



## Seligmann Family Story: Berlin-Albuquerque

by Uwe Westphal

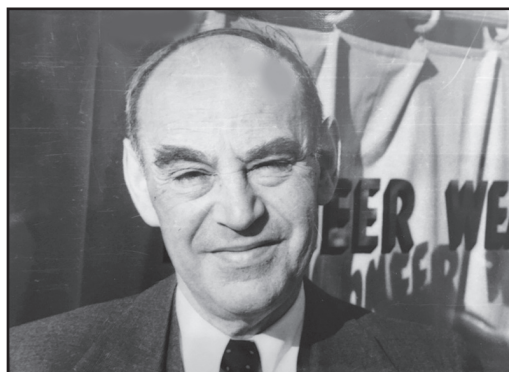
**I**n 1984, while doing research for a book I was writing about the Jewish history of Berlin's ready-made clothing industry, I heard about the L. Seligmann Company from emigrated fashion designers, noting its very good reputation. Leopold Seligmann's company belonged to the top of the list of companies in the Berlin fashion scene. I found out that Leopold had emigrated to New Mexico with his family.

I met with employees and family members of the Seligmanns who had emigrated to London and the U.S. and was able to compile an unusual story, which led from Berlin-chic to 1718 Yale SE, Albuquerque New Mexico and the Pioneer Wear company, featuring denim fabrics and leather for Western outfits. It was a story of fashion, desperation, displacement, deception, but also of courage, success, and perseverance.

Leopold, born in Berlin in 1881, had three brothers who emigrated to the U.S. as early as 1896 and set up their own business in silk printing for fabrics. Such family connections, particularly in the U.S., were essential for Leopold's career after his escape from Berlin in 1936-7. Fashion was the trade that ran in the family.

Leopold opened his clothing company in Berlin in 1920. The Weimar Republic, the first democratic state after the German Empire fell apart, created enormous potential for a steady economic recovery period after WWI. Although Germany lost the war, the nation was picking up the pieces and things looked better after 1923.

Leopold was one of the very successful Jewish merchants who completed a solid commercial training program in ready-to-wear clothing, with a three-year apprenticeship, circa 1897. He was apprenticed to his uncle, Otto Seligmann, who ran his own clothing store in Berlin. After the war, in 1920, Leopold and two business partners, bought the company from his uncle and established "Leopold Seligmann" in the center of Berlin's fashion industry. In 1922, Leopold took over his uncle's company as sole owner. Among his customers were various com-



*Leopold Seligmann in front of the Pioneer Wear building.*

panies that had department stores all over Germany. These companies guaranteed Leopold high sales of fashionable and inexpensive women's clothing. Exports to Switzerland, Norway, and Holland were his recipe for success. The quickly established legendary reputation of Seligmann's fashion was born.

A rapid expansion of his product range at home and abroad gave Leopold the reputation of a fashion house producing high quality and fashionable garments. In 1920s Berlin, Leopold created what are now known as fashion trends, the reason his company survived the

global economic crisis of 1929, unlike many other Jewish companies in Berlin, which drifted into insolvency. Berlin's ready-to-wear clothing industry, founded by Jewish tailors and businessmen in the 1830s, had already survived and suffered crises before. This time, fashion slowly became a popular consumer item in Berlin.



*Uwe Westphal*

Leopold Seligmann was a respected fashion czar with talented designers. He knew his concept would work. Fast fashion changes and copying trends guaranteed success. He was not afraid of international competitors and even competed with Parisian haute couture.

With 1933 and Hitler's rise to power, Leopold realized he would have to leave Berlin. Leopold's wife, Johanna, their 15-year-old daughter, Ruth, and their sons, Hans and Rudy, were getting used to the idea. Going to school was soon forbidden for Jews. For them there was no future in the German capital. In 1935, with the help of Seligmann relatives in the U.K., Ruth

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## President's Column



It's hard to believe at times that it has been approximately one year since states, cities, and communities began to "lock down" as COVID began to spread, not differentiating among people. Those of us who have come through this incredibly challenging time without family or friends becoming ill or succumbing to the virus are indeed most fortunate and thankful. Let us hope that with greater vaccine availability and continued public-health cautionary practices, better times lie ahead. To those NMJHS members and friends who may have suffered illness or loss, our condolences. My father and his four siblings survived the Spanish flu in New York City because their mother locked them all down. A wise woman she was.

On behalf of the Board, we thank you for your loyal support in maintaining your membership and making generous donations, and we thank our new members who joined the NMJHS family after our recent programs and Fall Conference. Each of you can continue to help us by spreading the word about us and recruiting new members, either in-state or beyond. We are also incredibly grateful to our speakers, who volunteer their time, knowledge, and expertise for our diverse programs.

