimes family members.

With the coming of the railroad, populations shifted and community dominance changed. During the years of World War II, New Mexico became home to a newly emerging group of scientists and engineers who worked on the Manhattan Project and eventually staffed the scientific laboratories, creating a major employment sector. The final strand of doctors, lawyers, and other professionals contributed to building our modern Jewish community.

The concept grabbed me and wouldn’t let go. I wrote it as a one-page summary and sent it off to some friends who had been at the showing of the Colorado film. They loved it. I sent it to then-Director of Federation, Sam Sokolove, with a note saying, “What do you think, and who do you know with ability to make a film, because I lack that skill set.” Sam’s response was swift, “I have a film maker for you. He lives in San Diego, you saw his film, *Tijuana Jews*, which we showed as a joint program of NMJHS and ADL. Call Isaac Arntstein.” I did, not actually believing that an award-winning film maker at his level would talk with me. His response was as swift as Sam’s: a day later, he was on the phone. It turns out he had been itching to produce a film on New Mexico Jews for many years. We talked and began to draft a plan. In February 2015, Isaac came in, and I called together an advisory committee. We met and began to think in earnest about how to proceed. I learned about film making; Isaac learned about New Mexico.

Again and again, things fell into place. I learned about the Loggie Carrasco manuscript. Norma Libman, who teaches about the *Anusim/Conversos* and their history, augmented the reading I had done in Stan Hordes’ ground-breaking book *To the End of the Earth*. Before long, I had a list of people whose stories were ready to be told.

Not long after, my friend Betsy Nordhaus Messeca, descendant of a pioneer merchant family, told me about the book

her niece, Hannah Nordhaus, was about to publish, *American Ghost*. I contacted Hannah, read the book, and knew this was the opening to the next strand. The governor of Acoma Pueblo, Fred S. Vallo, spoke at Congregation Albert, telling the story of Solomon Bibo, and the third strand was in place. In April, I was in Santa Fe, speaking at Temple Beth Shalom and mentioned the project. A wonderfully articulate retired chemical engineer, Haskall Sheinberg, came up, introduced himself, and talked about being a part of the building of Los Alamos and the Manhattan Project. The stories were in place.

In a similar almost magical way, a friend told a friend, and the first of our funding grants came in from the Maurice Amado Foundation. We needed a fiscal agent, and another friend said, “Talk with the New Mexico Community Foundation.” We did. We had a match. I talked about it, set up meetings with community members who might have an interest, and with several funding grants from local people, and some smaller contributions from others, we had a minimal budget and moved forward.

In February of 2016, Isaac drove in with cameraman Sergio Ulloa. We hired a local film student, Mark Francisco, and did a week of interviews and location shooting. Isaac edited it all, adding archival photographs and old family films, and on May 15 we showed 30 minutes of the work in progress. Yee haw! Challah is rising in the desert, and we are now applying to foundations and individuals for funding to complete the 90-minute documentary with a projected completion date of November of this year.

Watch for the grand opening at a theater near you! ✨



Paula Schwartz

## A Sense of History

by Professor Emeritus Henry Tobias



Anniversaries are not occasions for deep research but for musing. In that spirit, I offer this soliloquy.

About a year and a half ago, it occurred to me that in 2015 it would be 25 years since my book, *A History of the Jews in New Mexico*, had appeared in print—1990. It was difficult for me to believe that so much time had passed. As I dwelt on the passage of time, I then recalled that 2015 would be the year that the New Mexico Jewish Historical Society would also be celebrating its 30th birthday. These two dates were not very far apart and in the same decade.

This led me to consider that two volumes of biographies of old New Mexican Jewish families appeared in the mid-1980s. And in the same frame of thought, I recalled that a sharp increase of research and publication on the crypto-Jews of New Mexico had also blossomed in the same decade. Taken together, it seemed to make the 1980s an unusually strong time for the desire to learn about New Mexico's Jews. In light of this opinion it seemed to me that the decade deserved at least a special glance from those interested in New Mexican Jewish history.

