

Tudo se ilumina para
aquêlê que busca la luz.
BEN-ROSH

HALAPID

All is illuminated for
one who seeks the light
ARTURO CARLOS
BARROS BASTO

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TOMAS SANCHEZ, FOUNDER OF LA- REDO

by Carlos M. Larralde, PhD
In the eighteenth century,
dashing explorers launched
colonies in the present Mex-
ico-Texas border regions,
then northeastern New



Larralde

Spain. Tomas Sanchez was one of these. With Sanchez as one of his officers, royal Viceroy José de Escandon promoted commerce and ideas beyond the Mississippi. Sanchez established twenty towns along the Lower Rio Grande (South Texas and the area of Tamaulipas, Mexico) with a Spanish population of 3,600, and 18 missions ministering supposedly to 3,000 converts. Water was needed to be diverted from the river to irrigate nearby crops. They had to overcome opposition from local Indian tribes. The Marquis de Altamira reported that Indians had caused "murders, thefts, fires, and all kinds of inhuman atrocities, they desolate entire jurisdictions...." The Karankawas, Lipan Apaches and the Comanche, raided the communities. Still, a cautious Sanchez made Indians part of the villages.

to page 8

ARE YOU READY FOR CONFERENCE 05 ?

800 Historic Buildings, Great Beach and Lots to Do

by Gloria Trujillo

The conference this year will be held in Miami Beach, Florida, at the Hotel Mar-seilles, a gorgeous Art Deco hotel situated on the ocean in the South Beach area. SCJS President Abe Lavender, who lives in the area, suggested that we hold the conference there in 2005. And we also listened to our members and picked a locale where there are plenty of things to within walking distance of the hotel.

South Beach, also known as SoBe, ranks as one of the Travel Channel's top ten beaches in the world. Situated at the southern end of the barrier island in Miami

Program Offers Speakers On Diverse Themes From Three Continents

by Stanley Hordes

to page 2

*"The contentious revelation that my mother's family
is of Crypto-Jewish origin" led to*

...Remembering

by César Ayala Casás

I grew up in Puerto Rico and was raised in a nominally Catholic household in which religion was not very important. The contentious revelation that my mother's family is of Crypto-Jewish origin took place in 1995, when I was 35 years old.

The revelation happened in New York at a family dinner with my mother Zaida Casás Alicea and her first cousin César López Casás. My mother's father, Fernando Casás Cadilla, and César's mother, Lucia Casás Cadilla, were siblings. My mother was visiting from Puerto Rico and César came over from New Jersey to meet her.

During the dinner conversation César mentioned casually that he was a Reform Jew. Out of curiosity, I asked, "Why did you *choose* to become a Jew?"

Uncle César responded:

"I do not look at this as a conversion, I look at this as a return to our roots. Has your mother not told you?"

"Has my mother not told me what?"

"Our grandfather, Manuel Casás, who came to Puerto Rico from Spain, was a Marrano."

My initial reaction was disbelief. My mother wanted to change the subject. Her attempts at digression plus my expressions of disbelief, quickly brought my uncle César to a rage. Incensed with anger, César pointed to my mother and said:

"Your father used to light candles on Friday!"

I was shocked by my mother's answer.

"Yes, all of his life, Fridays at dusk, he used to light candles, religiously [meaning "punctually"]. What does that have to do with anything?"

I went home and took notes, composed a letter which I sent to César, and he wrote back with annotations. I initiated a correspondence and continued it until his death in March 2005.

My uncle César retired in Southern Spain in 1996, a few months after we first met in New York. In my very first letter to him, I wrote down the dialog as I had heard it at the first meeting.



to page 6

Temple Beth Tov-Ahavat Shalom

6438 SW Eight Street
Miami, Florida

Invites you to Services and Lunch

Shabbat Evening Service: Friday, August 5,
8:15 pm, *oneg shabbat* follows.

Shabbat Morning Service: Saturday, August 6,
9:15 am;

Lunch following, 12 noon, as our guest

Guests may attend any or all of the events
Please RSVP to abelavender@aol.com

The temple is in the area known as West Miami, about ten miles from the Marseilles conference hotel in Miami Beach, and about six miles west of downtown Miami. See page 3.

If your *HaLapid* has a label advising you that this is your last issue, you may not have paid your membership dues for 2005. To continue receiving *HaLapid* and being on the forefront of research and networking of Crypto-Judaic studies, please clip or copy and complete the form on the back cover and mail it as instructed.

FROM THE EDITOR

By Dolly Sloan



This issue focuses on our 14th Annual Conference, in Miami Beach, August 7-9. You'll find **Stan Hordes'** article on the program features, including the array of speakers on diverse topics from all parts of the globe, beginning on page 1. Conference Vice President **Gloria Trujillo** fills us in on other aspects of the conference, including outside activities, vacation features and our delightful Art Deco Hotel, also on page 1.

Did you know that our President **Abe Lavender** is the author of a history classic, *Miami Beach in 1920*? Who better to tell us of the delights of today's all-year-round resort? See his article on page 3. On pages 11 and 12, you'll find the tentative Program Agenda and Registration Form, the latter waiting for your to complete. We hope you'll be joining us for an exciting conference and resort fun.

Carlos Larralde, authority on crypto-Jews of Texas, writes about his ancestor in *Tomás Sanchez, Founder of Laredo*. See page 1.