As some of you know, I often refer to NMJHS as "the little engine that could!" Despite the recent uphill climb, we continued to chug along. Our future is bright, and we look forward to the following upcoming programs and events:

- June 13: Annual Business Meeting and Guest Speaker, Stacey Ravel Abarbanel, "My Grandfather and Pancho Villa"
- October 30 and 31: Annual Fall Conference co-sponsored with the Texas Jewish Historical Society, "The Galveston Movement." The format has yet to be decided, but we are planning for either a virtual conference or a hybrid, in-person/virtual via Zoom.



*NMJHS President  
Linda Goff*

During this past year, we have accomplished:

- Publishing *Legacy* on-time with quality articles of interest
- Presenting a successful Virtual Fall Conference
- Work on two grant-funded projects, "Preserving the Papers of the Late Rabbi Leonard Helman," and "New Mexico Jewish Physicians in the Indian Health Service 1960 – 1980"
- Sponsored Dr. Janet Yagoda Shagam's Research Fellowship project, "A Taste of Home: Eating Jewish in mid-century Albuquerque"
- Met Year 3 goals for our first-ever Endowment fundraising campaign, sponsored by the Harold Grinspoon Foundation, and we received an incentive grant for meeting those goals. Year 4 begins April 1. Do consider participating and supporting our efforts to keep that engine going into the future!

We thank all of you for your loyal support! ☆

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Editor: Estelle Miller  
Copy Editor: Lynn Ruzinsky  
Layout: DT Publishing, Santa Fe  
Printing: Minuteman Press, Albuquerque  
Mailing: Southwest Mail Center, Albuquerque  
NMJHS is a beneficiary agency of the Jewish Federation of New Mexico.

## Welcome NMJHS New Members

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**Seligmann Family Story** *(continued from p. 1)*

fled first to London, then, in 1936, to New Mexico.

Leopold witnessed the gradual expropriation of his company. At the end of 1937, Leopold and Johanna hastily left Berlin and their home, first for London, where they picked up Hans and Rudy, and then for Albuquerque. A month before the pogroms of November 1938, when thousands of Jewish businesses were expropriated and arrests of Jews became the rule, the Seligmanns arrived in New Mexico, bereft, but at liberty.

Ruth Seligmann, who was already registered in Albuquerque as Ruth Seligman, later wrote in her memoirs about the difficulties in raising money for the escape: "...My father had owned a small life insurance policy in England, which he sold, and my mother a diamond bracelet and a ring, a painting... Our brother Hans (later John) sold his Leica camera and these funds gave us a new start..." The once-successful fashion company L. Seligmann in Berlin no longer existed.

**Albuquerque - a difficult new beginning**

There was little time to get used to the new and very foreign home and culture. Ruth quickly adapted to the American way of life. John and Rudy were drafted as soldiers after the U.S. entered World War II against Hitler. They changed their name from Seligmann to Sullivan.

Ruth remembers:

"Our uncles, already in the U.S. for some time, rented a house for us, paid our rent for a few months ... so we were able to get a business started. A friend of our uncles showed us how to make silk screen prints and helped us to find

a resource for blocked laminated fabric, which could not ravel ... we made sleeveless boleros with silkscreened pockets. While at UNM I met Jose Toledo from Jemez Pueblo and he painted Indian designs, which we used on silk frames for those pockets. Later we printed rodeo-type designs, such as a bucking bronco with rider, on black boleros for special Western events..."

Without question, Leopold, his wife Johanna, and daughter Ruth started to acclimate very quickly to the culture of a completely foreign environment. They had to adapt and gain a full understanding of the textile business in New Mexico. Based on European business know-how, what they knew best and had been successful at in Berlin, a new start was imminent. The big question was: How did this work in New Mexico?

They did not want to take social welfare state aid, an attitude that many Jewish refugees from Germany held once they escaped their homeland. And Leopold,

one imagines, certainly preferred to stay independent, a lesson he took with him to the U.S. The aim: to establish a fashion style that was wearable for a potentially large and new clientele in the new country.

Just as he had learned from Parisian fashion, which was copied in Berlin, Leopold ad-

opted a culturally fitting new style into his design ideas for a business in Albuquerque. It was the same talent and ability that gave him the courage for a new beginning.

In a letter dated May 1940, Leopold wrote to his friend and fellow clothing

entrepreneur from Berlin, Leopold Lindemann, who had also emigrated and who had found refuge from the Nazis in Manchester:

"...We (the Seligmanns) are quite happy to be here. We have worked hard in the 1.5 years and have established a small but nice business. All of us, my wife Ruth, Hans (John) and sometimes Rudy (who also goes to school) work hard.... You would be surprised if you knew what my children are accomplishing and that at 60 years old Leopold became young again in his capacity for work and development of ideas....