A strong awareness of the presence and activities of the Jews grew out of that cluster of events I cited. The two volumes of family biographies, which also included other topics involving New Mexico's Jews, were the work of an El Paso rabbi, Floyd S. Fierman, who had spent many years wondering about and researching the subject of Jews in the Southwest U.S. Some of his interest in New Mexico grew out of a sliver of information about Solomon Jacob Spiegelberg, probably the first Jew in territorial New Mexico. It propelled the rabbi into a quest for more information that never ceased for him. His diligence

led him to uncover varied sources, which confirmed a Jewish presence early in New Mexico's territorial days. The major contents of his labors, as seen in his books, titled *Guts and Ruts* and *Roots and Boots*, involved the business activities and genealogy of early New Mexican Anglo-Jewish families. They featured chapters on the Spiegelbergs, Staabs, Bibos and Freudenthals. These families and their succeeding generations became a major source of interest to Jewish New Mexican historians and readers.

### Enter Stan Hordes

In a similar way, a professional historian, Stanley M. Hordes, had focused his graduate studies on the Mexican Inquisition. That induced him to inquire whether Jews who feared the consequences of the Inquisition had migrated to New Mexico. They would have done this secretly while adhering publicly to the Catholic faith. In modern terms that behavior gained them the present title of crypto-Jews. Although the phenomenon was not new to Hispanics, it was new to the recently arrived Ashkenazic or Central and East European Jews who came to the territory and state of New Mexico and the American-born Jews who came after World War II.

Hordes was an energetic and determined scholar, who served for a time as the state historian. He loosed a torrent of articles and lectures that served to awaken and spread knowledge of crypto-Judaism. The mysteries and unique problems of the subject intrigued the Anglo Jews even though Ashkenasim and Sephardim were culturally quite distinct from each other. Hordes wrote a book on New Mexico's crypto-Jews, which appeared in 2005, titled *To the End of the Earth*—a 10th anniversary. It is an indication of the widespread interest in the subject beyond New Mexico that Columbia University Press in New York published it.

### The Creation of NMJHS

The creation of the NMJHS provided a different dimension to the study and publication of New Mexico Jewish history thus far noted. It was conceived in the late 1970s and early 1980s by a number of persons who discovered their mutual interest in that history. They created the formal organization in 1985, now known as NMHJS. The society devoted itself to gathering and preserving materials related to New Mexico Jewish history and to bringing a knowledge to as wide an audience as possible through conferences, speakers, as well as publications.

The organization attracted a sizeable membership—close to 400—a few years after its founding. That was no small number given the size of the Jewish population of New Mexico in the early 21st century. The society has served as a spearhead for education and organization of New Mexico Jewish history since its founding. Without doubt, I believe, it increased the interest and participation of the general Jewish population in a way that several books alone could not do. As a visible organization, it gave the Jewish public an opportunity to learn that the Jews, despite small numbers, had played a surprisingly active role in New Mexico's history and had even been creators to some degree of a modern economy in many places, as well as reducing the distance between the well-defined ethnic groups in New Mexico's population. One small example of this was the insistence of many merchants that their prospective employees learn Spanish before coming to New Mexico.



Dr. Henry Tobias

(continued on p. 8)

**A Sense of History** (continued from p. 7)**My Book**

*The History of the Jews in New Mexico*, as I noted, appeared in 1990. It served as a description of the Jewish experience in New Mexico since the creation of the territory and was the first published history of its kind. To the best of my knowledge, it still is. It marked the coming together of the earlier facets noted for the 1980s. Its existence also became a part of the growing desire of New Mexico's Jews to learn about their history. The volume sold well and is currently in its ninth printing. It still produces royalties for the author. The UNM Press tells me that it is quite unusual for a book to receive attention and remuneration for that long. It indicates a sign of growing and continuing interest in the subject. The fact that the public library system of Albuquerque purchased copies for each of its 17 branches when the volume appeared speaks to an expected wide interest in New Mexico's Jews among the general population.

Taken together, the events I chose for the 1980s thus contributed to an increased desire and number of Jews to learn about their history. They became a base for further interest and study. Fierman's works involved interviewing family members and learning whatever they knew about earlier generations, retrieving documents, and calling on business and social associates to increase his knowledge. These efforts also produced a new interest among people who had not considered their families from the perspective of Jewish history before. The search for information by other authors broadened the audience in the same way. Each time a researcher asked questions of persons around the state, sought out archives and government documents related to business affairs, new interest followed them. The Society, through its formal programs, allowed a casual population to participate and pushed interest and knowledge ever further among New Mexico's Jews.