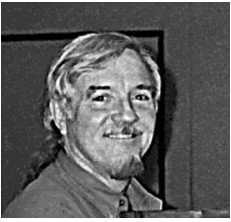
In *Remembering*, **César Ayala Casás** describes "the contentious revelation" of his family's Jewish Heritage. See page 1.

Finally, for Member Closeup this issue, we salute scholar and frequent program presenter **Seth Kunin** on page 10.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

By Abe Lavender

As the Society approaches its annual conference for the first time on the east coast, we in Miami Beach are looking forward to hosting you. Let me give you a little information about the



area. Miami began as a metropolitan area in 1896, and Miami Beach was incorporated in 1915 with 641 people, including about five Jews. Following World War II, Miami Beach began developing a large Jewish community, and by 1970 the city was 80% Jewish, the largest Jewish city of its size group in the United States. While the Jewish percentage in Miami Beach

now is about 35-40%, the tri-county Jewish population, including the areas around Miami, Fort Lauderdale, and Palm Beach, forms the third largest Jewish community in the United States. A few Hispanics lived in the area in the early years, but in the early 1960s large numbers of Cubans began coming to the Miami area to escape the dictatorship of Fidel Castro. Today, the county is a little over half Hispanic, with about half of Cuban background, and the others coming from a large number of Hispanic countries, especially Nicaragua and Colombia. With over a million Hispanics in the county, there must be many descendants of crypto-Jews.

Miami Beach, which shares an island with a few other municipalities, is a very cosmopolitan city, with a population of about 85,000. Much emphasis is put on historic preservation, with the many beautiful Art Deco buildings competing with the beach as major tourist attractions. The city is very progressive with, for example, some of the strongest anti-corruption ordinances in the nation and one of the most progressive unmarried partners ordinances in the nation. It also has a very active cultural and entertainment life. Mayor David Dermer, of an old Jewish family, is a strong support of all these accomplishments, and leads an equally progressive city commission. Reflecting the cultural cosmopolitanism of the city, the city commission of seven, including the mayor, is exactly evenly divided between Jewish members and Hispanic members. As only Miami Beach could do it, there are three Jewish members, three Hispanic members, and one Jewish member from Cuba. It is not unusual to hear six or eight languages in one day.

Only a few blocks from the hotel is the famous tree-lined Lincoln Mall, a wide pedestrian-only promenade eight blocks long with restaurants, sidewalk cafes, artist shops, designer clothing stores, a movie theater, and other attractions.

Eight blocks west from the Marseilles Hotel is the world famous Holocaust Memorial (www.holocaustmmb.org). And, eighteen blocks south is the famous Jewish Museum of Florida (www.jewishmuseum.com). Both have many visitors, although please note that the Museum is closed on Mondays (but open on all other days of the year, including Fridays and Saturdays, except Jewish holidays). The synagogue closest to the Marseilles is Temple Emanuel, a Conservative congregation. True to Miami Beach's emphasis on architecture, the synagogue has impressive Greek Revival architecture, which blends well with the city's Art Deco, Mediterranean, and MiMo (MiamiModern) styles. Temple Emanuel is on the corner of Seventeenth Street and Washington Avenue, only two and a half blocks from the Marseilles Hotel.

The Cuban Hebrew Congregation (Temple Beth Shmuel) is at the corner of Seventeenth Street and Michigan Avenue. It is a conservative synagogue, founded in 1961 by Ashkenazi refugees from Cuba, conducts much of the service in Spanish, and is only eight blocks from the Marseilles Hotel. There are many

synagogues in Miami Beach and the Miami area, but another one of special interest is Temple Moses, the largest Sephardi synagogue in the area, in the northern part of Miami Beach. Located at 1200 Normandy Drive, it has a membership largely from Turkey, many by way of Cuba, conducts most of the service in Spanish, and is about six miles north of the hotel.

It is important to know that, unlike a half-century ago when Miami Beach was a winter resort which closed down during the summer, the city is now a year-long tourist area. With airplanes, air conditioning, and a nice summer ocean breeze (the Marseilles is located on the ocean), the summer tourist presence is about 75% as large as during the coldest months up north.

Elsewhere in this issue you have seen the invitation to attend events at Temple Beth Tov-Ahavat Shalom, the "partly-anusim" synagogue in Miami. Temple Beth Tov is a relatively small Conservative synagogue, with a membership of about 200, and with a large number of retirees mostly from Eastern European backgrounds. The synagogue was founded in 1956, and some of the members have been with the synagogue since its founding or shortly thereafter. Our late co-president, Harvey Sootin, who passed away on May 15, 2005, was one of the founding members in 1956, and a fervent leader in encouraging returnees to join the synagogue. In 1956, the synagogue was in a predominantly Jewish neighborhood which subsequently has become a predominantly Hispanic neighborhood. Following typical movement patterns in the United States, most of the children of the retired members have moved to suburbs or other towns, seeking more diverse occupational opportunities. Declining membership was a problem.

Partly because of the synagogue's location and visibility in a Hispanic neighborhood, with a big scroll and Star of David in front, in the last two years about thirty Hispanics sought out the synagogue and converted and/or returned to Judaism, and another ongoing conversion class has nine people with more people periodically joining. Word-of-mouth has become increasingly important. Fortunately, Rabbi Manuel Armon, who was born and raised in Argentina, and is a Judaic scholar in English, Spanish, Hebrew, and Yiddish, has taught the conversion classes in Spanish, while all synagogue services are in English and Hebrew. The welcoming of the returnees has been very fortunate for the synagogue because the returnees now have begun to fill a number of positions in the leadership of the synagogue, as well as contributing young members who help with all sorts of activities such as voluntarily painting sections of the interior, making small repairs which confront a small synagogue, and explaining to people like me how to operate a DVD.