"We have the funniest business in the world and you would laugh .... We make exclusively WESTERN things made from denim, leather, leatherette, in western style; that means riding outfits for Rodeos which are fringed, printed and decorated with conchas. We have created a name for ourselves with Pioneer Wear.... We did not compete with (fashion companies) in New York and have already established a nice list of customers. It is really interesting that western European ideas can be converted to Western American taste."

And exactly at this point, there he was again, a clothing entrepreneur, developing something new in fashion from what is there that pleases the public. This was the old inventive and innovative spirit of Jewish ready-to-wear clothing dating back to the time of the founders in 19th-century Berlin.

Leopold wrote and received letters from Europe, Latin America, and other parts of the U.S. He wanted to stay in touch with old Berlin friends who also had emigrated. Over the years, these letters became increasingly emotional and full of worries for the well-being of their friends. News arrived in Albuquerque from Europe about the Holocaust.

*(continued on p. 4)*



*Ruth & Ted Gallacher*





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## Seligmann Family Story (continued from p. 3)

By 1943, Leopold and Johanna had to say good-bye to their two sons, drafted into the U.S. Army to fight Hitler and his allies. For Leopold and his wife, business changed, but they kept going. Now, U.S. Army supply was produced instead of Mexican folk garments. It must have been a difficult time for Johanna, Leopold, and their daughter Ruth. With two sons in the war business had to go on. New business connections were made.

Leopold's company, Pioneer Wear, had just 100 workers in a small factory. And something that Leopold had experienced in Berlin happened to him in Albuquerque. Competitors took Pioneer Wear clothing apart and then copied his style. But a competitor from Tucson miscalculated with Leopold. No one could copy the quality he delivered. So, designers from Tucson came to Albuquerque to work for Pioneer Wear and learn its unique design, the stylish mix of local and regional tradition and modern fashion ideas from Europe.

Although everything went according to plan, towards the end of the war, Leopold was constantly angered by bureaucratic requests from New Mexico State officials. He wrote to his friends in London:

"We have in this country, a 'wage and hour' law which is under the same supervision as the 'Price Stabilization Board'.... I do my best ... but it is a little bit trying." He disliked such "... bureaucratic annoyances." What Leopold meant was the time-consuming effort he had to put into completing all the requirements of the officials for his business.

For a short time, Leopold worked with his daughter, Ruth, at a new Seligman business entity: Craftwear. A Pioneer Wear - Exclusive Styles, 415 Copper Avenue, Albuquerque, was established. But Ruth wanted to run Craftwear on her own. She certainly had the capacity

to establish a new business making and selling women's and children's clothes.

In 1945, shortly after the war, Leopold also began his legal efforts and contacts with Germany. He wanted restitution for his expropriated company. To do this, he had to provide evidence of sales, the number of employees, and business books, from the time before 1936.

"I believe it is only fair ...," he wrote to his old Berlin friend, Erwin Danziger, who emigrated to New York, "... that I receive from the German government a settlement for the loss of our firm, the boycott, the liquidation...."

But times were not fair. Leopold died unexpectedly in 1946, a great and sad loss for the entire family. He must have felt under enormous pressure to rescue his entire family from the Holocaust.

His widow, Johanna, took over the Pioneer Wear company. Daughter Ruth, by this time rather fluent in English and educated with a keen sense of and interest in fashion, had taken over Craftwear in 1945. She was assisted by her husband, Ted Smith-Gallacher, of Port Tampa City. Ted was a well-known violinist with the Tampa Symphony Orchestra when they married in 1944, but he ventured into fashion with his wife. "A garment factory was what they had in mind," wrote the Tampa Sunday Tribune on June 20, 1954:

"Craftwear was an instant success in ready-to-wear for children and women. Ruth Gallacher was determined to carry on what her father Leopold achieved in Berlin and New Mexico: quality in large numbers with original new designs.

"The Gallachers' business was mostly wholesale, but they did carry some retail transactions in Old Albuquerque, site of their first plant." Still, Craftwear continued to grow fast, with an assembly-line

(continued on p. 5)

**Seligmann Family Story** (continued from p. 4)

production of 100,000 garments per year.

By 1954, Ruth and Ted Gallacher delivered their products to 450 American stores in 25 states. Pioneer Wear and Craftwear didn't compete, but complemented each other's fashion products. This was, if consciously done or not, a classic Berlin business model of two companies that sprang out of one family. "Her business experience came from her association with her father's firm, the late Leopold Seligman who was one of the largest suits and coats manufacturers in Germany," as reported in the *Albuquerque Journal*.