The large number of merchants of the pre-war era served as another attractive dimension of inquiry. They existed in virtually every community in New Mexico and for some researchers, Fierman provided a model of reaching out to families, friends, and business connections, which increased participation in the quest for knowledge.

It is relatively easy to measure quantity by compiling membership in the Society and its meetings, the sale of books, and the increase of publication and lectures. How accurate that number is as a measure of interest for the whole Jewish population we cannot know. The farther we move from available numbers, the less certain we are of our calculations. It is even much more difficult and beyond my capacity to say how deeply the interest goes. People may absorb a sense of their history with little awareness of having done so. A personal anecdote may be one way of illustrating it. Several years ago, I underwent cataract surgery. As I was put under the anesthesia, which was only partial, I heard the surgeon say, "This is the guy who wrote *A History of the Jews in New Mexico*." That at least some awareness had gone this far, I believe, was impressive. The effects of the 1980 factors helped produce a new dimension of Jewish consciousness in a New Mexico past of which they had become a part. History fosters this kind of self-knowledge.

**The 1980s**

Having offered the 1980s as a landmark in the growth of historical research and interest, I feel it necessary nevertheless to point out that the 1980s did not arise out of a vacuum. There were works that dealt with Jews in New Mexico before 1980, but with a difference. One can point to William Parish's magisterial work on the Charles Ilfeld Co. of Las Vegas as a major case in point. Parish's volume, which appeared in 1961, concerned itself with the business methods and development of the highly success-

ful enterprise in the last decades of the 19th and early 20th centuries. Its intent, however, was not to focus on the history of the Jews but to describe the company in economic terms. Indeed, the work was an extension of his doctoral dissertation in economics at Harvard.

In addition, there were articles in scholarly journals that had limited readerships and were usually not seen by the general public. Some of the articles were portions of the later completed works of the authors printed in the 1980s. There were also memoirs of great value, such as those of Nathan Bibo, which were important sources for historians. Jews also were included in the general works on New Mexico history at least as far back as the 1920s. They appeared largely as eminent individuals with no look at them as a distinct group or in historical form. Nor were the Jews themselves without interest in New Mexico history. They had joined the Historical Society of New Mexico when it was reformed in 1881 after having been shattered by the Civil War.

In a general way, however, some of the weakness of a sense of Jewish history in New Mexico among the Jews before World War II arose out of self-imposed conditions, which guided their behavior. Most important, it seems to me, was the attitude of the early generations of Jewish newcomers to New Mexico not to stand out as Jews but rather to become as assimilated as possible to the Anglo population without losing their identity. Even if one notes that Jewish congregations appeared slowly from the mid-1880s on, their creation did more to make them like the organizations of non-Jewish society. An emphasis on their own history, however, would have been an act of separation that would have distinguished them from the rest of the population. The memory of European anti-Semitism was ever with these early Jews and assimilation their

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**A Sense of History** (continued from p. 8)

answer to it. Although that attitude faded, it remained a consideration until World War II. Perhaps this reticence on their part was a modest Ashkenazic form of crypto-Judaism, but it certainly did not foster a sense of history or a desire to seek it out.

There were, of course, other reasons that acted to preclude their sense of history. Too little time had passed to consider the subject. They were far too concerned with their own business affairs to worry about their ethnic past. The present was their concern.

**Changes After World War II**

For an answer of why things began to change after World War II, one must turn to other conditions. A far larger Jewish population migrated to New Mexico after the war than had existed prior to it. The character of the newcomers differed sharply in many ways from the older pre-war population. The entrepreneurs who dominated the pre-war economic makeup of New Mexico's Jews were now joined in large numbers by scientists in or related to the atomic industry. The growth of the whole population of New Mexico attracted highly educated Jewish professionals of all sorts. Teachers and doctors came. Even the Department of History at University of New Mexico reflects this phenomenon. When I entered that faculty in 1959, there was one Jewish member. When I left in 1969, there were four. This new population, moreover, was largely composed of American-born Jews. Their behavior as Jews was quite different from the caution exercised before the war. The Holocaust,

the creation of Israel, and the rise of the civil rights movements all contributed to a sense of obligation to speak out as Jews and as advocates of causes rather than to mute their own presence.