Roberto Gonzalez is now the president of the synagogue. While other synagogues in the area have some returnees, Temple Beth Tov has become known as the major synagogue in Miami for returnees and/or converts. The former long-time members of the synagogue are thrilled that the synagogue is continuing, and the new members are thrilled that such a welcoming synagogue is available. The synagogue is vibrant and enthusiastic. In the last few months, for example, we have had a Ladino Music Night, a talk on the holocaust by George Klein, one of our members who is a survivor and gives numerous talks to the community on the Holocaust, a talk on Sephardim in Israel by Dr. Zion Zohar, director of the Sephardi Studies Program at Florida International University, and a Klezmer Music Night.

"Then Joseph died, and all his brothers and all that generation. But the descendants of Israel (Jacob) were fruitful and increased greatly; they multiplied and grew exceedingly strong; so that the whole land [of Egypt] was filled with them."

Exodus 1:6-8

BELMONTE MUSEUM RECORDS HISTORY OF ANUSIM

by Sérgio Castro Pinheiro



In photo below, Professor Adriano Vasco Rodrigues addresses the opening ceremonies. His collection forms the backbone of the museum's objects.

Photos by Naomi Leite



The Hebrews sojourned in the land of Egypt for nearly 430 years. The Bible tells us little more about that period in the life of our ancestors; as such, we know next to nothing about these four centuries in the history of the Israelites.

There is another period of nearly 400 years during which the history of an entire segment of the Jewish people vanishes from view. Between the onset of the persecution of Jews in Portugal, in 1496, and the first written testimonies of Jewish travelers' encounters with Portuguese *marranos* at the end of the nineteenth century, there is an enormous gap in Jewish history: nearly four centuries, during which the persecuted descendants of Portugal's Jews all but ceased to exist, little more than a ghostly presence in the eyes of their Jewish contemporaries.

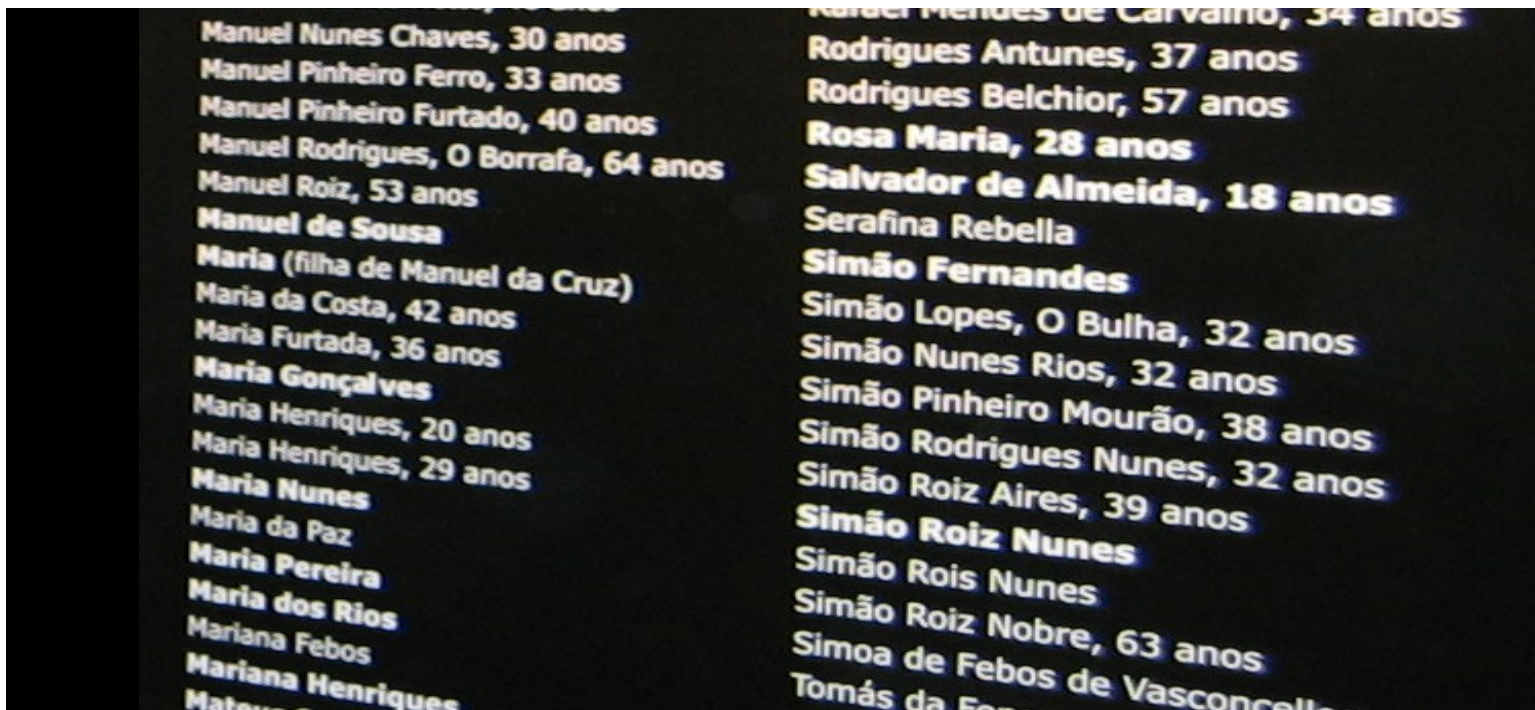
While we have a great deal of scholarship on the Jews of Spain and Portugal prior to 1496, and then again from 1917 until our own day, most studies dealing with the intervening years focus on the Inquisition, the inquisitors and their preferred tortures. We know far less about the Inquisition's Jewish victims. The Portuguese public, like Portugal's historians, still views their story with a certain intellectual discomfort.