Contributing to this entrepreneurial success was that Ruth learned the profession from her father at an early age. She even advertised as a model for Craftwear. The legacy of Leopold and a great tradition of Berlin fashion continued 6000 miles away, in New Mexico.

The courage to deal with Leopold's legacy fell primarily to John and Rudy Sullivan, after they returned from the war. Unfortunately, Rudy died in 1961. Under John's management, the company continued to make progress. In July 1965, the *Albuquerque Journal* reported: "... The firm was flexible enough to adjust to changes in the market... The company Pioneer Wear and Craftwear operated from several locations ... before Pioneer Wear moved ... into a 15,000 square foot large building at 1719 Yale SE, Albuquerque."

Leopold's widow was deeply involved in running the Pioneer Wear businesses, and she was very effective. State-of-the-art fabrication facilities allowed the company to respond to rapid changes in fashion trends. And business-friendly

Albuquerque supported the companies, because they also brought jobs to the city. But, ultimately, it was John Sullivan who scored the biggest coup, in a contract with the Phillip Morris cigarette company for the Marlboro brand. Phillip Morris advertising, the "Marlboro Man" dressed in a suede fringed jacket made by Pioneer Wear and created by a refugee from Berlin, became a global brand. "...John Sullivan elongated a 91,000 square foot plant housed with nearly 500 employees, including shippers and designers," wrote the journalist David Specht in 1975.



*John Sullivan*

Ruth and Ted sold Craftwear in 1974. An important chapter of history ended. It followed a chapter of Nazi persecution, refugees' initiative, and brave new beginnings after the Holocaust. When Leopold Seligmann and his family fled Berlin in 1937, he and his wife could hardly have imagined the huge success of their ideas, the company, and what his spouse and children made of it: a world-wide-known brand. The most widely read U.S. fashion magazine, *Womans Wear Daily*, praised Craftwear and Pioneer Wear as the most innovative companies in the U.S. fashion market of the 1950s-70s.

The recognition of Seligmann's work, of Leopold's courage to make a completely new start after he had been robbed of his company and his house, after he was forced to flee and humiliated, recognition was denied to him by the German officials. Former, non-Jewish fashion bosses in Berlin pretended in the 1980s that they didn't know about the Seligmann business.

A restitution trial in 2002 yielded just 9% of the estimated value of Leopold's company.

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## Life & Legacy Donor Testimonial

by Paul R. Sklar for the New Mexico Jewish Historical Society



In the 1880s Harris and Carolina (Lena) Levy and their children Nettie, Sam, Max, and Jake (Jacob) settled in "boomtown" Las Vegas in the New Mexico Territory. We knew very little about our Levy family during their time out West. My parents told a somewhat vague family story having something to do with the Santa Fe Trail. As kids we grew up thinking that our great grandparents must have taken a wagon train out West. Of course, the "Iron Horse" had reached Las Vegas by the 1880s. Our Levy Family Research Project in New Mexico blossomed with access to the Internet and with great thanks to the NMJHS. The Levys were active and popular members of the Las Vegas community.

The U.S. Population Census of 1900, Las Vegas, San Miguel County, New Mexico provided a baseline of valuable information. Harris ran a general store, and Lena owned real estate taking title to various plots of land in Las Vegas. The local newspapers (such as *The Las Vegas Daily Optic* (1880-1908) and *The Albuquerque Citizen*), accessed primarily through the "U.S. Library of Congress, Chronicling America," offered a surprisingly rich source of regular news stories and columns citing various activities of members of the family.

Lena, Harris, and Jake passed away in 1902 and 1905. Jake tragically drowned while duck hunting in Kroenigs Lake. All three made front-page headlines in the local newspapers. All three rest in the Levy Family Plot at the Montefiore Cemetery in Las Vegas. Nettie married and stayed out West. Max and Sam both became telegraphers for the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railroad and then the Western Union Company. Max and Sam started a stock brokerage business in Las Vegas based on their expertise

with the telegraph lines quoting the Chicago and New York markets. They branched out with offices in Albuquerque and Bisbee, Arizona and then Pueblo, Trinidad and Denver, in Colorado.



Paul R. Sklar

Stories appeared in the local newspapers about grade-school programs and the family's involvement with Congregation Montefiore (which the local newspaper referred to as the "Jewish Church"), county fairs and fundraisers. These included colorful accounts of when Max bought a thoroughbred racehorse named Shecam and when Max had a 1906 Thomas Flyer delivered from Buffalo, New York. Stories appeared about local baseball games, the bowling league, and a late-night chess game played over the telegraph lines. And there were front-page stories about the rise and demise of Max and Sam's once successful brokerage business known as The Levy Brothers.