In addition, the newcomers, still outsiders, looked with curiosity at the existence of Jews in New Mexico. How and why did they come to this strange new land? These eastern U.S. Jews knew a great deal about their own historical existence, but nothing about New Mexico. The search for Jews in New Mexico was to some of them a fascinating exercise. The participants in this interest in New Mexican Jewish history in the 1980s came mainly from these newcomers. The pre-war factors which had hindered an interest in history broke down. The new conditions opened a capacity for the growth of a sense of history, and the activities of the 1980s provided the opportunity to fulfill it.

One thing seems clear—that over a 30-year period a whole new dimension of awareness had grown up among New Mexico's Jews. One result of this has been to create a sense and mood of pride among Jews and the place they have had in the development of modern New Mexico in a century and three quarters. Perhaps they had a greater feeling of belonging to New Mexico as much as other Anglos who arrived at the same time. This is no small matter in the growth of a sense of confidence in their belonging here.

**A Look to the Future**

Whether the future can match the activity of the past 30 years becomes the

question of the hour. History does not end with the last page of a book. It is a continuing process and demands study and interest of the kind we are engaged in here. New generations are constantly forming. They merit the same attention as has been given to the first generations of the 19th century. Those early generations may have received so much attention as they did because they were such a surprise to newcomers.

I hope you will forgive me if I mention that a second volume of mine (*The Jews of New Mexico Since World War II*) appeared in 2008. It is short compared to the first. My purpose in writing it was to bring the story to the end of the 20th century and indicate, however briefly, how much new had appeared in the Jewish community after World War II. The growth of both religious and secular organizations allowed comparison with other urban centers that could not have been made before World War II. Outreach to non-Jewish organizations and the rise of women's roles increased the richness of communal life to a degree nonexistent before the war. For those who are interested, there is no shortage of issues and possible research topics to pursue.

In conclusion, I express my belief that the decline of a desire to study one's history amounts to a loss of interest in knowing oneself. A continuing desire to pursue it would be an act of optimism and self-enrichment that cannot and should not be discarded. ✧

*Editor's note: This article is based on a lecture that Henry Tobias gave at the NMJHS Fall Conference in Las Cruces on November 14, 2015.*

**IN MEMORIAM**

Our heartfelt condolences go out to:

- ✧ Doris Francis on the death of her husband Louis Erhard.
- ✧ Dianne Layden on the death of her sister Barbara Layden Bernstein.
- ✧ Rabbi Ben Morrow on the death of his brother Harry Morrow.

**May their memory be a blessing.**



# Bon Appetit!

by Marcia Torobin

**R**eaders of *Savueur* voted its largest city a “culinary destination,” the *Huffington Post* praised its food as “downright delicious,” *Forbes* said its cuisine was “true fusion,” and *Condé Nast* deemed it had the world’s best vegetarian food. Its wines are first class, its restaurants are among those France rated as some of the best in the world, and its food has inspired a new generation of chefs in the U.S. and abroad.

If you haven’t been to Israel in the last 10 years or so, you are in for a surprise. The country has become a culinary mecca, slicing, dicing, and mixing the rich food traditions of its diverse population. Ashkenazi, Sephardic and Palestinian cooking, along with scores of other food traditions, co-exist both side by side and intertwined to create a unique and exotic cuisine.

It wasn’t always so. Agriculture and connecting with the land were part of the Zionist ethos but “fine dining” was not. Economic and security necessities were the focus of the fledgling state whose resources were already tightly stretched. In the beginning, food was rationed, and simply producing enough food to feed Israel’s population was the goal.

In the pre-State period, food helped shape and forge a national identity with labels such as the “Hebrew banana” and the “Hebrew egg” produced by “Jewish hands.” As late as the 1960s, El Al stewardesses donned uniforms in bright orange, in homage to one of Israel’s main exports, the Jaffa orange.