The declaration of the Portuguese Republic in 1910, with full freedom of religion, and the arrival of the Polish Jewish mining engineer Samuel Schwartz in Belmonte in 1917 and subsequent publication of his book on the crypto-Jews he found there (*Cristãos-Novos em Portugal no Século XX*), brought an end to those 400 years of "darkness." But remarkably, until this year, Portugal lacked a Jewish museum to recover the story of those centuries.

On April 17, 2005, the inauguration of the Jewish Museum of Belmonte—a tiny town in the mountains in the center of Portugal, birthplace of the discoverer of Brazil—began with all the pomp and circumstance possible in a village of 2,500 inhabitants: among the nearly 400 people present at the opening ceremonies were the mayor of Belmonte, other civic leaders from the region and the head of the regional Tourism Board, a Minister of Parliament (representing the Prime Minister), the president of the local Jewish community and representatives of the Jewish communities of Lisbon and Oporto, a representative from the Israeli Embassy, and nearly all of the Jews of Belmonte.

One of several museums to be opened in Belmonte in a short period of time, the Jewish museum is part of an initiative to transform the town into a major historical center for the region. It is located in an eighteenth-century Catholic school, purchased by the municipality and totally restored to transform it into a modern Jewish museum, with a dramatic and original design. It is situated at the heart of the oldest neighborhood, where many Jewish families still live in carefully preserved stone houses. It lies just down the hill from the town's medieval castle and the modern synagogue.

The museum can be divided into three principle components, each with a diverse set of objects linked to Judaism. The most interesting of these centers on a collection of personal objects once owned by crypto-Jewish families, some of them very old, loaned by Prof. Adriano Vasco Rodrigues and his wife's family, the Carquejas. These objects provide an



An enormous black plaque, listing the names and ages of victims of the Portuguese Inquisition

exceptional record of daily life during and after the Inquisition, for example a primitively-carved wooden mezuzah that could be carried in one's pocket. The 170-page exhibition catalog, which contains essays by eminent scholars of crypto-Jewish issues, is indispensable for understanding the original context and meaning of these objects.

The second component deals with the Jewish presence in the region of Belmonte from the Roman era through the Middle Ages, with Roman-era coins from Jerusalem, a tombstone from the same period bearing an engraved menorah, and a reproduction of an engraved stone from the town's long-gone thirteenth-century synagogue. Belmonte's modern crypto-Jewish community is also evoked here, through a small ethnographic display on Passover rituals.

The final and most moving component is a memorial, in the form of an enormous black plaque, with the full names and even ages of victims of the Inquisition from the Belmonte region. As I was able to see from visitors' reactions, this is among the most powerful parts of the museum, and it provides one of the first public manifestations of the *duty to remember*, in Portugal, to bring justice to the victims of the "Holy" Inquisition's executioners.

The museum seems to have also been intended to convey aspects of the Jewish religion in general, as it contains modern and even new items of Judaica, some of them with no obvious connection to the region. It also contains an auditorium, a small library, and an embryonic Jewish studies center, named for Prof. Rodrigues, which may serve as the future seat of Jewish studies for a nearby university.

The sole negative point in the museum is the lack of explanatory information in the exhibition hall. The panels give little historical context, and none are translated into English. This is also a shortcoming of the otherwise outstanding catalog, which is written in Portuguese and followed by a short Hebrew summary.

It is worthy of note that this entire project was carried out by non-Jews, it was financed by non-Jews, and all of the work that made the museum's opening possible came from non-Jews, in particular the new "Route of Ancient Jewish Quarters," a project of the regional Tourism Board. Regardless of

whether their motives were political or economic, we can consider the museum's creators among the great friends of the Jewish people and their history, and thank them heartily for their efforts.

SERGIO CASTRO PINHEIRO is President of Hanamel—Associação de Cultura Hebraica do Porto. Born in Portugal, raised in Paris, his family originated in Bragança (Trás-os-Montes), an important crypto-Jewish community and synagogue site during Barros Basto's time. This article in French, from which it was translated by Naomi Leite, can be found on SCJS's website, www.cryptojews.com



“Why did you choose to become a Jew?”

The letter came back with an annotation in the margins:

“I did not *become*. I *was*.” [emphasis author’s]

César then wrote to set up a meeting about family history. The communication started with a friendly family introduction and then moved forcefully to the topic of Jewish ancestry:

It is virtually impossible to convey how happy I felt to see Zaida and her three bright and personable children. Zaida and I grew up close to each other in a Puerto Rico that no longer exists.

Hanukkah starts at sunset today. It would be nice if we could meet in the near future to talk about the Casás as Marranos, and the Jewish experience. Like you, I left “home” at 17. From San Juan, to the U.S., Havana (that forever ghastly place), Europe, North Africa.

César and I met in the Village in New York. From those meetings, from notes that I took of our conversations, and nine years of detailed letters, I learned that the Jewish ancestry in my family derives from the father of my mother’s father, Manuel Casás Cadilla, a Spanish citizen who came to Puerto Rico early in the twentieth century. He separated from my grandfather’s mother and moved from Humacao to San Juan, and thereafter to Havana, Cuba, in the 1920s. After moving to Havana, he never saw his Puerto Rican children again and with the exception of César, to my best knowledge he never met his Puerto Rican grandchildren. He finally retired and died in Spain in the 1960s.