Max (my maternal grandfather) and his older brother Sam went back East to Philadelphia in 1917. Max and his wife Rose (Cohen) moved to Brooklyn, where they raised two children. Sam and his wife Della (Jacobs) with their five children, born in New Mexico and Colorado, stayed in Philadelphia. Both families were later jokingly referred to as "shirt-tail cousins". Over the past 20 years, I have been finding and meeting with "long-lost" New Mexico cousins to share this research.

Paul Sklar lives in New York City with his wife Amy and sons Mason and Daron.

Each of these discoveries about our New Mexico Jewish experience have been significantly enhanced by membership in the NMJHS. For our posterity, please support the Life & Legacy Program.☆



## Meet New NMJHS Board Members

### Ron Duncan Hart Ph.D.

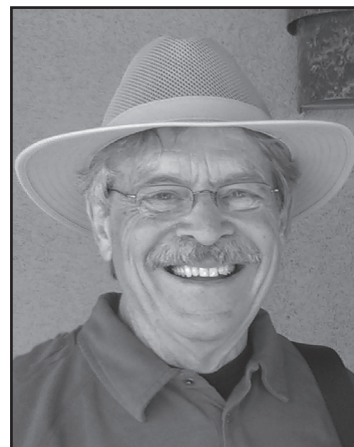


on Duncan Hart, Ph.D., is a cultural anthropologist from Indiana University with postdoctoral work in Jewish Studies at the University of Oxford. He is the Director of the Jewish Learning Channel and the Santa Fe Distinguished Lecture Series. He is the former President of the Jewish Federation of New Mexico; for many years he served as the Program Director of the New Mexico Jewish Historical Society and received the Hurst Award from that organization. He is a former University Vice-President and Dean of Academic Affairs, who also worked in South America for twenty years with

UNICEF, the Ford Foundation, and other international agencies. He has awards from the National Endowment for the Humanities, the National Science Foundation, Ford Foundation, and Fulbright among others.

Hart has written a number of books on Jewish life and cultural history. The more recent ones are *Crypto-Jews: The Long Journey, Jews and the Arab World: Intertwined Legacies, Sephardic Jews: History, Religion and People*. He is co-author/editor of the award-winning book *Fractured Faiths: Spanish Judaism, the Inquisition and New World Identi-*

*ties*, and he was the consultant on Sephardic culture for an exhibit of the same title at the New Mexico History Museum in 2016. ☆



### Janet Yagoda Shagam Ph.D.



It is with enthusiasm that I look forward to working with the New Mexico Jewish Historical Society Board and its membership. I see my role as one that helps to find programs and resources increase awareness of the contributions Jews have made to the cultural richness of our state. In addition, and particularly in these times of unrest and conflict, I feel it is important that the NMJHS makes efforts to reach out to our community at large.

Some years ago, I emerged from a career as a microbiologist and university educator and transformed into a freelance medical and science writer and artist. For the most part, I write for the public. In addition to science and medicine, I enjoy writing about the Conversos as well as culinary history. Printmaking—intaglio, lithography, and the painterly collagraph—is the focus of my art practice. ☆



### Sarah Leiter



Sarah Leiter is a Ph.D. candidate at the University of New Mexico, where she is studying cultural and linguistic anthropology. Her research focuses on identity, religion, and citizenship among New Mexican descendants of Sephardic Jews. She also is the Coor-

dinator of Community Outreach at the Jewish Federation of New Mexico, where she works with Hillel at UNM and the Sephardic Heritage Program. Originally from Los Angeles, California, Sarah is excited to be joining the NMJHS Board to support its work on preserving and sharing Jewish history in the southwest.



# Finding My Ilfeld Heirloom

by Kay Miller

**M**y grandmother, Ruth Ilfeld, told me a story that I loved when I was a girl. I was taking horseback-riding lessons at the time, and I adored horses. Ruth rode her horse to school in Albuquerque in the 1910s. One day, she heard music playing on her way to class. To Ruth's amazement, her horse began to dance. After returning home, her mother informed her that the horse had belonged to a circus at one time. I envied Ruth for having been able to ride horseback to school, on a dancing horse no less.

Ruth was the daughter of Louis Ilfeld and Anna Staab. Louis, a brother of Charles, ran a general store for awhile. One day, Billy the Kid walked into the store and demanded supplies. Louis complied, and Billy left without paying for the merchandise. I imagine Louis was glad that he wasn't harmed. Ten days later, Billy made a return visit and paid for the items he had taken!