Tastes were shaped through Israeli cookbooks. Ingredients such as eggplant, olives, and olive oil, staples of the Middle East and the Sephardic/Mizrahi pantry, were largely unknown to the first waves of Eastern European Jews. It was

the early cookbooks that helped make these ingredients a staple in all Israeli homes. These same cookbooks, though, scoffed at Mizrahi eating habits while embracing Ashkenazi food.



The vibrant restaurant scene that characterizes Tel Aviv and Jerusalem today wasn’t part of the state’s early landscape. Restaurants that did exist were largely Ashkenazi, while the exotic and flavorful foods brought by Sephardic/Mizrahi Jews were enjoyed within the confines of one’s home, not out.

Beginning in the 1950s, there was a steady increase in the standard of living. With greater disposable income, Israelis began traveling abroad, bringing back a more sophisticated palate and a taste for new foods and wines. At the same time, waves of immigrants from Arab lands due to the 1967 war, the influx of Jews from the Soviet Union, and the airlift of Ethiopian Jewry helped make Israel home to immigrants from over 70 countries. They brought with them their own foods and traditions, adding to the cooking melting pot Israel was rapidly becoming. A new generation of chefs embraced the diversity as well as the contributions of Palestinian cuisine to the Middle East’s culinary cabinet.

Paralleling the revolution in food was a revolution in wines. The beginning of commercial wine production dates back to the 1890s when immigrants from the First Aliyah sought ways to make the

hard-scrabble land more productive. With funding from Baron Rothschild, the Carmel Winery was born, and it is still Israel’s largest. But the production of award-winning wines didn’t occur until 1983 when the Golan Heights Winery opened. Owned by a collective of kibbutzim and moshavim, the winery has since gone on to win nearly 60 international gold medals and produces wines that are exported to 32 countries around the world.



Marcia Torobin

Israeli-born chefs, such as Yotam Ottolenghi, put Israeli food on the international map, exporting its flavors to London, while other chefs did the same elsewhere. Last year *Esquire* named the

(continued on p. 11)

## A CULINARY EXPLORATION OF ISRAELI CUISINE

**Sun, August 28, 11:00 AM—CCA**

*In Search of Israeli Cuisine*

Santa Fe premiere of new documentary

**Mon, August 29, 6:00 PM—Georgia**

Dinner featuring culinary creations from the cookbook *Zahav*

**Wed, August 31, 5:30 PM – Santa Fe Culinary Academy**

Demonstration cooking class and dinner with recipes from *Zahav*

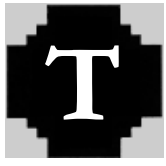
**January/February 2017 in Israel**

A special culinary tour tracing the footsteps of *In Search of Israeli Cuisine*  
Details to be announced

**For more information, tickets and reservations, visit [www.SantaFeJFF.org](http://www.SantaFeJFF.org) Call 505-216-0672.**

## Treasurer's Report for 2015

by Gila Yaniv, Former Treasurer



The New Mexico Jewish Historical Society is a nonprofit 501(C)3 corporation, incorporated in New Mexico, operating on a cash accounting basis, with the exception of payroll taxes. It has one part-time employee (office administrator).

Last year, NMJHS contracted with an accountant to handle all the accounting facets of the business.

For the calendar year 2015, the NMJHS had revenues of \$38,220 and expen-

ditures of \$32,279, resulting in net income of \$5,941.

The NMJHS Finance Committee (FC), chaired by the treasurer, meets periodically, exploring ways to enhance revenues and reduce expenses. In addition, the FC proposes to the Executive Committee (EC) and the entire board of directors the budget for the current fiscal year, to be approved by the board. Major sources of revenue for 2015 were: Fall Conference 54 percent, memberships 20 percent, contributions 7 percent, Jewish Federation 6 percent, Scholar in Residence 6 percent, sales

of books and brochures 4 percent, and other income 3 percent.

Major expenses for 2015 were: Fall Conference 32 percent, payroll 24 percent, printing and postage 10 percent, contract services 9 percent, facilities and equipment 6 percent, insurance 5 percent, graphics and design 4 percent; book sales 2 percent, supplies 2 percent, program expenses 2 percent, and remaining expenses combined 4 percent. ☆

*Editor's note: Rae Siporin is the current NMJHS treasurer.*

### Bon Appetit (continued from p. 10)

New Orleans Israeli restaurant "Shaya" as the best new restaurant of the year, and this year *The New York Times* named the James Beard award-winning chef Michael Solomonov's Israeli cookbook *Zahav* as the "Best Cookbook of the Year."