My mother had had a correspondence with her grandfather, whom she never met in person. My great grandfather, Manuel, kept in touch with his grandchildren in Puerto Rico through letters. The brother of Manuel, Rogelio, went from Spain to Havana, Cuba, lived many years there, and retired in Spain also. Some of his writings are very suggestive of a Crypto-Jewish identity, but not conclusively.

For example, in an essay published in Spain once he had retired there after living many years in Cuba, Rogelio complains about the employment practices of Catholics, presumably those

of Cuba: “I have seen many Catholics hired in the houses of Jews, what I have never seen is a Jew hired in the house of a Catholic.” I inquired with my uncle César and he replied that he had met his great uncle Rogelio in Havana in the 1950s and that he was not only a Jew, but “very kind. Very orthodox.”

A sister of Manuel and Rogelio, Agripina, went to Argentina. I have no information yet about the religious history of the Casás in Argentina.

With the exception of César López Casás, no one else in my family in Puerto Rico has asserted a Jewish identity. I have been puzzled by the contrast between the memory of Jewish ancestry of César López Casás and the lack of such memory on the part of everyone else in my family.

In one letter, César described an exotic world of “strange people” who met in the porch of his house during his childhood.

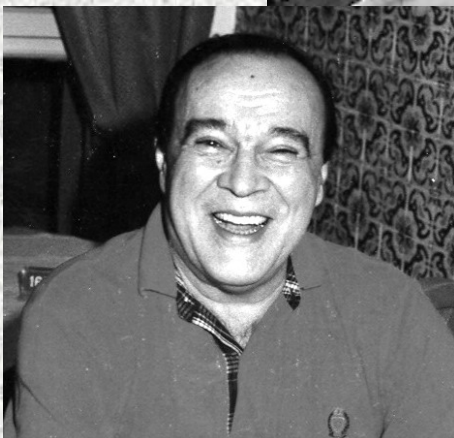
There was something strange. Something exotic. In the porch of the green house where I was born in Humacao, strange people met. From warehouses, drug stores, and commercial establishments among others. Marranos. During the processions of Holy Week, sometimes I was forbidden from observing. I would climb up into the wooden bed and look through some blinds high up.

In his letters, César documents a living crypto-Jewish tradition, the Jewish literature that circulated, the correspondence between his mother and cousins in Spain during World War II, who were concerned that Franco might decide that there were “real Jews” in Spain and hand them over to the Germans. Apparently in the small towns in Spain, where everyone was Catholic, people knew who were the descendants of Jews, in the twentieth century!

In the late 1940s to early 1950s, my grandfather Fernando Casás used to drive César’s mother Lucía Casás (sister of Fernando) to San Juan to a temple in the Miramar section of the City. She would go into the temple and my grandfather and César would go to Old San Juan and then return to pick her up after the service. There was of course no temple in the small town where the Casás lived, and the temple in Miramar was for “the gringos.”



Above, Uncle César Lopez Casás sits with sister Zaida Casás Alicea, the author’s mother, at right and cousin Monsita Rivera at left



Left, a cheerful, more mature Uncle César shares a happy moment

In the summer of 2004, I went to Puerto Rico with the mission of finding at least one relative who remembered Jewish ancestry other than César López Casás. Before I was able to interview any of the cousins, I found my “second witness” in my mother. In my hometown of Guaynabo, in casual conversation, I relayed to my mother the claims of her cousin, César López Casás, to the effect that he met his grandfather Manuel Casás Cadilla, in Marín, Province of Pontevedra, in Spain in the summer of 1954.

César claims that the grandfather revealed what he already knew from his own mother Lucía, that the Casás were Jews. The grandfather, by César’s account, checked that his grandson was circumcised, and asked him if he ever went to the “Western Wall” to say a prayer for him. When I used the Spanish word for Western Wall, “*muro de los lamentos*,” my mother’s eyes lit up and she said: “My grandfather used to write about that.”

I asked her about the context in which the *muro de los lamentos* was mentioned. My mother said that her grandfather, Manuel Casás, urged her in his letters to visit him in Spain, because he was too old to travel. He mentioned in his letters that if he were not so old there were two places to which he would like to travel: to Puerto Rico to meet his grandchildren, and to *el muro de los lamentos*. My mother never visited him in Spain, or paid attention to this little detail. Evidently, my mother had pieces of the story but they did not translate into a Jewish identity. César had more pieces of the story and actively sought to reconnect with the Jewish tradition. What accounts for this difference?

My uncle’s letters were centered on the theme of “remembering.” Throughout our nine years of correspondence, he relentlessly insisted on relaying the family history to me, as his grandfather and his own mother had emphasized to him. According to my uncle, he was not only fulfilling a historical duty but a religious one as well. What he was relaying to me was the same that was relayed to him by his mother and grandfather, a hidden story of Jewish affiliation that had to be remembered, as per Deut 4: 9-11.

But take utmost care and watch yourselves scrupulously so that you do not forget the things that you saw with your own eyes and so that they do not fade from your mind as long as you live. And make them known to your children and to your children’s children. The day you stood before the Lord your God at Horeb, when the Lord said to me, “Gather the people to Me that I may let them hear My words, in order that they may learn to revere Me as long as they live on earth, and may so teach their children.” [emphasis author’s]

But this insistence on my uncle’s part is something that took place once he had “returned” to Judaism. What accounts for his desire to return to it in the first instance? I think, first and foremost, that contact with Jewish communities accounts for the difference.