When Ruth attended college in the East, she met Eugene Ach from Dayton, Ohio. She was all of 4'6" tall, while Eugene was 6'5". The pair made quite a sight and they fell in love. They married and moved to Dayton, Ohio, and later to Cincinnati, my home town. Ruth started the first interior-design business in Cincinnati, which she named Greenwich House. Not only did Ruth have an eye for art and design, she loved artistic items from New Mexico. She had a number of Native American pieces displayed in her home.

Eugene started a toy company, Merry Manufacturing, in Cincinnati. They were known for their kits with miniatures of real products. Ruth and Eugene had three children. They also took in a Jewish, refugee girl from Nazi Germany.

Sadly, Eugene died of a heart attack at age 58, before I was born.

Ruth lost her husband, but she never lost her love for him or of New Mexico. Each summer she visited her grandfather's former home in Santa Fe. By that time, Abraham Staab's house was an inn, where she stayed with fond memories of her youth.



Ruth Ilfeld

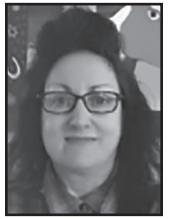
I learned more about my family history from books about Jewish settlers of the West and from the Internet. In 2012, I wrote and illustrated a book entitled *Jews of the Wild West*, about the Staabs and the Ilfelds. I continued to research the family, and eventually I came across something that amazed me.

On an online forum about silver jewelry, there were some photos of pieces designed in the 1930s and '40s by a Bill Ilfeld of Las Vegas, New Mexico. I never heard of Bill Ilfeld and I was surprised that I hadn't. There was a photo of a gorgeous, western-style cuff bracelet that he designed.

The bracelet had a motif of horseshoes, stars and a lariat. It was signed, "Bill Ilfeld STERLING". There were a few photos of his insect brooches too. I was thrilled by my discovery, especially because I'd been an avid collector of vintage jewelry since high school. I wondered why I'd never heard mention of Bill within the family.

I started looking for any available pieces by him on ebay and elsewhere. I didn't find any for a few years. Eventually, I found more articles about Bill. He was a World War II veteran and a grandson

of Charles Ilfeld. Bill was part of a scandal, and I still don't know if that is why he was not mentioned by my grandmother, who passed away many years ago. Ruth would have appreciated his work.



Kay Miller

Bill had a jewelry shop in Gallup with a partner named Lea. Bill's wife, Madeleine, was jealous of Lea, and one day she came into the shop and shot her rival. Lea was not seriously hurt. Soon after, Madeleine shot herself in a suicide attempt. She must have been a bad shot, because she recovered. Bill divorced her and married Lea, hence the scandal.

After searching for a few years, a Bill Ilfeld brooch appeared on the Ruby Lane website. I loved the silver brooch in the shape of a horseshoe with pieces of turquoise and a silver lariat intertwined. At the time I thought the price was too high, and I passed on it.

A year and a half later, an impressive silver concho necklace by Bill appeared on ebay, & I snapped it up. Surprisingly, a month later a different ebay seller offered a matching Bill Ilfeld concho bracelet, which I also bought. I was absolutely thrilled to have discovered the pieces and to own them and wear them. When I started researching my family history, I never imagined I would find a western-style Ilfeld heirloom designed by my Jewish ancestor.



Ilfeld brothers (left to right) Charles, Louis, Bernard, and Noa

For more information about Kay Miller and *Jews of the Wild West* visit [www.jewsgowest.com](http://www.jewsgowest.com).☆



## 2020 Hurst Award Winners

by Linda Goff



congratulations to Isabelle Medina Sandoval and Norma Libman for being nominated and selected to receive the 2020 Hurst

Award. Each year an individual(s) or organization is honored. The Dr. Allan and Leona Hurst Award is given "to the person, persons, or organization who has contributed to New Mexico Jewish history, culture, and community over a substantial period of time." Both Isabelle and Norma have contributed to our knowledge, awareness, and sensitivity to crypto-Jews in New Mexico in their own distinctive ways.



Isabelle Sandoval

Isabelle Sandoval, who was born in Wyoming, spent many summers on her family's ranch in Mora County in northern New Mexico. Her family origins can be traced back multiple generations to Portuguese Jews who eventually found their way to an "outpost" in New Mexico. They arrived in New Mexico in 1598. As with many crypto-Jewish family stories, the family became Catholics yet retained traditional Sephardic Jewish customs such as candle lighting, animal slaughter, and family recipes, to name just a few. Well into adulthood, Isabelle undertook a personal journey to research and explore her family history and made the decision to reclaim her lost Jewish heritage. Isabelle has served as a leading voice for New

Mexican crypto-Jews in her writings for more than 20 years, especially through poetry, and has published two children's books entitled, *Hidden Shabbat* and *Guardians of Hidden Traditions*.