So what is the "new" Israeli cuisine? Its eclectic nature makes it hard to simply describe. Consider "Kobniih," a dish from the highly acclaimed "Catit" in Tel Aviv and described as follows: veal tartar, smoked wheat cream, harissa, aubergine cream, tomato vinaigrette and Persian lemon. Or try "Raphael's" and master chef Rafi Cohen's "Fresh Mediterranean Mackerel with Sour Cream, Fresh Onions and New Olive Oil" with its echoes of Ashkenazi

flavors brought into the 21st century. Jerusalem's "Machneyuda," located next to the Mahane Yehuda *shouk* in Jerusalem, showcases a fusing of traditions with its "Semolina Cake and Tehini Ice Cream." And for an old/new take on Arab food there is "El-Babur," serving kebabs cooked in fresh tomato sauce wrapped in pita dough and baked in a *tabun*, a clay oven that dates back to biblical times.

For a closer look at this "culinary revolution," the Santa Fe Jewish Film Festival is presenting a culinary exploration of Israeli cuisine that will allow Santa Feans to see, taste, and experience the best of Israeli cooking. It all starts on August 28. See inset on the previous page for more information.

In the meantime, *Bon Appetit* and *B'Teyavon!* ☆

### *The Jewish Legacy of New Mexico Wins New Accolades!*

The National Federation of Press Women announces its winner in the category:

#### Non-Fiction Adult-History

For more information about this NMJHS multiple award-winning publication and other NMJHS publications, please check out our website, [www.nmjhs.org](http://www.nmjhs.org)

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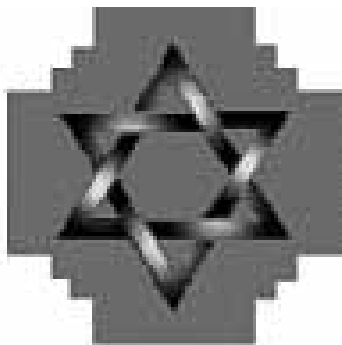
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**Calendar of NMJHS Upcoming Events**

Check for future events at [www.nmjhs.org](http://www.nmjhs.org)

**August 28:** *In Search of Israeli Cuisine*, Santa Fe premiere of new documentary. Jewish Film Festival. CCA, 11 a.m.

**August 28:** “*Converso* Ancestral Voices.” Descendants of New Mexico *Conversos* will speak with the voice of one family sharing highlights from the history, contributions, and unique traditions of their *Converso* family. This event is a collaborative effort of the NMJHS, Nahalat Shalom, and Temple Beth Shalom. Temple Beth Shalom, 2 p.m.

**August 29:** Dinner featuring culinary creations from the cookbook *Zahav*. Georgia, 6 p.m.

**August 31:** Demonstration cooking class and dinner with recipes from *Zahav*. Santa Fe Culinary Academy, 5:30 p.m.

**September 25:** “The Jewish Legacy in New Mexico History: A Panel Discussion.” Author and UNM Professor Richard Melzer will lead a panel discussion with contributing authors and others about experiences from the pre-Territorial days through statehood and current times. Fuller Lodge, Pajarito Room, Los Alamos, 1-3 p.m.

**October 9:** Santa Fe and northern New Mexico NMJHS Members & Friends Afternoon Social. NMJHS President Linda Goff will host an informal social in Santa Fe. NMJHS member George Donoho Bayless will present a 15-minute program about his great-, great-grandmother Mary Donoho, the first Anglo woman to travel down the Santa Fe Trail. 2-4 p.m.

**November 12 & 13:** NMJHS Fall Conference, “Jewish Identities: Lost, Rediscovered, and Reclaimed.” New Mexico History Museum/Palace of the Governors & The Lodge at Santa Fe. See story, page 4. For information: [www.nmjhs.org](http://www.nmjhs.org) or call 505-920-7771.