The Casás were Jews settled in Galicia, Spain, due to connections with the Spanish merchant marine (Marín, Province of Pontevedra). From there they migrated to Puerto Rico, Cuba and Argentina in the early twentieth century. Instead of isolated individuals in a self-enclosed rural setting, there was extensive travel. Rogelio Casás Cadilla, my great-grandfather’s brother, describes in his writings, for example, visiting Jewish merchants in Paris and New York. He lived in Havana, where there were large Ashkenazi and Sephardic communities and where, unlike Spain, there was religious freedom. Given this range of travel, one could come into contact with Jewish communities, certainly in Argentina and Cuba, much less so in Puerto Rico.

The example of the Casás points to a kind of experience in which the descendants or “remnants” of crypto Jews have been in at least intermittent contact with Jews, and this has allowed them to maintain whatever elements of a Jewish identity they retained. I imagine, for I don’t know with certainty, that what happened to César and to myself must have happened in previous generations, helping some members in the family retain a Jewish identity. The essential ingredient is the existence of Jewish communities that can provide context and a sense of reality to the “memory” of Jewish ancestry. Isolated descendants of Jews in a little town with no organized Jewish life face tremendous obstacles. Their children find the notion of Jewish ancestry to irrelevant because there are no others around. In this context, Jews are characters from an ancient story book, not your next door neighbors.

How the Casás retained a Jewish identity in Spain up to the early twentieth century is not something I can answer at present, except to point out that Pontevedra had one of the principal Iberian *aljamas* in the Spanish middle ages and remnants of a Jewish tradition until the twentieth century. I would like to know how the Jewish iden-

tity of the Casás fared in different places according to access to Jewish communities. Concretely, it would be interesting to reconstruct the story of the Casás in Havana and the Casás in Argentina, where there were large Jewish communities, including Sephardic communities, and to contrast this experience with the story of the Casás in a small town in Puerto Rico with no organized Jewish life.

To my relatives in Puerto Rico the Marrano story is simply a genealogical fact with no bearing on their identity, a sort of meaningless datum with no context. To my uncle César, and now to myself, Jewish ancestry has become a fact of social life and therefore part of our identities. I realized this two years ago when I entered a synagogue for the first time in my life to attend the Bar Mitzvah of the son of a neighbor. I was greeted at the door of the temple by my neighbor, who held my hand firmly between her two hands, looked at me straight in the eye, and said “Welcome home.” [emphasis author’s]

Until that moment, the story of Jewish ancestry was to me simply a genealogical fact. It dawned on me then that knowledge of this ancestry on my neighbor’s part made her consider me a Jew. I had never, not once, thought of myself as a Jew, nor did I imagine that anyone else thought of me as a Jew. Ever since that small incident, which shook me profoundly, I have not been able to think of myself otherwise. The accumulated campaign in favor of “remembering” on the part of my uncle César via the extensive letters, plus the social reality of neighborhood and workplace settings where there are lots of Jews, influenced this transformation. Of course, there was a cumulative experience and the little incident merely tipped the scale.

In his last letters, my uncle César prompted me to seek a conversion or a ceremony of return, but I have such an anti-clerical upbringing that I find it hard to relate to the Jewish heritage as a religion. It is much easier for me to look at it as cultural tradition. I am, of course, perfectly aware that this cultural tradition is a religion. I regularly attend a Faculty Torah Study Group at UCLA, and I read all I can about crypto Judaism and Marranos. Incidentally, I am really looking forward to the publication of Stanley Hordes’ *To the End of the World*, which should come out by the time of our next SCJS conference.

Additionally, I have been most fortunate to meet Rabbi Chaim Seidler Feller at UCLA and have had a very supportive correspondence with Rabbi David Kunin, whose responsa on the return of the *anusim* is a remarkably brave document. The important point for me is that the project of “remembering,” that my uncle advocated so ardently until his death this year, cannot be carried out in isolation. Remembering is a collective enterprise that must be nurtured among people with experiences similar to mine. Attending the SCJS last summer in Portland helped me break out of the sense of isolation that characterizes the crypto Jewish experience.

For the moment, I just wish to learn, and to advance in the process of recovering the memory of this suppressed past, which I now feel is part of my own heritage and which my children should know.

As to the outcome of this rather strange search, I have no predictions. So let me end by hiding behind the poetic authority of scripture: “He who scattered Israel will gather them, and will guard them as a shepherd his flock.” (Jer 31:10)

CESAR AYALA CASAS PhD was born and raised in Puerto Rico. He is currently Associate Professor of Sociology at UCLA. This article was adapted from a moving presentation he gave at the 2004 SCJS conference in Portland.

"The impression is, he was a no-nonsense sort of man," Historian J. B. Wilkinson wrote about Sanchez, "a down-to-earth gentleman principally interested in problems at hand but blessed with a shrewd foresight which was to benefit his descendants in the present generation."

His full name was Tomas Sanchez de la Barrera y Gallardo. Judging from his descendants, Sanchez was tall and of ruddy complexion. His eyes were gray-blue that sparkled with emotion, a massive pride and a quick temper. Local historians mentioned that Sanchez, a criollo from Nuevo Leon, Mexico, was born on June 4, 1709. His father, Tomas Sanchez, was baptized on April 26, 1680. His grandparents were Tomas Sanchez and Maria Barrera, married in Monterrey on January 21, 1673.