She became a pioneer on her own, applying for Portuguese citizenship under the recently declared "Law of Return" by the Portuguese government. After two long years, multiple pages of paperwork and trips to the Portuguese Consulate in San Francisco, Isabelle received her Portuguese citizenship and passport! With this personal achievement, Isabelle "found her way home."

Norma Libman is a more "recent arrival" to New Mexico, about 20 years after a very successful career as a writer and as a journalist for the *Chicago Tribune*. Her interview stories are amazing and fascinating, and often a "Who's Who."

As a writer and lover of history, Norma became interested in crypto-Jews here in New Mexico. After some initial background research, Norma sought out historians and others who had completed extensive research and personal interviews on the topic in order to begin her own study and interviews with the

crypto-Jewish community in the state. After a training/mentorship period, Norma gained access to individuals and families to hear and record their stories.

Along with other literary and writing interests, Norma has gained the great respect of many in the field of study and has given numerous professional presentations at academic conferences and community groups. She is a much-sought-after speaker on the history of crypto-Jews and has traveled throughout the country, educating audiences and sharing these fascinating stories.

She has also published on the topic. Articles she has written include: "Conversos and crypto-Jews" and "Should Jews Return to Spain?"



Norma Libman

Both Isabelle and Norma represent the intention and meaning of the Hurst Award. They richly deserve recognition of their dedication to disseminating the crypto-Jewish legacies in New Mexico history from the 16th Century to today, albeit from different perspectives and experiences.

There have been 27 recipients of this coveted award, including this year's two winners.☆

### Many Thanks for Your Contributions

#### Guardian

Stuart Feen and Sunny Sonnenschein  
Linda Goff

#### Friend

Ana Klenicki  
Walter and Karen Halpern  
Heath and Barbara LaMont  
Victor and Barbara Weisskopf

#### Pioneer

Phyllis Arlow  
Peter and Sharon Dorfman  
Christine Durfee  
Eleanor Edelstein  
Robert and Irene Gale  
Philip Goldstone  
John Gravel IMO Shirley Jacobson  
Nancy Greenberg  
Meriom Kastner  
Bo Keppel

Joyce Levine  
Steven Ovitsky  
Nancy Minces Paxton  
Rita Siegel  
Stuart and Rosalie Simon  
Lewis Terr  
Nolan and Patricia Zisman

#### Lifetime Members

Linda and Edward Goff

## Temple Aaron Welcomes Dr. Robert Lennick as New Rabbi

by David London

**D**r. Robert Lennick is now serving as rabbi at Temple Aaron of Trinidad, Colorado, beginning a new chapter in the renaissance of the oldest synagogue in the Mountain West.

Based in Albuquerque, Rabbi Lennick is CEO of the Jewish Federation of New Mexico. In 2016, the synagogue building was almost lost to sale and dissolution, when a group of volunteers and generous supporters stepped in to ensure its future. Fueled by an infusion of energy and early funding, programs and services have attracted a growing community of individuals and families from Colorado, New Mexico, and beyond. A campaign for restoration and preservation of the building is currently in full swing.

Rabbi Lennick joins a long and distinguished list of rabbis who have served Temple Aaron since the congregation was founded in 1883 (the synagogue building was constructed in 1889.) Rabbi Leopold Freudenthal, the first long-term rabbi at Temple Aaron, served the congregation from 1889 until his death in 1916. His

son Alfred established the Freudenthal Foundation in the 1940s; this generous endowment sustained Temple Aaron for about the next 70 years. Various rabbis served on a part-time or temporary basis including Rabbi John Feldman, Rabbi

Dr. Jacob Marcus, Rabbi Sylvan Schwartzman, Rabbi Jack Shlachter, and others.

As Rabbi Lennick describes, “Temple Aaron is a loving, welcoming congregation to all people. It stands for inclusion, compassion, and encouraging all forms of Jewish expression. The congregation’s 138-year history has been a beacon of Jewish life in Southern

Colorado and Northern New Mexico. It is a cherished ‘saving remnant’ of Jewish life, where tenacity, dedication and pride have carried Temple Aaron forward from generation to generation. Now, Temple Aaron is in a new chapter of growth and aspiration as we continue the preservation of our historic synagogue home and welcome a new generation of devoted members and friends. Temple Aaron is a powerful symbol of determination and optimism. We welcome you to join us in our journey towards the future.”