I am a descendant of the explorer Tomas Sanchez. He married several times. One particular woman that he had several children with was the gregarious Catarina de Crive. Their daughter, Josefa, was born about 1730 and died about 1800. She was my ancestor. Sanchez had several grandchildren that he liked, such as Juan José Galan, born July 1, 1745. He died about 1812 and inherited Sanchez's manic depression.

During that era, many women perished during childbirth, and Josefa almost died during Juan José's birth. Giving birth as early as fourteen years of age, women had a high childbirth death rate due to untold infectious diseases. Josefa's babies grew up at the expense of their mother, extracting minerals such as calcium and other nutrients from her blood and bones. In the end, her skeleton became brittle, predisposing her to the trauma of spinal fractures.

Feeling in need of a housewife to take care of him and his family, Sanchez felt the need to marry. Then the cycle would start all over again. He had children from these relationships and diseases took a toll on several of them. Sanchez had about nine children and testified to his vitality and his devotion to family life when his rancho was inspected in 1757.

During Colonial Mexico, the Sanchez family used different surnames, a practice common among Hispanic Jews. Like other Jews, Sanchez had confidence in himself. As late as the 1700's, some Mexican Jews read the scroll of the law, mostly in Spanish and chanted in Hebrew that only a few could interpret.

Sanchez's family roots sprang from Nuevo Leon since the 1600's, as part of the community founded by New Christian Governor Luis Carvajal (Luis Carvajal y de la Cueva). There were probably 100 or more families. As before, Jewish women accompanied their husbands and upheld religious traditions with fortitude and fervor. When inspection revealed circumcision, and thus the presence of male Jews, the horrified Inquisition affirmed that Carvajal's nephew had performed the painful operation on himself and other men.

Carvajal's relatives faced the Monterrey Holy Inquisition and some perished in the Church's bonfire. "By the end of the sixteenth century, the Inquisitors were the objects of

scorn and hatred." Illustrations of these fanatical judges can be found in the work of Mexico City artist Sebastian Lopez de Arteaga, painting in the 1600's. As late as the 1700's, Sanchez and his contemporaries faced anti-Semitic literature, an example of which was written by Esteban de Ares Fonseca, published in Lisbon and shipped to Mexico.

Viceroy Escandon won the admiration of the Spanish government because of the work of colonization in the lower Rio Grande of the industrious Sanchez and other able officers. An exceptional lieutenant, Sanchez was a man of few words, who never avoided responsibilities. The argumentative and stubborn Sanchez strived to be a dedicated servant to the crown and labored tirelessly on town planning and agriculture. Remarkable for his legal knowledge, Sanchez commanded respect and was fiercely jealous of his honor and that of his family. He engaged in brawls and duels, concerning unjustified slurs on his good name.

The enthusiastic Escandon established hamlets along the Lower Rio Grande River, while Sanchez remained his right hand. A crafty politician and probably Jewish, Juan José Vasquez Borrego remained an influential friend of Sanchez. He had no use for Catholicism. The audacious Sanchez suggested to Borrego that he be permitted to establish a town at the lower Rio Grande with his well-disciplined newcomers. Like Borrego, he intended to pay all the costs of furnishing the pioneers and defending the location, so that there would be no expense to the royal treasury. But Sanchez was told by officials to find a site instead by the Nueces River.

One last time, Sanchez obediently took off for the Nueces and made an honest effort to find a suitable place near the river, but could not, possibly because of hostile Indians. A frustrated Sanchez declared to Borrego that if he failed to establish his habitation along the lower Rio Grande, he would drop the whole idea. Borrego refused to see any negative reports and communicated with Escandon. On May 15, 1755, Escandon approved giving Sanchez acreage by the Rio Grande to develop, and named it Laredo. This is the site of the present Laredo, Texas.

The principal livelihood of the inhabitants was raising livestock, although the numbers of animals were far short of the thousands in the pueblos downstream. Sanchez, who had been promoted to captain, owned numerous horses and cattle. He believed Laredo could be a prosperous village since livestock provided excellent breeding opportunities and income. Pigs remained unpopular as a commodity.

By classifying a single man as a "family," one could say there were a few families living in Laredo. Wilkinson affirmed that the dwellings consisted of 85 inhabitants, about half of whom were of the immediate family of Sanchez or close relatives. But this small number still represented growth, for just two years before, Sanchez had begun his community with only three families. All the original newcomers and those who came next had been brought to Laredo without expense to the royal treasury. The living quarters had not progressed beyond jacales, or huts, built of brush. It gave the place the appearance of a



camp. The chronicler, A. Lopez de la Camara Alta, dismissed the dwellings as the frivolous Rancho de Laredo. In time, the resulting town had homes with walls of hard-packed earth, coated with thick lime plaster. The equality of citizens prevailed.

For a long period, Laredo did not have a priest. A government inspector, José Tienda de Cuervo, falsified a report during the 1700's that "the residents living here" had a "desire for an ecclesiastical minister to attend to them." Historian Carlos Castañeda noted, "There was no mission nor much hope of one being established in the near future, not for lack of Indians but for the want of a missionary." The scholar J. B. Wilkinson wrote that "The overworked minister to the families at Laredo as well as to those at Revilla and Dolores, visited the town at long intervals. This is no indictment of his zeal but evidence of the parsimony of the Spanish crown, for the costs of missionaries were paid from the royal treasury."