Dr. Robert Lennick

Temple Aaron’s connections to New Mexico have deep roots. Being located in the first town of any size north of the Colorado border, the congregation has served many New Mexico communities, most notably Raton, for decades. Since the 1980s, members of the Rubin family of Raton (Leon and Kathryn of blessed memory; Randy, who still lives in Raton; and Ron and his family, now residing in Colorado Springs) have been the primary stewards of the Temple. To this day, Temple Aaron’s events attract folks from Northern New Mexico, Santa Fe and Albuquerque, many of whom are members of NMJHS. Kathryn Rubin received the Hurst Award, NMJHS’s highest honor, in 2017.



David London

With Rabbi Lennick at the spiritual helm, ongoing programs at Temple Aaron include a monthly Shabbat morning Torah study and a monthly Shabbat candle lighting/schmooze (currently online), regular Passover and High Holiday services, and more. Please visit [templeaaron.org](http://templeaaron.org) for a full list of events, to make donations, and to learn how you can become part of our community.☆

### Seligmann Family Story (continued from p. 5)

In the U.S., Pioneer Wear (which finally closed in 1998) and Craftwear still stand as models for sustainable company strategies and fashion innovation.

The proof: check Google and Ebay for Pioneer Wear and Craftwear. You’ll still find many fans of the Seligmann style.☆

#### Appendix:

Uwe Westphal, author of: *Fashion Me-*

*tropolis Berlin* – The Story of the Rise and Destruction of the Jewish Fashion Industry.

Order: Amazon U.S. or via [www.ipg-book.com](http://www.ipg-book.com), [orders@ipgbook.com](mailto:orders@ipgbook.com)

This article was made possible by many eyewitnesses I have spoken to. My very special thanks go to Leigh Wilson (granddaughter of Leopold Seligman) and Prof. Noel Pugach.

### Sharing Your Family History

NMJHS continues to collect New Mexico Jewish family histories through oral interviews to share with the public and preserve in the New Mexico State Archives. If you are interested in participating, contact the NMJHS office:

5520 Wyoming Blvd. NE  
Albuquerque, NM 87109  
505-348-4471, [admin@nmjhs.org](mailto:admin@nmjhs.org)



### NMJHS “Pioneer” Society Donors

The following members have made their commitment to ensure our Legacy will be passed down to the next generations by contributing to our Endowment Fund. We continue to work on identifying additional participants. Won't you join us today?

As of March 31, 2021

Rick & Kathy Abeles  
Dorothy Corner Amsden  
Anonymous (4)  
Gloria Abella Ballen and  
Ron Duncan Hart  
Lance & Julia Bell  
Wayne Bobrick  
Jeffrey Brown and  
Cherri Hudson-Brown  
Patricia Carlton  
Alan & Diane Chodorow  
Sandra & David Dietz  
Stuart Feen and  
Carol Sonnenshein  
Bill & Margrethe Feldman  
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Naomi Sandweiss  
Rae Siporin  
Paul Sklar  
Robert Spitz  
Marcia Torobin  
Murray Tucker, z”l  
Sarah Winger

### NMJHS Legacy Team

Lance Bell  
Linda Goff  
Naomi Sandweiss



# Legacy

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## Membership in NMJHS

For information contact the NMJHS office at 505-348-4471 or [admin@nmjhs.org](mailto:admin@nmjhs.org) to request a membership brochure. Alternatively, you can download a membership application from the NMJHS website, [www.NMJHS.org](http://www.NMJHS.org)



## Future Events

### **“Moriscos: Hidden Muslim Identities in New Spain,” co-sponsored with The Islamic Center of New Mexico.**

Dr. Karoline Cook, Professor of Iberian Atlantic History, Royal Holloway College, University of London  
Sunday April 11 4:00 PM AM via Zoom

### **“Anti-Semitism Yesterday and Today,” co-sponsored with Chavurat Hamidbar and the ADL Mountain States Region.**

Sue Parker Gerson, Senior Associate Director ADL Mountain States  
Sunday April 18 11:00 AM via Zoom

### **“Jews on Broadway,” From Shtetl to Sondheim**

Dr. Stephen Whitfield, Professor Emeritus American Studies at Brandeis University  
Sunday April 25 2:00 PM via Zoom

### **NMJHS Annual Business Meeting & Guest Speaker, Stacey Ravel Abarbanel**

“The True-ish Jewish Story of my Grandfather and Pancho Villa”  
Sunday June 13 1:00-3:00 PM via Zoom or in person TBD

**“West of Hester Street and the Galveston Movement: Jewish Communities in the Southwest”** Co-Sponsored with The Texas Jewish Historical Society  
October 30-31 in Las Cruces, NM, via Zoom or in-person TBD