Castañeda pointed out, "... nothing was done to remedy the deplorable situation for several years." Sanchez and other colonists in Laredo were not upset. To them the authority of priests, bishop and popes meant nothing. Jews poured into New Spain as soldiers and as merchants, writes Liebman. The scholar, Gustavo Baez Camargo, stated that when Jews arrived in Mexico, they resented priests with a passion. The Church had categorized the Jewish Messiah as an evil anti-Christ.

Like most immigrants, the keen and intuitive Sanchez retained a Catholic façade. Bitter memories of the Inquisition in Monterrey remained alive. The Inquisition never flourished beyond the Rio Grande. "The incompetence of the Inquisition officials in the areas distant from Mexico further impeded the effectiveness of the Holy Office," writes Liebman. This concept that the frontiersmen "lived free of molestation," was contradicted by the confrontation of the clergy's political meddling by Sanchez, the independent spirit.

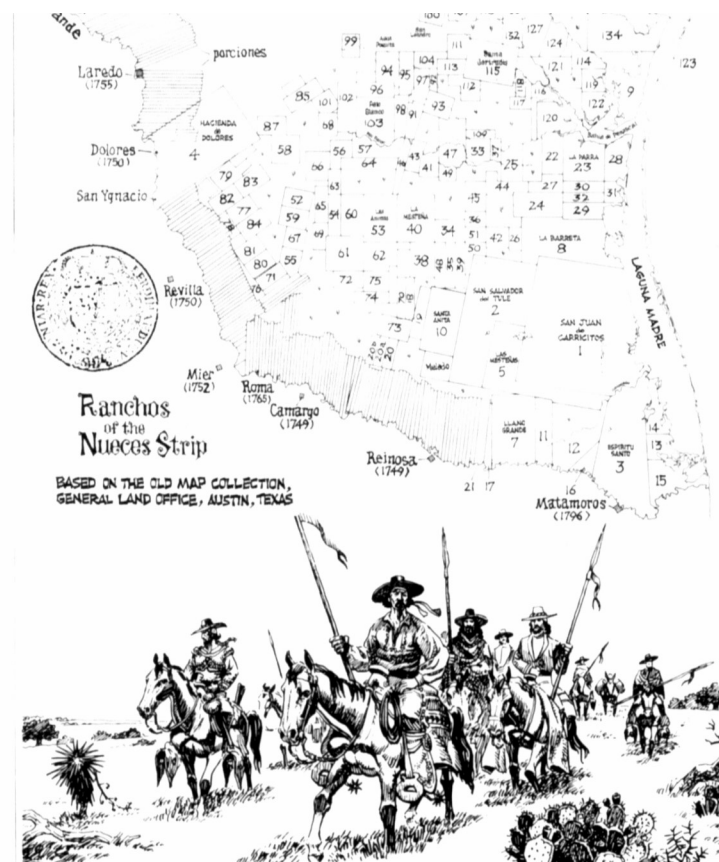
When the Archbishop of Guadalajara returned from eastern Texas by way of Laredo in 1759, he saw what he believed was the need for a priest. A shocked prelate reported that the inhabitants of Dolores and Laredo lived like heretics. Children were rarely baptized. The archbishop questioned Sanchez, suspecting heresy. By now, the eighteenth century inquisitors were more lenient in order to retain their authority.

Then the archbishop did what a desperate Sanchez feared the most. The passionate clergyman in Laredo criticized local politics, demanded absolute obedience and rushed a priest to Laredo. The ecclesiastic raised a storm of protest to the viceroy, while the royal treasury and the people of Laredo paid for a priest. A furious Escandon protested that religious conflicts disrupted the stability of the settlements. He believed that the missionary of Revilla was sufficient to attend to Laredo's spir-

itual needs, which could barely survive to support a priest. Castañeda commented that Escandon's policy should be "taken with a grain of salt."

As for Sanchez, he died about 1785, probably from tuberculosis or another disease that exterminated a majority of the indigenous people. If Sanchez's skeleton was available, examining his teeth and cranial sutures could reveal his age and health at death. As a sickly child, rings of thin enamel on his teeth would suggest high fevers while his teeth were forming.

Never flaunting their success, Escandon and Sanchez established and invigorated several cities and the cattle industry in South Texas and parts of Mexico. Images of a haunted Sanchez and other Spanish gentlemen on horseback during a full moon were created by folklore. While greeting others, they politely lifted their hats off with their head. Refusing to acknowledge crucifixes, they chanted their own special prayers during Friday evenings.



From Larralde, p. 9

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Letter to the Editor

In the Winter, 2005 Edition of *HaLapid*, it was my great honor to write the "Member Closeup" article on Rabbi Albert L. Plotkin. In the last paragraph, I stated, "I'd better schedule my own Rite of Return." I did so and underwent my Rite of Return February 4, 2006 (25th day of Shevet, 5765). This very emotional and moving event was presided over by Rabbi Plotkin and took place at the beautiful new synagogue in Sedona, AZ, amidst the towering Red Rocks and amongst the welcoming and loving members of the Jewish Community of Sedona and the Verde Valley. When Rabbi handed me the Sacred Scrolls, I thought my heart would burst with joy as I cradled them in my arms! I read the She'ma and portions of the Sephardic Siddur (a wonderful gift from former SCJS President Gloria Trujillo) in Spanish in memory of my ancestors, who were denied the free expression of their Judaism. My Hebrew name is Rochel bat Avraham. This significant event comes after many years of study and contemplation. I share this joyous news with my SCJS "family." I am now FINALLY fully Jewish! The "circle" is complete.

RANDY BACA

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